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Envy between Girls: A Philosophical Analysis of Simone de Beauvoir and Elena Ferrante

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Abstract

I bring together the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Elena Ferrante to philosophically analyze envy in girlhood friendships. I compare two kinds of envy: the destructive envy between girls in their mode as object-beings as described by Beauvoir in *The second sex* (2011); and the more ambivalent form of envy that I identify in Lenu's friendship with Lila in Ferrante's *The Neapolitan quartet* (2012–15) and Beauvoir's with Zaza in both *Memoirs of a dutiful daughter* (1963) and *The inseparables* (2021). Using Beauvoir's existentialist understanding of subjectivity and freedom in *The ethics of ambiguity* (1976) and *The second sex*, I argue that envy for a girl friend's intellectual abilities can act as an impetus for the girl to pursue new ends in her mode as subject-being, while simultaneously causing her negative feelings. In doing so, I demonstrate that intellectual friendships between girls that feature envy can open up the girl's situation such that new possibilities of freedom are available to her that may not have been otherwise.

1. Introduction

I read Elena Ferrante's *The Neapolitan quartet* (2012–15) around the same time that I read Simone de Beauvoir's first autobiography *Memoirs of a dutiful daughter* (1963). In doing so, I encountered two literary examples of a fascinating intellectual friendship between girls. Both friendships involve envy, and yet despite (or arguably, because of) this envy, the protagonists gain pleasure and purpose in their emotional and intellectual lives. In *The second sex* (2011), Beauvoir provides an account of why girls experience envy for each other. Interestingly, this account does not mention envy girls can experience for another girl's intellectual skills, instead focusing on envy for a girl's appearances and desirability for men. By analyzing the friendship between protagonist Lenu and her friend Lila in *The Neapolitan quartet* alongside Beauvoir's account of her friendship with Zaza in both *Memoirs* (1963) and *The inseparables* (2021), I extend Beauvoir's account of envy between girls in *The Second Sex*.

In doing so, I focus on the emotion of envy itself, using Marguerite La Caze's work on envy (2001) to understand the ambivalence of envy that is evident in both the literary friendships I analyze. Using La Caze's argument, I challenge the assumption that envy experienced between girls is purely negative. I then use Beauvoir's own existentialist framework in both *The second sex* and *The ethics of ambiguity* (1976) to form an existentialist account of envy, arguing for its potential as a route to developing individual subjectivity. I argue that envy, when present in an intellectual friendship between girls, can positively foster the individual girl's subjectivity, acting as an impetus for her to set up and pursue new ends. However, I also argue that such envy must ideally only be experienced temporarily, such that the girl is not overcome by envy. I suggest that envy can be curtailed with a strong sense of self. Beauvoir's account of the development of the girl in *The second sex* reveals, I argue, the specific difficulties girls face in forming this authentic sense of self.

By bringing together Beauvoir's and Ferrante's work we can extend Beauvoir's phenomenological approach of using literature to do feminist philosophy by engaging with the experiences of girls and women in a different context, using texts that Beauvoir did not have access to when she was writing. *The second sex* was first published in France in 1949, and as such her account of girlhood and womanhood is specific to her context. She focuses predominantly on the experiences of French, English, or other white, predominately upper- or middle-class European women during that period or earlier.¹ *The Neapolitan quartet*, however, is written by Italian author Elena Ferrante, with the first novel *My brilliant friend* published in Italian in 2011, and in English in 2012.² The story begins in the 1950s, set in a poor neighborhood in Naples. We follow the lives of narrator Elena Greco (nicknamed Lenu) and her friend Rafaella Cerullo (nicknamed Lila). We witness their girlhood and teenage years in the 1950s and 1960s and their lives as women until they reach their sixties in the final novel of the series, *The story of the lost child* (2015). Beauvoir's and Ferrante's texts, situated as they are with different countries and languages of origin, written in different times, are both widely read today, translated into numerous languages, and appreciated for their ability to enrich the lives of a diverse array of readers. The analysis of these works together is therefore timely, engaging with the growing field of Ferrante studies and fostering a literary friendship, if you will, between Ferrante and Beauvoir.

When reading *The Neapolitan quartet*, I could not help but notice that Ferrante depicts the lives of her female characters in ways that reflect Beauvoir's account of women's lives in *The second sex*.³ Ferrante never explicitly admits that she references Beauvoir, even in *Frantumaglia* where she lists writers who inspire her, including Haraway, Butler, and Braidotti (2016, 322).⁴ However, we do know that she has read Beauvoir's work, because, as Stefania Lucamante (2008) indicates, Ferrante enacts a rewriting of Beauvoir's *The woman destroyed* in her novel *Days of abandonment*, with Ferrante's protagonist Olga explicitly referring to *The woman destroyed* in her narration. Unlike the clear influence of Beauvoir in *Days of abandonment*, the link between Beauvoir and *The Neapolitan quartet* is less explicit, although Chiara Degli Esposti (2019, 153) argues that there are numerous connections to be made between Beauvoir's four-volume autobiography and Ferrante's tetralogy in terms of structure, themes, and plot. For example, Degli Esposti calls our attention to the fact that both tell the coming-of-age of a female public intellectual who attains a level of freedom through her educational achievements (2019, 154). She writes,

The most relevant step of this emancipatory process is her entry into the scholastic environment where each protagonist's encounter with a brilliant female classmate modifies forever her attitude towards learning. Their friendship engenders in the narrator contrasting feelings of emulation and intellectual competition and provides a constant stimulus to self-improvement. (2019, 154)

Degli Esposti also highlights how both Zaza and Lila are presented as possessing exceptional intellectual traits that become a model for the protagonists (2019, 157).⁵ I focus in more detail on what Degli Esposti identifies by exploring the emotion of envy present in this dynamic of emulation and intellectual competition, engaging with Beauvoir's feminist and existentialist philosophy in the process.

Degli Esposti also problematizes the way that Ferrante is influenced by Beauvoir in *The Neapolitan quartet* without acknowledging it, linking this to the way Lenu's character depends on Lila's ideas for her own writing (2019, 159). It is certainly interesting to consider why Ferrante "artfully disguises the literary models from which she draws inspiration" (2019, 159), although at this stage it is impossible to know her true intentions without her having specifically discussed the matter publicly. Regardless of Ferrante's lack of acknowledgment, I think we can understand why Ferrante would reemploy Beauvoir's writings in her own work. Beauvoir's texts contain insights about the human condition, and more specifically, the condition of girls and women within patriarchal culture, that are arguably as relevant today as they were during Beauvoir's lifetime. I suggest that Ferrante reemploys Beauvoir's focus on a complex, intellectual friendship between girls because this topic remains timely, and it is interesting to reexplore such themes within a new time and place. Ferrante not only reemploys Beauvoir's themes but extends them and fleshes them out in a way that allows us to philosophically analyze the envy that can occur in intellectual friendships between girls in more detail than if we were merely analyzing Beauvoir's account of her friendship with Zaza. As I will show, Ferrante's account of the relationship between Lenu and Lila allows us to ask new questions about Beauvoir's account of her relationship with Zaza. First, however, I turn to Beauvoir's account of girlhood, subjectivity, and envy in *The Second Sex*.

