

# THE BODECIA BOOK CLUB REVIEW

## The Other Side of You by Salley Vickers

The Other Side of You is a story about love, it tells of love at its finest, the connection between soul mates: the spark and acknowledgement that is too often overlooked. It is how two people fit together – like lobsters (they mate for life!) *sorry had to throw the Friends quote in!*

It tells a tale of Elizabeth Cruickshank, and for her falling in love felt like "meeting someone whom I had known intimately and from whom I had been separated for a very long time". Her tale is told through the thoughts of her analyst, Dr David McBride, whom she has been referred to after her lover's death and her subsequent failed suicide. Dr David McBride, himself familiar with the pain of losing a loved one. When he was five, his older brother died in an accident; since then "*I had lived with this invisible gash in my side, this breach in my dyke, this crumbling portion of my sea wall*". For them both, love is the very definition of life, the experience through which a person comes to know the other side of them.

Set between a psychiatric hospital in the south of England, and in Rome the book's world is made up of people who live on the borders of life, ever conscious of death's presence.

As Elizabeth talks - of first meeting the art historian, and Caravaggio expert, Thomas, their years apart thanks to a single instance of bad luck, her subsequent loveless marriage and, much later, the chance meeting that brought them back together again - McBride listens transfixed. Partly it is because her story helps him understand the full, traumatic impact of his brother's early death. But it is also because the experience of connecting so deeply with another's grief strips him of his professional persona.

Elizabeth does something else for her doctor - she introduces him to Caravaggio's world of pain and passion. The 1601 painting The Supper at Emmaus, showing Christ sitting at table with two of his disciples after the Crucifixion, comes to represent for McBride a further "other side" of himself, that which is forever flanked by the beloved dead.



After a mutual connection through the paintings of Caravaggio, she unfolds and one night animatedly tells her tale of infidelity, love and loss and subsequently just what events made her come to be in such a state. Her story is moving and affects both characters in a deep and profound way which ripples out to the very edges of this book.

Caravaggio's brutal and sometimes criminal nature is compared with the passion and beauty of his paintings to reveal to Elizabeth and David that, "A real artist knows the other side of himself better than the side he's in at the time. You don't paint as you are, you paint as you are not. But you only know what you are not through knowing what you are".

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Salley Vickers is a qualified psychologist as well as the author of now four books. Perhaps because of this, her focus is on the internal life of the characters and their professional and personal interactions.

This is not a book for those who like a lot of action and strong story lines. We found it slow to get into, persist as we did and you will soon love reading about Rome and the insight into paintings and get swept away with Elizabeth's love affair.

FIVE lines from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* set the theme and structure *The Other Side of You*.

*Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
When I count, there are only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman  
—But who is that on the other side of you?*

The use of the quote enhances the haunting quality in her writing and, together with discussions about the 17th century painter Caravaggio and, particularly, Road to Emmaus, creates a sense of deep humanity.

Now I bet you didn't think you would have learnt so much by the end of this book review!

We gave *The Other Side of You* **6 ½ / 10**

The book we are now reading is **Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier**