volupté

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 5, Issue 2, Autumn/Winter 2022
Vernon Lee

ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Publication: 23 January 2023

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.v.v5i2.1676.g1789

volupte.gold.ac.uk

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

volupté

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Vernon Lee

BADS TRANSLATION PRIZE 2022

REVIEWS

Preface

This issue is the second to be focused on a single figure. Our inaugural issue published in 2018 was dedicated to Arthur Symons and now, four years later, we are delighted to be able to devote the current issue to another prolific and versatile writer and critic, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget, 1856-1935). As Patricia Pulham and Sally Blackburn-Daniels acknowledge in their guest-editors' Introduction, scholarship on Lee has grown in leaps and bounds over the last twenty years and Lee is now accessible to 'a whole new generation of readers and students and prompting scholarship not only on her fiction but on other genres in which she wrote, as well as fictionalized versions of Lee in contemporary fiction' (p. ii).

Readers of *Volupté* will know that the facility to work across genres and disciplines, within and beyond traditional boundaries, and including critical and creative perspectives, is at the heart of the journal's mission. This issue is a Vernluptéan celebration of all these things, with critical contributions that serve to underline the dynamic and enriching complementarities in Lee's work, between music, musicology, and the essay form (Fraser Riddell, Michael Craske), dance, drama, and politics in *The Ballet of the Nations* (Sally Blackburn-Daniels, Marco Canani), and orientalism, politics, and nationhood (Patricia Pulham). In the creative section, Meta Witte offers a selection of reproductions of acrylic paintings depicting the fantastical world of Lee's fairy-tale 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady'. All of these contributions speak in different ways to the concept of 'interart aestheticism' that underpins Lee's work. A legacy of Pater's decadent aestheticism, 'interart aestheticism' glories in connections, influences, and relationships, and in Lee's work it presents *personally* as a 'bricolage constructed artfully from her influences, reading, recollections, knowledge, and experience' (p. v).

A round of applause for our BADS Essay Prize winners. We publish two essays this year, which were declared as 'exemplary in portraying the persistence of decadence'. In 'Hamlet and Decadent Reimagination', Conner Moore explores the ways in which Shakespeare's early modern revenge play can be reconceptualized within the imaginative framework of decadence. And in 'Screwball', E O Gill deploys the Hollywood notion of screwball comedy as a filmic methodology which brings together hyper-visual sexual play in everyday suburban environments. 'While "Hamlet and the Decadent Imagination" confirms the ever-present nature of decadence', our judges declared, 'especially as it is reimagined in the context of Shakespeare's classic, "Screwball", both the essay and installation, reminds one of the "aliveness" and experimental edge of decadence today.'

We also publish the winning translation of the BADS Translation Prize, an extract from Leopold Andrian's novella *The Garden of Knowledge* (1895), translated by Francesca Bugliani Knox. This was praised for the way in which it 'conveys the echoes of fairy-tale and captures a balance between archaism and archly modern tones that seems distinctive. It also manages a good tonal balance, rendering the strangeness of the original material and without becoming too stilted.' *The Garden of Knowledge* will be the inspiration and source text of an exciting new immersive production that premieres at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London in February 2023.

Finally, festive gratitude to our Guest Editors Patricia Pulham and Sally Blackburn-Daniels, and our BADS Essay Prize and Translation judges. The *Volupté* team wish all our readers unwholesome joy in 2023.

Jane Desmarais
Editor-in-Chief
31 December 2022

Vernon Lee: Decadence, Morality, and Interart Aestheticism

Patricia Pulham and Sally Blackburn-Daniels

University of Surrey and Teesside University

This collection of essays ensued from 'Vernon Lee 2019', an international conference held to mark the centenary of Lee's return to her Italian home, Villa Il Palmerino, after enforced exile during World War I.[1] While Lee emerged as a significant writer in the heady atmosphere of late nineteenth-century Aestheticism and decadence, she continued to publish extensively throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and her death in 1935, she produced a wealth of new material in a variety of genres including travel writing, novels, philosophical and aesthetic treatises, and compilations of supernatural fiction. As the new century dawned, she also became politically active; in the years leading up to World War I, her polemical pacifist articles appeared in the periodical press and she wrote an important anti-war morality play, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (1915). In *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912) and *The Beautiful* (1913), she took criticism in exciting new directions, focusing on the developing field of 'psychological aesthetics'; experimented with literary analysis in *The Handling of Words* (1923); and consolidated a lifelong interest in musicology in *Music and its Lovers* (1932).

Writing in 2003, Vineta Colby, one of Lee's biographers, commented that only 'a small company' read the work of Vernon Lee (Violet Paget, 1856-1935). In the two decades that have elapsed there has been a major expansion of academic interest in Lee's œuvre. Since then, access to Lee's work in published and digitized form has increased dramatically, introducing her to a whole new generation of readers and students and prompting scholarship not only on her fiction but on other genres in which she wrote, as well as fictionalized versions of Lee in contemporary fiction.[2] This has generated immensely valuable and exciting new research; new editions of her letters (no longer abridged); and several international conferences, including two in 2022: 'Vernon Lee, Aesthetics and Empathy' held in September at Churchill College, Cambridge, and 'Vernon

Lee et le fantastique' held in October at the Université de la Côte d'Opale, Boulogne-sur-Mer, the French city in which Lee was born. Despite this surge in critical responses, however, many of the works Lee published in the twentieth century remain underexplored, and there is more to be discovered not only by examining her influences, but also by juxtaposing her ideas with those of theorists and artists who were her temporal contemporaries in the latter decades of her life.

This special issue of *Volupté* focuses primarily on works produced or reprinted post-1900. However, given the strands of interest that recur in Lee's writings, authors also revisit earlier works to rethink and reconsider how aspects of them might be read differently in the light of developments in her own thoughts on ethical Aestheticism, phenomenology, and political activism, or in relation to psychoanalytic theory, anthropology, musicology, and orientalism. For example, in 'Musical under the touch of the Universe: Aesthetic Liberalism, Music, and Vernon Lee's Essayistic Art of Resonance', Fraser Riddell brings Lee's exploration of phenomenology into dialogue with Hartmut Rosa's theory of 'resonance'; from Rosa's sociological perspective, the quality of human life depends on one's open relationship with the world, beyond the pragmatic measurements of resources or fleeting moments of happiness. First tracing Vernon Lee's 'affective modes' (p. 8) spanning *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) to 'Out of Venice at Last' (1925), Riddell then analyses Lee's essay, 'Signor Curiazio: A Musical Medley', first published in *Juvenilia* (1887), to examine the connections between the ethical values evident in her writings on music and her stylistic experimentation with the essay form in the broader contexts of nineteenth-century liberalism.

Music, morality, and phenomenology are similarly at the heart of Michael Craske's essay, 'Lying Down or Standing Up for Music: Hearing and Listening in Vernon Lee's *Music and its Lovers'*. As Craske illustrates, in the questionnaire that Lee included in this text, she is not only preoccupied by questions of sensory and emotional engagement but also with one that asks for a value judgement, encouraging her respondents to comment on the moral or immoral aspect of music with specific reference to Wagner. Craske further shows that Lee's focus on music's modes of

reception – making distinctions between hearing, listening, and overhearing – must be understood in the context of nineteenth-century debates surrounding the meaning, usage, and function of music. Like Riddell's, Craske's analysis moves backwards and forwards in time, juxtaposing Lee's 'A Wicked Voice', first published in 1887 as 'Voix maudite', with *Music and its Lovers* to provide a rich reading of Lee's longstanding investment in the sensory capacity of 'hearing'.

Patricia Pulham's essay, 'Orientalist Aestheticism: Vernon Lee, Carlo Gozzi, and the Venetian Fairy Comedy' similarly engages in literary time-travelling. Beginning with Lee's early works: *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* and *The Prince of the Hundred Soups* (1883), Pulham explores the orientalism of Carlo Gozzi's fiabe teatrali: *La donna serpente* and *Turandot* (both performed in Venice in 1762) and its impact on Vernon Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' (1896) and 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' (1897). Establishing these critical connections, Pulham demonstrates how Lee's writings participate in the late-Victorian orientalist zeitgeist and how this orientalism has implications for Lee's own later thoughts on the question of 'nation' in works such as *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster* (1920). Pulham argues that the reprinting of 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' in *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Tales* (1927), published the year after the premiere of Giacomo Puccini's opera, *Turandot*, in April 1926, encourages a re-examination of this tale and its explanatory preface in the context of Italian politics and Lee's own post-war meditations on the permeability of national boundaries.

As their titles suggest, the two remaining essays in this special issue, Sally Blackburn-Daniels's 'From Crystal Palace to the *Grand Guignol*: Vernon Lee and the Great War' and Marco Canani's 'Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*: A Modern Morality, an Intermedial Mosaic', both centre, like the closing sections of Pulham's essay, on Lee's responses to World War I, but in very different ways. Blackburn-Daniels's article considers how Lee marries dance, anthropology, and drama in *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster*. Using as her starting point Lee's experience of seeing a war dance by the Dahomey people – specifically Amazon warriors – at the Crystal Palace exhibition in Sydenham in July 1893, Blackburn-Daniels highlights how the anthropological

and ethnological discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are discernible in both Lee's essays and her fiction. Furthermore, she demonstrates how the anthropological study of these women and other warriors, along with the faux barbarity of the Parisian Grand Guignol, influenced the dramatic and stylistic techniques Lee deployed in *The Ballet of the Nations*.

Like Blackburn-Daniels's essay, Canani's discusses *The Ballet of the Nations*. In his wide-ranging study, Canani considers the play an 'intermedial mosaic', a form of 'interart imbrication' and traces the explicit and implicit allusions that contribute to its complexity.[3] He argues that alongside the influence of medieval morality plays, Lee's drama engages with different art forms drawn from Italian, German, and French culture, inspired not only by Andrea Orcagna's frescoes at Pisa's Campo Santo and Baroque *Trauerspiel*, but also by the work of Giovanni Battista Lulli, the French-naturalized composer about whom she writes in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*.

While focusing on *The Ballet of the Nations*, Canani is attentive to the interart aesthetic that characterizes much of Lee's work and highlights the ways in which we might think of it as a form of bricolage, constructed artfully from her influences, reading, recollections, knowledge, and experience. Indeed, the motif of 'lumber' is one that recurs in her writings and appears early in the new preface to *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* that accompanied the 1887 edition where she describes her Italy of the period as one born of a 'remote lumber-room full of discarded mysteries and lurking ghosts'.[4] Yet, the interart aesthetic Canani identifies in Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations* also resonates more broadly with the ways in which the arts function in her works and point to the legacy of Pater's own decadent Aestheticism.

In their introduction to *Decadence and the Senses*, Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé recognize the 'Decadent preoccupation with synaesthesia and the interrelationship of different art forms'.[5] In 'The School of Giorgione', the essay in which Pater meditates on the sensuous nature of the arts, he initially challenges what he refers to as the popular misapprehension that the various arts – poetry, music, and painting – are simply 'translations into different languages of one and the

same fixed quantity of imaginative thought'; instead, he claims that 'all true aesthetic criticism' begins with the recognition of each art's individual beauty'.[6] 'But', he argues:

> although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what the Germans term an *Anders-streben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.[7]

As this issue of *Volupté* shows, this is a view of the arts that Lee embraced throughout her writing career and it is one that emerged in fledgling form in an early essay, 'The Child in the Vatican' where she invents a 'fairy tale' in which the 'Statue-demons' in the Vatican galleries cast a spell on a visiting child. This spell makes it love not only Rome, but beauty and the arts, a love that becomes ever stronger as it grows, and elicits unexpected emotions until, once grown, the child realises that 'it had been learning something which others did not know'.[8] This secret knowledge allows it to hear in a Mozart symphony 'unintelligible words' and to recognize that bars of music are 'the brethren, the sounding ones of the statues', that all who are brethren 'whether in stone, or sound, or colour, or written word', will always speak to it, and that it will 'believe only in them and in their kin'.[9] There is little doubt that the child in Lee's fairy tale is none other than Lee herself, and it is in Rome where, accompanied by Mary Newbold Sargent and her son, John Singer-Sargent, the young Lee develops a taste for the arts in their myriad forms, an experience supplemented elsewhere by the teachings and advice of her brother Eugene Lee-Hamilton, and early mentors, Henrietta Jenkin and Cornelia Turner.[10]

This 'brotherhood' of the arts and the various ways in which one art might enhance another is evident in the works discussed in this volume: in Riddell's essay, the aesthetics of music and the essay form enrich one another; in Pulham's Gozzi's commedie dell'arte transform into supernatural fiction; in Blackburn-Daniels's article dance, drama, and political polemics coalesce. But, as Stefano Evangelista has argued, in her later work Lee attempted to distance herself from decadent Aestheticism. In his analysis of 'Valedictory', he argues that this closing essay in

Renaissance Fancies and Studies (1895) 'marks a shift' in her thinking 'from abstract aestheticism to an ethics of sympathy and usefulness' and he notes Lee's attempt to move pleasure in the arts from the body to the soul.[11] This concern with ethical Aestheticism is especially identifiable in the musicological analyses provided by Riddell and Craske in this collection, and is equally evident in Vernon Lee's stance on nationalism, patriotism, and World War I in *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster*. Yet the notion of 'empathy' that informs her psychological aesthetics and ethical responses to the Other in her political polemics requires a permeable membrane between body and soul, self and the world that makes it almost impossible to maintain those distinctions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Lee ventured to rewrite 'the history of aestheticism' and revise her own contributions to it.[12] Yet, as is evident from the essays in this issue, her efforts were not entirely successful; the lure of the arts and her attraction to the less wholesome aspects of decadence and Aestheticism continued to haunt her thought in later life. They remain discernible in the dense, layered allusiveness that marks her work and offers such fertile, productive ground for new scholarship.

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[1] 'Vernon Lee, 2019' was organised by the University of Surrey and the University of Oxford in collaboration with the Associazione Culturale Il Palmerino and the British Institute in Florence.

[22] See Paula Marantz Cohen, *What Alice Knew: A Most Curious Tale of Henry James and Jack the Ripper* (2010); Mary F. Burns's *Portraits of an Artist* (2013) and her series of detective novels by the same author featuring Violet Paget and John Singer-Sargent as sleuths; and Melissa Pritchard, *Palmerino* (2014).

[3] Elisa Bizzotto, 'Blurring the Confines of Art and Gender: Aubrey Beardsley's Legend of *Venus and Tannhäuser*, "The Fragment of a Story"', in *Strange Sisters: Literature and Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Francesca Orestano and Francesca Frigerio (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 213-32 (p. 218).

[4] Vernon Lee, Preface to *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), pp. xiii-xlix (p. xxvi).

[5] Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé, 'Introduction', *Decadence and the Senses*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

[6] Walter Pater, *Studies of the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2010), p. 122.

[7] Pater, p. 124.

[8] Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: Satchell, 1881), p. 27.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856-1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 38.

Eugene Lee-Hamilton, Lee's half-brother, initially entered the British diplomatic service which he left due to ill health, becoming a published poet. Among his most recognised collections are *The New Medusa* (1882) and *Sonnets of the Wingless Hours* (1894). Henrietta Camilla Jackson Jenkin (1807–1885) was a Paris-based writer of popular fiction whose works include an anti-slavery novel, *Cousin Stella: Or, Conflict* (1859) and *Jupiter's Daughters* (1874). Cornelia Boinville de Chastel Turner (1793–1874) authored two novels, both of which were published anonymously: *Angelo Sanmartino: A Tale of Lombardy* (1859) and *Charity: A Tale* (1862).

[11] Stefano Evangelista, 'Vernon Lee and the Gender of Aestheticism', in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aestheticism*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 91-111 (p. 108).
[12] Evangelista, p. 109.

'Musical under the touch of the Universe': Aesthetic Liberalism, Music, and Vernon Lee's Essayistic Art of Resonance

Fraser Riddell

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> [A] band somewhere outside had begun to play […] a tune, by Handel or in Handel's style, of which I have never known the name, calling it for myself the *Te Deum* Tune. And then it seemed as if my soul, and according to the sensations, in a certain degree my body even, were caught up on those notes, and were striking out as if swimming in a great breezy sea; or as if it had put forth wings and risen into a great free space of air…
>
> Vernon Lee, 'The Use of Beauty' (1909).[1]

Vernon Lee's essayistic writings on music are underpinned by an ethical commitment to modes of relationality that sustain a vibrant connection between self and world. For Lee, certain styles of Western art music – most notably eighteenth-century Italian opera – facilitate through their formal and affective affordances experiences of spiritual and moral healthiness: a heightened awareness of one's personal agency and autonomy; an affirmed sense of stable, integrated selfhood; and a sympathetic openness to the claims of the other. Attending to the relational dynamics of Lee's essays allows us to register more fully the range of affective modes her works inhabit, and to think more carefully about the relationship between her ethical commitments and her distinctive treatment of the essay form. It also enables a more careful consideration of the place of Lee's writings on music within broader cultures of liberalism in the late-nineteenth century, one that manifests itself not only in the social and political claims made for music in her writing but also within the stylistic affordances of her experiments with essayistic writing.

From Lee's earliest published writings, collected in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), to her final quasi-sociological work on practices of listening, *Music and its Lovers* (1932), Lee maintains a seemingly dogmatic preference for eighteenth-century music over and above other musical styles. As Carlo Caballero and others have noted, her discomfort about the music of Richard Wagner and other late-Romantic composers underpinned a number of her articles on

musical aesthetics, and provided the scenario for her best-known fictional work, the short story 'A Wicked Voice' (1890).[2] While Lee's early critics typically tended to dismiss such firmly held views as embarrassing examples of 'Puritanism' or 'Victorian judgmentalism', recent scholarship has allowed us to register more fully the complex affective dynamics that underpin such aesthetic commitments, ranging from nostalgia to anger, the 'spectral' to the 'strident'.[3] Yet despite this growing awareness of the tonal complexity of Lee's aesthetic essays, critics have nevertheless tended to overlook the playfulness of her essayistic style – her keen sense of the absurd, the sharpness of her irony, or the manner in which she recruits humour in support of her ethical ends.[4]

Lee's 'Signor Curiazio: A Musical Medley', first published in *Juvenilia* (1887), draws on such techniques to develop a model of ethical relationality, one which emerges by setting in contrast Lee's responses to eighteenth-century opera and nineteenth-century musical Romanticism. Examining the origins of the essay's conception and composition reveals the carefulness with which Lee recruited the essay form to further these ethical ends. In doing so, she participates in a Victorian essayistic tradition in which this most nebulous of literary forms – what Lee herself called 'an amphibious creature, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl' – becomes a vehicle for exploring fundamental questions about art, agency and subjectivity.[5] David Russell's work on the handling of the essay form in the nineteenth century has helpfully recognized its preoccupation with the promise of 'aesthetic liberalism': a belief that certain modes of experience (aesthetic) might sustain modes of relation by which people live together (liberalism).[6] The essayistic styles of writers such as Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, and Walter Pater, Russell suggests, work in different ways to articulate 'the experience of one's own aliveness in creative contact with the world', and seek to 'render this experience open and somehow more available to us'.[7] Such work participates in the broader 'ethical turn' within Victorian studies, here looking beyond the diegetic modelling of moral behaviours in realist novels which has been the focus of much scholarship, to consider instead the formal capacities of essayistic writing to articulate modes of intersubjective relation.[8] Similar work on liberalism in Victorian musical cultures, by Sarah Collins and others, has explored the

significance of music's 'liberal agency': promoting 'an openness or sympathy towards different forms of life', whilst foregrounding 'the possibility of experiential notions of individuality and freedom'.[9] Here, the category of 'liberalism' functions less as a descriptor of particular political allegiance and more as an exemplary ethical model of cognition, presupposing a self which is rational, autonomous, open-minded, sympathetic.[10] Lee's own politics, as Vineta Colby has observed, were consistent throughout her adult life in being 'liberal with socialist leanings'.[11] Her most explicitly political essays, collected in *Gospels of Anarchy* (1908), are representative of this stance in their castigation of philosophies that undermine notions of individual moral responsibility, self-determination, and rational reflection.[12]

Lee's commitment to offering a positive account of the ways in which certain forms of aesthetic experience might sustain a healthy relationship between self and world places her at odds with a long intellectual tradition that has sought to problematize and challenge affirmative claims about the political and social efficacy of art.[13] Indeed, one of the potential sources of scholarly embarrassment about Lee's aesthetic essays is that their mood is far removed from the forms of critical affect that have traditionally been prized within such professionalized literary-critical study, whether the distanced quasi-scientism of certain iterations of New Criticism or the paranoia that might be seen to motivate what Paul Ricoeur has called the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.[14] Yet, in this respect, her essays share a disposition that is similar to that which motivates the recent so-called 'post-critical turn' in literary scholarship. Rita Felski, for instance, has influentially called for a more capacious acknowledgment of the variety of affective attachments that our aesthetic experiences bring into being. 'What would it mean', Felski asks, 'to be less shamefaced about being shaken or stirred, absorbed or enchanted', or to 'forge a language of attachment as intellectually robust and refined as our rhetoric of detachment?'[15]

Many of Lee's most distinctive aesthetic essays are preoccupied with finding an appropriately 'robust' and 'refined' style for articulating what is at stake when we are 'shaken or stirred' in our encounters with art. At the same time, Lee's work – at least from the mid-1880s

onwards – insists that our aesthetic experiences directly impact upon our ethical capacities: our sense of duty to wider communities, our sensitivity to the feelings of others, our responsibility for careful reflection. Thus, far from being merely a descriptive exercise in capturing the phenomenological richness of aesthetic experience, her essays rather develop a distinctive account of the ethical role of art in sustaining a relation between self and other. The dynamics of this encounter can be demarcated by bringing Lee's works into conversation with the sociological theories of Hartmut Rosa, a philosopher working in the critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt School.[16]

Rosa's work offers a normative model of the 'good life', in which human flourishing is determined by 'the quality of one's relationship to the world'.[17] His concept of *Resonanz* [Resonance] describes a mode of relation characterized by an openness to a capacious range of cognitive, affective, and somatic experiences. Examples in our contemporary moment, Rosa suggests, extend from our relationship to the natural world to our engagement with the historical past, while also encompassing everything from aesthetic experience to the pleasures of physical exercise. Such 'axes of resonance' share in common their ability to 'fill the world with colour and sound and allow the self to be moved, to be sensitive and rich'.[18] Importantly, this 'resonant' mode of relation is neither narcissistic (in which the self finds itself replicated in the other), nor masochistic (in which the self is dissolved into the other). Rather, resonant experiences allow for self and other to engage in a dynamic process of mutually 'affecting and being affected'.[19] This comes into sharper focus through Rosa's turn to another acoustic metaphor: that of two pendulum metronomes, each running at a slightly different tempo. When these metronomes are placed next to one another on a hard stone surface they will continue to keep time independently. However, when placed on an elastic or flexible surface (such as a thin, raised wooden board), the metronomes will gradually begin to move towards each other and ultimately oscillate in perfect unison. This physical phenomenon encapsulates, for Rosa, the enabling function of a 'vibratory medium' (or 'resonant space') in allowing for new modes of mutually responsive relation to come into being.[20]

While Rosa's resonant subjects are shaped through such social and environmental conditions, they nevertheless reflect a bounded and autonomous model of selfhood which has much in common with Lee's 'aesthetic liberalism'. Despite their seemingly mechanistic synchronization, Rosa's ticking metronomes each represent individual subjects who 'speak with their own voice', rather than merely echoing each other: 'not merging in unity, but encountering another as an Other'.[21] Their ability to be moved by their respective presence is predicated on their 'constitutive inaccessibility': 'both subject and world [are] sufficiently "closed" or self-consistent' to retain their own distinctive sense of self, 'while also remaining open enough to be affected or reached by each other'.[22]

Lee's writings might be understood as a richly descriptive catalogue of her life-long exploration of the different 'axes of resonance' identified by Rosa – the historical, the aesthetic, the natural world, and the sensing body. The manner in which her enduring interest in the affective and ethical dynamics of relationality informs her choice of essayistic and dialogic literary forms has been noted by some of her most sensitive critics.[23] Here, the similarities between her approach and that of Rosa might emerge though a brief examination of her essay on what she calls 'aesthetic sociability', 'Nisi Citharam' (from *Laurus Nobilis*, 1909).[24] Like Rosa, Lee turns to an acoustic analogy – a 'lyre […] kept carefully in tune' – to articulate the value of an openness to the 'primæval everlasting affinities between ourselves and all things', in which 'our souls becom[e] musical under the touch of the universe'.[25] 'The essential character' of such an encounter, Lee concludes, 'is its being a *relation* between ourselves and certain objects'.[26] Significantly, this experience of openness can be properly sustained only where an individual maintains a clear sense of their own distinctive separateness from the claims of the other. For Lee, proper ethical 'maturity' comes only with the repudiation of a 'youthful instinct' towards 'union, fusion, marriage […] with what our soul desires'.[27] In place of this 'ownership' or 'complete possession', we should instead embrace those spontaneously occurring experiences in which an encounter with the non-self 'tak[es] us by surprise'.[28]

'Nisi Citharam' is also acutely sensitive to how certain experiences, such as the aesthetic, create an atmosphere that facilitates communication between self and other. 'The enjoyment of beautiful things,' Lee insists, is 'heightened by sharing': 'the aesthetic emotion […] intensified by the knowledge of co-existence in others'.[29] She evokes the significance of this encounter through another acoustic metaphor: it represents, she suggests, 'the delight in each person communicating itself, like a musical third, fifth, or octave, to the similar yet different delight in his neighbour, harmonic enriching harmonic by stimulating fresh vibration'.[30] Here, self and other retain their distinct identities: they never sound an *identical* note in a merely narcissistic echo. Rather, each sympathetically responds with a note that harmonically complements the other (the third, fifth or octave that might form one part of a consonant major chord). In doing so, they come together in their individuality not only to reinforce the intensity of their respective personal affective responses, but to create an emotional atmosphere that is in itself a newly formed product of their shared relational experience.

Lee's 'Signor Curiazio' is one of her most significant essayistic reflections on the relationship between music and the ethics of relationality. Its playful style – by turns ironic, indecisive, dogmatic, and long-winded – requires a reader who is not only carefully alert to Lee's shifting tone, but also patient enough to enter into the spirit of her digressive provocations. The essay opens with a puzzle: why does a fragment of melody from Domenico Cimarosa's opera *Gli Orazi e i Curiazi* [*The Horatii and the Curiatii*] (1796) continually 'come into [Lee's] thoughts' at the point at which she attempts to 'sum up [her] ideas about Wagner's theories and practice'?[31] To articulate the 'unexpectedness' and 'grotesqueness' (p. 107) of this intrusion of a 'fragment of consciousness' (p. 105) from the eighteenth century into her attempt to explicate the aesthetic principles of Wagner's musical Romanticism, Lee guides her reader through a 'roundabout' (p. 107) digression regarding a 'rococo' opera that itself concerns the staging of an opera – *Le Convenienze Teatricali* [*The Etiquette of the Stage*] (1794). In a long passage that follows, to which I will return below, Lee proceeds to invent an 'imaginary prologue' to this comic opera so that she can

evoke the 'utter scorn of dramatic propriety' (p. 132) of the eighteenth-century stage. Begging the 'patience' (p. 128) of her readers, Lee then advances to describe the style of Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi*. This is embodied in the contrast between the 'brutal grandeur' (p. 130) of its Roman plot and the 'ridiculously lovely' music to which it is set. Such 'musical peculiarities', Lee suggests, make the opera – and, in particular, the characterization of its lead role, Curiazio – 'a masterpiece of utter dramatic incongruity and insanity' (p. 133). Curiazio, Lee laments, is now 'inaccessible' to her readers 'except in musical archives' (p. 133) – a fact which permits another detour, this time to set up a comparison between Cimarosa's hero and the perhaps more familiar figure of Arsace in Gioachino Rossini's *Semiramide* (1823). This leads us back to Wagner, to Lee's 'astonishment' at the 'mysterious and inappropriate' (p. 138) intrusion of Cimarosa in the midst of *Tristan und Isolde*, and, more broadly, to the contrast between music which is 'constantly straining after dramatic effect' and that which is 'serenely and sweetly overlooking everything of the sort' (p. 137).

Only then does Lee turn to the abstract question in musical aesthetics with which the essay is notionally preoccupied: to what extent can music express 'individuality' (p. 141)? What is the relationship between apparently 'impersonal emotion' (p. 144) produced by abstract musical form, and our sense of the 'personality' (p. 145) of a character on the operatic stage? In addressing these questions, Lee pursues a striking comparison of the pre-tonal harmony of Palestrina and the chromatic harmony of Wagner's *Tristan*. Both harmonic strategies, she suggests, in their 'vagueness and aimlessness' (p. 152), represent 'music of the infinite, music about nothing at all, music without personality' (p. 151). For Palestrina and Wagner to refuse the 'definiteness of musical form' (here aligned with Classical tonal harmony) is to abandon 'the well-defined character of him who sings it' (p. 161). Recognising the implications of this, Lee argues, requires us to 'shift […] the ground of dispute from aesthetics to ethics' (p. 168).

The remainder of Lee's essay proceeds to develop an ethical theory of the relationship between musical form and her sense of relational 'resonance'. On the one hand, she presents eighteenth-century music as facilitating 'a sense of deep sympathy' (p. 106) between self and other,

an ethical response achieved through the effects of objective aesthetic emotions stimulated by musical form. On the other, she presents the 'vagueness and aimlessness' (p. 152) of music by Palestrina and Wagner as prompting a solipsistic withdrawal of the self from the claims of the other, an ethical stance she associates with a subjective emotional response to music's 'nervous' stimulation (p. 166). This distinction is developed in a series of evocative descriptions of musical form as something which enacts at a formal level the dynamic movement of the self in relation to other objects. The polyphonic texture of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* (c. 1562), for example, consists of 'an eddying and whirling of strains perpetually revolving upon themselves; parts crossing and recrossing only to remain for ever isolated like disconsolate spirits wandering past each other, or stars moving about in crowded solitude' (p. 148). Such music models a mode of subjectivity in which one is trapped within the boundaries of the self, painfully aware of the existence and the claims of the other, and desiring a more intimate and sustaining relationship with them, but wholly unable to find a point of contact. Like the fixed celestial motions of the stars, Lee's 'disconsolate' Dantean 'spirits' are bound within repetitive cycles of a movement that hold them always at arms' length from those they dearly wish to touch. The music of the eighteenth century, in contrast, fulfils something of this desire for an ethical relation grounded in physical proximity. Here,

> duets […] between voices of similar pitch [offer] certain effects […] when the two parts touch, embrace, cling to one another, come in contact with painful intensity of dissonance, which must inevitably give us a sense of souls meeting only to part, the pathos of a human farewell. (p. 161).

This music presents a model of autonomous individual subjectivity, in which the self admits a relation with the other that requires the admission of one's vulnerability to the 'painful intensity' and 'pathos' that might arise from genuine social contact. Importantly for Lee, Cimarosa's music cements and reinforces the boundaries of the social self, necessary for meaningful relation with the other. It 'gives us a sense of clearness, of separateness […] of co-ordination and completeness' which, Lee emphasizes, 'is cognate to the moral nature of the living man or woman' (p. 161).

Like many of Lee's aesthetic essays, 'Signor Curiazio' represents an attempt to weigh the abstract claims of aesthetic philosophy against the actual experience of an encounter with an artwork. In this respect, Lee participates in a well-established tradition of English essayistic writing on aesthetics, of which John Ruskin and Walter Pater are perhaps the most representative figures, that is deeply circumspect about systematizing or dogmatic theories of art's social and personal significance.[32] Here, Lee is implicitly in dialogue with the formalist musical aesthetics of Edmund Gurney, whose treatise *The Power of Sound* (1880) she had reviewed positively in 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music' (1882).[33] Lee and Gurney held each other's work on music in mutual high regard. In July 1881, Gurney commented to Mary Robinson that 'he read all [Lee's] things with great interest & that [Lee] was the only writer on music whose career he watched with interest'.[34] Even in 1897, by which time Lee had immersed herself in the works of a hugely wide range of contemporary European aesthetic theorists, she still referred to Gurney as the one 'whom I admire above all other writers on aesthetics.'[35] Gurney's central claim is that the particular aesthetic-emotional force of music arises through listeners' perception of musical form. The formal structures of absolute music, he argues, appeal to a distinctive 'musical faculty' – a cognitive function which has evolved to allow listeners to experience pleasure that arises, say, from the 'ability to construe and enjoy a number of successive tones as a unity'.[36] In locating the origins of musical pleasure solely within the formal aspects of music, Gurney set himself against other prominent traditions in nineteenth-century aesthetics and psychology, such as associationism, which understand emotional responses to music as related to the listeners' individual memories and social experiences. In 'Signor Curiazio', Lee attempts to find a way to reconcile the 'impersonality' of Gurney's stance with her own sense that music is deeply connected both with our sense of self, and our ability to sustain a resonant relationship with others. In Gurney's terms, she suggests, music offers 'emotion […] but emotion is not a man or a woman, it is not an individual' (p. 144). Yet such a view conflicts with her deeply felt sense of the 'personal' ethical relation modelled through the characters in eighteenth-century opera. Ultimately, Lee squares her

own views with those of Gurney by concluding that 'when we have got to musical form, we have got also to musical personality, for they are in reality one and the same thing' (p. 153). Musical form, Lee insists, retains an ability to enact forms of spiritually healthy – and deeply personal – modes of social relation. Such modes of relation, she insists, are predicated on a model of stable, coherent, and autonomous model of liberal selfhood.

The ability of eighteenth-century music to reaffirm this liberal self – to leave us feeling 'reposed and refreshed' (p. 171) – is set in stark contrast with the music of Wagner. In her ethical critique Lee returns repeatedly, both in this essay and elsewhere, to two key issues germane to my interest in how the 'resonance' of certain aesthetic experiences facilitate or limit relationality. Firstly, Lee argues that Wagner's music gains its effects only by holding up a narcissistic mirror in which listeners find themselves reflected. So structurally disorientating and affectively overwhelming is this music, she suggests, that listeners are unable to experience the objective aesthetic emotions awakened by musical form. They are merely confronted with their own pre-existing subjective emotional experiences. Whilst listening to *Tristan*, the listener becomes introspectively and solipsistically detached from the interpersonal connections that sustain their moral selves: 'unconscious of the theatre, of the spectators, of the actors, almost of the music and almost of our real selves […] our past, our present, our future – all the things about which we think, after which we strive, all gone, forgotten' (p. 172). This music promotes 'neither sympathy with virtue, nor admiration for beauty'. Rather it presents a sustained communing with egotistical emotions that ostensibly arise from the characters on stage, but in fact have their origins in the materiality of the listener's body: 'the buzz of their blood is in *our* ears, the palpitation of every one of their arteries is throughout *our own* bodies, the choking of their voice is in *our* throats' (p. 173). In 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner' (1911), Lee attacks Wagner's music in similar terms for rendering listeners 'passive and self-centred', 'isolating the ego' so that it is reduced to 'knowing only its own fluctuations and desiring only its own intensification'.[37] Wagner's repeated leitmotifs, which emerge from the 'confused flux' of the surrounding music, work as a strategy to delude the

listener into thinking that they are engaging with objective musical content.[38] In fact, she suggests, 'the recollection of such moments […] makes you think afterwards […] that it must have been the music (in reality barely listened to and not all followed) which told you all the secrets you have really been telling yourself'.[39]

Secondly, Lee suggests that the somatic emotional force of this music is so intense that it challenges the coherence of the self, rendering it unable to form relations with new objects: 'our real selves […] have melted away have disappeared, have melted away' (p. 172). In 'Beauty and Sanity' (1895), modern music – of which Wagner's *Tristan* serves as the representative example – threatens the coherence of the social self: in its appeal to subjective emotional excess it is guilty of 'melting away […] the soul's active structure, its bone and muscle, till there is revealed only the shapeless primæval nudity of confused instincts'.[40] Such music, Lee argues, 'sells its artistic birthright', which is to afford to listeners 'a vast emotional serenity […] wherein they can lose themselves in peacefulness and strength'.[41] Both of these issues come into sharper focus in 'Out of Venice at Last' (1925). Here Lee draws direct parallels between the 'days of moody isolation of my self' that she always feels when in Venice and her experience of Wagner's music, which 'conspire[s] to melt and mar our soul' with its 'ungraspable timbres and unstable rhythms and modulation'.[42] Listening to this music, she suggests, confronts one with 'a self fluctuating and shifting in stagnation like the shallow and stagnant Venetian waters'.[43] In its enervating emotional plenitude, it offers no possibilities for forming new relations between self and world ('the stimulus of […] fragment forcing us to furnish what it lacks out of our own heart and mind').[44] Rather, it merely prompts a solipsistic turn inwards as it invokes a nostalgic sense of lost possibility: 'it brings up, with each dip of the oar, the past, or rather the might-have-been'.[45]

This contrast between the ethical significance of Wagnerian romanticism and eighteenth-century Italian opera similarly informs Lee's essay 'Botticelli at the Villa Lemmi' (1882), where she once again turns to the latter in order to consider strategies for sustaining a vibrant relationship with the world.[46] For Lee, the 'incongruous hotch-potch' of such Italian opera makes it uniquely

well-placed to 'bring art into life' by creating an atmosphere where one's focus hovers between aesthetic and social worlds.[47] This manifests itself within the formal affordances of the music itself, at the level of the demands placed by the performance on listeners' styles of attention, and in the modes of sociality that opera-going might promote. When listening enraptured to symphonic music in the concert hall, Lee suggests, 'our minds are tied as with a ligature'.[48] Italian opera, in contrast, allows for audiences' minds to follow the contours of their own inclination: 'the melodies may be taken or left at will […] they are not forced upon us whether we be fit to enjoy them or not'.[49] Implicitly, the motivic complexity of nineteenth-century orchestral music requires of the listener an intense mode of sustained close attention, figured here (with a characteristic musical pun) as akin to the mental strangulation of a 'ligature'. In contrast, the comparative melodic simplicity and the prevalence of formally predictable *da capo* arias in eighteenth-century Italian opera, alongside the often-incidental relationship between musical and narrative content in such works, means that a listener is relatively free to let their minds wander. Indeed, for Lee, the opera itself becomes defined by the pleasures of distraction:

> An opera is a sort of little epitome of life: you move, look about, follow an action with eyes and mind, look at faces, dresses and movements, take in words and sights; see and chat with your friends; and if, with all this, you listen to music, it is *freely*, as you would listen to the sound of birds among the numerous impressions of a walk in the country.[50]

Lee's syntax here invites us to partake in the freely wandering, open attention that she most prizes. Framed by the familiarity of second-person address, her prose leads the reader through a succession of sensory perceptions and bodily movements – not random, but following the moment-by-moment imperatives of one's curiosity. If, at first, we merely 'look about', our roaming eyes soon begin to take pleasure in 'faces, dresses, movements'. What matters most is that one is able to form the attachments that arise most organically in relation to one's own wants and desires. In this respect, listening '*freely*' models an exemplary form of liberal cognition. Indeed, the act of listening to music, she suggests, might very well be altogether incidental to one's experience of the opera: it is relegated to the end of this long sentence, and falls far behind a 'chat with friends'.

Lee's opera-going is simultaneously an aesthetic and a social experience or, as Hartmut Rosa might say, one in which the aesthetic creates the 'resonant' atmosphere in which new forms of social relation might emerge.[51]

Lee's commitment to the ethical importance of these resonant experiences is also sustained through her distinctive handling of the essay form. The particular stylistic idiosyncrasies of 'Signor Curiazio', for instance, come into sharper focus when understood in the light of the essay's genesis and publication history. As Linda K. Hughes has demonstrated, Lee shrewdly targeted her essays for publication in a range of journals, typically with a view to subsequent publication in book form.[52] Lee had initially hoped to place 'Signor Curiazio' in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1882, but the piece was ultimately not accepted for publication. Her correspondence with William Blackwood concerning the essay is instructive for the insights it gives into Lee's conception of the form she adopted for the piece. The idea for 'a study of Wagner or rather Wagnerism' was initially suggested to Lee by J. M. Langford – a senior editor at the magazine, who shared with Lee an interest in eighteenth-century music – following the publication by Blackwood of Lee's article 'Mozart: A Study of Artistic Nationality' in May 1882.[53] 'Mozart' was one of a number of densely-argued articles on musical aesthetics that Lee published between the late 1870s and the early 1880s, characterized by what Lee herself called 'scientific heaviness'.[54] In pitching her piece on Wagnerism in November 1882, Lee made clear to Blackwood that she wished to present her future 'musical papers' for *Blackwood's Magazine* in 'the shape rendered (I may now say without too much vanity) popular by my book *Belcaro*'.[55] In order to give Blackwood a sense of the 'form more original & artistic […] in which [she] should prefer to convey any future musical ideas to [his] readers', Lee forwarded to Blackwood a spare proof copy of an essay from *Belcaro* (likely to have been 'Cherubino', a musical piece which, as Lee boasts to Blackwood, was 'spoken [of] in the most flattering way' by reviewers in *The Academy* and elsewhere).[56] Blackwood responded that 'he had no objection to throwing it into the form you suggest' – and invited Lee to send the piece to him at her leisure.[57]

The letter that Lee subsequently sent to Blackwood to accompany the submission of 'Signor Curiazio' to the magazine is interesting for what it suggests about the form of Lee's essay.[58] Here, she characterizes her essayistic technique as an attempt to 'attack the subject in a sidelong fashion'.[59] She justifies her decision with reference to a number of factors, all of which demonstrate an acute sensitivity to the demands of both the literary marketplace and the needs of her readers. She aims to write in a form that is distinct from the 'perfect flood of books, pamphlets, review and newspaper articles' on Wagnerism which 'overwhelmed the public' following the first London staging of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in the summer of that year.[60] At the same time, she hopes to animate technical questions of musical aesthetics in a manner that avoids the 'dryness of abstract musical disputes'.[61] Indeed, she regrets that her recently published 'scientific piece on music' in the *Contemporary Review*, 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music', 'appears to be Sanskrit to all my friends'.[62] Her final aim is to appeal to those readers who may be 'repelled by the weariness of Wagnerism' by intermingling her material on *Tristan und Isolde* with reflections on eighteenth-century Italian opera.[63] Lee first saw *Tristan* at Drury Lane in London on Saturday 24 June 1882, with Mary Robinson (the first production of the opera in the United Kingdom). She wrote to her mother the following day that the opera 'bored [her] much more than expected'. 'There are some fine pieces', she noted, 'but the whole effect is insupportably monotonous & tedious'. In returning to 'the grotesque musical world of the 18th century', instead, Lee responds to the 'lamenting' of 'all [her] friends', who assumed that she had given up writing about this period after her first book, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880).[64]

The 'sidelong fashion' in which Lee reformulates the 'scientific heaviness' of her subject in 'Signor Curiazio' reflects her long-standing concern with finding an appropriate style for writing about music. In a letter to her friend and mentor Henrietta Jenkin in 1875, Lee contrasts what she sees as two opposing 'intolerable' extremes in such writing.[65] On the one hand, stand technical treatises dominated by 'lectures on fourths and false fifths', which render their authors 'narrow minded', having 'lost all suppleness of mind from excessive study of counterpoint'. On the other,

a tradition of Romantic idealist writing on music – of which E. T. A. Hoffmann is perhaps the most representative example – defined by its fixation with 'shapeless clues about the soul'. Practitioners of such 'morbid' writing, she suggests, risk becoming 'limp, faded and quasi-hysterical from indulging too much in emotional mysticism'. Explicit here is Lee's concern with the way in which the demands of certain strategies for writing about music might risk distorting what is most valuable in one's distinctive intellectual and emotional relationship with the artform. In charting a course between desiccated, pedantic intellectualism and self-indulgent poetic rhapsodizing, Lee positions herself in the tradition of an aesthetic liberalism that simultaneously values both careful rational reflection and an openness to the possibility of self-transformation through one's deeply personal aesthetic encounters. Her thoughts on music, she admits to Jenkin, may ultimately strike some readers as 'strange or even insufferable', but she nevertheless hopes to develop a style that allows her to articulate her 'ideas on the subject […] insidiously and slowly'.

