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Beauvoir  
The Prime  
of Life

*The Prime of Life*

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (1908–86) was a French philosopher, novelist, and essayist, and the lifelong companion of Jean-Paul Sartre. De Beauvoir's first book, *L'Invitée*, was published in 1943. In 1945 she published *Le Sang des autres*, a novel dealing with the question of political involvement. De Beauvoir's breakthrough work was the semi-autobiographical *Les Mandarins* (1954), which won the Prix Goncourt. Roman Catholic authorities banned it and de Beauvoir's feminist classic *The Second Sex* (1949), in which de Beauvoir argued that 'one is not born a woman; one becomes one'.

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SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

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*Translated by Peter Green*



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*To Jean-Paul Sartre*

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## Preface

When I undertook to write about myself I found that I had embarked upon a somewhat rash adventure, easier begun than left off. I had long wanted to set down the story of my first twenty years; nor did I ever forget the distress signals which my adolescent self sent out to the older woman who was afterwards to absorb me, body and soul. Nothing, I feared, would survive of that girl, not so much as a pinch of ashes. I begged her successor to recall my youthful ghost, one day, from the limbo to which it had been consigned. Perhaps the only reason for writing my books was to make the fulfilment of this long-standing prayer possible. When I was fifty, it seemed to me that the time had come. I took that child and that adolescent girl, both so long given up for lost in the depths of the unrecalled past, and endowed them with my adult awareness. I gave them a new existence – in black and white, on sheets of paper.

I had no plans for taking this project any further. Adult status brought disenchantment with the future. When I had completed my *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* no voice spoke to me out of my past, urging me to continue the story. I made up my mind to turn to some other task; but in the event I found myself unable to do so. Beneath the final line of that book an invisible question mark was inscribed, and I could not get my mind off it. Freedom I had – but freedom to do what? What new direction would the course of my life take as a result of all this fuss and commotion, the pitched battle that had culminated in victorious release? My first instinct was to bury myself behind my books; but they provided no solution. Indeed, their own validity was being challenged. I had chosen to be a writer, and had in fact written various works. But *why*? Why those

*particular* books, *only* those and none other? Had I overshot my ambition, or fallen short of it? There could be no common ground between the boundless, infinite hopes I entertained at twenty and the actual achievement which followed. I had got at the same time both much more and much less than I wanted. Little by little I became convinced that, from my own point of view, the first volume of my *Memoirs* required a sequel. There was no point in having described how my vocation as a writer was acquired unless I then went on to show its realization.

Besides, on reflection, the task possessed an intrinsic interest for me. My life is by no means over yet, but by now it has developed a pattern which the future seems unlikely to modify very much. For various reasons, which I shall have to clarify during this autobiographical study, I have hitherto avoided asking myself just what that pattern is. I must find out now or never.

It may be objected that such an inquiry concerns no one but myself. Not so; if any individual – a Pepys or a Rousseau, an exceptional or a run-of-the-mill character – reveals himself honestly, everyone, more or less, becomes involved. It is impossible for him to shed light on his own life without at some point illuminating the lives of others. Besides, writers are constantly badgered with questions about why they write, or how they spend their time. Over and above the mere craving for gossip and personal titbits, it does seem as though many people genuinely want to know what writing, as a profession, involves. The question can be better answered by studying an individual case than by offering generalized abstractions; this is what has encouraged me to embark on this volume. Perhaps my investigations will help to eliminate certain misunderstandings such as always arise between writers and their public, and which I have frequently experienced, to my personal annoyance. No book takes on its full meaning without the reader knowing the circumstances and background of its inception, and having some acquaintance with the personality of its author. By addressing my readers directly I hope to perform this service for them.

At the same time I must warn them that I have no intention of telling them everything. I described my childhood and adolescence

without any omissions. But though I have, as I hope, managed to recount the story of my life since then without excessive embarrassment or indiscreetness, I cannot treat the years of my maturity in the same detached way – nor do I enjoy a similar freedom when discussing them. I have no intention of filling these pages with spiteful gossip about myself and my friends; I lack the instincts of the scandalmonger. There are many things which I firmly intend to leave in obscurity.

On the other hand, my life has been closely linked with that of Jean-Paul Sartre. As he intends to write his own life story, I shall not attempt to perform the task for him. This book will examine neither his ideas nor his work; I propose to mention him only in so far as he played a part in my own existence.

Some critics supposed that I meant *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* as an object lesson for young girls; my main desire really was to discharge a debt. The present work, at all events, has no moral purpose. I have endeavoured to put down the facts concerning my life: I make no *a priori* assumptions, though I believe that truth in any form can be both interesting and useful. I cannot tell what purpose may be served by the truth I have attempted to outline in the following pages, nor who may benefit from it. I only hope that my readers show a similar lack of prejudice. Lastly, though I have suppressed certain facts, I have at no point set down deliberate falsehoods. It is likely, however, that my memory has betrayed me over various small details. Such minor errors as the reader may observe should certainly not be taken as invalidating the general veracity of this narrative.

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## PART ONE

### I

The most intoxicating aspect of my return to Paris in September 1929 was the freedom I now possessed. I had dreamed of it since childhood, when I played with my sister at being a 'grown-up' girl. I have recorded elsewhere my passionate longing for it as a student. Now, suddenly, it was mine. I was astonished to find an effortless buoyancy in all my movements. From the moment I opened my eyes every morning I was lost in a transport of delight. When I was about twelve I had suffered through not having a private retreat of my own at home. Leafing through *Mon Journal* I had found a story about an English schoolgirl, and gazed enviously at the coloured illustration portraying her room. There was a desk, and a divan, and shelves filled with books. Here, within these gaily painted walls, she read and worked and drank tea, with no one watching her – how envious I felt! For the first time ever I had glimpsed a more fortunate way of life than my own. And now, at long last, I too had a room to myself. My grandmother had stripped her drawing room of all its armchairs, occasional tables, and knick-knacks. I had bought some unpainted furniture, and my sister had helped me to give it a coat of brown varnish. I had a table, two chairs, a large chest which served both as a seat and as a hold-all, shelves for my books. I papered the walls orange, and got a divan to match. From my fifth-floor balcony I looked out over the Lion of Belfort and the plane trees on the Rue Denfert-Rochereau. I kept myself warm with an evil-smelling kerosene stove. Somehow its stink seemed to protect my solitude, and I loved it. It was wonderful to be able to shut my door and keep my daily life free of other people's inquisitiveness. For a long time I remained indifferent to the décor of my surroundings. Possibly

because of that picture in *Mon Journal* I preferred rooms that offered me a divan and bookshelves, but I was prepared to put up with any sort of retreat at a pinch. To have a door that I could shut was still the height of bliss for me.

I paid rent to my grandmother, and she treated me with the same unobtrusive respect she showed her other lodgers. I was free to come and go as I pleased. I could get home with the milk, read in bed all night, sleep till midday, shut myself up for forty-eight hours at a stretch, or go out on the spur of the moment. My lunch was a bowl of borsch at Dominique's, and for supper I took a cup of hot chocolate at La Coupole. I was fond of hot chocolate, and borsch, and lengthy siestas and sleepless nights: but my chief delight was in doing as I pleased. There was practically nothing to stop me. I discovered, to my great pleasure, that 'the serious business of living' on which grown-ups had held forth to me so interminably was not, in fact, quite so oppressive after all. Getting through my examinations, on the other hand, had been no joke. I had worked desperately hard, always with the fear of possible failure, always tired, and with various stubborn obstacles to overcome. Now I encountered no such resistance anywhere: I felt as though I were on vacation forever. A little private tutoring and a part-time teaching job at the Lycée Victor-Duruy guaranteed me enough to live on. These duties did not even prove a burden to me, since I felt that by performing them I was involved in a new sort of game: I was playing at being a grown-up. Hunting for private pupils, having discussions with senior mistresses or parents, working out my budget, borrowing, paying back, adding up figures – all these activities amused me because I was doing them for the first time. I remember how tickled I was when I got my first salary cheque. I felt I had played a practical joke on someone.

Clothes and cosmetics had never interested me overmuch, but I nevertheless took some pleasure in dressing as I wanted to. I was still in mourning for my grandfather, and had no wish to shock people, so I bought myself a grey coat, with shoes and toque to match. I had two dresses made, one of the same grey, and the other in black and white. All my life I had been dressed in cotton or woollen frocks, so

now I reacted by choosing silk-style materials instead – crêpe de Chine and a ghastly fabric of embossed velvet called *velours frappé* which was all the rage that winter. Every morning I would make up with more dash than skill, smothering my face in powder, dabbing a patch of rouge on each cheek, and applying lipstick liberally. It struck me as ridiculous that anyone should dress up more elaborately on Sunday than during the week. Henceforth, I decided, every day was to be a holiday as far as I was concerned, and I always wore the same get-up, whatever the circumstances. It did occur to me that crêpe de Chine and *velours frappé* were rather out of place in the corridors of a *lycée*, and that my evening shoes might have been less down at the heel if I hadn't tramped the Paris pavements in them from morning till night; but I couldn't have cared less. My personal appearance was one of those things that I refused to take really seriously.

I moved in, bought a new outfit, had friends in to see me, and went visiting myself; but all these were preliminary activities only. My new life really began when Sartre returned to Paris in mid-October.

Sartre had come to see me when we were in Limousin. He stayed at the Hôtel de la Boule d'Or, in Saint-Germain-les-Belles, and in order to avoid gossip we used to meet out in the country, a good way from town. In the old days I had often wandered here, bitterly hugging my loneliness; but now I hurried blithely across the grassy parkland every morning, skipping over hurdles and plunging through dew-wet meadows. We would sit down together in the grass and talk. The first day I never supposed that, away from Paris and our friends, such an occupation would wholly suffice for us. I had suggested that we might bring some books along, and read. Sartre refused indignantly. He also swept aside all my suggestions that we might go for a walk. He was allergic to chlorophyll, he said, and all this lush green pasturage exhausted him. The only way he could put up with it was to forget it. Fair enough. Though I had received little encouragement in that direction, talking did not scare me. We picked up our discussion at the point where we had left off in Paris; and very soon I realized that even though we went on talking till Judgement Day, I

would still find the time all too short. It had been early morning when we came out, and there was the luncheon bell already. I used to go home and eat with my family, while Sartre lunched on cheese or gingerbread, deposited by my cousin Madeleine in an abandoned dovecote that stood 'by the house down the road'; Madeleine adored anything romantic. Hardly had the afternoon begun before it was over, and darkness falling; Sartre would then go back to his hotel and eat dinner among the commercial travellers. I had told my parents we were working together on a book, a critical study of Marxism. I hoped to butter them up by pandering to their hatred of Communism, but I cannot have been very convincing. Four days after Sartre arrived, I saw them appear at the edge of the meadow where we were sitting.

They walked towards us. Under his yellowing straw boater, my father wore a resolute but somewhat embarrassed expression. Sartre, who on this particular day happened to be wearing a decidedly aggressive red shirt, sprang to his feet, the light of battle in his eye. My father asked him, quite politely, to leave the district. People were gossiping, he said; besides, it was hoped to get my cousin married, and such apparently scandalous behaviour on my part was harmful to her reputation. Sartre replied vigorously enough, but without too much violence, since he had made up his mind not to leave a minute sooner than he intended. We merely arranged somewhat more secret meeting places, in a chestnut grove a little distance away. My father did not return to the attack, and Sartre stayed on another week at the Boule d'Or. Afterwards we wrote to each other daily.

By the time I met him again, in October, I had (as I describe in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*) jettisoned all past attachments, and now threw myself unreservedly into the development of this new relationship. Sartre was soon due for his military service; meanwhile he remained on vacation. He was staying with his grandparents (his mother's family, that is: their name was Schweitzer) on the Rue Saint-Jacques, and we would meet each morning in the Luxembourg Gardens, where carved stone queens gazed blindly down at us amid a dapple of grey and gold: it was late at night before we

separated. We walked the streets of Paris, still talking – about ourselves and our relationship, our future life, our yet unwritten books. Today it strikes me that the most important aspect of these conversations was not so much what we said as what we took for granted, and what in fact was not so at all. We were wrong about almost everything. An accurate character sketch must needs take these errors into account, since they expressed one kind of reality – our actual situation.

As I have said elsewhere, Sartre lived for his writing. He felt he had a mission to hold forth on any subject, tackling it as best suited him in the light of circumstance. He had exhorted me to open my eyes to the manifold glories of life; I too must write, in order to snatch that vision from obliteration by time. The self-evident obviousness of our respective vocations seemed to us to guarantee their eventual fulfilment. Though we did not formulate it in such terms, we were approaching a condition of Kantian optimism, where *you ought* implies *you can*. Indeed, how could one's resolution falter in doubt at the very moment of choice and affirmation? Upon such an occasion will and belief coincide. So we put our trust in the world, and in ourselves. Society as then constituted we opposed. But there was nothing sour about this enmity: it carried an implication of robust optimism. Man was to be remoulded, and the process would be partly our doing. We did not envisage contributing to this change except by way of books: public affairs bored us. We counted on events turning out according to our wishes without any need for us to mix in them personally. In this respect our attitude was characteristic of that general euphoria affecting the French Left during the autumn of 1929. Peace seemed finally assured: the expansion of the German Nazi party was a mere fringe phenomenon, without any serious significance. It would not be long before colonialism folded up: Gandhi's campaign in India and the Communist agitation in French Indo-China were proof enough of that. Moreover the whole capitalist world was, at the time, being shaken by a crisis of the utmost gravity; and this encouraged the assumption that capitalism as such had had its day. We felt that we were already living in that Golden Age which for us constituted the secret truth of History, and

the revelation of which remained History's final and exclusive objective.