2. Girls and subjectivity

Beauvoir's account of envy between girls hinges on her more general account of subjectivity. Beauvoir argues that being a girl or woman means grappling with a situation that limits one's access to authentic existence as a subject. In *The second sex*, she uses her existential and phenomenological approach to analyze how it is that one *becomes woman*. This is not an analysis of *what woman is*. Beauvoir asserts "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman," expressing this existentialist principle that human individuals have no essential being (2011, 293). So, there is no essential truth to what woman *is*: instead, an individual becomes woman as a result of her facticity or specific socio-cultural situation (Mitchell 2017, 259). Beauvoir devotes chapters in *The second sex* to the formative years of childhood and girlhood, those years that directly *precede* one's life as a woman.⁶ These chapters provide fascinating phenomenological accounts of the lived experiences of girls as they experience this process of becoming woman, shaped by their situation.

Girls and women, like all individuals, experience the inescapable ambiguity of human existence. In *The ethics of ambiguity*, Beauvoir writes that the tragic ambiguity of man's⁷ condition is that he shares with his fellow men the privilege of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects (1976, 7). She writes, "In turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (1976, 7). In other words, individuals are both an "external object" and "an inwardness" (1976, 113). Furthermore, the individual is both existence and a lack of being (1976, 115). One is a lack of being in that one *is* nothing; there is no essential nature of one's being (1976, 57). To exist authentically as a subject, one must justify the world to oneself by moving towards ends that one has created for oneself (1976, 57). Alternatively, to passively accept oneself as *being*, as an object in the world, is to allow oneself to be inauthentically reduced to the immanence of one's facticity (1976, 115). The meaning and justification of one's existence does not reside within our being, nor within the end we set up, but in the very activity of constructing and pursuing that end by means of our freedom. Beauvoir writes, "to say that it [existence] is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won" (1976, 129).⁸

While all humans inevitably live out this ambiguous existence, grappling with their status as both subject and object in relation to others, Beauvoir shows that being a girl or woman means grappling with a situation that makes authentic existence as a subject more difficult. While girls and women are just as *ontologically* free as anyone else, their situation limits what they can do with this freedom. This occurs through limiting the girl to her mode as object-being and preventing her from attaining subjectivity through free pursuit of ends that she can lose herself in. In 1944 Beauvoir writes in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*,

it is right to say that whoever seeks himself will lose himself, and that it is in losing himself that he finds himself. If I seek myself in the eyes of others before I have fashioned myself, I am nothing. I take on a shape and an existence only if I first throw myself into the world by loving, by doing. (2005, 130)

As I will show, Beauvoir argues that envy between girls occurs when a girl compares herself to and competes with other girls in terms of their perceived value in the eyes of others. Such envy does not involve the girl's mode of existence as subject being, instead arising from and reinforcing a limiting situation in which girls are alienated from themselves and from each other.

3. Girlhood and envy

Becoming woman is often understood in terms of becoming a person with a specific role in relation to others, as discussed in the chapters on being wife, mother, or lover in *The second sex*.⁹ Beauvoir specifically characterizes the girl's ontological status as marked by *a waiting* in the sense that, while she is a subject who has recently grasped her newfound independence from her original infantile dependence on her mother, she also awaits, with varying amounts of awareness, becoming a woman who is *Other* or object-being in relation to man, or indeed a *being-for-men* (2011, 159).¹⁰ The girl comes to desire a woman's "destiny," that is, to be loved by a man, to be married, and to become a mother, because these roles provide women with value in patriarchal society.

Since girls acquire value in this way, girls compare themselves to other girls in terms of their value for men. Beauvoir writes that girls tend to envy and admire the one among them who receives the most masculine admiration (2011, 353). Further, Beauvoir writes, even if it is the case that the girl

is absorbed by studies, sports, a professional training, or a social and political activity . . . she has a harder time than the young man in accomplishing herself as an autonomous individual . . . even if she chooses independence, she still makes a place in her life for the man, for love. She will often be afraid of missing her destiny as a woman if she gives herself over entirely to any undertaking. (2011, 392)

A “woman’s destiny” requires a relationship with a man, and it is in this sense that the girl is consumed by “waiting for Man” (2011, 352). This influences girlhood friendships, such that there usually comes a time when friendships between girls are sacrificed.

For most older girls, whether they have a laborious or frivolous life, whether they be confined to the paternal household or partially get away from it, the conquest of a husband—or at least a serious lover—turns into a more and more pressing enterprise. This concern is often harmful for feminine friendships. The “best friend” loses her privileged place. The girl sees rivals more than partners in her companions. (2011, 392)

This rivalry between girls can be further understood if we consider the way that Beauvoir characterizes girlhood as a period when the girl begins to create herself as object-being for the desire of men, causing her to experience a *doubling* of her being. This doubling of one’s being is a way of inauthentically assuming one’s facticity specific to the lived experience of girls and women.

For Beauvoir, woman is characterized by the conflict between her subjectivity and her object-being. She writes, “Woman’s drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential” (2011, 17). Becoming desirable involves focusing on one’s object-being. In desiring passivity, in making herself object, the girl becomes “an idol in which she proudly recognises herself” (2011, 374). Pursuing herself as idol, she doubles herself; “instead of coinciding exactly with her self, here she is existing *outside* of her self” (2011, 360). She aims to “catch” a man, to become prey, and this project involves manicuring her passivity (2011, 360). The girl “tries makeup, hairstyles; instead of hiding her breasts, she massages them to make them bigger, she studies her smile in the mirror” (2011, 360). Such activities bring the pleasure of being desired by men and have the taste of a project, with the goal of acquiring a lover and/or husband. This allows the girl to ascend sexually and socially from girl to woman in order to achieve a “normal” (heterosexual, feminine) woman’s destiny. However, the undertaking of catching a man, of doubling oneself, of becoming a desirable object-being, is characterized by Beauvoir as a lie. She writes that “the adolescent girl is condemned to the lie of pretending to be object, and a prestigious one, while she experiences herself as an uncertain, dispersed existence, knowing her failings” (2011, 381). It is with this concept of the lie that we can understand the inauthenticity of the girl or woman when she creates herself as object-being. When the girl assumes the passive undertaking of becoming object for man, such a becoming is not actually possible, and

she unavoidably remains a human being with flaws, a mind, and feelings that exist inside her, separate from the desirable object, the double, that she constructs.

