

Virginia Woolf

Alexandra Harris

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Alexandra Harris's hugely acclaimed book *Romantic Moderns* (winner of the 2010 *Guardian* First Book Award and the 2011 Somerset Maugham Award) overturned our picture of modernist culture during the interwar years. Her second book is a hugely pleasurable biography of Virginia Woolf, one of the greatest writers of all time.

Giving equal balance to Virginia Woolf's work as well as her life, Harris follows the chronology of her life, considering each of the novels in context, and giving due prominence to the range of her dazzlingly inventive essays.

For a passionate and determined young woman, Woolf had to endure a long apprenticeship as she struggled to be a writer. But Harris shows that behind her sober image, there was a woman whose wit, vivacity and sense of fun became a source of her power. She also had an extraordinary capacity for finding and communicating pleasure - in people, places, books and things. 'Fundamentally,' she tells her diary in 1929, 'I am the happiest woman in W.C.1.'

Alexandra Harris's insights into Woolf's courageous life, shaped by a defiant refusal to submit to literary convention, social constraints and mental illness reveal what heroism she possessed. But while her life appears dramatic and sensational: incest, illness, genius, suicide, she savoured quiet ordinary living, from long walks over the Sussex Downs to the small routine pleasures of her marriage.

Alex Harris, who is a Woolf scholar and teaches her work to students, brings us a fresh understanding of the life and work of one of the towering figures in literature, whose work still inspires seventy years after her death.

Author

Alexandra Harris is a cultural historian and a lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool. *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* was published by Thames & Hudson, and she is currently working on her next book, on the English weather, which will also be published by Thames & Hudson in 2012.



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