

The Actress and Beauvoir: Shining a spotlight on Regina in *All Men are Mortal*

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Aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's depiction of Regina in her novel *All Men Are Mortal* (1946) anticipate her later exploration of existentialist ideas about female actors, narcissism and transcendence in *The Second Sex* (2011/1949). Literary theorists have tended to overlook the figure of Regina in *All Men Are Mortal*, focusing instead on Raymond Fosca, the immortal character whose eternal alienation dominates the narrative. Most have not examined the ways in which Regina reflects aspects of Beauvoir's Existentialism. Regina's destructive longing for fame and immortality reflect significant aspects of Beauvoir's feminism as it is outlined in *The Second Sex*. In particular, the characterisation of Regina is shown to foreshadow the development of Beauvoir's philosophies about women, acting and narcissism.

Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's novel *All Men Are Mortal* (1995/1946) is one of her more neglected works. Although "belatedly assessed as successful," the novel was "[o]riginally dismissed as an inferior piece of literature" (Bergoffen 2009, 116). However, it is an important work. In it, Beauvoir not only explores existentialist ethics as they relate to a "politics of finitude" (Bergoffen 2009), but touches on gender relations impacting actresses at the time of its publication (Langer 2001, 78–79), thereby foreshadowing several ideas she later articulates in *The Second Sex* (2010/1949).¹ Nearly seventy years after the publication of *The Second Sex* (*TSS*), Beauvoir's ideas on female transcendence, as expressed in her theory and in her fiction, remain relevant to feminist theory. *TSS* influenced second-wave feminism and feminist post-modernists, and, as

¹ I use the term "actress" rather than "female actor", for the sake of consistency with Beauvoir's terminology, as well as that of other theorists cited herein.

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Claudia Card has argued, “the complexity of Beauvoir’s idea of freedom is only now being taken up by feminists” (Card 2003, 38–9.)

Establishing that the actress Regina is an example of Beauvoir’s use of fiction to examine philosophical ideas deepens our understanding of Beauvoir’s view that philosophy alone cannot illuminate all metaphysical aspects of the human condition (Bergoffen 2009). Critical readings of *All Men are Mortal (AMAM)* have largely overlooked the figure of Regina, focusing instead on the existentialist implications of the character Raymond Fosca and his narrative of immortality and alienation (Fallaize 1998; Bergoffen 2009; Moser 2008a; Crowell 2012). Most have not examined the ways in which Regina reflects aspects of Beauvoir’s Existentialism; it has even been suggested that the novel “does not directly reflect [Beauvoir] or her milieu; nor, of course, at that date, feminism” (Duchêne 1996). In contrast, I argue that Regina’s destructive choices and her longing for fame and immortality reflect significant aspects of Beauvoir’s feminism as it is outlined in *TSS*.

Contemporary critics of *AMAM* such as Elizabeth Fallaize, Jeff Malpas, Susanne Moser and Debra Bergoffen have considered the novel’s existentialist themes, primarily in relation to Fosca (Crowell 2012, 303; Moser 2008b, 64; Fallaize 1998, 3; Bergoffen 2009). They provide valuable insights without addressing the significance of Regina in great detail. Reviewer Anne Duchêne is overtly dismissive of the character, describing Regina as “insufferable” before reassuring readers that “[i]t is important not to lose patience: her role steadily dwindles, as Fosca tells her his story” (Duchêne 1996).

Scholars who look more closely at Regina include Kristana Arp and Terry Keefe (Keefe 1998; Arp 2001). Arp describes Regina as “a vain, anxiety-ridden actress,” who believes she “can achieve immortality by existing in [Fosca’s] eyes,” until “she finally realizes the cruel joke: his immortality renders everything in human life insignificant for him” (Crowell 2012, 258). In her study of Beauvoir’s *oeuvre*, Arp demonstrates that the author often uses “interpersonal relations to make metaphysical points about human subjectivity.” In particular, she argues that Beauvoir depicts Regina as needing the look of the Other to feel as though she exists, and that Regina therefore “clearly ... lives in bad faith” (Arp 2001, 41). This is arguably so because surrendering one’s sense of self to the look of the Other results in “self-estrangement”, an element of existential bad faith caused by allowing the other’s view of the self to dominate self-perception (Cooper 1999, 116–17). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre’s bad faith is a

complex state of being, most simply described as a “lie to oneself” (Sartre 2007, 48). Beauvoir relates bad faith to the *hetaera*, whose life as a kept woman, she says, is marred by insincerity (Beauvoir 2010, 629-630). My argument complements Arp’s work, with one important exception: Arp argues that “Regina’s desire to have others look at her does not jibe with [Jean-Paul] Sartre’s description of being-for-others in *Being and Nothingness*.” (Arp 2001, 41). While Regina’s desire to be looked at may seem inconsistent with Sartre’s idea of shame in the presence of an Other, Fosca’s ‘look’ causes her to experience the very “decentralization” that Sartre describes in this context. In brief, for Sartre, the uneasiness of the looked-upon self stems from a subjectivity shift—“a decentralization of the world”—which occurs when the self becomes the object of an Other’s contemplation (Sartre 1969, 275, 255). Regina’s crisis, linked to the “ageless gaze” (34) of the immortal Fosca, reflects Sartre’s “decentralization” in amplified form. When Regina is objectified by Fosca’s gaze, which she experiences both on stage and as his lover, she is split into a being-for-herself and a being-for-others. That is, she experiences a Sartrean ontological duality in the look of an Other. When she comes to see herself *only* as Fosca sees her—as a being-for-others—she exemplifies an existential self-estrangement compatible with Sartre’s philosophy.

