



BRILL



brill.com/sdbs

Editor's Introduction / Présentation du numéro

Jennifer McWeeny

Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, USA

jmcweeny@wpi.edu

In a paradox that twists time and tangles the line between life and death, Simone de Beauvoir has published a book thirty-four years after she died. *Les Inséparables* was released by Éditions de L'Herne on October 7, 2020.¹ Less than a year later, two English translations of the at-once old and new novella are at our fingertips. Vintage Books and Ecco Press respectively published *The Inseparables* on September 2, 2021 and *Inseparable* on September 7, 2021.² Translations in several other languages are in process.³ Finished, typed, and kept private since 1954, Beauvoir's latest story is both familiar like a childhood friend and revelatory like a first kiss. It's a tale about the religion of desire—an irreverent religion that speaks not of prior lives nor afterlives, but of this irredeemably sensuous life lived in the present. Practitioners of this faith *want*: particular people, bodies, tastes, time, freedom, opportunities. Theirs is an orientation that roots them in the world, opening them to touch, companionship, nourishment, isolation, risk, and loss.

That *The Inseparables* has come into our lives during a global pandemic, at a time when being in the presence of others exposes us to infection—when *separation* is precisely what protects us from illness and death—enables us to receive its story differently than we might have otherwise. Nestled in its pages, I am nostalgic for a time when action and desire flowed easily and unthinkingly, when it was second nature to create something of the moment and throw

1 Simone de Beauvoir, *Les Inséparables*, Paris, Éditions de L'Herne, 2020. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation *INS*.

2 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Inseparables*, trans. Lauren Elkin, London, Vintage Books, 2021; *Inseparable*, trans. Sandra Smith, New York, Ecco, 2021. Subsequent references to the latter English translation are indicated by the abbreviation *INSE*, although I refer to the English title of Beauvoir's novella throughout this introduction as "*The Inseparables*" because this rendering retains the tension between plurality and unity present in the French title.

3 *The New York Times* reports that seventeen countries have so far secured the translation rights to *Les Inséparables*. Alexandra Alter and Laura Cappelle, "Coming Soon: New Fiction from Simone de Beauvoir," *New York Times*, April 28, 2020.

myself into becoming other than what I am. I remember the evening glow on people's faces at a party I attended on rue de l'Odéon on March 14, 2020, on the eve of the first closure of public places in France. I remember the cocktails of conversation and perfume, the rhythm of music pulsing up the body, the charm and character of my companions, the color of the sky above the Église Saint-Sulpice just after midnight. How chaste I have become since, in these infectious times. My present commerce with people, scents, sounds, tastes, and textures is mediated by screens, masks, and hesitation in the face of an unknown future. Always and already separated, I worry about how comfortable I am now being at a distance from others and myself.

The writings featured in this issue engage primarily two of Beauvoir's texts: *The Inseparables* and *The Second Sex*.⁴ This fecund juxtaposition draws our attention to five crucial years in Beauvoir's evolution as a writer and thinker: the period from 1949 to 1954. Focusing on this transitional time between the essays and novels of Beauvoir's early years and the memoirs, journalistic accounts, and feminist writings of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s highlights the movement of history. The six articles and one memoir that make up this issue approach the question of history (and specifically, Beauvoir's [relation to] history) in various ways, from examining the mid-century reception of *The Second Sex* in France and analyzing the meanings of its chapters on "History" to illuminating distinctions between fiction, memoir, memory, and real life in reference to *The Inseparables* and constructing a feminist memoir of a family who immigrated to France from Tunisia in 1951. After discussing the content of this issue in the first two sections, I derive a philosophy of "inseparables" from Beauvoir's novella in the final section and suggest that it might help us navigate current conditions of disconnection.

1 History and *The Second Sex*

The lead article of this volume and issue is this year's *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* Featured Translation / Traduction annuelle: Sylvie Chaperon's "Outcry over *The Second Sex*," which was originally published in French in 1999 and has been translated into English by Sophia Millman. "Outcry over *The Second Sex*" is one of the first studies of the French reception of Beauvoir's magnum opus in the

4 *INS; INSE*; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010 [1949]. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation ss.

years immediately following its publication (1949–1951).⁵ Chaperon's historical analysis of more than thirty reviews of *The Second Sex* that appeared in French journals and newspapers not only gives insight into the complicated political landscape of post-World War II France, but also reveals social attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and feminism prevalent at the time.

In 1949, French politics was divided between the Right and Left, yet the reception of Beauvoir's text was not split along these lines. Communists as well as Gaullists criticized *The Second Sex*, albeit for different reasons. Whereas the latter sought to protect the traditional, heterosexual family against progressive ideas, the former criticized Beauvoir's individualistic, psychological approach to women's oppression. Others, such as François Mauriac and Julien Gracq, framed the debate in terms of the relationship between morality and literature.⁶ Curiously, few commentators emphasized Beauvoir's feminism.⁷ Most reviewers, whether defending Beauvoir or criticizing her, avoided this charged term along with political questions about women's rights. Chaperon concludes that what was not discussed in the reviews circumscribes a sphere of acceptable public discourse in post-World War II France. As she explains, "The outcry over *The Second Sex* was thus nothing less than a question about what could or could not attain a political, or at least social, status—that is, it was about specifying what could or could not be debated collectively." Beauvoir's transgression of social norms is less about the specific views that she advocates in *The Second Sex* than it is about the fact that she brought women's lives, experiences, and thoughts into the public arena.

