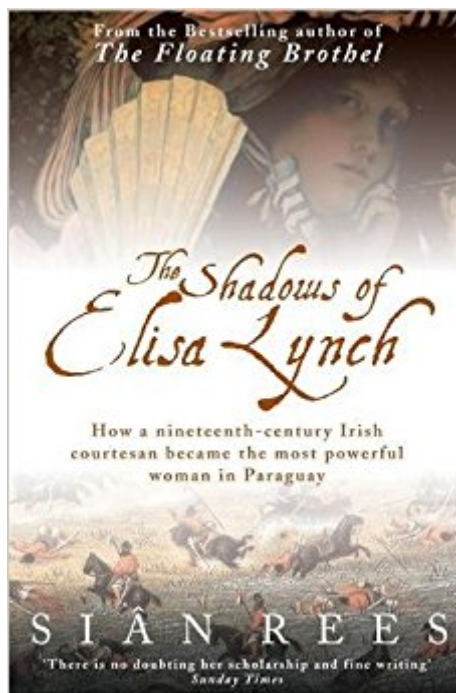




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The Shadows Of Elisa Lynch: How A Nineteenth-century Irish Courtesan Became The Most Powerful Woman In Paraguay



Synopsis

Long before Eva Peron turned Argentina upside down, Elisa Lynch brought Paraguay to its knees. In 1854, an ambitious Irish courtesan met a South American General in Paris and returned with him to Paraguay. When he became President, she became his de facto first lady and together they changed the course of the country's history. Consumed by desire for Napoleonic glory, General President Lopez took Paraguay into a disastrous war against her neighbours. Elisa Lynch went with him on campaign, turning conditions of war to her advantage where she could. He was killed in the northern hills but she survived, only to be expelled from Paraguay and die an obscure death in Paris. Reviled and respected, loved and distrusted, Elisa Lynch has been described as both a heroic companion to Lopez and a malign enchantress. In *The Shadows of Elisa Lynch*, Sian Rees tells her fascinating story of recovered history.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Headline Review (January 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0755311159

ISBN-13: 978-0755311156

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #4,303,946 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Paraguay #338345 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs

Customer Reviews

[a] complex & remarkable story Sunday Telegraph

Sian Rees has a degree in history from Oxford University. The bestselling work of narrative non-fiction *The Floating Brothel* was her first book.

The ingredients of a great tragic opera are all there. Elisa Lynch, a mid-nineteenth's century Irish beauty escapes Algerian boredom to become a courtesan in Paris. She charms the dashing young son of Paraguay's founder of the nation and follows him to Asuncion. As the country modernises, the economy blossoms and expands, she rides the crest to become the country's richest and most

powerful - if hardly the most loved or respected - woman. Her lover, now the Mariscal Presidente - gets himself involved in a war with Brazil. He loses as he must, and with his teen age son is killed on his retreat into the mountain wilderness of the interior. Elisa, who has steadied him in the battlefield while plundering the city and grabbing lands the size of Belgium, follows him to the end and buries and reburies them after drunken soldiers have violated the grave, then vanishes slowly in post-Napoleonic France. Was she a woman so cold that she could please anyone? Was it greed, ambition, circumstances - or simply all-overriding love? Hillary Clinton might know - but she would not tell. Nor, in the end can SiÃfÂn Rees. Unlike in The Floating Brothel there is no human story from that time she can follow - just history. Unable to write a novel, she meanders like the Rio Paraguay among the marshes and the banks covered with orange trees and, searching for Elisa' Lynch' shadows, is lost emotionally. A great story but not quite the great historical book one would expect from a writer noted for her compassionate love and her ability to portray historical events through contemporary eyes, values, and sensibilities. I suspect that SiÃfÂn knew it, and tried to hurry the job along. As a result it is too long, and confusingly told. The maps at the beginning are tantalising and they are useless. Between blancos and colorados she cannot quite make out who is who. Nor can the reader. But what a plot for a movie. Where are you, Luchino Visconti?

Excellent

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