



Living in Squares, Loving in Triangles: The Lives and Loves of Virginia Woolf & the Bloomsbury Group

By Amy Licence

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The lives of the sisters Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf have long been celebrated for their central roles in the development of modernism in art and literature. Inspired by European Post-Impressionism, Vanessa's experimental work places her at the vanguard of early twentieth-century art, as does her role in helping introduce many key names – Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso – to an unsuspecting public in 1910. Virginia took these artistic innovations and applied them to literature, pushing the boundaries of form, narrative and language to find a voice uniquely her own. Yet their private lives were just as experimental. Forming the core of the Bloomsbury Group, they welcomed into their London and Sussex homes a host of their talented peers and followed their hearts in the pursuit of love. Vanessa's marriage to art critic Clive Bell was shaken early on by his flirtation with her sister, but this allowed her to find happiness with fellow artist Roger Fry. It was the predominantly homosexual Duncan Grant, though, who would become her lifelong partner, as they shared and decorated their home, Charleston, making it a living showpiece for their art. Virginia's marriage to Leonard Woolf placed him more in the role of carer than husband, with the pair abstaining from sex and living under a regime designed to meet the needs of Virginia's fragile mental health. Her meeting with the aristocratic Vita Sackville-West and their lesbian affair led Virginia to write one of the masterpieces of modern literature. What led the sisters to make such choices? How did they reconcile life and art? How did it feel, in early modern Britain, to live outside the social box? The sisters lived bravely, passionately and innovatively; where did this strength and talent come from?

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Editorial Review

Review

... an introduction to Woolf's life, work, and milieu, focusing on her relationship with her sister Vanessa Bell and six key figures: Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, and John Maynard Keynes. Noting that sisters flaunted conventional mores of their time, the book delves into the motivations behind their marriage and relationship choices; Virginia was in a sexless marriage with a man but had a lesbian affair, and Vanessa had multiple male lovers but was lifelong partner to a male homosexual. The book draws on letters, diaries, photos, reviews, published and unpublished works, and other primary source materials. B&w historical and color contemporary photos are included, showing sites, murals, and paintings. (*Protoview*)

About the Author

Amy Licence has been a teacher for over a decade. She has an MA in Medieval and Tudor Studies and has published several scholarly articles on the Tudor dynasty and Richard III. Including In Bed With the Tudors ('A fascinating book examining the sex lives of the Tudors in unprecedented detail' THE DAILY EXPRESS) and Cecily Neville ('This insight is so rare and so valuable' PHILIPPA GREGORY). Amy has written for THE GUARDIAN, TLS, BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE & appeared on BBC radio & television. She lives in Canterbury with her husband & three children.

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