



The Disinherited: A Story of Family, Love and Betrayal

Robert Sackville-West

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In the small hours of the morning of 3 June 1914, a woman and her husband were found dead in a sparsely furnished apartment in Paris. It was only when the identity of the couple was revealed in the English press a fortnight later that the full story emerged. The man, Henry Sackville-West, had shot himself minutes after the death of his wife from cancer; but Henry's suicidal despair had been driven equally by the failure of his claim to be the legitimate son of Lord Sackville and heir to Knole. *The Disinherited* reveals the secrets and lies at the heart of an English dynasty, unravelling the parallel lives of Henri's four illegitimate siblings: in particular his older sister, Victoria, who on becoming Lady Sackville and mistress of Knole, by marriage, consigned her brothers and sisters to lives of poverty and disappointment.

The Disinherited: A Story of Family, Love and Betrayal Details

Date : Published June 24th 2014 by Bloomsbury USA (first published April 24th 2014)

ISBN : 9781408824825

Author : Robert Sackville-West

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Nonfiction, European Literature, British Literature, Literature, 20th Century



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From Reader Review The Disinherited: A Story of Family, Love and Betrayal for online ebook

Alison says

I won a copy of this book via Goodreads First Reads.

It is a fascinating read, but a bitter one. The lives of the illegitimate Sackville-Wests are not easy, nor that of their parents and the resulting fall out echoes down the generations.

Only Victoria of the illegitimate branch claims some kind of acknowledgement via her marriage and life at Knole, but estrangement from the rest of her siblings was somehow inevitable.

It is not an easy read by any means, but worth the while. I must now catch up with Robert Sackville-West's previous book.

Jane says

This review first appeared on the Historical Novel Society website. I also wrote a feature article about the book for the same website.

This is the second book by Robert Sackville-West (aka Lord Sackville) about his family and the sprawling house (far too small a word for Knole) they've inhabited since 1604. It focuses on the exotic family branch stemming from the liaison of Lionel Sackville-West, a fifth son (thus unlikely to inherit) with a married Spanish dancer nicknamed Pepita. A run-of-the-mill example of minor British nobility at play abroad eventually became the subject of a notorious lawsuit; Lionel ended up inheriting Knole after all, and his son Henry – who believed he was legitimate – contested the right to Knole of his cousin, also Lionel.

To add to the drama, the younger Lionel had married the older Lionel's daughter, Victoria, also nicknamed Pepita, and Victoria found herself in the unenviable position of having to broadcast her own illegitimacy as a defense against her brother's claim. As Victoria was the mother of the writer Vita Sackville-West, known best for her affair with Virginia Woolf, this lucidly written and entertaining history will be of great interest to many readers, particularly those who have read Orlando or visited Knole and experienced the magnetic pull of this enormous, ruinously expensive national treasure.

Gonzaga Escauriaza says

Es una historia interesante que ademas nos ayuda a entender como era la sociedad inglesa de los últimos años del siglo XIX y del principio del siglo XX.

Hannah says

I received this as a goodreads first read. Thank you very much to the publishers for this book. The review is of my own thoughts.

I hadn't read "Inheritance", so I came to the whole Knowle saga without any prior knowledge. This is a remarkably good social history and extremely readable. Robert's enthusiasm for researching his family shines through - along with personal warmth and charisma. It does feel like he's chosen you, the reader, for a special storytelling session.

Trick with this kind of book is to keep the balance between necessary detail (dates/places/people etc.) and some titbits of gossipy type comment to not make it too dry. With this book it is handled exceptionally well. Also worth mentioning how balanced the narrative is, all to often an author will give away who their favourite personality is by overdeveloping their history or sidetracking into other stories.

Finally I just want to mention that in itself this is a really pretty book to hold and look at!

Kate says

I did try -- I got about 25 pages into this book and realized I'm not particularly interested in the history of the Sackville-West family. So I abandoned it in favor of one of the 800+ books looming from the bookcases in my bedroom, all waiting to be read.

Holly Donnelly says

A good read. The author is excellent at stringing together details that really bring the era alive. It's hard for American readers to understand how a whole class of people could expect to get by on inherited wealth for generations without ever expecting to work or add value to society. Even the Sackville-West's who held diplomatic posts didn't seem to work very hard at it. Reading this book made me appreciate how rotten the old system was. The book was interesting even if most of the characters weren't very admirable.

Sue Robinson says

The fascinating story of the Sackville-West's of Knole, Kent, brilliantly told by a family member.

Daniela says

The story is indeed quite captivating. The writing style lets the reader down page after page turning more into a dry chronicle of facts then a personal heartbreak story of a family ripped apart by greed and old grudges.

Downton Abbey is far less interesting than the history of the Sackville-West family, simply because what is

narrated in this book is real. However, there is a great divide between a great historian and a great writer. Robert Sackville-West is more the former than the latter. And this is a pity.

Sarah Shayler says

A goodreads 'first-reads' winner.

An interesting read on the lives of the Sackville-West family - a story I knew very little about. Feeling my way through their lives I followed their journey throughout history. Difficult to analyse the plot as it is based on the family's legacy. Well structured and beautiful photography laces the pages with a sense of emotion and fascination.

A well written description of events that people, like myself, who know very little, to gain so much information. Insightful. Most definitely not a book I would normally pick from the shelf.

Very easy and enjoyable to read, perfect for those 2 minute reads whilst waiting for the train to arrive, or cramming in before leaving for work.

Penny says

A great read - and one of those 'you couldn't make it up' books about real life people and places.