Beauvoir describes the object-being that the girl creates of herself as akin to merchandise, using this to explain the envy that arises between girl friends. When the girl doubles herself, existing as subject-being whilst simultaneously setting herself up as idol and object-being to “catch” a man, she is alienated from her self. She sets herself up as a character to be offered for the admiration of others, so that her self-worth and identity depends on these foreign consciousnesses (2011, 383). Thus, Beauvoir writes “this double she identifies with herself but to whose presence she passively submits is dangerous for her” (2011, 383).¹¹ A criticism from another person can destabilize the girl when she relies on others for the validation of her double (2011, 383). Beauvoir writes:

Her worth does not derive from her own effort but from a fickle approbation. This is not defined by individual activities but by general reputation; it seems quantitatively measurable; the price of merchandise decreases when it becomes too common: thus the girl is only rare, exceptional, remarkable or extraordinary if no other one is. Her female companions are rivals or enemies; she tries to denigrate, to deny them; she is jealous and hostile. (2011, 383)

The value of merchandise is higher the more unique it is, and this does not depend on the qualities of one object, but its qualities compared with other objects on the market. Accordingly, a girl does not find her worth by evaluating herself as object in isolation, but by comparing her desirability to that of other object-beings. This creates hostile relations between girls as object-beings, relationships characterized by envy and competition. In such relationships, any desirable trait of the other throws the girl’s own value into question. It is not possible for all object-beings to be extremely valuable; the higher the quantity of valuable merchandise that exists, the less valuable each item of merchandise becomes.¹² So not only does the girl experience the ambiguous existence of all human individuals, but her situation also fosters alienation from herself and from other girls.

4. Beauvoir and Zaza

Interestingly, in Beauvoir’s account of her girlhood friendship with Zaza Mabile in her first autobiography *Memoirs*, Beauvoir subtly distinguishes between this friendship and the general characteristics of friendships between girls that she articulates in *The second sex*. Beauvoir portrays her friendship with Zaza as distinctly intellectual. She writes:

We would take refuge in Monsieur Mabile’s study, and, far away from the tumult, we would talk . . . with Zaza I had real conversations, like the ones Papa had in the evenings with Mama. We would talk about school work, our reading, our common friends, our teachers, and about what we knew of the world: we never talked about ourselves. We never exchanged girlish confidences. We did not allow ourselves any kind of familiarity. We addressed each other formally as “vous” (never “tu”) and, excepting at the ends of letters, we did not give each other kisses. (Beauvoir 1963, 92–93)

It is worth noting that in her chapter “The girl” Beauvoir describes “lesbian tendencies” as being common to girls, writing that they often share intimate friendships to varying degrees (2011, 366–70).¹³ Further, in her chapter “Childhood” she writes that girl best

friends often share secrets with one another, such that their friendship is based on talking about themselves. She writes, “since they cannot act, they talk, readily mixing up serious words with totally meaningless ones; abandoned, ‘misunderstood’, they go looking for consolation in narcissistic sentiments: they look on themselves as heroines in novels, admire themselves and complain” (2011, 321). With no kisses and no “girlish confidences,” Beauvoir distinguishes her girlhood friendship from the friendships she describes and analyzes in *The second sex*.

This demarcation is further evident when Beauvoir describes her admiration for Zaza’s intellectual skills, writing that she *did not* experience envy. She writes of Zaza that “The manner in which she spoke to the teachers astounded me; her natural inflexions contrasted strongly with the stereotyped expressionless voices of the rest of the pupils . . . everything she had to say was either interesting or amusing” (1963, 91). A few pages later, she expresses the point about envy explicitly:

I didn’t require Zaza to have any such definite feelings about me: it was enough to be her best friend. The admiration I felt for her did not diminish me in my own eyes. Love is not envy.¹⁴ I could think of nothing better in the world than being myself, and loving Zaza. (1963, 96)

What strikes me about Beauvoir’s assertion that she did *not* envy Zaza is that, even if Beauvoir *did* experience envy for Zaza, it would not be the kind of envy between girls that Beauvoir outlines in *The second sex*. In *The second sex*, Beauvoir describes the girl’s envy in relation to the girl friend as fellow object-being. This sort of envy would most clearly be evident in the way a girl envies another’s physical characteristics and charms, her clothes, and the attention she receives from boys and men. Beauvoir claims not to envy Zaza’s admirable intellectual qualities, her way of speaking, her qualities of being interesting and amusing: features, I argue, that contribute to Beauvoir’s enjoyable *intellectual* friendship with Zaza.

The difference between the way Beauvoir describes girls and their friendships in *The second sex* and the way she describes her own girlhood and friendship with Zaza raises some questions regarding Beauvoir’s possible sense of superiority over other girls and women. One could argue that there is something problematic in the way that Beauvoir attributes a negative type of envy to other girls and women and then claims to be released from any sort of envy in *Memoirs* (1963, 96). Beauvoir tends to *other* herself from women in general, to categorize her own life as unique and special in comparison to the countless stories of women she utilizes in both *The second sex* and her literature. The way she conceives of her difference (and possible superiority) to other women is noticeable in her introduction to *The second sex* where she discusses what kind of person is best suited to “elucidate the situation of women,” implying the suitability of herself for the role (2011, 15). She writes “many women today, fortunate to have had all the privileges of the human being restored to them, can afford the luxury of impartiality: we even feel the necessity of it,” and further:

many of us have never felt our femaleness to be a difficulty or an obstacle; many other problems seem more essential than those that concern us uniquely: this very detachment makes it possible to hope our attitude will be objective. Yet we know the feminine world more intimately than men do because our roots are in it; we grasp more immediately what the fact of being female means for a human being, and we care more about knowing it. (16)

These statements lend themselves to being interpreted as Beauvoir asserting her superiority over other women, as well as her detachment, impartiality, and objectivity which, she seems to presume, most other women do not have. However, I think it is important to recognize that Beauvoir *was* different to many other women of her time and place, and that her experiences and achievements were unique. Arguably, her recognition of her difference to and separateness from other women demonstrates her honesty and justified pride. Furthermore, it could be argued that there was a necessity for Beauvoir to distance herself from the general lot of women to be taken seriously by the other intellectuals around her who were, for the most part, men.¹⁵ When it comes to her account of her friendship with Zaza, I do not think she distances herself from the envious friendships she analyzes in *The second sex* out of superiority or dishonesty, but instead from an inability to analyze the complexities of her relationship with Zaza with the impartiality and objectivity that she could apply to her analysis of other women's lives.