Terry Keefe’s study, which considers Beauvoir’s philosophical, autobiographical and fictional writings, argues that Regina,

like so many of Beauvoir’s heroines ... [is] a living illustration of the ‘hollowness’ of consciousness or the difficulty of knowing what we are, and she sees relations with others as constant competition and conflict (Keefe 1998, 174).

According to Keefe, despite her depiction of Regina as “an unpleasant, malicious woman,” Beauvoir “ensures that our dominant feeling towards [her] gradually comes to be one of pity” (174). He argues that this is because Regina’s “obsessive aversion to death” is “deeply human” (174). In particular, the reader sympathises with Regina’s “anguish” when, having discovered Fosca’s indifference, she sees herself “from the point of view of eternity” (Keefe 174). She realises that “nothing at all can enable her to stop the march of time or escape death” (Keefe 173). Despite their important insights, neither Arp nor Keefe reads Regina in relation to her gender or in relation to Beauvoir’s actress in *TSS*.

Regina can be read as a fictional precursor to Beauvoir’s ideas about the female narcissist’s reliance on her reflected image (Beauvoir 2010, 684-

5), and the problem of “servitude” that Beauvoir suggests limits actresses when they focus on supporting their egos and pleasing men (628). Regina is depicted as a narcissist who longs for fame as a means to eternity and is willing to sleep with a male film producer in pursuit of significance. The themes of narcissism, fame and seduction Beauvoir explores in this depiction also appear in *TSS* in relation to “the actress” as a type of woman whose career choices may either facilitate or undermine her existential transcendence.

In *TSS*, Beauvoir considers the ways in which types of women—including “the actress”—achieve or sabotage their own existential transcendence.² For Beauvoir, transcendence is the cornerstone of “existential morality”; it is an essential state of being in which an individual achieves freedom—and thus a justified existence—“through projects”:

Every subject ... accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing towards other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion towards an indefinitely open future. (17).

Beauvoir contrasts this state of being with that of “immanence”, an oppressive state of stagnation. Without transcendence,

there is a degradation of existence into ‘in-itself’, of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil (17).

The moral imperative Beauvoir ascribes to transcendence as an aspect of liberation accords with Sartre’s (and her own) argument that the most meaningful pursuit of all is freedom. This pursuit carries great responsibility, according to Sartre, because when we pursue freedom, we find that “it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on our own” (Sartre 2007, 48). With no excuses or determinism on which to blame errors, radical freedom brings an absolute responsibility that extends beyond the individual, because in choosing one’s path, one commits to an ideal which is then projected on to others: “[N]othing can be good for any of us unless it is good for all” (Sartre 2007, 24). Similarly, Beauvoir argues that an individual’s freedom “can be achieved only through the freedom of others” (Beauvoir 2000,

²Other female types explored in *The Second Sex* include the Girl, the Lesbian, the Mystic, Prostitutes and Hetaeras, the Narcissist, the Woman in Love, the Mother, and the Married Woman.

73). In *TSS*, a great actress can achieve freedom and transcendence in this way, specifically by developing her craft such that she is able to give her audience members a transcendent experience: "A great actress ... will go beyond the given in the way she expresses it, she will really be an artist, a creator who gives meaning to her life by lending meaning to the world" (Beauvoir 2010, 757-8). However, unless the actress is sufficiently dedicated, the distractions of fame and seduction will lead instead to bad faith. Indeed, for the actress in *TSS*, the line between transcendence and bad faith is a fine one (628-632). Illustrating this precariousness, Regina's pursuit of transcendence itself results in immanence. This is because the kinds of transcendence Regina seeks—achieving fame as a film star or eternity through the love of an immortal man—depend on the successful seduction of male characters. Such methods, according to the standards Beauvoir sets in *TSS*, could never result in transcendence because they perpetuate the actress's dependence, rendering freedom impossible, for "[h]ow can [woman] find independence within dependence?" (17.) Beauvoir's characterisation of Regina as an actress who comes to value fame and male approval over her craft—with all its transcendent potential—therefore reflects important existential themes and suggests that the acting profession was significant territory in Beauvoir's examination of what constitutes a meaningful female existence.

