



“On ne naît
pas femme :
on le devient...”

The Life of a Sentence

Edited by
Bonnie Mann &
Martina Ferrari

“On ne naît pas femme : on le devient”

“On ne naît pas femme :
on le devient”

The Life of a Sentence

Edited by BONNIE MANN AND
MARTINA FERRARI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

© Oxford University Press 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mann, Bonnie, editor.

Title: "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient" : the life of a sentence /
edited by Bonnie Mann and Martina Ferrari.

Description: New York : Oxford University Press, 2017. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046301 (print) | LCCN 2017026713 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780190608835 (online course) | ISBN 9780190608828 (pdf) |

ISBN 9780190678012 (ebook) | ISBN 9780190608811 (cloth : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Feminist theory. | Feminism. | Beauvoir, Simone de, 1908–1986.

Classification: LCC HQ1101 (ebook) | LCC HQ1101 .O5 2017 (print) |

DDC 305.4201—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016046301>

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed by Sheridan Books, Inc., United States of America

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Contributors xi

Introduction 1

Bonnie Mann

SECTION I | Intellectual History 7

CHAPTER 1 Before Beauvoir, Before Butler: “Genre” and “Gender”
in France and the Anglo-American World 11

Karen Offen

CHAPTER 2 Beauvoir Against Objectivism: The Operation of
the Norm in Beauvoir and Butler 37

Bonnie Mann

SECTION II | History of a Scandal 55

CHAPTER 3 The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What’s
Missing from *The Second Sex* 59

Margaret A. Simons

CHAPTER 4 While We Wait: The English Translation of
The Second Sex 71

Toril Moi

CHAPTER 5 The Adulteress Wife 103

Toril Moi

CHAPTER 6	Simone De Beauvoir: <i>The Second Sex</i> (Review of the New Translation)	115
	<i>Nancy Bauer</i>	
CHAPTER 7	The Grand Rectification: <i>The Second Sex</i>	127
	<i>Meryl Altman</i>	
SECTION III The Philosophers' Debate		137
CHAPTER 8	The Floating "a"	143
	<i>Debra Bergoffen</i>	
CHAPTER 9	Becoming A Woman: Reading Beauvoir's Response to the Woman Question	159
	<i>Megan M. Burke</i>	
CHAPTER 10	The Phenomenal Body Is Not Born; It Comes to Be a Body-Subject: Interpreting <i>The Second Sex</i>	175
	<i>Carmen López Sáenz</i>	
CHAPTER 11	Woman Does Not Become Her	201
	<i>Janine Jones</i>	
CHAPTER 12	The Second Sex of Consciousness: A New Temporality and Ontology for Beauvoir's "Becoming a Woman"	231
	<i>Jennifer McWeeny</i>	
SECTION IV The Labor of Translation		275
CHAPTER 13	The Life of a Sentence: Translation as a Lived Experience	279
	<i>Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier</i>	
CHAPTER 14	Challenges in Translating Beauvoir	287
	<i>Marybeth Timmermann</i>	
CHAPTER 15	French Women Become, German Women Are Made? Simone de Beauvoir, Alice Schwarzer, Translation and Quotation	297
	<i>Anna-Lisa Baumeister</i>	
CHAPTER 16	Becoming Woman: Simone de Beauvoir and <i>Drugi pol</i> in Socialist Yugoslavia	315
	<i>Anna Bogić</i>	

CHAPTER 17	Retranslating <i>The Second Sex</i> into Finnish: Choices, Practices, and Ideas	331
	<i>Erika Ruonakoski</i>	

Index	355
-------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would like to thank the contributors for their persistence and patience throughout the long process of bringing this volume to fruition, and for the gift of their reflections on the work of Simone de Beauvoir. We thank Lucy Randall, Hannah Doyle, Jamie Chu, and the entire editorial staff at Oxford University Press, including the reviewers of the book proposal and the manuscript. In addition, we are grateful to the University of Oregon for sponsoring the conference where all this began, Shelley Harshe for her efforts in standardizing and subediting the manuscript, and Melissa Gustafson and the staff at the Oregon Humanities Center for their assistance with financial costs of subventions and editorial support. Lastly, we thank Meryl Altman, Nancy Bauer, Toril Moi, and Margaret Simons and the following journals and presses for granting us permission to reprint formerly published essays in this volume. Altman's article, "The Grand Rectification," was originally published in *Women's Review of Books*, September/October 2010, Vol. 27, No. 5. Bauer's review of the book's new translation, "Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*," was first published in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, August 14, 2011. Moi's piece, "While We Wait: Notes on the English Translation of *The Second Sex*," was first published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 4, while her "The Adulteress Wife" was published in *The London Review of Books*, February 11, 2010, Vol. 32, No. 3. Simons's article, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*," was originally published in *Women's Studies International Forum*, in 1983, Vol. 6, No. 5. And finally, we would like to thank Mary McLevey for generously stepping up at the last minute to do the indexing for this volume.

CONTRIBUTORS

Meryl Altman, Ph.D., Professor of English and Women's Studies at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.

Nancy Bauer, Ph.D., Dean of Academic Affairs for Arts and Sciences and Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts.

Anna-Lisa Baumeister, graduate student in comparative literature at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

Debra Bergoffen, Ph.D., Bishop Hamilton Philosopher in Residence at American University and Professor Emerita of Philosophy at George Mason University in Washington D.C.

Anna Bogić, PhD candidate in the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, freelance translators of works in social science, art, and feminist literature, former faculty members at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, authors of many books in English and French on subjects ranging from grammar to cooking.

Megan M. Burke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Program of Gender and Women's Studies at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Martina Ferrari, graduate student in philosophy at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

Janine Jones, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Bonnie Mann, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

Jennifer McWeeny, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Humanities and Arts Department at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Toril Moi, Ph.D., James B. Duke Professor of Literature and Romance Studies, and Professor of English, and Theater Studies at Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina.

Karen Offen, Ph.D., Historian and independent scholar affiliated as a Senior Scholar with the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University in Stanford, California.

Erika Ruonakoski, Ph.D., Senior Researcher (PhD) in the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Carmen López Sáenz, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia in Madrid, Spain.

