



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

Vineta Colby

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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Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography recovers this crowded and intellectually eventful life from her previously unpublished letters and journals, as well as from her books themselves.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.

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