Beauvoir's depiction of Regina—a character described by Jacqueline Rose as "the narcissistic woman *par excellence*" (Beauvoir 1995, vi)—foreshadows her argument that the limitations and pitfalls that complicate woman's road to transcendence are a product of her marginalisation. Reminiscent of the character's determination to prove herself unique, Beauvoir argues that narcissistic women prize uniqueness as an antidote to the obscurity and generality of their inessentiality in a male world (Beauvoir 2010, 684-5). Beauvoir describes narcissism as "a well-defined process of alienation: the self is posited as an absolute end and the subject escapes itself in it" (683). Regina's narcissism feeds her fixation on fame and immortality, which leads to her professional and emotional demise, foreshadowing Beauvoir's argument in *TSS* that "[a] stubborn narcissist will be as limited in art as in love because she does not know how to give herself" (693). Indeed, Regina exemplifies Beauvoir's "pseudo-artist" or "ham" (693, 758), an actress type that "often falls into self-worship or seduction," making transcendence or "going beyond herself" impossible (758). The "pseudo-artist" lives in a state of immanence, sustained by her narcissism or reliance on "the comfort of

male support", secured through seduction (758). For such a figure, "no road opens onto transcendence" (630).

Regina's pursuit of fulfilment through fame and male approval, instead of through her craft, results in a strong and troubling sense of inessentiality, despite her final attempt to seize control and prove her agency (Beauvoir 1995, 74). Instead of achieving transcendence and liberty, Regina becomes further constrained and anguished by her limitations as a mortal woman reliant on the approval of men. In this sense, the figure of Regina exemplifies the defining situation of Beauvoir's "woman":

[Woman] discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. 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 (Beauvoir 2010, 17).

Regina, fame and immortality

First published in 1946, *AMAM* is set just before the Second World War. In the novel, Regina is an ambitious Parisian actress, with a keen awareness of her mortality and a strong desire to escape its inevitability. While on tour, Regina meets the mysterious Raymond Fosca. She takes him back to Paris, hoping to "cure him" of his melancholia and to restore his passion for life (Beauvoir 1995, 17). When she learns of his immortality, she becomes obsessed with winning his eternal love. In pursuing eternity through Fosca, Regina alienates her lover Roger and her friends Florence, Sanier and Annie. But Fosca cannot love Regina forever. Having watched several lovers and wives live and die, Fosca sees Regina as generic, indistinguishable from other women. Her mortal life, like all mortal lives, is too brief to be of value to him or to the world. Additionally, his eternal perspective and inability to effect lasting political change has resulted in an inability to find meaning in his life or the lives of others. He can love no one (138). This knowledge precipitates a crisis for Regina; she finds herself estranged from her own reflection in the mirror and unable to sustain her belief in her uniqueness. Realising that her pursuit of fame through the approval of film producer Dulac will not assuage her anguish, she decides to retire from acting, briefly proving her agency to herself, if not to Fosca. The novel ends after Fosca details his experience of

immortality to Regina in what is the largest part of the novel. When he finally abandons her to her crisis, he reassures her that her life, and thus her anguish, will end soon. She responds with a cry of existential despair (403).

Regina's initial goal is fame, a goal she conflates with the desire to be loved: "[H]ow often had she sworn to herself that one day she would be loved, she would be famous!" (24). She does not perform art for art's sake or that of her audience. On the contrary, she thinks she is too good for her provincial audiences. After thundering applause in the darkened theatre, Regina is disappointed when the lights go up and she sees who has witnessed her performance:

When they had been sitting in the darkness, invisible and anonymous, one did not know who they were; she could as well have been performing before a gathering of gods. But now, seeing them face to face, she found herself confronted by ordinary mortals of no special importance. (1)

In Beauvoir's terms, Regina's preoccupation with how she is admired, rather than with how well she has performed and moved her audience, suggests that she is like the majority of female performers, for whom "their art, their occupations are only a means; they are not involved in real projects" (Beauvoir 2010, 630). According to Beauvoir, actresses can only escape the system which sustains masculine prestige if they achieve "concrete freedom from the work they choose and love" through dedication to the acting craft as a "real project". Otherwise, they remain *hetaerae* (kept women) and pseudo-artists, enacting the visions of men in order to achieve fame or wealth. For such an actress, "*Others* exploit what she *is*; she does not create a new object." (630)

In her pursuit of fame, Regina experiences disillusionment, realising that even stardom could not relieve her sense of impermanence:

Perhaps her name would be remembered for a while. But there would be no one to remember that special taste of life on her lips, that passion that burned in her heart, the beauty of the red flames and their phantasmagorical secrets. (Beauvoir 1995, 25)

Deciding that only the immortal Fosca can provide the immortality she craves, Regina imagines that when she talks to him, "every inflection in her voice reverberate[s] through eternity" (44). As such, Fosca is a figure who is worthy of being in her imagined audience, her "gathering of gods"

(1). Knowing of his immortality, Regina marvels that she was ever “satisfied with [her] modest ambitions”: to “be beautiful for another ten years, to play Phèdre and Cleopatra, to leave a faint memory in the hearts of mortal men which would gradually crumble to dust” (32). That she is frustrated by the ephemeral nature of her occupation, as well as of her life, is evident when she tells Sanier: “You’re lucky to be a writer: books live on. The rest of us won’t be around for long.” (5).