Lee's 'slow' style in the essays collected in *Juvenilia* has certainly been recognized by both her sympathetic and less patient critics – what an anonymous reviewer in *The Spectator* called her 'habitual abuse of the *tempo rubato*'.[66] Yet the relationship of such slowness to the wily, cunning 'insidiousness' of a writer who ludically entraps her readers by playing the long game has been less widely noted. In 'Signor Curiazio', this becomes the central formal strategy through which Lee cultivates a space for resonance in her handling of the essay form. Here, the openness of the self to new objects is sustained through modes of humour and irony that work against the premature foreclosure of the reader's sympathetic imagination. Indeed, the exclamation with which Lee begins her essay – 'Nonsense! I said to myself' – should immediately alert us to the significance of the 'irrelevant' (p. 102), the 'absurd' (p. 132), and the 'preposterous' (p. 140) in how Lee pursues her aims. This is most marked in her keen awareness of the place of digression, indecision, and reversal – in what she calls 'these most vagabond of musical dissertations' – as her argument unfolds. She repeatedly begs the reader's indulgence whilst often purposely stretching the limits of this tolerance: 'the business is a little roundabout' (p. 107); 'we shall get to it presently, and you

must have patience for the moment' (p. 128); 'now we come to the really curious part of the matter' (p. 139). Elsewhere, she develops an argument in one direction only to then abandon that line for a different approach ('let us face it again; or rather let us attack it from another side' (p. 146)), or reveals that a certain view she has propounded was, in fact, something of a red herring all along ('when I persisted in talking about this […] I was perfectly aware that…' (p. 160)). In other instances she establishes a position on a particular question, only then to admit her indecision: 'Yet I am not so sure about it…' (p. 165). By the time Lee reaches the final paragraph of her long essay – 'thinking over all this, and reverting to the point from which I started' (p. 176) – the reader might be forgiven for feeling that her 'reversion' to the 'start' is as much a sly admission of her wilful inconclusiveness as an attempt to demonstrate that she has elegantly settled the question at hand.

The most eccentric aspect of Lee's quest for resonance in 'Signor Curiazio' is the inclusion of the 'imaginary prologue' (p. 108) with which she begins her essay. The passage represents a long flight of fancy on the behind-the-scenes absurdities that underpin the making of an eighteenth-century opera, from the tensions between composer and librettist to the self-obsession of the principal singers. It evokes a tradition of comic operatic treatments of the subject, perhaps most notably in Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* [*The Impresario*] and Salieri's *Prima la musica e poi le parole* [*First the Music and then the Words*], which were first performed as the first and second parts of an Imperial entertainment at the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna on 7 February 1786. The prologue is characteristic for the self-awareness with which Lee indulges her stylistic slowness. Indeed, the essay's speaker toys with her readers' impatience in this indulgently long-winded digression. A number of lengthy paragraphs begin with the word '[f]inally' or '[a]t last'. The prologue incorporates a number of much-delayed arrivals, a languorous description of the hours spent by the composer 'ingeniously powdering his wig', and a report of the *primo uomo* 'stretch[ing] himself gracefully on a sofa'. Lee, in short, stubbornly refuses her readers' demands to get a move on. Not only is the plot of the prologue recounted in a way that is knowingly tiresome, but its speaker seems to revel in presenting us with details out of logical sequence. When first introduced to the

'Poet', for instance, we are, in effect, both told and *not told* the name of this man 'whom subsequent events may possibly identify with Antonio Sografi' (p. 109).

Precariously balanced between irreverence and irrelevance, the prologue might seem to some readers a perfect example of what Virginia Woolf derided as Lee's 'slack & untidy' style, with its 'ligaments […] too loose'.[67] Yet its self-conscious needling of the reader's impatience signals its more careful intent. The passage animates the essay's broader concern with resonant atmospheres of relationality: it evokes at length a lively, chaotic inter-personal connectedness, characterized by messy compromises and the reconciling of clashing egos. Its wilful digressiveness releases the reader from the demands of argument or analysis, and instead creates space, perhaps, for new modes of relation. In Cosmo Monkhouse's review of *Belcaro* (1881), the poet and critic observed that Lee's distinctive 'way of conveying ideas […] has an effect of creating activity in the reader's mind which no other mode can equal'. This 'continuous and delightful stimulation of thought', he suggests, will inevitably lead her readers towards 'conversation, dreaming, speculation, and all kinds of pleasant and healthy mental exercise'.[68] Monkhouse implicitly articulates the cognitive styles of an aesthetic liberalism that is expressed through the digressions, diversions and indecisions of the Victorian essay form. Far from promoting introspection or solipsistic withdrawal – an accusation often levelled against Lee's most obvious model, Walter Pater – Lee's essays encourage an imaginative and engaged sociality: they are a starting point for discussion, the opening up of creative reflection, an invitation towards a renewed relationship with the world.

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[1] Vernon Lee, 'The Use of Beauty', in *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1909), pp. 1-40 (pp. 14-15).
[2] Carlo Caballero, '"A Wicked Voice": On Vernon Lee, Wagner, and the Effects of Music', *Victorian Studies*, 35.4 (1992), 385-408.
[3] See, for example, Vineta Colby, 'The Puritan Aesthete: Vernon Lee', in *The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 235-304; Christa Zorn, 'The Handling of Words: Reader Response Victorian Style', in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 174-92 (p. 178); Martha Vicinus, '"A Legion of Ghosts": Vernon Lee (1856–1935) and the Art of Nostalgia', *GLQ,* 10.4 (2004), 599-616; Patricia Pulham, 'Violence and the Pacifist Body in Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', in *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature: Bodies-At-War*, ed. by Petra Rau (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 46-63 (p. 46).

[4] Some recent notable exceptions include discussion of Lee's 'leisurely, even playful attitude' in Catherine Maxwell, 'Vernon Lee's Handling of Words', in *Thinking Through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 282-97 (p. 285); and the function of irony in Lee's literary criticism in Alex Wong, 'Vernon Lee's Problem with Landor', *Cambridge Quarterly* 45.2 (2016), 135-56.
[5] Vernon Lee, *Ottilie: An Eighteenth-Century Idyl* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1883), p. 7.
[6] David Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 4.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See Rebecca N. Mitchell, 'The Ethical Turn', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 226-36; Amanda Anderson, *Psyche and Ethos: Moral Life After Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[9] Sarah Collins, 'Aesthetic Liberalism', in *Music and Victorian Liberalism: Composing the Liberal Subject*, ed. by Sarah Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 1-12 (p. 9).
[10] For a discussion of how such modes of 'liberal cognition' became formalized, see Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[11] Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003), p. 272.
[12] Vernon Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908).
[13] See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
[14] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 33. For a discussion of the origins of this phrase, see Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 14-51.
[15] Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. xiv.
[16] For a concise introduction to Rosa's work and a discussion of its relevance to literary studies, see Rita Felski, 'Good Vibrations', *American Literary History*, 32.2 (2020), 405-15.
[17] Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. by James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p. 5.
[18] Ibid., p. 9.
[19] Ibid., p. 166.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 447.
[22] Ibid., p. 174.
[23] See Catherine Maxwell, 'Vernon Lee's Handling of Words', p. 286-87; Joseph Bristow, 'Vernon Lee's Art of Feeling', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 25.1 (Spring, 2006), 117-39.
[24] Vernon Lee, 'Nisi Citharam', in *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1909), pp. 41-76.
[25] Ibid., p. 43.
[26] Ibid., p. 52.
[27] Ibid., p. 51.
[28] Ibid., p. 52.
[29] Ibid., p. 49.
[30] Ibid., p. 54.
[31] Vernon Lee, 'Signor Curiazio: A Musical Medley', in *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questio*ns, 2 vols (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887), I, pp. 317-94 (p. 102; p. 101.) Hereafter cited in the text parenthetically.
[32] See Stefano Evangelista, 'Things Said by the Way: Walter Pater and the Essay', in *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present*, ed. by Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 241-57.
[33] For Gurney's musical aesthetics, see Sarah Collins, 'Utility and the Pleasures of Musical Formalism: Edmund Gurney, Liberal Individualism, and Musical Beauty as "Ultimate' Value"', *Music and Letters*, 100.2 (May 2019), 335-54.
[34] Vernon Lee, letter to Matilda Paget, 26-28 July 1881, in *The Selected Letters of Vernon Lee*, ed. by Amanda Gagel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 320. For a detailed consideration of Lee's musical formalism, see Fraser Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body in English Literature at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 43-47.
[35] Vernon Lee, letter to Mary Costelloe Berenson, 4 November 1897, in Mandy Gagel, 'Selected Letters of Vernon Lee' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston University, 2008), p. 590.
[36] Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (London: Smith, Elder, 1880), p. 112; Edmund Gurney, 'On Some Disputed Points in Music', *Fortnightly Review*, 20 (1876), 106-30 (p. 130).
[37] Vernon Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', *Fortnightly Review*, 95 (May 1911), 868-85 (p. 885).
[38] Ibid, p. 881.
[39] Ibid., p. 882.
[40] Vernon Lee, 'Beauty and Sanity', *Fortnightly Review*, 64.58 (August 1895), 252-68 (p. 261).
[41] Ibid.

[42] Vernon Lee, 'Out of Venice at Last', in *The Golden Keys and Other Essays on the Genius Loci* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1925), pp. 73-77 (pp. 74-75).
[43] Ibid., p. 74.
[44] Ibid., p. 75.
[45] Ibid., p. 76.
[46] Vernon Lee, 'Botticelli at the Villa Lemmi', in *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*, 2 vols (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887), I, pp. 77-130. The essay was first published in *Cornhill Magazine*, 46 (August 1882), 159-73.
[47] Ibid., p. 106.
[48] Ibid., p. 126.
[49] Ibid., p. 125.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Rosa, *Resonance*.
[52] Linda K. Hughes, 'Vernon Lee: Slow Serialist and Journalist at the *Fin de Siècle*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 50.1 (2021), 173-202.
[53] Letter to William Blackwood, 1 May 1882, *Letters*, I, p. 356; Vernon Lee, 'Mozart: A Study of Artistic Nationality', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 131 (May 1882), 635-53.
[54] Letter to Matilda Paget, 24 July 1882, *Letters*, I, p. 384. See 'Musical Expression and the Composers of the Eighteenth Century,' *New Quarterly Magazine*, 8 (April 1877), 186-202; 'Comparative Aesthetics', *Contemporary Review*, 38 (Aug 1880), 300-26; 'The Art of Singing, Past and Present,' *British Quarterly Review*, 72 (Oct 1880), 318-42.
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[56] Ibid.; 'Cherubino', in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: Satchell, 1881), pp. 129-55.
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[58] Letter to William Blackwood, 20 December 1882, *Letters*, I, p. 400.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.; 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music,' *Contemporary Review*, 42 (December 1882), 840-58.
[63] Letter to William Blackwood, 20 December 1882, *Letters*, I, p. 400.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Letter to Henrietta Jenkin, 28 January 1875, *Letters*, I, p. 188.
[66] 'Vernon Lee's "Juvenilia"', *Spectator*, 28 January 1888, pp. 143-44.
[67] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1915-1919*, 20 April 1919, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 266.
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Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*: A Modern Morality, an Intermedial Mosaic

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Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (1915) documents the rise of nationalist discourses that led to World War I, as well as Lee's zealous commitment to the promotion of pacifist values in contradiction to the rhetoric that had been fuelling the hostilities. The letter that she addressed to the secretary of the Women Suffrage Alliance, Rosika Schwimmer, which appeared in the *Evening Post* on 3 October 1914, is a blatant vindication of her activism. Besides stating the need for women across the world to take sides against the barbarity that was plaguing Europe, Lee offers a passionate summary of her engagement with contemporary politics. This began with her response to French novelist Paul Bourget's anti-German campaign:

> so far back as 1907 I answered in the *Westminster Gazette* an article by French academician Paul Bourget calling upon England […] to help France to keep Germany in the place befitting her as a civilization without Latin (or he was civil enough to add) even Anglo-Saxon *order*, a civilization still unwashed of its muddy dross ('encore mal lavé de ses scories'), a civilization expressed by the *Bourgeoisisme* (I am quoting) of Goethe, the *vulgarité* of Heine, and altogether little better than a *semi-barbarism* destined to a *rôle subalterne* in Europe.[1]

Lee was afraid that the *Entente Cordiale*, which had been signed in 1904 to improve Franco-British relationships, might have taken on dangerous implications for the increasing nationalist drives across Europe. Accordingly, in the years leading up to the war she had signed numerous contributions to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, the *Nation*, the *New Statesman*, and the French *Correspondances*.[2] As Peter Gunn remarks, Lee's anti-war activism even changed her entourage at Il Palmerino, which became a pacifist hub hosting visitors such as Philip Edward Morrell, one of the few Members of Parliament who voted against Britain's declaration of war on Germany in 1914.[3]

When the conflict broke out, Lee was unable to return to Italy from her usual holiday in England, and this event shaped *The Ballet of the Nations*. This allegorical work, which intentionally conflates different genres and codes, was published with elegant illustrations by painter Maxwell Armfield that framed the text with a 'pictorial commentary' as the frontispiece states. However,

contemporary reviewers strongly criticized the inconsistency between word and image, as the latter seemed deliberately to avoid the brutality of the war. As Rachel Baldacchino summarizes, *The Ballet of the Nations*

> was largely ignored by readers and critics and the few reviews that covered it were either lukewarm or completely dismissive. The *Athenæum* called it 'a clever piece of imaginative description of WWI' which served to expose Lee 'as a stylist' and the *Saturday Review* said it was 'not the sort of literature which endures in another age since it expresses the fury of the moment'. Armfield's pictorial commentary was not well received either. The *Manchester Guardian* criticised his 'exaggerated avoidance of the brutal' whilst *The Evening Standard* argued that the illustrations were 'unforgivable' and completely irrelevant to Lee's *Ballet*, so much so that they turned it into a 'book of nonsense'.[4]

These reviews criticize Lee and Armfield as they seem to fall in with the aesthetic fallacy that was to concern Theodor Adorno after World War II – that is, the need to represent the horrors of the conflict in such an aesthetic form as to avoid morbid or voyeuristic effects.[5] Adorno specifically referred to the Shoah, but his preoccupation, particularly with the risk of endorsing the values that legitimize war and death, raises issues that are crucial to any representation of violence and warfare. With the necessary distinctions, the reviews of *The Ballet of the Nations* suggest the relevance of an aesthetic paradigm suitable for representing the horrors of the conflict without complying with the culture that fostered them.

That Lee had similar issues in mind is manifest in her decision to republish her contemporary morality play as part of *Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes & Introduction* in 1920. In a revised form, *The Ballet of the Nations* appears here as a two-act interlude framed by a Prologue in which Satan dialogues with Clio, the Muse of History, and an Epilogue. *Satan the Waster* foregrounds a more explicit search for theatricality than *The Ballet of the Nations*, although the Note to the Reader clarifies that the 'drama is intended to be read, and especially read out loud, as *prose*'.[6] Moreover, in the introduction to the trilogy, Lee admits that she had intended to come up with 'symbolical figures, grotesquely embodying what seems too multifold and fluctuating'. This search led to an 'improvisation' with which she was ultimately dissatisfied.[7]

For these reasons, scholars have mostly explored *The Ballet of the Nations* as a text reflecting Lee's pacifist commitment and her concerns over the role of art and beauty in the light of historical

contingency. Grace Brockington, for instance, rightly argues that the work foregrounds 'an aesthetic controversy about the function of art in a belligerent society'.[8] While I agree with Brockington, I also believe that her claim that *The Ballet of the Nations* consists of 'two books, two conflicting interpretations of art's role' needs further contextualization.[9] More to the point, I suggest that such perceived inconsistency is to a considerable extent the result of the complex web of allusions that lies beneath *The Ballet of the Nations*. Lee's work bridges aesthetic issues and ethical concerns by appropriating a hybridization of the poetics of art that attempts an osmotic fusion of diverse genres and art forms. Possibly prompted by Richard Wagner's experimentation in the mid-nineteenth century, this aesthetic process, as Elisa Bizzotto illustrates, had been pursued by artists and writers at the fin de siècle. It is my contention that Lee follows a similar pattern to voice her pacifism at the outbreak of the Great War.[10]

Accordingly, in this article I argue that *The Ballet of the Nations* stands out as an intermedial mosaic, an imbrication that is formed of a complex, multifarious web of hints and suggestions. Besides paying homage to the tradition of morality plays, Lee's allegory incorporates into her prose the visual representations of the 'Danse Macabre' and 'The Triumph of Death'. Moreover, I suggest that *The Ballet of the Nations* should be placed within the context of nineteenth-century experimentation in the fields of music and ballet, with Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* (1849), Camille Saint-Saëns's tone poem *Danse Macabre* (1874), and the Italian extravaganza *Ballo Excelsior* (1881), providing representational models for Satan's dominion as well as the implicit faith in a future brotherhood of the nations.

The Ballet of the Nations as a trans-genre work

Several textual and non-textual elements suggest that *The Ballet of the Nations* is an attempt to align different genres and art forms. The frontispiece states that *The Ballet of the Nations* is a 'Present-Day Morality', thus grounding it in a specific dramatic tradition. Armfield's illustrations, on the other hand, are defined as 'a pictorial commentary'. This indication foregrounds a precise relationship

between text and images in spite of the inconsistencies, which amount, as Brockington has documented, to about half of the pictures.[11]

The Ballet of the Nations is patently modelled on the example of medieval morality plays, a vernacular genre that staged allegorical characters embodying abstract or moral qualities such as Vice, Justice, and Virtue, and had a didactic aim. Lee follows the same pattern: Satan, who is known as 'the World's great Stage-Lessee', assisted by the Ballet-Master, Death, groups an orchestra and a *corps de ballet* for his gruesome show. The former consists of allegorical personifications of passions and habits, such as Self-Interest, Fear, and 'her shabby, restless twins, Suspicion and Panic'. The instrumentalists are complemented by a couple, Lady Idealism and Prince Adventure, and several other passions: Sin (who is also known as Disease), Rapine, Lust, Murder, Famine, Hatred, Self-Righteousness, and the 'Prince of Tenors', Heroism. During the rehearsal, Satan summons some of the nations to dance, while others – presumably the countries that had chosen neutrality during World War I – remain seated with Sleepy Virtues and Centuries-to-Come, a character that stretches the temporal dimension of *The Ballet of the Nations* forward.[12]

Before Satan and Death arrange their performance, the narrating voice locates the dramatic action in a well-defined historical context, which coincides 'with the end of the proverbially bourgeois Victorian age' and other unspecified events that have occurred in 'South Africa and the Far East, and then in the Near East quite recently'.[13] The allusion is arguably to the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the Agadir Crisis (1911), the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912), and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), about all of which Lee had openly voiced her dissent.[14] Still, the silent presence of Centuries-to-Come, coupled with the vagueness inherent in the allegorical construction of this character, hints at a typical element of medieval moralities, that is, the timelessness resulting from conflating the contemporary with the eternal.[15] This strategy is also confirmed by the presence of Science and Progress, two characters that clearly point towards a future dimension. Moreover, the timelessness of the ballet that is about to be staged on the 'Theatre of the West' is fully embodied

in its impresario, Satan, whom the dancing nations acknowledge as 'a power transcending their ephemeral existence'.[16]

Lee adopts the allegorical and didactic pattern of morality plays, but further evidence indicates that the models she had in mind were possibly much broader. My claim is that *The Ballet of the Nations* is a trans-genre work, a text that employs the main characteristics of the macro-genre to which Lee assigns it – that is, the morality play, as the subtitle suggests – but which also encompasses features typical of other genres and forms. This conflation results in a work that is far more complex than the mere assemblage of different tropes and conventions, many of which are explicitly alluded to in the text. Satan, for instance, admits preferring the Ballet of the Nations to any of the other mystery-plays that Death occasionally stages, such as Earthquake and Pestilence. Only a few lines later, the reference to another medieval vernacular genre, and to the role of pageants in illustrating biblical stories is followed by Satan's claim that the ballet 'answers perfectly to what the Spaniards call an *Auto Sacramental*, a sacred drama having all the attractions of a bull-fight'.[17]

A popular dramatic genre in medieval and Renaissance Spain, *autos sacramentales* developed along the lines of morality plays and were performed on religious feast days and at other celebrations. Lee was familiar with Calderón de la Barca's *autos sacramentales*, as her allusion to *El purgatorio de San Patricio* (1628) in the story 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' (1909) suggests. Moreover, Patricia Pulham has illustrated that *The Ballet of the Nations* also subsumes elements of the *auto da fé* [act of faith], the ritual of punishment and public penitence for heretics that was introduced by Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in the late fifteenth century.[18]

The *auto da fé* was not impromptu, but a carefully concocted event that showcased human suffering and, as Satan says, it even included bull fights. Pulham's argument on the influence of the *auto da fé* on *The Ballet of the Nations* is convincing, and I would add that the ideological implications of this Spanish ritual branch out further than the religious sphere. The *auto da fé* was meant to celebrate the politics of the Spanish Monarchy, whose judicial system compared – and cooperated

– with that of the Pope.[19] From this perspective, this Catholic ritual was also a spectacle of national power and supremacy, which is precisely what Lee points to. After rapping three times on his desk, Master-Death thus announces the title of the performance to the company: 'THIS Ballet of ours […] is called the Ballet of the Nations. Nothing very new in the title, but one that always draws.'[20] But as far as the spectacularizing of nationalistic ideology is concerned, Death's assertion also grounds Satan's performance in another long-established dramatic genre. This is the French tradition of the *ballet des nations*, a fact that scholars have curiously overlooked despite its being explicitly recalled in the title of Lee's work.

Like the *auto da fé*, the *ballet des nations* testifies to growing chauvinistic ideologies. Both contributed, in fact, to the celebration of national superiority in front of other nations, either by showcasing the power of a country to preside over people's lives, or by mocking foreign customs. The latter aspect is typical of the early sixteenth-century *ballet des nations*, which stages French grandeur by parodying other nations through the allegorical representation of what were perceived as their stereotypical flaws.[21] The Germans, for instance, were the object of parody as gullible drunkards, a portrait that insists on the barbarism that was also to fuel early twentieth-century nationalist drives, leading to the gory spectacle of *The Ballet of the Nations*. In addition, Lee's desire to show horror and suffering, and the spectacle of the nations as a corps de ballet dancing aimlessly except for Satan and Death's directions, also point, as in a game of Chinese boxes, to another dramatic genre.

Embedded in Lee's tragic morality tale is the admixture of violence and comedy that was a staple of the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol. Looking back on the conflict in the preface to *Satan the Waster*, Lee defines the Great War as

> gigantically cruel, but at the same time needless and senseless like some ghastly 'Grand Guignol' performance. It could, as it seemed to me, have been planned and staged only by the legendary Power of Evil; and the remembrance of mediaeval masques naturally added the familiar figure, fiddling and leering as in Holbein's woodcuts, of a Ballet Master Death.[22]

The passage confirms that Lee conceived of her pacifist morality as a response to a number of different dramatic and visual conventions. Founded in Paris in 1897, the Grand-Guignol was

considered to be the antonomasia of the theatre of horror, largely because of its melodramatic combination of realistic and naturalistic elements. Lee explicitly compares the war to the performances of the Grand-Guignol in the introduction to *Satan the Waster*, but allusions to its dramatic conventions can also be traced in *The Ballet of the Nations*. Due to their desire to draw the audience's attention to the physicality of pain, the plays staged at the Grand-Guignol laid specific emphasis on body language. In 1908 playwright André de Lorde authored *Pour jouer la Comédie de salon*, a guide for actors that provided a catalogue of expressions for the head, the face, and the body:

> THE FACE
> The *eyes*.—Half-closed: malice, disdain. Lowered: great respect, shame. Wide open: amazement, anger, terror. […]
> The *mouth*.—Half-open: surprise, joy. Wide open: astonishment […]. Lower lip extended: disdain, sulkiness, ignorance. Lower jawbone extended: ferociousness. Chattering of teeth: mad terror.
>
> THE HEAD
> Forward: curiosity, ferociousness. Back: audacity, insolence, fear. To the side: pity, indolence. […] Lowered: shame, fear. […]
>
> THE BODY
> With shame, and often with terror, the body is held in, the back is curved, the arms held tightly by the sides … with fear and with repulsion, the torso is held back.[23]

De Lorde instructed actors on particular gestures and expressions that were meant to show and elicit specific feelings and reactions, namely dismay, abhorrence, and loathing. In *The Ballet of the Nations*, Lee draws a similar distinction between the heads and the bodies of the dancing nations, and the contrast that she highlights fulfils an artistic as well as a political purpose. After announcing the title of the performance, Death points out that the nations 'have all got excellent heads', and thus allows them to dance according to their inspiration:

> The more they […] [cut] capers according to circumstances and inventing terrifically new figures, the more they will find, odd as it may appear, that their vis-à-vis as well as their partners will respond; and the more indissolubly interlocked will become the novel and majestic pattern of destruction which their gory but indefatigable limbs are weaving for the satisfaction of our enlightened Stage-Lessee, my Lord Satan, and the admiration of History.[24]

Lee's insistence on body language and the gruesome aspects it can convey suggests that she already had in mind the combination of horror and comedy that was a staple of the plays performed at the Grand-Guignol. However, her attention to the heads of the nations as entities separated from the body also transfers the doctrine of the body politic onto the stage. According to this metaphor, which originated in classical times, the structure of a polity is represented analogically as a human body, and its chief, be it a sovereign or a government, is the head presiding over the body and limbs. The doctrine was further elaborated during the Renaissance, with James I allegedly claiming that 'the proper office of a King towards his Subjects, agrees very well with the office of the head towards the body' and that 'the head hath the power of directing all the members of the body to that use which the judgement in the head thinkes most convenient'.[25] Though slightly modified after Charles I's execution, the allegory of the body politic remained in use and was further popularized by Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), as its frontispiece clearly indicates in foregrounding an image of the sovereign consisting of the bodies of the citizenry.

In Lee's case, the distinction between the heads and the bodies of the nations is central to her criticism of early twentieth-century governments, which she holds responsible for dragging their countries to gratuitous conflicts that are ultimately left to the people to fight:

> every Nation can dance Death's Dance however much bled and maimed, dance upon stumps, or trail itself along, a living jelly of blood and trampled flesh, providing only it has its Head fairly unhurt. And that Head, which each Nation calls its Government, but the other Nations call 'France', or 'Russia', or 'Britain', or 'Germany', or 'Austria' for short, that Head of each Dancing Nation […] is very properly helmetted, and rarely gets so much as a scratch, so that it can continue to catch the Ballet-Master's eye, and order the Nation's body to put forth fresh limbs, and […] keep its stump dancing ever new figures in obedience or disobedience to what are called the Rules of War.[26]

This interrelationship of multiple dramatic conventions and *topoi* pervade a text that bears witness to Lee's profound research into an aesthetic paradigm fit to represent the horrors of the war. In this sense, *The Ballet of the Nations* already suggests, as Nicoletta Pireddu rightly claims in relation to *Satan the Waster*, that 'the aesthetic sphere' that Lee had hitherto 'protected from moral, rational, and more widely utilitarian contaminations seems to be invited directly to participate in real life events'.[27] Such complexity probably explains why Lee conceived *The Ballet of the Nations* as a closet

drama, a dramatic text primarily suited for reading rather than stage production. Moreover, as Lee points out in *Satan the Waster*, her contemporary morality responded to visual, in addition to dramatic, conventions, and this combination should be borne in mind in order to fully understand her aesthetic experimentation at the outbreak of World War I.

The interart motif of the *danse macabre*

Lee's reference to Hans Holbein in *Satan the Waster* is especially relevant to an examination of the aesthetic pattern underlying *The Ballet of the Nations*. Holbein's grotesque drawings were published in 1538 as the series of woodcuts *Danse Macabre*, and exemplify the circulation of this genre, illustrating the theme of the *memento mori* – that is, the universality of death – during the Middle and Early Modern Ages. My contention is that the allusion to Holbein's woodcuts indicates Lee's attempt to transfer onto the page – and its fictional stage – the visual tradition of the *danse macabre*, the allegorical representation of death summoning the representatives of medieval society regardless of their rank, from peasants and labourers to popes and emperors.

Overall, direct references to the *danse macabre* are scant in Lee's writings, yet there is evidence that she had long been interested in the aesthetic significance of this visual trope. On 6 September 1879, Lee wrote to Linda Villari that she was eager to read the essay on 'The Dance of Death in Italian Art' that the Irish poet and journalist Ellen Mary Clerke had recently published in *Cornhill Magazine*.[28] The reference indicates that Lee had long been considering the *danse macabre* as a particularly fit dramatic subject, but it took the horrors of World War I to provide her with a suitable subject matter. Moreover, in investigating the history and the cultural significance of the visual trope of the *danse macabre*, Clerke arguably shares the same interart perspective that shapes *The Ballet of the Nations*.

Besides providing a survey of frescoes and murals illustrating the *danse macabre* in Switzerland, France, and Italy, Clerke foregrounds its relevance across art forms, from fine to applied and performing arts. The motif of the *danse macabre*, she argues, 'is found not alone on the

walls of cemeteries and churches, but on glass, tapestry, and household furniture', and it provides 'a favourite subject equally for painting and sculpture, as for poems, masquerades, and dramatic representations'.[29] Implicit in Clerke's argument is the idea of the *danse macabre* as an interart motif, which is further confirmed by her reference to numerous morality plays staged in Belgium and France in order to counteract the development of profane performances. Although this claim would probably require better grounding, Clerke fascinatingly suggests that

> [t]he form in which Death is portrayed in the earlier picture tends to confirm the idea that they were derived from a dramatic performance; for he appears not in skeleton shape, impossible to assume by a living actor, but still clothed in fleshly integuments, the corroded state of which could be conveyed by a judicious use of paint.[30]

Clerke suggests that the danse macabre is an interart motif *per se*, and hints at a genealogy that is reminiscent of the classical claim *ut pictura poësis* to the extent that it connects painting to poetry and drama. This potential imbrication is emphasized by the reference to Pietro Vigo's study *Le danze macabre in Italia*.[31] Published in 1878, the volume examines a wide range of pictorial and poetic examples of this theme in Italy, and it is complemented by a series of plates from at least three frescoes that are worth discussing here.

Fig. 1: Buonamico Buffalmacco, *Trionfo della Morte*, fresco, c. 1336-1341, Campo Santo, Pisa.

The first, and certainly the best-known, is the *Trionfo della Morte* at the Camposanto in Pisa [see fig. 1]. Originally believed to have been painted by Andrea Orcagna, and now attributed to the Florentine painter Buonamico Buffalmacco, the *Trionfo* plays a significant role in Lee's reflection, and especially her belief in an aesthetic continuity bridging the Middle Ages to modernity. In the

collection of essays *Euphorion* (1884), Lee describes the *Trionfo della Morte* as the first testimony of the revival of antiquity in Pisa, as well as an early example of the conflation of classical and medieval elements that she recognizes as an aesthetic tenet of the Renaissance. In the Pisan cloister, Lee claims,

> the art of the Middle Ages came for the first time face to face with the art of Antiquity. There, among pagan sarcophagi turned into Christian tombs, with heraldic devices chiselled on their arabesques and vizored [sic] helmets surmounting their garlands, the great unsigned artist of the fourteenth century, Orcagna of Florence, or Lorenzetti of Siena, painted the typical masterpiece of mediaeval art, the great fresco of the Triumph of Death. […] The antique and the modern had met for the first time and as irreconcilable enemies in the cloisters of Pisa; and the modern had triumphed in the great mediaeval fresco of the Triumph of Death.[32]

The Pisan *Trionfo della Morte* provided Lee with a visually powerful example of the aesthetic transition towards modernity, which is consistent with her intention to adapt a medieval genre such as the morality play in light of historical contingency. But Vigo and Clerke also dedicate ample room to the unattributed *Trionfo della Morte* that is now housed at Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo [see fig. 2]. In this fresco, Death violently enters the scene on the back of a horse. Men and women belonging to different social strata are grouped around Death, and several corpses lie scattered at the bottom.[33] It must be remembered here that Lee toured Sicily a few years before the beginning of the war. In 1912 she visited the Cappella Palatina, the Royal Chapel of the Normal Palace, but no record confirms a visit to Palazzo Abatellis. However, she most likely knew about this *Trionfo* through Clerke's essay.[34]

Fig. 2: *Trionfo della Morte*, fresco, 1440-1445, Palazzo Abetellis, Palermo.

Fig. 3: Giacomo Borlone de Buschis, *Danza macabra*, fresco, 1484-1485, Clusone, Oratorio dei Disciplini.

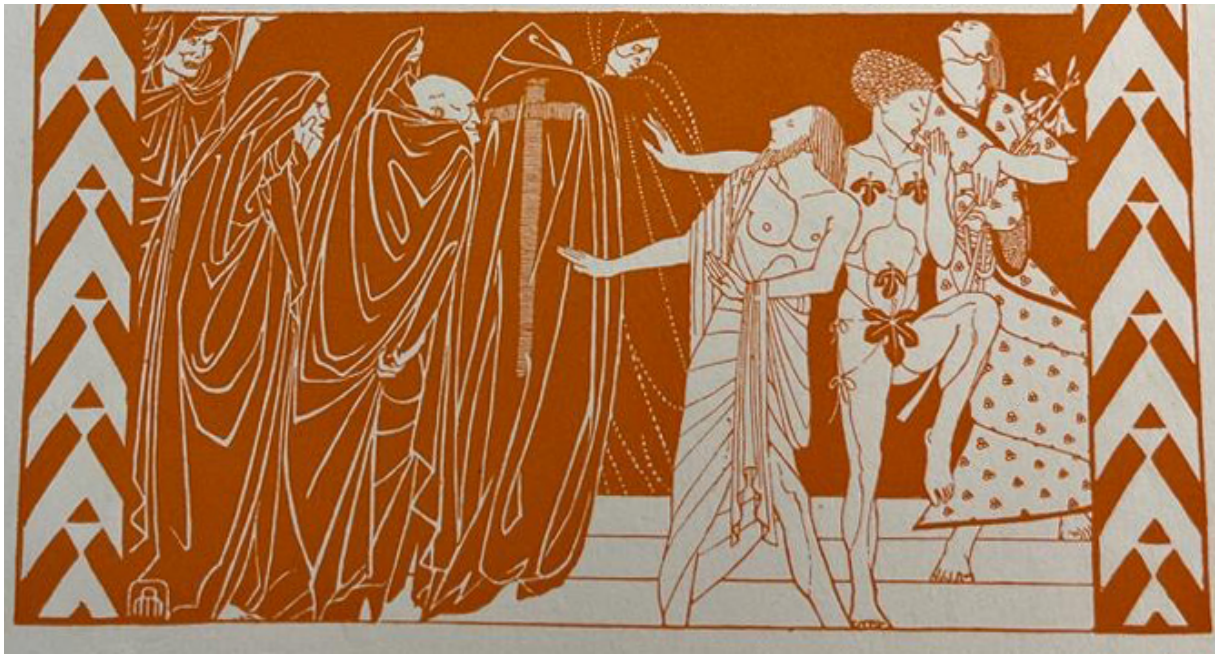

Fig. 4: Detail from Maxwell Armfield's illustration in Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 5.

Finally, both Clerke and Vigo dwell at length on Giacomo Borlone de Buschis' *Danza della Morte* in Clusone, near Bergamo [see fig. 3]. Dating to the mid-fourteenth century, the fresco is part of a cycle at the Oratorio dei Disciplini and represents a series of male figures who are waiting for death, a presence which is symbolically embodied in the skeletons standing next to them. Particularly striking is the horizontal arrangement of the composition and its complete lack of perspective, which is far more marked than in the Pisan *Trionfo*. Arguably this is the same viewpoint that shapes Armfield's illustrations for *The Ballet of the Nations*, which develops from left to right at the bottom end of each page, and equally lacks perspective [see fig. 4]. Thus, these three medieval frescoes give new meaning to Armfield's work, their bi-dimensionality, and the synchronous narration that they provide to Lee's text.

As far as illustrations are concerned, Lee's remarks in *Euphorion* also anticipate her claims about Hans Holbein's dramatic representation of death as the character of a masque in *Satan the Waster*. In the essay 'Symmetria Prisca', Lee considers Holbein as one of the masters of sixteenth-century German art, whose 'wonderful minute yet grand engravings' she views as a form of the Renaissance spirit deprived of the revival of antiquity.[35] In the essay devoted to 'The Outdoor Poetry', she draws an interart comparison in discussing the majesty of Lorenzo de Medici's *Nencia da Barberino* (c. 1469-1473) and the simplicity and the poverty of the mother in Holbein's woodcut 'Dance of Death' [see fig. 5]. Holbein, Lee argues, characterizes her dramatically:

> seated on the mud flood of the broken-roofed, dismantled hovel, stewing something on a fire of twigs, and stretching out vain arms to her poor tattered baby-boy, whom, with the good-humoured tripping step of an old nurse, the kindly skeleton is leading away out of this cruel world.[36]

It becomes clear that Holbein's woodcuts provided Lee with an aesthetic paradigm suitable for voicing her pacifist commitment in *The Ballet of the Nations* if one considers that in *Renaissance Fancies and Studies* (1895) she further praised them as a most poetic subject, one that was able to express the whole of human experience. 'Holbein's Dance of Death', Lee writes in 'The Imaginative Art of the Renaissance', is 'terrible, jocular, tender, vulgar and poetic', it 'contains it all'.[37] I suggest that

it is this admixture of features that made Holbein's drawings a suitable aesthetic precedent for Lee's representation of the Great War as a *danse macabre*.

Fig. 5. Hans Holbein, *Dance of Death: The Child*, c. 1526, woodcut.

It must be added that in discussing Leo Tolstoy's writings in *Gospels of Anarchy* (1908), Lee outlined a historical and anthropological conception of art that disentangled it from the deliberate search for beauty in favour of a materialistic approach that included 'building, weaving, pottery, dress, war, and ritual'.[38] This claim already hints at the layered interart aesthetics of *The Ballet of the Nations*, which we might regard as a palimpsest that responds to the general nineteenth-century interest in the *dance macabre*, making it an interart trope *per se*. One may think, for example, about Goethe's ballad 'Die Totentanz' (1813) or Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842). Around the same years, the *Trionfo della Morte* in Pisa and Holbein's woodcuts

inspired Franz Liszt's symphonic piece for solo piano and orchestra, *Totentanz*. While living in Pisa in 1839, Liszt was enraptured by the frescoes at the Camposanto, which, as he wrote to Hector Berlioz, he perceived as a visual translation of Mozart's *Requiem*. Moved by the *Trionfo della Morte*, Liszt first composed two sketches, 'Comedy of Death' and 'Triumph of Death', which were followed by a first version of *Totentanz* in 1839 and a second in 1853. According to Anna Celenza, the harmonic structure of the second theme of *Totentanz* clearly reveals Liszt's attempt to create 'aural depictions' of the Pisan frescoes, with specific focus on the hunting scene illustrating the encounter by the three living and three dead men.[39]

Interestingly, in a letter written in October 1884, Lee expressed her desire to 'learn all the Liszt & Wagner things' that she could 'lay hand on'.[40] And as far as *The Ballet of the Nations* and its orchestra are concerned, it is also significant that in *Music and its Lovers* (1932) she would claim that Liszt's compositions stand out for their 'harrowing harmonies and compelling rhythm', which result in 'more than orchestral sonorities'.[41] The connections between literature, music, and visual arts are further revealed if one thinks about Camille Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre*. Saint-Saëns did not originally conceive his tone poem as a work for orchestra but as a song for voice and piano, a decision akin to Lee's conception of *The Ballet of the Nations* as a closet drama. As Death plays the violin, the music awakens the dead who dance to the rhythm of the orchestra. This suggests several fascinating parallels with Lee's work in which Satan conducts the Orchestra of Human Passions and engages the nations in a dance that turns them into 'unspeakable hybrids between man and beast'.[42]

One further element should be considered in discussing the aesthetic context within which Lee developed her grotesque *Ballet of the Nations*, that is, the transformations of ballet as an art form between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Lee explicitly mentions the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol in Paris as antonomasia for the staging of gruesome performances, but the innovations introduced by the Milanese *Ballo Excelsior* also suggest several echoes within *The Ballet of the Nations*.

