

**THE SOCIAL UTILITY OF ART, 1870-1925: AESTHETICISM AND  
THE READING PUBLIC IN THE WORKS OF AMY LEVY AND VERNON  
LEE**

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## Abstract

Traditionally, our idea of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century British Aestheticism has been understood as a socially-disengaged cultural movement. However, as Paul Tucker noted, Walter Pater suggests that aesthetic consumption can be ethically-engaged when informed by a 'scholarly conscience.' The following study is concerned with writers Amy Levy (1861-1889) and Vernon Lee (1856-1935), whose dissatisfaction with the social elitism of the Paterian critic and interest in the public sphere, prompted a re-theorisation of the relationship between art's aesthetic value and its social utility. Surveying the breadth of each writer's critical and fictional works, I argue that whilst Levy and Lee extend Aestheticism to a broader reading public, the term 'public' is something of a misnomer. Their oeuvres are not, in principle, open to anyone. Both well-educated writers, Lee and Levy do not forfeit their intellectual integrity and creative esteem; instead, both mediate between aesthetic perfectionism and social utility.

Recently, Nicholas Shrimpton has asserted that: 'Art for Art's Sake is not a mark of triviality,' but instead 'the guarantee of [...] professional and intellectual integrity.' As figures on the outskirts of accepted notions of readership, securing professional and intellectual integrity is an important authorial strategy for both Levy and Lee. Overall, this study sheds a fresh light on what the term 'New Aestheticism' means: whilst it extends our more traditional definition of Aestheticism—by enabling us to consider a broader range of socially-marginalised figures as actively participating within it—this revised definition still regards Aestheticism as a movement that selects and excludes.

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## Introducing the 'New Aestheticism'

Nicholas Shrimpton argues that Walter Pater did not revere the term 'beauty' blindly. The recent 'formalist fight-back,'<sup>1</sup> he feels, has not accounted for the way Pater—a central figure of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Aestheticism as a cultural movement—worked to explain 'beauty' in received terms:

Pater, in 1873, was careful to insist that beauty, 'like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness.'<sup>2</sup>

Shrimpton compares Paterian critics to barristers who seek 'to persuade an audience of the universal validity of their intuitions (intuitions of aesthetic value in the artistic case) while always remaining conscious that their view will be controverted, often successfully.'<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Shrimpton hails in what he terms the New Aestheticism, which finds a middle-way between cultural theorists of the 1990s and formalist theorists of the 2000s:

Critics can and should pay attention to the socially, morally and intellectually referential qualities of literary or painterly texts – as long as they retain their sense of priority. These are real but merely secondary characteristics of the distinctive mode of discourse which they have chosen to consider. Art for Art's Sake is not a mark of triviality. For both artists and critics it is the guarantee of their professional and intellectual integrity.<sup>4</sup>

The New Aestheticism enables us to understand late-Victorian Aesthetes as channelling socially-engaged references through the formal dimensions of high-art.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Shrimpton, 'The Old Aestheticism and the New,' *Literature Compass* 1(2005):11. (The 'formalist fight-back' challenged literary theory of the 1990s and its view of art as culturally-determined phenomena. Susan J Wolfson's *Reading for Form*, for example, retaliates against an overwhelming disregard for art's formal dimensions.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.14-15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.15.

This recent development in research into British Aestheticism provides the backdrop to my thesis, which seeks to re-examine the relationship between art's social utility and its aesthetic value between 1870 and 1925. This is a broad period but my main focus will be on how changes in literary culture between the 1880s and 1890s prompted a significant revision of the delicate link between art's formal dimensions and its relationship with everyday life. Pater declares that the reader is of 'necessity a scholar'<sup>5</sup> and 'as we must think it, under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men.'<sup>6</sup> This restricts his notion of a readership engaged in high-art to 'the' small cultural elite. In this way, Aestheticism took no notice of a growing reading public, which, particularly in the city, found those from different social classes 'outside' Aesthetic circles.