At every level we failed to face the weight of reality, priding ourselves on what we called our 'radical freedom'. We clung so long and so desperately to that word 'freedom' that it will be as well to make a closer examination of just what we implied by it.

There was a genuine enough field of experience for it to cover. Every activity contains its own freedom, intellectual activity in particular, because it seldom repeats itself. We had worked hard; we had been forced, unremittingly, to rediscover and reevaluate; we possessed a practical, unimpeachable, intuitive awareness of the nature of freedom. The mistake we made was in failing to restrict this concept to its proper limits. We clung to the image of Kant's dove, supported rather than hindered in flight by the resistant air. We regarded any existing situation as raw material for our joint efforts, and not as a factor conditioning them: we imagined ourselves to be wholly independent agents. This spiritual pride, like our political blindness, can be explained in the first instance by the violent intensity which characterized all our plans. To be a writer, to create – this was an adventure scarcely to be embarked upon without a conviction of absolute self-mastery, absolute control over ends and means. Our boldness was inseparable from the illusions which sustained it; circumstances had favoured them both. No external hazard had ever compelled us to go against our own natural inclinations. We sought knowledge, self-expression; and now we found ourselves up to our necks in just such activities. Our way of life was so exactly what we wanted that it was as though *it* had chosen *us*; we regarded this as an omen of its regular submission to our future plans. The same fate that had served our purpose also shielded us from the world's adversity.

Nor, on the other hand, did we feel any private emotional obligations. I kept on good terms with my parents, but they no longer had any real hold over me. Sartre had never known his father, and neither his mother nor his grandparents had ever represented authority in his eyes. In a sense we both lacked a real family, and we had elevated this contingency into a principle. Here we were encouraged

by Cartesian rationalism, which we had picked up from Alain, and which we welcomed precisely because it happened to suit our convenience. There were no scruples, no feelings of respect or loyal affection that would stop us from making up our minds by the pure light of reason – and of our own desires. We were unaware of any cloudiness or confusion in our mental processes; we believed ourselves to consist of pure reason and pure will. This conviction was fortified by the eagerness with which we staked our all on the future; we were not tied down to any particular interest, since present and past were continually leap-frogging. We never hesitated to disagree with any point, and indeed with each other, whenever occasion demanded; it was easy for us to criticize or condemn the other's views, since every shift of opinion we regarded as a step forward. As our ignorance kept us unaware of most of the problems that might have worried us, we remained quite content with these revisions of doctrine, and indeed thought ourselves very daring.

So we went our way without let or hindrance, unembarrassed and unafraid; yet how was it that we did not at least stumble into one or two roadblocks? After all, our pockets were virtually empty. I scraped a scanty living, while Sartre was going through a small legacy he had from his paternal grandmother. The shops were laden with goods we could not buy, while all luxury resorts were closed to us. We met these prohibitions with indifference, even with active disdain. We were not ascetics, far from it; but now as before (and in this Sartre and I were alike) only those things within my reach, in particular those I could actually touch, had any true weight of reality for me. I gave myself up so completely to present desires and pleasures that I had no energy to waste on mere wishful thinking. What was the point in regretting the absence of a car, when there were so many discoveries we could make on foot, on the Bercy *quais* or along the reaches of the Saint-Martin canal? When we ate bread and *foie gras* Marie in my room, or had dinner at the Brasserie Demory (Sartre adored its heavy smell of beer and sauerkraut) we did not feel deprived of anything. In the evening we would look in at the Falstaff or the College Inn and drink our cocktails like connoisseurs – Bronxes, Sidcars, Bacardis, Alexanders, Martinis. I

had a particular weakness for two specialties – mead cocktails at the Vikings' Bar, and apricot cocktails at the Bec de Gaz on the Rue Montparnasse: what more could the Ritz Bar have offered us? Occasionally we broke out and enjoyed ourselves: I remember eating chicken and cranberry sauce one evening at the Vikings' Bar while up on the dais the orchestra played a popular hit of the day called 'Pagan Love Song'. I am sure this celebration would not have made such an impression on me unless it had been something out of the ordinary: indeed, the very modesty of our resources served to increase my pleasure.

In any case, the pleasure to be derived from expensive possessions is not so simple or direct. They are basically a means to an end; the glamour they acquire is shed upon them by some glamorous third party. Our puritanical education and the firmness of our intellectual commitment ensured that we remained immune to dukes, millionaires, owners of Hispanos, women in mink, and all such denizens of high society. We actually stigmatized this *beau monde* as the very dregs of the earth, on the grounds that it sucked profit from a régime which we condemned. I felt a certain ironical pity for these people. When I passed by the impenetrable portals of Fouquet's or Maxim's, I pictured them, cut off from the masses, helpless prisoners of their own wealth and snobbery – surely it was they who were the real outsiders. For the most part they simply did not exist as far as I was concerned: I no more missed their refined pleasures than the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. missed cinema or radio. Obviously the cash barrier formed a block to our curiosity; but this caused us no annoyance, since we were convinced that the smart set had nothing to teach us: their mannered self-indulgence concealed a howling void.

We had no external limitations, no overriding authority, no imposed pattern of existence. We created our own links with the world, and freedom was the very essence of our existence. In our everyday lives we gave it scope by means of an activity which assumed considerable importance for us – private fantasies. Most young couples tend to enrich their normally somewhat bare past with intimate fantasies and myths. We embraced this pursuit all the more zealously since we were both active people by nature, and for

the moment living a life of idleness. The comedies, parodies, or fables which we made up had a very specific object: they stopped us from taking ourselves too seriously. Seriousness as such we rejected no less vigorously than Nietzsche did, and for much the same reason: our jokes lightened the world about us by projecting it into the realm of imagination, thus enabling us to keep it at arm's length.

Of the two of us, Sartre was the most inexhaustible. He made up a whole stream of ballads, counting-out rhymes, epigrams, madrigals, thumbnail fables, and occasional poems of every description. Sometimes he would sing them to airs of his own invention. He considered neither puns nor wordplay beneath him, and enjoyed experimenting with alliteration and assonance. This was one way of coming to grips with the language – by both exploring the potential of words and discarding their everyday usage. From J. M. Synge he had borrowed the myth of the Playboy, the eternal wanderer who disguises life's mediocrity with glorious lying fantasies; and James Stephens' *The Crock of Gold* had provided us with the idea of the leprechaun, a gnome who crouches under tree roots and keeps misery, boredom, and doubt at bay by cobbling tiny shoes. Both of them, the adventurer and the stay-at-home, taught the same lesson: literature above all else. But in their hands the motto lost its dogmatic weightiness; and we derived a certain backhanded pleasure from referring to our future books, so dear to our hearts, as 'our tiny shoes'.

We were both as healthy as horses and of a cheerful disposition. But I took any setback very badly; my face changed, I withdrew into myself and became mulish and obstinate. Sartre decided I had a double personality. Normally I was the Beaver; but occasionally this animal would be replaced by a rather irksome young lady called Mademoiselle de Beauvoir. Sartre embroidered this theme with several variations, all of which ended by making fun of me. In his own case, things very frequently got him down – especially in the morning, when his head was still foggy with sleep, or when circumstances reduced him to inactivity: he would hunch himself into a defensive ball, like a hedgehog. On such occasions he resembled a sea elephant we had once seen in the zoo at Vincennes whose misery broke our hearts. A keeper had emptied a bucketful of little

fish down the beast's throat, and then jumped on its belly. The sea elephant, swamped by this internal invasion of tiny fish, raised tiny, hopeless eyes heavenward. It looked as though the whole vast bulk of his flesh were endeavouring to transmit a prayer for help through those two small apertures; but even so embryonic an attempt at communication was denied it. The mouth of the great beast gaped, and tears trickled down over its oily skin; it shook its head slowly and collapsed, defeated. When Sartre's face took on an unhappy expression, we used to pretend that the sea elephant's desolate soul had taken possession of his body. Sartre would then complete the metamorphosis by rolling his eyes up, sighing, and making silent supplication: this pantomime would restore his good spirits. Our various moods we regarded not as a kind of inevitable symptom engendered physically, but as a species of disguise that we assumed in a perverse moment and could discard at will. All through our youth, and even later, whenever we had to face a difficult or disagreeable situation we would work it out first as a private *ad hoc* drama. We turned it upside down, exaggerated it, caricatured it, and explored it in every direction; this helped us a good deal in getting it under control.

We used the same method in defining our domestic status. When we met again in Paris we found a name for our relationship before we had decided just what that relationship was to be. 'It's a morganatic marriage,' we said. As a couple we possessed a dual identity. In the ordinary way we were Monsieur and Madame M. Organatique, unambitious, easily satisfied, not very well off, the husband a civil servant. But sometimes I dressed up, and we would go to a cinema on the Champs-Élysées, or dancing at La Coupole, and then we were an American millionaire and his wife, Mr and Mrs Morgan Hattick. This was not a hysterical joke designed to make us feel that, for a few hours, we were enjoying the pleasures of the idle rich; it was, rather, a parody, which confirmed us in our contempt for high society. Our modest celebrations were quite enough for us: there was nothing further fortune could do for us. We were asserting our actual status. But at the same time we feigned release from it. That penurious pair of *petits bourgeois* whom

we called Monsieur and Madame M. Organatique had no real identity with us: by wriggling into their skins for a joke we emphasized the difference.

As I have already made clear, I also regarded my day-to-day activities – among others, my job as a teacher – in the light of a masquerade. By releasing the pressure of reality upon our lives, fantasy convinced us that life itself had no hold upon us. We belonged to no place or country, no class, profession, or generation. Our truth lay elsewhere. It was inscribed upon the face of eternity, and the future would reveal it: we were writers. Any other verdict was the merest false illusion. We believed ourselves to be following the precepts of those ancient Stoics who likewise had staked their all upon freedom. Committed body and soul to the work that depended on us, we threw off the yoke of all obligations irrelevant to this central purpose. We did not go so far as to abstain from such things altogether – we were too experience-hungry for that – but we bracketed them off as mere interludes. Circumstances permitted us a certain measure of detachment, free time, and general insouciance; it was tempting to confuse this with sovereign freedom. To explode this fallacy we would have needed to see ourselves from a distance, in perspective; and we had neither the means nor the desire to do so.

Two disciplines might have clarified our thinking, those of Marxism or psychoanalysis. We had only the most rudimentary knowledge of either. I remember a very fierce quarrel which took place at the Balzar between Sartre and Politzer, who was attempting to show Sartre up as a *petit bourgeois* at heart. Sartre did not reject the label, but maintained that it was inadequate as a complete definition of his attitude. He posed the thorny problem of the intellectual with a bourgeois background who – according to Marx himself – is capable of rising above the characteristic beliefs of his class. In what circumstances could this happen? How? Why? Politzer's shock of red hair glowed flamelike, and words poured out of him; but he failed to convince Sartre. In any case Sartre would have continued to play his part in the fight for freedom: he still believes in it to this day. But a serious analysis of the problem would have modified the ideas we held about it. Our indifference to money was a luxury we could

afford only because we had enough of it to avoid real poverty and the need for hard or unpleasant work. Our open-mindedness was bound up with a cultural background and the sort of activities accessible only to people of our social class. It was our conditioning as young *petit bourgeois* intellectuals that led us to believe ourselves free of all conditioning whatsoever.

Why this particular self-indulgence rather than another? Why continual questing alertness rather than a slumberous dogmatic certainty? Psychoanalysis might have suggested some answers if we had consulted it. It was beginning to spread in France, and certain aspects of it interested us. In the sphere of psychopathology, Georges Dumas's 'endocrinal monism' (our own name for his system; Dumas himself claimed to be a Cartesian dualist) seemed to us – as it did to most of our friends – quite unacceptable. We looked favourably on the notion that psychoses, neuroses, and their various symptoms had a meaning, and that this meaning must be sought in the patient's childhood. But we stopped short at this point; we rejected psychoanalysis as a tool for exploring a normal human being. We had hardly read any Freud apart from his books *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. We had absorbed the letter rather than the spirit of these works: we were put off by their dogmatic symbolism and the technique of association which vitiated them for us. Freud's pansexualism struck us as having an element of madness about it, besides offending our puritanical instincts. Above all, the importance it attached to the unconscious, and the rigidity of its mechanistic theories, meant that Freudianism, as we conceived it, was bound to eradicate human free will. No one showed us how the two might possibly be reconciled, and we were incapable of finding out for ourselves. We remained frozen in our rationalist-voluntarist position: in a clear-minded individual, we thought, freedom would win out over complexes, memories, influences, or any traumatic experience. It was a long time before we realized that our emotional detachment from, and indifference to, our respective childhoods was to be explained by what we had experienced as children.