Fig. 6. Cover of Romualdo Marenco's score for *Ballo Excelsior*, Milano, Sonzogno, 1881.

The *Ballo Excelsior* debuted at La Scala in 1881 with choreography by Luigi Manzotti and music by Romualdo Marenco [fig. 6]. The first act is set in Spain at the time of the Inquisition, which coincides with the period when most *autos da fé* were organized. Obscurantism is introduced as dominating over Light, but when the latter breaks the fetters that keep her captive the stage welcomes a series of allegorical characters and objects that celebrate the progress of humankind thanks to reason. The leading characters are Science, Industry, Civilization, Union, Value, Glory, and Fine Arts. In addition, several technological innovations, such as the steamboat, the electric battery, and the Suez Canal are welcomed as representative of the victory of Light over Obscurantism, therefore marking the triumph of Civilization.[43] Significantly, Obscurantism is defeated when Italian and French miners complete the excavations for the Mont Cenis Tunnel, which was inaugurated in 1871. The *Ballo Excelsior* is undoubtedly a celebration of contemporary technological progress, but it also foregrounds the role of reason as the one human faculty that can

guarantee a peaceful brotherhood of nations. This is suggested by the conjoined efforts of the Italians and the French, and the fact that the Mont Cenis Tunnel virtually obliterates the barriers between the two countries.

Lee most likely knew about the *Ballo Excelsior* from the Florentine *Nuova Antologia*, which dedicated ample room to the Milanese ballet because of its international popularity. In the 'Rassegna musicale' (published in January 1883), the *Excelsior* is praised as an innovative form of 'ballo a tesi', that is, a ballet in which the choreographic action is conceived not only as entertainment, but also as fulfilling a social mission. Central to Manzotti's experimentation, as the reviewer of *Nuova Antologia* argues, is the desire to promote the harmonious cooperation of nations through science and progress.[44] As Alessandra Campana remarks, Manzotti's extensive use of allegory, and his insistence on the 'iconic visualization of abstractions', are instrumental in staging the battle between good and evil, but they also provide an inventory of imagery that was easily accessible to the spectators.[45] This is precisely what Lee aspires to in *The Ballet of the Nations*, where Life and Progress are seen as enemies sending spies to watch Satan's performance.

Imbricating genres, reconciling arts

The apparent simplicity of Lee's verbal and Armfield's visual texts, and their seeming inconsistency, are layered instead onto a complex imbrication of dramatic genres and art forms. According to Brockington, *The Ballet of the Nations* is a satire in the etymological sense of the word 'medley' as it sets various emotions and historical moments side by side.[46] In addition to its political implications, *The Ballet of the Nations* stands out as an intermedial mosaic, an interart fresco whose key theme is certainly the Great War, but whose articulate aesthetic palimpsest hints at the nineteenth-century idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art'. Rooted in Romantic organicism, the concept was introduced by the German philosopher Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff and made popular by Richard Wagner, whom Lee had appreciated since at least the 1880s.

In Wagner's view, music, dance, and poetry were perfectly reconciled in Greek tragedy, but began to diverge with the collapse of the Athenian state. 'As the spirit of Community split itself along a thousand lines of egoistic cleavage', the German composer argues in the essay 'Die Kunst und die Revolution' ['Art and Revolution'] (1844), 'so was the great united work of Tragedy disintegrated into its individual factors'.[47] Against such a split, Wagner's desire was to produce a total work of art that could harmonize dance, gesture, music and poetry, and thus elicit an emotional as well as an intellectual response.

The aesthetic achievement that Wagner aimed to attain is not devoid of political implications. Such consideration, it should be noted, is all the more relevant when one reflects on the historical contingency in which Lee conceived *The Ballet of the Nations*. 'The Art-Work of the Future', Wagner states in the homonymous essay he published in 1849, may only arise 'in the fullest harmony with the conditions of our whole Life' – that is, only once 'the ruling religion of Egoism' is finally banned.[48] Wagner specifically addresses artistic selfishness, which he blames for splitting the sister arts into separate, incomplete genres that barrenly compete against each other. With the outbreak of World War I, however, creative selfishness arguably takes on new meanings. In *The Ballet of the Nations*, it also becomes a locus for representing and exposing the tragic consequences of unbridled nationalistic drives. Aesthetics and politics thus converge in an osmotic fusion, which inspired Lee's search for an artistic form apt to voice her zealous commitment to pacifism.

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[1] Vernon Lee, 'Vernon Lee Would End the War', *The Evening Post: New York*, 3 October 1914. Emphasis in the original.

A digital reproduction of the article is available in *Vernon Lee: Manuscripts, Published Works, and Typescripts*, 28, https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/vl_published/28 [accessed 30 December 2021].

[2] For an overview of Lee's antiwar articles and essays before and during World War I, see Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856-1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 200-09, and Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), pp. 292-309. These aspects are also discussed in Rachel Baldacchino, *Being in Borders: Empathy and Pacifism in the Essays of Vernon Lee (1900-1935)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, KU Leuven, 2018, https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1992573&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US [accessed 4 January 2022]). After the Dreyfus Affair, *Correspondances* became the newspaper of the Union pour la Verité, which was led by Paul Desjardins. Lee and Desjardins's 'Lettres d'une Anglaise et d'un Français sur les affaires présentes' appeared in *Correspondances*, 20.5 (1912), 233-34.

[3] Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 201.

[4] Baldacchino, *Being in Borders*, p. 108.

[5] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 240-58: 'When even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder' (p. 253).
[6] Vernon Lee, *Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes & Introduction* (New York: John Lane, 1920), p. v.

Lee conceived the ballet as a prose morality to be read at a meeting of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), for which she also authored the pamphlet *Peace with Honour: Controversial Notes on the Settlement* in 1915. Subsequently, she performed two readings of the *Ballet* in Chelsea in 1915 – the first at Armfield's studio, and the second at the Margaret Morris theatre. In 2018, a film version was released as part of a research project led by Grace Brockington at the University of Bristol with the theatre company Impermanence. In 2019, *The Ballet of the Nations* was staged at Il Palmerino under the supervision of Angeliki Papoulia and Federica Parretti. See 'Living Well in Wartime: Experimental Performance in Britain during the First World War', https://brigstowinstitute.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/project/living-well-in-wartime-experimental-performance-in-britain-during-the-first-world-war/ [accessed 12 February 2022], and Sally Blackburn-Daniels, 'A Theatrical Performance of Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', *SKENÈ: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*, 6.2 (2020), 225-33.

[7] Lee, *Satan the Waster*, p. vii.
[8] Grace Brockington, 'Performing Pacifism: The Battle between Artist and Author in *The Ballet of the Nations*', in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 143-59 (p. 144).
[9] Ibid.
[10] Elisa Bizzotto, 'Blurring the Confines of Art and Gender: Aubrey Beardsley's Legend of *Venus and Tannhäuser*, "The Fragment of a Story"', in *Strange Sisters: Literature and Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Francesca Orestano and Francesca Frigerio (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 213-32 (p. 241).
[11] See Brockington, p. 144.
[12] Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a pictorial comment by Maxwell Armfield (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1915). The volume is unpaginated; page numbers are indicated hereafter beginning at page one from the first page of Lee's prose, and so on.
[13] Ibid., p. 1.
[14] See Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 200, and Herward Sieberg, 'Vernon Lee's German Connections and Her Friendship with Irene Forbes-Mosse', in *Dalla stanza accanto: Vernon Lee e Firenze settant'anni dopo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Firenze 26-28 maggio 2005*, ed. by Serena Cenni and Elisa Bizzotto (Firenze: Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2006), pp. 285-307 (p. 288).
[15] See Pamela M. King, 'Morality Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 235-62 (p. 235).
[16] Lee, *Ballet*, p. 15.
[17] Ibid., p. 16.
[18] Patricia Pulham, 'Violence and the Pacifist Body in Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', in *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature: Bodies-At-War*, ed. by Petra Rau (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 46-63 (pp. 49-51).
[19] See Robert Potter, 'The *Auto da Fé* as Medieval Drama', in *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre. Lancaster, 13-19 July 1989*, ed. by Meg Twycross (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 110-18 (p. 116).
[20] Lee, *Ballet*, p. 7.
[21] Marie-Claude Canova-Green, 'Dance and Ritual: The *Ballet des nations* at the court of Louis XIII', *Renaissance Studies* 9.4 (1995), 395-403.
[22] Lee, *Satan the Waster*, p. vii.
[23] The passages are quoted in Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 40.
[24] Lee, *Ballet*, p. 7.
[25] Edward Forset, *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique* (1606), quoted in Katherine Bootle Attie, 'Re-Membering the Body Politic: Hobbes and the Construction of Civic Immortality', *ELH*, 75.3 (2008), 497-530 (p. 497).
[26] Lee, *Ballet*, pp. 13-14.
[27] Nicoletta Pireddu, '*Satan the Waster*: Peace and the Gift', in *Dalla stanza accanto*, pp. 270-81 (p. 271).
[28] Vernon Lee to Linda Villari, 6 September 1879, in *Selected Letters of Vernon Lee, 1856-1935*, ed. by Amanda Gagel, 2 vols (London and New York: Routledge 2017), I, p. 257.
[29] Ellen Mary Clerke, 'The Dance of Death in Italian Art', *Cornhill Magazine* (September 1879), pp. 346-60 (p. 347).
[30] Ibid., p. 351.
[31] Pietro Vigo, *Le danze macabre in Italia* [1878] (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1901).
[32] Vernon Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance*, 2 vols (London: Fisher Unwin, 1884), I, pp. 168 & 198.
[33] The *Trionfo della Morte* at Palazzo Abatellis is conventionally dated to the late fifteenth century and was housed at a hospital in Palermo in Lee's time. See Francesca Orestano who traces the influence of this fresco in Woolf's writing, in '*Jacob's Room*: crisi della prospettiva e "Trionfo della Morte"', in *La tipografia nel salotto: saggi su Virginia Woolf*, ed. by

Oriana Palusci (Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1999), pp. 149-66, and Michele Cometa, *Il trionfo della morte di Palermo. Un'allegoria della modernità* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2017).
[34] Colby, *Vernon Lee*, pp. 254-55.
Interestingly, when Lee's former friend Berend Berenson visited Sicily in 1953, he defined the *Trionfo della Morte* in Palermo as 'much more dramatic than the Pisan one'. Bernard Berenson, *The Passionate Sightseer: From the Diaries, 1947-56* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 120.
[35] Lee, *Euphorion*, I, p. 209.
[36] Ibid., p. 142.
[37] Vernon Lee, *Renaissance Fancies and Studies: Being a Sequel to Euphorion* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1895), p. 119.
[38] Vernon Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 143.
[39] Anna Celenza, 'Death Transfigured: The Origins and Evolution of Franz Liszt's *Totentanz*', in *Nineteenth-Century Music. Selected Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference*, ed. by Bennett Zon and Jim Samson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 125-54.
[40] Lee *Selected Letters*, I, p. 586.
[41] Vernon Lee, *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1932), pp. 302-03.
[42] Lee, *Ballet*, p. 15.
[43] See Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 69.
[44] 'Rassegna musicale', *Nuova Antologia*, 37 (1883), p. 355.
[45] Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship*, pp. 70-72.
[46] Brockington, p. 149.
[47] Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. and ed. by William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1895), I, p. 35.
[48] Ibid., p. 155.

From Crystal Palace to the Grand-Guignol: Vernon Lee and the First World War

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In July 1893, in a letter to her mother Matilda, Vernon Lee wrote that she would be attending the Crystal Palace exhibition in Sydenham, and whilst there she would 'witness some Dahomey people war dance'.[1] The promotional material, which featured heavily in the July, August, and September 1893 timetables of the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway, noted that the Dahomey were to be exhibited alongside 'Prandi's Royal Italian Marionettes' as 'The Greatest Novelty in Europe'. Across London, advertisements billed the Dahomey as

> THE FAMOUS AMAZON WARRIORS,
> *A REGIMENT OF POWERFUL WOMEN,*
> Natives of Dahomey, the Suite of Behanxin, King of Dahomey, taken Prisoners by the French Army, under the command of General Dodds. The finest of the Races of Africa.
> THE GREATEST NOVELTY IN EUROPE.
> EXCITING MARTIAL DISPLAY. SHAM FIGHT. THRILLING SCENES.[2]

The regiment performing at the Crystal Palace were a predominantly female militia, from the kingdom of Dahomey in Western Africa, now Southern Benin. Dahomey had been – outside of the royal line – a meritocracy, with the majority of palace attendants, politicians and administrators being made up of women from a cross-section of society including 'slaves, war-captives, free-born commoners, and women from well-to-do households'.[3] Historian Edna G. Bay notes that dress in the Dahomean society reflected position rather than gender, with women who oversaw male ministers being required to wear 'male' (Bay's term, not mine) garments.[4] John Duncan's *Travels in Western Africa, in 1845, & 1846* suggested that the women, particularly those in the nation's army, wore skirts or tunics with trousers underneath for freedom of movement, with their abilities being described as exceptional, who 'excel in martial appearance' beyond that of 'any body of native troops'.[5] Duncan continues: 'all [were] well armed, and generally fine, strong, healthy women, and doubtless capable of enduring fatigue […] if undertaking a campaign, I should prefer the females to the males of this country'.[6] Traditionally, when not in battle, the Dahomean army would

alternate 'the rhythm of war and ritual', with war becoming ritualized and ritual becoming militarized.[7] The ritual performances included songs that 'played on farming imagery, contrasting the drudgery of farm work with the glories of soldiering'.[8] Due to the horrors of colonialism during the nineteenth century, the French saw what they believed to be an endemic 'savagery' in its people (again, Bay's term) and 'felt justified in colonising Dahomey'.[9] The result was the capture and enslavement of the outnumbered and outgunned Dahomean army by General Dodds, and their exhibition as the greatest novelty in Europe at the Crystal Palace and the Paris Zoological Gardens.[10] During the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in Paris the Dahomey were exhibited on the hill of the Trocadero Palace as part of the colonies and protectorates, and during 1907 the people were on display at the Bois de Vincennes 'human zoo' on the outskirts of the city. The exhibition of this female militia was undoubtably unusual to its nineteenth and early twentieth-century audiences, particularly one so seemingly rigid in its gender roles.[11]

This article takes from this brief anecdote several things about Lee's approach to women during wartime and their participation in violence. The first being that towards the late nineteenth century, the study of other cultures and peoples (often problematic in its approach) had caught the public's imagination, and second, that within the Crystal Palace exhibition space the Dahomey existed for their audience as symbols of the barbaric past. Yet their race did not disbar their physical displays of strength, drawing comparisons with the 'classic' warrior women, the Amazons. It is my proposition that the figure of the warrior woman's performance of violence within the exhibition space and the ritualistic and spiritual origins of these performances suggested the artistic form for Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*. Furthermore, I would argue this paper is unique in its approach in drawing a line of influence from Dahomey, via the *Ballet Russes* and the Grand-Guignol theatre in Paris, to *The Ballet of the Nations*, illustrating the ways in which Lee is particularly interested in violence enacted by women – notably women presenting in a masculine way.

Lee's *Ballet* was written during the early years of the First World War, initially to be read aloud as a 'one-act symbolical war play' at an evening for the British pressure group the Union of

Democratic Control, at the Chelsea Studio in Glebe Place, London. The studio event was hosted by the playwright Constance Smedley, whose husband Maxwell Armfield later illustrated the volume.[12] This reading by Lee was followed by a second at the Margaret Morris Theatre. The publishers in the audience (according to Smedley) were 'so carried away by Vernon Lee's rendering and the audience's enthusiasm, that the next morning three offers [to publish] came'.[13] Chatto and Windus published *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* at Christmas 1915, with Maxwell's Hellenic style puppet-show illustrations. The narrative follows Satan and Ballet Master-Death as they put together an Orchestra of Passions who will drive the Nations to an unceasing, devastating, wasteful war. Instead of presenting war as a reaction to a single act of aggression, Lee highlights the ways in which the 'Politicians and Armament Shareholders have long got the stage-property in readiness, and the Scene-Shifters of the Press' were 'only waiting for the signal'.[14] This is not, Lee notes, the first dance staged by Death and Satan, the latest in a long line of performances have been in 'South Africa and the Far East, and then in the Near East quite recently'.[15] In *Being in Borders: Empathy and Pacifism in the Essays of Vernon Lee (1900-1935)*, Rachel Baldacchino notes how the 'Christmas book was largely ignored by readers and critics and the few reviews that covered it were either lukewarm or completely dismissive'.[16] She continues:

> [the] *Athenæum* called it a 'clever piece of imaginative description of WWI' which served to expose Lee as 'a stylist' and the *Saturday Review* said it was 'not the sort of literature which endures in another age since it expresses the fury of the moment'.[17]

The suggestion in the *Saturday Review* that Lee's pacifist *Ballet* was irrelevant beyond the period of warfare was perhaps partially correct. Yet Lee reworked this text into *Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes and Introduction* (1920), with the work becoming even more prescient after Lee's death which preceded the Second World War. Today, the work has received a resurgence of interest. The dance company Impermanence, supported by the Paul Mellon Trust and research from art historian Grace Brockington, adapted and filmed *The Ballet of the Nations* in 2018.[18] In 2019, the first theatrical performance of *The Ballet* was staged at the Villa Il Palmerino in Florence, and was brought to life by Angeliki Papoulia and Federica Parretti.[19]

Aside from a recent focus on the performance of the text, scholarship has frequently concentrated upon *The Ballet*'s variety of dramatic techniques and stylistic modalities. Elisa Bizzotto's focus on *The Ballet* as 'inscribed within a revival of medieval drama' was a response to both the text and the Villa Il Palmerino performance, in which Bizzotto highlights the similarities between Walter Pater's 'Denys L'Auxerrois' (1886) and Lee's *Ballet,* particularly in the use of allegory and 'late-medieval and early-modern performative practices'.[20] Katharina Herold's analysis of Lee's use of allegory and the ways in which the allegory enables a criticism and destabilization of boundaries has also been formative in thinking about these styles during the re-thinking and editing of this paper.[21] Herold's contention that women are actors in wartime violence was particularly suggestive, and while Lee's weapons were 'intellectual' and allegorical, and resulted in her ostracization, Herold notes that Lee refused to stand passively by. In 'Performing Pacifism: The Battle between Artist and Author in *The Ballet of Nations*', Grace Brockington contends that the dissonance between the classical-style illustrations and Lee's narrative creates discordance between words and image.[22] Patricia Pulham's 'Violence and the Pacifist Body in Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*' draws parallels between the Lee's rendering of violence and the Spanish *auto da fé*.[23]

Lee and the Amazons

The exhibition of the Dahomey was not only notable for the skill and athleticism shown by the warriors, but for the way in which the public and the press responded to an all-female militia, dubbing them 'Amazonians' [see fig. 1]. *The Pall Mall Gazette* (19 May 1893) states the warriors will provide:

> [a]n exhibition of the customs of their country, from sorcery to sword-dancing, and from prayer-dancing to sham-fighting. There are male warriors in the troupe, but it was upon the stalwart fighting-women with their black shining arms and shoulders, their naked feet with anklets of cowries shells which form their coinage, their sinewy strength, and their dexterity in the use of the arms they have borne in various engagements against the French in their recent campaign that the interest centred.

The displays by the Dahomey at the Crystal Palace combined examples of the kingdom's culture (sorcery and prayer-dancing), objectified female bodies (naked arms, ankles, and feet), and a performance that came to interest Lee from an anthropological position: 'sham-fighting' or the war dance.

Fig. 1. Advertisement for the Crystal Palace, Sydenham. Amazon Natives of Dahomey, 1893. Copyright of The British Library Board.

The *Daily Telegraph* (19 May 1893) enthused about the performance stating that

> [a]s to their Entertainment, let it at once be said that nothing so original has been seen in England for many a long day […]. The Greatest and most Thrilling Novelty to be seen in England during the Season of 1893. Admission – Sixpence and One Shilling.[24]

Even the press as far north as *The Yorkshire Post* was affected by the 'sensational' Dahomey Amazons. The journalist writes that these

> dusky ladies are fine specimens of muscular womanhood, and with their gleaming black skins, and rude adornments and costume, present a wonderfully picturesque spectacle […]. Seeing them in action, one can easily realise how it is that the French found Dahomey such a very hard nut to crack.[25]

The women arouse both an aesthetic pleasure from the viewer and a sense of awe: they are beautiful and deadly violent, a fearfully attractive combination. These women are the survivors of a colonial genocide, forced to perform by their captors for profit and gain. The war dance is simultaneously a display of physical prowess, and evidence of their defeat at the hand of the French.

The Dahomey Amazons' strength, agility and 'Greekness' fascinated anthropologists and visitors alike, disrupting Eurocentric ideas of beauty and female decorum with their 'figure such as Phidias or Praxiteles need not have disdained to model'.[26] Kate Nichols in '"[M]anly beauty and muscular strength": Sculpture, sport and the nation at the Crystal Palace, 1854-1918' suggests that by referring to celebrated classical Greek sculptors, The Dahomey Women's bodies transcended racial boundaries.[27] The European ideal of beauty championed by aesthetes and anthropologists of the period was essentially disrupted by this display of African 'Greekness' and feminine power.[28]

The aesthetic similarities between the Dahomey women and the ideal beauty of the Amazons would not have been lost on Lee. In 'The Child in the Vatican', an essay from Lee's collection *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1881) she discusses how her author's training began in 'the presence of statues' such as the Polycletan Amazon in the Vatican [see fig. 2].[29] From these figures Lee learned at a very young age (around seventeen) that 'the only intrinsic perfection of art is the perfection of form, and that such perfection is obtainable only by bodily

altering, or even casting aside, the subject with which this form is only imaginatively, most often arbitrarily, connected'.[30] Lee had crystalized this philosophy of aesthetics well before *Belcaro* through a discursive correspondence with her brother, Eugene in March 1873. On 15 March she writes of the sculptor of the wounded or Polycletan Amazon: 'Immediately after Phidias, Polyclete and Scopas died, decadence started […] because Greek art was content with certain types of beauty regarded as all artist's common aim'.[31] It is the body – the form – of the sculpture that attracted the young aesthetician Lee, not the suggestion of female physicality and violence.

Fig. 2. James Anderson's photograph of *Amazone. Vatican. Braccio nuovo*, 1859. Albumen silver print, 24x12.8 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.XO.251.3.67.

As she developed her aesthetic ideas, Lee re-visited the Vatican sculpture rooms frequently, with the Amazon figures helping her to consolidate her personal theory of *Einfühlung*. In 'Aesthetic Responsiveness: Its Variations and Accompaniments Extracts from Vernon Lee's Gallery Diaries, 1901-4' from *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912), Lee records visiting the *Braccio Nuovo* on 17 April 1901 and on 17 February 1902.[32] After this second later visit, she writes:

> I am not sure, but it seems as if the quality of *flesh*, possible softness and warmth, certainly helped us to look at her, perhaps by a kind of physiological *Einfühlung*. It may perhaps be merely a question of planes, as in a mountain. But I suspect something more than the form interests, the suggestion of a beyond, a life more than the skin […].[33]

Like the 'duskiness' of the Dahomey, the flesh of the 'Wounded Amazon' engages an empathetic responsiveness, in which she perhaps 'feels into' the figure her own masculine femininity. Like the Dahomey warriors, the Amazon is both a symbol of physical power, but also defeat; she is wounded, arm raised in the air, showing the softness of her form, and leaving her body vulnerable to penetration. Lee continues that '[a]fter the first day I found that I was examining not only the work of art, but the consciousness in which this work of art was reconstituted'.[34] On the contrary, on one of her visits to the Vatican during which Lee walks around to look at the form she feels 'not the faintest tendency to mime, in the sense of imitating the action of […] the Polycletan Amazon': Lee does not feel herself into the wounded woman warrior, her interest in the figure is aesthetic not dramatic.[35] She is a student of the figure, and of the form: she cannot imagine herself into the woman of violence, for to commit violence is to open oneself up to violence from others. She can neither celebrate the Amazon's war injuries nor the capture and enslavement of the Dahomey by the French colonisers.

I would like to suggest that is possible to see from Maxwell Armfield's first illustration in *The Ballet of the Nations* [see fig. 3] the resonances of Amazonian imagery in the aesthetic art of the early twentieth century. Armfield's Amazon shares the pose and dress with the Wounded Amazon frequently visited by Lee. In the bottom-left of Armfield's illustration, the reader is presented with a supine female dressed in a gathered robe, but with right breast bared and with a sword and

diadem on the bottom step. The figure's pose is evocative: the wounded position of the figure suggests a battle that has already been staged – and lost – by these formidable warriors. Yet unlike the stasis experienced by the statuesque Amazonians of the Vatican, Armfield's illustrated figures return to battle in the turn of a page. Like the Dahomey women's exhibition routine, the *Ballet of the Nations* is a performance, which is to be repeated scene by scene. This suggestion of a shared inspiration between Lee and Armfield does not of course mean that the disharmony between writer and artist pointed out by Brockington in 'Performing Pacifism: The Battle Between Artist and Author in *The Ballet of the Nations*' is an error, but that there perhaps was some convergence of influence.[36] Brockington describes the antagonism between author and illustrator as deriving from Armfield's choice to 'illustrate, and vindicate, the Aestheticism which Lee's text lampoons, rather than visualize the battlefield which is the real subject of her polemic'.[37] Armfield focused upon the form and the statuesque beauty of the Nations, rather than the 'flesh pellets' and bloody mangled forms of the dancers as *The Ballet* progresses.

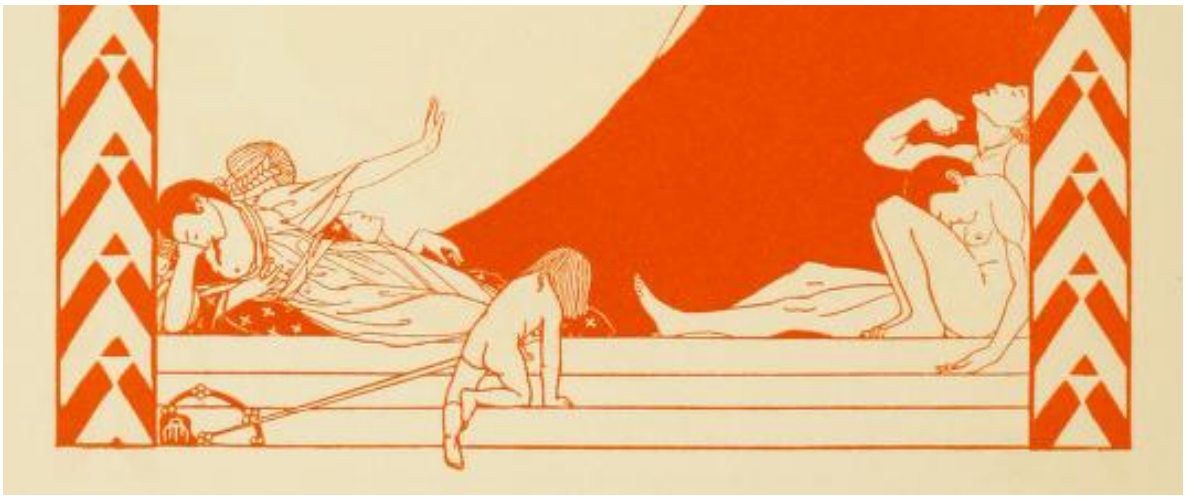

Fig. 3: Detail from Maxwell Armfield's illustration in Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 1.

Lee also encountered these Amazonians almost twenty years after viewing them in the flesh and in stone in Robert R. Marett's *Anthropology* (1914). Her copy of Marett's book is held by

the Harold Acton library at the British Institute of Florence. In his chapter on 'Social Organisation' Marett calls the Dahomey the 'lowest type of barbarian', with numbers of no more than one hundred thousand, and the protection of human life equivalent to that of medieval Europe. While anthropology and ethnology are disciplines which both sit across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, they occupy slightly different disciplinary spaces, and are defined differently. Anthropology is the study of human societies and cultures, and their development. Ethnology is the study of the characteristics of different peoples and the differences and relationships between them. Ethnology is the study of cultures; anthropology is the study of man. Ethnology is considered a subset of anthropology. To what extent then, was Lee aware of the sciences of anthropology and ethnology, and what impact did these disciplines have on her work? Lee was conscious of English anthropologist E. B. Tylor as early January 1875, at the age of nineteen. In a letter to her mentor Henrietta Jenkin, Lee confirms that she is 'reading a book by Tylor which [Jenkin] had recommended […] some time ago'.[38] Tylor was a professional anthropologist – firstly a reader, and then later a professor in the discipline at Oxford – and Lee was reading *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*.

The British Institute holds many of Lee's copies of works within this field, for example Osbert Crawford's *Man and His Past* (1921) – which includes an undated and anonymous review of the work from *The New Statesman* which has been cut out, folded, and placed within the leaves of the book. Crawford's work, *The New Statesman* argues, makes the reader pursue 'not only historical and anthropological tracks' but also 'material ones as are hidden in bog and heath'.[39] Marett's *Anthropology* (1912), also in the archive, argues that anthropology should be interdisciplinary and engaged with 'the whole study of man'.[40] Robert H. Lowie's *Primitive Man* (1920) is also present. Due to this polygenic position of some anthropologists, Lee's relationship to these works is often one of questioning and critique. Nowhere is this more so apparent than with Ernest Crawley's *The Tree of Life* (1905) which is the subject of Lee's 'Anthropological Apologetics' chapter, the first in Volume II of her *Vital Lies*. Crawley, Lee argues, dredges up

wisdom and morals from the 'primeval filth' of barbarous thought and through them traces the origins of Original Sin and the Trinity.[41] Whilst Lee's edition of Crawley's *The Tree of Life*, and his earlier work *The Mystic Rose: a Study of Primitive Marriage* (1902) are unfortunately not part of the British Institute holdings, we know Lee read these works diligently, through the intertextual allusions and direct quotations from these works within the chapter. Crawley was a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute and wrote for the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* and the *Eugenics Review,* including an essay considering 'Primitive Eugenics' (1910). For Crawley 'what we term "religious" marks a psychological predisposition of biological character, which is of supreme evolutionary importance'.[42] That religion in its multiple guises has survived throughout the evolutionary process suggests to Crawley that it has some advantage to humankind. For Lee, the opposite is true, these practices are primitive, and Lee argues that we are not. Religion is to Lee a return to the instinctive and unthinking. There must be a move away from the importance of life itself, and instead a focus on how that life is to be lived:

> Many of these beliefs and rites, which appear to us as ridiculous, obscene or ferocious, may have been at the time of their origin, respectable scientific hypotheses and moral humanitarian practices. Moreover, they were not only useful in keeping our savage ancestors alive, and inducing them directly to beget and nurture us, but they were even more useful even than that in securing mental attitudes of reverence, of obedience, of conservatism.[43]

Therefore, Lee suggests, religious belief becomes a 'vital lie', that stifles human evolution and moral responsibility. There are parallels to be drawn between the primitive practice of religion, and that of warfare. She brings this to our attention by suggesting that its perpetual presence not only in society, but also in the arts, is not a product of successful evolutionary development, but of an instinct that must be worked at. Despite Lee's mauling of Crawley's 'vital lies' she remained firmly interested in anthropological and ethnological discourse, and nowhere more so than *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (1915) and *Satan the Waster*. As allegorical satires of the First World War, both texts are concerned with the pervasive atmosphere of nationalism across Europe. While such explicitly political works do not immediately seem to intervene in the debates

connecting anthropology, I would like to suggest the existence of multiple strands of anthropological influences between *Vital Lies* and *The Ballet*, via Crawley, and through the work of Jane Harrison (1850-1928).

Stefano Evangelista in his monograph *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (2009) has shown that in the early 1890s 'Lee came into contact with the pioneering classical scholarship of Eugénie Sellers and Jane Harrison', during which time 'she drew on their ideas to formulate a critique of classicism' which marked the end of her identification with aestheticism.[44] Harrison was a classics scholar and anthropologist who had made Lee's acquaintance in the early 1880s. The relationship soon soured after the publication of Harrison's work *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (1885) in which Lee found issue with the 'style, theory and content' of the work.[45] Despite the friction between the pair, in 1915 Lee presented a lecture on *Harrison's Unanimism*. Unanimism focuses on ideas of a collective emotion, or a collective consciousness: it is a facet of crowd behaviour in which the individuality of members of a group are lost and overridden by simultaneous action. Kirsty Martin discusses how Unanimism's oneness of spirit fits within an anthropological discourse where 'primitive peoples' believe in a 'co-existent and intertwined' participation of souls.[46] I would argue that this interest in the collective conscience – which appears in *The Ballet of Nations* as the Orchestra of Patriotism – and Harrison's work on anthropology provides a framework for Lee's public pacifism.

The Ballet begins onstage with the rousing of the Passions by Ballet Master Death. The Passions are organized into the Orchestra of Patriotism, and the boy Heroism leads the Nations' macabre dance to the play's finale. The Aestheticism of Greek culture – to which the illustrator of the volume Armfield subscribes – is itself descended from earlier primitive civilizations and is integral to Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Harrison links the primitive person or the 'heathen' as a 'being of strange perversity' willing to bow down to any god, and notes his 'blindness': this aligns him to Lee's blind boy, Heroism.[47] Harrison suggests that understanding the psychology of the heathen is of benefit to contemporary readers 'since we realize that our own behaviour is based

on instincts kindred to his – in order that, by understanding his behaviour we may understand, and it may better, our own'.[48] If we follow Harrison's argument, Lee's use of the blind boy Heroism in *The Ballet* is for a didactic rather than a worshipful motive. In the unseeing and unquestioning sacrifice, there is the recognition of the futility of his waste on the battlefield. There is a link evident between this sentiment, and that of Baldwin, in the reciprocity of the soldier to 'fight and die miserably' for the nation that has protected him.[49] Harrison writes (and Lee underlines) in *Ancient Art and Ritual* that:

> and so arises the war-dance, or the death-dance, or the hunt dance [it is not] after a battle or hunt that he dances in order to commemorate it, but before. Once the commemorative dance has got abstracted or generalized it becomes material for the magical dance, the dance pre-done […]. The dance, as it were, a sort of precipitated desire, a discharge of pent-up emotion into action.[50]

Satan's ballet is a precursor to the war dance for real. Lee's interest in Harrison's comment that the war dance is a precipitated desire is fascinating. Using Harrison's timeline of the ritual we can ask: is Lee's *Ballet* a commemoration or a preparation for a successful war? Was Lee's performance of the piece to fellow Union of Democratic Control members at the Glebe Theatre a magical ritual aimed at discharging the tensions of the Nations, and by some supernatural force avoiding what became the First World War? Through this ritual enactment, Lee metaphorically shares a stage with the exhibited Dahomey or a plinth with the wounded Amazons, but her aim is not to provide a talisman for the success of Britain in the war, nor to show the strength and glorious beauty of female fighters, but as a way of showing the potential wastefulness of battle and highlighting the corrupt political and economic benefits which befall the classes whom the war serves. These thoughts are certainly crystalized by Lee, as I will demonstrate, in her personal notebooks.

The Orchestra figures include Self-Interest who is 'busy', Widow Fear and her daughters Suspicion and Panic 'wrapped in yesterday's *Daily Mail* and *Globe'*, and Lady Idealism and Prince Adventure:

> There came also Death's mother (or wife, for their family relations are primitive and not best inquired into) […]. With her came her well-known crew, Rapine, Lust, Murder and Torture, fitted out with bull-roarers and rattles and other cannibalish [sic] instruments.[51]

Surprising though it may be in this context, Lee seems to draw in the 'The Ballet' upon Crawley's study of the instincts of primitive peoples, religion, and marriage. Crawley specifically notes that the bull-roarer is a primitive instrument, a 'downright oddity' and integral to fertility rites. It is, simply, a thin piece of wood, with a long cord attached and swung in a circular motion. Lengthening or shortening the cord changes the vibrated sound produced by the instrument, enabling communication via tonal differences. Marett argues the instrument has ceremonial significance, a 'mystic purpose'.[52] Crawley's *The Tree of Life* argues for the link between the bull-roarer and primitive socio-religious ritual. Each tribe treasures the sacred bull-roarer or churinga 'like heirlooms and regalia': they play an integral part in intergenerational communication and ceremony.[53] That the bull-roarer is so entwined with Crawley's transmission of vitality and sacred knowledge makes it (in Crawley's eyes) a primitive precursor to Christian religious artefacts. But Lee acerbically attacks Crawley's opinions on the sacredness of the bull-roarer in 'Anthropological Apologetics' using his own argument from *The Tree of Life* to justify her point. She quotes: 'that the spirit creature whom up to that time he has regarded as all-powerful is merely myth, and that such a being does not really exist, and is only an invention of the men to frighten the women and children'.[54] Her final line 'So let this be the last but not least lesson of comparative mythology and its sacred bull-roarer!' suggests that it is not only those primitive women and children confounded by the supposed spiritual powers of the bull-roarer, but contemporary anthropologists as well.[55] So why include the bull-roarer in *The Ballet*?

> In their anxiety to prove that religious beliefs, specified or unspecified, are desirable and indispensable, our apologists ignore that the essence of a religious belief is that it should be held to be true […]. And they will cease to be *held as true* so soon as it is understood that they originate not in Divine revelation but in the jumbled abortive thoughts and panic-ridden rituals of savage men.[56]

The three systems of human thought as defined by Freud in 'Totem and Taboo' are in evidence here: the *animistic* or *mythological* is represented by 'Sin, whom the Wise Gods call Disease, and her classic crew, Rapine, Lust and Murder, with their bull-roarers and rattles', the *religious* mode by

'Widow Fear with her nimble children, Suspicion and Panic, playing on penny-whistles, fog-horns and that mediaeval tocsin-bell', and the *scientific* with 'Science and Organization' whose 'gramophone and pianola brayed and strummed away unflaggingly'.[57]

There is, furthermore, a temporal triad in place within the text: The primitive individuals dressed in newspapers, the classical Adventure and Idealism, and the modern Science and Organization: a temporal triad that effectively parallels the primitive Dahomean Amazons, exhibited at the Crystal Palace. Passions as they arrive: Self Interest, Fear, Suspicion, Panic, Idealism, Adventure, Sin/Disease, Rapine, Lust, Murder, Famine, Hatred, Self-Righteousness, Science, Organization, Heroism. The Passions exist to fuel the war, but the fuel is never consumed. As Matthew Kibble suggests the moral decline and decay of standards will always return, as will war.[58]

The Form

That Lee uses such a refined and high-art form as ballet is curious: especially when the dance is described as part of the text – in *The Ballet* – and danced, but not seen upon the stage in *Satan the Waster*. In 'Violence and the Pacifist Body in Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', Pulham argues for the significance of the art form and the physical body, suggesting that the performance of the ballet as an abject 'spectacle of suffering' is also a 'didactic allegory'.[59] It is possible that Lee was influenced by Igor Stravinsky's infamous ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* [*The Rite of Spring*], first performed in Paris on 29 May 1913. There are resonances between *The Rite of Spring* and *The Ballet*, one being the act of *Le Sacrifice,* in which 'The Chosen One' – in this instance a young girl (not the young boy Heroism) – is danced to death in the *danse sacrale. The Rite of Spring* was, according to Pieter C. van den Toorn, inspired by primitivism, a 'loosely aligned succession of imagined prehistoric rites […] to depict a series of primitive ceremonies'.[60] These thematic similarities suggest that Lee may have been influenced by news of the infamous performance, but, like the Audience of Nations in *The Ballet*, Lee was not privy to the shocking movements of the dancers

or musical score of *The Rite*. Lee was almost certainly in Italy during the period of *The Rite*'s performance.[61] But scandalous news travels far and wide, and there is evidence to suggest that Lee met *The Rite*'s impresario Diaghilev – although this is difficult to date, and almost certainly not before or around the time of *The Rite of Spring*. Certainly, prior to *The Rite*, Lee was aware of the impact and the audience of the *Ballets Russes* writing in her 1912 notebook:

> But this I will say. That if ~~the~~ the men & women of the classes who, through our wretched economic & educational inequality, ~~set~~ still governed Europe, had given ~~one tenth of the thought~~ to certain subjects one tenth of the attention wh. they gave to money making, or art ~~pl~~,or ~~imp~~ beautifying, or dirtying their own souls or pursuing any of their philanthropic aesthetic or big game shooting or parliamentary sports if they had ~~mind~~ had ~~disliked~~ cared for peace one tenth as much as they cared for clothes, cards, Russian ballets, post impressionism, ~~xxx, dinner~~ a « getting on », ~~«~~ daring what « has to be done » and ~~suit the~~ even their dealings with their own private sins & with God […].[62]

It is evident in this notebook entry that Lee views the ruling classes of Europe with disdain; their taste for lavish clothes, spendthrift pursuits such as cards, and Russian ballets rather than peace is significant. Lee's private vitriol for the bourgeois pursuits and the immoral inheritance and gathering of wealth is obvious, as is her attitude towards their 'dealings' with God to renegotiate the cost of their private sins. Culture, particularly the avant garde culture of the early twentieth century, of which post-impressionism and the *Ballets Russes* are exemplars, is one of the few cares of the 'elite'. Is the ballet form of Lee's pacifist polemic a way of drawing the attention of the ministers, diplomats, and governors of those countries invested in the war of 1914-1918? Is Lee adapting the form for a didactic purpose?

