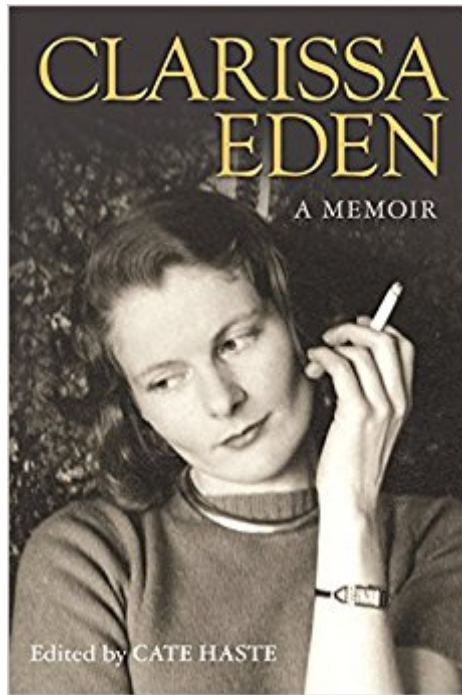


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Clarissa Eden: A Memoir



Synopsis

In 1955, at the astonishingly young age of 34, Clarissa Eden entered No. 10 Downing Street as the wife of the new Prime Minister, Anthony Eden. Born Clarissa Churchill in 1920, her uncle was the great Winston, and when she married the 55-year-old Eden, then Foreign Secretary, at Caxton Hall register office in 1952, there were crowds as big as the gathering that had cheered Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Wilding's wedding there six months earlier. A renowned beauty, she was at home with her mother's Liberal intellectual circle, and mixed in her youth with the pillars of Oxford's academic community, Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Bowra, and David Cecil among them. According to Antonia Fraser, she was 'the don's delight because she was beautiful and extremely intellectual.' Her close circle of friends included some of the leading cultural figures of the twentieth century, including Cecil Beaton, Evelyn Waugh, and Orson Welles. Her observations and insights into these men and their world provide a unique window into the mid 20th century. As the spouse of the most important man in Britain, the hostess at No. 10 and Chequers, Clarissa Eden was inevitably privy to a multitude of top-level secrets. The Suez crisis and Eden's ill health meant that she shared just four years of Anthony's political life and eighteen months as Prime Minister's wife. This individual, discriminating and honest memoir is her first account of extraordinary times.

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Customer Reviews

Clarissa is the young wife of England's leading politician whose life had been a flaming dedication to the Empire and all humanitarian ideals that were then believed to erase national lines. Anthony Eden

prefaced his work with dedication. What the Suez war did to the minds of his time was upsetting. Anthony remained, in theory, the ennobling Prime Minister that dedicated his life for the fulfillment of his historic mission: to preserve the Commonwealth. His main problem was when he saw the Empire sliding under their feet. Clarissa lived with the man who, if he had received more meaningful support from the superpower -USA- could have stopped and indeed eliminated the usual orgy permitted by inexperienced newcomers to the political arena in different parts of the Commonwealth World. Clarissa witnessed how startups have released their inhibitions and brought their ruling to the state of raw excitement which was driven to add the fateful effect on their people. Clarissa saw many emerging and young leaders schooled in a state in which the relation of the subject to the sovereign had no basis other than obedience; comfortable only in the presence of authority. Like her husband, she had combination of shrewdness, energy and intelligence with a political flexibility unseen in Europe since Talleyrand. The book is interesting to read.

Disappointing, but not surprising, this memoir reflects the sensibility and upbringing of its author. Although not looking for 'sensational', a little 'revealing' and 'insightful' would have been good. As the niece of Winston Churchill and the wife of that pure-British aristocrat, Anthony Eden, Clarissa Eden must have seen and known a lot. But oh so restrained is this memoir, that I had trouble finishing it without falling asleep. Has she forgotten? Is she too sensitive to her loves to share her insights? Or does she just lack the reviewing eye of mind? Unfortunately for us, she has not given us the opportunity to see through her windows into an age-of-drama past, a stage where giants walked and labored for our lives.

This is a brilliant memoir written by a woman of great intelligence and sophistication. She was the niece of Winston Churchill and lived at Downing Street during the Second World War. She later married Anthony Eden. Her gift for description, her humor, and her wisdom illuminate a time of great importance, and her portraits, whether of social or political figures, are deft and shrewd. One can only hope that this is the first of many books to come from Clarissa Eden.

It would be easy to disparage Clarissa Churchill Eden, as some reviewers already have. She was a great beauty -- and perhaps still is, based upon the later pictures -- well-connected with Anglo-Franco-American high society. She was an intelligent but passive observer of her times. Part I of the book shows her as a young woman of aristocratic background making her privileged way through artistic-Bohemian London during the late '30s and, gamely, through WW II. Part II of the

book concerns her marriage to Anthony Eden, PM for less than 2 years. This account will be of interest to students of the '50s, especially those who remember the Suez Crisis, which quashed British influence in the Middle East. Her account of Suez (in part attributed to private communications) explains in a human way why the British often harbor anti-American and anti-Israeli resentments. Enjoyable, even compulsive, reading for those of us with an interest in the period.

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