Margaret A. Simons, Ph.D., Distinguished Research Professor Emerita in the Department of Philosophy at the Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Marybeth Timmermann, American Translators Association-Certified Translator from French into English.

“On ne naît pas femme : on le devient”

| Introduction

BONNIE MANN

WHAT DOES IT MEAN for a sentence to have a life? How does one write a biography of a sentence? When the sentence in question is “*On ne naît pas femme : on le devient*”—in other words, the most famous feminist sentence ever written—what does the project of tracing its life look like? Surely if any sentence deserves a biography, or multiple biographies, it is this sentence that has inspired generations of women in their pursuit of freedom, that has led such a vibrant and extraordinary and *important* life, that has traveled across continents and languages and generations and catalyzed both personal and political change wherever it has traveled.

This particular biographical project emerged out of certain events in the life of the sentence in question. In spring of 2010, a new English translation of *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*) was published by Random House. Two American linguists living in France, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, had been commissioned by the publisher to translate this most famous of feminist texts. The first translation, published in 1953, heavily edited and widely regarded as scandalously poor by scholars, had been the only available English version for sixty years (see Simons and Moi, chapters 3 and 4, this volume). Readers of Beauvoir in English crossed the divide from one century to another waiting for a new translation of her most well-known work. Beauvoir scholars petitioned the publisher; they demanded a responsibly translated scholarly edition of the text that would treat it as the major philosophical work that it is. The publishers took umbrage at the feminist agitation, and refused to commission a new translation for years, or to relinquish their exclusive English language rights—when they finally did initiate a new translation, they explicitly decided that a scholarly edition was not appropriate to the nature and historical

reception of Beauvoir's text. The book had, after all—unlike a typical academic book—been read and loved by hundreds of thousands of women outside of the academy, all over the world. The occasion of the publication of the new English translation of *Le deuxième sexe* was historic, but this was a fraught history. Borde and Malovany-Chevallier were aware of what they were up against, and consulted broadly with Beauvoir scholars, literary theorists, and philosophers, as they undertook the monumental task of creating the first unabridged English translation of the text.

In June of 2011, the 19th International Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society was held in Eugene, Oregon. The organizers chose translation as their theme, titling the conference “Simone de Beauvoir: Interpretations and Translations for the 21st Century.” They invited Borde and Malovany-Chevallier to offer a keynote address. The new translation had already generated considerable controversy, with some prominent feminist scholars criticizing it, and others celebrating it (see Moi, Bauer, and Altman, chapters 5, 6, and 7, this volume). The conference provided a forum for discussion, critical reflection, and reconsideration of a wide variety of issues associated with the “travel” of a text from one context to another, one language to another, one time to another, one culture to another.

As Borde and Malovany-Chevallier told the participants about the grueling process of translation they had undertaken, a question was raised (as it had already been in reviews of the new edition) about their choice to translate the most famous sentence of the text, “*On ne naît pas femme : on le devient,*” differently than Parshley had. Parshley had chosen to render the sentence into English as “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” while the new translators omitted the “a” in their version, opting for “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.” The omission of the “a” changed the English version of the sentence dramatically. In their essay in this volume, and in their “Translator’s Note” to *The Second Sex*, Borde and Malovany-Chevallier justify this decision by referring to Beauvoir’s different uses of the word “femme,” particularly her use of it to refer to woman “as an institution, a concept, femininity as determined and defined by society, culture, history” (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2010, xvii). While the French sentence is ambiguous, they argue that they capture Beauvoir’s intended meaning by choosing wording that refers to “woman as determined by society” in English (xviii), which is in keeping with decades of feminist acceptance of social construction as *the* theory of sexual difference.

When they presented this explanation at the conference, a robust, even heated discussion ensued, with some audience members questioning

and others defending the translation decision, while arguing over what was philosophically and politically at stake in the difference. Soon those working on Beauvoir from other language contexts, such as German and Spanish, chimed in. What became clear in this and subsequent conversations was that this one sentence, *On ne naît pas femme : on le devient*, encapsulated and catalyzed a deep disagreement over the nature, limits, and status of social construction as the most accepted theory of sexual difference in our time, even as it catalyzed a cross-cultural and translinguistic conversation about the work of translation and the entanglement of translation practices with meaning. As the discussion continued that evening, over wine and dinner at one of Eugene's local wineries, this unique collection of essays was envisioned as a way of exploring the two intertwined controversies that had emerged in the life of this sentence: a controversy over the practice of translation and a controversy over the nature and status of sexual difference. The philosophers, translators, literary scholars, and historian who author these essays take decidedly different positions on the meaning of the sentence in French, thus on its correct translation—and consequently on the place and limits of social construction as a theory of sexual difference.

The translation controversy is rooted in the explosion of scholarship on the work of Simone de Beauvoir in the last twenty years, which has revealed a deep fissure between those scholars who insist on reading Beauvoir as a phenomenologist in the existential tradition, and those who understand her to be a social theorist who has little stake in the philosophical commitments of her generation. The latter take Beauvoir to be the founder of the theory of gender as a social construct, and take her famous sentence to be its most succinct expression. For these scholars, it is Beauvoir's insistence on denaturalizing sexual difference, on exposing the economic, cultural and social roots of its production, that mark her work as foundational for the global feminist movement today—on this view it is perfectly appropriate to say, following the popular mis-citation of the sentence, “women are made not born.” The phenomenologists tend to believe that this is a misreading of Beauvoir's philosophy, and a misunderstanding of her most famous claim. For this group, to “become” a woman is not the same as to be made into one, as if one were exclusively a passive object being acted on by external social forces. Beauvoir's phenomenological and existentialist commitments, indeed, would make any such view impossible. To “become” is to actively take up one's social condition in a way that is, at least potentially, spontaneous, creative and free, (though not in the radical sense of freedom embraced by the less socially minded existentialists).

On this view, Beauvoir could never be understood to have claimed that “women are made not born.”

But this conversation could not and cannot be just about the English translation. Within minutes of the debate erupting at the conference, we were talking about the life of the sentence across other languages, across time and space and cultural context. A number of linguistic contexts are explored in this volume: German (Baumeister), Spanish (López Sáenz), Serbo-Croatian (Bogić), and Finnish (Ruonakoski).