In 'Vernon Lee at the Margins of the Twentieth Century: World War I, Pacifism and Post-Victorian Aestheticism', Kirsten Mahoney suggests that despite Lee's outsiderism (as an ex-pat, as a pacifist, as a Victorian) 'compounded […] by the war' and the 'advent of new cultural *avant-gardes*', she chose instead to reinscribe the present, 'voluntarily occupying the margins, placing herself of the edges of new thought, on the outside of theories that required correction'.[63] Instead of positioning Lee's outsiderism and re-inscription as something distinct from those shaping the cultural future, Katharina Herold suggests that this is a signifier of the modern:

> Allegorical contemplation aims at the ruination of things so that it can, in its redemptive moment, construct (*baun*) a new whole out of the elements of the old. The rearrangement and displacement of pre-existing […] materials and modes such as allegory paradoxically freed up a blank canvas for modernist authors to deconstruct and reconfigure the world around them.[64]

This sign of modernity – a violent modernity – replaced a climate that Kibble suggests was 'receptive to both homoeroticism and the Decadent sensibility, both of which came increasingly under the attack of the more conservative formulation of Modernism that developed during and after the war'.[65] Kibble continues that the Modernists 'tried to give the impression that they represented an absolute break with the past, especially by disavowing any link with their immediate predecessors'.[66] But what is important here, is the connection between primitive ritual, ancient art-forms and the avant garde, and the way in which Lee – similarly to Diaghilev in *The Rite*, and T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* – utilizes anthropological concepts in boundary-pushing work. Yet Lee's *Ballet,* whilst reinscribing and reconfiguring the war as allegory, anthropological study, and intertext, did not ignore the transition between these eras and did not dissociate this avant-garde performance text from its Victorian, classical, or primitive roots. Lee presents the cyclical and frequent return of warfare though the ages, and suggests that only by peace between nations will there be true civility, allowing humanity to attain its highest form. Of course, writing and publishing such a pacifist polemic in the first years of the war meant that Lee was taking up intellectual arms and committing an anti-nationalistic act of violence. Writing about the Amazons in *Primitive Athens as Described by Thucydides*, Jane Ellen Harrison notes:

> The Greeks, if any people, held firmly the doctrine that
> A WOMAN ARMED MAKES WAR UPON HERSELF
> The woman armed and disarmed, the Amazon in defeat, they made beautiful and poignantly human, but the woman armed and triumphant […] remained a cold unreality.[67]

This is of course applied to the Dahomey; their fierceness somewhat dampened by the repetitive performances they were forced to present to Northern European audiences. The uniformed warrior woman with gun [see fig. 4] was displayed with decorative cowries and swords. The

Dahomey and the Amazon's violence is negated by its display in the safe space of the Crystal Palace or the Vatican Galleries.

Fig. 4. Michael Hanhart and Nicholas Hanhart's illustration 'Seh-Dong-Hong-Beh. An Amazon in the Dahoman army. A woman in uniform, holding a rifle in one hand and a decapitated head of enemy in the other', in Frederick Edwyn Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans: being the journals of two missions to the King of Dahomey* (London, 1851), plate facing p. 23. Copyright of the British Library Board. 10097.d.21. B20050-17.

I want to conclude by thinking about war as performance once more. Harrison and many other anthropologists believed that the war dance is a ritual fundamentally important in preparation for, or in celebration of, opposing tribal violence. It is not war itself, but presented as such. Lee's war dances, in *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster* were extant whilst Europe was at war: war itself had become the performance. Lee writes:

> The Ballet of the Nations, which constitutes the nucleus of the following drama, was written, in narrative shape, at Whitsuntide of the first year of the war; and published that

> same Christmas as a picture book in collaboration with Mr. Maxwell Armfield. It was in its origin merely such an extemporized shadow-play as a throng of passionate thoughts may cast up into the lucid spaces of one's mind: symbolical figures, grotesquely embodying what seems too manifold and fluctuating, also too unendurable, to be taken stock of. A European war was going on which, from my point of view, was all about nothing at all; gigantically cruel, but at the same time needless and senseless like some ghastly 'Grand Guignol' performance.[68]

The Parisian Grand-Guignol was a theatre which produced and performed up to five naturalistic horror and comedy shows per night, in an effect called a 'douche écossaise' [hot and cold showers]. Opened by Oscar Méténier in 1897, the theatre initially was a 'house of naturalism, dedicated to the true-to-life representation of a society dehumanized by capitalism and bourgeois morality'.[69] Like the Dahomey and Amazon sculptures, violence is presented within a safe space, and made impotent, yet is a display that still arouses. The early years of the theatre occurred during a period which was noted for its 'stability, growth and prosperity in France,' yet this epoch, as Lee would have known, 'was hopelessly divided along class lines and exacerbated by the national and international political crises' such as the Dreyfus Affair and the French colonial mission, resulting in the spectacle of the Dahomey warriors at the Crystal Palace.[70]

Romain Rolland, author of *Above the Battle* and the dedicatee of *The Ballet of the Nations,* wrote in *The People's Theatre* that the Grand-Guignol contaminated the audiences who bore witness to its graphic violence and sex. Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson in *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* argue that the 'audience willingly engaged with what was going on', they were complicit in the contamination: 'innocent spectators feel light-headed, morally outraged and yet guiltily stimulated as they stagger out of the theatre to join other people vomiting in the alleyway to the sounds of violent sex emanating from the darkest corners of the street'.[71] The theatre employed psychologists as writers such as Alfred Binet who were able to accurately describe madness, psychosis and delusion, as well as manipulate their audience – often to the point of fainting. Lee was no stranger to the works of Binet: her copy of *Le Magnétisme animal* (1887) has been carefully read and annotated. Lee's recognition of the war as this masterful manipulation, one to which people willingly consent, is interesting. *The Ballet* becomes war – a truthful, corporeal,

visceral representation of a war, early on – 1915 – with an aim of bringing people to their senses. The First World War itself, however, has become little more than a backstreet Parisian horror-show.

> All this air raid business, especially the crowds of sightseers, not merely that Sunday but for somedays a dreadful bicker of bedizened women in fur coats, & bedraggled other women, sodden, weary, with children & prams, snatching a half hour from work to enjoy the horror - all this has brought home to me the need of certain changes in our moral education. We must not put so exclusively a weight upon the idea of responsibility for evil, ~~making~~ leaving evil for which we are not responsible in a kind of platonic, contemplated relation from which the next step is using it for whatever pleasurable excitement or interest it may afford our dullness.[72]

This description in Lee's notebooks of the voyeurism of the middle classes in their luxurious outfits, picking over, and being excited by the ruins left by the arial bombardment of London by the German forces, causes the reader to think about the ways in which the war has become entertainment, and to ask where this voyeurism stands ethically. At what point does the witness to the violence participate in the horror? In 'Directing the Grand-Guignol', Martin Fluger and Dawn Williams discuss the actors' participation in the horror of the theatre, noting the trust between the audience and those on stage, so that all 'feel safe in unmasking themselves, in opening themselves to the perversion of the moment'.[73] The spectacle of war, violence, and misery was not new to the early twentieth century, but the process of witnessing these acts was heightened by the complicity of the witness in the acts of violence enacted on a grand scale.

Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations* draws upon scientific, aesthetic, and philosophical discourses to support her pacifist stance. Her early encounter with the statuesque Amazonians and Dahomey gave Lee the opportunity to consider the place of women in nations at war. The ways in which Naturalism and avant-garde theatre aroused 'primitive' desires to witness violence led to an increased interest and thirst for performed brutality. Lee was able to utilize this predilection as her own instructive weapon against the First World War and the nationalism and populism that stoked its fires.

[1] Vernon Lee, letter to Henrietta Jenkin, 28 January 1875. Vernon Lee Archive, Miller Library, Colby College.
[2] July 1893 timetable of the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway.
[3] Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 1998), p. 8.
[4] Ibid., p. 12.
[5] John Duncan, *Travels in Western Africa, in 1845 & 1846*, 2 vols (London: Johnson Reprint, 1967), II, p. 240.
[6] Ibid., p. 240.
[7] Bay, pp. 226-27.
[8] Ibid., p. 204.
[9] Ibid., p. 280.
[10] Ibid., p. 278.
[11] The female warriors of Dahomey have been immortalized as the protectors of Wakanda, the *Dora Milaje* in the Marvel *Black Panther* comics and as part of the film franchise. They have also been brought to the screen in *The Woman King* (2022) directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, in which the Dahomey retaliate against the Dutch colonizers and slave traders in Africa. The film is set in the 1820s before the abolition of slavery, and before French colonisation of the kingdom.
[12] Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), p. 223; cited in Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 163.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 1. *The Ballet* is unpaginated, so all page numbers provided in this article are my own, beginning at page one from the first page of Lee's prose, and so on.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Rachel Baldacchino, *Being in Borders: Empathy and Pacifism in the Essays of Vernon Lee (1900-1935)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, KU Leuven, 2018, https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1992573&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US [accessed 4 January 2022], p. 108).
[17] Ibid.
[18] See *The Ballet of the Nations* (2018), a film by Impermanence, and ,'Theatres of War: Experimental Performance in London 1914-1918 and Beyond', *British Art Studies*, 11 (2019), http://pdf.britishartstudies.ac.uk/articles/issue-11-tow-introduction.pdf [accessed 4 January 2022].
[19] See Sally Blackburn-Daniels, 'A Present-Day Morality for the Present Day', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 30 (2020), https://19.bbk.ac.uk/article/id/2931/ [accessed 4 January 2022], and Sally Blackburn-Daniels, 'A Theatrical Performance of Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', *SKENÈ: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*, 6.2 (2020), 225-33.
[20] Elisa Bizzotto, 'Vernon Lee, Walter Pater, and the Revival of Medieval Theatre' (Blog Guest Post), *Staging Decadence* (12 April 2021), https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/vernon-lee-walter-pater-and-the-revival-of-medieval-theatre [accessed 10 February 2022].
[21] Katharina Herold, 'Allegories on the International Scene: Vernon Lee's, Mina Loy's, and Else Lasker-Schüler's War Plays', *Feminist Modernist Studies*, 4.2 (2021), 203-21.
[22] Grace Brockington, 'Performing Pacifism: The Battle Between Artist and Author in *The Ballet of the Nations*', *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 143-59 (p. 146).
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[35] Ibid., p. 257.
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Orientalist Aestheticism: Vernon Lee, Carlo Gozzi, and the Venetian Fairy Comedy

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Vernon Lee's relationship with Venice might be described as troublesome yet productive. It informed a variety of her works including *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), her erudite history of Italian culture which includes chapters on Venetian theatre that focus on Carlo Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi;[1] 'A Wicked Voice', a disturbing story of musical possession that appears in her 1890 collection, *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories*, in which a nineteenth-century composer becomes obsessed with the voice of an eighteenth-century singer; her novella *Lady Tal* (1892), a light-hearted satire in the realist mode; and *The Prince of the Hundred Soups* (1883), a children's story that uses stock characters from the commedia dell'arte to tell the tale of an opera singer, Signora Olimpia Fantastici, and her adventures in 'Bobbio', a watery city that can only be Venice.[2]

In her preface to *The Prince of the Hundred Soups*, Lee describes the tale as 'a slightly modified translation' of an unpublished German manuscript supposedly written in 1838, by the 'author', Theodor August Amadeus Wesendonck, a German actor, puppeteer, and avid advocate of the commedia dell'arte, whose story, with the aid of her publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, Lee claims to have translated and abridged for her readership.[3] Lee maintains that the tale constitutes Wesendonck's attempt to show what could be done with commedia dell'arte characters:

> It was an experiment to show how much more interest could be got out of the Harlequins, Pantaloons, Columbines, and so forth, of pantomimes and puppet-shows than out of the distressed men and women – who know that they ought not to do it, but insist upon doing it nevertheless – of modern fiction.[4]

'Discovered' while Lee's own mind was taken up by the 'Comedy of Masks, Goldoni, and Gozzi' about which she had so recently written in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, Lee feels obliged to warn her readers that the work she is about to present features Wesendonck's own preoccupations with these topics, and asks them to note that they are the product of a youth

influenced 'by the fantastic and humorous vagaries of certain eccentric romanticists' among whom Hoffmann is pre-eminent.[5]

This essay argues that the influences Lee apportions to Wesendonck are those that inform at least two of her own fantastic tales: 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' and 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'. These stories, first published in 1896 and 1897 respectively, were inspired by Carlo Gozzi's fairy comedies: *La donna serpente* [*The Snake Lady*] and *Turandot* respectively, plays first performed in Venice in 1762 and influenced by eighteenth-century orientalism.[6] While Mary Patricia Kane has recognized the impact of Romantic writers such as Hoffmann and William Beckford on Lee's uncanny tales, she does not connect these with Gozzi's *fiabe teatrali*, even though Lee herself acknowledges Gozzi's own influence on Romantic literature.[7] Similarly, in his introductory essay to *The Snake Lady and Other Stories* (1954), an early collection of Lee's tales, Horace Gregory mentions Gozzi in relation to *The Prince of the Hundred Soups* yet fails to suggest further links between their writings, despite the fact that Gregory's chosen title resonates with the eponymous snake lady in one of Gozzi's plays. These critical connections, I suggest, offer new perspectives on how Lee's writings participate in the late-Victorian orientalist zeitgeist and the implications of this orientalism for Lee's own later thoughts on the 'nation' in works such as *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) and *Satan the Waster* (1920). The reprinting of 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' in *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Tales* (1927), published the year after the premiere of Giacomo Puccini's opera, *Turandot*, at La Scala, Milan on Saturday 25 April, 1926, which was itself prompted by Gozzi's work, also encourages a re-examination of this tale in the context of Italian politics and Lee's own post-World War I meditations on the permeability of national boundaries as well the fluidity of temporality that often characterizes her supernatural fiction.[8]

Orientalisms

In her introduction to *Late Victorian Orientalism* (2020), a volume of essays that explores the consumption and appropriation of the 'East' in nineteenth-century culture, Eleanor Sasso observes

that the Victorians 'envisioned the East in many different modes' which manifested themselves in a variety of 'Orientalisms'.[9] The latter half of the period saw the spread of what might be described as 'Oriental mania' that emerged in multiple ways: in home décor, costume, food, and entertainment. The broader impact of the Orient was evident everywhere, including in literature; for example, the years between 1850 and 1890 saw the publication of over 30 different English editions of *The Arabian Nights*.[10]

The popularity of this text resonates with the earlier orientalism of the eighteenth century. When Antoine Galland translated a collection of tales which became known in England as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (1704), he stimulated widespread interest in the oriental tale resulting in the publication of several editions, in both French and English, during the ten years that followed.[11] *The Arabian Nights* accelerated 'a taste for what would alternately be described as "oriental", "Arabian", "Persian", or "Moorish" fashions' which would inform British literature and the arts in this period.[12] Other translations from Eastern manuscripts such as François Petis de la Croix's Persian and Turkish tales soon appeared and were followed later in the century by home-grown oriental tales by writers such as William Beckford whose *Vathek* (1786) marked a transitional period in the development of the genre, balancing orientalist and gothic tropes, a combination that can also be found in Lee's late nineteenth-century fiction.[13]

The orientalism found in *Vathek* is similarly evident in Beckford's travel writing, especially in his descriptions of Venice. In a letter written from Padua, dated 14 June 1782, Beckford expresses his ambivalent feelings as he approaches the city; he finds that sadness engulfs him as he sees 'its world of domes rising out of the waters' and hears 'the toll of innumerable bells'.[14] The following day, refreshed after a dip in the ocean at the Lido, Beckford returns to Venice, searching its 'labyrinths of streets, canals and alleys' for 'amber and oriental curiosities' and finds that the variety 'of exotic merchandise, the perfume of coffee, the shade of awnings, and the sight of Greeks and Asiatics sitting cross-legged under them' makes him think himself 'in the bazaars of Constantinople'.[15] For Beckford, Venice is forever evocative of the East; it 'ever recalls a series of

eastern ideas and adventures' and he 'cannot help thinking St. Mark's a mosque' and the Palazzo Ducale 'some vast seraglio, full of arabesque saloons, embroidered sofas, and voluptuous Circassians'.[16]

While Lee does not mention Beckford directly in 'Out of Venice at Last!', an essay published in *The Golden Keys and Other Essays on the Genius Loci* (1925), she here expresses similarly powerful responses to La Serenissima. For Lee, Venice is a kind of poisonous drug; its 'beauty and poetry […] its shimmering colours and sliding forms' simultaneously stimulate and disturb her.[17] It is all 'too much', she writes, and each dip of the gondolier's oar evokes ghostly memories, bringing up the past, or rather 'the might-have-been'.[18] The exclamation that doubles as her title punctuates the essay with increasing force until, italicized in its final line, it graphically mirrors her physical flight from a city that overwhelms her both aesthetically and emotionally. However, Beckford does appear in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*. Musing on towns visited by eighteenth-century travellers in a chapter entitled 'The Arcadian Academy', Lee describes Venice as 'a place where Beckford could dream Oriental dreams of luxuriousness and hidden terrors, and compare the motley population, not less than the cupolas and minarets, to the strange world of Vathek which he carried in his mind'.[19]

Theorizing the Supernatural

By the time *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* appeared, Lee had published a number of critical articles on women novelists in *La rivista europea*, although she was still relatively unknown in Britain, especially by the critic who, unaware that 'Vernon Lee' was in fact Violet Paget, praised her book in the *Westminster Review*, telling his readers 'Mr Lee has written one of the most fascinating books that it has been our good fortune to meet with for a very long time'.[20] John Addington Symonds, an established scholar of the Italian Renaissance, was less effusive. 'I found it charming', he writes, but expresses doubt as to whether a readership unfamiliar with Italian culture would appreciate it.[21] Italian critics in full knowledge of their own culture had similar reservations. Reviewing the

book in 1881, Lee's friend, Enrico Nencioni, while praising its erudition and hailing her as 'il critico sagace e immaginoso' [the wise and imaginative critic], complained that 'she exaggerated the neglect of the eighteenth century by contemporary Italian scholars and critics'.[22]

More recently, Alessandra di Ricco has suggested that Lee's reading of the eighteenth century, and her identification of national character through the country's music and drama, are based in part on what she terms 'l'italomania degli inglesi' [English Italomania].[23] She also observes that Lee's representation of Gozzi, set against a 'picture-postcard' Venice, is affected by the way he had been received, championed and appropriated by European Romantic writers.[24] Nevertheless, she acknowledges that, as far as Gozzi is concerned, Lee's claim that the eighteenth century had been afforded little critical attention in Italy was justified. It is worth noting, she argues, that when Lee wrote *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, the country's own Gozzian critics 'were almost non-existent or rather in incubation' since they were officially born with the publication of Gozzi's *fiabe* in 1884-85, sponsored by Giosuè Carducci and edited by Ernesto Masi.[25] *Vernon Lee e Firenze settant'anni dopo*, the 2006 collection in which Di Ricco's essay appears, contains the facsimile of a playbill for the performance of Gozzi's *L'Augellino Belverde* [*The Little Green Bird*] which took place in 1900 at the 'Teatro Rustico del Palmerino', that is, in the gardens of Vernon Lee's villa in Maiano.[26] It seems that twenty years after her essay on his work, Lee was still firmly under Gozzi's spell which perhaps explains why his *fiabe* should have woven themselves into two of the works she produced only four years before staging his play at Il Palmerino. However, the imaginary Gozzi in *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* additionally informed her fiction and her theory of the supernatural in other interesting ways.

In Lee's essay 'Carlo Gozzi and the Venetian Fairy Comedy', Gozzi is constructed in a manner reminiscent of the thwarted artists that feature in her fantastic tales. She imagines him alone in his ancestral home, the 'haunted palace' at S. Canziano in Venice, surrounded by 'his Spanish plays and his collections of Arabian and Neapolitan fairy tales'.[27] Gozzi, for Lee, is a sensitive artist 'full of aspiration and suggestion: wondrous dreams, beautiful and grotesque, flitted

before him without his being able to seize them, like that fiddler trying for a lifetime to reproduce the exquisite sonata heard in sleep from the fiend'.[28] To her mind:

> In his plays he seems forever pointing to some suggestion of poetry, of pathos, and of humour, calling upon us to understand what he would do but cannot; saying almost piteously, 'Do you not see, do you not feel? Does not that situation, that word, appeal to your fancy? Do you not see dimly those fairy princesses, too beautiful to be seized […]. There, do you not hear the music? Do you not feel that a world of wonder is half visible to you? – Always suggestive, and sometimes successful in working out the suggestion; such must be the final verdict on Gozzi's plays.[29]

Yet for Lee, the 'incompleteness' of Gozzi's 'fairy plays' is complemented and completed by 'the fancy of the reader'.[30] The fiddler to whom Lee refers is no doubt the composer Giuseppe Tartini whose 'Devil's Trill Sonata', a complicated piece for solo violin, was reputedly instigated by a dream in which the Devil appeared and gave a virtuoso performance of a wonderful sonata that Tartini, once awake, strove to capture, but could not ever quite reproduce.[31] The story resonates with Lee's 'A Wicked Voice', published seven years after her essay on Gozzi, in which the contemporary composer, Magnus, who wishes to write an opera in Wagnerian style, is seduced by the voice of an eighteenth-century castrato which he describes as a 'cursed human voice', a 'violin of flesh and blood, fashioned with the subtle tools, the cunning hands, of Satan'.[32] At the end of the tale, Magnus has abandoned all efforts to write Wagnerian music and instead finds his head filled with the music of eighteenth-century opera, yet no longer able to hear the 'wicked' voice that inspired it.

The 'incompleteness' of Magnus' endeavour is familiar to readers of Lee's fantastic tales. For Lee, the elicitation of the supernatural requires obscurity and ambiguity. According to Lee, it is 'the mystery that touches us'; and ghostly figures must be shrouded in moonbeams, 'scarcely outlined, scarcely separated from the surrounding trees; or walks, and sucked back, ever and anon, into the flickering shadows'.[33] Lee's imagined Gozzi is similarly shrouded in mystery; he himself is, in her imagination, a fairy-tale child endowed by a fairy godmother 'with the humour and fancy of Beckford […] and Hoffman' [sic]; and she tells us that we must not be surprised that, amidst

what she terms the 'humdrum Italy of the humdrum eighteenth century', he developed the '*fiabesque*', or 'fairy comic style'.[34] The reason, she argues, is this:

> [I]n the midst of this Italy of the eighteenth century, with its prim little ways […] in the very midst and heart of all this was one strange, weird, beautiful, half oriental, half medieval thing, one city of gorgeous colour and mysterious shadow, in which the creole wizard of Fonthill [Beckford] felt as if he were moving in his own magic world of Vathek and that city was Venice.[35]

Venice, it seems, embodies the indistinction and uncertainty she identifies as important to the supernatural. In describing Venice as a magical city of contrast and coalescence, where East meets West, and colour meets shadow, Lee gestures at the very nature of Gozzi's fairy comedies in which magic and masking play such a significant part, and two of such works that inspired Lee are discussed in more detail below.

Gozzi's *La donna serpente* and 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady'

Gozzi's *La donna serpente* tells the story of a fairy princess, Cherestaní, who relinquishes her magical powers to marry a mortal, Farruscad. Cherestaní's father, the fairy king, Demogorgon, is against the match and warns Farruscad that he must not curse his wife, no matter her behaviour, telling him that if he does, the spell he has cast on his daughter will transform her into a snake for 200 years. In her review of Giulietta Bazoli's 2012 critical edition of *La donna serpente*, Tatiana Korneeva refers to Gozzi's sources. She comments on the influence of French and Italian romances such as tales of Melusine and Morgan le Fay and works by Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, and Pulci; Madame d'Aulnoy's fairy stories (*Les contes des fées* (1697)); and the sixteenth-century Spanish dramas that informed Gozzi's *teatro spagnolesco*.[36] However, she observes that the structure of *La donna serpente* was suggested by the French orientalist, François Pétis de la Croix's *Les Mille et un jours, contes persans* [*The Thousand and One Days, Persian Tales*], published in five volumes between 1710 and 1712.[37]

The story of the fairy Oriana in Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' draws similarly on the legacies of medieval romance narratives and plays with oriental imagery. Alberic, the grandson of Duke Balthasar Maria of the House of Luna, first falls in love with the image of

grandson of Duke Balthasar Maria of the House of Luna, first falls in love with the image of Oriana, represented in a tapestry depicting his ancestor, Alberic the Blond, in which her lower half remains obscured by a judiciously placed item of furniture. When this is moved, it reveals Oriana's snake tail but rather than being horrified by the discovery, Alberic finds that he 'loved the beautiful lady with the thread of gold hair only the more because she ended in the long twisting body of a snake'.[38] It is when exiled to the Castle of Sparkling Waters by his grandfather that Alberic first meets Oriana at sunset by the well in the castle gardens where she reveals herself to him as his 'Godmother'. In the same location, in the daytime, he finds the cold, green snake that he adopts as a friend. When he grows up he learns how Alberic the Blond released the Lady Oriana from the spell that trapped her in the form of a snake by responding to a mysterious request that appeared on the stone sepulchre in the castle gardens, asking him to thrice kiss the first creature to emerge from its marble recesses. Though repelled by the snake, Alberic the Blond nevertheless kisses it as instructed and is rewarded by the snake's transformation into the beautiful Oriana. The curse that binds her demands that to retain her human shape permanently, Oriana's rescuer must be faithful for a period of ten years. Prince Alberic discovers that his ancestor was unable to comply, and that Oriana was forced to return to her serpentine shape but permitted to take human form for an hour each day at sunset. While Lee's depiction of Oriana is sympathetic and she ironically offers Alberic – in both snake and human form – the warmth and love that his grandfather and his courtiers do not provide, her fate, unlike that of Gozzi's Cherestaní, is not a happy one. While Farruscad, Cherestaní's mortal husband, is asked like Alberic the Blond to swear that he will kiss on the mouth 'whatever horrible thing appears' when a sepulchre opens, and almost kills the snake that emerges from it before being told that it is in fact his wife, he kisses the serpent on the mouth and Gozzi's play ends happily with their reunion. By contrast, Prince Alberic's snake lady is killed while still in serpentine form, the creature's bloody, mangled remains being all that is left of the fairy Oriana.

The influence of Gozzi's orientalism on Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' is most evident in Alberic's disturbing encounter, at the age of eight, with his grandfather the duke on the

day of the feast of St. Balthasar. Prince Alberic finds the duke, often referred to as the 'Ever Young Prince in all Italy', at his toilet 'wrapped in a green Chinese wrapper, embroidered with gold pagodas', wearing 'an orange scarf of delicate fabric' about his head, while his face, is 'being plastered with a variety of brilliant colours'.[39] To 'the diseased fancy of his grandson', the duke appears as if 'made of precious metals', like the effigy 'he had erected of himself in the great burial chapel'.[40] But just as Alberic is mustering up the courage to approach his eminent grandparent, his eye falls on 'a sight so mysterious and terrible' that he flees: 'through an open door he could see in an adjacent closet a man dressed in white, combing the long flowing locks of what he recognised as his grandfather's head, stuck on a short pole in the light of a window'.[41] This strange encounter is followed by a recurrent dream in which Alberic sees the effigy of the duke come alive and step down from his niche in the burial chapel to take his place in the palace grotto, still dressed in 'the green bronze cloak embroidered with gold pagodas'.[42] Here, a range of marble animals pay homage to him and, as they do so, the duke's features become increasingly indistinct until all that is left 'beneath the great curly peruke' is 'a round blank thing – a barber's block'.[43]

Although in some ways quite different to Gozzi's *La donna serpente*, Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' shares key motifs, in particular the cursed fairy who must be released from her serpentine fate by a kiss; cruelty; untrustworthy servants; and most importantly a mutual source in the Chinese legend of 'Madame White Snake'. According to Whalen Lai, the 'chilling ghost story of "Madame White Snake"' is 'one of the best-known stories in China'.[44] Beginning 'as a tale of demonic seduction that occurred by a lake', chiming with 'myths of man-god romances in the *Songs of the South*' and with 'cults of yearly human sacrifice to He Bo, the river god', over time, she argues, these 'evolved into two distinct genres of "encounter with female immortals" and "run-in with demons"'.[45] Originally a she-demon, 'Madame White Snake' later took on 'the virtues of the female immortal – as a good wife and mother'.[46] The influence of this evolution is evident in 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady'; Alberic meets Oriana and her serpentine familiar by a well at the

Castle of Sparkling Waters, but Oriana is not the dangerous she-demon one might expect of the phallic woman, but instead a benign, 'motherly' Godmother.

In both Gozzi's play and Lee's story, the snake's metamorphoses into a woman, and the duration of that transformation depends on a man's fidelity and kindness. However, Gozzi's play is riddled with a misogyny that is implicitly questioned by the benevolence of Lee's snake lady whose fate, at the hands of cruel men, seems inevitable and thus elicits the reader's sympathy. As John DiGaetani has argued, Gozzi's works often reflect the tensions he experienced in life, and it is no wonder, perhaps, that his plays feature bitter 'battles of the sexes', and that women in his plays, like Turandot and la donna serpente are both 'dangerous and domineering'.[47] Lee's tale, with its bloodied phallic woman and effete *homme fatal* (in the shape of the ever-young Duke Balthasar) offers a subtext that subdues female and reifies male power while also hinting at the instability of the latter and accompanying fears of castration heralded, in Freudian terms, by the symbolic 'decapitation' of the duke represented by the barber's block. Decapitation, as we shall see, is equally significant in both Gozzi's *Turandot* and Lee's 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' which resonates with Gozzi's play.

Turandot and 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'

The name 'Turandot' is now perhaps best known to us as the title of the Puccini opera, but it was Gozzi who first brought the story to the Italian stage.[48] Although based on a Persian tale, Gozzi sets his play in China. While this might seem strange at first, Enrico Fulchignoni suggests that we must bear in mind the broader historical impact of intercultural influences on Venetian culture, the 'dense network of continuous exchange-movements of people', literature and performances that include the Jews who staged performances of 'Armenian and Albanian Turkish jugglers and acrobats […] not only in the public squares of Venice but also in the Venetian protectorates of Dalmatia' which survived until the eighteenth century.[49] While 'leaving few linguistic remains', Fulchignoni argues that such performances left 'indirect traces' that are expressed 'in masks and

mime' using characters that overcome 'the obstacle of language […] by acrobatics and gesticulation, comic invention, mockery, buffoonery, and the lazzo'.[50] Additionally, Fulchignoni points out that, alongside Persian fables, we must take into account 'the mysterious Chinese allegories' which informed Gozzi's comedies.[51]

The plot of Gozzi's *Turandot* is well known. Turandot, a cold and haughty princess, challenges her country's laws and refuses to marry any suitor unless he can answer three riddles correctly; failure means that he will not only lose her hand, but also his head, and the spiked heads of those who have failed line the city walls as Gozzi's play begins. An exiled prince, Calaf, arrives, and falling in love with Turandot's portrait, is compelled to try his luck. Although he succeeds in answering the riddles correctly, Turandot still refuses to marry him. Seemingly offering her a further chance at escape, but certain that she will not succeed, the prince asks that, on the following day, she should tell him his name. If she gets it right, she is free and he will die, but if she gets it wrong, she is bound to marry him. The intricacies of the plot: the lies, deceits and reversals are too complex to discuss in this brief synopsis, but key aspects of Gozzi's play are clearly appropriated by Lee and feature in 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'.[52] The male protagonist in Lee's tale is Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar, known, as his name implies, for his sexual exploits, but devoted to the holy Virgin whose protection he seeks as he ventures illegally into the Alhambra palace in Granada in search of a mysterious Moorish Infanta and her treasures. While at first glance the two stories seem dissimilar, there are crucial parallels that point to Gozzi's influence: the cruelty and beauty of the oriental princesses; the prospective lover's dependence on the correct answer to a question; and the beheading motifs that litter both texts.

In Gozzi's play, Turandot is so beautiful that 'no painter can capture her'.[53] According to Barach, the prince's servant, her 'inimitable beauty […] has attracted the greatest artists' but they cannot reproduce it.[54] However, he warns Calaf that 'beneath her beauty lies a fierce nature, and she is most ferocious to the male sex'.[55] He also cautions Calaf that 'Whoever looks at her portrait feels such a force in his heart that, they say, he seeks the original – and finds death instead'.[56] The

sight of even the lesser beauty suggested by her image can enchant and bewitch and Barach likens Turandot to a gorgon; 'It would be safer', Barach claims, for Calaf 'to gaze upon the dreadful face of the Medusa', thus suggesting that Turandot promises death, decapitation, and, in Freudian terms, signifies figurative castration.[57] When Calaf, surrounded by the palace eunuchs, is about to answer the final riddle, Turandot unveils and looks at him, confusing him with her loveliness in the hope of hastening his death. While Calaf succeeds in answering the riddle correctly and eventually wins Turandot's hand, Lee's Don Juan is less fortunate.

Don Juan's Infanta has comparable powers of enchantment and is 'most marvellously fair'.[58] Gaining access to inner depths of the Alhambra with the necromantic resources of his accomplice, Baruch, Don Juan finds himself similarly surrounded by the eunuchs that protect the Infanta, and is asked by her chief eunuch whether he 'does not consider her the most beautiful thing' he has ever beheld.[59] As Don Juan is asked the killer question – whether the Infanta is not more beautiful than the Virgin of the Seven Daggers to whom he has sworn his allegiance – she, like Turandot, unveils, raising 'her heavy eyelids' and fixing 'the cavalier a glance long, dark and deep'.[60] Unable to deny his allegiance to the Virgin, Don Juan is summarily decapitated. Despite the difference is setting and genre, the similarities between Gozzi's play and Lee's story are easy to see even, perhaps, in Lee's choice of the name 'Baruch' which is just one letter away from 'Barach', the name of the prince's servant in *Turandot*. Moreover, one of what might seem to be the crucial differences – the Spanish setting – is instead an indication that the commedia, and Gozzi's love of Spanish theatre, may have been on Lee's mind as she wrote this tale. As Franco Tonelli has observed, the Spanish legend of Don Juan had often been adapted and appropriated by the Italian commedia dell'arte and, as Tatiana Korneeva has argued, Turandot has her own Spanish counterpart in Gozzi's *La Principessa fiosofa, o sia Il controveleno* [*The Princess Philosopher, or the Antidote*] performed in Venice in 1772, based on the Spanish playwright Augustín Moreto y Cabaña's play *El Desdén con el Desdén* [*Disdain meets with Disdain*] (1654).[61] In this play the princess Teodora, like Turandot, challenges social conventions by rejecting marriage; as Korneeva notes, Gozzi's

'disdainful princess of Barcelona and her suitor represent another variant of the Chinese princess Turandot and her lover Calaf'.[62]

Writing Hybrid Identities

Yet, taking these affinities into account, what – beyond source material – might Gozzi's commedia, written and performed in the eighteenth century, offer Vernon Lee writing at the fin de siècle? One answer, perhaps, lies in the commedia dell'arte's use of masks and masking to create identities. Conscious of the fact that, at the end of the nineteenth century, 'a woman's writing on art, history or aesthetics' was rarely read 'with anything but unmitigated contempt', in 1875, Violet Paget adopted the pseudonym 'Vernon Lee' which appeared on the articles she published for the Italian journal *La rivista europea*.[63] Yet when her 'true' identity was discovered, Lee refused to drop the mask. Examining the semiotics of commedia personalities in eighteenth-century Venice, Michael Quinn notes that many of the famous figures 'were developed as "signature" characters, as images identified with particularly skilled performers, invented to some extent by those performers and their masks'.[64] In the commedia, the mask, he argues, 'was not designed to hide an essential identity but to construct an artistic one' and was recognizable across genres and settings.[65] In *Turandot*, for example, Truffaldino is 'no longer a servant from Bergamo', but has been 'recast as the chief eunuch of the king's seraglio and dressed in "Chinese style"'.[66] In a similar way, the name 'Vernon Lee', though identified with Violet Paget, functions as a cultural marker in fin-de-siècle literature; a masked constant that was recognized across the literary genres of Lee's substantial production while simultaneously challenging simple definitions of gender.

And what, beyond appropriation, might we read in the borrowed orientalism that informs Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' and 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'? In some sense it is in keeping with the strategies of decadent writing. As Kristin Mahoney argues, the decadent movement 'is known as much for its cosmopolitanism as its Orientalism' and as she points out, critics have 'struggled with how to categorize its relationship to racialized difference'.[67] Using Oscar

Wilde as an example, she demonstrates how such criticism has linked Wilde and his circle to both 'ethical engagement with alterity and troubling forms of exoticization', and highlights how 'the decadent movement's love of the stranger was often bound up with its fetishization of anything deemed strange'.[68] Yet, as Mahoney asserts:

> At the same time, while decadence's appetitive ethos certainly tended to foster the objectification and appropriation of difference, many members of the movement worked to detach themselves from more bombastic forms of jingoism, nationalism, and ignorance, and, in their perpetual quest for new sensations, they often approached cultural difference with curiosity rather than disdain.[69]

Vernon Lee's engagement with Gozzi's orientalism certainly chimes with the decadent attraction to and fetishization of the Other that Mahoney discusses above. Clearly, Lee takes pleasure in the aesthetic visualization of Duke Balthasar Maria, wrapped in his 'green Chinese wrapper, embroidered with gold pagodas', his head bound, by 'an orange scarf of delicate fabric', his face masked 'with a variety of brilliant colours'.[70] This description combines a strange beauty and exoticism with the uncanniness of an animated effigy, an automaton, the chinoiserie of his attire functioning as a secondary form of alienation. There is a similarly mechanical quality to the non-speaking Moorish Infanta in 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' whose gestures speak for her. Her beauty is masked beneath her veil and only revealed at the crucial moment when she awaits Don Juan's answer, using the power of her gaze to unsettle him. This 'mechanical' quality seems implicit in the conventional masks associated with the commedia dell'arte. The actors are recognized not by their own visages, but by the masks they adopt that signify their gender, type, and social standing.

However, such orientalist aesthetics are problematized when appropriated for nationalist ends. By the time 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' is reprinted in *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Tales* (1927), Giacomo Puccini's operatic version of Gozzi's *Turandot* has premiered in Milan, and both Puccini and Lee live in an Italy affected by the tragedy of World War I, rising nationalist politics, and post-war gender dynamics. As Arman Schwartz puts it, at first Puccini's *Turandot* 'appears utterly remote from the world of power: based on a whimsical eighteenth-century play, steeped in

extravagant chinoiserie [and] reliant on the conventions of fairy-tales'.[71] Yet, he suggests that it is easy to read Puccini's *Turandot* 'as a political allegory, one consistent with fascism's own narrative of the degradation of post-World War I Italy and of Mussolini's heroic rise'.[72] Similarly, Gaoheng Zhang has argued that the gender relations in Puccini's opera may be read in the context of Italian nation building and colonialism. He points to the Italo-Turkish war' as 'the most significant colonial event that preceded the creation of Turandot' and suggests that the gender relations around which the opera centres offer 'an important angle from which to consider the opera in relation to empire and Orientalism'.[73] For Zhang,

> these gendered transactions not only represent the Orientalisms and imperialism that are intrinsic to the opera – i.e., Chinese Orientalism of Central Asians and historicized chinoiserie in Italian opera – but also provide artistic responses to the regeneration discourse in Italy during the first quarter of the twentieth century. This discourse was closely associated with Italy's empire-building, war experience, and the Northern European Orientalization of Italy.[74]

These political tensions, Zhang suggests, surface when one reads the relationship between 'Calaf's Central Asian identity and Turandot's Chinese identity as one of periphery and hegemony'.[75]

In her 1927 preface to 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' addressed to her dedicatee, Maurice Baring, Lee recalls the tale's origins in travels undertaken in late 1888, when she had visited Spain and glimpsed 'real Moors at Tangier', especially 'a little Moorish bride, with blue and red triangles painted on her cheeks like my Infanta's'.[76] Additionally, she remembers reading Lane's *Arabian Nights*, a book 'much-thumbed in childhood', as she developed her story.[77] Yet, by the time the story was reprinted in *For Maurice*, Lee had written *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) fuelled by the advent of World War I, and *Satan the Waster* (1920) her post-war meditation on national boundaries informed by her understanding of empathy. To analyse 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' in the context of its post-war publication and in the light of Gozzi's and Puccini's own works is to ask how its fin-de-siècle orientalism might be re-read. Elsewhere, I have noted how Lee herself, like Gozzi, appropriates and repurposes dramas from Spain's Golden Age.[78] *The Ballet of the Nations*, subtitled 'A Present-Day Morality', resonates with the Pedro Calderón de la Barca's

autos sacramentales, productions resembling medieval morality plays performed during Corpus Christi, and Calderón is referred to directly in 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'.[79] This suggests that, for Lee as for Gozzi, textual, temporal and national boundaries are there to be crossed, and in the years leading up to and following World War I, such questions become, for Lee, increasingly pressing.

Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Lee published an article entitled 'The Sense of Nationality' (1912) in which she takes issue with the French nationalist politician Maurice Barrès who is later mentioned in her 1927 preface to 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers'. Challenging Barrès' call for a 'sense of nationality', Lee argues that nationality is relational, that one can only understand one's own if one acknowledges that of others.[80] This empathetic approach to national identity is one that preoccupies Lee during and after the war and is born of the multiple national influences that informed her own childhood experience. In a short story, 'The Heart of a Neutral', published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November 1915, she constructs herself as an infant on whom, in a manner reminiscent of the christening scene in *Sleeping Beauty*, a series of fairy godmothers bestow their gifts. Here, like Gozzi, Lee becomes a fairy-tale child. As Mandy Gagel explains:

> Each [fairy godmother] is the personification of a country from which Lee can trace her lineage and upbringing (England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Poland), and each gives her a gift from their culture. Although most are good fairies, one is evil (we are not told which country this fairy represents) and condemns Lee to a life in which she will never fully belong to one nation over another.[81]

However, one of the good fairies mitigates the curse by bestowing the following blessing on the child:

> When all the nations shall welter in the pollution of warfare, this child's eyes shall remain clear from its fratricide fumes; she shall drink deep of sorrow, but recognize and put away from her lips the sweetened and consecrated cup of hatred.[82]

The permeability of national boundaries is inculcated in Lee's intellectual development, and in her work this porousness extends to questions of genre and of temporality; Gozzi's *fiabe teatrali* prove fertile ground for Lee's fantastic tales, tales characterized by ghosts that fetch and carry between the past and the present, and protagonists who find themselves haunted by a past

they cannot quite grasp. For Lee, ambiguity is at the heart of the supernatural and, it seems, at the centre of her orientalist aesthetics. Like many of her decadent contemporaries, she finds herself on the boundary Mahoney identifies between 'cosmopolitanism and Orientalism' also embodied by Venice and the Venetian culture that sits uneasily, though often fruitfully, on the cusp between East and West.[83] In the propagandist context of World War I, for Lee national ambiguity becomes increasingly problematic, her pacifist stance resulting in the loss of friends and publishers. In the war's aftermath it is perhaps unsurprising that it is in Venice, in 1925, that she finds herself disturbed by a 'moody isolation' of self, a self 'fluctuating and shifting in stagnation like the shallow and stagnant Venetian waters', troubled by the city's liminality, its vulnerability, and its complex cultural history.[84]

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[1] Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), dramatist and librettist whose plays centred on the lives of the emergent middle classes; Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806), Venetian aristocrat and playwright who popularized the commedia dell'arte in his *fiabe teatrali* or, as Lee terms them, Venetian fairy comedies.