Further demonstrating her anxiety over her impermanence, Regina is troubled that the character she portrays on stage, Rosalind, “dies” every night (32). The role of Rosalind reminds Regina of the precariousness of her existence, as a woman and as an actress. In this sense, Regina pursues Fosca’s love to secure a more lasting form of transcendence. In his gaze, she initially feels “beyond space, beyond time” (35), as though “[t]here were no longer any hours or days, no more time, no more place” (28). Struggling to accept the limitations of her life and her craft, Regina begins to believe that Fosca’s eternal love will allow her to transcend such limitations in a more meaningful way than mortal fame could provide: “he’ll guard me in his memory until the end of time” (40). She comes to believe that to be admired by the same eyes that have “gazed upon so many women celebrated for their beauty, for their talents” means she will be able to join their ranks, be “part of that story” and never be forgotten (43-5). Living on in Fosca’s eternal memory then becomes her main reason for living, such that when she is without him, she comes to think: “there is nothing left for me but to die” (77). In this way, we see the figure of Regina disengaging from her craft, thereby closing off her singular avenue to transcendence as conceptualised by Beauvoir.

Beauvoir’s “Actress” figure

Beauvoir’s analysis of women and narcissism in *TSS* is mobilised, in part, through the female type she calls “the actress”. One of a number of female types, “the actress” features prominently in the chapter titled “The Independent Woman”, which is situated within Part Four of volume ii: “Towards liberation” (Beauvoir 2010, 735-768).³ Through “the actress”, Beauvoir examines narcissism and dependence in relation to the existential ideals of freedom and independence. In *AMAM*, too, Beauvoir uses an actress figure to explore the tension between acting,

³The actress type also appears in chapters titled “The Narcissist” and “Prostitutes and Hetaeras”, the latter of which emphasises film stardom (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 613-632).

transcendence and the situation of womanhood. This suggests that the actress is a significant figure in Beauvoir's theoretical and creative examinations of female liberty and transcendence.

In "The Independent Woman", Beauvoir argues that "work alone can guarantee [woman's] concrete freedom" and enable her to achieve transcendence. Without meaningful work, "she stubbornly pursues the impossible quest for being through narcissism, love, or religion" (738). According to Beauvoir, actresses represented a rare potential for privilege and freedom because they could "attain concrete freedom from the work they choose and love" (630). Their capacity through "artistic expression" to "go beyond the very given they constitute" meant that "[f]or three centuries [actresses were almost] the only [women] to possess concrete independence in society" (757).

However, Beauvoir argues that the "rare advantages" of the profession "conceal traps ... [of] self-worship or seduction" (758). All women are vulnerable to these traps because they exist on the periphery of a world shaped by men, whose support is likely to hinge on an appealing appearance and an ability to seduce. However, actresses are particularly vulnerable because "it is rare to become a star", and the alternative to stardom is perpetual seduction (629-630). Unless she can resist narcissism and "escape men's yoke", the actress will sink into "ham acting," which will "exaggerate all her narcissistic defects" (757-8).

Beauvoir distinguishes between "ham[s]" or "pseudo-artists" (for whom acting is either a way to earn money, achieve fame or satisfy narcissism), and great actresses, "authentic artists who transcend themselves in the role they create" (692-3).⁴ While the former will be satisfied by "simply exhibiting what she *is*," the latter "will really be an artist, a creator who gives meaning to her life by lending meaning to the world" (757-8). By illuminating the human condition on stage, great actresses facilitate the emotional or existential growth of those who watch them. They attain transcendence because they are freely engaged in meaningful projects.

Regina is depicted as having the potential to be such an actress, but being vulnerable to the traps Beauvoir describes, further demonstrating the figure's foreshadowing of Beauvoir's take on actresses and feminism in *TSS*. She is shown to have talent and a capacity to move her audience. In the opening scene, the audience applauds loudly through five curtain

⁴As examples of the latter, Beauvoir refers to such renowned nineteenth-century actresses as "Rachel [Felix]" and "[Eleanora] Duse". (Beauvoir 2010 693)

calls and greets the actors after the show with flowers (Beauvoir 1995, 1): "their eyes glowed with enthusiasm" (2). Regina's friend, Sanier, says that Regina and her rival co-star Florence will have "exceptional careers" (5). However, unlike Beauvoir's "great actress", Regina shows no desire to motivate or "uncover the world" to others through illuminating performances (Beauvoir 2010, 626). Instead, her indifference to facilitating the transcendence of others through her performances, and her focus on winning admiration and fame, finally render her a "pseudo-artist" or a "ham," one who surrenders to masculine support and narcissism and "see[s] in art a servant of [her ego]" (758).

The Trap of Seduction

In *TSS*, Beauvoir uses the term "seduction" to describe female behavior towards men whose support they are forced to seek owing to economic inequality and entrenched masculine "prestige" (10). For the hetaera, whose fortune depends on her ability to seduce men: "her whole life is a show: her words, her gestures, are intended not to express her thoughts but to produce an effect. ... Stubborn bad faith governs her inner life and permits her studied lies to seem true" (629-30). In *AMAM*, Regina enacts Beauvoir's subsequent articulation of the trap of seduction when she invites film producer Dulac to a dinner party and dresses to please him. At the gathering, Regina "sense[s] Dulac's gaze" as she crosses the room, and she asks her friend Annie if she looks "beautiful" (Beauvoir 1995, 20-1). Regina is aware of—and dismayed by—her complicity in the game she is playing, demonstrating Beauvoir's ideas on bad faith and women's subjectivity directly:

She hated the way her hair was done and the film-star make-up. She hated the false smile that she could feel forming on her lips and the social tone of her voice. 'It's degrading,' she thought angrily. (21)

Regina expresses a desire not to exploit herself in future:

'Roger wants me to tone down all my distinctive features. They only appreciate obvious beauty.'