My thesis is concerned with female writers Amy Levy (1861-1889) and Vernon Lee (1856-1935), whose dissatisfaction with the social elitism of the Paterian critic and interest in the public sphere, prompted a significant re-theorisation of the relationship between art's aesthetic value and its social utility, one distinct from the socialist aesthetics of figures such as William Morris. To justify my dual author study, the complexity of Levy and Lee's relationship with literary culture—both of whom were 'outsiders'—enabled them to make a particularly compelling contribution to this debate in their critical and fictional works. For Amy Levy, the idea of what Aestheticism affords the reader fortunate enough to have access to it is invaluable. As a result, across her oeuvre, she is committed to extending Aestheticism into a broader range of public contexts. Levy is aware of the way cultural institutions—and the theories that work to

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<sup>5</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p.31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

underpin their operations—dictate the production of 'high-art.'<sup>7</sup> In this way, she exposes how the Aesthetes are dependent on institutional support and furnishes a campaign for the extension of such support in the public sphere. This, she hopes, will facilitate participation in Aestheticism for a broader range of classes: female Jews being one. In the first chapter, I consider the way Amy Levy attempts to create a public space for private textual practice in late-19<sup>th</sup>-century London. I will examine how this ambition finds Levy working within the parameters of a literary culture she wanted to extend, and also sees her reworking the aesthetic and institutional frameworks at her disposal. In terms of retrospective periodization, it is clear that we should consider Levy as a late-Victorian writer.

For the second author of this thesis, it is not quite as clear as to which period she belongs. Living a lot longer than Amy Levy, Lee's oeuvre extends into the twentieth-century and Modernism. It is partly for this reason that my study of Lee appears in the second chapter of this thesis. Lee is examined second also because I regard her re-theorisation of Aestheticism as a sort of appendage to Levy's. Whilst Levy asks the question, 'where can we read and write?' Lee asks, 'how should we read and how should we write?' Lee works on the assumption that a space to engage in Aesthetic practice is intuitively-built; we can access this space, she argues, provided we enter a co-operative, three-way relationship with the reader, writer and art object. For this reason, issues of social class do not feature as seriously as they do in Levy's work. Like Levy, Lee articulates her dissatisfaction with the insularity of Paterian Aestheticism and calls for its extension into a broader range of contexts. However, her

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Ian Small notes that 'institutional theories of art hold that it is only the operations of the institution that will in fact designate a piece of writing as a literary work.' (Ian Small, 'Annotating "Hard" Nineteenth Century Novels,' in *Essays in Criticism*, 36 ((1986)): 283).

feeling of discontent stems from a slightly different concern. For Lee, the scholar has far too much authority in the reading process to the extent that often, the formal dimensions of the work are overlooked. Yet, this does not mean that she hands the reins over to the reading public in the same way that Levy does; she bears a degree of distrust towards the common reader. Whilst Levy locates her reader in the civic institution into which all classes can physically stumble, Lee does not make it as easy. She demands that the individual starts with a sense of intellectual and moral responsibility, and it is only once this is achieved that a space for aesthetic pleasure will materialise. So, whilst Levy theorises a facilitative aesthetic, Lee theorises a moralizing one. Whereas Levy attempts to accommodate a diverse range of literary tastes, Lee seeks to prescribe the methods for acquiring certain types of aesthetic appreciation. Thus, whereas Levy addresses the reading public at large and accepts that this might decentralize her authorial aims, Lee addresses the individual reader and endeavours to construct a close-knit relationship with him or her (her ideal reader is androgynous). In the context of Lee's authorial aims, commercial success is subordinate to impressing upon the reader a sense of moral obligation and intellectual stimulation. As I will explain in the conclusion of my thesis, this is because Lee did not really 'need' an income from her writing in the way that Levy did. Lee's egotism contrasts quite significantly with Amy Levy's authorial drive towards survival as a professional writer in the late-Victorian city.

Both writers met in 1886 in Florence. As Levy's poem 'To Vernon Lee' suggests, their friendship blossomed during discussions on the relationship between art's social value and its respective aesthetic merits: 'Thereby ran on of Art and Life our speech/ And of the gifts the gods had given to each/ Hope unto



