SACKVILLE-WEST, VITA (1892–1962)
British novelist, poet, biographer, and travel writer. The granddaughter of a Spanish dancer, and daughter of the impec
tuous 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 “unnatu
ral,” but with care, frankness, and deep mutual affection theirs lasted forty-nine her day (as did those of Violet Trefusis), it cannot be said that she ranks as a major writer. Her life showed, however, the va
rieties of experience open to a privileged woman in an era in which social controls were gradually lifting.


Evelyn Gettone

SADE, DONATIEN
ALPHONSE FRANÇOIS, COMTE DE, KNOWN AS MARQUIS DE (1740–1814)
French writer and thinker. A play
boy 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 medita
tion 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