Chaperon's article, "Outcry over *The Second Sex*," when it was first published marked the beginning of a new era in Beauvoir studies because it understands European history through Beauvoir's oeuvre and illuminates that oeuvre through the study of history, thus opening the door for disciplinary analyses beyond the literary and philosophical ones that predominate in Beauvoir scholarship. The following year, in 2000, Chaperon published the authoritative

5 See also Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 119–157; Jo-Ann Pilardi, "The Changing Critical Fortunes of *The Second Sex*," *History & Theory*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1993, 51–73; and Ingrid Galster, "Le scandale du 'Deuxième Sexe,'" *L'Histoire*, no. 232, May 1999, pp. 19–21.

6 François Mauriac, "Demande d'enquête," *Le Figaro*, May 30, 1949, p. 1; "La Question posée," *Le Figaro*, June 6, 1949, p. 1; Julien Gracq, "La Littérature à l'estomac," *Empédocle*, no. 7, January 1950, 3–33, pp. 24–26.

7 For exceptions, see Colette Audry, "Le Deuxième Sexe et la presse: Livre très lu, mal lu et mal compris," *Combat*, no. 1700, December 22, 1949, p. 5; and Jane Albert-Hesse, "Esclave, victime, complice? C'est toute la condition de la femme que traite Simone de Beauvoir avec *Le Deuxième Sexe*," *Franc-Tireur*, November 3, 1949, p. 4.

book on Beauvoir and history: *Les Années Beauvoir: 1945–1970*.⁸ Over the last two decades, research on the historical reception of *The Second Sex* and Beauvoir's feminism has blossomed.⁹ Ellie Anderson's review of Judith G. Coffin's *Sex, Love, and Letters: Writing Simone de Beauvoir* in this issue covers one of the most recent contributions to this line of scholarship. Such projects have dovetailed with the rise of research in translation studies and linguistics that traces how the content of *The Second Sex* travels to different languages and cultures.¹⁰ Revisiting Chaperon's pathbreaking article today in its English translation invites us to think comparatively, noting similarities and differences not only between Beauvoir's time and our own, but also between the history of Francophone and Anglophone receptions of her work.¹¹ The next phase of historical studies is starting to pursue these questions, as is research undertaken from the perspectives of other social sciences, including anthropology, sociology, geography, political science, and psychology.

Three articles in this issue—those by Debra Bergoffen, Sameema Zahra, and Amie Zimmer—approach the question of history differently than Chaperon: rather than consider historical receptions of *The Second Sex*, they analyze the view of history developed in the book itself. Specifically, they look to Beauvoir's historical explanations of how male domination arose in society and why it endures. As Beauvoir argues in the first chapter of the “History” part of *The Second Sex*, it is because all human beings value transcendence that the sex

8 Sylvie Chaperon, *Les Années Beauvoir: 1945–1970*, Paris, Fayard, 2000.

9 See, for example, Min Dongchau, “Awakening Again: Traveling Feminism in China in the 1980s,” *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 28, 2005, pp. 274–288; Rosie Germain, “Reading *The Second Sex* in 1950's America,” *Historical Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1041–1062; Julia Bullock, “From ‘Dutiful Daughters’ to ‘Coeds Ruining the Nation’: Reception of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in Early Postwar Japan,” *Gender & History*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2018, pp. 271–285; Marine Rouch, “Simone de Beauvoir et ses lectrices: hypothèse d'une influence réciproque (1949–1971),” *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2019, pp. 225–251; Judith G. Coffin, *Sex, Love, and Letters: Writing Simone de Beauvoir*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2020.

10 See, for example, Bonnie Mann and Martina Ferrari, eds., “*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient...*”: *The Life of a Sentence*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017; Sylvie Chaperon and Marine Rouch, eds., “Reading and Translating *The Second Sex* Globally / Traduire et lire *Le Deuxième Sexe* à l'échelle globale,” special issue, *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2; Pauline Henry-Tierney, “The Many Faces of Beauvoir: Paratranslated Materiality in *Le Deuxième Sexe*,” in *Translating Feminism: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Text, Place, and Agency*, ed. Maud Anne Bracke, Julia C. Bullock, Penelope Morris, and Kristina Schulz, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave MacMillan, 2021, pp. 43–65.

11 In France today, scholars are studying *The Second Sex* with fresh eyes. See Manon Garcia and Raphaël Ehram, eds., “*Perspectives philosophiques sur 'Le Deuxième Sexe' de Simone de Beauvoir paru il y a 70 ans*,” special issue, *Philosophie*, vol. 144, January 2020.

most associated with transcendent activities in various stages of economic and technological development came to assume and retain a superior position in society.¹² Bergoffen, Zahra, and Zimmer each sheds new light on Beauvoir's claim, sometimes expanding upon it and other times challenging it.

In "Caught in the Crossfire between Being a Woman and Being a Refugee: The Politics of Refugee-Camp Sexual Violence," Debra Bergoffen extends her previous work on sexual violence to address specific forms of violence experienced by women refugees.¹³ According to Bergoffen, sexual violence is unlike other types of violence because it is used to deny an ontological reciprocity between the sexes by establishing that man is the only Subject. In refugee camps, man's status as the Subject is undermined by his statelessness. Following Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, Bergoffen claims that refugees lose their right to have rights and are reduced to "bare life" (*zoë*) by the states that do not recognize them.¹⁴ In such contexts, sexual violence against women is one way for man to re-establish his status as the Subject by affirming the sexual difference that would rank men superior to women. Contrary to United Nations reports that suggest that the prevalence of sexual violence in refugee camps is a result of the breakdown of traditional gender norms, Bergoffen argues that it is precisely these norms that are amplified in the camps, thus revealing the mutually constitutive relationship between sexual violence and patriarchy that is often obscured in everyday contexts.