you, and unto me Despair.<sup>8</sup> This, I think, symbolizes the differences between the two writers: whilst Levy is a realist and the gravity of everyday life provides material with which to work, Lee is a self-proclaimed idealist, who rejects traditional forms in favour of those which offer transgression from the everyday. The form of Levy's fiction belongs to a realist aesthetic, whilst Lee's (when at its most effective) is 'otherworldly.' A fictional example of this is the direct contrast between their representations of Medea da Carpe. In her dramatic poem 'Medea,' Levy recovers this female figure as a vital role in the plot development and strives to humanize her. In contrast, in Lee's short story 'Amour Dure,' Medea is a supernatural, peripheral figure within the narrative, so much so, we are left to speculate, as Levy wondered in a letter to Lee: 'Did Medea da Carpe ever really exist?'<sup>9</sup> This takes us to both writers' notions of Aesthetic temporality. Levy hopes that Aestheticism can operate within the time-frame of everyday life; whilst Lee hopes that by bringing the past into the present, we will question how we know what we know. Therefore, while Levy's works are very much entrenched within late-Victorian London (particularly in *Reuben Sachs*, *The Romance of a Shop* and *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*), Lee's are set within historical Italian towns, in which figures of the past come to haunt the globe-trotting tourist (particularly in *Hauntings*).

Towards the end of both chapters, I will consider the limitations of these re-theorisations and expand more fully on this

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<sup>8</sup> Levy, 'To Vernon Lee,' in ed., Melvyn New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, c1993), p. 398.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Levy to Vernon Lee, (January 1887); quoted in Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p.258.

topic in the concluding chapter. In that final chapter, I will assess how their ideas extend across the breadth of their fictional and non-fictional works. In Levy's work there is interplay between the two forms, but not necessarily the same level of interdependency as there is in Vernon Lee's. I will evaluate what this says about the value of both writers' re-theorisations. Whether either writer deserves to be canonized, or whether their self-conscious subject positions are too palpable within their literary works, is an issue I wish to address. In thinking around this issue, I will ask the question: should we value Lee and Levy's writings as literature or as socio-historical documentation? In answering this question (a process which will involve complicating its polemical implications), I hope to depict both writers as participating within a movement as understood by the terms of New Aestheticism. For both writers, 'Art for Art's Sake is not a mark of triviality [...] it is the guarantee of their professional and intellectual integrity.' Or at least, as I will show, that is what they hoped.

Chapter One: 'We are materialists to our fingers' ends': the civic institution and the reading public in Amy Levy's Aestheticism

To write thus at six-and-twenty is given to very few; and from the few thus endowed their readers may safely hope for yet greater things later on. But 'later on' has not come for the writer of *Reuben Sachs*, and the world must forego the full fruition of her power.<sup>10</sup>

-- Oscar Wilde

To those who read Amy Levy today, it is a well-known fact that 'she died by charcoal gas inhalation in 1889, two months before her twenty-eighth birthday.'<sup>11</sup> In modern editions of her work, the paratext portrays her suicide as a significant autobiographical detail.<sup>12</sup> Reading Levy's biography alongside her bibliography, these editions suggest that whilst 'many of Levy's writings are important as literature [...] nearly all are intriguing cultural documents'<sup>13</sup> providing a first-hand explanation for why a promising literary career was cut short. From a contemporary perspective, it is a useful detail: not only does it speak of the conditions that Jewish women faced in late-Victorian London; it draws her into our imagination as a writer whose artistry would lead to the resourcing of her

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<sup>10</sup>Oscar Wilde, 'Amy Levy,' in *The Woman's World*, (1890): 52; in Susan David Bernstein, ed., *Reuben Sachs: A Sketch*, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, c2006), p.170.

<sup>11</sup> In Melvyn New's 'Introduction,' the opening paragraph reads: 'Amy Levy was born in Clapham in 1861 and died by charcoal gas inhalation in 1889, two months before her twenty-eighth birthday. In taking her own life, she raised numerous questions about the despairs of an educated Jewish woman in late Victorian England but also put an end to a promising literary career.' (Melvyn New, ed., *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*, ((Gainesville: University Press of Florida, c1993)), p. 1).

<sup>12</sup> The textual condition of Amy Levy's work is limited. Since the initial publication of her second novel, *Reuben Sachs* in the late-Victorian period, her works have seldom been re-printed. However, attempts to recover Amy Levy have appeared over the past twenty years in modern editions. It is evident that Levy's suicide is one example of how writers recover her, using it as a pretext for her fall from print: 'One could hazard several guesses as to why she has been neglected—first, her early death (suicide) at the age of twenty-seven.' (Julia Neuberger, ed. *Reuben Sachs*, ((London: Persephone Books Ltd, 2001)), p. v). The paratext plays a significant role in recovering the works of Amy Levy. Gerard Genette states: 'text is rarely presented in an unadorned state.' It is 'the paratext [that...] enables a text to become a book [...] offered as such to its readers, and more generally, to the public. Genette would argue that the paratextual elements of each edition are 'more than a boundary or sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a "threshold" [...] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.' (Citation for all quotes: Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)), p.1.)