If Marxism and psychoanalysis had so little influence on us, at a time when many young people were rallying to both, it was not only

because our knowledge concerning them was so sketchy, but also because we had no wish to observe ourselves from a distance with the eyes of strangers. Our first need was to prevent any dissociation between mind and personality. Far from setting theoretical limits to our freedom, we were now practically concerned with safeguarding its existence – for it was in danger.

In this respect there was a marked difference between Sartre and me. It struck me as miraculous that I had broken free from my past, and was now self-sufficient and self-determining: I had established my autonomy once and forever, and nothing could now deprive me of it. Sartre, on the other hand, had merely moved on to a stage of his development as a man which he had long foreseen with loathing. He had more or less shed the irresponsibility of adolescence, and was entering the adult world which he so detested. His independence was threatened. First he would be obliged to do eighteen months' military service, and after that a teaching career awaited him. He had found an answer to this: a French lectureship was being advertised in Japan, and he had put in an application for October 1931. He counted on spending two years out there, with the possibility of further foreign posts afterwards. According to him the writer or storyteller should be like Synge's Playboy, and never settle anywhere for good – or with any one person. Sartre was not inclined to be monogamous by nature: he took pleasure in the company of women, finding them less comic than men. He had no intention, at twenty-three, of renouncing their tempting variety.

He explained the matter to me in his favourite terminology. 'What we have', he said, 'is an *essential* love; but it is a good idea for us also to experience *contingent* love affairs.' We were two of a kind, and our relationship would endure as long as we did: but it could not make up entirely for the fleeting riches to be had from encounters with different people. How could we deliberately forgo that gamut of emotions – astonishment, regret, pleasure, nostalgia – which we were as capable of sustaining as anyone else? We reflected on this problem a good deal during our walks together.

One afternoon we had been with the Nizans to a cinema on the Champs-Élysées to see *Storm Over Asia*. After leaving them we walked

down as far as the Carrousel Gardens, and sat down on a stone bench beneath one wing of the Louvre. There was a kind of balustrade which served as a backrest, a little way out from the wall; and in the cagelike space behind it a cat was miaowing. The poor thing was too big to get out; how had it ever got in? Evening was drawing on; a woman came up to the bench, a paper bag in one hand, and produced some scraps of meat. These she fed to the cat, stroking it tenderly the while. It was at this moment that Sartre said: 'Let's sign a two-year lease.' I could arrange to live in Paris during these two years, and we would spend them in the closest possible intimacy. Afterwards, Sartre suggested, I ought to take a job abroad too. We would live apart for two or three years, and then rejoin one another somewhere – Athens, maybe – where we could, for a longer or shorter period, live more or less together. We would never become strangers to one another, and neither would appeal for the other's help in vain; nothing would prevail against this alliance of ours. But it must not be allowed to degenerate into mere duty or habit; we had at all costs to preserve it from decay of this sort. I agreed. The separation which Sartre envisaged caused me some qualms; but it lay well in the future, and I had made it a rule never to worry about anything prematurely. Despite this I did feel a flicker of fear, though I regarded it as mere weakness and made myself subdue it; I was helped by the knowledge, based on previous experience, that Sartre meant what he said. With him a proposed scheme was not mere vague talk, but a moment of actuality. If he told me one day to meet him exactly twenty-two months later on the Acropolis, at five o'clock in the afternoon, I could be sure of finding him there then, punctual to the minute. In a more general way I knew that no harm could ever come to me from him – unless he were to die before I died.

There was no question of our actually taking advantage, during our two-year 'lease', of those 'freedoms' which in theory we had the right to enjoy. We intended to give ourselves wholeheartedly and without reservation to this new relationship of ours. We made another pact between us: not only would we never lie to one another, but neither of us would conceal anything from the other. What is known as *la vie intérieure* aroused the greatest disgust among

left-wingers; the gardens where sensitive, refined souls cultivated their delicate secrets these folk regarded as stinking swamps, the background for constant discreet trafficking in betrayal, or the consummation of filthy narcissistic pleasures.

In order to dissipate this dark miasmic atmosphere, they themselves had acquired the habit of exposing their lives, thoughts, and feelings in broad daylight. The only limit set on these public revelations was due to lack of interest: any of them who went on too much about himself would have bored the rest. But no such restrictions existed between Sartre and me; and we therefore agreed to tell one another everything. I was used to some reserve, and at first this rule of ours embarrassed me. But I soon came to realize its advantages. I no longer needed to worry about myself: all my actions were subjected to a kindly enough scrutiny, but with far greater impartiality than I could have achieved myself. The picture I thus received I regarded as objective; and this system of control protected me against all those fears, false hopes, idle scruples, fantasies, and minor brainstorm which can so easily breed in conditions of solitude. The absence of solitude did not bother me; on the contrary, I was delighted to have got away from it.

The thought that Sartre was now an open book to me, as easily read as my own mind, had a most relaxing effect on me. Later I learned better. Since he concealed nothing from me, I thought myself absolved from any necessity to think about his problems. On several occasions afterwards I perceived that this was a lazy way out. But, though I reproached myself for sluggish obtuseness, I did not blame the rule that we had adopted. We were never to dispense with that rule; no other would have suited us.

This is not to suggest that in my opinion sincerity is either a universal necessity or a universal panacea: I have frequently had occasion since then to ponder its uses and abuses. I pointed out one of its dangerous qualities in one passage of my last novel, *The Mandarins*. Anne (whose prudence in this particular context I approve of) advises her daughter Nadine not to tell the young man who loves her that she has been unfaithful to him. But Nadine's actual motive is not so much to make a clean breast of things to her lover as to

provoke his jealousy. Frank speaking is not only, very often, a means of communication but of action too; it isn't playing fair if, while pretending that no pressure is being brought to bear, you bludgeon someone with an indiscreet truth. Such ambiguity of language does not wholly preclude plain speaking; but it does make one or two precautions necessary. Ordinarily it will suffice to allow some little time to elapse, and then the words will have lost their sting. After a decent interval one can, without prejudice, reveal facts and feelings that would have implied a form of intrigue, or at least some sort of interference, if blurted out on the spot.

Sartre often thrashed out this problem with me, and he also tackled it himself in *L'Âge de raison* (*The Age of Reason*). In the first chapter we find Mathieu and Marcelle pretending to 'tell all', but in fact avoiding all serious discussion. Sometimes speech is no more than a device for saying nothing – and a neater one than silence. Even in a case where words *do* convey information, they lack the power to suppress, sidetrack, or neutralize reality; their function is to *confront* it. If two people manage to convince themselves that they possess any power over the events or people which form the subject of their mutual confidences, then they are deceiving themselves: their 'honesty' is the merest pretext. There is a certain type of supposed loyalty which I have often observed, and which in fact constitutes the most flagrant hypocrisy: it is limited to the sphere of sexual relations, and its purpose, far from aiming at any intimate understanding between a man and a woman, is to supply one of them – more often the male partner – with a soothing alibi. He nurses the illusion that by confessing his infidelities he somehow redeems them; whereas actually he inflicts a double hurt upon his partner.

There is no timeless formula which guarantees all couples achieving a perfect state of understanding; it is up to the interested parties themselves to decide just what sort of agreement they want to reach. They have no *a priori* rights or duties. In my youth I took an opposite view; at that period I was too prone to imagine that what suited me must needs suit everybody.

Today, on the other hand, I feel irritated when outsiders praise or criticize the relationship we have built up, yet fail to take into account

the peculiar characteristic which both explains and justifies it – the identical sign on both our brows. The comradeship that welded our lives together made a superfluous mockery of any other bond we might have forged for ourselves. What, for instance, was the point of living under the same roof when the whole world was our common property? Why fear to set great distances between us when we could never truly be parted? One single aim fired us, the urge to embrace all experience, and to bear witness concerning it. At times this meant that we had to follow diverse paths – though without concealing even the least of our discoveries from one another. When we were together we bent our wills so firmly to the requirements of this common task that even at the moment of parting we still thought as one. That which bound us freed us; and in this freedom we found ourselves bound as closely as possible.

I use the word 'sign' here; and in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* I said that both Sartre and I were seeking some kind of 'salvation'. I have employed such terms because we were, in fact, a couple of mystics. Sartre had an unqualified faith in Beauty, which he treated as inseparable from Art, while I attached supreme importance to Life. Our vocations did not coincide completely. I suggested what the difference was in the notebook where I still, from time to time, jotted down my problems and worries. One day I wrote: 'I want to write: I want to put down phrases on paper, to take elements from my life and turn them into words.' But on another occasion I clarified this ambition more precisely: 'I shall never be able to give myself to art excepting as a means of protecting my life. I shall never be a writer first and foremost, like Sartre.' Despite his bursting high spirits, Sartre used to say that he attached little value to happiness; he would have gone on writing however severe his personal afflictions might have been. I knew him well enough not to query this assumption of stubbornness, though I was made of different stuff myself. I had made up my mind, in the event of some extreme misfortune overtaking me, to commit suicide. As I saw it, the resolution which Sartre displayed set him above me. I admired him for holding his destiny in his own hands, unaided; far from feeling embarrassed at the thought of his superiority, I derived comfort from it.

To achieve basic understanding with someone is a very rare privilege in any circumstances; for me it took on a literally infinite value. At the back of my memory there glowed, with unparalleled sweetness, all those long hours that Zaza and I had spent hidden in Monsieur Mabile's study, talking. I too had experienced moments of poignant pleasure when my father smiled at me, and I could tell myself that, in a sense, this peerless man was *mine*. My adolescent dreams projected these supreme moments of my childhood into the future: they were not mere insubstantial fancies, but had a real existence for me – which is why their fulfilment never struck me as miraculous. Certainly circumstances were all in my favour: I might never have found anyone with whom I could reach a state of perfect agreement. When my chance was offered me, I took it; the passion and tenacity with which I did so showed how deeply rooted the urge was in me.

Sartre was only three years older than I was – an equal, as Zaza had been – and together we set forth to explore the world. My trust in him was so complete that he supplied me with the sort of absolute unfailing security that I had once had from my parents, or from God. When I threw myself into a world of freedom, I found an unbroken sky above my head. I was free of all shackling restraint, and yet every moment of my existence possessed its own inevitability. All my most remote and deep-felt longings were now fulfilled; there was nothing left for me to wish – except that this state of triumphant bliss might continue unwaveringly forever. Its sheer intensity carried all before it; it even managed to engulf the fact of Zaza's death. I was shocked enough at the time: I wept and felt my heart would break; but it was only later that grief made its real, insidious inroads upon me. That autumn my past lay dormant; I belonged wholly to the present.

Happiness is a rarer vocation than people suppose. In my opinion Freud was quite right to link it with the satisfaction of infantile desires. Normally, unless it is crammed full to the point of imbecility, any child seethes with multitudinous appetites: what it can grasp in its hands is nothing compared to the rich harvest it can see and feel all around it. It still has to develop the sound emotional balance that will

allow it to take an interest both in what it has and it has not. I have often observed that people whose early years have been ruined by a surfeit of unhappiness, humiliation, fear, or, above all, resentment are able to enjoy only abstract satisfaction when they grow up – money (if money per se does not bring happiness, said Freud, that is because no child wants money), fame, honour, power, respectability. Early victims both of others and of themselves, they turn away from a world which afterwards reflects nothing for them except their own long-standing indifference. (My cousin Jacques, to whom I refer in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, seems to me a typical example of this inaptitude for happiness, which was clearly due to the conditions of his childhood.) On the other hand, though such elements as we endow with absolute authority may weigh heavily upon us, they can also grant us unparalleled fullness of delight. I was not particularly spoiled as a small girl; but circumstances had fostered the growth in me of innumerable desires, which my studies and family life made it vital to suppress. But they only burst forth with greater violence, and to quiet them seemed a task of the utmost urgency. This proved to be a long and exacting undertaking, to which I devoted myself without stint for years. I have never met anyone, in the whole of my life, who was so well equipped for happiness as I was, or who laboured so stubbornly to achieve it. No sooner had I caught a glimpse of it than I concentrated upon nothing else. If I had been promised renown and glory at the price of happiness, I should have refused. It was not merely this effervescent sensation in my heart, but also the belief that here lay the truth about my existence, indeed about the world. I longed more passionately than ever to grasp this truth; the time had come to set substantial objects, good flesh and bone, over against the images, fantasies, and mere words that had helped me to foreshadow their presence. I would not have chosen in any way to change the conditions under which I was setting about my task. Paris seemed the very centre of the world to me; I was bursting with health, and had leisure at my disposal. Furthermore, I had met a travelling companion who stepped out along my own road with more self-assurance than I could muster myself. Thanks to these factors I was able to cherish the hope of turning my life into a model experience, a whole

world in microcosm: they also ensured that the world and I would agree. In 1929 I believed – and said so – in peace, progress, and a glorious future. My own experience had to partake of this universal harmony; if I had been unhappy I should have felt myself an exile, and reality would have eluded me.

