

# Tête-à-Tête

*The Tumultuous Lives and Loves of*  
Simone de Beauvoir  
*and*  
Jean-Paul Sartre



HAZEL ROWLEY

To my father, Derrick Rowley  
(1922–2004)

An extension of this copyright page appears on page 13.

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## A NOTE ON SOURCES



A major source for this book has been Sartre's and Beauvoir's correspondence, published and unpublished. Sartre's letters to Beauvoir (and to some other girlfriends) were compiled by Beauvoir, after Sartre's death. The two-volume *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres* appeared in French in 1983. In order not to embarrass third parties, Beauvoir left out certain passages and changed some names. However, she deposited the original letters in the Bibliothèque Nationale, where they can be consulted on microfilm in the manuscript room of the old Rue de Richelieu library.

After Beauvoir's death, Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir embarked on the daunting task of deciphering Beauvoir's handwriting for future publications. In 1990, she published Beauvoir's letters to Sartre, with no omissions or changes whatsoever. Beauvoir's letters to Nelson Algren, written in English, appeared in 1997. (Algren's literary agent, Candida Donadio, who owned Algren's copyright after Algren's death, would not allow Le Bon to publish Algren's side of the correspondence.) *Correspondance croisée*, the early correspondence between Beauvoir and Jacques-Laurent Bost, appeared in 2004.

As for unpublished sources, Beauvoir's early journals are in the Bibliothèque Nationale. These cover the years 1926–1930, and include interesting entries about her courtship by Maheu and Sartre. And Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir has donated dozens of boxes of correspondence (letters to Beauvoir) to the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Le Bon de Beauvoir has retained Beauvoir's most intimate correspondence and journals in her personal archives, and she let me see

important material that no scholar had seen before: letters to Beauvoir from Nelson Algren, Olga Kosakiewicz, Nathalie Sorokine, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ivan Moffat, and Claude Lanzmann; letters from Beauvoir to Olga, from Bost to Olga; some later letters from Bost to Beauvoir; and a journal extract Beauvoir wrote about the death of Jean-Pierre Bourla.

Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir says she has not begun to decipher the journal Beauvoir kept in 1958, or the one she kept from 1972 onward, on which she based *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. According to Le Bon, these are so illegible as to be virtually written in code.

Beauvoir's letters to Claude Lanzmann are in Lanzmann's possession, and he tells me he has no plans to publish them. I interviewed him twice, but did not see the letters.

Sartre gave hundreds of interviews, and participated in the 1977 film documentary *Sartre*, but he was discreet about his personal life. That is to say, he was prepared to say things about himself, but did not like to talk about others. Apart from the journal he wrote during the war, he did not share Beauvoir's propensity to write autobiographical material.

Like Beauvoir, Sartre was a prolific letter writer. He said that he would be perfectly happy to see these letters published. However, not much of his correspondence has seen the light of day. The published collections of his letters to Beauvoir, which appeared in English under the titles *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1926–1939*, and *Quiet Moments in a War: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1940–1963*, also contain a handful of letters to Simone Jollivet, Olga Kosakiewicz, and Bianca Bienenfeld (to whom Beauvoir gave the pseudonym Louise Védérine). A selection of Sartre's letters to Wanda Kosakiewicz from Greece in 1937 was published in a special issue of *Les Temps modernes*, numbers 531–33, Oct.–Dec. 1990.

At this point, most of Sartre's correspondence remains in private hands. I wrote to Sartre's literary executrix, Arlette Elkaïm Sartre, several times, but she never replied. Other researchers have also encountered this wall of silence from her. This is most unfortunate, because not only is Arlette Elkaïm Sartre sitting on a large collection

of Sartre papers and correspondence, she also owns the copyright to all Sartre's unpublished writings.

I have been told that Dolores Vanetti Ehrenreich has kept her letters from Sartre, and if Arlette Elkaïm gives her consent, they might possibly be published in the future. Vanetti, who is frail, in her nineties, and living in New York, was gracious to me but would not agree to see me. Apart from a brief interview with Annie Cohen-Solal in the 1980s, Vanetti has systematically refused to talk about her relationship with Sartre.

In the end, I was able to read hundreds of letters that Sartre wrote to other girlfriends, but, sadly, I am not able to quote from them, except for the minimal "fair use" allowed by copyright law. Michelle Vian has kept the thick piles of letters Sartre wrote to her from 1949 onward, and briefly let me peruse them. The letters Sartre wrote to Wanda Kosakiewicz over the years are in Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir's possession. She let me read several dozen—those I asked to see, from periods I wanted to know more about.

My most precious insight into Sartre comes from the letters he wrote his Russian girlfriend, Lena Zonina, between 1962 and 1967. Lena's daughter, Masha Zonina, let me read the entire correspondence at my leisure—more than six hundred pages in Sartre's neat handwriting. In these letters, he writes a lot about the other women in his life.

The originals, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, have been placed under a forty-year embargo: no one has access to them. In the early 1980s, Lena Zonina wanted to publish these letters, but Arlette Elkaïm Sartre refused permission. After Lena's death, in February 1985, Masha Zonina, eager to keep the letters in France and knowing that her mother had wanted to make them public, sold the letters to the Bibliothèque Nationale. In light of the disparaging remarks they contain about his other women, including herself, Arlette Elkaïm Sartre has made them inaccessible to scholars for almost half a century.

The Beinecke Library at Yale is friendlier to the Sartre scholar. The Sartre collection includes thirty-one letters and postcards that Sartre wrote to Liliane Siegel and, more important, over two hundred hours of taped interviews that Sartre's biographer John Gerassi con-

ducted between November 1970 and November 1973 with Sartre and members of his entourage, including Beauvoir, Olga and Wanda Kosakiewicz, Michelle Vian, Arlette Elkaïm Sartre, René Maheu, J.-B. Pontalis, André Gorz, Claude Lanzmann, and Jean Pouillon. It is wonderful to be able to hear these people's voices, and to attempt to decipher their hesitations, silences, and innuendoes. Interestingly, Olga, Wanda, and Arlette all give the impression that they did not feel able to say everything they wanted to say. Each one talked about Sartre with a degree of ambivalence. The fact is, Sartre was still alive; they did not want to be caught saying things behind his back to his biographer, and most of all, they were beholden to him.

In July 1985, Michel Rybalka taped more than twenty hours of interviews with Michelle Vian. His aim was primarily to find out more about the intellectual trajectories of Sartre and Boris Vian, but Michelle also made interesting comments about Sartre's character and her relationship with him. Rybalka let me listen to these interviews, which filled out and reinforced my own conversations with Michelle Vian.

At all times, I worked with the original French sources. Where they exist, I quote from the English translations, but if I did not find these accurate enough, I modified them, and indicated this in the endnotes. Otherwise, the translations from French are mine.

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