'It's a shame.'

'Don't worry. As soon as I've made two or three films, I'll make them accept my real face.' (21)

The conversation between the two women illustrates Regina's willingness to conform to a feminine ideal in order to secure Dulac's support, as well as her awareness of the compromise this entails. While Regina does not use the term "bad faith", she is aware that the compromise she has chosen is "degrading", which foreshadows the terminology Beauvoir later employs in her definition of immanence as a state of degradation (Beauvoir 2010, 17). Regina reassures herself: "I'll have my own back later" (Beauvoir 1995, 21). That her conviction is naive is supported in Beauvoir's later argument in *TSS* that most actresses "spend their entire lives in danger; they must seduce the public and men over and over without respite" (Beauvoir 2010, 629).

The chapter titled "Prostitutes and Hetaeras" in *TSS* examines women who come to depend on male approval for their financial support and their "worth" (625). The movie star is an example of the hetaera, because she "delivers Woman to the dreams of men who give her fortune and glory in exchange" (625). That is, the hetaera allows men to define what women will signify in the world. For Beauvoir, the hetaera is complicit in her own exploitation: "[S]he paid for her success with too much slavish compliance to sincerely wish for universal freedom" (629). For such a woman, even if she desires fame on her own:

[i]t is more often thanks to her masculine 'protection' that she will attain her goal; and it is men—husband, lover, suitors—who confirm her triumph by letting her share their fortune or their fame. It is this need to *please* another or a crowd that connects the movie star to the hetaera (626).

Regina illustrates Beauvoir's argument that the willingness to please, in pursuit of fame, limits the actress's capacity to become a true artist, because,

[t]he hetaera does not uncover the world, she opens no road to human transcendence: on the contrary, she seeks to take possession of it for her profit; offering herself for the approval of her admirers, she does not disavow this passive femininity that dooms her to man: she endows it with a magic power that allows her to take males into the trap of her presence, and to feed herself on them; she engulfs them with herself in immanence (626).

These figures are very different to Beauvoir's idealised "creator who, transcending himself [sic] in a work goes beyond the given and appeals to a freedom in others to whom he opens up the future" (626). Regina is

thus a "ham" who "cares not for what she accomplishes but for the glory that will cascade over her" (693).

In Beauvoir's view, "the greatest" actresses are "authentic artists who transcend themselves in the role they create" (693). Such a professional "escapes the hetaera's condition; she can experience true independence" (629). In contrast, she argues, most "Hollywood stars fall into slavery", at the mercy of their producers (628). The fate of such actresses is to be in bondage, in a slavery that is worse than that of a prostitute "who only gives her body" (628). When Regina resigns from acting, she escapes that fate, but not before demonstrating the nature of the slavery Beauvoir refers to.

Dulac is portrayed as objectifying women: "He was a connoisseur of the shapely leg, the well-rounded figure, the supple gait: he was a horse-trader" (20). Although Regina mutters that she "hate[s] those horsetraders [sic]," she declares herself willing to sleep with Dulac if necessary (21). In this sense, Regina demonstrates the characteristics of Beauvoir's hetaera, while Dulac's power to objectify and eradicate her unique characteristics accords with Beauvoir's description of Hollywood in *TSS*:

We know that Hollywood stars fall into slavery. Their bodies are no longer their own; the producer decides on their hair colour, weight, figure and type; teeth are pulled out to change the shape of a cheek. ... private life is just a moment in their public life ... The star who refuses to be give in to these demands will face a brutal or slow but ineluctable decline. (628)

For Beauvoir, this allows the actress "no invention, no progress, in creative activity" (630). As such, "[t]he greatest misfortune for the hetaera is that not only is her independence the deceptive reverse side of a thousand dependencies, but this very freedom is negative" (630). That is, the independence of Beauvoir's Hollywood "star" is an illusion. Should she try to test it by standing on her own two feet: "deprived of masculine support, even the movie star sees her prestige fade" (628). In *AMAM*, because Regina hopes to achieve fulfilment and fame through Dulac's approval and through Fosca's eternal love (Beauvoir 1995, 40), she can be viewed as seeking liberation through the affirmations of men (Beauvoir 2010, 627). Her subsequent anguish illustrates Beauvoir's argument that the hetaera's reliance on male approval undermines her sovereignty, leaving her trapped in a state of "servitude": "[t]he gifts showered on her

are chains" (628). Regina's surrender to Dulac's exploitative patronage and to Fosca's perspective of her are examples of her acceptance of exploitation, dependence and immanence, linking her with Beauvoir's conceptualisation of the hetaera's bad faith. Doubly bound, Regina thus represents Beauvoir's "pseudo-artist" who has fallen into, and is constrained by, the "trap ... of seduction" (758).