In continued discussion, questions emerged about the process of translating and what it means to do *feminist* translation, which entailed a recognition of the entanglement of meaning, interpretation, and translation practices—leading us to consider the importance of the emerging field of translation studies. According to Susan Bassnett, “in the 1990s, Translation Studies finally came into its own, for this proved to be the decade of its global expansion. Once perceived as a marginal activity, translation began to be seen as a fundamental act of human exchange” (Bassnet 2002). The field of translation studies arises from the rejection of a naïve understanding of translation as a direct and seamless conversion of one language to another. Translation scholars debate to what extent translation entails interpretation, whether a translated text should feel familiar and easy to the reader, or should invite a feeling of “strangeness” or “foreignness” that signals to the reader that the text has crossed over from one context to the other. By studying the life of a single sentence which has made the trip from French into many different languages, and which has led an incendiary and politically/philosophically charged life in many language contexts, this volume provides a poignant and unique case study for translation scholars. These essays link questions of translation to questions of meaning in the deepest, most politically and philosophically charged sense.

Featuring an essay by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier; articles by an intellectual historian (Karen Offen); seasoned Beauvoir scholars (Debra Bergoffen, Janine Jones, Carmen López Sáenz, Bonnie Mann, and Jen McWeeny) as well as some rising stars in Beauvoir scholarship and translation studies (Anna-Lisa Baumeister, Megan Burke, and Anna Bogić); and other translators of Beauvoir (Marybeth Timmerman and Erika Ruonakoski) this book tells the story of “On ne naît pas femme : on le devient” through an exploration of the meaning of translation and the translation of meaning. If these essays do their work, the reader will close our book and open *Le deuxième sexe* with a renewed sensitivity to the deep entanglements of language and meaning, and to the impossibility of a seamless transition from one language to another, or one time to another,

or one context to another. It is a profound realization—that a single, singular sentence can have a *life*. We have undertaken the task of assembling moments in the biography of that life in a single text, not to resolve the irresolvable contradictions, but to elucidate that life in its richness and nuance and complexity.

References

- Bassnett, Susan. 2002. *Translation Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Borde, Constance, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. 2010. "Translator's Note." In *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir, xvii–xxi. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

SECTION I

Intellectual History

The two essays in this section of the text explore the intellectual history and background of the debate ignited by Constance Borde's and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier's 2010 translation of *Le deuxième sexe*, one essay from the perspective of an intellectual historian, the other from that of a philosopher. The controversies regarding the translation of Beauvoir's sentence, "On ne nait pas femme : on le devient," are grounded in the "renaissance" of Simone de Beauvoir's scholarship (Kruks 2005). Renewed attention to Beauvoir's thought has sparked new disagreement between scholars who read Beauvoir as a phenomenologist in the existential tradition and those who see her as a social constructivist—and has raised new questions about the relationship between these perspectives. Although Beauvoir does not explicitly invoke the sex/gender distinction in her writing, the second group of scholars understand Beauvoir as *the* starting point for thinking gender as a social construct. Within this framework, her famous sentence, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Borde's and Malovany-Chevallier's translation), is taken to be the most succinct articulation of social construction's central insight. "Many of us," historian Karen Offen observes, "interpreted this phrase as indicating that anatomical sex did not totally govern the existence and destiny of women but that womanhood or 'femininity' is socially constructed in specific ways by the culture in which we live" (this volume, 11). For these scholars, Beauvoir played an integral role in one of the most important developments in feminist thought: the denaturalization of gender and the recognition that, to put it in Borde's and Malovany-Chevallier's words, "woman" is a construct, a "human condition," rooted in social, economic, cultural forces.

Yet, in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir does not explicitly introduce the sex/gender distinction, a conceptual differentiation formally introduced to feminism by British sociologist Ann Oakley in her 1972 survey, *Sex and Gender*, which juxtaposes “sex” (a term indexing the biological differences between female and male) and “gender” (a term referring to cultural differences and the social classification into masculine and feminine). Furthermore, to date, there is no consensus among feminist scholars as to how to resolve the debate regarding whether Beauvoir should be read as a proponent of social construction or existential phenomenology, or both. As Debra Bergoffen suggests in this volume, posing the question as an either/or may well be an expression of the same dualist thinking Beauvoir rejected. (The debate concerning how to read Beauvoir is taken up in the articles published in section III). But this is not simply a question for Beauvoir scholarship; it is a question for all of feminism and gender theory. After all, what is at stake here is nothing less than what we think sexual difference is, and how we think sexual difference works. The efficacy and reigning status of the dominant perspective in feminist theory, social construction, may also be at stake.

The work of intellectual history—a discipline that aims to, in Stefan Collini’s words, “recover the thought of the past in its complexity” (2008), and that upholds the belief that the meaning of an idea is found *in the world* and can be brought to light via a careful analysis of the assumptions and social contexts within which it emerges—proves helpful in contextualizing and, thus, providing the ground to think further about this debate. In this vein, one objective of this section, as Offen puts it, “is to reestablish the historical trajectories of the French usage of *genre* to indicate this sex/gender distinction” (this volume, 16) that most historical accounts which focus on men’s thinking too often miss. Recuperating the long history of *feminist* discourse that spans from the 1500s to the French Revolution on women’s versus men’s domains is central to settling the question of the meaning and usages of the French concept “*genre*.”

In “Before Beauvoir, Before Butler,” Offen advances two interwoven claims, grounded in a careful analysis of the usages of the concepts of “gender,” “*genre*,” and the “sex/gender” distinction in both Anglophone and Francophone cultures that pre-date Beauvoir by several centuries. She challenges the belief that the concept of gender was first introduced by Beauvoir and subsequently taken up in the 1980s by Anglophone scholars such as Judith Butler and Joan Scott. “Simone de Beauvoir’s beautifully articulated and seemingly revolutionary insight about ‘gender’—that ‘one is not born, but becomes, a woman’—only gave a novel ‘existentialist’

spin to a perception of the social construction of sex that had deep roots in French Enlightenment thought” (this volume, 18). Unearthing the prior usages of such concepts and reading Beauvoir’s famous sentence in that context (i.e., of “French historical understandings of ‘gender’” [this volume, 13]) gives Offen the ground to support—and this is her second claim—a social constructionist reading of Beauvoir’s famous sentence, thus suggesting a way to settle the ongoing debate.