I had previously enjoyed *Inheritance* by Robert Sackville-West. *The Disinherited* extends the story of some of his Victorian relatives that we met in his earlier book.

This time he concentrates on Lionel and his 'exotic Spanish dancer' mistress Pepita. There were 5 surviving children of this union and because Pepita was already married these 5 children were branded with the 'stain' of illegitimacy. (The eldest child even had her husband named as the father on the birth certificate even though Pepita hadn't seen him for 6 years - think on!!)

This 'stain' casts shadows over all their lives but especially when it came to being accepted in society, their marriage prospects and of course who would inherit the magnificent family home of Knole.

The 5 offspring definitely tended to romanticise their 'exotic' mother, casting stories around the relationship that in their heart of hearts they must have known to be untrue. The 'beautiful dancer' is clearly seen in photographs to soon be a somewhat stately, large matronly woman with a double chin for instance!

The 5 siblings also turn on each other and we are not talking family squabbles here. These were full blown, vituperative, vicious and extremely nasty rows, disagreements and even court cases.

The author has sympathy for some of them, and I can see why as they are his relatives. I myself felt very little sympathy for any of them!

Mia says

I cannot really say I enjoyed this book, but it certainly illustrates the point that fiction has nothing on reality

when it comes to family drama and that the human mind can contort reality any which way it wants in order to accommodate the psychological needs of the person involved. How Lionel Sackville-West could acknowledge his 'illegitimate' daughters to the point of bringing them into Washington society, while leaving his sons to work as farm hands in rural South Africa; how Victoria could see herself as a more legitimate heir than her siblings; how someone as dull and spiritless as Lionel could have cavorted about with Pepita for more than a decade in the first place...none of it makes any sense except that it all happened.

And oh, the moaning and moaning and moaning about money, while summering abroad in Europe and spending the autumn engaged in shooting parties, after the London season, of course. How did England avoid a French-style revolution? I need to revisit my history books.

Isabel Ewing says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book; (received as a first-read -- thanks!) it is a stunning account of the lives and tribulations of five illegitimate children from the Sackville West family in the late 19th century. I felt like I had known these people by the end of the narrative; their disappointments were mine too and malicious gossip shocked me too.

It also give a great insight into the wider pre-war world of Western Europe (and US). I was really interested by appetite for gossip, the social boundaries and surprisingly, the finances of this world which Mr SW handles well. A must read for anyone interested in this deceased world (or at least much-altered!).

This book definitely deserves 5* - though the start, and strangely the very end of the book are a little slower they serve the rest of the narrative well.

Though my French is not amazing, it's not awful either - occasionally the French quotations were a little too long and disrupted the narrative for me. However, I think Mr SW was correct to include them - it gave a real sense for the family and their mixed up heritage. Very (really, only very) occasionally Mr SW indulged himself by referring to a member of the family by his relation to them which was a little confusing at times, but made the narrative seem closer at hand subsequently.

The book itself is a beautiful volume and illustrated with charming photographs from the family collection. I can't wait to read Mr SW's other book (the Inherited) now; what a fascinating family!

Nick says

This was a free copy from First Reads.

It has taken me a fair while to get through, I kept putting it down and getting distracted by other books. I have given it 2 stars, but that is mainly based on my enjoyment of it, if this is a subject that you yearn to know more about then it is arguably 4*. Let me explain.

I do feel a certain affinity for Knole and the S-W family. I went to Sevenoaks School, which backs onto Knole Park, and spent many a cold afternoon on a cross country run around the walls of the house, around 30 years ago. I have also been on a tour of the house (the parts open to the National Trust). I'm also aware of the family links to the Bloomsbury set of the early 20th century.

So I'm not coming at this without a certain curiosuty. But, and it is a big but, there is an astonishing level of detail here that I think goes beyond what could be called rather self-indulgent on the part of the author. It is

very well-researched and, although well written, was not as engaging as I had wished.

It just left me a bit cold. But, if you are very interested in the minutiae of the correspondence between warring siblings, then this may be of interest.

As a minor annoyance, many of the quotes from letters in French are left untranslated

Helen Bookwoods says

This account of a grand family (the Sackville-Wests) and a grand estate, Knole, started out as an absorbing read when we follow Lionel Sackville-West's affair with a Spanish beauty and dancer Pepita, and the subsequent offspring who struggle all their lives with their illegitimacy. Lionel was not the eldest son, and thus heir, when he was canoodling with Pepita but, as fate would have it, he does inherit Knole, although by that time Pepita has died (at age 40).

The way Lionel treats his children is pretty appalling resulting in one of his son's running a hopeless (and ruinous) court case to establish the marriage of his parents and thus his legitimacy (and inheritance). The later parts of the book become a bit depressing as the siblings squabble amongst themselves, and are forever being slighted by their aristocratic relations. The way the sons were treated was particularly vile - shunted off to South Africa with little money to sink or swim while the eldest daughter, Victoria, sucks up to her cold, cantankerous father and even marries her cousin to get herself the coveted (legitimate) Sackville-West name. It's all pretty unedifying. The author, Robert Sackville-West, is the 7th Lord Sackville, and does a good job of remaining impartial and giving us a vivid portrait of the *dramatis personae*.

Lili says

A remarkable family saga centred on the beautiful house of Knole and it's complicated custodians. It is a troubled story detailing the intimate lives of those who through no fault of their own have no birth right and are therefore consigned to the fringes of a fascinating family; The Sackvilles. The author, in a brilliantly researched and constructed way, brings this intricate, sorrowful tale of Pepita, Lionel, their children and descendants to life. A wonderful read.

So pleased to have received this as a Goodreads first read and it well deserves 5 stars.
