

Conformity and Rebellion

Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*

Recalling her early childhood, Simone de Beauvoir notes “being a child filled me with passionate resentment, my feminine gender, never”(55). As a student at the Sorbonne, she recalls in a similar vein that “I certainly didn’t regret being a woman; on the contrary it afforded me great satisfaction” (295).

What aspects of de Beauvoir’s upbringing, education, and general life experience do you think made her feel this way? Do you think she would have felt differently had she had a brother?

When she decides to study at the Sorbonne to become a *lycee* professor, Simone’s father is both proud and saddened. Why does her academic brilliance evoke mixed emotions within him?

Both Simone and her friend Zaza were brought up in devoutly Catholic families. While Simone breaks away from the Church and becomes an “unbeliever” at 15, Zaza remains devout. What differences in the girls’ family lives and social positions do you think might have influenced the different paths that they took? Why is Zaza’s mother able to exercise a kind of control over her daughter’s life that Mme de Beauvoir is not?