The work of intellectual history carried out by Bonnie Mann in her chapter, “Beauvoir Against Objectivism: The Operation of the Norm in Beauvoir and Butler,” also takes up the controversy about whether Beauvoir should be read as a proponent of social construction or existential phenomenology. Differently from Offen, however, Mann does not seek answers by tracking the history of feminist discourse prior to 1949, but by tracing Beauvoir’s response to the old tensions between realism and idealism, objectivism and subjectivism, determinism and freedom. Mann suggests that Beauvoir’s position vis-à-vis these tensions, one aimed at overcoming dualisms and affirming the ambiguity of the human condition, provides useful guidelines to answer the questions at the core of the current debate regarding Beauvoir’s philosophical sensibilities and a powerful challenge to the most often espoused poststructuralist approach to sexual difference. The poststructuralist position tends to give in to the temptation of “resolv[ing] the ambiguity of our condition by accounting for sexual difference through an overwhelming focus on the determinacy of power and structure” (this volume, 44), ultimately swinging toward objectivism.

Explicitly taking up the difference between Beauvoir’s and Butler’s accounts of gender, Mann argues that Beauvoir gives us a theory of gender as justification, as distinct from a Butlerian theory of gender as performative. The performative account of gender developed by Butler is a “less politically able account” (this volume, 46) of sexual difference in that it focuses exclusively on the *existential* dimension of performativity (i.e., how one establishes one’s worth—and, with it, one’s “social space of livability and the epistemic space of intelligibility” [this volume, 48]). Butler more or less ignores the “structuring of gender norms as operations of domination . . . [and] the oppression of women *within* coherent gender” (this volume, 48). In other words, while the kernel of Beauvoir’s analysis is, as Mann puts it, “normative domination and subordination” (this volume, 49), the destitution of what Butler calls the “‘livable’” and “‘intelligible’ life,” Butler focuses on the “normative exclusion and inclusion” (this volume, 49), emphasizing the “derealization” of those who are excluded from coherent gender.

Mann's treatment of the intellectual history revolving around the realism versus idealism controversy alive at Beauvoir's time gives her grounds to worry that Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's choice to translate Beauvoir's sentence by omitting the "a"—in other words, their explicit choice to read Beauvoir as a social constructivist in the determinist sense—"swings toward objectivism" (this volume, 45). The political stakes of this choice, Mann argues, are high: since woman, on this reading, is a "wholly determined thing," the options available to feminists are either despair or the rejection of "'woman' as the site of a feminist life" (this volume, 51). What we, as feminists, should do, Mann suggests, is to affirm the ambiguity constitutive of women's becoming and accept the fact that "[t]o become that name, 'woman,' if one is a feminist, is to fight for it as a space of freedom even while living in relation to its determinations" (this volume, 51).

The authors' emphasis on different "intellectual histories" reveals the weight that context plays in settling questions of the interpretation and meaning of our most politically salient concepts, thus affirming one of the guiding tenets of intellectual history, namely, as Peter Gordon reminds us, its rejection of "a kind of Platonist attitude about thoughts, as if they somehow preexisted their contexts and merely manifested themselves in various landscapes" (Gordon n.d.).

References

- Collini, Stefan. 2008. "Intellectual History." *Making History*. London: School of Advanced Study, University of London. Accessed September 8, 2016. http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/intellectual_history.html.
- Gordon, Peter E. n. d. "What Is Intellectual History? A Frank Partisan Introduction to a Frequently Misunderstood Field." Accessed September 8, 2016. <https://sydney.edu.au/intellectual-history/documents/gordon-intellectual-history.pdf>.
- Kruks, Sonia. 2005. "Beauvoir's Time/Our Time: The Renaissance in Simone de Beauvoir Studies." *Feminist Studies* 31(2): 286–309.
- Oakley, Ann. 1972. *Sex, Gender, and Society*. London: Temple Smith.

1 | Before Beauvoir, Before Butler
“Genre” and “Gender” in France and
the Anglo-American World

KAREN OFFEN

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR’S eloquent formulation, in *Le deuxième sexe*, “On ne naît pas femme : on le devient,” inspired many readers on both sides of the Atlantic.¹ Beauvoir’s two-volume book, first published in French in 1949, reached English-language readers in H. M. Parshley’s abbreviated translation in 1952.² In Parshley’s translation, the sentence read “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” Many of us interpreted this phrase as indicating that anatomical sex did not totally govern the existence and destiny of women but that womanhood or “femininity” is socially constructed in specific ways by the culture in which we live. This way of thinking would not have surprised cultural anthropologists, but it was a revelation for many young people, certainly for those of my generation. We, like Beauvoir and most of her French contemporaries in the post–World War II period, were thinking of a world in which the male “becomes” a man and the female “becomes” a woman. We were certainly not thinking in terms of fluid or multiple sexual identities, as has since become fashionable.

Several decades would pass before a new generation of feminists in the Anglo-American world—notably intellectuals and academics—would reinvigorate Beauvoir’s formulation, baptizing it with the term “gender.” In the interim, feminist analysts spoke of “sex roles” and of the restrictions these sex roles imposed on individual self-realization, especially for those individuals born female (see Gornick and Moran 1971).

Only in 1972 would British sociologist Ann Oakley publish her influential survey, *Sex and Gender*, which juxtaposed the term “sex” (male/

female, equated with “nature”) and “gender” (masculine/feminine, equated with “culture”).

“Sex” is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. “Gender,” however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into “masculine” and “feminine.” (Oakley 1972, 16)³

This formulation, so simple and easy to understand, was widely adopted by feminist intellectuals throughout the English-speaking world in the 1970s and early 1980s and informed a plethora of academic feminist publications on gender in sociology, anthropology, psychology, and the other social and human sciences.⁴ It subsequently drifted beyond the realm of academia, penetrating the vocabulary of the press and various media outlets to the point that it sometimes became fashionable to speak, in an inexact manner, of “two genders” rather than of two sexes.