[2] *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* was later published in Italy in 1881 under the title *Il Settecento in Italia*; 'A Wicked Voice' was first published in French as 'Voix maudite' in *Les lettres et les arts* (1887).

[3] Vernon Lee, preface to *The Prince of the Hundred Soups* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1883), pp. v-xxiv (p. vi).

[4] Lee, *Hundred Soups*, p. vi. The term 'modern fiction' used by Lee here most likely refers to the realistic plays of Gozzi's contemporaries Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) and Pietro Chiari (1712-1785) who conveyed Enlightenment ideas through their dramas. Goldoni was influenced by Molière's satirical theatre whereas Chiari responded to eighteenth-century ideas of sensibility. For more on the rivalry between Gozzi and Goldoni, see Tatiana Korneva, 'The Art of Adaptation and Self-Promotion: Carlo Gozzi's *La Principessa filosofa*', in *Theatre Cultures within Globalising Empires***,** ed. by Joachim Küpper and Leonie Pawlita (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

[5] Lee, *Hundred Soups*. p. xi. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822), is best known as the author of fantastic tales, most notably 'Der Sandmann' ['The Sandman'], first published in *Die Nachtstücke* (1817), which features a life-like puppet. It is worth noting that Wesendonck shares two of his names with Hoffmann. Hoffmann had himself been introduced to the works of Carlo Gozzi while working in Warsaw between 1804-1806.

[6] 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers' was originally published in French as 'La Madone aux sept glaives' in *Feuilleton du journal des débats de Samedi*, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 14 February 1896. It was first published in English in two parts in the *English Review*, January/February 1909, before being reprinted in *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories* (1927). 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' appeared in Volume 10 of the quarterly aestheticist periodical, *The Yellow Book* (July 1896), and was later reprinted in *Pope Jacynth and Other Fantastic Tales* (1907).

[7] Mary Patricia Kane, *Spurious Ghosts: The Fantastic Tales of Vernon Lee* (Urbino: Carocci, 2004), pp. 63 & 46. Kane also refers to Lee's early story 'Carpo Serpente', written when she was thirteen, which tells the story of a serpent man who lives near a tomb and which recalls aspects of both the plot of Gozzi's play *La donna serpente* (1762) and Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady'.

[8] This fluid temporality also informs her travel writing where physical places are often described as spaces layered with historical and mythical resonances.

[9] Eleanor Sasso, *Late Victorian Orientalism* (New York: Anthem, 2020), p. 2.

[10]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[11] Antoine Galland (1646-1715), French orientalist and archaeologist. The tales were first published in English under the title *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* and are often referred to as the *Arabian Nights* or *One Thousand and One Nights*.

[12] Robert L. Mack, *Oriental Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. ix. Other eighteenth-century examples include John Hawkesworth's *Almoran and Hamet* (1761) and Frances Sheridan's *The History of the Nourjahad* (1767). Beckford's *Vathek* was written in French in 1782, then translated and published anonymously in Britain as *An Arabian Tale: From an Unpublished Manuscript*.
[13] Pétis de la Croix, *Contes turc*s (1707) and *Les Mille et un jours, contes persans* (5 vols, 1710-12), the latter reputedly translated from a collection of Persian tales.

William Beckford (1760-1844), writer, patron of the arts and wealthy plantation owner, is now best known for *Vathek*, a Gothic novel centred on the excesses of the eponymous Caliph; for his travel writing, *Italy with sketches of Spain and Portugal* (2 vols, 1834); and for the extravagance and opulence of Fonthill Abbey, a Gothic Revival country house built at Fonthill Gifford, Wiltshire.
[14] William Beckford, *Italy with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), I, p. 291.
[15] Ibid., p. 292.
[16] Ibid., p. 293.
[17] Vernon Lee, 'Out of Venice at Last', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), pp. 339-41 (p. 340).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Lee, *Studies*, p. 32. 'Vathek' here is the eponymous Caliph in Beckford's novel.
[20] Quoted in Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856-1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 2.
[21] Quoted in Vineta Colby*, Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 41.

John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), poet and critic whose works on Renaissance culture include a seven-volume collection, *Renaissance in Italy* (1875-1886).
[22] Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p. 41. Nencioni refers to the work of Luigi Settembrini (1813-1877), Francesco de Sanctis (1817-1883), and Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907).
[23] Alessandra di Ricco, 'Il Settecento di Vernon Lee', in *Vernon Lee e Firenze settant'anni dopo*, ed. by Serena Cenni and Elisa Bizzotto (Florence: Consiglio Regionale Toscana, 2006), pp. 142-53, p. 149.
[24] Ibid., p. 149; my own translation.
[25] Ibid., p. 149; my own translation.

Ernest Masi (1836-1908), Italian historian of the Risorgimento.
[26] L'Augellino Belverde is a sequel to Gozzi's earlier play, *The Love of the Three Oranges*, performed at the Teatro San Samuele, Venice, in 1761.
[27] Lee, *Studies*, p. 279.
[28] Ibid., p. 282.
Guiseppe Tartini (1692-1770). Italian composer and violinist born in Venice.
[29] Ibid., p. 282.
[30] Ibid., p. 283.
[31] See Leopold Auer, *Violin Master Works and Their Interpretation* (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), p. 2.
[32] Vernon Lee, 'A Wicked Voice', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, pp. 154-81 (p. 154).
[33] Vernon Lee, 'Preface', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, pp. 37-40 (p. 37).
[34] Lee, *Studies*, pp. 278-79.
[35] Ibid., p. 279.
[36] Tatiana Korneeva, 'Review of Carlo Gozzi, *La donna serpente,* edited by Giulietta Bazoli (Venice: Marsilio, 2012)', *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, 28.1 (2014), 186-89.
[37] Ibid., p. 187.
[38] Vernon Lee, 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, pp. 182-228 (p. 188).
[39] Ibid., p. 190.
[40] Ibid., pp. 190-91.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., p. 191.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Whalen Lai, 'From Folklore to Literate Theatre: Unpacking *Madame White Snake*', *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51.1 (1992), 51-66 (p. 52).
[45] Ibid., p. 51. The earliest printed version of the story appears to be 'The White Maiden Locked for Eternity' in *Stories to Caution the World* written during the Ming dynasty by the historian and poet Feng Menglong (1574-1646). The story, which incorporates Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian influences, is a Chinese fairy tale about a snake spirit who falls in love with a human.
[46] Ibid.
[47] John Louis DiGaetani, *Carlo Gozzi: Translations of The Love of Three Oranges, Turandot, and The Snake Lady* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 2. One suspects that, for all their shared aesthetic concerns, in Lee Carlo Gozzi might have found a further example of his challenging *femmes fatales*. Barach tells his prince, 'Turandot is absolutely a

tigress, my lord', words that foreshadow Henry James' well-known description of Vernon Lee in a letter to his brother William: 'She's a tiger-cat!' he warns, 'don't caress her […] she is as dangerous and uncanny as she is intelligent'; see Burdett Gardner, 'An Apology for Henry James' '"Tiger-Cat"', *PMLA*, 68.4 (1953), 688-95 (p. 694).
[48] The story of Turandot was one of the stories in Pétis de la Croix's *The Thousand and One Days* which features the character of 'Turandokht', a cold princess whose suitors die if they do not answer three riddles correctly.
[49] Enrico Fulchignoni, 'Oriental Influences on the Commedia dell'Arte', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 7.1 (1990), 29-41 (p. 32).
[50] Ibid. The 'lazzo' is a stock comic routine associated with Commedia dell'Arte.
[51] Ibid., p. 33.
[52] The story of Turandot and her luckless suitors also resonates with Lee's 'Amour Dure: Dure Amour' in which the ghost of a *femme fatale* leads the male protagonist to figurative castration and literal death.
[53] Carlo Gozzi, *Turandot*, in *Carlo Gozzi: Translations of The Love of Three Oranges, Turandot, and The Snake Lady with a Bio-Critical introduction*, ed. by John Louis DiGaetani (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 43-106 (p. 52).
[54] Ibid., p. 49.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., p. 50.
[57] Ibid., p. 52.
[58] Vernon Lee, 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, pp. 249-78 (p. 268).
[59] Ibid., p. 269.
[60] Ibid., p. 271.
[61] Franco Tonelli, 'Molière's "Don Juan" and the Space of the Commedia dell'Arte', *Theatre Journal*, 37.4 (1985), 440-64 (p. 451); Tatiana Korneeva, 'The Art of Adaptation and Self-Promotion: Carlo Gozzi's *La Principessa filosofa*', in *Theatre Cultures within Globalising Empires*, ed. by Joachim Küpper, Leonie Pawlita, and Madeline Rüegg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018) pp. 40-58 (p. 41).
[62] Tatiana Korneeva, 'Adaptation', p. 50. Korneeva also observes that the play includes a figure named 'Giannetto', 'if not exactly the *commedia dell'arte* mask of Pantalone, then a modernised version of him' (p. 50). *La Principessa filosofa*, as Korneeva explains, is one of approximately twenty Spanish Golden Age dramas that Gozzi adapted for Italian theatre; in such works, 'he found not only a new source of inspiration' but also 'a way to renew and revitalise Italian theatrical practices more generally' (p. 40).
[63] Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p. 2.
[64] Michael L. Quinn, 'The Comedy of Reference: The Semiotics of Commedia Figures in Eighteenth-Century Venice', *Theatre Journal*, 43.1 (1991), 70-92 (p. 74).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., p. 85.
[67] Kristin Mahoney, 'Taking Wilde to Sri Lanka and Beardsley to Harlem: Decadent Practice, Race, and Orientalism', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 49.4, (2021), 583-606 (p. 583).
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Lee, 'Prince Alberic', p. 190.
[71] Arman Schwartz, 'Mechanism and Tradition in Puccini's *Turandot*', *The Opera Quarterly*, 25.1-2 (2009), 28-50 (p. 32).
[72] Ibid.
[73] Gaoheng Zhang, 'The Three Riddles in Puccini's *Turandot*: Masculinity, Empire, and Orientalism', in *Der musikalisch modellierte Mann: Interkulturelle und interdisziplinäre Männlichkeitsstudien zur Oper und Literatur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Ester Saletta and Barbara Hindinger, pp. 397-416 (p. 402). The Italo-Turkish war was fought between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ottoman empire between 1911-1912, resulting in the colonization of sub-provinces that were known as 'Italian Libya' from 1911-1934.
[74] Ibid., pp. 403-04.
[75] Ibid., p. 404.
[76] Vernon Lee, preface to 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, pp. 243-48 (p. 248).

Maurice Baring (1874-1945), British diplomat, linguist, and author who was a member of the famous Baring Brothers banking family.

[77] Ibid. The edition of *Arabian Nights* Lee refers to here is likely to be the translation by Edward William Lane, published in serialized monthly form between 1838-1840, before being collected in three volumes in 1840, and subsequently published in a revised edition in 1859.
[78] See Patricia Pulham, 'Violence and the Pacifist Body in Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*', in *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 46-63.
[79] Ibid., p. 49.

[80] Vernon Lee, 'The Sense of Nationality', *The Nation*, XII, 12 October 1912, pp. 96-98.
[81] Vernon Lee, ''The Heart of a Neutral', *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1915, p. 687.
[82] Ibid.
[83] See Mahoney, 'Taking Wilde to Sri Lanka'.
[84] Lee, 'Out of Venice at Last', p. 339.

Lying Down or Standing Up for Music: Hearing and Listening in Vernon Lee's *Music and its Lovers*

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My childhood experience of learning musical instruments was characterized by severity. Formal, impersonal teachers and a limited repertoire were the norm in 1970s and '80s music teaching, based, as it was, on passing the Associated Board exams. Frivolity was not encouraged, for I was meant to be producing what was then (and is now, to an extent) called 'serious' music.

'Seriousness' began with the body. When playing the piano one was told to sit upright, to be attentive to the music and to hold oneself throughout a performance with a posture that paid a certain *homage*. The standard manuals for learning the piano in those days, Dame Fanny Waterman and Marian Harewood's three-volume series *Piano Lessons*, gave posture a moral imperative. An illustration at the beginning of the first book showed three different pianists. The first was hunched and looking at his fingers on the keyboard. 'This is a bad pupil', said a caption. The second sat erect. 'This is a good pupil', said another. The third, however, was said to be a 'great pianist'. With an outwardly curved back and dramatically-held fingers as if submitting to but also commanding the music like a magician, this pianist was at one with his art.[1] This practical but moral necessity was also applied to my other instruments, including the violin and the bassoon. Granted it is hard to hunch with the latter, but the bassoon's almost comically prodigious appearance, which suggests far more than it ever seems to give, always had to be transcended through the seriousness with which one related to and clutched the instrument.[2]

These rules were not only for performers but also for listeners or the 'audience' – the etymology of which includes the idea of 'formal hearing' and 'attention'.[3] As a member of a concert hall audience, one is still bound (perhaps coercively) to rituals about the entrances of conductors, first violinists, and soloists, but also to ideas about clapping (essentially, when to show regimented emotion or not), as well as how to appear musically attentive. These ritualistic physical demands

on the audience create a structure for the performance. In a concert hall there is often a sense of delicacy surrounding music, or possibly in the music itself, which a misplaced cough might crack.

These postures and actions, which imply a policing of the body, have their origins in the nineteenth-century reception of music. They are the physical manifestation (perhaps a ghostly schematic) of a central debate in musical aesthetics of that era about the role of emotion and its release or control in music; the debate, in modified form, still goes on today. Vernon Lee's final book, *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (1932), was her own exhaustive and exhausting contribution to this argument and is framed by a proposition that differentiates the actions of listening and hearing. The former she characterizes as a state of attention and bodily control, demanding a responsive posture. The latter, however, is a passive state of 'lounging' or 'not sitting up to music', to reference one of Lee's correspondents (whom she quotes approvingly), which evokes louche images of the decadent *salon*.[4] Lee regards the lounging state of hearing as a bad aesthetic posture, one that invites the self to take over and swamp the objective patterns of music. It causes less reception, not more, for it takes the hearer away from the appreciation of form.

Music and its Lovers matches the elusiveness of its subject matter. Written over twenty years, it was based on responses to questionnaires sent out in 1905, but the work initially floundered until what was to become its first chapter appeared as an article in the *North American Review* in 1917. Lee returned to the work after 1918, keen to publish the research as a whole, but she then found herself 'lost […] literally and materially, among these multifarious documents of all shapes and sizes […] in three languages (with the occasional Italian addition)'.[5] The book retains – happily I think – the scars of that process. Some sections are roughly cut, others fluid and composed, while responses to psychologists and digressions, postscripts, repetitions, and expansions of earlier passages are littered throughout. It also lacks a consistent, unifying voice and could be criticized for being a vocal blend or choir, although 'blend' is perhaps too mild a word. This is undoubtedly a result of the way the text was edited together from twenty years' worth of Lee's notes, but it is

also because of how she arranges the replies to her initial questionnaire.[6] Her correspondents are often denoted by first names, such as 'Bettina', 'Marcel', or 'Colonel Dick', who sound like characters in a melodrama. Sometimes, they are identified formally, such as M. Ernest ('amateur psychologist') or anonymously as 'American Musician', or purely by initials, such as 'C. A. T.', whom I take to be Clementina 'Kit' Anstruther-Thomson, Lee's sometime lover and collaborator. The replies are often wildly different, frequently forthright, dismissive, and even inadvertently funny. Many are given verbatim and at length, while others are reported or strung together in long, fragmented chains of quotation that obscure Lee's reactions. There are also chunks of quotation in untranslated languages, usually French, some with a sprinkling of German, while many responses are listed under headings such as 'Beethoven', 'Wagner', and 'Mozart', which are useful for gauging the interests and prejudices of the age towards musical performance.

Music and its Lovers is ultimately not fully formed. Its chapters and parts seem uncomfortable with each other, not quite content to be sharing the same cover. Its readers might also be forgiven for thinking themselves more like an audience, observant of the need 'to sit up' to Lee's argument and not quite able to take part in her performance, the result of which has clearly been decided well in advance, despite the wealth of evidence Lee claims she will sift through.[7] As such, the book forces the reader to play out the processes of listening and hearing that Lee investigates. Occasionally, having read yet another of Lee's digressions but then been jolted to attention by one of her frequently wry comments, you realize that you have only *heard* the words, not *listened* to them.

The lack of coherence in *Music and its Lovers* and the uncomfortable play between listening and hearing are linked. The disjointed text might be taken as a correlative of Lee's concerns about the body's role in musical production and aesthetics. Naturally, Lee centralizes the body in her discussions about what music does to audiences, for music effectively materializes itself in the bodies of its listeners. But in an argument reminiscent of Plato's concerns in *Laws* about the potentially corrupting nature of new music, Lee is anxious about the desires that music might

unleash, threatening to override and negate the intellect. While all music has this potential, especially for the bodies of the "'musically uneducated'", whose minds are apt to wander from the perfection of form, Lee suggests that certain kinds of music are more dangerous than others.[8] In this regard, Lee's chief villain is Richard Wagner.

Wagner as Orgasm: The Context of *Music and its Lovers*

> Wagner adds to his sound arrangements [which are] suggestive of the languors and orgasms within the human being, all the sound arrangements which can possibly suggest elemental storms and floods, sunlight irradiations, and also such dead calms as that in which the Ancient Mariner *saw the sea rot*.[9]

Lee was formidably well-read in musical aesthetics and she published numerous reviews and articles about music. But given its publication date near the end of her life, *Music and its Lovers* curates her opinions, but also those of her peers, as well as summarizing the state of early twentieth-century musical aesthetics.

Music and its Lovers is organized around the work of two musical personalities, theorist Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) and the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883). While it references Wagner continually and often disparagingly, Hanslick goes unmentioned, though, as I will show, Lee was deeply influenced by his work. Any discussion of *Music and its Lovers* needs to include awareness of this context, and so by way of my own digression, the history of nineteenth-century music is characterized by a battle between different opinions on how to capture the meaning, value, and purpose of music itself. The conflict was polarized around the terms 'programme music', advocated by Wagner and Franz Liszt (the term was Liszt's) and instrumental 'absolute music', advanced by Hanslick (the term 'absolute' was Wagner's originally, which he used pejoratively, with implications of aristocratic superiority).[10]

'Programme music' suggests a purpose other than music itself, and Wagner's purpose was revolutionary. Following the failure of the Dresden Uprising of May 1849, in which he was implicated, and having suffered rejection and ridicule for his political and musical ideas thereafter,

Wagner's ultimate goal was to create a national, continental music free from the constraints and observances of the concert halls which were then centred on an aristocratic elite. He believed that music should give voice to the common *volk* or 'folk', which necessitated a new form of opera or musical drama forged from a union of music with language, or more properly poetry, a process he saw as being analogous to political unification. The poetry of German Romantics such as Goethe and Schiller, had, Wagner thought, already captured a national, even European identity. According to this new Romantic language, music could now be *about* something, and this was to be the collective desires and demands of the common man.

The purpose of music was, according to Wagner, to evoke human emotions, and in his own work attention naturally fell to activating the bodies of his audiences. As he states in *Zukunftsmusik* [*The Music of the Future*] (1860) – a primer written in preparation for what became the disastrous 1861 Paris production of *Tannhäuser* (1845) – his own music speaks 'most clearly to the emotions' with the orchestra working with 'maximum effect on the audience's feelings' and their bodies.[11] In its expressiveness, Wagner's music was one of flesh and blood. Although hard to believe now, given that his operas are regarded by many as the peak of aesthetic elitism, by bringing music *down* to the level of the common human body, Wagner's objective was essentially populist. He was, in a sense, advocating an equality of the bodily senses or what Linda Dowling has called an 'aesthetic democracy'.[12]

Hanslick's plea for 'absolute music', on the other hand, articulated in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, or *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854), partly springs from concerns about this Wagnerian populism.[13] Hanslick states that music should not be made to speak or give voice to anyone (he forgets, perhaps, about those who commission and finance musical works). Neither should it generate emotions or describe them, for the goal of music and composers is not human representation, he claims, but the creation of an exclusive, conceptualized beauty. As music is contentless, unlike all other artforms, which are mimetic, this beauty is pure, unsullied by the human, and its audience (to whom it is indifferent) should aim to divest itself of any extraneous

thoughts or feelings in order to truly appreciate it, for musical beauty is 'independent and not in need of an external content' as it 'resides solely in the tones and their artistic connection'.[14] Hanslick admits this divesture is difficult, as anyone who has found themselves with a wandering mind in a concert hall can attest to, for it requires an intellectual 'listening', which means following and understanding the music's *rapports* (to borrow a word from Lee).[15] In this realm, an audience can perceive music's 'rightful sovereignty of beauty' (suggesting hierarchy, monarchy) and its transcendence to 'the absolute idea', for music 'has no model in nature'; it 'is truly "not of this world"'.[16] Absolute music, therefore, is a condition of taste, education, and class quality; it has nothing to do with the voice of a common *volk*. Not content with privileging music's intellectualism, Hanslick also ferociously attacks emotionally-laden music. Thinking of Wagner, he insists that it is pathological, hysterical, diseased. It annihilates objectivity by demanding a return to the self, and, indeed, such music is 'not really music at all'.[17]

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and well beyond it, Wagner was continually accused of degeneration, anti-intellectualism, of seeking to return humanity to a primordial darkness, as if he were a musical version of Darwin. His call for human kinship in music reached down to basic human concerns. The commonality of man, as he saw it, was found in love, and in concert with his opera's subject matter – which tended to be erotic love, such as in *Tannhäuser* or *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) – his music appeared to long for the emancipation of potentially forbidden desires.[18]

This accusation was correct. The intention of Wagner's music is indisputably erotic as his prose writings clarify. For example, in his 1852 polemic, *Oper und Drama* [*Opera and Drama*] (written during his political exile, just after his flight from Dresden), he presents the operatic union of music and poetry as sexual intercourse:

> *Music is a woman.*
>
> The nature of Woman *is love:* but this love is a *receiving* (empfangende), and in receival (*Empfängniss*) an unreservedly *surrendering*, love.

> Woman first gains her full individuality in the moment of surrender. She is the Undine who glides soulless through the waves of her native element, till she receives her soul through the love of a man.[19]

One might interpret these words as metaphorical, but Wagner's prose writings are often endowed with a visceral autoeroticism, which occasionally turns self-destructive, even Sapphic.[20] Take, for example, Wagner's description of the conception of *Tannhäuser*. While working out its music, he was thrown into a

> state of burning exaltation […] that held my blood and every nerve in fevered throbbing. My true nature […] had quite returned to me – now seized, as in a passionate embrace, the opposing channels of my being and disembouched them both into *one* stream: a longing for the highest form of Love. – With this work I penned my death-warrant […] I now could hope no more for life.[21]

In *Opera and Drama*, Wagner moves from music as woman to feminizing parts of the human body, with hearing fetishized as sexual penetration. 'The ear is no child', he states, but 'a staunch and loving woman, who in her love will make that man the blessedest who brings *in himself* the fullest matter for her bliss'.[22]

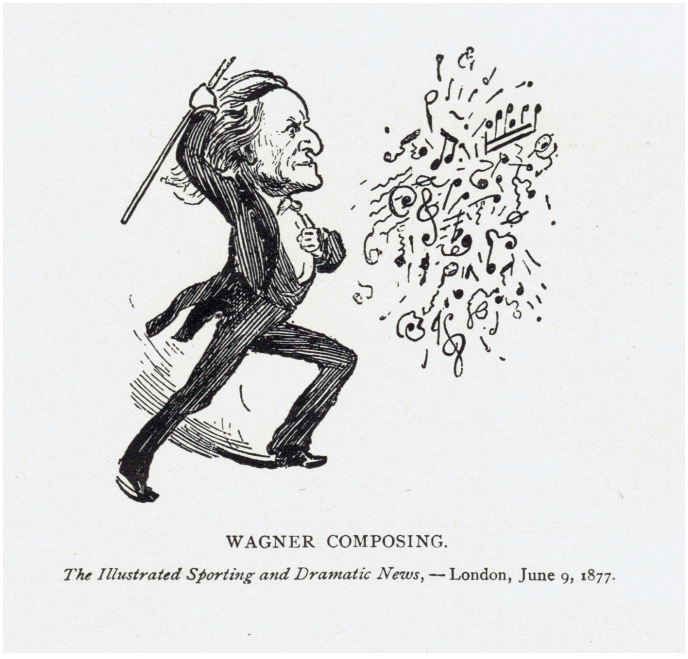


Fig. 1: 'Wagner Composing', from the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 9 June 1877, reprinted in Adolphe Jullien, *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works*, trans. by Florence Percival Hall, 2 vols (Boston: Knight & Millet, 1900), I, xx.

As Jean-Jacques Nattiez has discussed, Wagner's music is a feminizing process for male listeners and aspires to androgyny, which Wagner believed to be the future state of mankind.[23] Yet, despite this gender transgression or musical 'queerification', Wagner says nothing about a woman's reception of music or the possibility of female composers. One is left wondering if he views romantic music as possibly endangering women by an excess of feeling.[24]

Music is now embodied as a sexual ear and, in turn, the ear becomes a metonym for the passive action of hearing (see fig. 2). The ear receives the seminal words of language without resistance, an image recalling Suzanne G. Cusick's frank exploration of music's autoerotism and posture in her essay 'On a Lesbian Relationship with Music', where she wonders 'What if ears are sex organs? […] If music IS sex, what on earth is going on in a concert hall during, say, a piano recital? […] Are we observers of a sexual act? Are we its object? Why, exactly, are we in the dark?'[25]

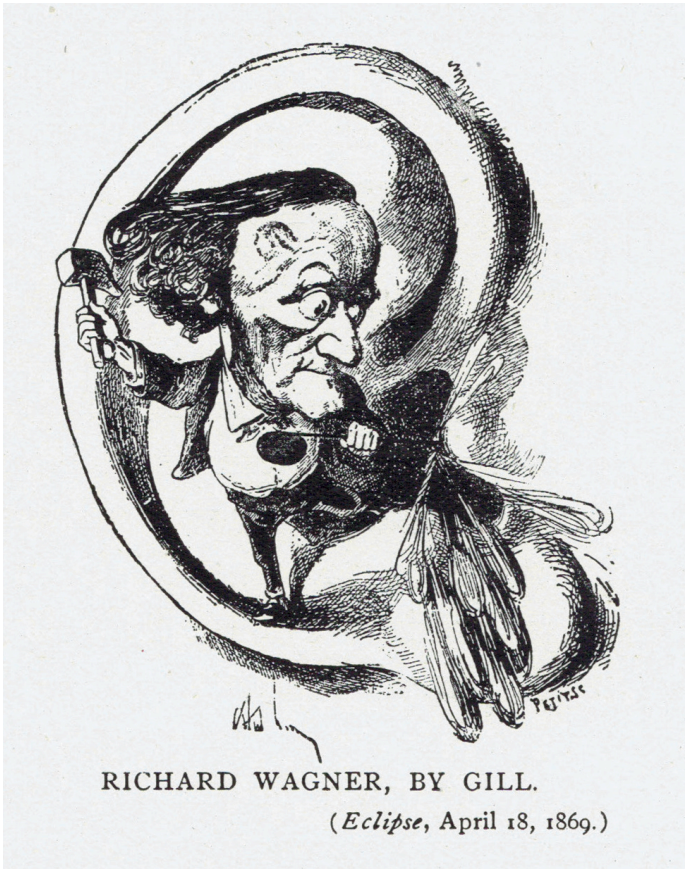


Fig. 2: André Gill, 'Richard Wagner', *L'Éclipse*, 18 April 1869, p. 1, reprinted in Jullien, *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works*, II, 235.

Wagner was one of the first composers to insist on the lights being turned off in opera auditoriums and several of Lee's respondents in *Music and its Lovers* were certainly aware of what he might have been up to in the dark.[26] 'Violet H.' (presumably Violet Hunt), for example, complains that 'Wagner is so physical that it's scarcely decent to talk about'. Another contributor, identified only as a 'Doctor of Philosophy of many universities', manages to suggest the composer's post-coital benefits, for his music '*arouses my emotions intensely*', she is 'intimately stirred', but 'she comes from hearing it not only optimistic but clear-headed and "ready for work"'. A puritan *coup de grâce* is provided by another 'anonymous', who declares 'Wagner has utterly debased music by his […] *Program Musik*' for 'in Wagner we have the first traces of pornographic art. The greatest art cannot and does not touch sexuality'.[27]

Wagner as abortion

As its title suggests, *Music and its Lovers* maintains a strong, even suggestive, relationship with the Wagnerian erotic. *Lovers* indicates promiscuity. The book might be accused of indulging this passion, given its multiple voices and in the way Lee's initial questionnaire invited its respondents to talk about how music affected their own bodies. However, Lee's use of the pronoun 'its' might also be a point of difference to the Wagnerian identification of music as feminine, suggesting a neutered form, for despite the implication of her title, Lee's aim is to resist music's erotic charms. The action of *Music and its Lovers* is one of intellectualization, of cleansing it of base promiscuity. Its intention is to demonstrate that music exists on an 'alleged "higher plane"' and its 'purification of human feelings are genuine and intelligible psychological facts, and indeed among the most important ones of all aesthetics'.[28]

Lee's starting point is the ear, which she calls that 'complex and mysterious faculty'.[29] Like Wagner, her argument is gendered, though its gendering is not dogmatic in its application, but transgressive. It shifts the contentious programme/absolute music argument by refusing to accept polarization, fusing the contrary positions of Hanslick and Wagner. The synthesis of *Music and its*

Lovers works by positioning Wagnerian emotionalism as a state we all find ourselves in but must reject before we can understand music on its own terms.

The general problem of sound is that it threatens to swamp or dissolve us. Unlike sight, which can be instantly blocked by the eyelid, sound is constant. It immerses us in a homogenous ambience which tends to activate general emotions. Lee gives an example from her own diary of walking into Westminster Abbey and being overwhelmed by impressions of size, enclosure, and the sound of the organ, and interestingly likens it to being plunged into a bath. She concedes the Abbey's ambience may well be positive, but this positivity wears off after '*a few minutes (or seconds?)* [as] *one begins to "look" and to "listen", and the state is broken, the charm gone*'.[30] However, habitual 'hearers' of music refuse to give up this initial stage, she claims. They indulge and embrace ambience as it changes in time. They lounge in it, letting their mind wander inwards to explore the effect on their bodies. The hearer does not

> want to listen or have anything to listen to. He does not grow impatient of passiveness because he is by nature musically passive and likes being 'played upon'. […] Mere hearers will sit happily through hours of concerts. […] He will continue immersed in that passive enjoyment which may perhaps be the greatest, indeed almost the only great enjoyment he ever receives directly from music. […] Buoying him up, stimulating and soothing; moreover shutting himself off from the ceaseless pursuing and being pursued of real life, music enables him to witness, nay enact, imaginary dreams, to re-live the past, foretaste the future; see visions, roam in day-dreams; moreover, music may sting and lash his perchance dulled sensibilities, intoxicate him in 'Dionysiac' pleasures, spiced, as Nietzsche says ('*Stachel der Unlust*') or drugged, with pain.[31]

The reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* [*The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*] (1872) is instructive. The philosopher wrote his work almost as a primer to the music of Wagner, a man he adored, possibly to the point of erotic obsession. In simple terms, Nietzsche's Dionysiac art refers to an undifferentiated, orgiastic music which overrides barriers, bringing hearers into communion with the force of a primitive rite. In contemporary musical terms, one might think (snobbishly even) of a rock concert, but Nietzsche was thinking of Wagner, placing the orgiastic melodies and harmonies of his opera *Tannhäuser*, for example, in contrast to an Apollonian art, which leads listeners in the opposite direction to an

appreciation of the '*bright god of intellectual beauty*', to quote one of Lee's respondents.[32] By invoking Nietzsche in her hedonistic description of musical hearing – which collapses pleasure and pain – Lee, too, is summoning Wagner, for she employs and develops the composer's metaphor of music as a sexual act. Indeed, her points about the musical listener (described as 'he' throughout the above quotation) are highly evocative of the feminized Wagner, 'longing for the highest form of Love' (see note 21) who enjoys being 'played upon'. But in a riposte to Wagner's aesthetics, Lee portrays this primordial sexual intercourse as sterile. The 'chaos' engendered by the indulgence of hearing bears what Lee shockingly calls a 'distressful abortion'.[33] Hearing causes music to remain as an unformed child, an embryo that cannot aspire to completed form and, thus, claim a life of its own.[34]

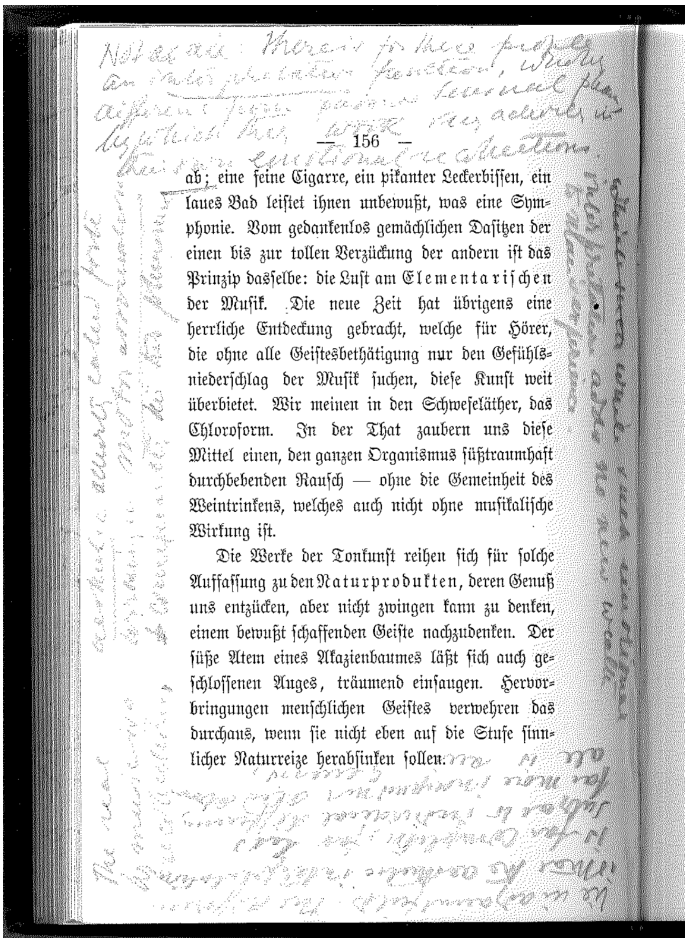
For Lee, Wagner's music is hearing music *par excellence*. It asks for nothing but hearing, for its audiences remain floating in its interminable sound patterns. What progress there is in this music, she claims, is only a means of enlarging this aural experience towards an ambient totalization that resists clarity in favour of a 'confused flux'. This 'imprisons the semi-musical', for 'half-attentive' hearers fall into 'lassitude' and are open to 'hypnotic susceptibility'.[35] Ultimately, Wagner is a Narcissus, leading his audiences through infantile confusion to a self-regarding titillation at the water's edge. His music disavows any possibility of new forms or identities, leaving its hearers immured in a relationship with themselves.[36]

Music as queer purgation

> […] there is that queer 'Dionysiac' possibility, the fact that some music can overwhelm some 'Hearers'; and what is more, stir, churn up, the inner seas of their being, open the invisible flood-gates and trouble their welling-up or stagnant pools.[37]

Lee owned an 1896 edition of Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful*, now kept in the library of the British Institute of Florence.[38] Its German gothic text is heavily annotated. On some pages, Lee's handwriting encloses the text in an outwardly-facing rectangle, almost as if she were trying to surround and capture Hanslick's words. At the beginning of the third chapter, for example, Lee

notes Hanslick's discussion of the immediacy of music's 'primal' or 'primordial' sound ('*Das Urelement der Musik ist Wohllaut*').[39] She has placed a heavy but affirming double stroke alongside another paragraph that stresses music's goal – a 'specifically musical beauty', while the following sentence, suspended between paragraphs – 'The content of music is *sonically moved forms*' – is also underlined, with a number of words and phrases subsequently picked out that discuss music in terms of 'contoured lines', curves and 'arabesques'. The word 'Lipps' is in large lettering, followed by two exclamation marks, which I take to be the philosopher of aesthetics, Theodor Lipps. On one of the following pages, Hanslick's comments about the ear and its undervaluation in aesthetics, are also highlighted.



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ab; eine feine Cigarre, ein pikanter Leckerbissen, ein laues Bad leistet ihnen unbewußt, was eine Symphonie. Vom gedankenlos gemächlichen Dasitzen der einen bis zur tollen Verzückung der andern ist das Prinzip dasselbe: die Lust am Elementarischen der Musik. Die neue Zeit hat übrigens eine herrliche Entdeckung gebracht, welche für Hörer, die ohne alle Geistesbethätigung nur den Gefühlsniederschlag der Musik suchen, diese Kunst weit überbietet. Wir meinen in den Schwefeläther, das Chloroform. In der That zaubern uns diese Mittel einen, den ganzen Organismus süßtraumhaft durchbebenden Rausch — ohne die Gemeinheit des Weintrinkens, welches auch nicht ohne musikalische Wirkung ist.

Die Werke der Tonkunst reihen sich für solche Auffassung zu den Naturprodukten, deren Genuß uns entzücken, aber nicht zwingen kann zu denken, einem bewußt schaffenden Geiste nachzudenken. Der süße Atem eines Akazienbaumes läßt sich auch geschlossenen Auges, träumend einsaugen. Hervorbringungen menschlichen Geistes verwehren das durchaus, wenn sie nicht eben auf die Stufe sinnlicher Naturreize herabsinken sollen.

Fig. 3: Lee's annotations of her 1896 edition of Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, with kind permission of the British Institute of Florence.

In Chapter Five, Hanslick discusses the difference between listening and hearing, and Lee has noted a paragraph which could be mistaken for one of her own in *Music and its Lovers*. Here Hanslick dismisses 'hearers', calling them loungers: 'Half awake, nestled into their armchairs, those enthusiasts let themselves be carried away and rocked by the vibrations of the tones, instead of contemplating them keenly'. He then describes the '*pathological*' pleasures of music as being like 'a warm bath' or the effect of a 'fine cigar'. Lee has heavily encircled the page on which these quotations appear with indistinct comments (see fig. 3). These comments may have inspired the comparison in *Music and its Lovers* of 'ambience' with bathing.[40]

Lee's copy of *On the Musically Beautiful* requires closer analysis if we are to see its full influence on *Music and its Lovers*, but we know she valued it greatly. A few years after reading it, she called the work that

> splendid essay […] in which he [Hanslick] demonstrated that, whatever its coincident powers of suggesting human emotion, the genius of the composer is manifested in the audible shapes, the musical movements which he builds up in the soul of the listener.[41]

As in Hanslick's text, the aesthetics of *Music and its Lovers* concern the process of listening as an intellectual pursuit. Immersed in music and sensing the Wagnerian siren song, a true listener turns away from the physical effect of the music on the body to activate their mind and contemplate the musical structure, 'a movement of more and more fullness and clearness […] of the present' which cleanses 'the mind from pollution'. From here listeners can take in

> all the relations of sequences and combinations of sounds as regards pitch, intervals, modulations, rhythms and intensities, holding them in the memory and coordinating them in a series of complex wholes, similar […] to that constituted by all the parts, large and small, of a piece of architecture [… and] these audible shapes made up of intervals, rhythms, harmonies and accents, themselves constitute the meaning of music to this class of listeners.[42]

On hearing a symphony for the first time, even the musically educated might only hear blocks of sound. There may be unresolved contours or a sense of different parts, harmonies, and melodies. It may take a third or a fourth listening before it can be fully comprehended. Reading like this is, of course, hard work and exhausting. It demands a 'sitting up to music', Lee states, reminding us

of Waterman and Harewood's illustrations in Piano Lessons, or a 'standing up', to paraphrase Franz, a 'highly trained musician', who appears to be worried about the intoxicating effects of Wagner on his libido. 'Sitting up' is defined as 'working one's brain hard to thoroughly grasp some difficult and complex piece' and is, therefore, a recognition of music's 'presence' as form through which a listener can experience the 'lucid joy of following and grasping, of becoming one with beautiful movements in pitch and time and with interwoven harmonic relations'.[43] It might be said that 'joy' and 'becoming one' is suggestive of emotion and sexual union, but Lee has an answer for this. 'Joy' is the reward for intellectual achievement; it is a 'pure joy' of contemplation, a joy of 'engrossing attention'. And it is a *sui generis* emotion, an objectified state born of liberation from the merely human.[44]

Emotions other than 'joy' are also found in music, but these are actually a complex form of original memory. To describe this, Lee employs the evidence of C. A. T. or Kit, who states that what hearers often confuse for real emotions are actually the 'ancestors' or the 'foundations of the emotions'.[45] Although one refers these emotional states to one's self, a hearer becomes entangled, unable to throw them away and moves inwards with them. Listeners, however, can hear them for what they are. In a more literary fashion, Lee describes these ancestors as the '*Infinitive* of the verb':

> '*Music is not interwoven with (one's) feelings as a human being. The feeling communicated to me by music is rather the ANCESTOR of those feelings* […]. *the foundations of the emotions* […]. *it calls up embryo emotions*' […]. She [Thomson] calls the common 'Ancestor' a Verb. And I, with less picturesqueness and more pedantic precision, should like to add: the *Infinitive* of the verb.[46]

Lee's listening is a process of bringing into the light that which is hidden, mediated by the body, but which then purifies, objectifies its product. These 'Ancestors' are a ghostly memory asking you to sit up and act. For it 'is remarkably like a ghost […] it is the ghost of numberless concretes. […] Like the Ghost in *Hamlet* it can talk about action; but it cannot itself act (morally or the reverse); it can only haunt'.[47] Sitting up, standing up, so that one doesn't 'lose the name of action', to quote *Hamlet*, and fall into reverie, is what listening is all about.

