

La Vanguardia, Sunday 27 March 2011

Couple Secrets

HAZEL ROWLEY (1951 – 2011), biographer

Born in London, Hazel Rowley emigrated with her parents to Australia just after her eighth birthday. Rowley, who recently died in New York at the age of 59 following a cerebral haemorrhage, graduated from the University of Adelaide and, after obtaining a PhD in French and German, worked as a lecturer at Deakin University, Melbourne.

Rowley, who always wanted to specialise in biographies, published her first work on the Australian novelist Christina Stead to great acclaim, from critics and readers alike, and was awarded several prizes in 1994. She also published a biography of Richard Wright.

However, it was in 2005 that her best-known and most controversial work appeared. *Tête-à-Tête* analysed the relationship of a couple of legendary intellectuals: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Some of the research material had previously appeared in Rowley's doctoral thesis on Simone de Beauvoir.

This book was written with the cooperation of Beauvoir's adopted daughter, Silvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, who gave Rowley access to previously unpublished letters between her adoptive mother and Sartre. Yet it wasn't easy. Arlette Elkaïm Sartre, who was the executor of his legacy, insisted that some of the material Rowley used should be removed from the final text. Two different editions appeared. The European version was bowdlerised while the other, for the American readership, gave explicit details of the couple's disagreements and battles. This version revealed the deals the couple made, for example over their both having other, contingent relationships. As Rowley says, they could both sleep with other people and be completely transparent about it. She shows how their pact ended up in deep-running intrigues and personal infernos. Hazel Rowley published her last book this year. This is a study of another famous couple: *Franklin and Eleanor: An Extraordinary Marriage*.