<sup>13</sup> Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p.11.

own end. This idea is prominent in Karen Weisman's article, 'Playing with Figures: Amy Levy and the Forms of Cancellation,' which concludes: 'Amy Levy died by her own hand, and her death necessarily inscribes itself into the lens of our reading.'<sup>14</sup> Oscar Wilde initiated the idea that Levy's oeuvre is very much 'life-defined' in his obituary article, 'Amy Levy,' which appeared in his journal *The Woman's World*, in the days following her death:

The loss is the world's, but perhaps not hers. She was [...] seldom well enough to feel life a joy instead of a burden; and her work was not poured out lightly, but drawn drop by drop from the very depth of her own feeling. We may say of it that it was in truth her life's blood.<sup>15</sup>

The 'world must forgo the full fruition of her power' but, as Wilde suggests, the penetrating quality of Levy's work is rendered from the same intense awareness of life's limits that led to her death. Wilde does not explicitly make the connection between this and Levy's style but this obituary article directs us towards a crucial link between the two.

In the penultimate paragraph, Wilde celebrates Levy's second major novel, *Reuben Sachs*, for 'Its directness, its uncompromising truth, its depth of feeling, and above all, its absence of any superfluous word, [which] make it, in some sort, a classic.'<sup>16</sup> Conciseness and economy of style are characteristics that shape Levy's aesthetic and render into her writings an awareness of life's limits. As the traditional notion of 'beauty' alone—a notion that finds allegiance with the phrase 'art for art's sake'—cannot be regarded as a prime source of creative inspiration for Levy, her writings are distinguished from the compositional complexities and

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<sup>14</sup> Karen Weisman, 'Playing with Figures: Amy Levy and the Forms of Cancellation', *Criticism*, 43 (Winter 2001): 77.

<sup>15</sup> Wilde, 'Amy Levy,' p.170.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

labyrinth sentence constructions of high-art Aestheticism.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Wilde's account of her style adds testament to the fact that Levy does not bow out of Aesthetic circles. His description resembles Pater's self-qualifying aside in 'Style' in which he reminds us not to overlook the beauty of economy and verbal restraint: 'Self-restraint, a skilful economy of means [...] has a beauty of its own.'<sup>18</sup> This is, of course, an uncharacteristic moment in Pater's otherwise effusive advocacy of adornment and as such, shows how Levy works within the margins of Aesthetic culture.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, by appropriating the one-volume novel, she works within the margins of the mass-market. Unlike the penny-a-line hack or the New Woman figure, Levy does not compromise her creativity and intellectual integrity when articulating social truths. Instead, she mediates her socially-engaged authorial concerns through a compositionally elegant style. In this way, Levy resists the common binaries: she is not withdrawn into the esotericism of high-art adornment but, at the same time, she refuses to buy into art as a social utility. Crucially, this reiterates Levy's participation within a movement as understood by the terms of New Aestheticism.

In this chapter, I will examine the way Levy works to negotiate her creativity and intellectual integrity through her awareness of public modes of reception. As such, I seek to examine Levy's endeavour to re-theorise Aestheticism's fields of reception. Karen Weismann explains that in the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century, definitions of readership derived from 'totalizing

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<sup>17</sup> I will provide examples of this later in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Pater, 'Style', p.14.

<sup>19</sup> Against this, Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* has a chapter devoted to a critique of 'euphuism,' in which economy of style is praised. However, as I will exemplify in chapter two, Pater's deployment of style is complex, rather than economic.

assumptions about “audience” abstractly conceived.<sup>20</sup> Weismann argues that as a female Jewish writer living in late-Victorian London:

Levy could only challenge the facile [...] utter spuriousness of [...] a widely presumed homogeneity in readership but knowing too her uneasy reliance on its dominant constituents anyway, she could become neither the singer in solitude nor a voice in the choric throng.<sup>21</sup>

Out of necessity, Levy speaks to a readership—as it was then spuriously understood—but in doing so, articulates her dissatisfaction with it.