Bergoffen's analysis suggests that Beauvoir's ideas about sexual violence shifted in the years following the publication of *The Second Sex*. As she explains, "It is not until Beauvoir takes up the case of Djamila Boupacha and becomes involved in the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women that she invites us to connect the dots between the ways that lessons in violence available to boys but denied to girls discussed in *The Second Sex* become the tools of sexual violence that solidify the patriarchal configuration of the sexual difference." In other words, the early Beauvoir did not link violence with the maintenance of male superiority in society. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, Beauvoir was questioning her previous claim that women build solidarity with men of their own races and classes rather than with other women, and began

12 ss, pp. 74–75.

13 Debra B. Bergoffen, *Contesting the Politics of Genocidal Rape: Affirming the Dignity of the Vulnerable Body*, New York, Routledge, 2012; "Why Rape? Lessons from *The Second Sex*," in *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Hoboken, NJ, Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, pp. 311–324.

14 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1968 [1951]; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998. *Homo Sacer* was originally published in 1995.

to attend closely to women's strategies for resisting sexism, violence against women, colonialism, and state violence.¹⁵

Whereas Bergoffen examines how sexual violence maintains patriarchy, Sameema Zahra considers the ways that patriarchy maintains sexual difference by falsely establishing a distinction between production and reproduction in "Risking Life versus Giving Life: Revisiting Simone de Beauvoir." Referencing Beauvoir's concept of "project" from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Zahra argues that pregnancy and motherhood are not necessarily natural functions, but can instead be understood as transcendent activities that create values and open the future. According to Zahra, pregnancy constitutes a risk worthy of transcendence (a "Risk") because the woman shares her body with another being, destabilizes the given, and is ambivalently directed toward an unknown future. Consistent with the recent trend in Beauvoir studies advanced by Sarah LaChance Adams, Sara Cohen Shabot, and others that highlights the complexity of Beauvoir's views on motherhood, Zahra criticizes hasty equations of pregnancy and motherhood with immanence, repetition, and biological function.¹⁶ She writes, "[Beauvoir's] famous passage about 'risking life' is instead meant to expose the biased lens of patriarchy, which, if removed, dissolves the opposition between giving life and Risking life." Reversing Beauvoir's account of the origins of male domination, Zahra suggests that women would not think of pregnancy and motherhood as mere "functions" if patriarchy were not already trying to perpetuate itself by insisting that the social roles of men and women conform to the dichotomies of transcendence/immanence and creation/function.

Amie Zimmer extends the discussion of male domination from ethics to epistemology by considering the ways that knowers and knowledge are sexed in patriarchal contexts. In "Husserl, Beauvoir, and the Problem of the Sexes: Standpoint Epistemology and Feminist Politics," she shows how Beauvoir's notion of historical subjectivity, which is indebted to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, makes a significant intervention in status-quo associations of men's perspectives with objectivity and universality. By positioning women's first-person perspectives as "epistemically authoritative," *The Second Sex* reveals that the very concept of objectivity is sexed in a way that confers superiority on men. We find this phenomenological critique not in the second volume on "Lived Experience," as we might expect, but in the first volume on

15 ss, p. 8.

16 Sarah LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, and What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014; Sara Cohen Shabot, "Laboring with Beauvoir: In Search of the Embodied Subject in Childbirth," in *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Hengehold and Bauer, pp. 134-145.

"Facts and Myths." As Zimmer writes, "Beauvoir's chapters on history in *The Second Sex* do not engage in anything like 'mere' description, but actively engage with history (through the production and narrativization of empirical information) and challenge history (by illuminating the contingencies of something like an *a priori* condition for history)." In this sense, Beauvoir's history chapters are a practice in *generative phenomenology* and, as such, can establish a feminist "standpoint" that is both historical and collective.

The confluence of interest in Beauvoir's history chapters in this non-thematic or standard issue suggests that Beauvoir studies may be shifting its attention back to the first volume of *The Second Sex* after the widespread prioritization of the second volume during the 1990s and 2000s, when many scholars were establishing a phenomenological reading of Beauvoir's view of sexual difference.¹⁷ This turn to the first volume also reflects a renewed interest in Marxism, historical materialism, and critiques of capitalism during this global pandemic when widespread dependence on laborers, the suffering caused by workplace exploitation, and the social consequences of income inequality are becoming more and more pronounced.

2 Memoir, Memory, and *The Inseparables*

Whereas the mid-century reception of *The Second Sex* reflected a social outcry over its subject matter, the current reception of *The Inseparables* has been overwhelmingly positive, even if, like the early readers of *The Second Sex*, contemporary reviewers sometimes evade what is said in the book. Dozens of reviews of *Les Inséparables* and its English translations have already appeared, and a number of online webinars and interviews about the text have taken place. Three questions, in particular, dominate these initial interpretations. First, readers are wondering why Beauvoir never published the novella in her lifetime. Common hypotheses include that its content was "too intimate" to be published while she was alive; that she and Jean-Paul Sartre judged its quality wanting; that she was deterred by the fierce criticism she received five years

17 See, for example, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex,"* trans. Linda Schenck, Hanover, NH, Wesleyan University Press, 1996 [1991]; Debra B. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities,* Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1997; Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree, eds., *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir,* Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2001; and Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir,* New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

before for writing *The Second Sex*; and that she had already decided to transition to writing memoirs rather than fiction.

Second, and by far the question that occupies the most interest, is that of identifying the precise type of relationship that occurs between the novella's main characters, Sylvie and Andrée. Reviewers have employed a wide range of terms to explain their connection, including "devotion," "unintimate love," "cerebral love," "physical attraction," "ambiguous friendship," "*amitié amoureuse*" (romantic friendship), "suppressed lesbianism," "LGBTQ love," and "lesbian passion."¹⁸ This focus on clarifying the nature of the protagonists' relationship has led reviewers (male reviewers, in particular) to attribute various sexual orientations to Sylvie and, by extension, Beauvoir herself, as the idea that the novella is based on Beauvoir's real-life friendship with Élisabeth Lacoïn, commonly known as "Zaza," lures readers to conflate character and author. Beauvoir has been described as "heterosexual," attracted to the "alpha male" Claude Lanzmann, possessing a "second sexuality," "lesbian," "cryptolesbian," "bisexual," "pansexual," and "polyamorous."¹⁹ Commentators are also debating whether applying our current vernacular of orientations to Beauvoir's text is anachronistic or revisionist, and whether the story of Sylvie and Andrée is sufficiently outdated as to lack legibility in contemporary landscapes that recognize multiple, fluid, and nonbinary gender identities.²⁰

The third question, not unrelated to the second, asks about the novella's position vis-à-vis categories and periods of literature. Some reviewers see *The*

18 Skye C. Cleary, "Her Brilliant Friend: Simone de Beauvoir's Long-Suppressed Portrait of Devotion in Adolescence," *Times Literary Supplement*, September 24, 2021; Merve Emre, "Simone de Beauvoir's Lost Novel of Early Love," *The New Yorker*, August 30, 2021; Deborah Levy, "Deborah Levy on Simone de Beauvoir's Lost Autobiographical Novella *The Inseparables*," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2021; Léo Juanole, "'Les Inséparables' ou l'ambiguë amitié de Simone de Beauvoir pour Zaza," *Vanity Fair*, October 1, 2020; Judith Thurman and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, "On *Les Inséparables*, Simone de Beauvoir's Unpublished Novel," Villa Albertine, video, 1:03:04, October 22, 2020; Boyd Tonkin, "The Inseparables by Simone de Beauvoir Review—Her Lost Novella Is Finally Published," *The Times*, August 28, 2021; Jamie Wareham, "Why Simone de Beauvoir's Same-Sex Love Story Nearly Wasn't Published (Until Now)," *Forbes*, October 7, 2020; Paul B. Preciado, "La deuxième sexualité de Simone de Beauvoir," *Libération*, October 2, 2020.

19 Arnaud Viviant, Frédéric Beigbeder, Olivia de Lamberterie, Jean-Claude Raspiegeas, and Jérôme Garcin, "Simone de Beauvoir, amours lesbiennes et roman posthume: le Masque à lu 'Les Inséparables,'" FranceInter, podcast, 6:34, November 17, 2020; Preciado, "La deuxième sexualité"; Alexandre Antolin, "Note de lecture: *Les Inséparables* de Simone de Beauvoir," *La Mafia Lavande*, November 13, 2020; David Jack, "Interstitial Spaces: A Posthumous Coming-of-age Novel by Simone de Beauvoir," *Australian Book Review*, no. 438, December 2021.

20 See, for example, Viviant et al., "Simone de Beauvoir"; and Antolin, "Note de lecture."

Inseparables as a novel in the classic French tradition of *Madame Bovary*, *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and *La Princesse de Clèves*.²¹ Others have compared *The Inseparables* to nineteenth-century Russian literature exemplified by Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* or to contemporary literatures of female friendship, such as Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Quartet*.²² Still others see Beauvoir's novella in narrower terms as consistent with "lesbian literature of the 1950s" in the vein of Rosamond Lehmann, Béatrix Beck, Djuna Barnes, and Violette Leduc.²³

Different from these reviews in genre, length, and content, the articles about *Les Inséparables* featured in this issue develop and defend theses about the novella and situate Beauvoir's latest publication in relation to her oeuvre and her life history. Whereas short, online formats that often house the popular-review genre encourage a focus on items of public interest surrounding *The Inseparables* (Why did Beauvoir decide not to publish the novella? What is Beauvoir's sexuality? Which writers are most like Beauvoir?), Éliane Lecarme-Tabone and Philippe Devaux present interpretations of the text itself in an academic style that provides detailed analysis and citations. By shifting the genre of discourse, they open current and future conversations in important ways.

Éliane Lecarme-Tabone's article "Des *Inséparables* aux *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*" is one of the first published on *Les Inséparables*, and it is likely to be a definitive resource for scholars working on the novella, as well as on Beauvoir's memoirs. Here Lecarme-Tabone traces the genesis of Beauvoir's turn to autobiography to the 1954 manuscript. She argues that *Les Inséparables* is a crucial point of transition between two phases of Beauvoir's writing: her fiction period from *When Things of the Spirit Came First* to *The Mandarins* (1938–1954) and her memoir period from *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* to *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1958–1981). Although Beauvoir attributes aspects of her own experience to several characters across her fiction (for example, Marguerite, Marcelle, and Chantal in *When Things of the Spirit Come First*), it is not until *Les Inséparables* that she concentrates her own biographical details into one character who assumes a first-person perspective. According to Lecarme-Tabone, Sylvie's saying "I" in the novella foreshadows Beauvoir's autobiographical turn.