Beauvoir's indication that she did *not* envy Zaza is arguably contradicted in other statements regarding their friendship. She indicates elsewhere that her friendship is more complex, involving feelings of envy and dependence. While Beauvoir asserts that "I was not in the habit of comparing myself with others" (1963, 101), she also writes, comparing herself and Zaza's performance at school, that "although her marks were not as good as mine, her free-and-easy attitude to her work gave it an indefinable quality which mine lacked, despite or perhaps because of my assiduity. She was said to have 'personality': that was her supreme advantage" (1963, 112). In *The inseparables* (Beauvoir et al. 2021), where we see Beauvoir's fictional account of her friendship with Zaza through the characters of Sylvie and Andrée, Sylvie, the character representing Beauvoir herself, notes that: "I was troublingly aware of the gift she had received from heaven, which I found so enthralling, her personality. Secretly I thought to myself that Andrée was one of those prodigies about whom, later on, books would be written" (12). In this fictional account, we perhaps see a more honest representation of the envy Beauvoir felt for Zaza's approach to her studies when she writes that "Andrée was a brilliant student; if I still came in first place it was because she was too haughty to compete for it. I envied her indifference without being able to reproduce it" (2021, 18). In these passages, Beauvoir arguably expresses a form of envy for Zaza's personality, originality, and attitude specifically in relation to her intellectual skill and performance at school. Interestingly, this envy seems to be ambivalently tied to admiration.

Beauvoir also expresses her intense feelings of dependence on Zaza, describing how the friendship impacted her emotional state and feelings of self-worth. Such descriptions further indicate a complex friendship marked by envy for her friend whom she nonetheless loves and admires. After feeling some depression at the beginning of a school term without knowing why, Simone experiences a rush of positive feelings when Zaza finally returns:

One afternoon I was taking my things off in the cloakroom at school when Zaza came up to me. We began to talk, to relate various things that had happened to us, and to comment on them; my tongue was suddenly loosened, and a thousand bright suns began blazing in my breast; radiant with happiness, I told myself: "That's what was wrong; I needed Zaza!" (Beauvoir 1963, 95)

This reliance on Zaza for happiness is further expressed when she writes "I should have lost all desire to go on living if I had been separated from Zaza" (1963, 122). This

dependence is interestingly coupled with feelings of low self-worth when Beauvoir compares herself with Zaza. She writes, “It was only when I compared myself with Zaza that I bitterly deplored my banality” (1963, 114). She perceives Zaza as having personality, and contrasts this with herself: “‘I’ve no personality,’ I would sadly tell myself . . . I could find no trace of my own subjectivity” (1963, 113). Interestingly, Beauvoir does not explain this dynamic as one of dependence, lack of self-worth, or envy. Instead, she provides a metaphysical explanation for her emotions in relation to Zaza.

Beauvoir explains that her feelings of lack in comparison with Zaza result from the fact that she unavoidably apprehends Zaza from the outside; as a complete being with perceivable characteristics, differing from her own imprecise, inwardly felt experience of herself. She writes, “inside me, everything was shapeless and without significance. But in Zaza I could glimpse a presence, flashing as a spring of water, solid as a block of marble, and as firmly drawn as a portrait by Durer. I compared this with my own interior void, and despised myself” (1963, 112). Even in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* Beauvoir refers to feeling despair in her youth when comparing her own perceived lack of personality with “certain classmates” who “dazzled” her (2005, 116). She explains this experience as follows.

However long I look at myself in a mirror and tell myself my own history, I never grasp myself as a solid object. I feel within me that void which is myself; I feel that I *am* not . . . The other easily takes on that marvellous and inaccessible character because he alone experiences for himself the void in his heart. For me, he is an object in the world, a plenitude. I who am nothing, believe in his being, and yet he is also something other than an object. (2005, 116)

I do not think that Beauvoir’s explanation for why she felt these negative feelings of dependence and low self-worth in relation to Zaza is convincing enough. Her explanation does not account for why she feels this way specifically in relation to her close friend, and not in relation to the numerous other individuals she engages with in her daily life. These contradictions indicate that perhaps Beauvoir was not being honest with herself about her feelings of envy for Zaza.¹⁶ To further understand the type of envy that Beauvoir seems to feel toward Zaza, which she does not account for even in her description of envy between girls in *The Second Sex*, I turn to the writing of Elena Ferrante.

5. Lenu and Lila

In *Frantumaglia* (2016), in an interview about her writing practice, Ferrante writes that she wanted no hypocrisy in her narration; “my narrator had to be honest with herself in both cases, she had to consider herself honest when she is tranquil, and when she is enraged, envious, and so on” (275). In *The Neapolitan quartet*, this intention is evident in Lenu’s narration of her friendship with Lila. Unlike Beauvoir’s inability or unwillingness to admit her feelings of envy, Lenu does not shy away from revealing the details of both her intensely positive and negative feelings in her friendship with Lila. In addition, she does not resort to explaining these feelings away with universalizing accounts of the problem of relating to others in general. We are therefore provided with a more consistent and detailed account of the envy that can be experienced between girls in intellectual friendships, alongside the positive aspects of their relationship, such as feelings of admiration and pleasure.

Like Beauvoir's account of her intellectual friendship with Zaza, in *My brilliant friend*, Lenu's friendship with Lila is characterized by their pleasurable and fulfilling conversations together. Throughout the quartet, Lenu draws inspiration and intellectual energy from Lila, whom she considers to be a genius, with intellectual talents beyond her own. Lila possesses such intellectual virtues even though she is prevented from continuing her education beyond elementary school, while Lenu goes on to complete high school and university studies and eventually becomes a writer in adulthood. In *My brilliant friend*, following a conversation with Lila about love, during which they "speak in the language of comics and books," Lenu recounts, "Those moments lighted my heart and my head: she and I and all those well-crafted words . . . The exchange with Lila had given me a pleasure so intense that I planned to devote myself to her totally" (Ferrante 2012, 103). Conversation with Lila takes on a quality of collaboration that Lenu feels brings them together. Lenu encounters their joint capacity to give meaning to their experiences; "I, I and Lila, we two with that capacity that together—only together—we had to seize the mass of colours, sounds, things, and people, and express it and give it power" (2012, 138). Indeed, when talking to Lila, Lenu finds that Lila's capacity to wield words is passed onto her.

[Lila] took the facts and in a natural way charged them with tension; she intensified reality as she reduced it to words, she injected it with energy. But I also realized, with pleasure, that, as soon as she began to do this, I felt able to do the same, and I tried and it came easily . . . (Ferrante 2012, 130)

Together, the girls construct complicated dialogues, where Lila's intellectual energy acts as a catalyst for the girls to participate and give meaning to the world collaboratively. Such passages indicate the intensely rewarding aspect of the intellectual bond in Lenu and Lila's friendship. However, this dynamic is also characterized by negative feelings of dependence and envy.

When Lenu takes a trip to Ischia, she receives a letter from Lila that provokes a heady mix of admiration and envy. Lenu describes her response to reading Lila's letter as follows.

Lila was able to speak through writing; unlike me when I wrote . . . unlike even many writers I had read and was reading, she expressed herself in sentences that were well constructed, and without error, even though she had stopped going to school, but—further—she left no trace of effort, you weren't aware of the artifice of the written word. (Ferrante 2012, 226–27)

It is later, when Lenu rereads this letter, that we see more clearly the ambivalent feelings that arise in response to it; "Again I felt humbled by Lila's ability to write, by what she was able to give form to and I was not, my eyes misted. I was happy, yes, that she was so good even without school, without books from the library, but that happiness made me guiltily unhappy" (2012, 231). Here is arguably an instance of Ferrante's honest narration, where she evocatively expresses Lenu's experience of both admiration, pleasure, and envy in response to Lila's intellectual skills.