For some, however, two sexes and, by analogy, two genders did not suffice. In 1985, Anne Fausto-Sterling published her *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men*, and subsequently argued that one should preferably think in terms of five sexes—that male and female were not enough.⁵ In 1986, Judith Butler published her radical reading of Beauvoir’s “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” “Simone de Beauvoir,” Butler argued, “does not suggest the possibility of other genders besides ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ yet her insistence that these are historical constructs which must in every case be appropriated by individuals suggests that a binary gender system has no ontological necessity” (1986, 47–48).⁶ In that same year, Joan Wallach Scott published her controversial and widely influential article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis” (1986), which introduced to historians a new (what is often called postmodern) understanding of the term both as a category of analysis and as a signifier of power relations.⁷ The respective contributions of these academic feminists (and others) have influenced a new wave of thinking about gender and individuality that, by transcending the male/female dichotomy, unquestionably has serious potential ramifications for the organization of human societies.

This chapter, however, intends to explore the emergence and operations of the concepts of “gender,” “*genre*,” the “sex/gender” distinction, and the differing politics of their contemporary usage among English-speaking and French-speaking academic feminists prior to the contributions of Butler, Scott, and many others in the 1980s. Here I will invoke

historical evidence of earlier instances of usage in both Anglophone and Francophone cultures that even predate Beauvoir by several centuries, instances long since forgotten by most people, and not picked up on even by most feminist historians. This inquiry is driven by two questions that bothered me for a number of years: first, why it was that, in France, some contemporary feminist theorists, academicians—and especially historians—so long resisted adopting the concept of “gender” pioneered (or so they believed) by their postmodern Anglo-American counterparts of the 1980s; and, second, why—at the same time—they ignored, discounted, and failed to reclaim the earlier uses of the virtually identical term *genre*, deliberately employed by predecessors from their own feminist past to signify the earlier sex/gender distinction as concerns women and men.⁸ My intention is, in part, not only to reestablish the historical trajectories of these contentious terms “gender” and “genre” as used by feminists on both sides of the Atlantic over a period of several centuries prior to Beauvoir, but also to intervene in contemporary feminist theory politics by providing evidence that could facilitate the reappropriation of the French term “genre” as an equivalent translation of the English term “gender” to connote—quite simply—the “social construction of sex.”

My argument here has two sequential parts: first, to analyze French texts in which the use of “genre” is historically significant, and second, to connect these findings with my review of the use of the term “gender” in English. Both these elements are necessary, given the context provided by this book, which analyzes the varying understandings of Beauvoir’s famous sentence—which in my understanding would best be translated in English as: “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.” To date, there seems to be no consensus among feminist philosophers and literary historians on the question of whether (or not) Beauvoir’s sentence can be read as a claim for social construction of the sexes (see Bergoffen and Burke, chapters 8 and 9, this volume). But by setting this sentence, and Beauvoir’s work more broadly, in the context of French historical understandings of “gender,” I would hope to demonstrate that the sentence *should be* read in terms of social construction, as many of us have always believed before the controversy over translation arose. In my view, the very life-cycle organization of *Le deuxième sexe* (especially the second volume, “L’Expérience vecu”), coupled with the evolutionary existentialist notion of being/becoming—and given the historical context in which the book was written and published and the placement of the famous sentence at the beginning of the chapter on

childhood—strongly support a social constructionist reading. Beauvoir may have cast her distinction in existentialist terms and phrases, but the distinctions between the sexed body one is born with and what societies make of it is deeply embedded in French culture, as I hope to demonstrate below. Notably, in the Anglophone world, I am not alone: in an important review-essay on new works in the Beauvoir corpus, historian Judith Coffin remarks (citing the Parshley translation of the sentence) that “this sentence remains the twentieth century’s tersest and most elegant statement of gender as a cultural and psychological formation” (2007). The Australian sociologist R. W. Connell, who has written so eloquently and clearly on “gender” as a social construction, also relies on the Parshley translation to undergird her work (2002, 4; see also Connell 1985; 1987).

“Gender” and “Genre” in the Francophone Context

In France, with the notable exception of Christine Delphy, the (now former) editor of *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, the historian Michèle Riot-Sarcey, and several other historians of British and American women such as Françoise Basch and Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, most French feminist academics stubbornly resisted the introduction of the English term *gender*, preferring to speak in terms of *masculin/féminin* (or *la différence sexuelle* or *rapports sociaux de sexe*).⁹ Some argued that the term “gender” is a twentieth-century American “neologism,” untranslatable even by the seemingly similar French word *genre*.¹⁰ A particularly striking example of such resistance occurred when the article “Gender as a Social Category” (1988) by the Stanford developmental psychologist Eleanor Maccoby was published in French in 1990 as “Le Sexe, catégorie sociale,” accompanied by a long footnote explaining why the French term *genre* could not be used instead of “gender” (see Maccoby 1990, 16). In the French social sciences, “masculin/féminin” and “la différence des sexes” still carry the day,¹¹ although today the use of “genre” signifying “gender” has made such substantial headway that it is being contested and banned from schoolbooks by the ministry of education on the grounds that it might confuse students about their sexual identity.¹²

Outside France, the prominent multilingual, multinational scholar Rosi Braidotti, who heads the Netherlands Research School of Women’s Studies at the University of Utrecht, also embraced this antagonistic French perspective. In a 1994 interview with Judith Butler, Braidotti insisted that

“the notion of ‘gender’ was a vicissitude of the English language, one which bears little or no relevance to theoretical traditions in the romance languages” (1994, 37). In 2002, in an article, “The Uses and Abuses of the Sex-Gender Distinction,” Braidotti repeated this claim. Anglophone scholars, including historians, have repeated and reinforced such “conventional wisdom” by taking such statements about the term “gender” at face value. For example, in 1998 historian Robert Nye echoed in print what seems to have become a widespread consensus about the apparent absence of a translatable term: “The problem is exacerbated by the French language lacking to this day, at least in common usage, an adequate word for ‘gender’” (88). In the same year historian Mary Louise Roberts reiterated another erroneous commonplace, when she wrote that “It is hard to believe that only ten years ago, ‘gender’ was largely a term of grammar” (1998, 171).¹³

Among historians in France, “gender” has made considerable headway in the last several decades. The first issue (1995) of *Clio: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* declared: “the expression ‘history of women’ covers women’s studies, the relations between the sexes, feminisms, and what the Anglo-Saxons call gender” [“l’expression «histoire des femmes» . . . recouvre les études sur les femmes, les «rapports de sexes», les féminismes et ce que les Anglo-saxonnes nomment le *gender*”]. In her penetrating study *Écrire l’histoire des femmes* (1998), Françoise Thébaud continued the practice of using *gender* in italics, signifying a foreign word.¹⁴ However, Thébaud’s second edition (2007) included the term “genre” in the title, this time without italics. Also in 2007, the French women’s history organization *Mnémosyne* launched an online journal *Genre et Histoire*,¹⁵ mirroring the English-language title of the Anglo-American publication *Gender and History*.