The trap of Narcissism

Regina's narcissism makes the type of transcendence Beauvoir advocates in *TSS* impossible for her because it leads her to crave immortality and fame at the cost of her independence and existential integrity. While in *TSS* Beauvoir cautions against thinking of all women as fundamentally narcissistic, she notes that unfulfilling and repressive "circumstances invite woman more than man to turn towards self and to dedicate her love to herself" (683). In her view, this makes transcendence through meaningful action impossible, and she describes narcissistic women writers in particular as being "burden[ed]" by "a self-indulgence that hurts their sincerity, limits them and diminishes them" (693). The problem for Beauvoir is that "the stubborn narcissist will be as limited in art as in love because she does not know how to give herself" (693). Similarly, she is likely to give up on creative disciplines "requiring strict training and demanding solitary work" because she is not "driven by a positive desire to create" – rather, she is "avid for glory" (693). This inability to love or create is reminiscent of Regina's callous treatment of her lover Roger, whom she loves for his "intelligent devotion ... as much as she could love anyone other than herself" (Beauvoir 1995, 17), and of her subsequent willingness to abandon her career if it will prove her significance to Fosca.

Beauvoir argues that female self-worship is most marked in actresses, because "nothing will give the narcissist deeper satisfaction than devoting herself publicly to the theatre" (692). In the theatre, "better than in mirrors it is in others' admiring eyes that she sees her double haloed in glory" (691). This imagery echoes that used in the opening paragraph of *AMAM*: "In every face there were eyes, and reflected in each pair of eyes was Regina, bowing and smiling" (Beauvoir 1995, 1). Similarly, Beauvoir's description in *TSS* of the narcissistic woman's need "to be two so as to establish a tender dialogue (Beauvoir 2010, 684) echoes Regina's gratification when, sitting at a table in a bar after an opening

performance, she pretends to do her makeup so that she can look at herself:

She needed to look at herself. She loved her face; she liked the lively, subtle shade of her blonde hair, the haughty severity of her high forehead and her nose, her winsome mouth, the boldness of her blue eyes. She was beautiful, yet hers was a beauty that was so harsh and so unusual that at first it startled. 'Ah! if only there were two of me,' she thought, 'one who speaks and the other who listens, one who lives and the other who watches, then how I would love myself! I'd envy no-one.' (Beauvoir 1995, 4)

Regina's narcissism foreshadows that of Beauvoir's "pseudo-artist" in *TSS*. The latter cannot be a transcendent actress who "uncover[s] the world" for others because she "lacks the generosity to forget herself, which keeps her from going beyond herself" (Beauvoir 2010, 626, 758). On these terms, Regina is not like the rare "great" actresses who "make of their person the instrument of their art instead of seeing in art a servant of their self". Rather, she is the pseudo-artist who, "instead of integrating her narcissistic indulgence and the sexual freedom she enjoys into her artistic life ... often falls into self-worship or seduction" (758). Like the hetaera who misguidedly "seeks [in glory] the apotheosis of her narcissism" (632), Regina exemplifies Beauvoir's idea that "the admiration she feels for herself limits the actress's talent in many cases; she deludes herself as to the value of her mere presence to the extent that serious work seems useless to her" (758). She thus exemplifies Beauvoir's actress who has fallen into the limiting trap of narcissism, to the detriment of her transcendence.

Narcissism and the thwarted "One and Only"

At the heart of Regina's crisis is her sense that she is losing her uniqueness, something she has hitherto relied upon for her sense of worth. According to Beauvoir, in *TSS*, the narcissistic woman prizes her uniqueness while, counter-intuitively, looking for her "double" as evidence of it. Over time, "swallowed up in generality" by domesticity, Beauvoir's woman seeks her "double" in the mirror as well as in literature (684-8). Regina, who—as we have seen—admires her reflection and wishes there were two of her, illustrates this phenomenon (Beauvoir 1995, 4). She dreads generality, and her need for affirmation of her uniqueness leads to anger when her audience shows appreciation for her co-star Florence:

They surrounded Florence, too. They had also brought her flowers, and when they spoke to her, that little flame shone in their eyes as well. As if they could like both of us, thought Regina angrily, a blonde as much as a brunette, and each completely different. (2)

In her anger, Regina exemplifies Beauvoir's later proposition that "[t]he hetaera who seeks to distinguish herself is a priori hostile to the one who, like her, lusts for a privileged place" (Beauvoir 2010, 630). This is also evident when Regina attempts to sabotage Florence's relationship with Sanier by mentioning Florence's other lover; she does so because she feels bitter that Florence has Sanier's undivided attention:

Love was in their eyes, love alone; the great human drama was unfolding between them as if no one on earth had ever loved before, as if Regina had never loved ... [n]o amount of success, no triumph could, in that instant, prevent Florence from shining in all her glory within Sanier's heart. (Beauvoir 1995, 4)

The scene positions love as an avenue to the unique state that Regina desires, and comes to seek, from the immortal Fosca. Despite thinking herself better than others—"no woman can compare herself to me"—Regina nonetheless feels threatened, and seeks reassurance in her mirror (3-4). This highlights Beauvoir's view that because woman has fewer opportunities to attain self-identification than men, she turns to her mirror as a surface upon which to assess her value: her passive beauty can be "caught in the immobile trap of the mirror's silvering" and is the measure of her power and worth in a man's world (Beauvoir 2010, 684-5). The reflected image therefore combats female inessentiality by supporting a sense of individuality and uniqueness:

[T]he world is reduced to this piece of glass where one image shines: the One and Only. Every woman drowned in her reflection reigns over space and time, alone, sovereign; she has total rights over men, fortune, glory and sensual pleasure (685).