Like Beauvoir and Zaza's relationship, Lenu's intellectual friendship with Lila acts as an impetus for her study and life in general, while also causing her negative feelings of dependence and low self-worth. In *My brilliant friend*, when Lenu feels distant from Lila

during certain parts of the narrative, she describes a significant decline in her drive to study. Lenu feels that “what I did by myself couldn’t excite me, only what Lila touched became important. If she withdrew, if her voice withdrew from things, the things got dirty, dusty” (Ferrante 2012, 100). Lila’s influence on Lenu’s desire to study is such that Lenu feels excited only by those interests she shares with Lila. When Lila joins Lenu in studying Greek or Latin, or when she discusses certain ideas and topics with her, these areas become a site of interest and dedication for Lenu, leading inevitably to her impressive academic success in these areas at school. However, when Lila withdraws, Lenu loses her motivation, focus, and passion. During such an episode, she remarks,

I soon had to observe that, since Lila had stopped pushing me, anticipating me in my studies and my reading, school, and even Maestro Ferraro’s library, had stopped being a kind of adventure and had become only a thing that I knew how to do well and was much praised for. (2012, 187).

This aspect of Lenu’s intellectual relationship with Lila can be understood as a form of harmful dependence. Lenu acknowledges that her dependence on Lila causes her grief; “I felt grieved . . . because she [Lila] knew how to be autonomous whereas I needed her” (2012, 132). Not only does Lenu notice her own dependence, but she seems to envy the independence she perceives in Lila.

While we can lament what appears to be Lenu’s dependent intellectual relationship with Lila, we can simultaneously suggest a more positive interpretation, in that the friendship between the girls offers Lenu the opportunity for a rare experience of collaboration in her intellectual pursuits. Lenu’s reliance on Lila can be seen as stemming from both a lack of independence and the good fortune of finding someone with whom dialogue and shared focus bring her such inspiration and passion. For example, when Lenu receives excellent grades at school for an essay on Dido, she reflects on the importance of Lila’s ideas in helping her to fully understand and creatively interpret the topic; “Of course, I said to myself, the essay on Dido is mine, the capacity to formulate beautiful sentences comes from me; of course, what I wrote about Dido belongs to me; but didn’t I work it out with her, didn’t we excite each other in turn, didn’t my passion grow in the warmth of hers?” (2012, 188). This passage describes the positive impact of conversation and dialogue with a trusted friend in the process of developing one’s own intellectual pursuits. Intellectual dialogue and collaboration with a significant other allow for mutual excitement—the growth of one’s passion in the “warmth” of another’s.

6. The ambivalence of envy

What we have, then, is Beauvoir’s account of envy between girls in *The second sex* which describes a purely negative form of envy experienced by girls because of their status as object-beings-for-men. We also have Beauvoir’s account of her friendship with Zaza in *Memoirs* and *The inseparables* where she seems to be in denial about her feelings of envy for Zaza, explaining the harmful aspects of her dependence by universalizing what in fact are feelings towards one particular friend. We then have Ferrante’s account of a very similar intellectual friendship between girls, this time between Lenu and Lila, which brazenly confronts the complex mix of emotions in this friendship, with no attempt to explain away the feelings of envy.

Beauvoir's account of envy between girls in *The second sex* corresponds to a widely understood perception of friendships between girls. In *Adolescent girls and their friends*, Vivienne Griffiths writes that friendships between girls have a dual nature in that they are close and supportive but also liable to cause jealousy and emotional tension (1995, 3). In *Elena Ferrante's key words*, Tiziana de Rogatis echoes this assertion when she writes that "One of the most pervasive stereotypes about women is that they don't know how to be friends, which is to say they don't know how to establish a loyal, transparent relationship free of murky feelings like jealousy and envy" (2019, 57). Rogatis argues that Ferrante breaks this stereotype by placing the intense, fiery friendship between Lenu and Lila at the heart of her quartet (2019, 57). She writes, "Theirs is not the classic ethos of the reciprocal, loyal bond between two equals: this kind of self-determination is a male privilege, one historically predicated on and inevitably a complement of, male dominance" (2019, 57–58). At first glance, this may seem like a contradiction because Rogatis first identifies the stereotype that girls cannot establish friendships free of envy, and then claims that Ferrante is breaking this stereotype by presenting a friendship between girls that is neither reciprocal nor loyal. However, I understand her point to be that Ferrante breaks the stereotype by focusing on a friendship that is mired by envy and yet is nonetheless a valuable friendship for the two girls involved. Their friendship is characterized by both positive and negative features, and is worthy of literary and philosophical exploration, not to be dismissed as an example of women "not knowing how to be friends."

The intellectual friendships between Lenu and Lila and Beauvoir and Zaza feature a complex array of emotions, including a form of envy for the other's intellectual skills and character. Enmeshed as it is in this enriching yet painful dynamic, this form of envy cannot easily be categorized as negative for the girl. Stiliana Milkova refers to Lila and Lenu's friendship as "competitive-generative" (2021, 128) and Rogatis expresses a similar understanding when she writes that "It is interesting to learn that 'one draws strength from the other' not only thanks to their supportiveness and mutual respect but also thanks to their rivalry, which leads them to appropriate from one another, at a cost, dolls and men, writing and future plans" (2019, 66). Further, Rogatis writes, "The rivalry and competitive anxiety produced by the two friends' fantasies of superiority and expropriation enable them to gain partial freedom from the gender, inequality and violence both are subjected to" (2019, 69). The generative and productive form of competition and rivalry identified here points to an ambivalent form of envy that is not merely negative.

The reciprocity of this ambivalently productive friendship dynamic is evident in both *My brilliant friend* and *Memoirs*. For example, Lenu narrates that she notices a tension in Lila, "the desire to prove that she was equal to whatever I was studying" (2012, 160). Lila is driven to study Latin and Greek in her own time to demonstrate to Lenu that she can do what Lenu does at school, even though she herself is prevented from continuing her schooling. Furthermore, Lila expresses that she values Lenu's academic skills when Lenu employs sophisticated argumentation to help Lila select a wedding dress among the heated, mixed opinions of her fiancé's sister and mother. Lila expresses that she likes "immensely" how Lenu used words to navigate this sensitive social situation (294). Furthermore, in the intimate moments when Lenu helps Lila to bathe and dress on her wedding day, Lila insists that Lenu should never stop studying because "you're my brilliant friend, you have to be the best of all," demonstrating her esteem for Lenu's intelligence and academic prowess (312–13).