Lee's turning away from the human body in the comprehension of music may seem to contradict her earlier experiments in art galleries concerning the body's reaction to painting and sculpture. But unlike the subject of these experiments, who is in this case Thomson, the hearer submerges their body into a musical bath and effectively gives up the action of 'the perceiving body', which was for Lee, as Lene Østermark-Johansen describes, also a 'creative body'. The hearer loses an artform's trace of lines, curves, and shapes, and, therefore, a sense of action, movement, evolution in time and becoming.[48] By using music to look inwards rather than appreciating form, one loses the possibility of empathetic responses to art, an awareness of correspondences and relationships that enable the subjective experience to 'turn into the objective'.[49]

By suggesting that the hearer gives up the opportunity of empathy, Lee is also refuting Wagner's ideas about the *volk* and his supposedly democratic aesthetics. For Lee, a greater, more fulfilling and meaningful kinship is not to be found in Wagner's generalized, primitive emotions, but rather in intellectual community.

Coda

> O sweet art, in how many a grey hour,
> When I am caught in life's tempestuous
> round,
> Have you kindled my heart to loving warmth
> And borne me away to a better world.[50]

Lee's musical contemplation is a walled garden. She arrives at this image when discussing the action of Franz Schubert's song *An die Musik: Du holde Kunst* (1817), which leads its listeners to 'the sanctuary, the *hortus inclusus* which we might never attain unaided'.[51] Such a garden offers purity. One can enjoy its flowers freely in the knowledge that the realities of the outside world will not disturb.

Lee's endorsement of formalism was certainly timely, marking her out as a prescient thinker on music. As Mark Evan Bonds has discussed, the success of absolute music in the latter half of the twentieth century was partly a reaction to the co-opting of music for 'national, social,

and political ideologies to an unprecedented degree', or, in a sense, an excessive popularization of music, which would have been anathema to Lee's demands for private, intellectual contemplation.[52] But it is also possible to see something lurking behind Lee's formalism that is altogether more emotional. The flowers in her walled garden may be beautiful, but the same flowers also suggest fertility and sexuality.

For a book that aspires to describe a purely intellectual beauty, *Music and its Lovers* often betrays far more visceral emotions than that of the 'joy' of contemplation and its objective relations. Below its inquiring surface, Lee's attitude to musical emotionalism and sexuality is, at times, irritated, exasperated, even displaying an excessive defensiveness (which occasionally reaches Wagnerian proportions). In turning to formalism to silence musical sexuality, we can also, as Fraser Riddell states, see Lee stifling her own sexual emotions, for music threatens the 'disclosure of aspects of the self that would otherwise remain hidden', for in music she might have to 'painfully confront those queer aspects of the desiring self that she would rather repudiate'.[53] Lee's reactions to Wagner and her gendered sense that she was being 'husbanded by the claims of [its] music', for instance, are often highly suggestive of a fear of violation or a nervousness about the possibility of being uncovered.[54]

Music and its Lovers is certainly aware of the possibility of 'shameful listening'.[55] Responding to 'the case of that Answerer who discovered a pornographic element in Wagner', Lee states

> there may arise a shame-faced liking or a prudish indignation in connection with music. For human beings are capable of many more emotions than they enjoy having, also of some emotion which they can't enjoy without such a sense of remorse or *infra dig.* interfering with aesthetic contemplation.[56]

Completed at the end of Lee's life, it is possible to see *Music and its Lovers* as an attempt at textual cleansing, a shedding of excess, in a process akin to Lee's ideas about empathy, in which subjectivity, and all the problems this entails, are transmuted into the objective. The result, however, is not beautiful. In dealing with the sublime nature of music, it is almost as if *Music and its Lovers* has become its victim, fragmented and incomplete. Its words may well be bookishly

containing, but much leaks from its pages and this uncontained spillage seems in tension with the need for its readers to 'sit up' and not lounge. Perhaps this is why, despite the length and depth of its inquiry, *Music and its Lovers* still feels unfinished and inconclusive.[57]

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[1] I refer here to the 1967 imprint. The 2014 imprint has different captions to lessen the moral impact. These read 'Bad position', 'Good position' and so forth. In both the '67 and '14 versions, the 'bad' and 'good' pupils are apparently male, white, and wearing short trousers and long socks (despite the sex of the authors), while the male 'great pianist' is shown fully trousered, in tails and with a bowtie. This suggests adult masculinity is desired in piano performances (with a touch of the bohemian allowed, given the '67 pianist's 'Franz Liszt' hairstyle). See Fanny Waterman and Marian Harewood, *Piano Lessons Book One* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 1967, 2014), p. 6.

[2] All this was in stark contrast to my experience of pop music in the '70s and '80s, where slouching was apparently virtuous. The same was also true of some jazz. In a riposte to Dame Fanny, jazz pianists like my great uncle Leonard were always to be found hunched at their pianos, cigarette in mouth, irreverently banging out the music without regard for appearance, albeit with the same dedication and attention as that of a concert pianist performing Beethoven.

[3] See 'Audience, n.'. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. <https://0-www-oed-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/view/Entry/13022?redirectedFrom=audience> [accessed 14 September 2022].

[4] Lee here quotes 'Leo'. See Vernon Lee, *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), pp. 46, 106 (afterwards, Lee, *Music*).

[5] Lee, *Music*, p. 16. The 'multifarious documents' included the questionnaires 'complicated by commentaries and extracts, but with the thread of connection broken and lost'.

[6] A reviewer called this questionnaire 'an interrogation'. A copy of the English questionnaire appears in the final pages of *Music* (pp. 563-67) and testifies to the reviewer's concern. See 'The Radiance of Eternity', *Saturday Review*, 12 November 1932, p. 515. Irene Cooper Willis assisted Lee in compiling and editing the book.

[7] As Fraser Riddell has discussed, Lee's views on 'musical aesthetics changed very little over the course of her long career'. See Fraser Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body in English Literature at the 'Fin de Siècle'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 43.

[8] Lee, *Music*, p. 540. See this page also for a wealth of anti-Wagner comments. On Plato and the corrupting nature of music, see *Laws* (7.802-3), trans. by A. E. Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 1225-517 (pp. 1373-74). Plato's concerns were often invoked in criticism of Wagner's music in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially in terms of the possibility that his music might feminize male listeners, a process that Wagner – as we shall see – welcomed and enjoyed.

[9] Vernon Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', *Fortnightly Review*, 89.533 (May 1911), 868-85 (p. 880). Spelling in context.

[10] This contextualization is necessarily simplified.

[11] Richard Wagner, *Three Wagner Essays*, trans. by Robert L. Jacobs (London: Eulenberg Books, 1979), p. 40. I call the essay *The Music of the Future* as this was how it was first known in English. For more on the French *Tannhäuser* of 1861, see Jeremy Coleman, *Richard Wagner in Paris: Translation, Identity, Modernity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 137-68.

[12] Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 50.

[13] On the social 'superiority' of absolute music, see Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 215-16.

[14] Eduard Hanslick, *'On the Musically Beautiful': A New Translation*, trans. by Lee Rothfarb and Christoph Landerer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 40.

[15] Lee, *Music*, p. 36.

[16] Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, pp. 63, 17, 43.

[17] Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music*, p. 9.

[18] On Wagner's music as sexual hysteria, see any section on Wagner in *Entartung* (1892; English trans. *Degeneration*, 1895) by Max Nordau, a follower of absolute music, who claimed Wagner was suffering from erotic madness. Even Wagner's supporters were happy to admit the sexual potential of his music. See Edward Dannreuther's article, 'The Musical Drama' (*Macmillan's Magazine*, 33.193 (November 1875), 80-86 (p. 81)), in which he states that Wagner's music is 'the very impulse of passion […] the spirit of music is orgiastic'.

[19] Wagner, 'Opera and Drama', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (*RWPW*), trans. by William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892-1899), II, 111. I retain here and afterwards the inconsistent italicization and capitalization of Ellis' Wagner texts, unless otherwise stated; I also do this with quotations from Lee's *Music*.
[20] By 'Sapphic', I relate Wagner's experience to Fragment 31 of the sixth century BCE Greek poet's corpus, which portrays the erotic sublime as self-destructive. Anne Carson translates part of Sappho's Fragment 31 thus: 'fire is racing under skin […] and cold sweat holds me and shaking | grips me all, greener than grass | I am and dead – or almost | I seem to be'. Anne Carson, *If not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 63. Yopie Prins describes the impact of sapphic, erotic language 'in terms of masculine domination and feminine submission. […] Sappho is identified with the figurative feminization of the reader.' Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 39.
[21] Wagner, 'A Communication to my Friends', *RWPW*, I, 323. 'Highest' here is an inverse hierarchy to Hanslick's, i.e., an ennoblement of sexuality. For Wagner's sensual pleasure while composing music, see Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 133-42.
[22] *RWPW*, II, 271. The character of Senta in Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), who throws herself from a cliff to fulfil herself sexually and spiritually to redeem the eponymous Dutchman, is a surely a Sapphic figure, and, given the androgenizing character of Wagner's art, needs investigation in these terms.
[23] In a letter to August Röckel of 1854, Wagner states 'The highest satisfaction of individual egoism is to be found in its total abandonment, and this is something that human beings can achieve only through love: but *the true human being is both man and woman*' (emphasis in original). Quoted in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. by Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 78. See also note 8 on Plato and music's potential to feminize listeners.
[24] In one of the most extraordinary moments of *Opera and Drama*, Wagner says that Beethoven became androgynous through the sexual abandonment of wedding Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' to the music of his *Ninth Symphony* (*RWPW*, II, 107). For more on the fear of Romantic classical music feminizing men or on homosexuality and music, see, for example, Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body*, pp. 20-33, and David Deutsch, *British Literature and Classical Music: Cultural Contexts 1870-1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 139-84. On the dangers of musical desire threatening 'the autonomy of female characters, for whom it has potentially fatal consequences', see Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 31.
[25] See Suzanne G. Cusick, 'On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight', in *Queering the Pitch: A New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd edn, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 67-82 (p. 79). For more on Wagner's sexual 'liquefaction of desire' in music, which also 'deconstructs gender', see Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 142, 146.
[26] On Wagner's need for the auditorium lights to be extinguished, see Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 31, and Ned A. Bowman, 'Investing a Theatrical Ideal: Wagner's Bayreuth *Festspielhaus*', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 18.4 (December 1966), 429-438 (p. 436).
[27] Lee, *Music*, pp. 540, 302-03, 305, 533. Other correspondents complain of Wagner making them ill. '"Wagner?"' claims 'Pictrix', '"My hair raises with rage. Many experiments have been tried to deceive me, but I always know and am physiologically ill"', p. 538.
[28] Lee, *Music*, p. 66.
[29] Lee, *Music*, p. 40.
[30] Lee, *Music*, p. 147. Italics in original.
[31] Lee, *Music*, p. 149.
[32] Lee, *Music*, p. 294. Italics in original. Although speaking generally, the respondent may be thinking of eighteenth-century Italian opera 'beloved' by Lee, to quote Riddell. Although this opera lacks '"poetical suggestion" (or "what the Germans call *Inhalt*"), [… it] succeeds instead on the grounds of its formal beauty' (Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body*, p. 42).
[33] Lee, *Music*, pp. 294, 155.
[34] Lee makes a relationship between music's power of emotional suggestion and infants and animals in her essay 'The Riddle of Music', *Quarterly Review*, 204 (January 1906), 207-27 (p. 213). This dramatically contrasts with Wagner's theory, for the result of this intercourse for the composer is the ever-fertile artwork of the future (or what he calls the *Gesamtkunstwerk*). See also note 23.
[35] Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', pp. 875, 877.
[36] One of the most famous examples of Wagner's music inspiring narcissistic ownership is contained in a fan letter sent by the French poet Charles Baudelaire to the composer in 1860. 'At first it seemed to me that I knew your music already', he says. 'It seemed to me that the music was *my own*, and I recognized it, as any man recognizes those things he is destined to love'. See *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude*, trans. by Rosemary Lloyd (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p. 145.
[37] Lee, *Music*, p. 300.
[38] Lee notes at the front in pencil 'finished reading [this] July 16 1901'. See Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 9th edn (Leipzig: Johann Ambrodius Barth, 1896), the British

Institute of Florence, the Vernon Lee Library, 787.17, CID 98542. My great thanks to Lucia Cappelli at the British Institute for giving me long-distance access to this book by scanning its pages.
[39] Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, p. 73.
[40] Eduard Hanslick, *'On the Musically Beautiful'*, pp. 40-41, 82, 83. In Lee's German edition, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, pp. 72-74, 153-54.
[41] Lee, 'The Riddle of Music', p. 209.
[42] Lee, *Music*, pp. 101, 103, 31.
[43] Lee, *Music*, pp. 46, 242, 46, 144. Franz states, flaccidly, that he '*can't stand up against Wagner. It is perhaps a kind of intoxication*', p. 242. Italics in original.
[44] If it is another form of sex, it is alien sex, 'not of this world', to quote Hanslick (see note 16) or one shorn of bodily realities. Lee quotes her correspondent 'Barbara', who talks about '*pure joy*' having nothing to do with human emotion, for music '*has no human emotional existence. It takes me out of myself*'. Lee, *Music,* p. 64. Italics in original.
[45] Lee, *Music*, p. 72.
[46] Lee, *Music*, pp. 71, 75. The italicized sentences in quotation marks are Thomson's words.
[47] Lee, *Music*, p. 71.
[48] Lene Østermark-Johansen, '"Life is movement": Vernon Lee and sculpture', *Word & Image*, 34.1 (2018), 64-72 (p. 71).
[49] I reference and quote here Carolyn Burdett's work on Lee and empathy. See Carolyn Burdett, '"The subjective inside us can turn into the objective outside": Vernon Lee's Psychological Aesthetics', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 12 (2011), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.610 [accessed 13 September 2022].
[50] From *An die Musik, D. 547* (1817) by Franz Schubert, lyrics by Franz von Schober. Translation from *The Book of Lieder*, chosen, translated and introduced by Richard Stokes (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), p. 406.
[51] Lee, *Music*, p. 105.
[52] Bonds, *Absolute Music*, p. 297.
[53] Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body,* pp. 39, 44.
[54] Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', p. 877.
[55] Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body,* p. 44.
[56] Lee, *Music*, pp. 519-20.
[57] Note the preface's opening paragraph, which is a disingenuous disclaimer as to what the book is about: 'It can teach no one whether any particular music happens to be good or bad'. Lee, *Music*, p. 13.

Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady

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Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady (Leipzig: Institut für Buchkunst, 2022) is a 72-page hard-cover graphic novel, and is an adaptation of Vernon Lee's short story 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', first published in volume 10 of *The Yellow Book* (July 1896).[1] This short story was Lee's only contribution to the magazine and utilizes gothic and decadent themes, such as possession, mythology, and the femme fatale in order to explore societal pressures, marginalization, and gender politics.

I first encountered Vernon Lee's work while researching ghost stories in my fifth semester at art school. What makes 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' especially suitable for a graphic novel is the centrality of the tapestry to the plot – the pictorial world of the tapestry is introduced in the first part of the fairy-tale and then fully explored as the tragic story unfolds. 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' tells the story of an isolated prince who grows up in his grandfather's castle. He falls in love with a medieval tapestry, and through studying the detailed wall hanging, he learns about plants and animals – it is his window onto the world. One day, when some furniture is shifted, he discovers a captivating image of a snake-woman on it. The fairy-tale takes a strange turn when the prince is sent into exile and he recognizes his new surroundings from the tapestry.

When I was reading the fairy-tale, I was moved by its sensitivity and rich descriptive language. This inspired my full-page acrylic paintings which depict both the fantastical world of the story and the emotional intensity of Lee's narrative. My graphic novel is best understood as a free adaptation of the original short story. Since the fairy-tale is quite long, I gave myself the freedom to focus on aspects that would work well in a visual medium, shortening the story and cutting some of the characters. To me the central element of Lee's narrative is the tapestry and during my design process I looked at many tapestries from the nineteenth century and earlier. In

particular, the colour palette and floral imagery are inspired by the mille-fleur style of the late Middle Ages. Many of my paintings have a characteristic dark blue background. My use of hierarchical proportion is also based on medieval art. The scale of the figures often reflects their relative importance in the pictures, and the statues in the background mirror the main characters' emotions and sometimes even their actions.

I have kept the written text short in order to retain focus on the images, and the sentences are a part of my composition – they follow the movement in the paintings and sometimes disappear into them. To contrast with the experimental placement of the typography, I choose the traditional book font, Garamond.

The graphic novel is available via Institut für Buchkunst Leipzig, which is part of the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. Contact oestringer@hgb-leipzig.de or the artist on Instagram @onlymay.

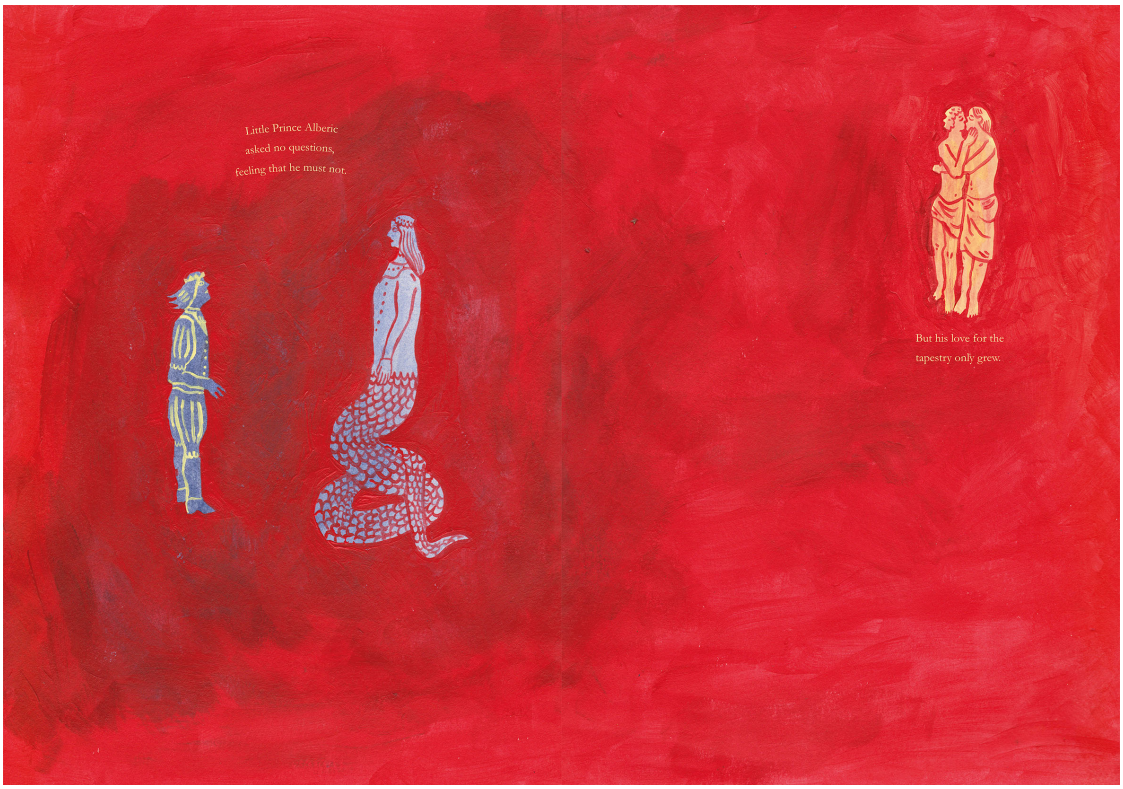
[1] Vernon Lee's short story can be read at https://1890s.ca/wp-content/uploads/YBV10_lee_prince.pdf [accessed 22 November 2022].

Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady

Selected Images by the Artist

The tapestry is explored in detail.

Prince Alberic discovers the people on the tapestry.



Prince Alberic falls in love.

The Duke disapproves of the tapestry.

The Snake Lady transforms for the first time.

Prince Alberic meets his suitors.

Hamlet and Decadent Reimagination

Conner Moore

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The decadents and Aesthetes of the *fin de siècle* exhibit a distinct penchant for incorporating diverse artistic works into their idiosyncratic aesthetic universe, including those which may appear alien to the decadent ethos. This process facilitates transformative and provocative new understandings of the original texts. Two exemplary cases of this practice can be observed in the treatment of the classical poet Sappho and of the biblical princess Salomé as they are rendered in decadent literary works. Nicole Albert credits Charles Baudelaire with sparking the nineteenth century rediscovery of Sappho with his references to the poet in *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), further popularized in English thereafter by his disciple, Algernon Charles Swinburne.[1] The decadent caricature of Sappho reduces her to a vessel of transgressive sexuality, effectively disregarding any notion of biographical fidelity to the poet or her extant literary legacy. Petra Dierkes-Thrun tracks the evolution of Salomé's representation in the same period, and a pattern becomes discernible in the decadent treatment of canonical figures. The early works of decadents and Symbolists transform the New Testament narrative 'into a lurid tale of dangerous female sexuality and cunning, physical passion, and pathological perversity',[2] setting the stage for the character's metamorphosis in Oscar Wilde's 1891 play. The obedient daughter of the biblical story becomes the apotheosis of the decadent *femme fatale.*

Enter William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1599-1601)*,* a play famously wrought with ambiguity and contested meanings, ripe for decadent reimagination. *Hamlet,* for its part, provides little resistance to the process of its assimilation into the realm of decadent aesthetics. No more so than the transformative recreations of Sappho or Salomé, for that matter, does *Hamlet* refute or preclude its decadent appropriation. This is because the practice I deem 'decadent reimagination' does not invent or misidentify elements of decadence in the texts it is enacted upon, but rather

identifies and amplifies the presence of decadent aesthetics and motifs as they already exist in variously latent states within the original texts themselves. *Hamlet* features several sites at which decadents can justifiably identify aesthetic and philosophical affinities between the play and their own literary tradition. As in decadent literature, prolific references to decay and disease in the play are aestheticized in highly poetic and morbid language. Hamlet's own fixations on death and perverse sexuality are also characteristic of decadence, as is the pervasive presence of philosophical pessimism, the perception of the world as decaying and ruined and of life itself as an unpleasant realm of meaningless suffering – by Hamlet's measure, both Denmark and the world are prisons.[3] The representation of misogyny provides another link between Shakespeare and the decadents, as Hamlet expresses in his disgust for women a rejection of (a feminized) nature. This same conflation underlies decadent expressions of misogyny in accordance with their self-decreed position of being 'against nature', expressed concisely in Baudelaire's claim that '[w]oman is *natural*, that is to say abominable', that she 'should inspire horror'.[4] These transhistorical commonalities fuel the practice of decadent reimagination, allowing for new ways of reading a text against the grain, of detecting generative ruptures in the prevailing critical discourses surrounding a work, and for positing both new interpretive potentialities and spaces for provocative adaptations.

This essay utilizes *Hamlet* as a model for the practice of decadent reimagination by demonstrating how a text from as far outside the bounds of the recognized nineteenth-century decadent canon as Shakespeare's early modern revenge tragedy could be productively reconceptualized within the imaginative framework of decadence. Understanding the ways in which decadent authors conceived of Shakespeare himself offers a useful context for examining how decadent reimagination has been exercised upon *Hamlet*. Shakespeare functions for the decadents as a model for the romanticized ideal of the artist, while they recognize and intensify what they perceive as transgressive and perverse qualities of Shakespeare's life and writings.[5] Their construction of Shakespeare as a forbear of their contemporary Aesthete serves both to legitimize their own controversial artistic practices and to *épater le bourgeois* by situating within their own

maligned literary tradition the esteemed playwright who has arguably become synonymous with artistry itself. The first section of this essay identifies the decadent elements in the text of *Hamlet* which facilitate decadent reimagination, expanding upon the characteristics identified above and demonstrating their latent decadent potential by reading *Hamlet* through the prism of decadence, drawing comparisons between the play and key works of decadent literature. G. Wilson Knight's provocative essay 'The Embassy of Death' (1930) is foregrounded in this section, not only for its amplification of what I argue are decadent tropes and motifs in *Hamlet*, but to further illustrate the ways in which the practice of decadent reimagination might be implemented not only in artistic creation but in literary criticism. The second section examines the decadent illustrator John Austen's visual reinterpretations in *Hamlet* (1922) as a case study for the artistic practice of decadent reimagination. Austen exploits the latent decadent aesthetics and motifs in Shakespeare's play to produce a reconceptualization of *Hamlet* located firmly in the realm of the decadent artistic and literary tradition. The analysis of Austen's work is intended as an especially cogent demonstration of how decadent reimagination might be applied in artistic creation because Austen is working both outside the traditionally recognized temporal bounds of the decadent tradition and with a text that has not already been extensively reimagined by the canonical decadent authors, as would be the case were he deploying figures such as Sappho or Salomé. The selection of Knight's essay and Austen's illustrations as the core examples of decadent reimaginations speaks to the generic diversity and creative potential of the practice, while suggesting that it remains undertheorized as a staple of both decadent literature and critical studies of decadence.

Decadent Aesthetics and Motifs in *Hamlet*

In his insightful and generative reading of *Hamlet* in 'The Embassy of Death', Knight exhibits the critical practice of decadent reimagination by reading the character Hamlet against the grain of the established critical consensus and emphasizing the very same tropes, motifs, and philosophical underpinnings which, I will demonstrate, are shared with decadent literature. Knight

counterintuitively characterizes the eponymous prince not as the familiar noble and respectable Hamlet of the Victorians or the sensitive and conflicted but ultimately sympathetic figure popularized by the Romantics, but as a dark character so enmeshed in death, suffering, and pessimism that these things radiate from him and corrupt the world around him. From our first encounter with Hamlet, Knight writes, he is grimly contrasted with the rest of humanity: 'alone in the gay glitter of the court, silhouetted against brilliance, robustness, health, and happiness, is the pale, black-robed Hamlet, mourning'.[6] There is something alien about Hamlet throughout the play, and it is from him that the various conflicts and the spectre of death emerge: 'Hamlet has set in contrast to him all the other persons: they are massed against him. […] he is the only discordant element, the only hindrance to happiness, health, and prosperity: a living death in the midst of life'.[7] Knight's Hamlet is thus an implicitly decadent figure, one that contributes to the decay of all that surrounds him, one whose 'mind is drawn to images in themselves repellent',[8] something emphasized by Max Nordau in his moralistic diagnosis of Baudelaire in *Entartung* [*Degeneration*] (1892; translated as *Degeneration*, 1895):

> [Baudelaire] abhors nature, movement, and life […] he loves disease, ugliness and crime; all his inclinations, in profound aberration, are opposed to those of sane beings […] his mind is filled with somber ideas, the association of his ideas works exclusively with sad or loathsome images; the only thing which can distract or interest him is badness – murder, blood, lewdness and falsehood.[9]

The clear parallels between Nordau's description of Baudelaire and Knight's of Hamlet are indicative of more than the specific affinity between the poet and the prince as described above, for Nordau did not treat Baudelaire as a figure in isolation but as the forefather of the entire decadent literary tradition. The characteristics he ascribes to Baudelaire, which Knight also finds in Hamlet, can simultaneously be seen as connective tissue between *Hamlet* and the broader world of decadence beyond Baudelaire. The sense of political and social decadence in the play; the prominence of disease, decay, and other morbid imagery in Hamlet's mind; the specifically antinature mode of misogyny articulated by Hamlet; the prominence of pessimistic philosophy in Hamlet's thinking: each element is characteristic of decadent literature, demonstrating the ease

with which the decadent imaginary, whether critical or creative, can assimilate a text such as *Hamlet* into its aesthetic universe.

Hearkening back to the 'decadence' of the Roman Empire, one of the most common and intuitive understandings of the term 'decadence', as noted by David Weir, is its political and social sense, used to refer to a political body which is in a state of 'historical decline', or the pervasive sense within a culture that it is experiencing 'social decay'.[10] In *Hamlet*, a political assassination has successfully supplanted the heir apparent, and the figure who now sits upon the throne is cast in Hamlet's mind as a false monarch, grotesque and undeserving, an illegitimate usurper who has compromised the proper functioning of the Danish state. Claudius rules over a kingdom which is under threat from a vengeful adversary; his court is filled with death, secrecy, and madness; the very boundaries between the living and the dead have been destabilized with the appearance of the Ghost, all indicating a clear sense of political and social decline evident in Marcellus' assessment that '[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark'.[11] Knight troubles the tendency to lay the blame for Denmark's decline at Claudius' feet, insisting that Hamlet himself is the source of Denmark's decay: 'the sickness of his soul […] infects the state – his disintegration spreads out, disintegrating'.[12] His pursuit of revenge causes the instability and upheaval characterizing Claudius' reign, making the prince yet again the single discordant element in an otherwise vibrant court. Hamlet corrupts Denmark, Knight argues, because he awakens to the reality of death and adopts philosophical pessimism.[13] The decadents similarly expressed a pessimistic worldview and were also characterized by their detractors as the source of corruption in the late nineteenth-century literary world; they were primarily labelled as 'decadent' in the other sense described by Weir, of 'aesthetic inferiority',[14] but they are further credited by figures such as Nordau with embodying a negative influence outside of literature which contributes to the decay of society itself.

Replete with references to death, disease, and decay, *Hamlet* could be labelled as decadent not simply because these motifs are present and prominent but due to the ways in which they seem to infect the text, and especially because they are presented in a distinctly aestheticizing fashion.

This finds its apex in Hamlet's exchange with Polonius in Act 2, Scene 2. Performing his 'antic disposition',[15] Hamlet abruptly broaches the subject of a decaying animal's carcass with Polonius and proceeds to align the grotesque imagery with female sexuality, and Ophelia specifically, using vivid and poetic language: 'For if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion – Have you a daughter?', '[l]et her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing. But not as your daughter may conceive'.[16] A similar merging of morbid imagery and sexuality in Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' ['A Carcass'] exemplifies the decadent tendency to aestheticize taboo and grotesque subjects as a method of critiquing social mores surrounding art and beauty.

Baudelaire's poem features a pair of lovers who go for a stroll and encounter 'a disgusting corpse on a bed of shingle, with its legs in the air like a lewd woman's, inflamed and oozing poisons and nonchalantly and cynically laying open its stinking belly'; emphasizing the supposed beauty of the grotesque scene, the speaker describes how the 'magnificent carcass […] unfolded its petals like a flower'.[17] The speaker proceeds to compare his lover to the decaying carrion, as smoothly as Hamlet connects the image of the maggots on the dog's carcass with the beautiful and vibrant Ophelia, connecting *Hamlet* and decadence in their respective tendencies toward transforming the morbid into the artistic and exhibiting an underlying disgust toward female sexuality. Janet Adelman, contributing to the ubiquitous psychoanalytic interpretations of *Hamlet,* describes female sexuality as a force that 'invades *Hamlet*' via Hamlet's mingled disgust and desire for his mother, invoking a sense of contamination which undermines his relationship with Ophelia.[18] But as Knight observes, Hamlet's disgust towards life and the morbid obsession with death and decay emanate from himself rather than the invasive force of female sexuality, just as Elaine Showalter builds upon David Leverenz claim that 'Hamlet's disgust at the feminine passivity within himself is translated into violent revulsion against women'.[19] The aesthetics of death and decay in *Hamlet* are not distinct from the antinature misogyny that the play shares with decadent literature, as the two elements are mutually constitutive.

Quite unlike the view of the Romantics, who perceived a kindred spirit in Hamlet and constructed perhaps the most durable conception of the character, Hamlet does not necessarily love or admire nature, and his sentiments could be interpreted to express an inverse perspective toward life and nature. This may be clearest in his Act 1, Scene 2 soliloquy, in which he ruminates on the union of his mother and Claudius and expresses his ennui, pessimism, sexual disgust, and misogyny in a poignant metaphor:

> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> […] 'Tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely.[20]

The natural workings of the nonhuman world are not romanticized in Hamlet's mind; they tend toward monstrosity and invoke disgust. The garden/world is not as ordered and beautiful as it ought to be, and it threatens social stability as it becomes more 'natural' and unkempt. The 'unweeded garden' metaphor indicates that to Hamlet, life, nature, and sexuality are all meaningless and distasteful, just as the decadents positioned themselves firmly 'against nature', a phrase frequently translated as the title of Joris-Karl Huysmans's seminal novel *À rebours* (1884) [*Against Nature*]. Huysmans's protagonist similarly articulates an antinature misogyny and a preference for the artificial over the natural: 'artifice was considered by Des Esseintes to be the distinctive mark of human genius. Nature, he used to say, has had her day'.[21] Adelman examines Hamlet's figure of the 'unweeded garden' as an evocation of the Garden of Eden and the fall of man, an allusion that reinforces Hamlet's misogyny by casting woman as responsible for man's fall from grace.[22] Furthermore, this rhetorical move attempts to justify the Aesthete's disgust with woman and nature alike, which become indistinguishable from one another in the antinature misogynistic imaginary.

Huysmans cogently illustrates this notion in a memorable episode of *À rebours* in which Des Esseintes dreams that he and a woman are fleeing from the anthropomorphized embodiment of Syphilis. Characterized as stupid and inept, the woman slows him down and makes noise while

they are trying to hide, suggesting that women are ineffective allies in man's battle with the natural world and its various maladies. As the figure of Syphilis approaches the trapped and helpless man, it transforms into the semblance of an eroticized woman. Her sexuality and her destructive capacity become indistinguishable from Des Esseintes' disgust for nature – the supposed naturalness of woman, centred around her body, her sexuality, and particularly her reproductivity, become a threat that finds its most obvious symbolization in this description of her genitals as floral weapons.[23] Jane Desmarais considers the prominent role of flowers and gardens in decadent literature, positing that the decadents 'created instead an image of the garden as a corrupt and corrupting space, a toxic landscape that reminds us of our frailty and inevitable degeneration. This garden is an inversion of the garden paradise'.[24] Similarly in Hamlet's 'unweeded garden' nature is both corrupted and corrupting, the space in which his father died, Eden fell, and his mother's incestuous and thus disgusting sexuality flourishes uncontained. For Baudelaire and Swinburne, Desmarais notes, 'the fertile garden is transformed into a space revealing natural beauty and nature's evil',[25] much like the imaginative garden space for Hamlet exposes nature, and his mother's sexuality – misogynistically conflated with nature – as repulsive and destructive.

Hamlet's antinature misogyny leads him to the same place as it does the later nineteenth-century writers, to a rejection of female sexuality and to an embrace of antinatalism, the pessimistic rejection of procreation on the grounds that it is immoral to reproduce human life which will only suffer if brought into existence. This is the logical conclusion to which Hamlet's misogyny, detestation of nature, and consistent scepticism toward the value of existence lead, and he expresses the idea most cogently in his infamous and ambiguous imperative toward Ophelia. 'Get thee to a nunnery!', he counsels her, and proceeds to question the value of reproducing human life when all beings will inevitably sin, suffer, and die:

> Why, wouldst thou be a
> breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet
> I could accuse myself of such things that it were better my
> mother had not borne me.[26]

While we can find the antinatalist notion of preferring nonexistence to existence in the biblical books of Job and Ecclesiastes, it was the pessimist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who transferred this idea to the nineteenth-century decadents, arguing in 'Nachträge zur Lehre vom Leiden der Welt' ['On the Suffering of the World'] (1851) for his 'conception of the world as the product of our own sins and therefore as something that had better not have been'.[27] Such invocations of antinatalism appear within a wide array of decadent literature, as when Des Esseintes observes the suffering of children in the world and concludes: 'What madness it was to beget children'.[28] He calls for the widespread embrace of antinatalist beliefs and practices: 'If in the name of pity the futile business of procreation was ever to be abolished, the time had surely come to do it'.[29] In Baudelaire's novella *Fanfarlo* (1847), the protagonist 'considered reproduction as a vice of love, pregnancy a spider's disease'.[30] Antinatalism is further discernible throughout the works of the French decadent novelist Rachilde, as in *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), where an omniscient narrator expresses the desire for mankind to '[f]orget natural law, tear up the procreative pact'.[31] Hamlet does not make these arguments explicitly, yet the end of procreation is the logical conclusion of his questioning of the value of reproducing human beings who will be sinners (as all beings are according to Christian ideology), and his declaration, 'I say we will have no more marriages'.[32] Marriage is understood in his cultural context as a prerequisite for procreation, hence his appeal to end the one includes the other.

John Austen's Illustrated *Hamlet* as Decadent Reimagination

Having considered the features of *Hamlet* which could be interpreted as decadent, we turn toward a creative instance of just such a reimagination in the work of John Austen.[33] Published in 1922, John Austen's illustrations of *Hamlet* have garnered extremely sparse critical attention despite their nuance and ingenuity.[34] While Austen's work emerges decades after the peak of the British decadent tradition in the 1890s, he clearly exhibits decadent aesthetics and his work is replete with motifs found in the works of the nineteenth-century writers. Luisa Moore notes the particular

influence of Aubrey Beardsley upon Austen and the stylistic similarity between the two, referring to him as Austen's favourite artist at the time he was working on the *Hamlet* illustrations.[35] Austen's decadent reimagination of *Hamlet* simultaneously manages to reimagine decadence itself, as he employs Beardsley's style in a distinctive fashion. Moore argues that while Beardsley provides illustrations of a text, 'Austen "steals" and repurposes (or perhaps adapts) Beardsley's style',[36] a practice evocative of decadent reimagination.

Austen sees in the world of *Hamlet* a mystical realm of death and decay, a hidden domain of decadence which has been obscured in prevailing conceptions and understandings of the text. Austen's key interventions all acknowledge, contribute to, or otherwise complicate many of the contested discourses surrounding the play: for example, he invents the presence of an entity Moore identifies as the Greek goddess Nemesis, a puppet-master unrecognized in the shadows who is behind both the presence of the Ghost and Hamlet's subsequent pursuit of revenge. A major site of identifiably decadent aesthetics in Austen's depictions is the prominence of decadent *femmes fatales* in the play, including not only the female characters but, through a transgressive display of reimagination, dangerous and feminized depictions of Hamlet himself, the Ghost, and Claudius (see fig. 1). Austen unambiguously depicts the Ghost as evil and possessing Hamlet, whose madness is genuine, and posits that he not only was once earnestly in love with Ophelia, but also had a sexual relationship with her, illustrated through interlude images depicting the two nude figures in idyllic scenes set before the play opens.

Fig. 1: John Austen, illustration for *Hamlet*.
Source: The Folger Shakespeare Library, Creative Commons.

Indeed, the most compelling site of Austen's reimagination is the representation of Ophelia and his subtle invention of a narrative arc through his illustrations, which suggests that Ophelia attains revenge against Hamlet for his mistreatment and neglect of her. This provocative intervention disrupts established understandings of the play, making it a prime example of the creative practice of decadent reimagination. Ophelia embodies many of the qualities which the decadents could admire in a female character: sexually dissident, eccentric, and eventually insane, enveloped in tragedy; her beauty is even emphasized in death as any male Aesthete would be sure to appreciate.[37] A passing glance at Austen's depictions of Ophelia might suggest that they are little more than imitations of Beardsley, saturated with misogyny and objectification, bordering on the pornographic with their unnecessarily exposed nipples (see fig. 2). These representations of Ophelia, however, crucially reveal the workings of Austen's reimagination of *Hamlet* in its entirety,

as they make it most obvious that they are all being filtered through Hamlet's own decadent and misogynistic mind. John Austen's decadent *Hamlet* is rather the decadent Hamlet's *Hamlet*, as conveyed by John Austen. As Moore emphasizes,

> Ophelia's highly sexualised, objectified appearance derives from nothing in the text except Hamlet's accusations, and so reflects his misogynistic perception of women, although it is intensified by Austen's chosen aesthetic (a decadent and sometimes tawdry style in the manner of Beardsley).

The tantalizing images of Ophelia are thus nothing more than 'a grotesque projection of Hamlet's diseased imagination'.[38]

Fig. 2**:** John Austen, illustration for *Hamlet*.
Source: The Folger Shakespeare Library, Creative Commons.

This tactic reveals the ways in which Austen's decadent illustrations of *Hamlet* may also be interpreted as a critique of the decadence existing both within the text of *Hamlet* as espoused by

the eponymous character and within the literary and artistic world of decadence itself. Moore convincingly argues that Austen provides Ophelia with a unique and virtually unprecedented form of autonomy in his reimagined narrative, one which actually reshapes the contours of the recognizable *Hamlet* into a new story about a mistreated young woman's revenge against her neglectful and traitorous lover. While there are traces of this hidden narrative scattered throughout Austen's illustrated edition of *Hamlet,* the key image revealing this subtle revenge arc is the 'Dramatis Personae' (see fig. 3). Here, the giant looming figure of the goddess Nemesis looks down over the cast of *Hamlet* while a contemplative and scheming Hamlet ignores the desperate and pleading Ophelia kneeling beside him. As Moore contends, the 'Dramatis Personae' illustration 'implies that Ophelia desires vengeance for Hamlet's mistreating her. Although she might not explicitly vocalise this in the play, her problem is precisely that she is unable to'. Her position is evocative of prayer, as 'Ophelia's body creates a diagonal meeting Nemesis' face. While she tilts her head sideways, as if gazing at Hamlet, she also appears to look up at Nemesis. Kneeling with arms upraised, Ophelia seems to implore the deity for vengeance'.[39] The goddess of revenge would presumably be present at Elsinore if summoned by Hamlet's revenge against his murderous uncle, but the alternative interpretation of Austen's narrative indicated by Moore would suggest instead that it is Ophelia's need for revenge which Nemesis is meeting in Denmark.