At the beginning of November Sartre went off to do his military service. On the advice of Raymond Aron he had learnt up some meteorology. He was assigned to Saint-Cyr, where Aron was at the time a sergeant-instructor and initiated Sartre into the handling of an anemometer. I recall that I went to see Grock perform on the evening he left, and did not find the great clown funny in the least. Sartre was restricted to barracks at Saint-Cyr for a fortnight, and I could pay him only a brief visit. He received me in a kind of parlour, which was packed with other soldiers and their families. He had not resigned himself to the stupidity of military life, nor to wasting eighteen months: he was still furious. I too was repelled by any idea of constraint; as we were both anti-militarists, we felt unwilling to make any attempt to see a bright side to the present situation. This first meeting was a miserable affair: the dark-blue uniform, beret, and puttees looked to me like a convict's rig. Later Sartre had more freedom of movement: I would go off three or four times a week and meet him at Saint-Cyr in the early evening. He would be waiting for me at the station, and we would have dinner at the Soleil d'Or. The barracks were two or three miles from town; I would walk halfway back with Sartre, and then hurry back to catch the last train, which left at nine-thirty. Once I missed it and had to walk to Versailles. Trudging alone along that black road, sometimes in the teeth of wind and rain, and watching the white distant gleam of convolvulus through the park railings, gave me an exhilarating sensation of adventure. Occasionally Sartre came into Paris for the evening: a truck would drop him and a few of his comrades at the Place de l'Étoile. He only had a couple of hours, perhaps less: we would sit in a café on the Avenue Wagram, or perhaps take a turn down the Avenue des Ternes, eating *beignets au confiture* in lieu of dinner. We called them 'hunger-pluggers'. He

usually got off all day Sunday. In January he was assigned to Saint-Symphorien, near Tours. Together with a *chef de poste* and three assistants he lived in a villa that had been turned into a meteorological station. His chief was a civilian, and let the military personnel arrange their own lives as they pleased; they worked out a roster system that gave them an extra week off every month, over and above their official free time. So Paris remained the centre of our life together.

Though we spent much time alone in each other's company, we also went out with friends. I had lost nearly all my old companions: Zaza was dead, Jacques married, and Lisa away in Saigon. Riesmann no longer interested me, and I had lost touch with Jean Pradelle. Suzanne Boigue had quarrelled with me: she had tried to marry off my sister to a man in his forties – an eminently worthy match, she assured us, but poor Poupette was scared stiff by his weighty manner and bull neck. Suzanne could never forgive me for Poupette's having refused him. Shortly afterwards I got a furious letter from her, saying that some anonymous caller had telephoned her and talked a lot of rubbish: she suspected me of being the practical joker in question. I denied it by return post, but she was not convinced.

Of all the people who had mattered to me, then, I introduced Sartre to only four: my sister Poupette, Gégé, Stépha, and Fernando. Sartre always got along well with women, and he took to Fernando; but the latter went off and settled in Madrid with Stépha. André Herbaud had taken a teaching job in Coutances, and was preparing for his own examinations at the same time; so though I still kept in close touch with him, he paid only flying visits to Paris. There were really very few links with my past life surviving. On the other hand I did get to know Sartre's own circle of friends. We saw a good deal of Raymond Aron, who was just finishing his period of military service at Saint-Cyr. One day, feeling very nervous, I drove out with him alone to Trappe to find a meteorological balloon that had gone adrift. He had a little car of his own, and sometimes took us in to Versailles from Saint-Cyr for dinner. He was a member of the Socialist Party, an organization which we despised – firstly on the grounds that it was infiltrated by the bourgeoisie, and secondly because we

were temperamentally opposed to the idea of reform: society, we felt, could change only as a result of sudden cataclysmic upheaval on a global scale. But we hardly ever talked politics with Aron. Mostly he and Sartre argued bitterly about problems of philosophy. I took no part in these discussions, since my mind moved too slowly for them; nevertheless I found myself more often than not on Aron's side. Like him I had a weakness for idealism. In order to guarantee the human spirit its condition of sovereign freedom, I had come to the banal conclusion that the world must be scrapped and started again. Sartre's originality lay in the fact that while he granted the conscious mind a splendid measure of independence, he came down very heavily on the side of reality. This characteristic of his could be recognized not only in his remarkable capacity for self-revelation, but also in a certain down-to-earth quality that was impossible to minimize. He made no distinction between his own vision and the actual object he saw, which threw him into some very thorny problems – though his convictions were never shaken by mere difficulties. Should one attribute such stubborn realism to pride or to love? He would not accept the proposition that the human element in him could be duped by appearances, and he was too passionately attached to this world to write it off as mere illusion. It was his sheer vitality that fostered such optimism in him – an attitude which allowed the subjective and objective viewpoints equal validity. It is impossible to believe both in the notion of 'colour' and in 'vibrations of the ether', so he rejected Science and followed the trail blazed by countless inheritors of Idealist criticism; but he went to unheard-of extremes in his total rejection of universals. To him general laws and concepts and all such abstractions were nothing but hot air: people, he maintained, all agreed to accept them because they effectively masked a reality which men found alarming. He, on the other hand, wanted to grapple with this living reality, and despised any analysis which limited its dissecting to corpses. He envisaged a world-wide system of intelligence centred upon the concrete – and therefore upon the individual, since only the individual entity has any real existence. The only metaphysical systems which he did not reject were those which regarded the cosmos as a

synthetic totality, such as Stoicism or Spinoza's doctrines. Aron, on the other hand, enjoyed critical analysis, and set himself to tear Sartre's rash syntheses to bits. He had the knack of getting his opponent in the fork of a dilemma and then crushing him with one sharp hammer stroke. 'There are two alternatives, *mon petit camarade*,' he would say. 'Take your choice.' And a faint smile would flicker in those vivid blue eyes, which always had so intelligent and cynically disillusioned a look about them. Sartre struggled hard to avoid being cornered, but as there was more imagination than logic in his mental processes, he had his work cut out. I cannot recall one occasion on which he convinced Aron – or on which Aron succeeded in shaking Sartre's own beliefs.

Then there was Nizan – married now, and the father of a family, who was doing his military service in Paris. His in-laws had a house at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, built and furnished in the ultramodern style, where we spent an entire Sunday making a film out on the terrace. Rirette, Nizan's brother, was an assistant director, and owned a camera. Nizan played the part of a curé, and Sartre that of a pious young man brought up in a religious establishment. Some girls set about seducing the young man, but when they pull off his shirt they find a huge glowing scapular on his chest. Then Christ appears to him, and talks to him man to man: 'Do you smoke?' Christ asks, and pulls the Sacred Heart out of his bosom and offers it to him in lieu of a lighter. In any event this bit of the scenario proved too hard to do, and we gave it up. We made do with a more benign sort of miracle: the girls, thunderstruck by their vision of the scapular, fell on their knees and worshipped God. The parts were played by Rirette, myself, and a splendid young woman at that time married to Emmanuel Berl, who shook us by smartly stepping out of her almond-green dress and parading, in broad daylight, with nothing on but black lace panties and bra. Afterwards we went for a walk in the country lanes; Nizan was still wearing his soutane, and had one arm affectionately clasped round his wife's waist, a sight which made passers-by blink. The following spring he took us to Garches Fair. We knocked down stuffed dolls with the faces of well-known generals and financiers, and Nizan pointed Doriot out to us: he was shaking an old

workman's hand with a fine show of fraternal demonstrativeness – which elicited sharp disapproval from Sartre.

We never had discussions with Nizan: he refused to approach serious subjects directly. Instead he would tell a series of carefully selected anecdotes, and refrain from drawing any conclusion from them: he preferred to bite his nails and mutter dire prophecies and sibylline threats. As a result our differences were passed over in silence. On the other hand, like many Communist intellectuals at this period, Nizan was not so much a revolutionary as a rebel, which meant that over a whole range of topics he privately agreed with us – though in some instances this agreement rested on misconceptions which we left undisturbed. Between us we tore the bourgeoisie to shreds, tooth and nail. In the case of Sartre and myself, such hostility remained individualistic, *ergo* bourgeois: it was not so very different from that which Flaubert attributed to the 'grocers' and Barrès to the 'barbarians', and it was no accident that to us, as to Barrès, the engineer symbolized the 'privileged enemy'. He imprisoned life under his steel and concrete; he marched straight ahead, blind, unfeeling, as confident in himself as in his mathematical formulae, and implacably identifying means with ends. In the name of art, culture, and freedom we condemned him, and through him Universal Man. Despite this we did not align ourselves with the aesthetic views held by Barrès: the bourgeoisie as a class was our enemy, and we actively desired its liquidation. We sympathized in principle with the workers because they were free of any bourgeois blemish; the crude simplicity of their needs and the constant struggle they kept up against physical odds meant that they faced the human situation in its true colours. Accordingly while we shared Nizan's hopes for a revolution of the proletariat, it was only the negative aspect of such a revolution that concerned us. In the Soviet Union the great blaze of the October Revolution had long since flickered out, and, as Sartre said, by and large what was emerging there was a 'technological culture'. We should not, we decided, feel at all at ease in a socialist world. In every society the artist or writer remains an outsider, and one which proclaimed with such dogmatic fervour its intention of

‘integrating’ him struck us as being about the most unfavourable environment he could have.

Sartre’s most intimate friend was Pierre Pagniez, another student of his year at the École Normale, who had just passed his *agrégation de lettres*. They had gone in for meteorology together, and annoyed Aron by flicking paper darts at him during his classes. Pagniez sometimes had dinner with us at the Soleil d’Or: he was fortunate enough to get a Paris assignment. Sartre met him in town every time he came up. He was of a Protestant family, and, like many Protestants, was aggressively modest by temperament. A secretive, deliberately sarcastic person, he had wide interests but few enthusiasms. He had peasant connections, and loved the country and *la vie rustique*. He used to say, laughing, that he was a *passéiste*: he believed in a bourgeois Golden Age, and in certain of the bourgeoisie’s values plus the virtues of the working class. His appreciation embraced Stendhal, Proust, English fiction, classical culture, nature, travel, conversation, friendship, vintage wines, and good food. He carefully avoided ambition in any form, and did not feel obliged to write in order to justify his existence. It seemed to him quite sufficient to sample, intelligently, what this world had to offer, and to make oneself a pleasant niche in it. He used to say that there were certain special moments – for instance, when a particular landscape exactly fitted a particular mood – that gave the impression of perfect inevitability. But in general there was nothing systematic about his outlook. He would cheerfully declare that he never made up theories. Those held by Sartre amused him vastly, not because he thought them more wrong-headed than anyone else’s, but because for him life and ideas always contradicted one another, and it was life that interested him.

Sartre’s own interests included life and his ideas; those of other people bored him. He distrusted Aron’s logic, Herbaud’s aesthetic theories, and Nizan’s Marxism. Thanks to Pagniez he learned how to garner every experience with an observant concentration unmarred by any subsequent *arrière-pensée*: Pagniez instilled into him what he called an ‘awareness of nuances’ that acted as a corrective for his own wild enthusiasms, and this was only one of the reasons why he felt such lively appreciation for Pagniez’s conversation.

There were a lot of points over which he and we were in agreement. Like him, we made an *a priori* estimate of the artisan class, whose work we regarded as the product of untrammelled imagination, culminating in some artifact stamped with individual idiosyncrasy. About the peasants we had no opinions of our own, and were only too glad to agree with what Pagniez told us. He accepted the capitalist régime, while we condemned it; yet despite this he upbraided the ruling classes for their decadence, and attacked them in detail just as wholeheartedly as we did. For our part, we restricted our criticisms to the theoretical plane, and modelled our own way of life, with some enthusiasm, on that of the *petit bourgeois* class to which in fact we belonged: our tastes and interests were more or less identical with theirs. Sartre and Pagniez were united by their mutual passion for understanding people. They could spend hours analysing a gesture or a tone of voice. With such common affinities to bind them together, they cherished a strong affection for one another. Pagniez went so far as to say that with his fine-chiselled nose and generous mouth Sartre was quite a handsome fellow. Sartre subjected Pagniez to humanistic views that would have made his hair stand on end coming from anyone else.

There was yet another bond between them: the admiring devotion which they both, in varying degrees, felt for Madame Lemaire. Herbaud had discussed this lady with me the previous year, in terms that aroused my interest. I was full of curiosity when I paid my first visit to her flat at the far end of the Boulevard Raspail. She was forty, which at the time I thought a great age, though exotic too. She had been born in the Argentine of French parents; after her mother's death she and her sister, who was a year older than she, had been brought up on a big, lonely *estancia* by their father. A doctor and freethinker, the latter gave them, with the aid of various governesses, a decidedly masculine education. They were taught Latin and mathematics; they acquired an abhorrence for superstition and learned the value of sound reasoning; they galloped their horses across the pampas and had absolutely no social life. When they were eighteen their father sent them to Paris. Here they were welcomed by an aunt, a colonel's wife and a very devout person,

who launched them into salon life. The two girls, shattered, decided privately that *someone* must be mad – but who? The rest of the world, or themselves?