Nowhere in these controversies over “gender” did the thought ever emerge that the French themselves might have pioneered the concept of the social construction of sex and used the word “genre” to connote it. Yet the evidence I have compiled over a number of years demonstrates that this usage has authentic historical roots in French feminist criticism, conceptualized centuries before Anglo-American feminists began to cultivate the concept in the 1970s. I presented some of this evidence in earlier articles and in my book *European Feminisms* (2000; French edition 2012).¹⁶ In what follows, I attempt to document to a greater extent the homegrown historical “Frenchness” of this concept, even though it runs counter not only to today’s conventional wisdom but also to ongoing linguistic politics at the governmental level.¹⁷

Exploring the Sexual Politics of Historical Knowledge in France

The long history of feminist thought in early modern French culture (that is, from approximately 1500 up to the French Revolution) reveals a long though overlooked historical pattern of what we might, even today, consider as advanced thinking about the issue of gender. Using the very word *genre*, it operated, in fact, as the French equivalent for the term we now call “gender;” it spoke directly to the social and cultural construction of sex, whereby male and female are culturally rendered masculine and feminine. Thus, well before Beauvoir, Oakley, and the postmodernist usage introduced subsequently by other feminist theorists, the sex/gender distinction existed in the French sociopolitical vocabulary. One objective of this article is to reestablish the historical trajectories of the French usage of *genre* to indicate this sex/gender distinction.

This is particularly interesting, in fact, because of the very construction of the French language, in which what linguists call the “grammatical” (as distinct from the “natural”) “*masculin/féminin*” operates at its organizational core, resulting in curiosities such as the fact that the word *féminin* can operate either in the masculine or feminine mode, depending on what it is modifying. In French, a clear terminological distinction between “*sexe*” and “*genre masculin/féminin*” can be historically documented.

When one examines the French historical record, one finds that the term *genre* recurs again and again in a context that references the social (or, more precisely, perhaps, the sociopolitical) construction of sex. Already in the sixteenth century, the itinerant philosopher Henri-Corneille Agrippa de Nettesheim spoke of *genre masculin* and *genre féminin* to refer to human categories of males and females and argued for the “nobility and excellence of the feminine sex and its preeminence over the other sex” (1990 [1537], 79).¹⁸ Agrippa was not talking merely about grammar. Nor were some of his successors, including women such as the celebrated seventeenth-century French novelist Madeleine de Scudéry. She and her counterparts argued that “women” had been *deformed* by culture—this is precisely an argument about the cultural construction of sex. A larger, yet still random sample of eighteenth-century French Enlightenment texts, notably feminist texts, that I have accumulated to date make this usage abundantly clear. French critics of women’s subordination exhibited an acute awareness that the relations between the sexes were neither God-given nor determined exclusively by “nature.” Indeed, they often deployed the distinction between “nature” and “culture,” which is clearly present in

these (and other) French texts (well before the 1760s, when Jean-Jacques Rousseau would turn his attention to the nature/culture dichotomy in the education of boys and girls) to argue *against* women's ostensible inferiority to men and for their "natural" equality. These early feminists blamed this development squarely on men's urge to dominate women, and they denounced the grossly inadequate education offered to girls as a means to that end. Both their critique of women's education and of their subjection in marriage were central to Enlightenment criticism of the existing order, even as others argued the case for women's civilizing mission, a move that would generate the enormously influential concept of the mother-educator and foster the founding of schools (both private and public) for girls. It was here, in the French Enlightenment, well before either the nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet—so well read in the biomedical literature of the postrevolutionary period—or the twentieth-century anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss had identified women with nature and men with culture, that the nature/culture debate began to heat up and that sexual physiology and social construction began to be distinctly identified and contrasted.¹⁹

Recent publications in eighteenth-century intellectual history such as those by Liselotte Steinbrugge (1995) and Thomas Laqueur (1990) completely miss this point because they are basing their arguments solely on the texts of male philosophers and physicians, while ignoring the female critics who challenged their views. What is important to underscore in relation to the texts that historians do study, from the perspective of historians of feminism, is that such "naturalizing" discourses functioned culturally as antifeminist responses to the by then well-articulated feminist claims that woman-as-gender was in fact constructed, in the instance, through women's poor, inadequate, faulty education and constricted upbringing, which undercut their "natural equality" with men (See Offen 1998b; 2000).

In France—contrary to what most historical accounts of men's thinking would have us believe—such a total naturalization of "woman" never entirely succeeded; there was always a significant strand of "feminist" discourse that claimed "culture," not "nature" as women's domain. Indeed, all the intrusive efforts to shape, control, and guide the education and upbringing of French girls (and boys), from Fénelon and Rousseau to the powerful female educators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, flow from that concern, as does the bitter rivalry between Catholic and secular educators for control of French girls' schooling (see Clark 1984; Leduc 1997; Mayeur 1979; Rogers 2006). One might even argue that the comprehensive notion of the idea that a social construction of sex exists was

most fully elaborated in Enlightenment debate about the woman question and the suitable upbringing of female children to serve (or to subvert) the purposes of a male-defined society. What such a sampling suggests is that Simone de Beauvoir's beautifully articulated and seemingly revolutionary insight about "gender"—that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (or simply "woman" without the "a," which is the choice Beauvoir's current translators made)—only gave a novel "existentialist" spin to a perception of the social construction of sex that had deep roots in French Enlightenment thought.