21 Benita Eisler, "Inseparable' Review: A Lost Story of Youth from Simone de Beauvoir," *Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2021; Tonkin, "The Inseparables." See also Jean-Louis Jeannelle's review in this issue.

22 Kate Kirkpatrick, "Matters of Love and Death," *Literary Review*, September 2021; Tatiana Nuñez, "Being Single Is Not a Vocation': On Simone de Beauvoir's 'Inseparable,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 28, 2021.

23 Antolin, "Note de lecture"; Preciado, "La deuxième sexualité."

Lecarme-Tabone furthers the case that *Les Inséparables* is a precursor to autobiography by enumerating important similarities between the novella and *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, such as their parallel endings. But it is the differences between the two works, in particular, that enable us to see the pull of memoir in Beauvoir's literary evolution. Whereas the genre of fiction foregrounds the drama and emotion of the experience, memoir allows Beauvoir to emphasize the social and political implications of the story and enact a sharper critique of the bourgeois milieu that suffocated Zaza. Lecarme-Tabone writes, "On peut donc conclure que, dans les deux textes, Beauvoir décrit, avec toute sa complexité, le sentiment intense que lui inspira Zaza, mais que, dans *Les Inséparables*, la forme narrative choisie et les transpositions opérées en exaltent les aspects passionnels" (We can thus conclude that, in the two texts, Beauvoir describes the intense feeling that Zaza inspires in her with all its complexity, but that, in *The Inseparables*, the chosen narrative form and the transpositions operate to exalt the emotional aspects).

Philippe Devaux also assumes a comparative approach to the novella in "À propos des *Inséparables* de Simone de Beauvoir." Unlike Lecarme-Tabone, however, Devaux is not comparing works in Beauvoir's oeuvre, but rather the fictional account of Andrée with the real-life story of Zaza. Fiction of this sort tempts us to read the story of Sylvie and Andrée as a "témoignage" (firsthand account) of Simone and Zaza. Alternatively, Devaux implores readers to take seriously the first page of the text: "[C]eci n'est pas vraiment votre histoire mais seulement une histoire inspirée de nous. Vous n'étiez pas Andrée, je ne suis pas cette Sylvie qui parle en mon nom" (This is not truly your story but simply a story inspired by us. You were not Andrée, and I am not the Sylvie who speaks in my name).²⁴ Devaux provides a wealth of historical details that expose important differences between the story of Andrée and that of Zaza, and considers the literary reasons that may have motivated these adjustments. For example, Zaza went to Berlin for three months, whereas Andrée was going to be sent to Cambridge for two years, and Zaza's parents did not have an arranged marriage as Andrée's did (in fact, Zaza's parents' families opposed their marriage because they were first cousins). In addition, although Sylvie confesses her love to Andrée late one night in the kitchen at the latter's vacation home, it was actually Zaza who first confessed her love for Simone in a letter dated July 21, 1927.²⁵ Devaux explains that "[p]ar ces libertés prises avec la chronologie réelle,

24 *INS*, p. 21; *INSE*, p. v.

25 Letter from Élisabeth Lacoïn to Simone de Beauvoir, July 21, 1927, in *Zaza, 1907–1929: Correspondance et carnets de Élisabeth Lacoïn* by Élisabeth Lacoïn, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004, pp. 94–95.

par le choix de conjuguer ainsi dans la fiction des circonstances et des événements séparés dans la réalité, la romancière des *Inséparables* produit pour le lecteur un effet cumulatif" (by taking these liberties with the actual story, by thus choosing to bring together in fiction circumstances and events separated in reality, the author of *The Inseparables* produces a cumulative effect for the reader). Devaux's study is also an invitation to explore Zaza's writings themselves, which are compiled in the book *Zaza*, and to consider her own accounts of the time and her relationships alongside Beauvoir's.²⁶

The two scholarly reviews of *Les Inséparables* in this issue—one in English by Ursula Tidd and the other in French by Jean-Louis Jeannelle—bring further analysis of the novella. Of special note is Tidd's emphasis on how oppression is transmitted from mother to daughter and how the critique of marriage presented in *The Second Sex* is amplified in *The Inseparables* (a detail also discussed by Lecarme-Tabone). Jeannelle, for his part, explores Sylvie's and Andrée's divergent attitudes to religion and poses the "*jeune fille*" (girl) as a symbolic character at an existential crossroads like Jean Genet's "thief" or Violette Leduc's "bastard."²⁷

The final text in this issue is a memoir by Joelle Palmieri titled "L'héritière" that traces the author's lineage in a family that immigrated to France from Tunisia after World War II. Focused on similar subject matter as *The Inseparables*, namely, the coming-of-age of a French girl trying to twist free of social restrictions, "L'héritière" provides another perspective and genre from which to explore Beauvoir's novella. Palmieri's memoir follows the young girl Joelle (Jo-elle), named after her maternal and paternal grandfathers who were both called Joseph, from her birth in 1959 to her political awakening to feminism, anticolonialism, Marxism, and anarchism in the 1970s. Joelle is the youngest of four sisters, two of whom were born in Tunisia before the family immigrated to France in 1951. Their father, Janvier, also born in Tunisia, was a mechanic and electrician in the French navy in Bizerte during the war. His father's ancestors were political and economic refugees from Eastern Europe who started new lives (and were given new names) in Italy in the nineteenth century. Born in the 1890s in Algeria, Joelle's paternal grandfather joined the French army around 1910, but was crossed off the register and deemed "*apatride*" (stateless)