Madame Lemaire dealt with the problem by getting married, to a doctor whose means were ample enough to let him devote his life to research; her sister followed her example, but was unlucky enough to die in childbirth. Madame Lemaire no longer had anyone with whom she could share the astonishment she felt at the manners and ideas then current in society. She was particularly stupefied by the importance which people attached to one's sex life: this struck her as decidedly comic. Meanwhile she bore two children; and in 1914 Dr Lemaire abandoned his laboratory and his rats, and went off to the front, where, under the most appalling conditions, he operated on hundreds of wounded men. After his return he took to his bed and never got up again. He lived in a draught-proof room, racked by imaginary ailments, and very seldom received visitors. During the summer he was moved either to the villa at Juan-les-Pins that Madame Lemaire had inherited from her father, or else to his own country house near Angers. Madame Lemaire devoted herself to him, and her children, and to various ageing relatives or stray down-and-outs. She had given up the notion of existing for her own pleasure. When her son failed his *baccalauréat*, she engaged for the summer vacation a young tutor from the École Normale, who accompanied the family into Anjou: this, of course, was Pagniez. She enjoyed shooting, and so did he; when September came they tramped across field and furrow together, and once they had started talking to each other, they never stopped. As far as Madame Lemaire was concerned, it went without saying that this friendship had to remain platonic. As Pagniez had been affected by the puritanism of his own environment, I fancy it is unlikely that the notion of overstepping certain fixed limits ever occurred to him either. But an intimacy did develop between them, which Dr Lemaire encouraged: he trusted his wife implicitly, and Pagniez rapidly won his esteem. The Lemaire boy passed his exam in October; and Sartre, on Pagniez's recommendation, now began to coach him for his *baccalauréat* in philosophy, becoming a familiar figure about the house. Pagniez

spent all his spare time on the Boulevard Raspail, where he had his own room. Sartre frequently spent the night there, and even Nizan slept there on one occasion. My Valleuse cousins, who happened to live in the same block, took considerable exception to such free-and-easy hospitality, and implied that Madame Lemaire was indulging in the most lurid debauches.

She was a petite and plumpish woman, who dressed in a discreetly elegant style. Some photographs which I saw later showed that she had been a remarkably pretty girl: she had lost her striking looks, but not her attractive personality. Her face, under its halo of thick black hair, was quite round; she had a tiny mouth, an exquisite nose, and really astonishing eyes. It was not their size or colour that struck one so much as their intense aliveness. From head to foot she was bursting with life: every smile and gesture and flicker of expression rippled through her entire being, without ever (to all appearances) causing her any emotional upset. Her mind, too, was ever alert; being both inquisitive and a patient listener she attracted confidence, and knew a great deal about the affairs of all those who approached her. Despite this she maintained in such relationships the starry-eyed amazement of an eighteen-year-old girl. She spoke of these people in a detached fashion, like an anthropologist, and with great felicity of phrase. Sometimes, though, she lost her temper. She affected a somewhat crotchety rationalism, which drove her to deliver furious tirades couched in most unexpected language. I found her conversation enchanting. She won my approval in another way, too; though she made light of Grundyish gossip, she remained a respectable woman. It was true that I despised marriage, and was in favour of a love affair being pushed to its logical conclusion; but I had not emancipated myself from all sexual taboos, and promiscuity in a woman still shocked me. Besides, I admired anything which made some inroad on contemporary triteness. The relationship between Madame Lemaire and Pagniez seemed to me one of unusual subtlety, and far more valuable than an ordinary liaison.

Sartre occupied a far less important place in Madame Lemaire's life than did Pagniez, but she was nevertheless extremely fond of

him. His stubborn determination to be a writer and the unshakeable certainty of his convictions both delighted and dumbfounded her. She found him very amusing when he put himself out to entertain her – and even more so on numerous occasions when he had no intention of doing so. Two years previously he had written a novel called *Une défaite* (which Gallimard sensibly turned down) based on the love affairs of Nietzsche and of Cosima Wagner. The hero, Frédéric, with his aggressive ‘voluntarism’, had given Madame Lemaire and Pagniez a good deal of quiet fun. They nicknamed Sartre ‘miserable Frédéric’, and this was what Madame Lemaire called him when he tried to impose his own tastes and beliefs on her, or to dictate her actions, especially concerning the education of her son. ‘Listen to miserable Frédéric!’ she would exclaim, laughing, to the world at large; and Sartre would join in the laughter. He accused her of treating her lame dogs with over-indulgence, while she accused him of thoughtlessly disseminating dangerous advice. He despised traditions and morality, and exhorted people to be guided by their reason and instinct alone. This showed lack of discernment on his part. *He* might be enlightened enough to use freedom sensibly, she observed, with withering scorn, but the common run of mankind lacked his reasoning ability, and it was better to let them stick to the beaten path. They got a great deal of enjoyment out of these disputes.

Madame Lemaire did not bestow her friendship lightly, and I found favour more quickly with Pagniez. Even so, his regard was edged with a certain irony which often disconcerted me. Both of them intimidated me. They set great store on reserve, tact, and good manners; whereas I was an impetuous creature, with more passion than subtlety in my make-up. My trouble was an excess of good nature: I drove so straight for my goal that on occasion I showed myself lacking in tact. I did not have proof positive of this; but often in Madame Lemaire’s presence I felt clumsy and adolescent, and was certain that she and Pagniez were passing judgement upon me. I didn’t blow this up into a major worry, though: it never occurred to me that their criticism was directed at any basic element in me. Besides, only Sartre’s opinions could really get under my skin; and in

any case, for all their reservations, they treated me with great kindness. Just because I *was* so outspoken, this satisfied me.

Madame Lemaire, Pagniez, and Sartre set great store by observing the subtle distinctions which divided our several relationships. If I went into a restaurant with Sartre and found Madame Lemaire having dinner with Pagniez, she would cheerfully insist on our staying separate. Sometimes we went out with Pagniez but without her; sometimes we took tea in the Boulevard Raspail without Pagniez. Occasionally I would let Sartre go off alone to see his *petits camarades*, and very often he would also have a private session with Pagniez. Such habits astonished me at first; but I soon got used to them. Friendship is a delicate structure; it can adjust itself to sharing in some respects, but in others it insists upon retaining a monopoly. Every combination we formed – whether *à deux*, *à trois*, or *à quatre* – had its own special features and conventions; it suited us to avoid sacrificing this diversity.

Often, however, the four of us met. We spent some delightful evenings together. Sometimes we had dinner in Madame Lemaire's kitchen, a slice of *pâté* and a couple of fried eggs. Sometimes we ate at Chez Pierre on the Avenue d'Italie, and then, without batting an eyelid, I would wolf down a plate of hors d'œuvres, some sort of fish done in sauce, jugged hare, and *crêpes flambées*; I can scarcely believe it looking back, but in fact my normal diet was so frugal that when I got the chance I tore through a really gigantic meal. On Christmas Eve Madame Lemaire's daughter Jacqueline, and her son, nicknamed The Tapir, had supper with us on the Boulevard Raspail. They were both roughly my own age. The table gleamed with flowers and cut glass and lacework. Pagniez had got the most famous brand of Strasbourg *foie gras* and a genuine Christmas pudding from London, not to mention some deliciously ripe African peaches. There was a lavish abundance of courses, and plenty of wine and other delicacies; our heads began to swim a little, and we were brimful of affection for one another.

When spring came we would often drive out along the banks of the Marne in Madame Lemaire's car, with Pagniez at the wheel. We would eat a fried meal at the Chant des Oiseaux, or perhaps go for a

spin in the forest around Saint-Germain or Fosse-Repose. This was a new experience for me; the headlights slashing their shafts of radiance through the depths of the woodland seemed a most beautiful sight. Often before returning home we would drink a cocktail or two in Montparnasse. We might all look in on a new film together, or dress up and go off to listen to Jack Hylton and his boys; but most often we just talked. We would discuss various people we knew, analysing their behaviour, their motives, just where they were right and wrong, sorting out their problems for them. Madame Lemaire always advocated caution; Sartre and I would plump for bold solutions, while Pagniez normally upheld some sort of compromise. The persons concerned went their own sweet way; but we discussed them as carefully as if we had held their fates in our hands.

Some Sundays Sartre stayed in Tours, and then I would catch the first train out. He would bicycle down from the Villa Paulownia to the station (the Villa stood at the top of a small hill) and we would meet there, shortly before midday. I discovered the charms and limitations (hitherto unknown to me) of a provincial Sunday afternoon. There was a big brasserie with a female orchestra, a clutter of cafés, one or two restaurants, a seedy dance hall, an ill-kept park where lovers wandered, some pleasant family walks beside the Loire, and dozens of old, silent streets. This was quite enough to keep us amused. In those days we saw every sort of object as though it were one of those tiny handkerchiefs from which a conjuror can produce silk scarfs, streamers, flags, and yards of ribbon. A cup of coffee became a kaleidoscope in which we could spend ages watching the mutable reflections of ceiling or chandelier. We invented one past for the violinist, and quite a different one for the pianist. A great many things always happened to each of us between one meeting and the next: nothing struck us as insignificant, or was passed over by us in silence. I was acquainted with the slightest twitch of expression registered by any of Sartre's cronies; he knew, down to the last detail, everything that our friends in Paris were up to. The world at large passed endless information on to us, which we never tired of hearing.

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Yet we did not have entirely the same reaction to it. I was

swallowed up in transports of astonishment or delight: 'Look at the Beaver,' Sartre would say, 'in one of her trances again!' He himself kept very cool-headed, and always tried to verbalize his visual impressions. One afternoon we were standing on the heights of Saint-Cloud, and gazing out at a wide landscape of river and woodland: I felt elated by this spectacle, and reproached Sartre for his indifference to it. He talked about the forest and the river far more eloquently than I did, yet they did not make him *feel* anything. He defended himself against this charge by asking what the real definition of feeling was. He had no taste, he said, for all those disordered physical reactions – violent palpitations of the heart, trembling, or giddiness – which paralyse verbal communication: when they were gone, nothing remained. He placed more value on what he termed 'emotional abstractions'. The significance of an expression or a spectacle reached him in a disembodied form; he kept himself detached enough from the event to try and catch it in words. On several occasions he explained to me that this was the only attitude a writer could possibly take. If you feel nothing, you cannot write at all; but if, on the other hand, you are so overcome by feelings of joy or horror that you cannot control them, then you are no longer able to give them adequate expression. Sometimes I admitted that Sartre was right; but on the other occasions I reflected that words have to murder reality before they can hold it captive, and that the most important aspect of reality – its here-and-now presence – always eludes them. I was led from this point to ask myself, somewhat anxiously, just what functions words could, or could not, perform. This was why I felt so personally affected by Virginia Woolf's reflections on language in general and the novel in particular. Though she emphasized the gulf that yawned between literature and life, she appeared to expect that the discovery of new techniques would allow a narrowing of the gap, and I hoped she might be right. But alas, her latest book, *Mrs Dalloway*, suggested no answer to the problem that she raised. Sartre was of the opinion that there was an initial fallacy here, in the framing of the question itself. He too believed that any account of an event imposes a deceptive pattern upon the truth, an idea which he expounded in *La*

*Nausée* (Nausea); even though the narrator resorts to verbal incoherence, and strives to grasp experience raw, in all its random scattered shapelessness, he can produce a mere imitation only, stamped with his own shortcomings. But Sartre thought it idle to deplore this discrepancy between things and words, between the world as it is and artistic creativity; on the contrary, he regarded it as the basic condition of literature, its main *raison d'être*. The writer's achievements are all gained within the limits of this apparent handicap, and instead of longing to abolish it, he ought rather to turn it to good advantage.

Perhaps; but all the same I found it hard to adapt myself to the split. I wanted to write books, yet not to give up my 'trances': I was torn between two conflicting desires. It was because of this inner conflict that I clung for so long to the concept of art which I had settled for before my meeting with Sartre, and which was so very far from his own. The creative act, in his view, meant assuming responsibility for the world, giving it something it needed; whereas I felt one must turn one's back on it. It was not only 'realism' I distrusted, but all pathos and tragedy, anything that smacked of the sentimental. I rated Bach much higher than Beethoven, whereas Sartre at that time much preferred the latter. I like hermetic poems, surrealist films, abstract art, illuminated manuscripts and ancient tapestries, African masks. I had a passion for watching puppet shows: Podrecca's marionettes were too realistic for my taste, but other performances I had seen, at the Atelier and elsewhere, possessed a quality of calculated naïveté which I found enchanting. Such predilections can be partially explained by the influences I had undergone in my youth. I had rejected the notion of divinity, but not all aspects of the supernatural. Obviously I knew that a work wrought on earth can communicate only in earthly terms. But there were some that seemed to me to have broken free from their creator and absorbed something of the meaning he had tried to put into them. There they stood, foursquare and independent, dumb, inscrutable, like huge abandoned totems: in them alone I made contact with some vital, absolute element. It may seem paradoxical that I, who was so much in love with life, should have continued to demand this inhuman

purity of art. But there was logic in my obstinacy: since art led me away from life, it could attain fulfilment only by denying life's claims.

