



Painted Shadow: A Life of Vivienne Eliot

Carole Seymour-Jones

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This biography of Vivienne Eliot completely belies the long-held view of her as merely a demented woman. When Tom and Vivienne married in 1915 they had known each other only a few months. The predatory and exploitative Bertrand Russell, under the guise of taking the Eliots under his wing, soon drew Vivienne into a sexual relationship. The couple joined the emotional merry-go-round of the Bloomsbury and Garsington circles and their marriage became the subject of speculation. Nevertheless Vivienne flourished for a while helping her husband with his literary work, contributing poems, essays and book reviews to his magazine. But by the time she was committed to an asylum in 1938, five years after Eliot had deserted her, this spontaneous and loving woman had become a sad and lonely figure. Out of this emotional turbulence came the poem "The Waste Land". Carole Seymour-Jones seeks to show that the poem cannot be understood without reference to the marriage. Based on papers both privately-owned and on university archives, and on Vivienne's own writings held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the author aims to offer a striking new picture of Eliot's first wife.

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