In *Memoirs* there is evidence that Zaza perhaps envied or admired Beauvoir's "hard-working, conscientious ways" while simultaneously reproaching her own "indolence" when it comes to study (1963, 117). Beauvoir recounts that during the Easter holidays at age 14, Zaza "wrote to me that she hadn't the heart to revise her physics notes, and yet the idea of failing grieved her deeply: 'You cannot understand how I feel, because if you had to prepare for a test, instead of torturing yourself about not knowing anything you would set to work to prepare yourself for it'" (116–17). We may not know how exactly their friendship benefitted Zaza's approach to her studies and projects. However, Beauvoir recounts passages in letters where Zaza expresses how much she values their friendship, such as when she sketches a "portrait" of Beauvoir as having the "warmest of hearts and an unequalled, kindly indulgence in overlooking the faults of her friends" (119). While my focus is on the narrators of these texts, whose perspectives and experiences we have access to, these various passages indicate that the envious dynamic I describe could to some extent be reciprocal. So, we must keep this in mind as I go on to analyze the ambivalent form of envy experienced by Beauvoir and Lenu.

7. Envy and freedom

The envy experienced by Lenu and, arguably, Beauvoir,¹⁷ is complexly tied up with admiration and enjoyment of the friend's intellectual skills. If we focus on the emotion of envy itself, it is evident that it can be understood as an emotion that incorporates admiration into its very structure. In her paper "Envy and resentment" (2001), Marguerite La Caze highlights the ambivalence of the emotion of envy due to both the negative and positive role it can play in the individual's life. I will begin by unpacking La Caze's account of envy before expanding on our understanding of this ambivalent emotion using Beauvoir's existentialist framework.

Philosophers have often characterized envy as a negative emotion that should be repressed (La Caze 2001, 31). La Caze argues that, conversely, envy can be understood as a crucial component of our emotional life, an emotion that enables us to respond to injustices against ourselves and others (2001, 31). She argues that purely negative views are based on a narrow understanding of envy as "the form of feeling pained or disturbed by other's rightfully gaining life's rewards" (31). However, La Caze suggests that there is another form of envy; "We feel envy when we recognise and are affected by the success or possessions of others which we consider desirable" (32). She then provides a definition of envy that can be applied to the kind experienced by Beauvoir and Lenu; "envy is a complex of feelings involving the recognition that others have, through luck or either deserved or undeserved means, received goods or had successes which are considered desirable" (32). By understanding envy as involving the recognition that someone possesses something that we consider desirable, especially in regard to some trait or skill, we can reveal a link between envy and admiration.¹⁸ I think the subtle distinction between the two is that admiration is the recognition of another's possession of a desirable object or trait, whereas envy is the same recognition with the added knowledge or appreciation that this desired trait is something that one lacks in comparison. This experience of envy, then, acts as an impetus for a subject to be able to identify desirable projects and set these up as ends to pursue for themselves.¹⁹

By allowing the individual to recognize what they lack in comparison to the envied/ admired friend, envy is unique in its role in shaping the individual's understanding of what they themselves value. La Caze writes that "Envy of some possession or situation alerts us to what is valuable to us and shows how valuable it is" (2001, 37). This

conception of envy explains why it is that Beauvoir and Lenu identify their envious feelings for their friend as both painful and yet positively crucial for their own sense of purpose, fulfillment and passion for their studies and life in general. Furthermore, La Caze's argument helps us to understand that what makes envy an especially harmful and negative experience for the subject is the guilt that is commonly experienced in conjunction. She writes, "the second-order guilt generated by considering these emotions to be unalloyed vice makes the often noted characteristic of their personal unpleasantness worse" (34).²⁰ This second-order guilt is evident in the previously cited passage in *My brilliant friend* where Lenu expresses that she felt "guiltily unhappy" in the face of Lila's excellent writing skills (Ferrante 2012, 231). Furthermore, it is arguably evident in Beauvoir's wish to distance herself from the emotion of envy in her account of her friendship with Zaza. With our revised understanding of envy as impetus, however, I argue that we can push aside the notion that, ideally, Beauvoir and Lenu should experience pure admiration, pure happiness in the face of their friend's skill. Without envy, without the apprehension of one's lack in the face of the friend's admirable qualities, there would arguably be no desire to pursue the acquisition of these qualities and skills oneself. It would mean that Beauvoir and Lenu would passively accept themselves as they *are*, inauthentically denying their capacity to transform, to become, to establish and pursue new ends. In addition, without the presence of this admirable/envious friend in the girl's life, she would miss out on the extremely pleasurable and inspiring experiences of intellectual conversation and collaboration.

The girl's experience of envy within an intellectual friendship dynamic expresses her ambiguous freedom as a human being; despite her oppressive situation that limits her to object-being status, she is nonetheless free to confront these limits and pursue ends in her mode as subject. This is the case because, first, if we were not free, we would not experience envy. Beauvoir writes in *The ethics of ambiguity* that "neither scorn nor esteem would have any meaning if one regarded the acts of a man as a purely mechanical resultant. In order for men to become indignant or to admire, they must be conscious of their own freedom and the freedom of others" (1976, 21). I think that envy, linked to admiration and serving as an impetus for the individual to identify values and ends to pursue, is similarly expressive of human freedom. In envying her friend, the girl expresses her own and her friend's capacity to choose, pursue, act, and change. Nonetheless, individuals are also constrained by their facticity, their situation defining the limits of their freedom. The envy between girls as object-beings described by Beauvoir in *The second sex* is such that girls experience envy for a static conception of the other's being. As object-being, the girl is passive, experiencing herself in her immanence; she is desirable, she *receives* attention from men. To envy this aspect of the other girl's being is to envy the passive charms of her appearance, her body. For Beauvoir, our body constitutes our situation (2011, 46). So, envy between two girls in their mode of object-being is envy for the girl mired in her situation, her facticity.

Envy for the girl's intellectual skills, her attitude, and her personality, is more complex because it recognizes as valuable and desirable those aspects of the girl friend that constitute her in her mode as subject. The intellectual girl thinks, writes, she discusses ideas, reads, pursues knowledge, and argues for her opinion. As such, this particular kind of envy between girls in an intellectual friendship cannot be considered in the way Beauvoir conceptualizes envy in *The second sex* as a relation between girls as merchandise comparing their desirability for men. Instead, as I have shown, this envious dynamic in intellectual friendships between girls allows the girl to identify her own values and acts as an impetus for her to pursue excellence in her studies and fulfillment

in her intellectual life more generally. Further, this dynamic is complemented by the inspiration and excitement that the girl experiences with her friend when they engage in conversations about various topics. The envious intellectual friendship, then, is crucial for the girl's situation because the friend as fellow subject constitutes a significant aspect of the girl's situation. Specifically, this envied girl friend constitutes a special aspect of the girl's situation in that she uniquely opens avenues for the girl's freedom.

