

*Tom & Viv* directed by Gilbert recounts the volatile marriage of poet TS Eliot and the British aristocrat Vivien Haigh-Wood. It spans from the early years of their passionate elopement to 23 years later, in 1938 where Vivien was committed to a private mental hospital. A controversial movie whose details today, still remain obscure and hotly disputed. Just as the relationship of Hughes and Plath evoked a range of conflicting perspectives, so too have the circumstances of another great poet's relationship with his wife. The movie initially portrays Eliot as a "duped" husband alluding that Vivien rushed him into this marriage without telling him about her suffering from "severe female problems" which would almost negate any chance for an intimate relationship. Eliot romantically declares "I love you. More than life itself. I'd do anything for you". Similarly, Hughes erotically alludes in "Fulbright Scholars" his first entry in the "Birthday Letters" anthology, that he "could hardly believe how delicious" his initial recollection of his and Plath's relationship would be.

However, like the Hughes' marriage the Eliot's marriage was also doomed to fail and it is similarly suggested that like Plath it was due to Vivienne's psychological instability. Gilbert presents ample evidence of Vivian's antisocial behaviour -- at one point she pulls a rubber knife on Virginia Woolf in order to steal her taxi. Woolf declares at a social gathering "there is nothing wrong with Tom that separation from his wife wouldn't cure. If she had any conception of his significance,...the drain on his energy must be alarming.'

Hughes also criticizes Plath's emotional outbursts in "The Minotaur" when he claims that Plath was "Demented by (his) being/ Twenty minutes late for baby-minding" and therefore she 'smashed' "the mahogany table -top that was "mapped with the scars of (his ) whole life" The metaphorical language here being quite provocatively damning of Plath's emotional state.

The movie, *Tom & Viv*, then depicts that by the mid 1920's, with Vivien now afflicted by rheumatism and neuralgia, that the Eliots were living in what Vivien referred to as "a fearful abyss" - a darkened flat, no visitors, no social life, a kind of psychological paralysis in which Eliot hardly felt himself to be alive. Eliot declares to a sympathetic friend "I'm married to a woman I love, but everything we do falls apart...I'm completely alone" The mid shot revealing the tone and stance of a dejected, long suffering husband!

Similarly, Hughes purports in 'Red', the last poem in the " Birthday Letters" anthology, that Sylvia had also had a detrimental affect on him . Making their home "A judgement chamber", a place of criticism and a "Shut casket for gems" with no possibility of salvation. Her metaphorical obsession with the colour 'red' "you revelled in red" inferred that while in earlier Plath poems, the colour red symbolized her life blood that in Hughes' perception it became a "stiffening wound" "Patterned with darkenings, congealments" His use of first person "I felt it raw ...I could touch the open vein in it" insinuating that it left their relationship " Catastrophic, arterial, doomed."

However, *Tom & Viv* is also an exploration of Vivian's sufferings in the relationship. The audience is given a conflicting viewpoint when considering the breakdown of their marriage. Their relationship is undoubtedly marked by what is ultimately a misdiagnosis of Vivien as clinically insane. In fact, losing control in her social circle

may have been Vivian's ultimate sin. Certainly, neither her husband nor her parents could ever afford to be associated with such a crime. Gilbert suggests that Vivien's eventual commitment to an insane asylum was brought about largely because she had offended her class. Or that after Eliot's reputation and position were secure, a position most decidedly influenced by Vivien's family status, he had no further use for her and therefore broke off any association he had with his wife during the duration of her incarceration. Not once during the 11 years that she was in the mental institution did Eliot write or visit. Further conflict emerges when it is discovered long after she is committed to an asylum, that she is, in fact, not insane, but that a hormonal imbalance is responsible for her instability.

It is established that during Eliot's budding career Vivian offered strong encouragement and support, constantly typing, proofreading and offering suggestions. In fact there is conjecture as to the extent of Vivien's input into the creation of Eliot's poetry. In particular, "The Waste Land" is featured in the movie and there is conflict between Vivien and Eliot as to the stimulus for the subject matter. During the recital of the poem Vivien alters some of the words "She brushes her hair and he can't bring himself to touch her", alluding to the belief that that is how Eliot feels about her. He contradicts saying "no, no that is not how it is". Eliot's constant, passive monotone in response leaving the audience to come to their own perception of what is actually the truth.

By: Mrs Bernadette Moore.