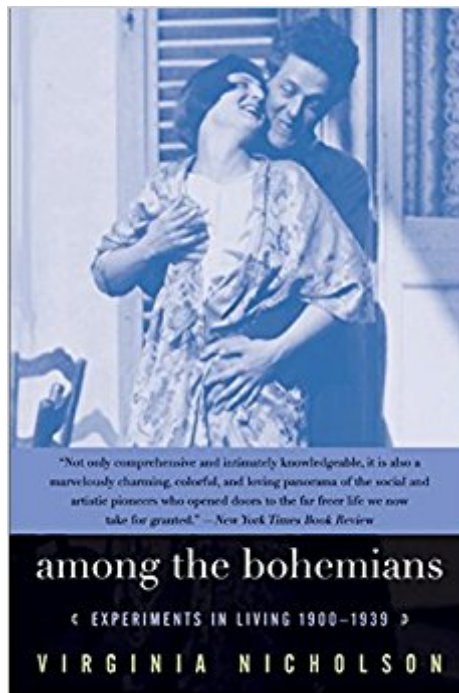




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Among The Bohemians: Experiments In Living 1900-1939



Synopsis

They ate garlic and didn't always bathe; they listened to Wagner and worshiped Diaghilev; they sent their children to coeducational schools, explored homosexuality and free love, vegetarianism and Post-impressionism. They were often drunk and broke, sometimes hungry, but they were of a rebellious spirit. Inhabiting the same England with Philistines and Puritans, this parallel minority of moral pioneers lived in a world of faulty fireplaces, bounced checks, blocked drains, whooping cough, and incontinent cats. They were the bohemians. Virginia Nicholson -- the granddaughter of painter Vanessa Bell and the great-niece of Virginia Woolf -- explores the subversive, eccentric, and flamboyant artistic community of the early twentieth century in this "wonderfully researched and colorful composite portrait of an enigmatic world whose members, because they lived by no rules, are difficult to characterize" (San Francisco Chronicle).

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Customer Reviews

Nicholson, granddaughter of painter Vanessa Bell and great-niece of Virginia Woolf, is uniquely qualified to write about the experimental lifestyle of her grandparents' generation. The early 20th-century British bohemians-Bloomsbury and their extended circles, and lesser-known rebels like Roy Campbell and Jacob Epstein-rejected bourgeois Victorian values and embraced life as art, open marriage, Rousseau-influenced education and even poverty. Perhaps because she is an insider (despite having been born well after its heyday), Nicholson is able to communicate the ideals and desires of this generation without romanticizing it. The exhilaration of the bohemians' freedom

and the hardships of the poverty in which many chose to live are equally portrayed. Their children place a golden haze on their youth but also blame their parents for not providing a rigorous education and a few rules to guide their way. The reader could also easily get impatient with how these talented individuals seemed determined to destroy themselves (the epilogue in particular reads like a catalogue of lives left ravaged by passions), but Nicholson effectively argues that theirs was the energy of true rebellion and implies that the excess was necessary to break with the constricting bonds of the past-and that the circle of bohemia ultimately changed how we all live. Although this account is written in a neutral, almost dry style as Nicholson examines the bohemians' daily lives thematically (sexual freedom, child-rearing, styles in clothing and interior decoration, etc.), the intimate conversations and salacious details related still titillate like gossip. Readers interested in the art, literature and personalities of this era will not be disappointed. B&w photos, illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a vibrant catalogue of anecdotes and tragicomic episodes, Nicholson pays homage to British writers and artists who challenged convention before the Second World War. Living for art could exact a price—Robert Graves, hoping to subsidize his writing, made a disastrous foray into shopkeeping, while a destitute Dylan Thomas used his books as furniture. For Nicholson, such recklessly hand-to-mouth living is downright heroic. Although the eccentric domestic arrangements of the Bloomsbury group are a familiar topic, she casts her net wide to include lesser-known figures like Nina Hamnett, a fixture at London's Café Royal, and Betty May—the cocaine addicted model of the sculptor Jacob Epstein—whose signature dish was grilled mouse on toast. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Among the Bohemians" is a book that should be read by anyone who harbors bohemian tendencies. Most serious readers fall into this category, consciously or not, so the appeal of this book is guaranteed to be wide-spread. The bohemians that the author puts her reader among are mainly English, with a sprinkling of European and American expatriates. Everyone who reads this book will have their own favorite bohemian. The one who stood out for me was Augustus John, the painter, a charismatic character who was at the center of English bohemian life in the first half of the twentieth century. His great talent as an artist was more than matched by his Rabelaisian life-style, which included driving a horse-drawn gypsy caravan filled with children and a wife or two across

England and a sexual vitality that drew innumerable women and girls (among them Caitlin Macnamara, Dylan Thomas's future wife) to his bed (or wherever). As the author points out, respectability and social responsibility, or even a basic adherence to the laws of the land, were not bohemian strong points. What these artists and other followers of alternative life-styles did bequeath to us, however, was a loosening of the strict social and moral codes handed down from 19th century England and America, so that today, in living the freer lives we live, we stand in their debt, whether we know it or not.

I'm sorry I read this book. Rather than drawing out the larger truths explored by these artists and critics, it belittles their lives and barely touches on their accomplishments. It's written in a style appropriate to a gossip column or the yellow press and contains so many scattered images and brief antidotes it becomes tiresome very quickly. Read the Vanessa Bell biography published almost twenty years ago instead.

Well written and researched.

Virginia Nicholson had a wealth of background information...her Great-aunt being Virginia Woolf, and Grandmother Vanessa Bell the painter, both considered Bohemians of their times, not to mention her father, son of Vanessa Bell being raised in a Bohemian atmosphere. If you want to know what the true Bohemian life-style was like I highly recommend "Among the Bohemians". No spoiler alerts here, read the book!

Extremely interesting. What I loved about this book is that it is organized by categories such as, food, interior decorating, clothes, morals, etc. So not only does the book contain lots of interesting facts about famous Bloomsbury people and their extended circles, it also talks about the Bohemian lifestyle itself.

Bought this book because I loved the author's other book-Singled Out-and I'm so happy I did. From page one I was entranced and had a hard time putting it down to go to sleep. A wonderful look at the women and men who helped to free the restrictions society in the early twentieth century placed on us. A great read.

This book is very well written, entertaining and informative. I highly recommend it to everyone, even

those not interested in the subject, as it speaks of an era that gave rise to a certain mindset about the need to experience hardship in order to create/

Beautifully written. Would recommend this to anyone wanting to know more about the bohemian way of life.

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