But, as Regina learns, this support is illusory. The theatre audience's appreciation of the dark-haired Florence, such that they admire "a blonde as much as a brunette," foreshadows Regina's reaction to Fosca's similar lack of discernment. Fosca explains to Regina that he loves Annie as much as he loves her and can make no "distinction" between them (Beauvoir 1995, 78). That Regina is not unique to Fosca is also evident when he refuses her offer of companionship early on:

'You say no without even looking at me. Look at me.'

'It's not worth the trouble,' he said. 'I've seen you a hundred times.'

'But from far away ...'

'From both far and near.'

'When?'

'Throughout every age,' he said. 'Everywhere.' (16)

The scene complements Dulac's objectification of Regina's body and undermines her sense of uniqueness. Her dismay is no surprise, given her rejection of religion as a young woman on the basis that God could not offer her exclusive admiration: "God loved everyone; she could never be satisfied with such indiscriminating benevolence". She vowed to become saintly without religion: by stirring passionate admiration in others, she would make herself "sacred to them" (11). Regina's desire to be extraordinary motivates her to impress Fosca; she does not "want to be just another blade of grass" (7), or, as expressed in *TSS*, "one woman among millions of others" (Beauvoir 2010, 687).

Preoccupied with proving her uniqueness, Regina takes Fosca to the village where she grew up, hoping to present herself to him as an individual. She talks of her childhood, "eager to resuscitate, however briefly, those little, transparent creatures in whose bodies her own heart had once beaten" (Beauvoir 1995, 63). Her eagerness suggests Beauvoir's later conception of the woman who "tries to find the dead child in her deepest self ... [in order to] revive her lost generality" (Beauvoir 2010, 687). Fosca's withering response is to point out that within each mortal life there are "[a]lways the same efforts, the same failures" (Beauvoir 1995, 63). When Regina asks Fosca if he remembers her stories, he shrugs and says:

'It's a story I've heard so many times.' She jumped up. 'No! It's not the same!'

'The same one, the only one.'

...

'But I'm different ... If I weren't different, why would you love me? You do love me, don't you?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'And for you I'm unique?'

'Yes,' he said again. 'A woman who is unique like all women.' (63-4)

Regina comes to realise that: "Everybody believed they were unique, preferred themselves above others. And they were all wrong, she as much as anyone else" (78-9). As Keefe argues, Fosca's story shatters "any remaining hope [Regina] may have had of seeing herself as unique" (Keefe 1998, 179). In these scenes, it is possible to see the nature of the exploitative gaze of audiences and the film industry—as represented by Dulac, with his taste for "obvious" beauty—as having its parallel in the effect of Fosca's "ageless gaze" on Regina and her threatened sense of uniqueness (Beauvoir 1995, 34).

Listening to Fosca, Regina realises that, in his immortal gaze, "the world [is] nothing more than a parade of fleeting visions" (62). The effect on her is a sense of fragmentation and dissolution. Fosca's "look ... would never die" and "[a]ll [Regina] could hope to do was to stay afloat a little longer before being transformed into foam" (63). In this respect, Fosca's view of Regina conforms to Beauvoir's position in *TSS* that women are treated as "inessential" in a patriarchal world (Beauvoir 2010, 17), a perception reminiscent of Sartre's idea of contingency.⁵

Conclusion

AMAM is imbued with Beauvoir's developing philosophy of the limitations women face when pursuing transcendence and liberty. In particular, Regina's fictional predicament is a precursor to Beauvoir's articulation in *TSS* of the narcissistic woman's need, born of her social marginalisation, to believe herself unique. For Regina, indifference to her uniqueness—whether linked to God, Dulac or the immortal Fosca—puts her sense of individuality and significance at risk. Her desire for immortality—first through fame (seeking Dulac's approval and patronage) and then through Fosca's love—reinforces her dependence on male approval and prevents her from approaching acting as an art form which can bring meaning to others' lives. Existentially constrained by her narcissism and dependence, the character foreshadows Beauvoir's argument in *TSS* that an actress's dependence on the approving gaze of the male Other compromises her

⁵ Sartre argues that human existence is "contingent" rather than "necessary" (Sartre 2007, 49).

artistry and renders her in a state of servitude, within which “no road opens onto transcendence” (Beauvoir 2010, 630). Regina is thus the epitome of Beauvoir’s “pseudo-artist,” doomed to “immanence” and a state of “opaque ennui” (631). She is the fictional antithesis of Beauvoir’s “great actress”, for whom transcendence is possible through absolute commitment to the acting craft.

