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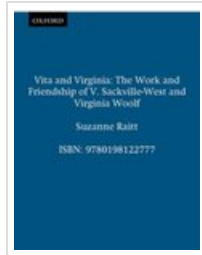


[Home](#) > [Arts and Sciences](#) > [ASBOOKCHAPTERS](#) > 15

[< Previous](#)

[Next >](#)

ARTS & SCIENCES BOOK CHAPTERS



Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

This book examines the creative intimacy between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf, interpreting both their relationship and their work in the light of their experience as married lesbians. The contradictions and conflicts of their situation are worked out through the construction of different narratives of femininity, in letters, novels, diaries, and other texts. *Vita and Virginia* looks at the two women's continual renegotiation of what it means to be female, and suggests that the mutual exchange of different versions of "womanhood" is crucial to the development of their friendship. *Orlando*, for example, was Virginia Woolf's way of threatening Sackville-West with the extent of her own knowledge about her, as well as the celebratory love-letter it is usually assumed to be. The book also offers readings of both women's autobiographical texts, and a long-overdue study of Vita Sackville-West's work as a biographer and a novelist. Emphasizing also wider contexts, this study examines the links between homosexual desire and literary innovation, public politics and private lives. It provides an invaluable perspective on the relations between sexuality and feminism in modernism.

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Virginia Woolf & Vita Sackville-West. ... At the beginning of 1924, the Woolfs moved to their new house in Bloomsbury, where they felt less isolated from London society. Virginia had already met author, poet and landscape gardener Vita Sackville-West, who was married to the bisexual diplomat and writer Harold Nichols. The friendship between the two women soon developed into a sexual and romantic relationship that lasted for a decade, and continued as a friendship until Virginia's death. The new movie 'Vita & Virginia' depicts the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. Here's the true story behind their love affair. Sackville-West's books were commercially and critically the more successful during her and Woolf's lifetimes, although today Woolf's work is more highly regarded. In 1924, Sackville-West published her short story *Seducers in Ecuador* with Hogarth Press to help with the Woolfs' mounting debts, and she followed it six years later with novel *The Edwardians*, which was a financial success. "Vita sold all these books, but people just didn't really understand Virginia Woolf's writing," says Smith. Vita Sackville-West invited Virginia Woolf to enjoy, perhaps for the first and last time, the forbidden fruits of desire.¹ How was that possible? What was it about Sackville-West that allowed Woolf to resist the discouragement of acting on her erotic desire for women? Sackville-West's economically privileged background, national identity, sexual education, and development of an alternative theory of sexuality and gender suggest answers to these questions. Sackville-West was in a position, because of class and of her own making, that made it possible for her to profoundly influence Woolf's life Vita Sackville-West, being incredibly popular at the time, is believed to be the woman who inspired Virginia to create the novel *Orlando*. Vita's son called the novel "the longest and most charming love letter in literature". The film *Vita and Virginia* reveals the complex nature of relationships and eliminates the stereotypes of feminine and womanish. Virginia Woolf's literary reputation remains haunted by the specter of the emotional and psychological challenges she faced which eventually resulted in her suicide. Our film brings to life a moment of personal triumph, where her br