



SACKVILLE-WEST, VITA (1892–1962)

British novelist, poet, biographer, and travel writer. The granddaughter of a Spanish dancer, and daughter of the imperious Lady Victoria Sackville, Vita Sackville-West was brought up on the family's palatial estate at Knole. In 1913 she married the homosexual diplomat Harold Nicolson. The partners agreed that the institution of marriage was "unnatural," but with care, frankness, and deep mutual affection theirs lasted forty-nine years.

In 1918 Sackville-West "rediscovered" Violet Keppel whom she had known as a child. Both were immediately smitten and embarked on a tempestuous affair, which Vita presented in fictionalized form in her novel *Challenge*, published in 1924 in the United States but not in England. She wrote a franker account for the drawer (which was not published until it was included in her son's memoir of 1973). In 1919 Violet contracted a marriage—which was not intended to be consummated—with Denys Trefusis, but she and Vita continued to escape for love trysts at various locales in Britain. Harold, for his part, was preoccupied with the peace negotiations at Versailles.

At the end of 1922 Vita met Virginia Woolf, ten years her senior, who enchanted her. Prompted by caution on both sides, their affair was slow to ripen, but it proceeded intermittently through much of the 1920s. Woolf wrote *Orlando* (1928), her novel of androgyny, as an act of homage to Vita; Sackville-West's *Letters to Virginia Woolf* was published in 1984.

Although Vita Sackville-West's books achieved considerable popularity in

her day (as did those of Violet Trefusis), it cannot be said that she ranks as a major writer. Her life showed, however, the varieties of experience open to a privileged woman in an era in which social controls were gradually lifting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Victoria Glendenning, *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West*, New York: Knopf, 1983; Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, New York: Atheneum, 1973.

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SADE, DONATIEN ALPHONSE FRANÇOIS, COMTE DE, KNOWN AS MARQUIS DE (1740–1814)

French writer and thinker. A playboy in his youth, Sade was imprisoned in Vincennes and in the Bastille for twelve years while a cabal of relatives prevented his release. Here he did most of his writing. Liberated by the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, he served for a time in Paris as a minor official. Having fallen afoul of the Napoleonic regime, he spent the last years of his life in the insane asylum at Charenton.

In the popular mind Sade is simply a scribbler of **pornography** who lent his name to the paraphilia known as sadism. Closer study of his writings reveals not only their elegant style and inventive plotting, but an astute, bitingly corrosive analysis of society and human motivation, which was forged by his solitary meditation and reading during his long years of confinement. The **philosophy** he evolved stems in large measure from the ancient **Epicurean** stress on the maximization of personal pleasure and the minimizing of