Though I was less wholeheartedly committed to literature than Sartre, my thirst for knowledge rivalled his. Even so he pursued the truth far more persistently than I did. I have attempted to show, in my book *The Second Sex*, why a woman's situation still, even today, prevents her from exploring the world's basic problems. I longed to know the world, to find a way of expressing that knowledge; but I had never envisaged tearing its final secrets from it by sheer brain power. In any case I was too full of the novelty of my experiences during this year to devote much time to philosophy. I restricted myself to debating Sartre's ideas with him. The moment we met on the platform at Tours station, or in the Gare d'Austerlitz, he would grasp my hand and exclaim: 'I've got a new theory.' I would listen to him attentively, but with a certain wariness. Pagniez claimed that his friend's fine logical structures often rested on some hidden sophistry, and when one of Sartre's ideas annoyed me I would search for the 'underlying sophistry'. More than once I found it. This was how I came to shatter a certain 'theory of the comic sense' – which Sartre himself, in any case, did not take over-seriously. On other occasions he would stick to his guns, however: so much so, indeed, that if I pressed him hard he did not hesitate to throw common sense overboard. His aim, as I have said, was to preserve the phenomena, the realities of this world; he asserted that such phenomena coincided exactly with man's knowledge of them. If he had made adequate allowance, when evaluating his scheme of things, for the instruments by which this knowledge was acquired, his position might have been stronger. But he flatly refused to believe in science, so much so that one day I got him to defend the thesis that microbes and other animalculae invisible to the naked eye simply didn't exist at all. It was ridiculous, and he knew it; but he refused to climb down, since he also knew that when you are defending a self-evident, obvious fact – even though it is not susceptible of truth – you have to cling to it in the teeth of wind and storm, against reason itself. Since then I have learned that, in order to make discoveries, the most essential thing is not merely to observe a gleam of light here and

there that other people have missed, but to drive straight for your goal, and damn everything else. I often accused Sartre of careless inaccuracy, but nevertheless I observed that his exaggerations tended to be more fruitful than my own scrupulous precision.

Sartre built his theories, fundamentally, upon certain positions which we both adhered to with some passion. Our love of freedom, our opposition to the established order of things, our individualism, and our respect for the working classes – all these brought us close to the anarchist position. But to be quite frank, our incoherence defied any sort of label. We were anti-capitalist, yet not Marxists; we glorified the powers of pure mind and perfect freedom, yet we rejected the spiritual approach; though our interpretation of man and the universe was strictly materialistic, we despised science and technology. Sartre was not bothered by these inconsistencies, and refused so much as to formulate them. ‘When you think in terms of *problems*,’ he told me, ‘you aren’t thinking at all.’ He himself skipped from one conviction to the next, without rhyme or reason.

What interested him above all was people. He wanted to replace the dry-as-dust analytical psychology taught at the Sorbonne with a concrete, hence synthetic, *apprehension* of individuals. He had stumbled on this notion in Jaspers, whose monograph *Psychopathology* (1913) had been translated into French in 1927: he and Nizan had corrected the proofs of the French edition. Against the causal aetiology employed by science, Jaspers set up a different method of thought: this did not rest on any universal principle, but worked through independent connections between isolated sets of facts, relying on intuitive guesses which had more emotion than logic about them, and which were presented as self-evident, irrefutable truths. Jaspers defined and justified his system as a new departure in the field of phenomenology. Sartre knew nothing about this brand of philosophical thought, but the notion of ‘apprehension’ had stuck in his mind, and now he was trying to apply it. He believed in graphology and particularly in physiognomics; he used to examine the faces of myself, my sister, and our friends and draw conclusions from them which he took perfectly seriously. I have remarked on the reasons for his distrust of psychoanalysis; but he was susceptible to any new

kind of synthesis, and he eagerly devoured early popularizations of the Gestalt theory.

If the individual is a synthetic totality, one and indivisible, his actions can only be judged in a global context. On the ethical plane too we rejected the analytical position. Neither of us wanted any truck with what is known academically as 'moral values'. At the École Normale Sartre had propounded a brisk slogan: 'Science is the outer cover of a ball. Morality is the hole inside.' I had an ingrained taste for the absolute, while Sartre was in revolt against universals; the result was that we both rejected not only the precepts current in our society, but any maxim whatsoever that laid claim to universal authority. Duty and virtue are concepts implying the subjection of the individual to laws outside himself. We denied such vain notions, and countered them with a living truth: wisdom. The wise man, in fact, establishes between himself and the universe a balance that is both individual and all-embracing. Wisdom is indivisible and cannot be parcelled out; nor can it be attained except by patient accumulation of merit. One either has or has not got it; and the man who possesses it no longer cares about the practical details of his life: he can take disaster after disaster in his stride. Some of Stendhal's heroes, for instance, are endowed with a peculiar grace altogether denied to the common herd, and which justifies their every action. We were obviously among the elect, and this Jansenistic outlook both satisfied our intransigence and gave us authority for following the dictates of our own will, without hesitation. Liberty was the one law we possessed. We were against anyone attitudinizing, standing on his rights, or presenting himself in an overflattering light. Apropos of Meredith's *The Tragic Comedians*, we had had a long discussion on the evils of 'reflexiveness'. We did not by any means suppose that *amour-propre* (in the sense in which La Rochefoucauld uses the term) corrupts all human actions; merely that once it touches them total infiltration takes place. The only sentiments we allowed were those spontaneously evoked by the object in view; the only actions, those that arose from some specific situation. We measured a man's worth by what he accomplished: his deeds and his works. There were good elements in this realism of

ours; our mistake was to assume that freedom of choice and action is a universal phenomenon. In this respect our morality remained bourgeois and idealist. We fondly supposed that we were representative of mankind as a whole; and thus, all unknown to ourselves, we demonstrated our identity with the very privileged class that we thought to repudiate.

These confusions of thought do not surprise me. We were lost in a world the complexities of which lay far beyond our understanding, and we possessed only the most rudimentary instruments to guide us through it. But at least we persisted in hacking out our own path. Every step we took brought fresh conflicts, and moved us on to yet further difficulties; and so during the years that followed we found ourselves swept far away from these first beginnings.

Sartre had begun writing again at Saint-Cyr. As he could not get down to a full-length work, he was trying his hand at poems. One of them was called 'The Tree'; the tree's pointless proliferation symbolized 'contingency', an image afterwards repeated in *Nausea*. He read it over without enthusiasm, and sketched the first draft of another, of which I still remember the opening lines:

Assuaged by the sacrifice of a violet,  
The great steel mirror leaves a purple afterglow in the eye.

Pagniez shattered his flow of inspiration by bursting out laughing. Nor was he any more indulgent with the first chapter of a novel in which Sartre intended to tell the story of Zaza's death. One morning the hero's eye glanced seaward, 'stroking the sunlight the wrong way'. This ruffled sunlight suffered the same reception as did the sacrificial violet, and Sartre did not press for its retention. He accepted criticism with imperturbable modesty: he always had moved on by then to something new, and from this progressive standpoint even the most recent events already seemed out of date, things of the past. Yet when an idea really laid hold of him he would pursue it through to the end: such was the case with *La Légende de la vérité* (The Legend of Truth), which he wrote while at Saint-Symphorien.

Once again he deployed his ideas through the medium of a story. It was almost impossible for him to state them directly: since he placed no faith in universals or generalizations, he denied himself the right even of formulating this repudiation in generalized terms. He had to replace proposition by demonstration. He admired those myths to which Plato, for similar reasons, had had recourse, and did not blush to imitate them. But this antiquated method imposed various irksome restrictions on his aggressive mind; and these restrictions were mirrored in the stiffness of his style. Nevertheless various new ideas did pierce through this armoured carapace. In *La Légende de la vérité* Sartre's latest theories found a shop window. He was already correlating varieties in the cognitive process with structural differences between one human social group and another. 'Truth,' he wrote, 'is a by-product of commerce,' and commerce he linked with democracy: when citizens regard *themselves* as interchangeable, they must needs evaluate the world in similar terms, and science emerges as an index of their outlook. The élite of any society despise this universalized attitude: such groups hammer out so-called general ideas for their own special use, ideas which at best possess only an uncertain degree of probability. Sartre showed even greater dislike for these clique ideologies than he did for academic literary unanimism. He kept his sympathy for those thaumaturge-like characters who, shut off from the City with its logic and mathematics, wandered alone in the wilderness and only trusted the evidence of their own eyes as a guide towards knowledge. Thus it was only to the artist, the writer, or the philosopher – those whom he termed the 'solitaries' – that he granted the privilege of grasping living reality. For a multitude of reasons, to which I will return later, this theory suited me very well, and I adopted it enthusiastically.

In August I took up quarters for a month in the little hotel at Sainte-Radegonde, on the banks of the Loire, which was a ten-minute journey from the Villa Paulownia. So it had happened at last: I was spending a holiday away from Meyrignac. How I had once dreaded this exile! But it turned out to be nothing of the sort; on the contrary, I found myself at long last firmly anchored to the heart of my real

existence. The countryside was most unattractive, but this did not matter. I found a sort of island, covered with undergrowth and easily reached without wetting one's feet, since the stream had almost dried up: I would retreat here every morning with a book. I lunched on a packet of *petits beurres* and a bar of chocolate, and then climbed the hill and met Sartre a few yards away from the meteorological station. Once every two hours he went off to take an observation, and I would see him waving a sort of miniature Eiffel Tower about in the air. We used to dine *al fresco* in Sainte-Radegonde.

He often had the whole day off, and then he would make inroads on that legacy of his, abandoning our inn garden for more luxurious restaurants. There were La Lanterne or the Pont de Cissé on the banks of the Loire, where we ate delicious little sausages and drank good dry Vouvray. Sometimes we went to Saint-Florent-sur-Cher, and explored the roadhouses that catered to the wealthier classes in Touraine. Two or three times Sartre chartered a taxi after lunch; in this way we visited the *châteaux* of Amboise and Langeais, and strolled round Vouvray, under chalk escarpments pitted with ancient cave dwellings. Such plutocratic excursions always brought a lean aftermath. One September morning we got off the train at the Gare d'Austerlitz half starving: we had eaten nothing for two days except a prune flan in the station buffet at Tours. We hadn't a sou between us, and the sole of my shoe had come loose: I went stumbling through the maze in the Jardin des Plantes as though I had a blister on my heel. As soon as our favourite café, the Closerie des Lilas, opened for the day, we sat down on the *terrasse* with cups of hot chocolate and piles of *croissants* lined up in front of us. There was still the problem of paying for them, though. Sartre left me there as a kind of hostage, got into a taxi, and did not reappear for an hour. All our friends were away on holiday, and I still do not know who was responsible for coming to our rescue. We used to borrow a good deal; in order to repay these debts, Sartre dug into his legacy, while I sold my books and all the smaller jewellery I had been given as a young girl, which greatly shocked my parents.

We read omnivorously. Every Sunday I brought Sartre armfuls of books borrowed – more or less legitimately – from Adrienne

Monnier's library. Being an addict of things like *Pardaillan*, *Fantomas*, and *Chéri-Bibi*, Sartre used to ask me insistently for 'entertaining trash', as he called it. Trash I could find for him by the bucketful, but such works were never entertaining; disappointed, he authorized me to comb through the section devoted to potentially good books. Nothing very outstanding was being published in France at the time. Despite the distaste which Claudel produced in us, we admired *The Satin Slipper* (1921). We were also struck by Saint-Exupéry's *Night Flight*. Technological advances, like those of pure science, left us unmoved; we did not respond to Professor Piccard's ascents into the stratosphere. But by linking continent to continent, the development of aviation was liable to modify human relationships; and so we followed, with some interest, the exploits of men like Coste and Bellonte, or Mermoz, and were determined, one day, to view the earth from their aerial vantage point ourselves. We were keen would-be travellers, and enjoyed travel books: we tried to picture New York from Paul Morand's account of it, or India from Andrée Viollis's *L'Inde contre les Anglais*.

A foreign country can best be understood through its literature. The country which intrigued and interested us the most was the Soviet Union, and we read all the young Russian authors whose works were translated into French. Nizan specially recommended to us an extraordinary futuristic novel by Zamyatin, called *We*. In one sense this satirical work proved that individualism still survived in the U.S.S.R., since such a book could be written and printed there; but the proof remained equivocal, since the novel's tone and climax left no loophole for optimism. It seems clear Zamyatin foresaw no possible alternatives for himself save conformity or death. I have never forgotten that city of glass, so miraculously clear and crystalline hard, which he invented and set against a sky of never-changing blue. Babel's *Red Cavalry* was a collection of desolate little sketches portraying the miseries and futilities of war; while Ehrenburg's *Greed* and Pilnyak's *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea* showed us the hard human struggle that underlay the sovietization and hydroelectric schemes so prominent in the social structure of Communism. A country which could produce literature of this sort, and turn out

such superb films as *The Battleship Potemkin* or *Storm Over Asia*, could not be accused of degenerating into a mere 'technological culture'. It is true, however, that other novels and films gave pride of place to cement works and tractors; our interest wavered between admiration and distrust.

Germany was at best vaguely reflected in books such as Jakob Wassermann's *The Maurizius Case* or Alfred Döblin's *Alexanderplatz, Berlin*. America, too, gave us more intriguing pictures on the screen than on the printed page. The most recent American bestseller, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, seemed to us a dull and laborious effort, and I preferred the rich, thick ferment of Dreiser's earlier novels. English writers we approached from a completely different angle. The society in which they moved was a solid, stable one, and they opened up no new horizons for us: what we appreciated in them was the quality of their art. The first novels of D. H. Lawrence had been published in France, and we recognized his talent. But we found his phallic cosmology disconcerting, while his erotic exhibitionism struck us as pedantic and childish. Despite this, his personality interested us: we read the memoirs of him written by Mabel Dodge, Brett, and Frieda Lawrence, taking sides in their various quarrels. We felt we knew them all personally. During these two years, also, translations of many English books appeared, including *Wuthering Heights*, Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, Mary Webb's *Precious Bane*, Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, and Richard Hughes's *A High Wind in Jamaica*.

In the field of philosophy and political theory we found little worth the gleaning. We despised the meanderings of Keyserling, whose work was then being churned out in translation at a great rate. We paid no especial attention to Kierkegaard's *Journal of a Tempter*. Among the works of non-fiction that we found of value during this two-year period all I can find are Trotsky's *My Life*, a new translation of Hölderlin's *Empedocles*, and Jean Wahl's *Le Malheur de la conscience*, which gave us a glimpse or two of Hegel. We read every issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, *Europe*, and the *Les Nouvelles littéraires*. We also got through a vast number of crime novels, which were just beginning to become fashionable. The Collection

de l'Empreinte had recently been founded, and critics were devoting serious articles to Edgar Wallace, Freeman Wills Crofts, and E. Phillips Oppenheim.

There was one medium which Sartre ranked almost as high as literature: the cinema. It was while watching images flickering across a screen that he had had his revelation concerning the fundamental necessity of art, and had come to realize how lamentably 'contingent' by contrast our physical background was. In most of his artistic preferences he displayed a leaning towards the classical; but this particular predilection set him among the modernists. Both our families, and indeed an enormous section of the middle-class population, still regarded the cinema as 'entertainment for housemaids', and at the École Normale Sartre and his friends were aware of belonging to an avant-garde when they had serious discussions about their favourite films. I was less bitten by the bug than he was, but nevertheless I eagerly accompanied him to private film society screenings and little local fleapits where they dug out the most fascinating programmes. We did not go there solely to enjoy ourselves; we brought the same serious approach to the occasion as young devotees show today when visiting a film library.

I have mentioned elsewhere how Sartre steered me away from 'art films' and initiated me into the world of galloping cowboys and whodunits. One day he took me to Studio 28 to see William Boyd in a classic Hollywood-type feature, the story of an honest, big-hearted cop who finds out that his brother-in-law is a crook. Big moral decision. It turned out that the curtain-raiser to this effort was a film called *Un Chien andalou*, by two men whose names, Buñuel and Dalí, meant nothing to us. The opening sequences took our breath away, and afterwards we were hard put to it to take any interest in William Boyd's problems. There were some other great films during those two years: *Storm Over Asia*, *The Wedding March*, *Mädchen in Uniform*, and *City Lights*. With somewhat uneasy curiosity we watched the début of the talkies: *The Broadway Melody*, *The Green Goddess*. In *The Singing Fool* Al Jolson gave so contagiously emotional a rendering of 'Sonny Boy' that when the lights went up I saw, to my astonishment, tears in Sartre's eyes. He used to cry unashamedly in the cinema,

and I regretted the efforts I had made to stop myself doing the same thing. *Le Million* amused us, enchanted us, and made us laugh; it was a perfect success, but we looked on it as an exception, and did not agree with Jean Prévost when he boldly wrote: 'I believe in the possibilities and artistic future of the talking film.' *Hallelujah* would, all the same, have been far less moving without the singing of its Negro cast, the beauty of the spirituals themselves, and – during the death-hunt which forms the film's climax – the squelch of mud and crackle of leaves at the heart of that tragic stillness. And what would have remained of *The Blue Angel* if Marlene Dietrich's voice had been erased from it? On this we were both in agreement. But all the same, Sartre had been too fond of silent films ever to admit without resentment the possibility that talkies might oust them altogether. Doubtless they would succeed in ridding talkies of their grosser technical shortcomings – for instance, match up voice resonance with movements and apparent distance on the screen – but in Sartre's belief the language of visual imagery was wholly self-sufficient. Any attempt to superimpose another medium on it would be disastrous. The spoken word was, according to him, incompatible with that special non-reality, at once poetic, humorous, and heroic, which attracted him to the cinema.

As for the theatre, we were discouraged by the general low standard of drama, and seldom went to a play. In October 1930, Baty opened the Théâtre Montparnasse with a run of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. We knew nothing about Brecht, but the way in which he presented Mack the Knife's adventures delighted us; and pictures of Épinal suddenly jumped into life on the backcloth. The work struck us as reflecting a completely anarchic attitude; we gave warm applause to Marguerite Jamois and Lucien Nat. Sartre knew all Kurt Weill's songs by heart, and often afterwards we would quote the catch-phrase about meat first and morality afterwards.

We also visited the music halls. Josephine Baker was at the Casino de Paris, repeating the same songs and dances that had rocketed her into celebrity several years earlier: once again she scored a triumph. At Bobino's we heard Georgius – an old man now – and the new star Marie Dubas, who stirred audiences to wild enthusiasm and

laughter: she was exceedingly droll when she sang numbers dating back to the 1900s (I remember one called 'Keep Your Distance, Ernest'), and we read into these parodies of hers a satirical attack on the bourgeoisie. She also included in her repertoire some rousing popular songs, the very crudeness of which we interpreted as a challenge to the police-protected classes; so for us she was an anarchist, too. Since we had made up our minds to like only those people and things that represented our own views, we tended to push all our chosen favourites into agreement with us by main force.

While books and entertainments meant a good deal to us, public events touched us scarcely at all. Changes of cabinet and League of Nations debates we found about as futile as the scuffles provoked from time to time by the *Camelots du Roy*. Vast financial scandals did not shock us, since for us capitalism and corruption were synonymous terms. The only difference about Oustric was that he had been unlucky, that was all. There was nothing of real interest in the newspapers, which seemed to be concentrating on attacks upon taxi drivers: two or three such incidents were reported weekly. The only thing that stirred our imaginations was the affair of the Butcher of Düsseldorf: in order really to understand something about human beings, we thought, it was necessary to investigate cases of gross abnormality. But by and large the world about us was a mere backdrop against which our private lives were played out.

The only moments that mattered to me were those I spent in Sartre's company; but in actuality I frequently got through the day without seeing him at all. I devoted a great deal of such time to reading, which I pursued in a haphazard fashion, according to Sartre's advice or my own whim of the moment. From time to time I would call in at the Bibliothèque Nationale, or take out books from Adrienne Monnier's library; and I became a subscriber to the Anglo-American library run by Sylvia Beach. There I sat, hunched over my fire in winter, out on my balcony during the summer, clumsily smoking English cigarettes and catching up on my cultural education. Over and above the books I read with Sartre, I went through Whitman, Blake, Yeats, Synge, Sean O'Casey, all of Virginia Woolf, a vast quantity of Henry James,

George Moore, Swinburne, Frank Swinnerton, Rebecca West, Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, all the translations published in the 'Feux croisés' series, and, in English, Dorothy Richardson's interminable series of novels from ten or a dozen volumes of which I learned precisely nothing. I read Alexandre Dumas, and the works of Népomucène Lemerrier and Baour-Lormian. I read Gobineau's novels, all of Restif de la Bretonne, Diderot's letters to Sophie Volland, not to mention Hoffmann, Sudermann, Kellermann, Pío Baroja, and Panait Istrati. Sartre took an interest in the psychology of mysticism, so I plunged into the writings of Catherine Emmerich and Saint Angela of Foligno. I wanted to understand Marx and Engels, and started in on *Das Kapital* at the Bibliothèque Nationale. This was not a success on my part. I made no distinction between Marxism and any other philosophy to which I had become accustomed: so much so, indeed, that the whole thing seemed immediately comprehensible to me, and in fact I grasped almost none of it. Nevertheless the theory of surplus appreciation came as a revelation to me, something with the staggering impact of Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* or Kant's space-time critique. I wholeheartedly condemned exploitation, and felt a vast satisfaction at stripping down its functional mechanism. A new day dawned upon my world at the instant that I saw labour as the source and substance of all values. Nothing was ever to make me deny this truth: not the objections which the final sections of *Das Kapital* aroused in me, nor those which I found in other books, nor even the subtle doctrines propounded by more recent economists.

To earn my living I gave private lessons and also taught Latin at the Lycée Victor-Duruy. Previously I had taught psychology to thoughtful, well-behaved secondary-school girls in Neuilly; and this new junior class of mine took me somewhat off my guard. Learning the rudiments of Latin is a grim business for ten-year-old girls, and I thought I would soften the grimness with a few smiles. My pupils smiled back; then they came clambering up on to the dais to get a closer look at my necklace, and began pulling at the lace collar of my dress. The first time I sent them back to their places they sat more or less quiet; but in a very short while they were wriggling and

whispering to each other incessantly. I tried to make my voice sound stern, and to instil a fierce gleam into my eye; but they still chattered and played up to me as much as ever. I decided to take a tough line, and gave the worst offender a black mark. She flung herself head first against the nearest wall, screaming: 'My father will beat me!' The whole class took this cry up, in reproachful tones. 'Her father will beat her!' they chorused. Could I, I asked myself, condemn her to paternal execution in this way? But if I let her off, how could I then punish her classmates? I found only one solution, and that was to talk so loud that my voice drowned the row they were making. The result was that those who wanted to listen could at least hear me; and I fancy my class learned about as much Latin as any other. But I more than once was summoned before an irate headmistress, and my assignment was not renewed.

In theory, after these two years' respite I had granted myself, I was supposed to take a job; but I hated the idea of leaving Paris, and looked around for some way to keep myself there. I turned to the wealthy and influential cousin who had once come to my father's aid; he gave me an introduction to Madame Poirier, one of the joint editors of *L'Europe nouvelle*, who was under some sort of obligation to him. Madame Poirier was married to the headmaster of a *lycée*; they had a rambling flat up in the school attics, full of antique furniture and Oriental rugs. To make a proper start in journalism, she told me, you had to have ideas to contribute. Did I have any ideas? No, I said, I didn't. They then advised me to stick to teaching. The husband took an interest in me. He was a tall, bald man in his sixties, with greenish eyes. Occasionally he invited me to have tea with him at the Pré Catalan, where he would promise me a lot of useful introductions and talk to me about Life, with an eager emphasis on its more libidinous aspects. At such moments he would look me straight in the eye, with a very serious expression, and his voice would become coolly clinical. He and his wife invited me to a cocktail party. It was my first sortie into the fashionable world, and I did not exactly shine. I wore a red wool dress, with a large white piqué collar – far too modest for the occasion. All the ladies on *L'Europe nouvelle* were dressed by couturiers: Louise Weiss, for instance, sitting there in

black satin with a circle of admirers all around her. One of the guests had been told off to keep an eye on me. He cheered up a bit when he pointed out a heavily made-up old crone who, so he told me, had been the model for *Mademoiselle Dax, jeune fille*, but thereafter conversation dragged miserably. I realized I would never be able to get on with these people, and made up my mind to go and teach in the provinces.

In the meanwhile I took what advantage of Paris I could. I had dropped nearly all the family connections – with aunts, cousins, and childhood friends – that I found boring. I quite often went for lunch with my parents. As we disliked quarrels, there were few topics of conversation open to us: they knew almost nothing about my present life. My father was annoyed at my not yet having taken a job. When friends inquired for news of me, he would tell them, in disgust, that I was having my Paris honeymoon. It is true that I enjoyed myself to the best of my ability. Sometimes I had dinner at Madame Lemaire's, with Pagniez, and they would take me to the cinema afterwards. I visited La Lune Rousse with Rirette Nizan, and we finished the evening off drinking aquavit at the Vikings' Bar. I went back to the Jockey and La Jungle with my sister and Gégé; I made dates and went out with anyone – or almost anyone. Fernando had introduced me to the gatherings that used to meet in the evening at the café on the corner of the Boulevard Raspail and the Avenue Edgar Quinet, and I went there regularly. There was Robert Delaunay the artist, and his wife Sonia, who was a fabric designer; Cossio, who painted nothing but small boats; the avant-garde composer Varèse, and the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro. Sometimes Blaise Cendrars would put in an appearance, and the moment he opened his mouth everyone uttered admiring exclamations. The evening was spent in fulminating against human stupidity, the decay of society, and currently fashionable art and literature. Someone suggested hiring the Eiffel Tower and equipping it with an electric sign that read MERDE! Someone else was for sousing the world in petrol and setting it alight. I took no part in these vituperations, but I enjoyed the smoky atmosphere, the clink of glasses, and the buzz of conversation that grew louder and louder as silence spread over Paris. One

night when the café shut, the whole gang went off to the Sphinx, and I followed them. Because of Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh I pictured brothels as highly poetical establishments, and I was not disappointed. The décor, in even flashier bad taste than the interior of the Sacré-Cœur, the lighting, the half-naked girls in their flimsy harlequin tunics – all this was a great improvement on the stupid paintings and carnival booths so dear to Rimbaud's heart.