Beauvoir writes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that "the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom" (1976, 91). This generally expresses the concept that part of my situation is the other people in my life who are also free and exist in their own situation, of which I myself constitute an aspect. My situation is thus defined by the presence of other free beings in my life. Furthermore, I am free insofar as I grapple with my own unique situation, pursuing projects or possibly revolting against the specific form/s of oppression that I am subjected to. Thus, the envied girl friend constitutes an aspect of the girl's situation in an oppressive patriarchal society that attempts to limit the girl to her mode as object-being for men. Moreover, this girl friend actually reveals the girl's freedom within that oppressive situation. Deborah MacKeefe (1983) argues that it is Beauvoir's friendship with Zaza that provides the impetus for Beauvoir's writing career. In *The Neapolitan quartet*, Lenu continues pursuing her study into high school and university and goes on to have a professional career as a writer, the success of which she continuously attributes to her friendship with Lila. These friendships, not in spite of, but because of their envious nature, provide the protagonists in these texts with the drive to pursue ends in which they find fulfillment, independence, passion, and, arguably, subjectivity in Beauvoir's existentialist sense.

For Beauvoir, "woman is defined as a human being in search of values within a world of values" (2011, 62). The world of values that we find ourselves situated in is created and upheld by humans and is thus defined by the specific people that surround us throughout our lives. In encountering other individuals, we encounter other options of how to be, how to think, what can be pursued. Who the girl encounters shapes what she values, desires, and therefore does.²¹ In *Memoirs* and *My brilliant friend* Beauvoir and Lenu are surrounded by women and other girls who are shaped by the patriarchal values specific to their context. These fellow women and girls are therefore likewise bogged down by the responsibilities and expectations that come with following the typical "woman's destiny." The girl friend in the intellectual friendship uniquely provides the girl with an opportunity to encounter values conducive to her freedom. This is bolstered by the fact that these possibilities, these values, are presented in a friend who is, in a sense, just like her. The girl can think: "if she, who is in many respects like me, can do that, then so can I." Sharon Marcus in *Between women* argues that friendship for the girl is the first experience of a relationship that is elected rather than assigned (2007, 56). It is therefore a relationship that expresses freedom from instrumental relationships as it does not entail material entanglements in the way that family relationships do (Marcus 2007, 56). Beauvoir's own existentialist philosophy can be extended to understand an ambivalent form of envy that is conducive to the individual girl's freedom and subjectivity. However, we must not think that the girl's envy toward her friend is purely positive. In virtue of its ambivalence, envy retains its negative qualities.

8. Envy and self-worth

Envy should not be understood as more positive than it is negative, only as ambivalent. I conclude my analysis by paying some necessary attention to the dangers of envy that

remain even with a more positive interpretation. I think it is important to recognize that the experience of envy between girls that I have described should ideally be temporary and not overwhelm the girl entirely. In *Frantumaglia* Ferrante writes that competition in female friendships is good if balanced by other more positive aspects:

competition between women is good only if it does not prevail; that is to say if it coexists with affinity, affection, with a real sense of being mutually indispensable, with sudden peaks of solidarity in spite of envy, jealousy, and the whole inevitable cohort of bad feelings. Of course, this makes for a very tangled skein of relationships, but that's fine. Our way of being is—for historical reasons—much more tangled than that of men, which is accustomed to using simplification as a quick way to solve problems. (2016, 349)

Arguably, in the literary friendships I have analyzed there were periods where envy and its connected emotions of dependence and low self-worth came to dominate the emotional life of the protagonists. This is where I think Beauvoir's account of envy between girls in *The second sex* holds value even in connection to the ambivalent form of envy present in these intellectual friendships. As explained above, girls are alienated from their bodies and their own selves, valuing themselves in terms of their value for men and becoming mired in their object mode-of-being. This inhibits them, preventing them from pursuing and losing themselves in freely chosen ends, and thus from "finding themselves." So the girl is arguably susceptible to experiencing low self-worth. Her situation shapes her to focus on the way she is perceived and valued by others, rather than on what she wants to *do*, pursue, and create. Arguably, supportive friendships that feature the affinity, affection, mutual indispensability, and solidarity that Ferrante mentions, would work to foster a girl's self-worth. Adjacently, a girl with a strong sense of self would arguably be less likely to experience a form of envy that overpowers her and would be more likely to healthily overcome the emotion, such that the envy would not prevail. I think that ideally both Beauvoir's and Lenu's friendships would have been more mutually supportive and conducive to their self-worth. However, this want of supportiveness is understandable given Beauvoir's account of the girl's situation and Ferrante's reference to our "tangled way of being" that exists "for historical reasons."

Although my focus has been on the way the girl's experience of envy and low self-worth is shaped by her sexed/gendered situation, it is also worth noting other factors such as race or class. Christine Maksimowicz (2016) analyzes Lenu's relationship with Lila using various studies on the effects of poverty and injustice on individuals' sense of self and their relationships with others. She cites research that finds that working-class individuals who have experienced unreliability and betrayals within the family and wider institutions demonstrate a sensibility of distrust and refusal of intimacy (2016, 212). Individuals inure themselves "to everyday injury by splitting off the subjective self" (214). Maksimowicz uses this research to understand how the poverty of Lenu and Lila's upbringing shape their individual lack of self-worth and inability to establish a friendship based on consistent trust and support. Furthermore, Lenu receives from both her mother Immacolata and Lila the expectation that she will academically excel and move beyond the poverty-stricken confines of the neighborhood, while also receiving criticism from them for supposing herself superior to her origins and abandoning those who remain behind (2016, 220). Such contradictory influence likely stems from Immacolata and Lila both seeking a reflection of their own worth in Lenu's success while also feeling diminished in comparison to her achievements. Maksimowicz writes that

“Within the relational dyad, Lila regularly projects the shame and pain of her own unrecognized self onto Elena while Elena transforms both Lila’s and her own injurious impulses into self-loathing that finds expression in her deep-seated doubt of her abilities and in her undoing of her achievements” (222–23). Maksimowicz thus demonstrates how Ferrante represents the factors of class that shape Lenu and Lila’s friendship, impacting their self-worth and ability to develop and maintain a dynamic of trust and support. This highlights the intersecting aspects of the girl’s situation that can make her more prone to an ambivalent envy that, although involving its positive aspects, may overwhelm her and be difficult to overcome. What are desirable, I think, are intellectual friendships that are just as conducive to self-worth as they are envy, even considering the emotion’s ambivalence.

9. Friendship and feminism

Beauvoir writes that “The girl’s character and behaviour express her situation: if it changes, the adolescent girl’s attitude also changes. Today, it is becoming possible for her to take her future in her hands, instead of putting it in those of the man” (2011, 392). The friendships between Lenu and Lila and Beauvoir and Zaza show the power of a significant intellectual friendship with another girl. Such friendships have the power to open up the girl’s situation such that new possibilities of freedom and ways of being are available to her that may not have been otherwise. I have argued that this opening up of possibilities for the girl occurs *through* envy: an ambivalent form of envy that incorporates admiration and allows the girl to identify values and pursue new ends. Envy can be destructive for friendships between girls in the sense described by Beauvoir in *The second sex* where girls compare themselves to each other in their object mode-of-being. However, when the kind of ambivalent envy evident in *The Neapolitan quartet*, *Memoirs*, and *The inseparables* is experienced, the girl’s experience of herself as subject can be fostered. While I argue that this ambivalent envy is conducive to the girl’s subjectivity and freedom, such an emotion is ideally experienced and then overcome, supported by a girl’s self-worth and mutual support within her friendship/s.

