

**Hazel Rowley's *Tête-à-Tête:*
Simone de Beauvoir
 and
*Jean-Paul Sartre***

Reviewed by Mary Lawrence Test and Myrna Bell Rochester

Hazel Rowley. *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005. Pp. 416. ISBN: 0-06-052059-0. (Hardback) \$26.95.

Tête-à-Tête: The Lives and Loves of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. London: Chatto and Windus, 2006. Pp. 429. ISBN: 0-70-117508-7. (Hardback) £20.

In the mid-1950s, Sartre's growing fascination with Flaubert led him to want to produce a complete study of that writer, so different from himself: There was a wealth of material on Flaubert, and Sartre was convinced that if he studied the evidence carefully enough, he could come to a perfect understanding of the man (Rowley 238; 238).¹ It is in this same manner that we, as decades-long readers of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, have always approached those two writers. Perhaps with that newly published treatise on their works, this additional book of memoirs, and still another volume of previously unpublished letters, we may come to a "perfect understanding." This is again what we hoped as we picked up these books.

Excellent scholars -- notably Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier, Michel Rybalka and Michel Contat -- have worked at chronicling the lives and works of Beauvoir and Sartre. But until Hazel Rowley's 2005 book, no one else has sought to establish a thorough account focusing on this couple's personal relationship and relationships with others,² combining information from all the "autographs" published to date, while conducting numerous new interviews and reading much unpublished correspondence. The title of the British edition, *The Lives and Loves of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, is more revelatory than the North American one.

Besides the new material, Rowley has made ample use of and credits her secondary sources, which include works by the above-mentioned chroniclers, in addition to well-known biographies and studies by Annie Cohen-Solal, Deirdre Bair, Toril Moi, John Gerassi, and Bernard-Henri Lévy. Personal memoirs, journals and letters published in the past 25 years by others close to the couple -- Claude Lanzmann, Jacques Lanzmann, Élisabeth Mabile [Zaza], Henriette Nizan, Bianca Bienenfeld Lamblin, Olivier Todd, Jean Cau, etc.-- also played an important part in Rowley's compilation.

If other curious readers resemble us, each time they pick up a new book or even an older one, they might wonder, as Sartre did in a letter he wrote to

Beauvoir on May 12, 1940: "Where exactly is Bost at this moment?" (Rowley 115; 115) We wish to know, for example: How long was Jacques-Laurent Bost away in the war? Why did Camus pull out of directing and starring in *Huis Clos*? Did Sartre travel alone to England to write the Freud screenplay for John Huston? Why did Évelyne Rey commit suicide, and why did Beauvoir not write about it? These questions and more are answered by Rowley's meticulous accumulation of quotes, facts, plots, and intrigues surrounding our peripatetic couple.

Rowley's information follows chronologically, with some backtracking where called for, to fill in details. It is highly readable, both for the general reader interested in the life and times of Sartre and Beauvoir, and for specialists, for whom a month-by-month chronicle of their adult lives would be useful.

Reading the early press reviews, one might have thought that the book would be filled largely with titillating or even salacious details. But for long-time readers of Beauvoir and Sartre, most of the detail is not new. What is new here is the chronology and the interrelationships that are drawn and explained. Of course, many of the personal relationships Rowley describes remain, to this day, unconventional ones. Lena Zonina, Sartre's Russian interpreter and lover during the 1960s, put it best, in a farewell letter to him: "[. . .] you and the Beaver together have created a remarkable and dazzling thing which is so dangerous for those people who get close to you" (Rowley 278; 277).

Through all this, we appreciate the fact that Rowley's tone remains steady and objective. The author does not judge, nor does she engage in pop psychology. Readers are implicitly invited to remain on the same level. This book is not a long one -- less than one-half the length of Deirdre Bair's valuable 1990 biography of Beauvoir. And there are notable absences: for example, Jean Genet and Violette Leduc. Nonetheless, we believe Hazel Rowley has made a practical and responsible contribution to the literature, which researchers may wish to consult for the facts and chronology and for the notes, perhaps, when working on studies which might be quite different in scope or objectives.

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Rowley worked with the full cooperation of Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir, Beauvoir's adopted daughter and literary executor. On the other hand, Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, who played the same life role for Sartre, has long been -- and remains -- uncooperative, refusing all contacts. Citing her desire to see Sartre read only in proper historical perspective, Elkaim-Sartre has sealed much unpublished material for forty years at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Elkaim-Sartre's refusal to permit quotations from -- or, in some cases, apparently, even reference to -- many of Sartre's unpublished letters forced Rowley to omit material she would have otherwise included. For the North American edition, however, the author was able to take advantage of the "fair use" clause of U.S. and Canadian copyright law to include snippets here and there of unpublished letters that she had been shown, mainly letters from Sartre to Michelle Vian, the widow of Boris Vian and one of Sartre's long-time

companions, as well as letters from Sartre to Lena Zonina. In fact, quoting previously unpublished material of any kind is rarely found to constitute "fair use." We are fortunate that Rowley was able to include as much of it as she did in the North American edition.

When it came to the British version, the author was even more limited in what she could quote from the unpublished letters by virtue of the stricter European copyright laws. Rowley makes reference to this fact in her "Acknowledgments" section. Although, in the main, the two editions track page by page, every once in a while a small quote had to be deleted or paraphrased for the British edition, which came out several months after the North American one.

Contrary to what some reviewers predicted early on, however, the British edition has not been watered down. We do learn less via direct quotations from Sartre to Lena Zonina about the suicide of Évelyne Lanzmann (Rey) and Sartre's reaction to it (272). However, the only two facts that appear to be completely deleted from the British edition are (1) that in 1962 Olga Bost's hair, formerly full and blond, was dyed "auburn" (271), and (2) that the car that Andre Reweliotty, Michelle Vian's long-time friend, business associate and lover, died in, also in 1962, was "burgundy-colored" (272).

We can regret Elkaïm-Sartre's stubborn refusal to permit access to all of Sartre's writings -- and perhaps indeed Sartre's choice of her in the first place as his literary executor --, but absent a few quotes and details, the British edition of *Tête-à-Tête* does not lose any of its thrust, importance, or appeal.

NOTES

1 Successive page numbers in parentheses refer to the two editions described in the heading of this review; single page numbers refer to the North American (HarperCollins) edition.

2 The "couple" relationship has recently been explored elsewhere. See, for example, Anna Trespeuch's account of the lives and works of Dominique Desanti and Jean-Toussaint Desanti (Dominique et Jean-Toussaint Desanti: *Une Éthique à l'épreuve du vingtième siècle*. Paris: Logiques historiques-L'Harmattan, 2003).