Genre, in French usage, was no longer (if indeed it ever was) solely about grammar. Of course, linguistic or grammatical or classificatory concerns are never far from any discussion of *genre*, but for centuries grammatical concerns about *genre* in French were, in fact, embedded in societal concerns about sex and its social construction. This is true at least since 1757, when volume 7 of Diderot's celebrated *Encyclopédie* appeared, featuring an article (signed E.R.M.) on *genre* which pointed squarely to the distinction between sex and gender that subsequently characterized Beauvoir's and Oakley's understandings of it. The word *genre* (derived from the Latin terms *genus* and *generis*, as is the English word *gender*) is almost immediately identified with sexual traits and with their social constructions. This 1757 article states:

Gender or class in ordinary usage, are nearly synonyms, signifying a collection of objects assembled together from a perspective that is common to them all: it is natural enough to believe that it is in this same sense that the word genre was first introduced into Grammar, and that one only wished to mark a class of names assembled under a perspective that was common to them all. The distinction of sexes seems to have occasioned that of genders taken in this sense, since masculine gender and feminine gender were distinguished, and that these are the two single members of this distribution in almost every language that has utilized them . . . (E.R.M. 1969 [1757], 589ff, my emphasis)²⁰

From the *Encyclopédie's* discussion of *genre* that attributed French grammatical distinctions to preexisting bodily sexual distinctions, it was no leap at all to transpose the term into sociopolitical contexts.

Although the term *genre* does not appear to figure *as such* in the debates of the late 1750s between Rousseau and d'Alembert over women's proper role and education, the linked concerns of sex/gender would proliferate during the early 1770s in connection with the celebrated case

of the Chevalier d'Eon, by some accounts “the most famous woman in Europe.” D'Eon, a decorated French military officer and diplomat posted to the court of George III in London (who cross-dressed as a woman at the English court among other places) was referred to by Edmund Burke as “the most extraordinary person of the age” (Burke’s *Annual Register*, quoted in Kates 1995, 3).²¹ By 1771 London businessmen were placing public bets on d'Eon’s sex; in 1776, the French king, Louis XVI recalled d'Eon, ordering him to “resume” wearing female dress and for the remainder of his life d'Eon subsequently “performed” a female persona. Only on his death was the chevalier’s sex revealed to be anatomically male.

The d'Eon case confirms that “gender” concerns—like feminist complaints (and indeed, as central to feminist complaints)—were in the air in France and clearly expressed in the language; in fact, they had become the talk of the European press. Some women were well aware of what was at stake. In 1772 Madame d'Épinay, not uncoincidentally the former benefactress of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (whose 1760s fictional works outlining the “natural” education of Emile—and Sophie—were extremely gender-prescriptive), wrote to her friend the Abbé Galiani commenting on Antoine-Léonard Thomas’s newly published tract on women, *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages* (1772; 1774). D'Épinay criticized Thomas because “he constantly attributes to nature what we have obviously acquired from education and institutions,” and “it would probably take a number of generations to get us back to what nature intended us to be. Perhaps we could get there, but [if we did] men would lose too much. They should be very happy that we are not worse than we are, after everything they’ve done to denature us through their splendid institutions . . . This is so self-evident that it hardly deserves comment” (Croce 1930, I, 178–180).²² It is in this context that one should understand the author’s later published comment (in her *Conversations d'Émilie* [1776], a dialogue between a mother and her daughter), “when I say *man* [*l’homme*], I mean all human creatures; when I say *a man* [*un homme*], I am designating only a human creature of the masculine gender [*du genre masculin*], and when I say *a woman* [*une femme*], I am designating a human creature of the feminine gender [*genre féminin*]” (d'Épinay, 1776, 11).²³ By this statement, Madame d'Épinay underscored her sense of the equivalence of the sexes in nature, and insisted on the sexual dualism inherent in the more culturally constructed notion of *genre*—or gender.

Another example confirms this French awareness of gender as the social construction of sex: In the *Journal de l'Abbé Mulot* for the years

1777–1782 (Mulot 1902), the author makes all sorts of jokes about gender at the expense of the educator Madame de Genlis, who had been appointed as the “*gouverneur*” (not *gouvernante*) of the children of the Duc d’Orléans. Mulot refers to her as “a governor of a new genre” [“ce *gouverneur* d’un nouveau genre”] and “the governess-governor wanted to become a man, but something was missing, and she became neither a man or a woman” [“la *gouvernante* *gouverneur* a voulu faire l’homme; mais il lui manquait quelque chose, et elle n’a fait ni l’homme ni la femme”]. Mulot ends by rehearsing an unattributed verse that was circulating at the expense of Madame de Genlis, and which is difficult to translate without missing the gender jokes:

Au physique je suis du genre féminin,
Mais au moral je suis du masculin.
Mon existence hermaphrodite
Exerce maint esprit malin . . .
Je suis Monsieur dans le Lycée
Et Madame dans la boudoir. (1902, 104–106)²⁴

These remarks and verses are manifestly about *genre* as “gender,” as constructed and permeable masculine and feminine categories. And there was more to come.

By early 1789, at the outset of the Revolution, an anonymously published “Ladies’ Request to the National Assembly” denounced “masculine aristocracy” and called for the abolition of all privileges of the male sex. A radical document in many respects, this text included a stunning proposal for a decree, with the following stipulations:

- (1) All the privileges of the male sex [*sexe masculin*] are entirely and irrevocably abolished throughout France;
- (2) The feminine sex [*sexe féminin*] will always enjoy the same liberty, advantages, rights, and honors as does the masculine sex [*sexe masculin*]; and
- (3) The masculine gender [*genre masculin*] will no longer be regarded, even grammatically, as the more noble gender, given that all genders, all sexes, and all beings should be and are equally noble. (Anonymous 1982 [1789], 11–12)²⁵

To be sure the first two demands are about ending sex discrimination, but the third speaks clearly to the relationship between sex, gender,

language, power, and French women's quest for political and social equality.

