

H-France Review Vol. 10 (March 2010), No. 52

Simone de Beauvoir, *Wartime Diary*. Translation and Notes by Anne Deing Cordero. Edited by Margaret A. Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. xii + 350 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-252-03377-3.

Review by Ursula Tidd, University of Manchester.

In the second volume of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, *La Force de l'âge*, France's foremost twentieth-century intellectual woman noted the impact that the outbreak of the Second World War had upon her: "l'Histoire m'a saisie pour ne plus me lâcher."^[1] The availability of the first English translation of Beauvoir's wartime diary is hence an important intellectual event, because it allows an Anglophone readership access to her (almost) quotidian intellectual, political, and social reflections from 1939 until early 1941. Modified excerpts of the wartime diary had already appeared in 1960 with the publication of *La Force de l'âge* and its subsequent translation into English. Most of the diary was then published in France in 1990 at the same time as two volumes of Beauvoir's *Lettres à Sartre*.^[2]

Posthumously published and following the publication of Sartre's own *Lettres au Castor* in 1983, Beauvoir's correspondence and war diary fuelled the scandal surrounding her unconventional relationship with Sartre and other lovers to the point that the historical and literary value of her war diary was largely neglected.^[3] This is unfortunate given the focus on memory and life writing that has predominated in the humanities since the 1980s. Set in the larger context of Beauvoir's *oeuvre*, the wartime diary is an important text for several reasons. First, it represents a fragment of the diaristic writing that she undertook throughout her life which has constituted a key resource for scholars of autobiography. Second, it amplifies her formal autobiographical volumes and complements her letters to Sartre during the period 1939-41, revealing Beauvoir's distinct literary and philosophical vision which was developing as she wrote her first full-length novel, *L'Invitée* (1943).^[4] Third, it forms an important testimonial resource for understanding the daily reality of the "phony war" which became the German occupation of France within the "zone occupée" during the period of the diary's coverage. Lastly, it offers an insight into women's lives and relationships at a time of significant transformation for women in French society, from the pen of the future author of *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), the pioneering study of women which was to prove an indispensable resource for second-wave feminism and women's studies.^[5]

This English language translation of the *Journal de guerre* has been transcribed, edited, and annotated by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Beauvoir's adopted daughter and literary executor. It comprises seven notebooks written from September 1, 1939, until January 29, 1941. There is a slightly longer version of "Notebook 7" than that included in the original French edition, with some supplementary philosophical and historical notes on "mind and reality" and "labor unions," the latter evidently background for Beauvoir's second novel, *Le Sang des autres* (1945).^[6] The translation constitutes the third volume in the *Beauvoir Series*, a multi-volume project published by the University of Illinois Press and overseen and edited by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir and philosophy professor Margaret A. Simons, comprising translations of Beauvoir's previously unpublished literary and philosophical writings from 1926 to 1979, accompanied by critical introductions to each text, bibliographical references, and indexes.

In addition to the helpful “Foreword” to the series and the “Preface” to the French edition of the diary, the volume opens with an extensive introduction by Simons, who has played a major role in Beauvoir studies since the 1970s, foregrounding the originality of Beauvoir’s philosophical vision, highlighting the shortcomings of the 1953 English translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and urging scholars to read Beauvoir on her own terms rather than through the prism of Sartrean existentialism. Inevitably, therefore, Simons focuses here on the philosophical importance of the diary: that it demonstrates clearly the philosophical influence that Beauvoir had upon Sartre during a period when she was finishing her metaphysical novel, *L’Invitée*, and he was beginning to write his existential ontology, *L’Être et le néant* (1943). [7]

Indeed, a careful reading of the *Lettres à Sartre* and the *Journal de Guerre*, undertaken with the awareness of Beauvoir’s deliberate misrepresentation of herself as a non-philosopher, and set alongside her earlier diaries of 1926–29, encourages a fuller appreciation of Beauvoir’s contribution to existentialism as an ethicist. As Simons notes here (p. 22), until war got under way later in 1940, Beauvoir’s understanding of the existentialist concept of “situation” (or how facticity impinges constantly on our notionally “absolute” individual freedom) is unhelpfully abstract. In July 1940, she realizes that although she might derive wartime comfort from her readings of Hegel in the Bibliothèque Nationale, others such as her Jewish friend and sometime lover, Bianca Bienenfeld, found themselves in a very different situation. In that sense, her wartime diary offers a prolonged reflection on the parameters of action and choice in wartime, yet it also provides thick detail of the “lived experience” of the everyday during the “phony war” and the early period of collaboration. For Beauvoir, the ethicist, the war constitutes an intensification of the self-other relationship and a test case to explore the limits of freedom and the nature of facticity.

As the war drags on, she becomes alert to its absurdity and to the contingency of death and suffering: that the continuance of life often balances on pure chance. For Beauvoir, the woman, the war cast her into a role played by many heterosexual Frenchwomen as they bid farewell to their male partners who were called up for military service: similarly, Beauvoir accompanied Sartre to the Gare de l’Est on 2 September 1939, as he left Paris to become *soldat* Sartre, just as she had earlier seen Jacques Bost, her lover, leave for the front. Yet she swiftly exceeds this traditionally gendered role, resuming her intellectual life, writing her first novel, and engaging in several love affairs with women and men in her milieu.

For this wartime diary is also the record of an intellectual woman’s everyday life: reading, writing, reflecting, and discussing the political situation and witnessing the gradual wartime metamorphosis of Paris. When not preoccupied with managing Sartre’s and Bost’s leave schedules on their intermittent visits to Paris, Beauvoir takes a certain pleasure in being with “women on the home front” (p. 58), mixing blue powder with water, oil, and even suntan lotion to black out the window panes. Yet such episodes are also food for reflection as she begins to think about gender roles and how they might form part of “situation” (pp. 132–33)—work that would directly inform *Le Deuxième Sexe*, which she began writing seven years later.

Beauvoir’s wartime diary will interest historians, philosophers, and literary critics who have an interest in France’s experience of the Second World War. Inevitably, Beauvoir’s war was an intellectual’s war and, as in most cases, it was not an especially heroic one, yet therein lies a key focus of the diary’s interest. For she captures a valuable sense of the everyday ambiguity, compromise, disorientation, and contingency of living through war, as its meanings and rationalizations shift and change across its timeline. This is a very valuable addition to the *Beauvoir Series*, which will make Beauvoir’s war diary available for the first time to many Anglophone readers. Overall, the translation is sound, despite some literalisms, and the text is accompanied by helpful notes and references. It can be thoroughly recommended.

NOTES

- [1] Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 1989), p. 409.
- [2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre, tome 1 : 1930-1939, tome 2 : 1940-1963* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
- [3] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres, tome 1 : 1926-1939 ; tome 2 : 1940-1963* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).
- [4] Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Invitée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).
- [5] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe, tome 1 : les faits et les mythes ; tome 2 : l'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).
- [6] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Sang des autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).
- [7] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

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ISSN 1553-9172