The most prominent women writer of the Twentieth Century, Virginia Woolf was the center of a network of artists, musicians, intellectuals, and authors. Known as the “Bloomsbury Group” after the area in London where many of them lived, they were friends, collaborators, interlocutors, promoters, and, sometimes, lovers. Including E. M. Forster, Vanessa Bell, and Lytton Strachey, the Bloomsbury set was the cutting edge of artistic and social change in the 1920s.

In this course, we will study works by Woolf and the company she kept: Katherine Mansfield, T. S. Eliot, and Ethel Smyth, among others. We will explore the influence of her artistic and personal relationships on her aesthetic and political ideas in, for instance, Orlando, Woolf’s fictional biography of her mistress, Vita Sackville West. How did Woolf’s close involvement with Bloomsbury intersect with her aesthetic experiments as well as with her analyses of the politics of gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and race?

You will be introduced to a cross-section of modernist art and to an important era in feminist history. Most of our class time will be spent discussing the assigned texts; when necessary, I will deliver short lectures to provide you with the relevant historical, social, and literary contexts. We will focus on fostering two important, basic skills: close, careful reading of literature, and critical writing—that is, examining literary texts analytically and in relation to their social and historical contexts.