During the turbulent years of the counterrevolution, French physicians did indeed write endlessly, as many scholars have since pointed out, about the biological limitations (read "inferiority") of the female sex; they tried very hard to "naturalize" woman—to decree that biology was indeed destiny, at least for women.²⁶ The works of Cabanis and Virey, among others, attest to this, and they had a profound effect. What has been less noticed, however, is the transmission of earlier emancipatory texts—and their concerns—to a later generation of feminists, and the probable effects of that transmission. This 1789 "Ladies' Request," in particular, was republished in the 1860s, along with a smattering of other feminist texts from the revolutionary era.²⁷

By the 1850s the feisty French feminist Jenny P. d'Héricourt had developed a specialty in laying bare the sexual politics of knowledge. She confronted the antifeminist Proudhon by criticizing his manic pursuit of male superiority and hierarchy through categorization. His uses of "le genre, la classe" were, in her view, nothing but arbitrary mental constructions (d'Héricourt 1860, II, 108).²⁸ When feminist agitation began to heat up again in 1868 Paris, the French feminist public speaker Maria Deraismes spoke repeatedly of "two genders" (*deux genres*) as distinct from two sexes (female and male), and triumphantly underscored what everyone should be able to see: "Women's inferiority is not a fact of nature . . . it is a human invention, a social fiction."²⁹ In a subsequent speech, she designated the "male gender" [*le genre mâle*] as constituting itself as an aristocracy, a point she elaborated in subsequent years (1990 [1891], 65). Had she picked up these usages directly from the republished 1789 text quoted above? Nothing could be less certain, though it seems extremely likely. What was certain was that Deraismes was promulgating in French a clear-cut understanding of and terminology for what we would subsequently come to know in English as the sex/gender distinction. It was this understanding, already deeply embedded in French feminist discourse and at the forefront of debates on girls' schooling as well as their general education and destiny—and as such, perhaps more present in Francophone culture than we have been led to believe—that I think Simone de Beauvoir inherited and transmitted to her Anglo-American readers through the language of existential philosophy and, perhaps unfortunately, without the juxtaposed terminology of *sexe/genre* (see Rogers 2006; Stewart 2001).

From France to the Anglophone World

But this is by no means the end of the story, and here I come to the second part of my argument. In the early 1950s, just as Beauvoir's book (originally published in 1949) was making its way into translation in England and the United States, the Johns Hopkins-based sexologist John Money (a specialist in the physical and psychological issues surrounding hermaphroditism and other genital abnormalities) introduced the term "gender roles" and (in his own words) "transplanted" the term *gender* "from language science to sexual science," in order to provide a necessary supplement to the term *sex*, and to emphasize the interactions between nature and culture. Subsequently he introduced the practice of speaking of *gender-identity/role* or *G-I/R* (Money 1985, 71).³⁰ Could he have possibly been influenced by Beauvoir's text—or other French works that made this distinction? A decade later, in 1968 the UCLA-based psychologist/psychoanalyst Robert Stoller (1968) published *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity*; it was this work, not Money's earlier coinage, that was highlighted by Ann Oakley in her feminist analysis of the sex/gender literature. In 1972 Money and his associate Anke A. Ehrhardt published their landmark study, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The Differentiation and Dimorphism of Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity*. In the meantime (1969), Betty and Theodore Roszak had published their important collection, *Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women* (1969).³¹

Early in the 1970s, some feminist scholars, more interested at that time in contesting male domination of women and challenging heterosexual sex roles, adopted the term "gender," retaining the distinction between sex and gender (along the lines laid out by Ann Oakley) while emphasizing the importance of sociocultural construction for producing masculinity and femininity (or "sex differences," in the psychological literature). Many of the most important theoretical and terminological developments, however, arose as a result of discussions among feminist and socialist-feminist scholars that spanned the Atlantic. Most of them were steeped in readings of Beauvoir. Feminist scholars had begun "to challenge the prevalent paradigms of social science," as historian Kathleen Canning put it (1993, 104).

By 1975 the young Wisconsin-based anthropologist Gayle Rubin, in her influential essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," introduced the notion of the "sex/gender system," which she defined as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these

transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (1975, 159). Rubin’s objective, like that of so many other socialist-feminist theorists, was to engage “the failure of classical Marxism to fully express or conceptualize sex oppression” (1975, 160), thereby situating the examination of the oppression of women squarely within the realm of political economy—and asserting the importance of gender for the construction of power relationships. Meanwhile, the new American academic journal, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, offered “a means to the end of an accurate understanding of men and women, of sex and gender . . .” (Stimpson et al. 1975, v). In the mid-1980s, the Australian sociologist R. W. Connell published an authoritative interpretation of gender and power that has received international acclaim.³²

Historians of women quickly saw the potential of gender analysis. Natalie Zemon Davis, not coincidentally a scholar of early modern French history, insisted in her 1974 Berkshire Conference paper (published in 1976) that the history of women must necessarily be a history of the masculine/feminine, while Joan Kelly-Gadol (a scholar of early modern Italy) perhaps inadvertently reintroduced the term “social relation of the sexes” (1976), a term already well-known to historians of mid-nineteenth century feminism from the analysis of John Stuart Mill in his landmark 1869 study *On the Subjection of Women*.³³ In her paper at the 1975 Barnard College conference in New York, subsequently published in *Signs* (1976), Kelly-Gadol also seems to have pioneered the notion of “sex as a category of social thought,” building on Gerda Lerner’s earlier insistence on *sex* as an independent variable, equally if not more important than “class” and “race” (Kelly-Gadol 1976, 813). This concept would be further developed, with “gender” replacing “sex” in the landmark article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” by Joan Wallach Scott (1986), who had become concerned about the ostensible theoretical insufficiencies of women’s history before the early 1980s. Scott’s rich and complex article also contains some examples of nineteenth-century British and French usages of “gender/*genre*,” which I have supplemented here.

Meanwhile, a number of things had happened to complicate the concept of “gender” for English-speaking persons, and most of these were related to earlier French thought. It was no longer strictly about the relationship between the terms male/female and masculine/feminine. Very quickly, the notion of gender as role, performance, and script developed in response to physiological and psychological issues concerning hermaphroditism, transsexualism, and, more generally, homosexuality. Not surprisingly, the story of the chevalier d’Eon resurfaced. These notions began to converge