26 Lacoïn, *Zaza*, 1907–1929.

27 Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York, Grove Press, 2018 [1949]; Violette Leduc, *La Bâtarde* [*The Bastard*], trans. Derek Coltman, Funks Grove, IL, Dalkey Archive Press, 2003 [1964]. See also Jean-Louis Jeannelle, "Simone de Beauvoir et l' 'autobiographie existentialiste': une réévaluation," *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2019, 67–86, p. 73.

and of “unknown origin” in 1922. Joelle’s mother, Consolata, was a seamstress who was especially religious after having miraculously survived the Spanish flu at age nine. Janvier and Consolata married in 1943, but only after Janvier agreed to embrace Catholicism and take Holy Communion. At this point, Consolata became a French citizen like her husband, and their four daughters would also be French citizens.

We find many similarities in the trajectories of Palmieri’s protagonist, Joelle, and Sylvie in *Les Inséparables*, such as their resistance to Catholicism and the social roles prescribed to women. Describing her father’s views, Palmieri writes, “[L]es filles doivent rester sages et pures, se dédier aux tâches du foyer, se marier, respecter leur mari, faire des enfants et les élever” (Girls must remain good and pure, dedicate themselves to tasks of the household, get married, respect their husband, have children and raise them). Like Sylvie, Joelle was at the top of her class as a young girl, but the stories of their lives diverge as they grow. As recent immigrants to France, Joelle’s family lives in poverty and strives to assimilate into French culture. They first stayed in her uncle’s garage in Villeparisis, then in a small shack with no running water, heat, or bathroom in Clichy-sous-Bois, and then in a “habitation à loyer modéré” (HLM) (low-income housing) in Nanterre.²⁸ Finally, in 1970, when Joelle was eleven years old, they settled in a small residence in Chatou. In Nanterre, Joelle and her sisters, being Tunisian immigrants, were protected from racism and colonial prejudices because it was the Algerian immigrants who were the primary subject of ridicule by the teachers. After moving to Chatou, however, Joelle experienced a shift in her social location: “Je deviens la bronzée, la basanée, l’étrangère” (I became the bronzed girl, the tanned girl, the foreign girl). By the time Joelle completes her *baccalauréat* in 1976, she is no longer at the top of her class. Palmieri’s memoir poses the questions of what women inherit from their families, religious backgrounds, economic classes, and citizenship statuses, and of how these inheritances can be transformed and transcended. Inspired by *She Came to Stay*, *The Mandarins*, and *The Second Sex*, Joelle eventually finds freedom in writing and journalism, and a feminist ancestor in Simone de Beauvoir.

28 On the relationship between French citizenship and the “banlieues,” see Mame-Fatou Niang, *Identités françaises: Banlieues, féminités et universalisme*, Leiden, Netherlands, Brill, 2019.

3 Fiction and Philosophy

In the spirit of the cross-fertilizations that animate this issue—between *The Second Sex* and *The Inseparables*, history and literature, the humanities and the social sciences, general-interest reviews and academic perspectives, the genres of fiction and memoir, research articles and creative writing, and the content and reception of texts—I offer an initial account of some of the philosophical themes expressed in *The Inseparables*. Specifically, I propose that we read “inseparables” as a philosophical concept that reveals “a practical and living attitude to the problems posed to the world today.”²⁹

The word “inseparables” (*les inséparables*), a plural noun used to personify and multiply the adjective “inseparable,” is used once in the novella beyond its title to describe the way that Sylvie’s and Andrée’s teachers referred to them when they were ten years old.³⁰ Additionally, the adjective form is utilized one time at the plot’s climax, when the two girls are fifteen and tell their secrets to each other late one night in the kitchen at Béthary.³¹ In Beauvoir’s real-life correspondence with Zaza, she uses the singular noun to refer to each of them, signing “*Votre inséparable*” (your inseparable), and, in her last letter to Zaza, calling her friend “*ma chère inséparable*” (my dear inseparable).³²

There are many meanings of “inseparables” in the novella that expose and develop the philosophical import of the concept. The first meaning signals proximity—both the physical proximity of sitting next to each other for nine years, whether in class or at the library studying for the *baccalauréat*, and the intellectual proximity of sharing each other’s notebooks and discussing ideas together, such as justice and equality.³³

We find a second sense of the term, however, when we see that, from the first paragraph of the novella, being “inseparables” is contrasted with the relationship of “communion.” Sylvie becomes an “*enfant sage*” (good girl) who conforms to the social and religious expectations of her milieu the day that she

29 Simone de Beauvoir, “What Is Existentialism?,” trans. Marybeth Timmermann, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2004, 323–326, p. 324. Essay originally published in 1947.

30 *INS*, p. 44; *INSE*, p. 18. The American translation of the text, *Inseparable*, has changed the noun to its adjective form here and in the title, as well as in the correspondence between Simone and Zaza appended to the novella.

31 *INS*, p. 83; *INSE*, p. 52.