In the late-Victorian period, the ‘presumed homogeneity in readership’ to which Weisman refers, took a predominantly upper-class, educated and male form. Familiar with ‘the sect/ They call “aesthetic,”’<sup>22</sup> Levy would have understood that the Aesthetes not only embodied this readership, but also prescribed the theory which secured their status as ‘the’ cultural elite. In ‘On Style,’ Walter Pater confirms this:

The literary artist is of necessity a scholar, and in what he proposes to do will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience—the male conscience in this matter, as we must think it, under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men.<sup>23</sup>

His clearly demarcated notion of readership excludes ‘female consciousness.’ In response to gendered exclusion, in her poem ‘Xantippe,’ Levy’s narrator criticizes ‘the high Philosopher’<sup>24</sup>:

Pregnant with noble theories and great thoughts,  
Deigned not to stoop to touch so slight a thing  
As the fine fabric of a woman’s brain.<sup>25</sup>

Enjambment in this stanza emphasises how Levy perceives the scholar as detached from everyday life and it suggests that it is this that limits ‘real scholarship to men.’ Detached from the following line, ‘Deigned not to

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Weismann, ‘Playing with Figures,’ p.77.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Levy, ‘To Laillie (Outside the British Museum),’ in ed., New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.381.

<sup>23</sup> Pater, ‘Style’, in *Appreciations* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), p.31.

<sup>24</sup> Levy, ‘Xantippe,’ in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.360.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

stoop to touch so slight a thing,' describes a philosophical practice privileged on high-ranked superiority. The subsequent image, 'fine fabric of a woman's brain' alludes to Pater's description of female conscience as 'light' and 'amiable.'<sup>26</sup> However, this image also alludes to a high Aesthetic. Together with the word 'pregnant,' this imagery associates Aestheticism with the female form; and so Levy undermines Pater's idea that women are excluded from the movement on the basis of a pre-determined, physical weakness.

Yet, whilst Levy defends her gender, she has to contend with further exclusion due to what Susan David Bernstein terms her 'hyphenated identity.'<sup>27</sup> Paterian Aestheticism does not consider 'double-consciousness,'<sup>28</sup> a term, which, according to Bernstein, applies to the semi-assimilated Victorian Jew. Pater accounts for a single conscience in his description of the 'real scholar,' which bears (unsurprisingly) a remarkable resemblance to himself.<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that Pater is misogynistic. As I will explain more in chapter two, his focus is on the internal crisis of discipline subject organisation, rather than on academia's external relations with the rest of the world. Ingrained sexism in Pater's Aesthetic discourse is representative of the wider assumptions about gendered exclusion in institutions of higher learning. It is important to understand Pater in this way: his contribution to the field reveals that Aestheticism is subject to the wider political and hermetic principles of academic institutions. In turn, his contribution reveals that modes of high-art's reception are constricted by the academy's exclusionary politics.

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<sup>26</sup> 'In his self-criticism, he supposes always that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately, though without consideration for him, over the ground which the female conscience traverses so lightly, so amiably.' (Pater, 'Style,' p.32).

<sup>27</sup> Bernstein, *Amy Levy*, p.42.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>29</sup> His agnostic discussions set his writings apart from religious sects.

Across the breadth of her oeuvre, Levy is aware of the way cultural institutions—and the theories that worked to underpin their operations—dictate the production of high-art. Of course, there is a popular, 'low' art for the mass reading public but this is an undemanding, disposable art, which can afford to be read by those without the proficiencies for sophisticated textual practice.<sup>30</sup> High-art of the Aesthetic movement, on the other hand, demands high-level, scholarly engagement. For this reason, she knows that the reading public does not shape abstract conceptions of 'readership' in the same way as that elect group of specialized readers within private academic institutions do. Throughout Levy's short-lived (but, nonetheless, prolific) literary career, Walter Pater is representative of such a figure. Although Pater was, in many ways, marginalized at Oxford, his ideas on Aestheticism reinforce prominent debates in late-Victorian literary culture and, in doing so, confirm high-art's dependency on institutional support. For Pater, the social utility of art rests in the abstract process of textual interpretation, for 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end [. . .] To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy is success in life.'<sup>31</sup> This sentiment is appreciated in Levy's re-theorisation of Aestheticism; she notes that embodied modes of response can be ends in themselves. However, Levy critiques Pater's statement 'Not the fruit': it expresses an absolute disregard for the material apparatus that make engagement in Aestheticism possible. Those without access to a well-stocked library, for example, are debarred from the 'experience itself.' It further limits

