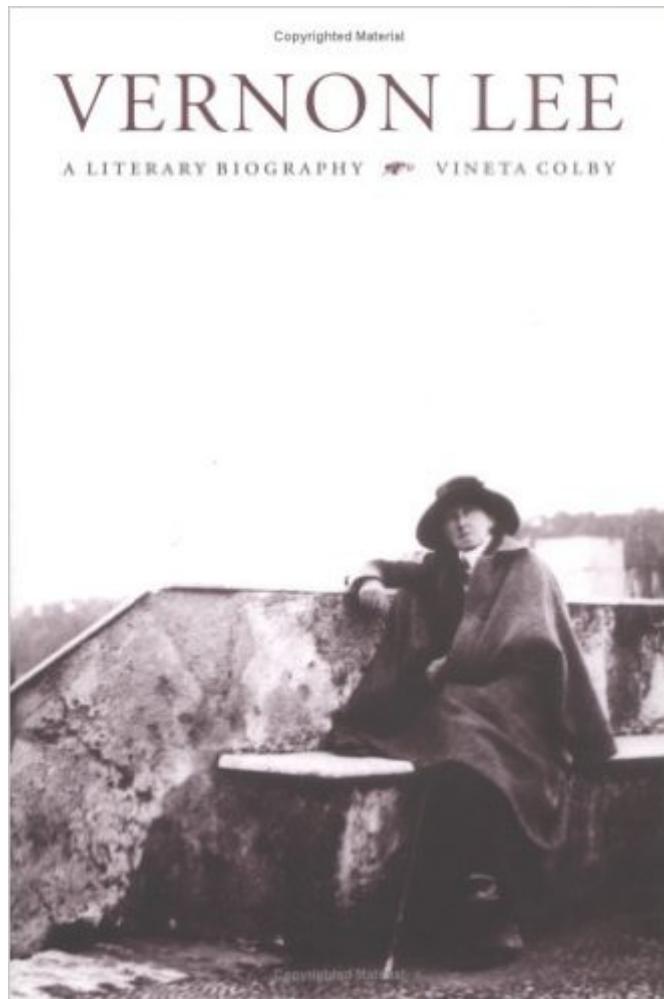


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Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography (Victorian Literature And Culture Series)



Synopsis

Vernon Lee, born Violet Paget in 1856 to English parents who lived on the Continent, bridged two worlds and many cultures. She was a Victorian by birth but lived into the second quarter of the twentieth century. Her chosen home was Italy, but she spent part of every year in England, where she published over the years an impressive number of books: novels, short stories, travel essays, studies of Italian art and music, psychological aesthetics, polemics. She was widely recognized as a woman of letters and moved freely in major literary and social circles, meeting and at times having close friendships with a huge number of the major writers and intellectuals of her time, among them Robert Browning, Walter Pater, Henry James, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Bernard Berenson, and Mario Praz. Although she never committed herself to one program of political activism, she was an advocate for feminism and social reform and during World War I was an ardent pacifist. In her last years she watched with dismay the emergence of fascism. Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography recovers this crowded and intellectually eventful life from her previously unpublished letters and journals, as well as from her books themselves. Vineta Colby also explores Lee's troubled personal life, from her childhood in an eccentric expatriate family to her several unhappy love affairs with women to her frank recognition that her work, brilliant as some of it was, remained unappreciated. Through it all, Vernon Lee clung to her faith in the life of the mind, and through Colby's engaging biographical narrative, she emerges today as a writer worthy of renewed attention and admiration. Victorian Literature and Culture Series

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Customer Reviews

Vineta Colby's scholarship is relaxed and assured. Page after page of this book presents information that will be new even to those who thought they knew all about the mysterious "Vernon Lee," the pen name-slash-alter ego of the British heiress Violet Paget, who preferred Italy to her own nation and writing to either. The women who Lee loved are also an interesting gallery, and her brother, the aesthete Eugene, who travelled flat on his back with a male attendant to take care of him, is a whole different trip, deserving of a book of his own. All in all, a terrific biography. I deduct one star only because, skilled as she is as a writer, she cannot manage to make Vernon Lee's individual writings even a fraction as interesting as she says they are. This is a problem Michael Holroyd faced with his magisterial biography of Lytton Strachey, like Vernon Lee a decidedly minor talent, but Holroyd managed to surmount the inherent problems and delivered a convincing defense of Strachey's writing in various categories, but this Colby cannot do. The reasons for this are both manifold and obvious, but a splendid try.

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