From Madrid and Budapest various artists and writers were sent on to me by Fernando and Bandi – the latter being a Hungarian journalist in love with Stépha, whom I had known at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Night after night I showed them around Paris, while they talked to me of other great unknown cities. I also went out occasionally with a young Chez Burma salesgirl, a friend of The Tapir's, whom I found a very likeable character: Sartre had christened her Madame de Listomère, after one of Balzac's heroines. We went to dance halls on the Rue de Lappe, our faces smothered in powder and lipstick, and we were a great success. My favourite partner was a young butcher's assistant. One evening, over some strawberries in brandy, he urged me to go home with him. I told him I already had a boy friend. 'So what?' he said. 'Look, because you're fond of beef doesn't mean you can't eat a slice or two of ham occasionally, does it?' It was a great disappointment to him when I refused to countenance a change of diet.

It was seldom that I got to bed before two in the morning. This explains why I got through the day so quickly: I was asleep. On Mondays, especially, I used to be dropping from fatigue because I got back from Tours at half past five in the morning. The third-class compartments were crammed full, and as there was always some man, either beside me or opposite, determined to indulge in a little knee rubbing, I never got a wink of sleep. Despite this I had to be at the Lycée Duruy by eight-thirty. In the afternoon, during a Greek lesson, I often passed out for two or three minutes while my pupil was trying to construe some passage or other. I enjoyed my exhaustion, though; I liked overdoing things – though I hardly ever got drunk. My stomach was simply not strong enough: two or three cocktails were quite enough to upset it.

But I had no need of alcohol to achieve a state of intoxication. I passed from pleasurable surprise to carnival elation; everything enriched and delighted me. There was so much I had to learn that anything, no matter what, held a lesson for me. One Sunday The Tapir drove me out to Tours in his little car, together with Madame de Listomère. We left Sartre late in the evening, and it was midnight when we had to stop in Blois because of engine trouble. I had no idea till then how sinister all provincial towns look at night. It took us over a quarter of an hour to rouse the hotel proprietress. She put us two women in one double bed, and gave The Tapir the room adjoining. But The Tapir and I wanted to talk, so he dragged his mattress into our room and slept on the floor there. The following morning all hell broke loose. We thought the proprietress was going to call out the vice squad. I revelled in this insignificant episode and thought it a great adventure.

There was another, equally unimportant incident which gave me considerable pleasure. After the school year was over I used to spend my Sunday nights in Tours. But on 15 August – at one in the morning, too – I found that the hotel where I usually stayed was fully booked. I tried two or three others, without success. I called a taxi and scoured the entire town: still no good. In the end the taxi driver offered to let me sleep in his cab, in the garage, and I accepted his offer gratefully. Then he changed his mind and said he was sure his wife would let me have their daughter's room – she was away at summer camp. I agreed, and went home with him – not out of simple-minded thoughtlessness, but because I trusted him. And sure enough, his young wife was waiting up for him in their big double bed, all smiles and make-up, prinked out as though for a party. The following morning they gave me coffee and wouldn't take a penny for their trouble. Their kindness moved me all the more because I came from a class whose members felt they had lost face if they did something for nothing. It also confirmed me in an attitude which I had adopted instinctively, and which I always hoped to stick to: when in doubt, to back my hunches and trust people or situations rather than fight shy of them.

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One of my greatest pleasures was to go out in a car. Pagniez

drove me to Tours three or four times, and took me over Chartres Cathedral and the Château de Chaumont. He got his discharge in February 1931, two or three weeks before Sartre, and conceived a desire to travel across France and revisit various cousins and friends of his. Madame Lemaire lent him her car, and he suggested that I should come along with him. A car journey, a *real* car journey, the first trip of the sort I had ever made! I went straight into a kind of daze, exhilarated, too, at the thought of ten days' tête-à-tête with Pagniez: I enjoyed his conversation and his company and the prospect of sight-seeing with him.

As chance would have it, two days before my departure Herbaud turned up in Paris and told me he was staying for two weeks, without his wife: that meant he would have time to spend on me. For some time our relationship had rested on an equivocal basis. He had no intention of admitting what Sartre meant to me, and I had no intention of enlightening him on the subject. Two months previously he had found a letter in my room which made the situation quite clear: he had laughed at the time, but had shown some annoyance too – although he had never concealed the fact that he was highly interested in a girl from Coutances. He issued an ultimatum to me: if I chose to go off with Pagniez rather than take advantage of his, Herbaud's, presence, then he would never see me again. I protested that I could not possibly let Pagniez down. 'Yes you can,' Herbaud told me. 'No I can't,' I said. Upon which he broke off with me. We went to the cinema, and I kept weeping, saying over and over again, 'But I *promised*.' Afterwards he told Sartre that this obstinacy of mine had exasperated him; he would have much preferred it if I had told him, quite bluntly, that I wanted to see something of the countryside. But in fact I was sincere in my protestations. I have always felt that to back out of a joint project, except in cases of unavoidable necessity, is an offence against any friendship, and I very much wanted to keep mine with Pagniez intact. The crux of the matter was that I now valued his intimacy more than I did Herbaud's. Pagniez stood closer both to Sartre and to me: though circumstances might limit the degree of intimacy we achieved, they also pointed to the prospect of enriching and developing it endlessly; while, on the

other hand, Herbaud – and he knew this – had little further part to play in my life. He belonged to the past, and I sacrificed him to the future. I was crying when I said goodbye to him, a thing which he found irksome: I can understand this, for the decision in fact was mine, whereas my noisy grief somehow turned it into an act of fate.

It was raining through Morvan, but all I needed to cheer myself up were the whispered words *We're off – we're on our way!* Our lunch at the Hôtel de la Poste in Avallon sent me into raptures. The following morning we went to see Brou church. I was moved by the recumbent marble effigies on their tombs, and the little figures of the Virtues carved below; and no one made me admire the stained glass, which was as frightful a creation as the stonework of Saint-Maclou. When we reached Lyon, Pagniez went off to call on friends, and I descended on my eldest cousin, Sirmione, who had married a medical student. Two or three of his brothers joined us at lunch, and the same half-witted orphan was still waiting on table: her martyrdom seemed perennial. They surprised me, rather more than they had when I was a small child. Because I was travelling with a man they assumed that I must be familiar with every kind of vice, and the coarseness of their jokes took me aback. Over the dessert they offered me what they called a 'Grenoble nut': this turned out to be an empty nutshell with a condom inside. They laughed so heartily over this that they spared me the need of trying not to look shocked. Afterwards, though, they showed me around Lyon, which was more to the point; and my cousin Charles took me over his little factory, which turned out sockets for electric light bulbs. It was my first encounter with industry and made a violent impression on me. Though it was broad daylight outside, the workshops were gloomy as night, and the air we breathed was laden with metal dust. Numbers of women sat there in front of a moving belt, which was pierced with holes at regular intervals. On the floor beside them was a packing case; from this they took a brass cylinder and inserted it into a hole on the belt, which proceeded to whisk it away. To and fro went the arms, from case to belt and back again, with a quick, ceaseless, staccato rhythm. For how long? I asked. Eight hours at a stretch, in this heat and stench, chained to the horrible monotony of this

in-and-out motion, without any respite. Eight hours, day in, day out. When my cousin saw the tears in my eyes he told me cheerfully that I must have drunk too much at lunch.

Passing across the Massif Central, I had my first sight of vast, snow-covered horizons. Pagniez was going to Tulle, and dropped me off at Uzerche. No question about it – I was revisiting the scenes of my past. I spent the night at the Hôtel Léonard, one of those places I had previously thought well-nigh unfit for human habitation, except by dregs of the earth such as peasants or commercial travellers: I was most comfortable there. Pagniez arrived to pick me up, and I recalled Proust's surprise when during his first car trip he confused *Guermites Way* with *Swann's Way*. In a single afternoon we visited places which I had imagined on the opposite side of the world from one another: the Château de Turenne, Beaulieu church, and Rocamadour, of which I had heard glowing descriptions all through my childhood, though no one ever took me there. I glutted myself with landscapes; and I had one great revelation – Provence. When I was small I had been most intrigued with what people told me about the Midi. How could it possibly be beautiful if there weren't any trees? I asked. There were no trees in the neighbourhood of Uzès, or around the Pont du Gard, yet these places had great beauty. I loved the bareness and smell of the moorland; I loved the bleak emptiness of the Camargue as we drove down to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. The real Aigues-Mortes impressed me as much as Barrès's description had done, and we lingered a long while at the foot of its ramparts, inhaling the stillness of the summer night. For the first time in my life I slept under a mosquito net; and for the first time, too, I saw rows of cypresses bent and twisted by the mistral, and learned the true colour of an olive tree. When I reached Les Baux, at night, again for the first time, the wind was blowing; fires twinkled down in the plain, and a fire was crackling in the grate at the Reine Jeanne, where we were the only guests. We had dinner at a little table close to the fireplace, and drank a wine the name of which, 'Le Mas de la dame', I recall to this day. For the first time ever I strolled through Avignon; we lunched on fruit and buns in a park overlooking the Rhône, under a glorious sky.

It was drizzling in Paris the next day. Herbaud had sent me a nasty little note, finally breaking off our friendship. Madame Lemaire wondered whether I had been right in refusing to yield to him, while Sartre was fulminating against the military authorities, who were releasing him later than he had reckoned. And how strange it was, after ten days of the closest intimacy, to find a sudden vast gulf (as I thought at the time) forming between Pagniez and me! The lesson of this homecoming was that even the happiest hour has its harsh moments, its occasional patches of shadow in which regret can take root and spring up.

At the age of nineteen, despite my ignorance and incompetence, I had genuinely wanted to write: I felt myself an exile, whose one remedy against solitude lay in self-expression. But now I no longer experienced this urge at all. In one way or another, every book is an appeal for help: but to whom, at this point, should I appeal – and for what help? I had all I could want. My emotions, my joys and pleasures, all constantly dragged me forward into the future with overwhelming intensity. Faced with such a press of people and events, I lacked the distance which lends perspective to one's judgements and enables one to discuss them. I could not bring myself to give up anything, and hence I was incapable of making my choice; the result was that I sank into a delectable but chaotic stew. As far as my past life was concerned, I did, it is true, feel a reaction against it: I had had more than enough of that phase. But it neither stirred me to nostalgia, which might have made me want to revive it, nor did it fire the kind of grudging resentment that drives one to a settling of old scores. I felt mere indifference, for which silence seemed the only appropriate expression.

Meanwhile, remembering my previous resolutions – not that Sartre would ever let me forget them – I decided to start work on a novel. I sat down on one of my orange-covered chairs, breathed in the fumes of the paraffin stove, and stared, with a perplexed eye, at the blank sheet of paper in front of me: I had no idea what to write *about*. Any literary work involves a portrayal of the world; I found the world's crude immediacy stupefying, and saw nothing in it; therefore

I had no viewpoint of it to present. My only way out of this difficulty was by copying the imagery that other writers had employed for the task: without admitting it to myself, I was indulging in pastiche, an always regrettable habit. But why did I make things worse by choosing *Le Grand Meaulnes* and *Dusty Answer* as my models? I had loved these books. I wanted literature to get away from common humanity, and they delighted me by opening up a magic world for my benefit. Jacques and Herbaud had encouraged my taste for sublimation of this sort, since they themselves both went in for it with some enthusiasm. Sartre, on the other hand, found all faking or illusion repellent; yet this did not stop his daily myth-making activities for our joint amusement, and in his own writings fable and legend still played a considerable part. At all events, he had, without success, advised me to be honest in my work: the only kind of honesty open to me at this point would have been silence.

So I set about manufacturing a story that, I hoped, would borrow a little of Alain Fournier's and Rosamond Lehmann's magic. There was an old château with a big park, where a young girl lived with her gloomy, taciturn father. One day, out on a walk, she passed three handsome, carefree young creatures who were staying in a nearby manor house for the holidays. She reminded herself that she was eighteen years old, and a sudden urge came upon her to go where she pleased and to see something of the world. She managed to get away to Paris, where she met a girl resembling Stépha, and an older woman rather like Madame Lemaire. She was to have had all sorts of most poetic adventures, but just what they were I never found out, since I gave up at the third chapter. I became vaguely aware that the magic wasn't working in my case, though this didn't prevent me from chasing it stubbornly, and for a long time. I still kept a touch of original 'Delly' about me, which was very noticeable in the first drafts of my novels.

My work lacked all real conviction. Sometimes I felt I was doing a school assignment, sometimes that I had lapsed into parody. But in any case there was no hurry. I was happy, and for the time being that was enough. Yet after a while I found it *wasn't* enough. I had hoped for something very different from myself. I no longer kept a private diary, but I still scribbled things down in a notebook from time to