32 “Documents Iconographiques” in *INS*; “Selected Letters between Simone de Beauvoir and Elisabeth ‘Zaza’ Lacoïn, 1920–1929” in *INSE*, pp. 142, 156, translations modified.

33 *INS*, p. 55; *INSE*, p. 28.

takes her first Holy Communion.³⁴ Unlike Andrée's father who "took Communion every Sunday with his family," Sylvie's father, Monsieur Lepage, never goes to mass.³⁵ Whereas communion is about connection through conformity and the act of losing oneself in order to uphold societal expectations, being inseparables involves forging a connection in the recognition of the other's individuality and uniqueness. Fittingly, the word "communion" erases the individuality of those who participate in the relationship, but the plural noun "inseparables" preserves their distinctness. Marriage is the ultimate act of communion and conformity. In the context of Andrée's Catholic milieu, this sacrament pledges piety, not only to God, but also to class, sex, heterosexuality, and the values of the bourgeoisie. Andrée and Pascal's engagement is foreshadowed by her taking Communion with him at church.³⁶ Like the love of God, the communion between Pascal and Andrée can obtain without corporeal nearness, without the sensual energy of having another body always in your field. Pascal easily accepts being separated from his fiancée for two years when Andrée's parents propose to send her to London.³⁷

The opposition between being inseparables and receiving communion opens upon a religion of desire that the two inseparables come to practice in the course of the novella. This religion prioritizes individuality over conformity, personality over materiality, presence over separation, and the contingency of the here and now over an absolute that would exist elsewhere. The plot follows a series of sacraments that are not "received" as they are in Catholicism, but are instead *created* through the actions of the protagonists. When they are young, Sylvie and Andrée are christened "the inseparables" because they insist upon sitting together.³⁸ As a consequence of her friendship with Andrée, Sylvie lets go of her old self, the "good girl" who did what others expected of her, and starts to become who she is. In this sense, becoming inseparables follows the inverse process of becoming a woman.³⁹ Rather than making one's body and oneself an object for another's desires, becoming inseparables involves Sylvie and Andrée making their bodies and lives their own through the realization

34 *INS*, pp. 22–23; *INSE*, p. 1.

35 *INS*, p. 34; *INSE*, p. 10.

36 *INS*, p. 109; *INSE*, p. 74.

37 *INS*, p. 155; *INSE*, p. 113.

38 *INS*, p. 44; *INSE*, p. 18, translation modified. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir uses the verb "*baptiser*" (to christen) in this context in her introduction to *INS*, 5–18, p. 8. See also afterword to *INSE*, 129–140, p. 132.

39 See Jennifer McWeeny, "The Second Sex of Consciousness: A New Temporality and Ontology for Beauvoir's 'Becoming a Woman,'" in *The Life of a Sentence*, ed. Mann and Ferrari, p. 262.

of their personal plans and desires. Visiting Andrée's bedroom, Sylvie has the urge to make the sign of the cross.⁴⁰ The book about Saint Anne, the patron saint of unmarried women, resting at Andrée's bedside suggests that the two have confirmed their faith in this unfaith. There is no sacrament of matrimony in the religion of desire, nor are there any last rites that would point to a world beyond this one.

The confessional chamber of this newfound creed is the kitchen at Andrée's family's vacation home in Béthary, infused with the incense of rising cake, brandy, and a late-night tête-à-tête. Andrée tells Sylvie that she had loved and kissed her neighbor, Bernard.⁴¹ Sylvie tells Andrée that she does not believe in God.⁴² Catholicism's sins of the flesh are virtues in this upside-down religion of desire. Just prior to their confessions, Sylvie and Andrée eat the terrestrial, sensual Eucharist of cherries soaked in brandy, reversing the order and meaning of sacraments in Catholicism. Whereas the dry, white wafer connects the Catholic parishioner to the body of Christ, the wet, red flesh of the cherries brings Sylvie to *her own* body and closer to Andrée. Sylvie tells Andrée how much she means to her and begins to intimate the depth of her feelings.⁴³ After this night, Andrée joins Sylvie in declining Communion at church that Sunday: "I don't take Communion anymore. I'm in a state of sin."⁴⁴ Now converted to a faith where conversion is never final but must be renewed again and again through action, the conflict between Andrée's new and old convictions is too much for her body to bear. The final scene of the novella returns to the color palette of the white wafer and the red cherries. Sylvie anoints the sick by laying three red roses on Andrée's grave. We could even say that in this moment Sylvie is ordained; she will model and proselytize the religion of desire—the religion of the inseparables—to others from that day on.

We find rituals of desire similar to those expressed in *The Inseparables* in the second unpublished chapter of *She Came to Stay*, which was submitted to Gallimard in 1938 with the first draft of the novel and removed from the final version published in 1943 at the editor's request.⁴⁵ The first excised chapter of *She Came to Stay* describes the protagonist's girlhood in many of the same terms as Sylvie's is described at the beginning of *The Inseparables*: the nine-year-old

40 *INS*, p. 45; *INSE*, p. 19.

41 *INS*, pp. 80–81; *INSE*, pp. 50–51.

42 *INS*, p. 84; *INSE*, p. 53.

43 *INS*, pp. 82–83; *INSE*, pp. 51–52.

44 *INS*, p. 83; *INSE*, pp. 52–53, translation modified.