Creating a sense of continuity between Austen's and Knight's respective works of decadent reimagination is the presentation of Hamlet as the discordant element in an otherwise stable environment. Austen's illustrations include several scenes of Nemesis appearing to judge Hamlet's actions rather than those of Claudius whom she is ostensibly present to cast judgment on, as evinced when she looks aghast at Hamlet dragging away the corpse of Claudius or concerned by Hamlet's invasion of Ophelia's private space in the 'closet scene' and the manipulation of her emotions which takes place therein (see fig. 4). But most poignantly, Nemesis looks down forlornly at the drowned body of Ophelia while Hamlet kneels in grief before them both, a scene pre-

empting the concluding massacre and perhaps Hamlet's final straw, leading Nemesis to pull some cosmic strings ensuring his death as deserved recompense for his abuse of Ophelia.

Fig. 3: John Austen, 'Dramatis Personae'.
Source: The Folger Shakespeare Library, Creative Commons.

Fig. 4: John Austen, illustration for *Hamlet*.
Source: The Folger Shakespeare Library, Creative Commons.

Within this reimagined narrative stemming from Ophelia's prayer to Nemesis for revenge, her death is also interpretable not only as a suicide but a sort of sacrifice to the goddess, offering her own life in exchange for Nemesis enacting divine judgment upon Hamlet. This reimagination bestows upon Ophelia a degree of agency and narrative importance which one hardly expects to find in a work related to a literary and artistic tradition as thoroughly infected with misogyny as decadence. Ophelia is transformed into something like another Salomé, a *femme fatale* in her own right who may be destroyed but is victorious in destroying the man by whom she is desired and scorned. In other words, Austen could be said to recognize and critique decadent misogyny through his reimagination of an autonomous and vengeful Ophelia: she might represent the kinds of objectified and resentful decadent women we find in Vernon Lee's works, who combat the misogynistic discourses of the dandy-Aesthete.[40]

Decadent reimagination as enacted in Austen's *Hamlet* illustrations does not merely depict traditional decadent aesthetics as they variously exist or are imposed upon the world of *Hamlet* (for instance transforming characters into *femmes fatales*, or adopting a Beardsleyesque style). Rather, Austen's acts of creation and intervention most cogently demonstrate the promise of decadent reimagination in rendering his illustrated world through the prism of Hamlet's misogyny as a method of cunning critique, and in the wholesale invention of Ophelia's revenge arc delivered through the introduction of Nemesis to the narrative and the new meaning ascribed to Ophelia's demise. Austen's *Hamlet* mirrors Knight's essay not only in the similarity of their interpretations of the decadence in the same text, but in the very practice of decadent reimagination, be it enacted in art or criticism. Just as the decadents' interventions in the literary legacy of Sappho or their transgressive depictions of Salomé successfully identified and exploited latent traces of decadence in unexpected sources, Austen's decadent reimagination of *Hamlet* demonstrates the capacities for the practice to develop new ways of understanding or engaging with literary works, expanding the possibilities for decadent artistic practices of adaptation, while Knight's essay exhibits the same potential for a decadent literary criticism.

[1] Nicole G. Albert, *Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of Fin-de-Siècle France,* trans. by Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016), p. 22.
[2] Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 15.
[3] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II. 2. 242-44.
[4] Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. by Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983), p. 65.
[5] Illustrative examples might be found in Oscar Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' (1889) and Rosette Lamont's essay 'The Hamlet Myth'. In Wilde's short story, the characters project upon Shakespeare the qualities of the nineteenth-century queer aesthete and the distinction between Wilde's characters, Wilde himself, and Shakespeare effectively collapse over the course of the narrative. Lamont examines Hamlet as an unacknowledged archetypal figure in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and suggests that parallels between the lives of Baudelaire and Shakespeare's account of the Danish prince fostered for Baudelaire a profound affinity with the character and explains Hamlet's subtle but pervasive presence in his works. See Oscar Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde,* ed. by J. B. Foreman (London: HarperPerennial, 1989), pp. 1150-1201; Rosette Lamont, 'The Hamlet Myth', *Yale French Studies*, 33 (1964), 80-91.
[6] G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 17.
[7] Ibid., p. 43.
[8] Ibid., p. 24.
[9] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. by George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 294.
[10] David Weir, *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 1.
[11] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I. 4. 65.
[12] Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 21.
[13] Ibid., p. 42. 'He is a [Nietzschean] superman among men. And he is a superman because he has walked and held converse with death, and his consciousness works in terms of death and the negation of cynicism. He has seen the truth, not alone of Denmark, but of humanity, of the universe: and the truth is evil. Thus Hamlet is an element of evil in the state of Denmark.'
[14] Weir, *Decadence*, p. 1.
[15] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* I. 5. 179.
[16] Ibid., II. 2. 181-85.
[17] Charles Baudelaire, *The Complete Verse,* trans. by Francis Scarfe (London: Anvil Press, 2012), p. 102. Scarfe elects to translate Baudelaire's verse into prose poems in order to retain as much of the character of the writing as possible, rather than the form of the original work.
[18] Janet Adelman, '"The Man and Wife is One Flesh": *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body', in *Hamlet: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Susanne L. Wofford (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 256-79 (p. 257).
[19] Elaine Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare,* ed. by Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 79.
[20] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* I. 2. 133-37.
[21] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 22.
[22] Adelman, 'Man and Wife', p. 260.
[23] Huysmans, *Against Nature,* p. 92. Huysmans describes 'the savage Nidularium blossoming between her uplifted thighs, with its swordblades gaping open to expose the bloody depths. His body almost touching the hideous flesh-wound of this plant, he felt life ebbing away from him'.
[24] Jane Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers from 1850 to the Present* (London: Reaktion, 2018), p. 133.
[25] Ibid., p. 146.
[26] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* III. 1. 122-25.
[27] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 49.
[28] Huysmans, *Against Nature,* p. 155.
[29] Ibid., p. 156.
[30] Charles Baudelaire, *Fanfarlo*, trans. by Edward K. Kaplan (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2012), p. 53.
[31] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus: A Materialist Novel*, trans. by Melanie Hawthorne, ed. by Liz Constable (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004), p. 91.
[32] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* III. 1. 148.
[33] John Austen and William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (New York: Calla Editions, 2010).

[34] The lone oasis in this scholarly desert would be Luisa Moore's 2021 dissertation focused on Austen's *Hamlet*, to which much of my analysis of the text is indebted.
[35] Luisa Moore, *Textual Critique Through the Artist's Eye: John Austen's Illustrated Hamlet*, PhD thesis, Australia National University, 2021, p. vii.
[36] Ibid., p. xxxv.
[37] See Martha C. Ronk, 'Representations of Ophelia', *Criticism*, 36.1 (1994), 21-43. Ronk describes Gertrude's aestheticization of Ophelia's death, a decidedly decadent practice fitting the tendency of nineteenth-century Aestheticism to value beauty in even the most unlikely, morbid, or transgressive sites at which it might appear, including the tragic death of a young woman.
[38] Moore, *Textual Critique,* pp. 135-36.
[39] Ibid., p. 88.
[40] See Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 43.

Screwball

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'Did you expect a happy ending?'
– Bugs Bunny

The Bugs Bunny epigraph gives away the fact that this essay strays from late nineteenth-century accounts of decadence. As an artist and curator whose practice mines film culture and genre – Hollywood, pornography, amateur videos – I promote screwball logics but also draw a line back to the work of Charles Baudelaire, that connoisseur, to which Aaron Poochigan refers as the 'tender freak of freaks',[1] whose unabashed intimate style always generates a strange ambiguity, not least because of the way Romanticism and realism cross paths in his work. It is in the decadent tradition of Baudelaire that I re-enact scenes, appropriate scripts and mess with genres in my own creative practice. This essay articulates the decadent methodology of the screwball via reference to the video and installation works I curated in the show of the same name at Verge Gallery in Sydney, Australia, June-July 2022. A mix of commissioned and existing pieces, *Screwball* featured work by California-based artists Harry Dodge, Stanya Kahn, P. Staff, and Aimee Goguen, alongside work by Australia-based artists Sione Monū, Nat Randall and Anna Breckon, Jimmy Nuttall, Brian Fuata, Frances Barrett, Archie Barry, Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran, and Garden Reflexxx.

Screwball was a love-letter to cinema and video art, featuring mostly video works alongside two works on paper. The gallery's glass façade was plastered in what looked like old 1970s/80s porn magazine covers that both concealed and protected the exhibition within. Designed by artist Ella Sutherland, these graphic citations also featured as the cover to the exhibition catalogue. Inside the gallery, two timber benches with overhanging towel racks – the kind you'd see in a horny locker room scene – were positioned in the gallery to entice visitors to sit down and settle in (see figs 2 & 3).

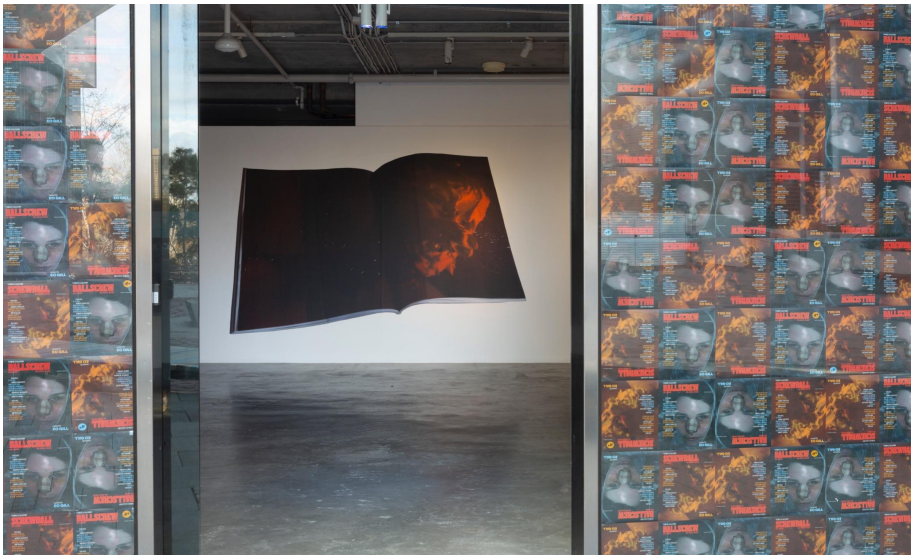

Fig. 1: *Screwball* (2022), exhibition documentation by Jek Maurer.

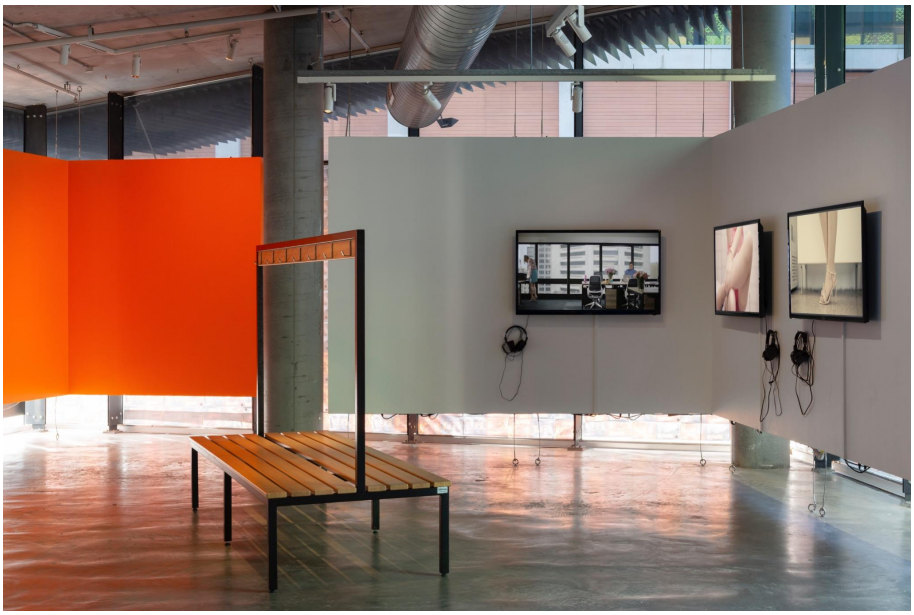

Fig. 2: *Screwball* (2022), exhibition documentation by Jek Maurer.

Fig. 3: *Screwball* (2022), exhibition documentation by Jek Maurer.

In a review of *Screwball,* Veronica Tello notes that the show strategically and powerfully responded to the current hyper-visibility of gender and sexuality discourse in art institutions, both in Australia and around the world.[2] Tello remarks that this drive to hyper-visibility emerges as art institutions scramble to ensure their relevance and futurity by 'diversifying, decolonising, and queering' their collections and initiatives.[3] At its worst, this impulse to 'heed the demands of contemporaneity'[4] favours images of positivity and progress, catering to the 'dark side' of modern queer representation and disavowing the link between queerness and loss.[5] Where some might perceive the unabashed celebration of queer identity and image as being in line with the decadent tradition, my view is that decadence is as much about evasion, disappearing and trickery as it is about excess, pleasure and indulgence.

As well as engaging the symbolic pleasure of identity, the Screwball is made up of multiple referents always pointing elsewhere, elusive and perverse. It swivels and side-steps. It is related to screwy and cartoonish personae like the clown, the jester, and the fool, but it is also intended as a verb, as in 'screwballing'. As a figure, the Screwball is like a clown insofar as its humour is very physical but also imbued with sadness; there is a melancholy buried away in their serious

commitment to the task at hand. The Screwball is also like a court jester in its ability to bend perspective and speak back to those in power. But the Screwball differs from these archetypal figures in taking gender and sexual tension as its primary area of play. The Screwball figure always engages the body in debauched pursuit of the imagination. Like everyone else who finds their metier on film, the Screwball desires to be looked at but deflects the gaze if and when it does not suit it.

As a namesake method, Screwball points to the classical Hollywood genre of screwball comedy that engages gender and sexual tensions, often across class lines, satirizing traditional relational dynamics and often bubbling with queer subtext. But, bar the exhibition title, screwball comedy as a genre is not explicitly apparent in Screwball. Instead, Tello notes, 'it acts as a vital historical framework. It is a citation and precedent of how film can screw.'[6]

Screwball's implicit citation of Hollywood genre sits in campy juxtaposition with its more explicit citation of gay 'realcore' porn videos from California in the 1970s and 1980s as a historically rich blend of classical and amateur forms of pornography and eroticism that preference the symbolic over the genital. Such films beckon contemporary communities to linger on the representational past, an experience I liken to edging, or the practice of stopping short of satisfaction in order to prolong pleasure. In the case of *Screwball*, the hyper-visual sexual play operates within 'real' or 'everyday' environments, including sites of suburbia and domesticity, in order to challenge what is considered intact and valuable.

So why Bugs Bunny? The first cartoon featuring Bugs Bunny and Elmer J. Fudd was called *A Wild Hare* (1940). The episode has a strong gloryhole motif. It commences with a soon-to-be-familiar white-gloved hand emerging from a rabbit hole to grasp the carrot left as bait by Elmer. When the gloved hand retracts into the hole, Elmer inserts the barrel of his gun after it. As Elmer thrusts the gun deeper into the hole, Bugs takes hold of it and pulls it even deeper, yanking it in and out repeatedly. Bugs finally pulls Elmer's head into the hole and plants a kiss on Elmer's lips.

The episode ends with Elmer crying which prompts Bugs to turn to the camera and say, 'You know, I think the poor guy is screwy.' It is Bugs and Elmer's shared shrewdness that allows the cartoon to codedly speak to issues of gender ambiguity, homoeroticism, trans-eroticism, and an undoing of the heteronormative frameworks on which the Looney Tunes comedy also relies.

Fig. 4: Video still from Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, *Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out* (2006).

A key node in the genealogy of the screwball method is the video work *Can't Swallow it, Can't Spit it Out* (2006) by Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, in which the pair cite Elmer J. Fudd's costume in the classic Warner Bros' cartoon *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957) (see fig. 4). In the work, which is a cornerstone of the Verge exhibition, Khan is wearing a green dress with white polka dots, cut off above the knee. Over this she has on a brown suede vest, laced up at the front. On her head she wears a Viking helmet with two sewn-in fake blonde braids. She is holding a large piece of Swiss cheese made from rubber. Kahn has a nosebleed. Hard to say why. Has she been punched? The blood trails down her cheek, over her mouth, to her jawline. She is standing in the California desert. To her right side is a highway, to her left, a cliff over a gushing dam. An

ambulance goes by, its sirens trilling. She stares into the camera, a perplexed expression anchored in her brow. She talks, almost compulsively, to the camera operator (Dodge), scrambling to hold their attention. The camera operator is both curious and apprehensive in their style and approach, following Kahn as a kind of implicated voyeur.

For Dodge and Kahn, re-embodying the originally animated figure of Elmer J. Fudd allows them to approach the alienation and violent trauma of contemporary queer life through crude humour and the notion of the absurd. Dodge and Kahn's use of Looney Tunes characterization recalls Patrick Nation's experimental documentary *Give Up On Hopes and Dreams* (2021), in which artist Terre Thaemlitz proposes a trans-analysis of *What's Opera, Doc?* Thaemlitz reads Bugs Bunny as a transfeminine figure who utilizes drag and passability as a means to escape the cisgender-male hunter's wrath. Bugs Bunny might also be read as phallo-obsessed or, perhaps more accurately, castration-obsessed, chomping through carrot after carrot with the kind of cool disregard that Freud might diagnose as over-compensation. Although Thaemlitz takes Elmer J. Fudd as representative of the cis-male, I also understand him to be an important transmasculine icon. Classic pointers would be his small stature, the phallocentricity of his costuming, specifically his gun, his failed machismo, and his service-bottom tendencies which blossom forth in the face of attraction, a sexual tendency that surfaces at the very beginning of Elmer's Looney Tunes career.

This trans and trans-historical rubric, though not explicit, is integral to Dodge and Khan's practice. Their shared interest in mobilizing gendered performance within video art contexts could be attributed to many things: the camp performative culture paved by the 1970s gay liberation movement, the 1980s AIDS epidemic and the consolidation of performance as an activist mode via ACT UP, or the resurgence of queer and trans activism in the late 80s and early 90s. Dodge has reflected that their practice emerged at the same time 'as Macy's was trying to use ACT UP's SILENCE = DEATH slogan as a way to sell motorcycle jackets'.[7] Kahn adds 'There was an elaborate network of communities in San Francisco who were pointedly interested in developing

a language to talk about being outside systems of legitimisation.[8] The timing and location of their practice also coincides with the emergence of third-wave feminism in the West, in particular intersectional feminisms where certain practices, among them video art and performance for the camera, were especially conducive to an autotheoretical turn for Indigenous, POC, queer, poor and working-class artists as a way to process and transform the discourses and frameworks of theory through their own embodied practices and relational lives.

Dodge, who also makes drawings and sculptures, played a supporting role in John Waters's *Cecil B. Demented* (2000) before codirecting his own award-winning feature with Silas Howard in 2001, the New Queer Cinema cult classic *By Hook or by Crook*. In the early 90s, Dodge and Howard co-founded Red Dora's Bearded Lady Cafe in San Francisco, a closet-sized lesbian cafe, gallery, and performance space near the Valencia Gardens housing projects in the pre-gentrified Mission District. The Bearded Lady served as an important cultural hub for a an emerging queerarts scene.

Dodge and Kahn's collaborative practice is often humorous, depicting tragic characters whose eccentricities work to resist coherent signification. In an interview, Dodge explains why they prefer consumer-level camcorders over film. Apart from it being a cheaper option, 'We're specifically interested in making a character out of the camera eye. We announce the current of the camera. It's presence in the present.'[9] The camera in Dodge and Kahn's practice becomes an explicit element of the plot. By enfolding the video apparatus into the narrative framework of each piece, Dodge and Kahn use 'the motivated camera' to draw attention to the means while paradoxically immersing the viewer in the 'authenticity' of each scene.[10]

The Screwball figure is also prevalent in the multidisciplinary practice of collaborators Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran. For *Screwball*, Thebus and Corkran made a large-scale wallpaper paste-up titled *In Dramatic Roles Such As These* (2022) (see fig. 5). The piece centralized cartoonish versions of themselves with Thebus as 'Comedy', her face covered in cream pie slop, and Corkran as 'Tragedy', her face battered and bruised following plastic surgery. The work

playfully hints at broader questions around transgender desire and becoming and mocks tired transgender narratives of failure and lack.

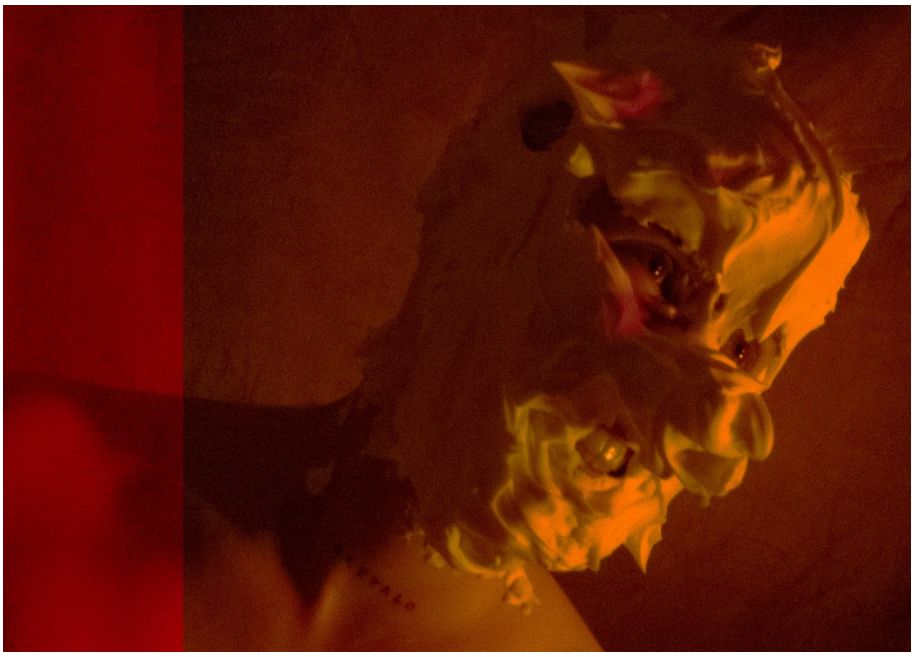

Fig. 5: Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran, *In Dramatic Roles Such As These* (2022).

In an earlier work, Thebus and Corkran engage the bunny motif in a large-scale, hand-studded, leather-hide installation titled *Bunny* (2021), which recalls Bugs Bunny as a 'horny innocent' whose fluffy cuteness slyly diverts the 'wrath of her enemies with the bat of an impossibly long eyelash while animatedly fucking the world' (see fig. 6). For Thebus and Corkran, the cartoon bunny taps into the symbolism of abundance and new life, though their 'Bunny' (like Bugs) is also devilish.[11]

Fig. 6: Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran, *Bunny* (2021).

Not all the artists in *Screwball* draw on Looney Tunes characterization. While the Screwball can attach to a character or behaviour that is odd or 'off', and so something to be laughed at, as with Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd, it is also registered as a navigational tool or methodology, a screwballing of convention that engages the obscene. Taken as a verb, screwballing is a way of toying with the filmic conventions that guide us in how and where we look. Screwballing means to make the camera an explicit element of the plot. It draws our attention to visual mechanics while paradoxically immersing the viewer in the 'authenticity' of the depicted action, as with Dodge and Kahn's 'motivated camera'. This screwy way of making work isn't about planning illusionary worlds: it is about the *action* of living. A way of passing time, the screwball engages relational, non-normative forms of sensuality, pleasure, and connection. Unlike narrative-driven forms, the

Screwball understands duration in relation to a kind of fetish-time, an experience of time as seen rather than measured.

The low-fi *Screwball* video work *Blue Car* (2022) by Garden Reflexxx (Jen Atherton and André Shannon) is one such piece. The 10-minute piece documents two friends, Gloria (Gloria Bose) and Bart (Shannon), on a road trip engaging in banal conversation as Atherton captures the interaction from the back seat with their phone camera. Annoyingly, the car's faulty interior light will not turn off and so Gloria addresses the issue by producing a small bottle of Prussian Blue nail polish from their bag and gradually paints over the light. The stark lighting in the beginning of the film gradually shifts into a saturated blue hue (see fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Video still from Garden Reflexxx, *Blue Car* (2022).

Another example is Jimmy Nuttall's video work *Fabulina* (2019), a single channel semi-narrative film, which loosely follows the journey of a group of slacker friends who drink a hallucinogenic ale called fabulina. Beginning in a mumblecore documentary style, the film ultimately descends into strangeness as the fabulina drug takes hold (see fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Video still from Jimmy Nuttall, *Fabulina* (2019).

Both Garden Reflexxx's and Nuttall's works recall early performance video art by John Waters, Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, and Kenneth Anger, where campy pleasure and decadent homoerotics meet with a realist aesthetic. Similar qualities can be seen in the work of Japanese director Toshio Matsumoto who coined the term 'neo-documentary' in relation to his 1969 feature film *Funeral Parade of Roses,* a loose adaptation of Oedipus Rex set in the queer underground scene of 1960s Tokyo. Matsumoto explains that 'neo-documentary' brings together 'Surrealist-inspired avant-garde filmmaking and documentary film style'.[12] *Funeral Parade of Roses* is formed from a collage of fragmented parts – TV commercials, interviews with the actors, popular culture references, political happenings, drag performance, Greek tragedy, and Kabuki Theatre. Matsumoto states:

> my creative intent was to disturb the perceptual schema of a dualistic world dividing fact from fiction, men from women, objective from subjective, mental from physical, candidness from masquerade, and tragedy from comedy. [...] I dismantled the sequential, chronological narrative structure and arranged past and present, reality and fantasy on temporal axes.[13]

Stephen Barber notes the Shinjuku district in which *Funeral Parade of Roses* was principally shot was intimately associated with experimental arts and gay culture in the 1960s. It also had a heavy police presence that meant Matsumoto was unable to obtain official permission to film there. 'As a result',

Barber writes, 'the exterior sequences of the film were done covertly, usually in one take, before the police arrived to break up the filmmaking process'.[14] The urgency and spontaneity produced in this environment in part determines the stylistic form of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, infusing the work with a sense of immediacy and intimacy. Much of the film was shot on handheld cameras in single takes and focuses primarily on the faces and bodies of the characters, which contributes to an overall effect of proximity and sensuality. The film's interior scenes are shot in small rooms, which Barber notes are 'often crowded with figures dancing or engaging in sexual acts, so that the camera has to manoeuvre and negotiate its way through space, with a perpetual sense of mobility'.[15] Mika Ko describes 'neo-documentary' as devised

> not only to achieve the 'new realism' created by dialectic confrontation between documentary and avant-garde conventions but also to explore its methodological potential for interrogating the political tensions of the period in a way that does justice to both visible and invisible social realities and avoids subordinating film's own independent reality to political imperatives.[16]

The advantage of working with a neo-documentary mode for artists like Garden Reflexxx and Nuttall is that it allows them to operate from a position of infiltration – they are working within the quotidian in order to expose reality as a performative fiction. The genre reimagines cinematic codes and conventions in order to shift the medium's relationship with the realities it depicts. Matsumoto stated that his focus as a creative practitioner was on 'experiments in context, experiments in deconstructing contextual systems through which people give meaning to the world'.[17] Similarly, the screwballing method explores contextual systems of suburbia and institutional environments, and their relation to formations of gender, desire, intimacy, and other bodily things.

The screwballing method privileges assemblages and process over polished or unified formations. All of the methods adopted by the artists represented in *Screwball* support a sensual and intimate mode of image-making in which the viewer experiences uncertainty and interminability with varying degrees of pleasure or irritation. It is intended that these methods keep

us in a promiscuous state of movement, collapsing the distinctions between truth and fiction, character and persona, scripted action and improvisation. This methodology opens us toward an erotic, ethical and political mode of filmmaking, where subjectivities, bodies and gazes are mutable, textured and charged.

Fig. 9: Video still from Nat Randall and Anna Breckon, *Piece of Work* (2022).

A screwballing methodology is also utilized in the structure and edit of Anna Breckon and Nat Randall's three-channel video *Piece of Work* (2022), which looks at the erotics of control as they manifest in the workplace in forms of officiousness, micromanaging, fallacious arguments and gaslighting (see fig. 9). *Piece of Work* explores the perversity of familiar techniques that workers use to get time-out, to catch a break or prevent others from doing so. Presenting three different narrative scenarios, the work explores the way in which sexual sadism is channelled through ordinary and repetitive interpersonal dynamics. Aesthetically, however, the film engages a screwball erotics grounded in being slightly off, in just missing the mark. It does this by taking the loop structure of the video work to explore live performance. While the film's structure remains the same for each loop, the takes of the performance included in each loop are distinct. The use of various performance takes combines live and mechanical repetition. By including what is

conventionally left unseen or discarded in the editing process of selection, *Piece of Work* emphasizes the impact of the affective nuances of performance on storytelling, rhythm and form. The loop structure is a familiar device for Breckon and Randall, who also employ the technique in their live mediated theatre works *The Second Woman* (2016) and *Set Piece* (2021). Breckon has described the looping iterations as a kind of 'edging', by resisting a climactic narrative structure. Instead, the repetition of the piece moves the viewer through a series of anti-climaxes.[18]

Fig. 10: *Screwball* catalogue cover, design by Ella Sutherland (2022).

Fig. 11: *Screwball* catalogue cover, design by Ella Sutherland (2022).

The ways in which the screwball method enacts a politics of edging is also evident in the *Screwball* catalogue, designed by Ella Sutherland and featuring artwork by Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran (see figs 10 & 11). The catalogue (along with the exhibition itself) is perversely organized in two orientations, 'Screwball' and 'Ballscrew'. The flip-cover references the 1980s aesthetics of Palm Drive Video and *Drummer Magazine*, California-based gay porn producers who promoted non-penetrative sex, leather, S&M, and kink as forms of erotic activism in the context of the AIDS crisis. The catalogue design builds on Sutherland's previous ink-on-paper body of work *Glyph, a body* (2020), which examines the early typeface production history of 1980s/1990s Australian lesbian erotica magazine *Wicked Women*. Both U.S. and Australian visual-erotic traditions feed into my own film methodology and interest in edging as a practice that simultaneously engages

and defers representational certainties, something I also find at work in the 'realcore' porn now available on the internet. I slavishly cite realcore porn in my own video work, which does not feature in *Screwball* but which I invoke here as evidence of the continuing pull of decadence as an aesthetic and intellectual framework.

Here, on a green medical bench in a sterile room, sits a young man, naked, his legs swinging over the edge. He sits like this for a long time. We watch as his mind wanders. This permitted act of voyeurism feels exclusive, thrillingly intimate. The door swings open, a creak cutting through the dull hum of the air conditioning unit. A doctor enters.

This is how the video starts. A banal enough scene but I note certain interferences. Those interferences prick me. Roland Barthes might call this moment a *punctum*, a kind of photographic accident that punctures and bruises the viewer. With its connotations of medical incisions and other bodily penetrations, the word *punctum* suits me. The *punctum* disrupts the tyranny of the visual, it interjects the body in the act of looking. It moves me to question how and where I look. The doctor proceeds with a number of tactile examinations including listening to the patient's heartbeat through a stethoscope, pressing on his abdomen to test for 'any pain or discomfort' and tweaking his nipples to test sensitivity.

Patient cums during Physical Exam is the title of a short video available for free viewing on pornhub.com. While the title promises orgasm, the video is more about *not* coming. What draws me to this video, and others like it, is the way it defers pleasure. In the porn world this is called edging. This deferral generates the sense of being held in time and allows the viewer to take pleasure in gestures that are isolated from normative notions of sexual pleasure and fulfilment. Unfolding in a single mid-shot, encapsulating the full procedure in real-time, the Pornhub video takes perverse pleasure in duration, resisting the usual temporality of mainstream pornography, and indeed, mainstream cinema. We might call this the erotics of regimented duration, something to which Chantal Ackerman has also alerted us.

Patient cums during Physical Exam is bad video. It is made up of shitty camera angles, pixelated image quality, and poor performance style. It is marked by a quality of improvisation or amateurism integral to the screwball method. As with documentary, the 'ugliness' of the image is precisely what injects it with urgency, volatility, potential. What pricks me here is the video's tendency towards two different kinds of concreteness: the scene itself and the glitchy materiality of the image.

The Physical Exam genre sits within a broader pornographic genre that Sergio Messina has termed 'realcore'.[19] Realcore includes a number of identifiable traits: wide-angle shots that preference the full scene over the detail of things; long, fluid, unedited segments; a non-fictional quality to the narrative; seemingly hurried or ill-considered framing and mise-en-scène; domestic settings; and non-actors as performers. Messina also identifies within realcore the sub-genre of fetish realcore, in which the people portrayed are often fully dressed or sometimes not visible at all. Covering the flesh of the body, disappearing the body altogether, fetish realcore thus challenges what it is we take pornography to be.

Other challenges to or extensions of the pornographic emerge in other ways from the inside of the genre. In his discussion of barebacking porn, Tim Dean claims porn as a form of documentary or a visual ethnography of a subculture and its ritualized scenarios that emerges alongside that culture, rather than retrospectively capturing it.[20] When the AIDS epidemic swept through San Francisco, for instance, the production house Palm Drive Video began offering viewers ways of conceiving of pleasure and desire beyond penetrative sex. Precursors of what is now called 'gonzo' style, Palm Drive Videos generally feature a single performer in front of a hand-held camera, which acts like another body in the scene. In one video a performer fucks a mud-puddle, in another a lumberjack-type guzzles semen from an old boot. The videos are like art works, a product of their time but also a commentary on the culture and environment they emerge from. Depictions of reality and attachment to fantasies of authenticity are highly mediated within pornographic production and reception. These staged depictions of bodily authenticity open us to

broader slippages in reality. This lingering on the real disrupts conventional acts of looking and forces us to ask where our pleasure begins.

My own video work *Cleave* (2021), a practice-based precursor to *Screwball*, is in part inspired by realcore and amateur pornography (see fig. 12). Meaning both to sever and to stick, *Cleave* has a non-linear narrative structure and features two performers (*Screwball* artists Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran). *Cleave* was shot during the COVID-19 pandemic largely in situ in the couple's home with a very small crew. The video runs for approximately 25 minutes and I loosely drafted the screenplay ahead of time, looting bits of text from old Hollywood films, classical Greek tragedy, realcore and net-porn, and conversations with my mother.

Fig. 12: Video still from EO Gill, *Cleave* (2021). Image by Katie Winten, featuring Athena Thebus and Chloe Corkran.

The video works to build a sense of edging through durational shots, reference, and innuendo before plateauing – holding the viewer in a state of agitation and unease. The two protagonists, Doctor-Mother and Patient-Son, flex pure interiority with the video seemingly structured around their individual wills and desires. With Cassavetean persistence, the camera lingers over the silences between them and their drifts of anxiety. Doctor-Mother vacuums her car, then sits, staring blankly

as Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman's *Time to Say Goodbye* plays through the car stereo. Other times she is more knowing – seizing opportunities for an observed existence, a reprieve from obscurity and loneliness like a modern-day Little Edie.

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[16] Mika Ko '"Neo-documentarism" in *Funeral Parade of Roses*: The New Realism of Matsumoto Toshio', *Screen*, 52.3 (2011), 376-90.
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Leopold Andrian, *The Garden of Knowledge* (1895)
A New Translation

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Ego Narcissus

καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δρᾷ ἵνα πάθῃ,
ὃ πάσχει ὅτι ἔδρασε.
–
Ein Orphiker

Piu ch'un anima e alta e perfetta
Piu sente in ogni cosa il buono ed il malo
–
Dante[1]

There was once a prince of some lands bordering on Germany who, when he was twenty years old or so, married a beautiful woman. He was very different from her, but she loved this difference in him, alluring mystery full of promise that it was, one that she believed sooner or later would wonderfully reveal itself. In the second year of their marriage, she bore him a son who resembled her more with every day that went by. Time passed, and, remaining as they did very different from each other, the hope which had nourished her love began to wane. Ten years later the prince fell ill, and as his end drew nigh, when his bracelet became too large for his wrist and his rings too large for his fingers, his face changing with each passing week, she felt again that uneasy love that she had once had for him, without, however, the hope that had formerly accompanied it, knowing as she did that he would shortly die. When the prince did then die, she thought that it was his death alone that had prevented the mystery from being revealed to her. And she mourned for him. Her son, Erwin, though, had her hands and voice, and the very sound of his voice both disturbed and assuaged the fulsomeness of her pain. And so it was that she sent him to boarding school.

At the time – he was almost twelve – Erwin tended, more than he would ever do again, to keep to himself, and happily so. His body and soul lived almost two separate lives, one mysteriously in the other. The things of the world outside had for him no more importance than things in a dream. They were words of a language that happened by accident to be his and only his will gave them meaning, context and colour. In college he would pass the day in the company of thirty classmates, each of whom would catch his attention and intrude on his life. Yet these companions were destined to remain foreign to his soul and therefore he saw their intrusions as an unbearable imposition, indeed he feared them as malicious foes. Realizing, though, that they impinged too much on his life, he began to reflect on the one thing that he believed he could understand of them, namely, their words. But those words, to which he attached great importance, utterly confused him since, spoken superficially, they changed meaning and, likewise, his new companions seemed at some moments articulate and, at others, unintelligible. He could not even understand his own life, dependent as it was on them. Even moments of joy came to him unannounced, unfathomable, as when his mother came to visit him or sent him letters and sacred images still redolent of her lace. In an existence over which he no longer had any control, even what his soul

could experience became unfathomable, be it the thrill as he went down the slopes on a toboggan between the infinite white snow and the infinite blue sky, or his melancholy on summer evenings.

Life was like an occupation for which he was not suited but was compelled to see through. It made him tired and all day long he looked forward to going to sleep. And when, later, in the dormitory upstairs the lights went out and his cheek rested on a cold pillow, he felt that shiver of contentment that only those who are unhappy experience when all around is at peace.

Sometime later Erwin was overcome by a longing for things that exuded a sense of peace: for the gentle Congregationists whom he befriended, for the fathers whom he met as they meditated in the park, for the celebrations in Church and above all for those secluded parts of the college in which chapels dedicated to unknown saints, together with a holy baptismal font, were tucked away.

The evening before his first communion he realized that this peace came from God, that this peace was truly to be found in God alone, and so he vowed to become a priest.

From that moment his present life became less burdensome to him because he regarded it as untrue, and with that he realized that only by participating in the life of the Church could he gain an intimation of the true life. He often thought of his future life in God. It would assuredly be most beautiful. In these intimations he began to find beauty of many varieties, ones that differed from each other in the same way as the murmurings of the glorious litanies in honour of the mother of God on warm evenings in May differed from the commemoration of the dead on All Souls Day or from the prayers that, on Good Friday in early spring, priest and congregation raised before bare altars to the cruel wood on which hung the Saviour of the world. But he also recognized other kinds of beauty. The castles in the autumnal countryside were beautiful, as were the rooms of palaces in the city when filled with fragrance and scent. Beautiful too were the carriages and the harnesses of their horses with silver embossed on their coats of arms. And the horses themselves! How beautiful they were: the white horses belonging to his mother, golden chestnut sorrels, the black horses of the coach and fours! And many other things existed, things that were not in God, things that as a priest he would never have and yet were beautiful … all the beautiful things of this world.

Life would be a struggle between the Church and the World. But he imagined this duel to be full of so many courtesies, such lofty ceremonies, such refined gestures, that, for those two great, equally brave, champions, the struggle was, as it were, transformed into a tournament. The two adversaries would indulge in this tournament as a pretext for standing off and facing each other, for admiring each other's splendour and for appreciating their own glory through that of their opponent. It was like two heroes coming to challenge each other from the ends of the world, the most intrepid hero of the east and the most intrepid hero of the west. After saluting each other, with their lances lowered but their visors still raised, they almost forget to fight as they gaze upon each other. In anticipation of this singular duel, Erwin savoured the easy-going pleasures of Vienna on his days out. He savoured them even more inasmuch as he felt like an envoy despatched from a distant realm to a foreign country to which he was to deliver a declaration of war on the following day. But for the time being, this envoy would remain content to admire the festive parades, games and performances organized in his honour.

During that period Erwin spent most of his time in the company of a Polish boy, who, like him, did not appreciate the food at school and constantly spoke of home. Erwin was, however, fonder of another boy called Lato, Lato with his fair, fair hair and bright eyes. But Lato mixed with his foes. And the latter, realizing that Erwin was scared of them, one day roughed him up on the toboggan slope. They threw him to the ground, a lot of snow went down his neck and he fell ill with pneumonia. During his convalescence, they had after all come to see him and so Erwin came to realize that in reality they were kind lads and not his enemies.

Soon after recovering he went to Bolzano accompanied by one of the fathers. Throughout the day he enjoyed the journey. But in the evening, when they passed through villages as lamps

were being lit, he felt sad that he could not inhabit any of them or at least meet the people who lived there. Then, at Innsbruck, an officer got onto the train, a lieutenant from the Kaiserjäger who was being transferred to Riva, a transfer with which he was delighted because the cough he had had for many years was showing no sign of improvement. He was very young, not particularly refined, but polite in a shy and engaging manner. He spoke in a roundabout way and tended to slightly over-emphasize vowels that shouldn't be stressed. Erwin liked him. After they got off the train in Bolzano, Erwin talked with the father about him. He had tuberculosis, said the father, and would soon die. All night long Erwin kept thinking about the lieutenant and his impending death. It seemed awful that they would never meet again and suddenly overcome by regret and despair, he realized that he did not even know his friend's name.