When Beauvoir typifies actresses as seeking through “artistic expression to transcend their given characteristics,” her discussion is grounded in the existentialist position that pursuing transcendence to avoid stagnation is a moral and existential responsibility, without which the individual (both male and female) is either guilty of a “moral fault” or bound to suffer “frustration and oppression.” (17) In line with both Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s ideas about the moral imperative to pursue not only one’s own liberty but the liberty of others, Regina’s bad faith occurs because of her focus on her own glory rather than on her craft and its power to transform the lives of those in her audience. Furthermore, this depiction illustrates Beauvoir’s ideas about the fine line actresses—and women more broadly—tread between transcendence and bad faith. The character of Regina therefore highlights and foreshadows a basic tenet of Beauvoir’s feminist philosophy, that woman’s “inessential[ity]” in a male-dominated world leads to characteristics—such as narcissism—which present obstacles to her fulfilment of her moral obligation to pursue liberty and transcendence.

While the significance of this interpretation of Regina to feminist scholarship in a broad sense cannot be examined in-depth within the parameters of this article, it is worth mentioning that parallels may be found between this interpretation and feminist scholarship in the area of film studies. Beauvoir’s philosophy in *TSS* remains relevant—and indeed valuable—to the analysis of contemporary films (Boulé and Tidd 2012, 10). Additionally, Beauvoir’s engagement with the power dynamics between an actress and a film producer in *AMAM* could be read as her response to feminist considerations of gender relations in the film industry in the 1940s. A significant feature of the Hollywood studio system, “which reached its zenith in the 1930s and early 1940s,” was that the financial motives of producers resulted in the mistreatment of actresses, who frequently embodied “shifting sexualities in a money-making movie industry” (Langer 2001, 78–79). Resonating with Beauvoir’s ideas in *TSS* about the damaging and controlling role of the producer in the life of the actress, and the ways in which pseudo-artists may alter their appearances in order to be deemed fit for stardom (Beauvoir 2010, 628), Langer refers

to “movie moguls” who “helped to support the existing double standard by disapproving of women who challenged marital bonds. Yet they inevitably made money from such bold women by punishing them in the films they produced for being illicit, immoral or aggressive.” (Langer 2001, 78) Beauvoir’s characterisation of Regina as willing to change her appearance and sleep with Dulac if necessary prefigures her examination in *TSS* of the power imbalance between male film makers and actresses in Hollywood at the time of *AMAM*’s publication in 1946. Through Regina’s willingness to compromise herself in the name of film stardom, Beauvoir explores the personal cost of this power imbalance and how it pertains to the idea of woman’s creative freedom and, more broadly, her existential transcendence.

Today, the idea of a choice between seduction and artistic integrity might seem outdated, given that female financial independence is more commonplace now than it was then and men are not the only ones running Hollywood studios or writing or directing films. However, recent revelations of Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein’s sexual manipulation of actresses over several decades suggests that this may not be the case (Kantor and Twohey 2017). As such, a modern reading of *AMAM* might focus on the ongoing significance of the novel’s examination of power relations between actresses and producers. Additionally, Regina’s willingness to conform to feminine ideals for the sake of fame, and her existential crisis resulting from her surrender to the male gaze, are worth examining in more detail. Such readings would do well to consider the field of celebrity studies. Many critics in celebrity studies draw on Existentialism—albeit implicitly—in their theorisation of fame as a troubling experience (Morrison 2014). While few explore the role of Existentialism in detail, David Giles and Jonathan Goldman both link the condition of being a celebrity to existentialist themes of anguish, authenticity, objectification or contingency (Giles 2000, 90; Goldman 2011, 1). While there is no direct comparison to be made between Regina as a represented actress and today’s actual celebrities as living beings, they reflect similar theoretical problems. For example, Regina’s pursuit of eternity—in lieu of fame—through the immortal gaze of Fosca relates to Leo Braudy’s argument that individuals pursue fame in order “to be singled out within time and to survive beyond it” (Braudy 1986, 589).

Regina demonstrates Beauvoir’s view that “the narcissist, alienating herself in her imaginary double, destroys herself” (Beauvoir 2010, 697). The character illustrates and foreshadows Beauvoir’s point that female narcissism may be a product of woman’s inessentiality in a male world. As

such, in her view, narcissism exists as both agent and saboteur in woman's efforts to overcome her oppressive inessentiality, further evidence that woman's condition in a patriarchal system is one of confinement, offering little hope of achieving the existentialist imperative of transcendence. Beauvoir's response to the Hollywood star system in *TSS* and *AMAM* indicate that the challenges facing actresses are central to her examination of Existentialism as it pertains to women, and that she explored them first in her characterization of Regina.

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Dr Joanna Morrison completed her creative writing PhD at Murdoch University in 2014, where she teaches writing as a sessional academic. Her fiction has been published in *Westerly* and anthologised in *Joiner Bay and Other Stories* (Margaret River Press, 2017). *The Actress and de Beauvoir* is derived from a chapter in her PhD thesis which comprises a novella and a dissertation collectively titled *The Actress and the Look of the Other*. The dissertation analyses two novelistic representations of actresses—Regina in Simone de Beauvoir's *All Men Are Mortal* (1946) and Sibyl Vane in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)—through relevant aspects of Existentialism to illuminate themes of objectification and alienation in the novels, in relation to these hitherto neglected characters.

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