



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.

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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

pain. He adds the corollary that to the extent that one's own pleasure can be increased by the pain of others so much the better for the beneficiary. Cruel as they may seem, such views accord with a recurring trend in human thought to find the ultimate motor of human action in self-interest. Applied to sexual conduct they link up with the ancient contrast between the active (enjoying) vs. the passive (suffering) partner. Denying the existence of God, he sees no barrier to the pursuit of self-interest as the goal of human life. A century before Friedrich Nietzsche, Sade anticipated most of his key insights about power and motivation. He also provided a striking example of the "transvaluation of values." As Lester Crocker has shown, Sade is the most radical and disturbing of all the Enlightenment thinkers. Yet because his books were hard to obtain until the 1960s, awareness of their importance has come late.

It is not generally realized that Sade was personally bisexual. In actual life—the murderous scenes in his books are not to be taken as records of real experience—one of his favorite sexual positions was to be penetrated by his valet as he penetrated a woman. He commended anal intercourse both for contraception and for (male) pleasure. Not surprisingly, in view of his prison years, he was also a connoisseur of **masturbation**.

Sade is sometimes taken to be misogynistic. Yet several of his books feature strong-willed women who are just as adept as the most ruthless man, if not more so, in obtaining their way. The didactic dialogue *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, which is perhaps the best introduction to his work, has a character (Dolmance) who defends male homosexuality. His masterpieces are the novels *Juliette* and *Justine*, the one showing the manifold satisfactions of those who follow his precepts of self-interest, the other the endless sufferings that are the lot of one who obstinately clings to virtue.

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SA'DI (CA. 1213-1292)

One of the most famous Persian poets and writers. Sa'di ("felicity") was his poetical name. He was born in Shiraz and attended the University in Bagdad. Thereafter he studied the mysticism of the Sufis and educated himself by traveling for years through almost the whole Islamic empire. In or about 1255 he settled in Shiraz where he earned himself a great reputation as a writer. His most famous works are the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) and the *Bustan* (Orchard), both consisting of stories and poems which are moralistic, didactic, mystical, and amusing.

An important theme in the works of Sa'di is the love for beautiful young boys, which he describes in all its facets, ranging from purely platonic and spiritual in the mystical love poems to obscene and lustful in what can be called his "pornographic" works. In his mystical love poems Sa'di invokes chaste love for boys as a way to transcend the self and ultimately achieve union with God. Beautiful boys can serve as mediators because they are considered as witnesses (*shahid*) of God's beauty on earth. In his more worldly poems and stories he is more cynical and down to earth about the problems and joys of loving boys. Love ended, of course, when the boy's facial hair blemished him: "Sa'di admires the fresh down of youth and not hairs rigid like a packing needle."

In general, Sa'di shared the attitude of his contemporaries toward homosexuality and consequently showed a strong aversion to passive homosexual