Erwin spent three years studying in Bolzano. At first many memories of the college in Vienna came back to him. They were not memories of things that had been dear to him while he was there. Rather, what he remembered was that life that he had held in little regard at the time. It appeared to him, seductive, brazen, almost tangible, observing him reproachfully and longingly. He could see in his mind's eye those journeys to Vienna in noisy horse drawn omnibuses, journeys that he enjoyed even though he was numb with cold. He could see a uniform, a cap, chin strap hanging loose in the manner that officers then affected. He could see the gas lamps burning on the sky-blue whitewashed walls. He could see those large afternoon parties at which nobody ever asked to leave with him so that he was left standing there, not knowing what to do. Often, too, he saw Lato with his bright eyes and fair, fair hair, Lato whom he scarcely knew. Indeed, that life became beautiful, imbued with a beauty that, at the time, he had discovered in other aspirations. But Erwin did not realize this and he longed to return to the college.

There were, however, many things he liked in Bolzano: the green bell towers, the dull, deep sound of the bells, forever ringing, and spring, when the fruit trees bloomed.

At that time, a singer who was accustomed to perform in big cities came to the theatre at Bolzano. With the many contrivances that she deployed during her stylized, intense, performance, she made her part real and yet simultaneously revealed to the audience that her part was no more than a sham, a pretext for prostituting herself in a singularly deferential manner. These two contrasting aspects of her performance made her all the more fascinating to Erwin. The theatre, with its music and lights, transformed what was vulgar, voluptuous and performed with abandon into an imposing, procacious and bewildering display; and yet, the thrill and splendour on stage mingled with the audience's applause conjured up, curiously, a great triumph for the singer and for her sumptuous physical presence. One particular aspect of her performance struck him again and again. Towards the end of the piece, the notes of the orchestra became fainter and more melodious, the choir took their leave and she remained alone on the stage. She then presented herself in front of the stage lights, her face brilliant with makeup, her eyes alight and her lips tinged with a slightly bland smile of apotheosis. At that moment, with tremors of emotion in her voice, which, because they were so affected, never failed to fascinate Erwin, she discharged her frivolous and disingenuous interpretation of the libretto onto the audience. By chance, Erwin discovered that in real life she was an elderly woman and that she wasn't beautiful at all. From that moment on she became even more extraordinary in his eyes. Eventually, he decided to pay her a visit, though the thought made him apprehensive. The singer lived in one room, together with an actor. She was indeed not beautiful and she was elderly, but even so she gave the impression of being a young girl.

During his first year at school Erwin didn't make any friends. After his first holidays were over, Heinrich Philipp arrived in Bolzano. Heinrich Philipp was not a true Austrian, but, with the dethronement of King Robert, his father, who was related to the king, had emigrated to Austria and Heinrich Philipp had lived in Vienna until he was sixteen. He always spoke about Vienna with Erwin. Heinrich Philipp possessed three qualities. Those who made his acquaintance noticed them

immediately, like the glittering of three precious stones. They were in fact three exercises of one single virtue. He possessed the goodness of saints, namely, the ability to understand the deepest motivation in every human being. He was courteous and adopted a manner appropriate to each person he encountered. And he was likeable for the constant consideration that he showed others. When, however, Erwin came to know him better, he noticed that Philipp sometimes changed completely. It was as if he was speaking right through Erwin and back to himself. And then, in those moments, Erwin learned words he did not know and understood the meaning of other words he had not previously understood – or, more simply, he discovered that, in what had up to then not been mysterious to him, there were numerous mysteries and that things bad and forbidden were also full of charm. When in those moments Heinrich Philipp spoke of Vienna, he adopted an unusual tone and Erwin dimly understood that the forbidden words were somehow connected to life in Vienna: the Vienna Opera Ball, the Sofiensaal, the Ronacher Theatre and the Orpheum and the circus and the *fiacre*.

His memories of the college and his acquaintance with Heinrich Philipp meant that, gradually, and in consequence of his new expectations, Erwin retrimmed his hopes for the future. Vienna and the great world would make them come true. He vaguely imagined a life in which the greatest beauty that there was could be enjoyed in the most beautiful and varied ways. Yet, though at peace with himself in this respect, he sensed every now and again a strange, restless impulse, one that was partly a desire to discover new things and partly an urge to deny what he in fact desired. But this impulse was not pronounced and Erwin contented himself with the knowledge that at some point it too would be requited. It would be fulfilled in the things that Heinrich Philipp talked about in such an odd and mysterious way: the Vienna Opera Ball, the Sofiensaal, the Ronacher Theatre and the Orpheum and the circus and the *fiacre*.

Even so in his mind he often returned to college, to his friends and, above all, to Lato.

Heinrich Philipp stayed in Bolzano for just one winter. Erwin found himself alone again. He would, though, be returning to Vienna and during his third year, he waited impatiently for the moment when he would do so. He didn't enjoy Bolzano anymore, except for the long walks in the company of an elderly priest, a physicist, who told him all about his life and scientific interests. These Erwin found meaningless but all the same he listened while the priest talked about magnets, colour changes and the way in which materials attracted each other, just as when, as a child, he had listened to tales of magicians, even though he already knew there were no such things. Indeed the elderly priest seemed to have something of the magician about him, in that he had the power to condition frogspawn to produce Siamese frogs.

At that time Erwin spent his summers either in the countryside with his mother or travelling in the mountains with his tutor. Once, during one of these trips in the Tyrol, he felt nostalgic for Bukovina and remembered a friend who lived there. But at the time he could not pay a visit and this made him feel that he had lost something irretrievably. Nor did the thought that he might see Bukovina on another occasion console him. Of these summers he would later remember the drawn-out evenings, by the great lakes of Carinthia, evenings that never became cool. He thought, too, of the people who liked to spend their summers there: actresses, students of the military academy and Viennese girls with their beautiful, soft, figures in white dresses with broad coloured silk ribbons.

By the time he arrived in Vienna Erwin was seventeen. Following his arrival, he visited the college as soon as he could. Many of his friends there took the opportunity to promise that they would come and see him at Christmas. This cheered him up, especially the thought of seeing Lato again. But he was even more eager at the thought of seeing a new boy whom he had just met for the first time. He was an ugly boy with big eyes who was slow on the uptake in class. Since he did not come from a rich family, he hoped to become an officer and find a position with an archduke.

During the first few months Erwin often visited his college friends, but as time went by he thought about them less and less and came to love Vienna for its own sake. He loved the large Baroque palaces in the narrow streets and the resounding inscriptions on our monuments, the

Spanish step of the horses, the uniforms of the guards and the courtyard of the imperial palace on winter days when the music, loud and boisterous, seeping into the limbs of the crowd, warmed and soothed them. He loved the major feast days, celebrated by all, especially that of Corpus Domini, the day on which the blessed body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ reaches us with no less radiance and jubilation than on those festive days when the Emperor Charles VI, returning from his Spanish territories, entered Vienna, the ever-faithful capital of his empire and kingdom.

Erwin also liked the shop window displays of heavily woven, single colour carriage blankets and the dark batiste of the handkerchiefs among bright flowery silks. He liked the coaches drawn by four black horses among the pink flowers of the Prater. He liked that the *fiacres* were as elegant as his friends, and he liked his elegant friends for their refined and easy-going way of life. Above all, he liked that, sometimes, they could dance all night long to the sound of village music and take delight in a single word or at the thought of being Viennese and that in the streets of Vienna even barrel organs were played well. The Viennese, it seemed, were charming by nature, with an allure that became evermore entrancing, like a light that fascinates us because we cannot work out if it is made of two colours constantly blending with each other, or just one colour forever changing its hue as it shimmers.

Often he felt exhilarated by presentiments of the many, many pleasures that Vienna yet had to offer and by the thought that, concealed within them, lay the mystery of their charm. And so Erwin was able to assuage the yearning for the 'other', a yearning that now had become more intense and more insistent than in Bolzano. Everything in which the 'other' was to be found was to hand: the Opera Ball, the Sofiensaal, the Ronacher Theatre and the Orpheum and the circus and the *fiacre*. When he said the 'other', he felt that in every direction there unfolded a world in which everything was forbidden and mysterious, a world just as large as the one he knew. In particular, when observing the *fiacres*, he had a strange, disconcerting rush of excitement. Some of them seemed remarkably like young gentlemen. That this similarity implied a contrast must, he thought, have something to do with the nature of the 'other'. He especially liked one *fiacre* who used to drive through the Prater in the spring. His horses had bouquets of violets in the harnesses and the *fiacre* sat there, leaning slightly forward, holding the bridles aloft and apart, arms raised elegantly, motionless but alive, like a graceful and somewhat mannered sketch thanks to the mannered elegance of his clothing.

In June of the second year, a friend invited him to make an excursion to a Heuriger together with two *fiacres*. They stayed there all night sitting at one of the small tables among the acacias, the scent of the plants mingling with the music. But Erwin did not find in the *fiacres* what he had imagined. They resembled, in fact, young gentlemen, even if the contrasts in their souls, like those in the style of their dress, were more marked. Sometimes they were more childlike, and their manners more delicate, albeit more artificial.

During the holidays, Erwin recalled from time to time how the *fiacres* had not disclosed 'the other' to him. The world, too, began to lose its fascination because there was no other world to contrast it with. In the autumn he stayed in the mountains for some time before returning to the city. He felt, though, as if he had left something behind in the pasturelands through which he had walked and the mountain huts in which he had stayed, or rather he felt as if he had forgotten to bring something of them with him. He feared the city, where autumn is perceived as a summer laid waste.

Just before Christmas Erwin made friends with one of his school companions, someone whom he hadn't taken any notice of in previous years. Clemens was poor and unrefined. He was indiscreet and mischievous like a street urchin yet at the same time almost touchingly innocent. His face was pale, apart from the dark circles around his eyes. His fair hair, lustreless as if powdered and the many soft yet expressive lines of his features, particularly those beneath his eyes, evoked the delicate beauty of late antiquity. Clemens had the same voice as the officer with whom he, Erwin, had travelled to Bolzano but did not look like him. He loved to look at him and listen to

the sound of his voice. What he liked even more was to walk with him in springtime in the Prater or to take him to see his erstwhile friends, friends who did not understand Clemens. He also loved spraying him with the latest fragrances or giving him things which were called beautiful because they were fashionably shocking and outré: Parisian fabrics and textiles in unusual patterns and colours, golden bracelets and silver or metal cigarette holders engraved with tiny coats of arms or large monograms. Often they went to taverns outside the city to listen to the big military bands. They were both captivated by the waltzes, monotonous in their unfailingly cloying vulgarity. And among the soft and seductive songs of a civilization pleased with itself, there came upon them a faint sense of cossetted happiness, a feeling of self-love or mutual love, or love for all they had loved, or love for their Austrian fatherland that indeed bestowed whatever they wanted and could not be forsaken.

Then spring came, a time of year when Erwin always felt lethargic and had the appearance of someone who was unwell, but this year more so than usual. In late spring, when the gardens were beautiful, he went to the gardens of Schönbrunn or Laxenburg or to the public gardens, always on his own. There he recited lines of poetry: what they said meant nothing to him, even though their musicality moved him. And in Bourget's languid verses two words stood out again and again. Again and again those two words made him shiver in that they promised to reconcile all that was sublime with all that was base, two things that he had previously sought separately. The words were 'woman' and 'life'.

[Cont'd]

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[1] Andrian does not follow Dante *verbatim*; he changes one or two words keeping the same meaning. He twice fails to insert the accents on *più*. All the editions of *The Garden of Knowledge* kept the original epigraph written by Andrian.

Mathilde Blind, *Selected Fin-de-Siècle Poetry and Prose*, ed. by James Diedrick (Cambridge: MHRA, 2021), 277 pp.
ISBN 9781781889633

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Mathilde Blind's writings, lectures, and intellectual interests make her a decadent and New Woman figure of the fin de siècle. Born in Mannheim, she was exiled from Germany, France, and Belgium after her stepfather Karl Blind took part in the Baden Revolution; the family settled in London, where they received visits from Giuseppe Mazzini, Karl Marx, and others. She wrote poems that criticized both the sexism of Darwinian sexual selection and the trope of the fallen woman, published in the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Dark Blue*, and formed friendships with Amy Levy, Vernon Lee, Arthur Symons, Mona Caird, and other late nineteenth-century writers. Her corpus includes not only a wide range of poems – among them epic poems, dramatic monologues, and ballads – but also lectures, critical reviews, biographies, translations, and a novel.

While much of Blind's work is available digitally, for example, through the *Victorian Women Writers' Project*, there has not been, to my knowledge, an edited collection of Blind's work since Symons's *The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* in 1900. James Diedrick's *Mathilde Blind: Selected Fin-de-Siècle Poetry and Prose*, the sixth volume in the MHRA's Jewelled Tortoise series, collects and annotates her three major volumes of verse: *The Ascent of Man* (1889), *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), and *Birds of Paradise: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895), bookended by two standalone poems, 'Nocturne' (1872) and 'Sea-Music' (1896). The volume will be of strong interest to students of decadence, the New Woman, and fin de siècle literary culture.

The volume begins with a critical introduction that establishes Blind as a secular, cosmopolitan freethinker and committed feminist whose work challenges gender norms and reflects a pan-European sensibility (p. 6). Diedrick discusses Blind's multiple identities as 'a Jewish woman, a sexual nonconformist, a political radical, and an expatriate' (p. 5), and her

contemporaries' tendency to assign her outsider status. The introduction surveys Blind's 'intellectual apprenticeship' (p. 1) as it informed her writing of the 1870s and 1880s, including her indebtedness to Enlightenment ideas, her translations of David Strauss and Marie Bashkirtseff, and her biographies of George Eliot and Madame Roland. Diedrick also provides helpful biographical contexts, such as her grief at the suicide of her brother Ferdinand following his failed attempt to assassinate Otto von Bismarck, and her friendships with fellow nonconformists Lee and Caird, including the sensual descriptions of Caird in Blind's Commonplace Book. Subsections address relevant contexts for the subsequent volumes of Blind's poetry, including her knowledge of evolutionary science, her challenge to gender norms through the form of the dramatic monologue, and the coexistence of both anticolonial and imperial and Orientalist strains in her work.

The contextual introduction sets up the first volume of Blind's poetry, *The Ascent of Man*, an ambitious evolutionary epic that gallops across broad swathes of human and planetary history. Readers will appreciate Diedrick's annotations to this highly allusive long poem, with its shifting rhyme schemes and references ranging across Greek philosophy, Hindu mythology, the French Revolution, and nineteenth-century industrialism. Blind's feminist revision of Darwinian struggle can also be usefully paired with her 1886 lecture to the Shelley Society on 'Shelley's View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin's', which the volume reproduces in full. Here, Blind finds in post-Darwinian nature 'the power of evil from which the poet's sensitive soul shrank with such horror – lust, hunger, rapine, cruelty' (p. 241). The essay and the poem will be of interest to scholars of both evolution and ecocriticism alike, as well as those interested in the afterlives of Romanticism. Less well known in Blind's œuvre are her 'Poems of the Open Air' that follow *The Ascent*, which include her two sonnets on the 1883 Krakatoa eruption, 'Red Sunsets'. These intriguing sonnets, according to Diedrick, 'combine both the generalized end-of-the-world foreboding prevalent during the *fin de siècle* and Blind's dream of a socialist future' (p. 118, n. 104).

Many of the poems in the next volume, *Dramas in Miniature*, address late-Victorian gender relations. Both 'The Message' and 'The Battle of Flowers' are about sex workers, and feature unrepentant subjects and moments of intergenerational contact with other women. In 'The Message', for example, a young girl gives flowers to a dying prostitute, which transports her back to memories of a childhood with her beloved mother. The volume also reproduces Ford Madox Brown's frontispiece illustration of this moment, in which the sufferer receives the blossoms and falls into reverie. 'A Mother's Dream' further criticizes unequal gender dynamics with its story of a woman who has been seduced and abandoned by an English gentleman. 'The Russian Student's Tale' exposes male arrogance, and might, like the other poems in the volume, be usefully paired in the classroom with dramatic monologues by D. G. Rossetti, Robert Browning, Augusta Webster, and others.

The overarching motif of birds in flight structures the last poetry volume included here, *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident*. The first section, 'Songs of the Orient', inspired by Blind's travels to Egypt, evidences the stance of the 'belated traveler', Ali Behdad's term for someone whose perception of the Orient is already shaped by colonialism and the tourist industry (quoted on p. 38). As Diedrick observes in the introductory headnote, some poems in the volume demonstrate an anticolonial perspective, such as 'The Beautiful Beshareen Boy', which is about a sixteen-year-old boy who is taken from Egypt to The World's Columbian Exposition to be put on display. This anticolonial perspective is, however, not as strong or robust as that of *The Heather on Fire*, Blind's protest of the Highland Land Clearances (published in 1886, and not included in this volume) (p. 39). The imperial gaze of Blind's feminism, for example, is evident in 'Mourning Women', a poem that associates Muslim women with abjection (p. 210). 'Nuit' merges Egyptian mythology with decadent tropes, imagining the primaeval night of Egyptian myth as 'a kind of Decadent femme fatale on a cosmic scale' (p. 193, n. 45).

The second section, 'Songs of the Occident', contains poems on Rome, Paris, and St. Gotthard in the Alps, including meditations on a broken Cupid sculpture and on Roman fountains

that will interest scholars of late nineteenth-century visual culture. 'Shakespeare Sonnets' are poems inspired by Blind's trip to Stratford-upon-Avon, including two on Anne Hathaway that Blind sent to Richard Garnett for feedback; Diedrick's annotations quote from their correspondence and show how Garnett's edits worked to 'diminish both the status of Anne and the erotic charge of the poem itself' (p. 225, n. 113).

Diedrick's arrangement of these three volumes and two poems makes new themes and relationships evident across Blind's work. Some of these, like androgyny, polymorphous sexuality, and the femme fatale, are addressed by Diedrick in the notes. Others will arise as readers encounter the juxtaposition of poems included here. I was struck, for example, by how Blind emerges, like her friend Algernon Swinburne, as an ardent poet of the sea. In the opening 'Nocturne', which appeared in *The Dark Blue*, the speaker describes boating with a beloved over sea waves that 'Bosomlike heaving with languid sighs, | Lifted, and tumbled, and broke with desire, | Licked, and fawned on her with tongues of fire' (ll. 18-20). We might read the later discovery of the lover's death, 'Icily beautiful! terribly fair!' (l. 65), her hair twining seductively around the bereaved lover, as a decadent echo and possible queering of Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott', with its imagery of the floating, alluring dead. The sea motif continues in *The Ascent of Man*, with its invocation of rude life 'multiplying in the ocean' (I.II. l. 19), and in 'Nuit', where the primeval night unfolds, through internal rhyme that mimics the repetition of waves, 'In wild commotion, | Out of the ocean, | With moan and motion' (ll. 17-19). The poetry section of the volume closes, fittingly, with 'Sea-Music', which commemorates the 'unearthly harmony' of the water (l. 10).

In addition to these poetry volumes, Diedrick also includes selected works of Blind's reviews of poetry, as well as contemporary reviews of her own work. The selections from Blind's reviews establish her wide-ranging and critical eye, with pieces on William Morris' use of alliterative measure, Arthur O'Shaughnessy's lyric poetry, and Augusta Webster's *Yu-Pe-Ya's Lute. A Chinese Tale, in English Verse.* Selected responses to Blind's own poetry offer an instructive lesson in the gendered politics of reviewing. Blind earns high praise as a lyric poet from multiple reviewers, but

is criticized, by H. F. Wilson, for lacking a 'sense of restraint' (p. 262), while Arthur Symons calls her work 'careless and unfinished' (p. 269). Diedrick's introduction notes that Blind was likely unaware of Symons's identity in his anonymous *Athenæum* reviews, and would probably have taken offence by some of the editorial decisions he made in the editions of her work he brought out after her death in his role as Blind's literary executor (p. 45). Diedrick also includes a selection from Louise Chandler Moulton's review of *The Ascent of Man* in the Boston paper *The Sunday Herald*, which gives a sense of how Blind's work may have reached audiences in America.

The volume also includes a table of contents, chronology of Blind's life, and select bibliography. It is well organized and accessible, although the addition of line numbers, for some of the longer poems especially, might aid in ease of reading and discussion in the classroom for subsequent editions. As noted above, Diedrick provides helpful notes, quotations and insights drawn from Blind's Commonplace Book and correspondence, archival documents which, to my knowledge, are not available digitally and so will offer welcome glimpses into Blind's biography. This book will be an indispensable new resource for students and scholars of Victorian women's poetry, travel writing, decadence, Aestheticism, the New Woman, queer and feminist literature, and literature and science.

Guilherme Carréra, *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins*
(London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 352 pp.
ISBN 9781350203020

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At a time of crisis of the liberal democratic project throughout much of the Western world, the examination of 'ruins' in relation to the development/underdevelopment of nation-states emerges as a timely topic worthy of investigation through the cinematic lens of documentarists and filmmakers of both developed and developing countries alike. Notably, the examination of what constitutes a ruin – with its aesthetic of decay and marginalization – has been explored by various traditions of realism in different national cinemas, from Italian neo-realism to Iranian film, within a context where the filmmaker's camera focuses on the destruction of cities and sites in contrast to the nation's political and economic problems as well as its social inequalities.

In this sense, Guilherme Carréra's *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins* is not new within the topic that it aims to explore. Nonetheless it stands out as an original work which offers an important contribution to English and Brazilian scholarship on contemporary Brazilian cinema. Carréra's in-depth research and discussion of three groups of documentaries explores the theme of ruins through different cinematic schools and their concerns, such as their roots in in the classic Brazilian cinema movements *Cinema Novo.* A result of his PhD thesis and research at the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster, Carréra's book situates this analysis within a wider assessment of Brazilian cinematic tradition which has dealt with the notion of ruins as decay and destruction, from the *Tropicalia* movement to *Cinema Marginal.* The films that come under Carréra's object of analysis include *White Out, Black In* (2014), *ExPerimetral* (2016), *The Harbour* (2013), and *Corumbiara: they shoot Indians, don't they?* (2009). A series of Brazilian filmmakers who work on social documentaries have also been interviewed, including Ana Vaz and Daniel Santos.

Brazilian Cinema has always had a concern with using ruins as a metaphor through which broader issues of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment can be examined. As Carréra states, the aim of the work is to explore an existentialist approach to the notion of ruins which is seen in connection to a national condition and the failure of the 'modern project' to develop Brazil. The book is divided into four parts to order to investigate the cinematic aesthetics of decadence explored by a set of contemporary social documentary texts. The first of the book's four parts provides an historical and critical overview of the aesthetics of ruins, from *Cinema Novo* to contemporary Brazilian documentary. Part two moves on to look at the (re)construction of Brasilia, the current capital, through the investigation of different approaches to cinematic realism, examining, for instance, the science fiction documentary of Ana Vaz and Rogerio Sganzerla's famous film *The Red Light Bandit* (1968), one of the main films of the *Cinema Marginal* movement which also flirted with *film noir* and the *pornochanchada* aesthetic (or 'sexploitation' films). Through a focus on the *Tropicalia* counterculture movement, which had among its popular culture influences the actress Carmen Miranda, known to be an icon of aesthetic exaggeration and largely associated with American stereotypes of the Brazilian *latina*, part three explores the first capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, during the colonial period as well as the period from independence until 1960. Part four discusses representations of indigenous territories, such as Macunaima and Iracema*,* further exploring the emergence of indigenous media and film by investigating texts which include *Corumbiara* (2009) as well as *Tava, the House of Stone* (2012), *Two Villages, One Path* (2008), and *Guarani Exile* (2011).

In *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins,* Carréra investigates the positions of the filmmakers who engaged with notions of underdevelopment in their filmmaking, stating how this was explored by Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes in his 1973 seminal essay *Cinema: A trajectory within underdevelopment,* which examined underdevelopment within the history of Brazilian cinema. A key argument made here denotes a form of metalanguage for Brazilian cinema: mainly that the nation's filmmaking operates within the very reality of underdevelopment and does not encounter the

strength to break away from this pattern of decadence. Carréra, quoting Gomes, comments that: '[c]aught between the passivity of the bourgeois audience and the financial issues preventing production from rebounding, "Brazilian cinema does not have the strength to escape underdevelopment"' (p. 47). Gomes denounces the 'cultural colonialism' in which Brazilian cinema found itself inserted, due to the imposition of Hollywood and its aesthetics, which nonetheless one could argue is not particular to Brazilian film as such but to other national cinemas which operate within the orbit of North American cinema. Thus, as Carréra notes, 'both the form and the content bear the marks of underdevelopment', even with *Cinema Novo* being pointed out as a school which thematically denounced a bleak scenario of inequality whilst however being also caught up in a 'precarious mode of production' (p. 47).

Carréra thus conceptualizes 'underdevelopment' by borrowing from both Celso Furtado's (2009) definition as well as from Bresser-Perreira's understanding of Brazil as 'a national dependent society' (p. 24). He also drew from other scholarly analyses on cinema, including the work of academics such as Idelber Avelar's essay 'History, Neurosis, and Subjectivity: Gustavo Ferreyra's Rewriting of Neoliberal Ruins' in Michael E. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh's edited collection, *Telling Ruins in Latin America* (2012), which examines 'ruins' from various perspectives, from understanding it as *performance* to viewing it as a mode of destruction caused by modernity in the twentieth century.

Carréra's book asks what we aim to do with the 'ruins' and what we intend to put in its place. He also situates this within the particular context of Latin American development, making a contrast between the destruction of the 'old world' by the 'new world' as well as alluding to the old European continent and the post-war European ruin. Arguably, the use of ruins as an intellectual hypothesis to explain the social (and human) condition has been widely explored by artists, intellectuals, filmmakers, and scholars in their work across the Humanities and Social Sciences. Carréra also claims to develop the theoretical framework of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and his uneasy relationship with Brazil. Lévi-Strauss travelled to the Amazon in 1936,

taking photographs which explored indigenous themes and conducting ethnographic fieldwork with the tribes of the Mato Grosso area.

However Carréra does not only refer to ruins from a metaphorical or philosophical standpoint, but underscores the material reality of an accelerated disintegration of the country following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the rise to power of populist far-right movements epitomized by the *Bolsonarista* political movement. Carréra discusses the fire and wreckage of Brazil's oldest historic National Museum in Rio as a symbol of this decay and of the overall collapse of the country, which he notes as having started to take place between 2015 and 2019. Carréra also criticizes what he calls the 'rotten modernization process and the savage neoliberal agenda' which not only causes high unemployment but also led to the acceleration of the process of destruction that was already part of Brazil's landscape of 'underdevelopment' (p. 22).

However, as a core theme that runs throughout the book and unites the cinematic aesthetics which it investigates, the examination of ruins as part of the legacy of underdevelopment in Brazil could have been further discussed through a postcolonial lens in view of the whole (de)colonization process of Latin America and Brazil in particular. It would have been good perhaps to have further explored the notion of 'ruination' as part of the wider Latin American legacy of European colonization, coupled with the social and political problems of the contemporary period that Carréra rightly identifies as being the driving motifs for the intensification of the nation's decadence. This is pinpointed, as stated previously, as being both an existentialist and metaphorical feeling as well as a sentiment, which makes its way through cinematic schools and documentary texts, as well as being manifested more materially in the landscape of Brazil and its political shifts. Carréra situates their own work within the tradition of social documentary in Latin America, nodding to the work of authors such as Julianne Burton's *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990) and the more recent Navarro and Rodriguez's *New Documentaries in Latin America* (2014). He also references classic Brazilian literature and other texts

that attempt to explore slavery and Brazil as a colony, such as Gilberto Frerye's *Casa Grande e Senzala* [*Masters and Slaves*] (1998) and Buarque de Holanda's *Roots of Brazil* (1995).

Carréra provides a critical and nuanced look at Brazilian cinema, avoiding the romanticization of schools closely identified with this aesthetics of decay and decadence, such as *Cinema Novo*. In his attempted examination of the structural inequalities in Brazil, he also assesses its strengths by showing the gruesome realities of Rio's *favelas* as well as the shocking scenarios of desolation and despair in the north-east of the country at a time of repression and military dictatorships. *Cinema Novo* has been represented by various nationally and internationally acclaimed filmmakers, such as Glauber Rocha and his well-known and critically acclaimed film *Terra en Transe* (1967), which captures the unique period of repression, poverty, and alienation in the dictatorship years in Brazil (1964-1985).

Carréra also states how *Cinema Novo* had a leading role as a Brazilian cinematic school which questioned for the first time the country's notion of progress and its thinking around development within the political context of the João Goulart government of the 1960s and the pressures for wider social and political change, which eventually led to military dictatorship. Carréra does not shy away from denouncing the limits of *Cinema Novo*'s project of 'political emancipation' (p. 48), given its roots in the mainly white and middle-class bourgeoisie of the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro. The book nevertheless engages in the assessment of *Cinema Novo*'s revolutionary praxis, stating how it has sought to portray the country's inequalities and its links with another Brazilian filmmaking movement, *Cinema Marginal*, which also aimed to explore the vulnerable, the outsider, and the downtrodden.

Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins is useful to readers with a knowledge of World Cinema as well as to those who are less familiar with core Brazilian cinematic traditions and how they have sought to engage with problems of social inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment**.** Carréra's dense, historically situated and in-depth examination of Brazilian social documentary films thus offers a more contemporary assessment of Brazilian filmmaking and sits alongside other

English language books in the field, such as Randal Johnson and Robert Stam's *Brazilian Cinema* (1982) – which also investigates classic films such as Nelson Perreira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas* – and Lucia Nagib's *New Brazilian Cinema* (2003). The latter explores the highlights of Brazilian cinema of the 1990s, a decade known as the renaissance of Brazilian film, with many films paying lip service to the *Cinema Novo* tradition but through a more contemporary, Hollywood lens which nonetheless underlined the concern with the country's political problems and its social inequalities. This was the case for Walter Salles' *Central Station* (1998), also heavily influenced by Italian neo-realism, and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins* is a solid, well-researched, and developed book that will be very useful for students and scholars alike in disciplines from Film Studies to Brazilian and Latin American Studies, Politics, and Media and Communications.

Brad Evans, *Ephemeral Bibelots: How an International Fad Buried American Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 264 pp.
ISBN: 9781421432694

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As the subtitle of Brad Evans's *Ephemeral Bibelots* provocatively suggests, this is a book about some long-obscured origins of American Modernism, about the relationship between the American and the international, and about the faddishness of fin-de-siècle ephemeral bibelots that largely have been ignored in studies of the period. As such, this book deepens our understanding of modern periodical studies and of long Modernism as it recovers a transformative print-cultural moment.

Evans depicts the ephemeral bibelots as proto-Modernist little magazines that are part of an international movement rooted in the cabarets of Montmartre and steeped in decadence and campy queerness. These bibelots challenge our understanding of the period as one dominated by home-grown realism and Naturalism as they underscore the importance of an allusive 'relational aesthetics' and a fleeting sense of artistic community. As Evans puts it, serious attention to the ephemeral bibelots compels us to recognize that the 'notion of the late arrival of Modernist aesthetics to the United States is simply wrong as a historical fact' (p. 29) and in serious need of correction – as this book sets out to do.

Chapter one focuses on one of the central editors of the bibelot movement, Gelett Burgess, who largely has been written out of the history of the American avant-garde (in part because of his emphasis on childhood), but who can be seen to anticipate such movements as Primitivism, nonsense, and Dada. Highlighting Burgess's editorial practices calls attention to the burgeoning networks of print reception that would come to characterize later Modernist literary production and serves to remind us that the newness of artistic works emerges from their 'repetition through particularly tight-knit, highly recursive publics' (p. 58), such as those generated by the bibelots.

Chapter two most fully theorizes bibelot networks with particular attention to 'blockages' and 'gaps' in circulation that would become the means of aesthetic innovation and infrastructure of Modernism. Drawing on Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, Evans suggests that although the ephemeral bibelots themselves generally did not circulate widely, we can understand their interconnectedness through 'an expanded definition of citational practice' (p. 69) invested in shared points of reference happening in the 'linkages' or 'edges' between magazine nodes. There are a number of candidates for these network edges – including authors and artists, translations, such genres as blurbs and stories-without-words, and markers of shared style. While citational practices helped stitch together a bibelot network, Evans suggests that the bibelots existed on a parallel (rather than intersecting) plane with more mainstream magazines, frequently citing such magazines but not being cited in return. The point would seem to hold for such quality magazines as *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, but it is complicated by Evans's own attention to *Vogue* (in the prologue and in Chapter four), which more directly participated in a network of citations with the ephemeral bibelots. Future studies might also consider the extent to which these bibelots engaged in citational practices with other kinds of magazines that typified the period – such as the snippet, humour, and bibliographical magazines – to paint a more detailed picture of the bibelot's place in the turn-of-the-century periodical field.

The third chapter closely reads two canonical works from a major literary figure, focusing on the novels *What Maisie Knew* (originally published in the bibelot the *Chap-Book*) and *The Ambassadors* to argue for Henry James as a 'theorist of the artwork of networks' who can help us differently understand the aesthetics of assemblage explored in the previous chapter (p. 111). James's emphasis on narrating connections in his novel – embodied elsewhere in the period by the dancer Loïe Fuller and alluded to in swirling images by such bibelot illustrators as Will Bradley – emphasizes the importance of relation even as it offers a critique of network models that struggle to represent circulation over time.

Chapter four examines gender in the bibelots with a focus on the women writers Kate Chopin, Carolyn Wells, and Juliet Wilbor Tompkins. Meditating on the cultural image of the butterfly and highlighting a continuity between *Vogue* and *M'lle New York* through a shared focus on consumer fashions, linking of feminism and faddishness, and promotion of Chopin, Evans considers the ways in which depictions of the New Woman were themselves in danger of being reduced to a fad. Evans then turns to the fiction of the lesser-known and underrated writers Tompkins and Wells to chart a 'literature of flirtation' centred on young women and sexual desire that would eventually make its way to more mainstream magazines.

The final chapter portends the end of the ephemeral bibelots in relation to the poetry of Stephen Crane, suggesting that Crane's identity as an author of Naturalist fiction and posthumous attempts by Amy Lowell and other Modernist figures to recover him as a *sui generis* proto-Modernist have obscured his connection to the bibelots. Such connections are evident, however, in a Philistine Society banquet held in a young Crane's honour (accompanied by a *Roycroft* souvenir volume) and through poetical allusions to Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue, who were central nodes in bibelot citation networks and who later served as inspiration for high Modernists such as T. S. Eliot. Evans suggests that one way to understand how the ephemeral bibelots disappeared from accounts of Crane and from literary history more generally is to acknowledge their success in migrating authors and themes to the more mainstream presses. But their disappearance can also be understood as 'the end of the relational era' that would be overtaken by a later Modernist turn to local avant-gardes and a preference for blowing up wispy connections (p. 156). In its quest for an origin myth that demanded a clean break from the past, 'Modernism buried the bibelots, and, in so doing, cut ties to what had been modern about American art in the preceding decades' (p. 156). Of particular relevance to this journal, Evans also notes that 'there could be a temptation to make a connection between the bibelot vogue and the early twentieth century by way of reasserting the place of Decadence in the constitution of Modernism' (p. 175) but concedes that there is no evidence of the bibelots being directly cited in the decadent Greenwich Village of the 1910s.

It is worth noting as well the companion website. In addition to providing digital versions of the many images taken from ephemeral bibelots that appear throughout the book, the website makes available for the first time full runs of *The Lark* and *M'lle New York* and provides a bibelot index that traces a citation network across approximately twenty bibelots through shared titles, author and artist contributions, images, and themes. These are important resources for future scholarship and teaching (I hope to bring them into my own classes), and serve as the basis for a number of network visualizations available on the site that did not make their way into the printed book. In addition to being of some interest in themselves, they also offer a glimpse of a critical road not taken. As Evans explains on the website: 'Early on in the project, I thought that using network visualization tools would answer many of my questions about the ephemeral bibelots. As it turns out, learning more about the tools led me to think less of their potential' for explaining an archive's meaning. While I think there still might be untapped potential for more dynamic network visualizations, this decision helps us to see that Evans's ultimate theorizing of network aesthetics is an evolved one, informed by extensive work (and frustrations) with networking tools and the limits of digital scholarship.

To close at the book's introduction, Evans explains that what he aims to demonstrate in this book is that forgetting the bibelots

> was not only unjustified but also that the story of how an art movement like this one is forgotten is almost as fascinating as how it is produced. In a sense, this is a story not only about the anonymity of a proto-Modernist American art movement but about the curiously beautiful dynamic of cultural evanescence (p. 24).

Later, in a telling aside, Evans offers a powerful formulation for the Humanities as a whole, noting that 'literary relations can move beyond immediate historical contexts, be they publication histories or political ideologies, and I take it that the project of the humanities in its most ambitious formulation is that of tracing new relations to older ones' (p. 94). *Ephemeral Bibelots* is itself an ambitious tracing of relations that has importantly uncovered a key literary and cultural movement

while attending to the forces that led to its cover-up, even as it grasps at the ephemeral connections between the bibelots and our own fleeting cultural moment.

Notes on Contributors

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Michael Craske is a lecturer in English literature at Queen Mary, University of London, where he completed his PhD on the relationship between the poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne and the operas of Richard Wagner. Recent and forthcoming publications include '"Let us adore spilled blood": Swinburne and the Scandal of *Poems and Ballads*' for the *Routledge Handbook of Scandals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, and 'The Music of the Venusberg: Richard Wagner and the poetry of Arthur Symons' in a collection of essays to be published by Greenwich Exchange in 2023 as *Salome's Bookshelf: Artists and Writers of the 1890s*. Published articles include '"A Genius for Inaccuracy": Edmund Gosse and the Case of Swinburne's Missing "Ear"', for *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism*, and 'Swinburne, Wagner, Eliot, and the Musical Legacy of *Poems and Ballads*' for the *Journal of Victorian Culture*. He also has research interests in Victorian musical adaptations of poetry, on which he blogs at www.verseandmusic.com.

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Meta Witte is a 22-year-old artist and illustrator from Germany. She is currently a member of the Illustration Studio at UMPRUM Prague. At her home university in Leipzig she studies Book Art and Graphic Design with a focus on illustration. Her work is often inspired by literature and theatre and combines a wide range of analogue techniques, like acrylic painting, pencil drawings, ink and collage.

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Sally Blackburn-Daniels is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Culture and Creativity at Teesside University. Sally's research is centred upon the intersections of literature, philosophy, and science at the cusp of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They have worked closely with the Associazione Culturale il Palmerino on the first theatrical performance of Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality* (1915), and the performance laboratory *In Vernon Lee's Name* (2022). Recent publications include a special issue of *English Studies* (2022), 'Bookshelves, Social Media and Gaming', co-edited with Edmund G. C. King (The Open University).

Patricia Pulham is Professor of Victorian Literature at the University of Surrey and currently President of the British Association for Victorian Studies. She is author of *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature*: *Encrypted Sexualities* (2020; 2022) and A*rt and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (2008). With Catherine Maxwell she co-edited an edition of Vernon Lee's fiction, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* (2006), and a collection of critical essays, *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics* (2006). Her research focuses on late-Victorian literature and culture, and she has published widely on late nineteenth-century writers including Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, and Olive Custance. She is also known for her work on Neo-Victorianism which includes several articles, a co-edited collection, *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past (*2010), and more recently a special issue of *Victoriographies*, 'Tracing the Victorians: Material Uses of the Past in Neo-Victorianism' (2019).

ESSAY PRIZE

EO Gill is a video artist and curator living and working on Gadigal land (Sydney, Australia). Gill is completing a hybrid PhD in the Department of Gender & Cultural Studies and Sydney College of the Arts at Sydney University. Their creative practice research speaks to bodily sites of tension, suspension and play explored through a self-reflexive documentary style. Gill was the recipient of the Create NSW Visual Arts (Emerging) Fellowship (2018) and has exhibited at Bundoora Homestead (Vic) and Verge Gallery and Artspace (NSW) among others.

Conner Moore is a PhD student in the English literature program at Miami University, having completed his MA at Miami University in 2021. His planned dissertation explores the representation of nonhuman animals in decadent literature, questioning to what extent the 'against nature' creed of decadent writers contradicts the ostensibly sympathetic treatment of animals in many of the texts. He has recently presented papers on the ways in which the commodification of artistic labor is depicted in Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* and Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, as well as on the application of an ecocritical lens to decadent literature, and on Virginia Woolf's relationship to the decadent movement.

TRANSLATION PRIZE

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EDITORIAL

Jane Desmarais (Editor-in-Chief) is Professor of English and Director of the Decadence Research Centre in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has written numerous essays on the theme of decadence and has co-edited several works, including *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (with Chris Baldick, Manchester University Press, 2012), *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems* (with Chris Baldick, MHRA, 2017), and *Decadence and the Senses* (with Alice Condé, Legenda, 2017). She is co-editor with David Weir of *Decadence and Literature* (2019), a volume in the Cambridge Critical Concepts series, and the *Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (2021). *Decadent Plays, 1890-1930* co-edited with Adam Alston is forthcoming with Bloomsbury in 2023. Her most recent monograph, *Monsters Under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers, 1850 to the Present*, was published by Reaktion in 2018.

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Robert Pruett-Vergara (Reviews Editor) is currently preparing a monograph of his thesis, 'Remy de Gourmont and the Crisis of Erotic Idealism', and his work investigates the interplay of erotic and philosophical discourses at the transition from Symbolism to modernism. Alongside the Cercle des Amateurs de Remy de Gourmont (CARGO), he co-organized the Fin de Siècle Symposium (Balliol College, Oxford, 2016). In 2018, he co-organized Decadence, Magic(k), and the Occult conference at Goldsmiths, University of London. His chapter on 'Dowson, France, and the Catholic Image' appears in *In Cynara's Shadow: Collected Essays on Ernest Dow*son (ed. by Alice Condé and Jessica Gossling).