My analysis of envious intellectual friendship is significant considering more general assertions of feminist goals expressed by both Beauvoir and Ferrante. In the conclusion of *The second sex* Beauvoir writes that “[Today’s woman] has to shed her old skin and cut her own clothes. She will only be able to do this if there is a collective change” (2011, 777). Further on, “if a caste is maintained in an inferior position, it remains inferior: but freedom can break the circle” (2011, 780). In *Frantumaglia* Ferrante writes “we women must fight through excellence of female thought and action” (2016, 352). My argument regarding envy in intellectual friendships between girls brings together these notions of collective change, freedom, and excellence of female thought and action. Arguably, the girl does not pursue freedom and become subject alone, but with others. Collective change for women can only occur when girls and women have friendships with each other that allow them to freely pursue values and ends other than those offered by the patriarchal construct of a valuable “woman’s destiny.”

Such generative friendships between girls are not easy to come by or to maintain, being influenced by the girl’s situation where oppression based on gender may also intersect with class, race, and other factors. It is significant that the stories of these two friendships occur after the event of Zaza’s death and Lila’s disappearance. I think the narrators’ distance from their friend allows them to reflect on their friendship and their feelings in a way that they could not when their friend was present in their life.

Furthermore, I think it emphasizes my point on the importance of envy being overcome. While in the grips of envy, it is arguably more difficult to openly express the admiration that is bound up with it. In analysing the emotion of envy between girls, I hope to have both elucidated the presence of this emotion in my chosen texts and to have prompted reflection on the presence of this emotion in our own lives as girls and women. In doing so, I hope to bring attention to the significance and complexity of our relationships with each other, and to highlight the emancipatory potential of friendships that feature this ambivalent form of envy.

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Notes

1 Beauvoir was, however, very much concerned with race and class. See Meryl Altman's chapter "Nothing to say about race and class?" in her book *Beauvoir in Time* (2020) in which she writes that "since not all women are equally materially situated or practically equipped to step away from sexist arrangements, a call for purely personal ethical change will only work for those who are the least constrained by material and practical structures. Insofar as Beauvoir was particularly addressing her own class, her message to them (us) is that unlike farm wives or factory workers, they (we) really have no excuse" (2020, 184).

2 Translated by Ann Goldstein.

3 I think it is interesting to note that *The second sex* was not published in Italian until 1961, although the original, French version was circulating in the mid-1950s among women involved in certain political parties and organizations, such as in the Communist and Socialist parties (Giardini 2011, 451).

4 She also names Firestone, Muraro, Cavarero, and Gagliasso.

5 Degli Esposti identifies these similarities and then goes on to analyze how both Beauvoir and Ferrante represent their protagonist's navigation of metropolitan environments.

6 Part I of vol. 2 of *The Second Sex* is titled "Formative years" and consists of four chapters: "Childhood," "The girl," "Sexual initiation," and "The lesbian", in that order.

7 Beauvoir refers to "man" throughout *The Ethics of Ambiguity* when analyzing the condition of human individuals in general. However, this gendered language is of course significant when considered in light of Beauvoir's work in *The second sex* in which she writes that "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being" (2011, 5–6).

8 It is worth noting that Beauvoir's oeuvre is deeply intertwined with Jean-Paul Sartre's. Beauvoir's concept of being articulated in *The ethics of ambiguity* reflects, develops, and responds to Sartre's own concept of being in *Being and nothingness*. For an interesting in-depth analysis of the links between Beauvoir and Sartre's ontological and existentialist concepts of being, freedom, and situation, I recommend Harvard Langley's article "Freedom and agency in *The Second Sex*" (2024).

9 See the chapters in *The second sex* titled "The married woman," "The mother," and "The woman in love."

10 See Burke (2018) for a focused discussion of Beauvoir's account of lived time in *The second sex*, including a discussion of the girl's experience of time as a "waiting."

11 Relevant here is Beauvoir's account of narcissism, which unfortunately I do not have the space to pay attention to. Julie K. Ward provides a helpful summary of Beauvoir's concept of narcissism (1999, 45).

12 We can further understand the consequences of theorizing girl/woman as merchandise by paying attention to Luce Irigaray's chapter titled "Women on the market." Here, Irigaray argues that women have value in patriarchy insofar as they "serve the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men" (Irigaray 1985, 172).

13 See Richards (2020, 178–206) for an exploration of the queer relationship that Lenu and Lila could have had. Also, see Ursula Tidd's interpretation of Beauvoir and Zaza's friendship as involving lesbian love (1999, 2021).

- 14 Sara Protasi argues against the overwhelming consensus that love and envy are “deeply incompatible” (2017, 1767).
- 15 See Beauvoir’s chapter on “The independent woman” in *The second sex* for her account of the lived experience of independent women. She explores the challenges women face when they live in ways that challenge traditional feminine roles while still unavoidably living in a patriarchal society.
- 16 Niza Yanay (1990) argues that Beauvoir struggled to validate her own feelings. She explores this by analyzing Beauvoir’s character of Francoise in *She came to stay*, who arguably refuses to express responsibility for her inner needs, instead rationalizing, justifying, and suppressing her emotions.
- 17 As she represents herself in *Memoirs* and *The Inseparables*.
- 18 Protasi argues for the beneficial nature of a particular kind of envy—emulative envy—which, put simply, is an experience of envy which “motivates the agent to overcome their disadvantage by improving themselves” (2017, 1778). My account of envy is related but distinct. Protasi denies that emulative envy is a form of admiration, asserting that “admiration is pleasant while emulative envy is unpleasant” (2017, 1779). However, I am arguing that this form of envy which incorporates admiration in its very structure is characterized by both positive and negative feelings, as is evident in my chosen texts.
- 19 Interestingly, Luke Purshouse cites a psychological study which finds that “envy largely correlates with feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction, wishfulness and longing, self-criticism and the motivation to improve” (2004, 182). See also, Smith et al. (1988). Furthermore, Peter Toohey defends jealousy’s role in encouraging creativity and competitive achievement (2014).
- 20 A source of this second-order guilt could be the stigma that surrounds it. Kristjánsson writes of the stigma surrounding the emotion of jealousy and indicates its “potential salience for flourishing lives” (2016, 753).
- 21 I do not think that girls are forced to follow role models, only that they do. All humans arguably shape themselves based on what they see as possible from those around them, or those people they are exposed to. This is why representation matters. However, I think individuals can also possess originality, expressing their uniqueness and pursuing ends that have not been pursued by anyone else.

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