45 Barbara Klaw, "L'Invitée Castrated: Sex, Simone de Beauvoir, and Getting Published, or, Why Must a Woman Hide her Sexuality?" *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 12, 1995, 126–138, p. 127.

Françoise Miquel “liked reading, did well at school, and went into terrible spells of rage when she was denied a treat.”⁴⁶ Young Françoise’s private moments, however, build a tension with the image of the “good girl” and suggest a splitting of her selves as she comes to know her own body and pleasures. The narration indicates in a roundabout way that Françoise liked to “tickle [herself] at length in that place where the skin is so soft and sticky when in bed at night.”⁴⁷

The second unpublished chapter chronicles Françoise’s evolving friendship with Élisabeth, a character who shares Zaza’s name and reflects many of her traits. Their first encounter is similar to that of Sylvie and Andrée in *The Inseparables*: Élisabeth arrives late to class and asks Françoise to borrow her notes; the two sit next to each other and become fast friends; Françoise compares herself to Élisabeth and concludes that “[n]othing had ever happened to her.”⁴⁸ After walking Élisabeth home from school one day, Françoise secretly watches her fix her hair in the mirror through a glass door:

She had taken her cap off and was combing her hair. The comb went down the red locks and the heavy shock of hair swelled and shivered on the back of her neck. Once, twice, ten times; with regular movement, the hand with red nails ran the comb through the copper-colored mane; the comb went again and again along the heaving wisps; once again; once again. It was fascinating. Françoise did not feel her body anymore; hair was brushing against the white, delicious and cruel flesh, caressing it.⁴⁹

When Françoise arrives home that evening, she goes to the study and imagines what Élisabeth is doing at that moment: “A supple body in a tight silk dress was lying down onto the cushions of a sofa and thick lips were blowing wisps of blue smoke.”⁵⁰ Françoise wants to know Élisabeth’s innermost life. She looks at all the objects in Élisabeth’s bedroom for clues as Sylvie looks at the objects in Andrée’s room and finds a story of another “saint” of women who choose their own values: Antigone.⁵¹ In the second unpublished chapter, Françoise’s mother

46 Simone de Beauvoir, “Two Unpublished Chapters from *She Came to Stay*,” trans. Sylvie Gautheron, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Simons with Timmermann and Mader, 41–75, p. 43. These chapters were published in French more than forty years after they were written as “Deux chapitres inédits de ‘L’Invitée,’” in *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier, Paris, Gallimard, 1979, pp. 275–331.

47 Beauvoir, “Two Unpublished Chapters,” p. 43.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 57.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

plays the role that Andrée's mother plays in *The Inseparables*: Madame Miquel has "the talk" about sex with her daughter and disapproves of her friendship with Élisabeth, calling it an "infatuation."⁵² Here, it is Élisabeth who marks the path to salvation in contrast to social expectations: "If one doesn't do as one likes, there's no point in living."⁵³ Élisabeth's captivating eccentricity motivates Françoise to be truly herself.⁵⁴ By the time we meet Élisabeth-the-woman in the published version of *She Came to Stay*, her former self, so full of life and personality, has undergone a slow decay as a result of her inability to find permanent values and to love herself in her social milieu. As Beauvoir explains in *The Prime of Life*, "[Élisabeth] yielded to the dizzying conviction that I had known in Zaza's company [...]: that universal truth—indeed, the very essence of the universe as we know it—belonged to *other people*."⁵⁵

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir speaks of existential philosophy in religious terms, claiming that we convert to this faith by refusing to "suppress [our] instincts, desires, plans, and passions."⁵⁶ Inseparables are the practitioners of existentialism; they support and encourage one another's projects and sensuality. They are the opposite of those whose selves are ironically consumed by a social communion that would erase a person's individuality in order to preserve the status quo. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir's explanation of Zaza's death is relevant here: "Zaza died because she tried to be herself and was convinced that such a desire was evil."⁵⁷ Inseparables save each other by affirming each other's selves in a world where no one is saved in the end and nothing is guaranteed. Beauvoir's image of "inseparables" is an image of our existential condition—the desire to know others and be known in turn, the tension between the seductions of conformity and the need for self-expression, the ways that love and friendship are antidotes to isolation, and the weight of history and memory that trails us all.

Not coincidentally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the word "*inséparable*" (inseparable) to describe emotional connection and bodily presence in one of his earliest essays, "Being and Having," written seven years after Zaza's death.⁵⁸

52 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

55 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green, 2nd ed., New York, Lancer Books, 1973 [1962], p. 412.

56 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, Secaucus, NJ, Citadel Press, 1997 [1948], p. 14. I thank Noreen Khawaja for drawing my attention to this passage.

57 Le Bon de Beauvoir, introduction to *INS*, p. 9; afterword to *INSE*, p. 133.

58 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Being and Having," trans. Michael B. Smith, in *Texts and Dia-*

He writes, “[I]n situations such as hope, despair, promise, and invocation, [the subject] tends toward the other and becomes inseparable from that other.”⁵⁹ Receiving this posthumous yet living gift of *The Inseparables* at this moment in history reminds us of what it means to overcome separation, inhabit our bodies, and affirm our desires. Facing an uncertain future, I wonder if Beauvoir’s new-old novella could be less a story about times past than it is about times yet to come.

logues: On Philosophy, Politics, and Culture, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and James J. Barry, Jr., Amherst, NY, Humanity Books, 1992, pp. 101–107. Essay first published in 1936.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 102, translation modified.