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<sup>30</sup> The idea of late-nineteenth-century British Aestheticism as a movement with ethical dimensions has generally been overlooked; most recent research persists in regarding Aesthetic criticism as a socially-disengaged cultural activity, particularly, as Ruth Livesey has recently argued, at the point of consumption. However, as Paul Tucker noted, Walter Pater suggests that aesthetic consumption can be ethically-engaged when informed by a 'scholarly conscience.' (See: Paul Tucker, 'Pater as Moralist,' in *Pater in the 1990s*, eds., Laurel Brake and Ian Small ((Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1999)), pp. 107-25).

<sup>31</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion,' in *The Renaissance* (1873), (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.152; quoted in Kate Hext, 'The "Illusive, Inscrutable, Mistakable" Walter Pater: an Introduction,' *The Victorian Web* (05 July 2007) [28 July 2008] <<http://victorianweb.org/authors/pater/bio.html>>.



Aestheticism's modes of circulation to those with access to these resources. As such, Levy regards it as an unsatisfactory statement that demands reform.

Her dissatisfaction with the social elitism of the Paterian critic and interest in the reading public prompts a significant re-theorisation of the relationship between art's aesthetic value and its social utility. By exposing high-art's dependency on institutional support, she furnishes a campaign for the extension of such support in the public sphere. She hopes that this will promote art as a public cultural activity and in turn, prompt 'a better, fuller fiction'<sup>32</sup> that accounts for 'the characteristic features of English social life of the present day.'<sup>33</sup> With this revised receptive understanding, she anticipates a tradition that accounts for 'the complex problem of Jewish life and Jewish character,'<sup>34</sup> and the concerns of a wider readership. Whilst Levy was not particularly disadvantaged, having received a University education—even if alleged institutional sexism meant she did not graduate<sup>35</sup>—she benefitted from access to civic institutions, such as the British Museum, which provided a 'multi-dimensional space'<sup>36</sup> to read, write and network. Championing Aesthetic praxis as a public cultural activity, Levy endeavours to account for the 'fruits of experience' in a public sphere. In doing so, Levy hopes to challenge the Paterian notion of an exclusively privatised, self-reflexive Aestheticism.

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<sup>32</sup> Levy, 'The Jew in Fiction', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 4 (June 1886): 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Beckman asserts: 'It is impossible to know precisely why she left before her final year and without taking her Tripos (final exams). The letters from this period—with one exception—reveal confidence, strenuous effort, and high spirits while the literature produced indicates emotional tumult and provides insight into the psychological burden of being a woman at Cambridge in her era.' (Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.55).

<sup>36</sup> Susan David Bernstein, 'Radical Readers at the British Museum: Eleanor Marx, Clementina Black, Amy Levy', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 2 (Summer 2007): 17.

In *Reuben Sachs*, Levy's satirical sketch of late-Victorian Anglo-Jewish life, Leo, an aspiring Aesthete, bemoans: 'we are materialists to our fingers' ends.<sup>37</sup> This crucial awareness of the link between Aestheticism and material life—however satirically it is suggested in *Reuben Sachs*—shapes Levy's campaign for the extension of material wealth and institutional support in the public sphere. She hopes that this support will extend Aestheticism's fields of reception to a broader range of social contexts and class of readers. She is not so much interested in entering pre-existing debates about proper modes of aesthetic attention (a la Pater), but rather she aims for a more responsive way of self-reflexively drawing attention to Aestheticism as always already implicated in the social world of circulation against which it defines its most hermetic principles. Overall, I hope that this chapter will cultivate our understanding of Levy's statements on readership, purism and textual practice in the late-Victorian period. Noting the interplay between her fictional and critical works, I will consider Levy's relationship with the literary marketplace, paying particular attention to the way she attends to the material embodiments and textual conditions of her work. In the context of Levy's attempts to re-theorise Aestheticism's field of reception, I will assess the pertinence of Margaret D. Stetz's observation that late-Victorian writers 'had to be aware of the market that might engulf or support them.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, Julia Neuberger, ed., (London: Persephone Books Ltd, 2001), p.63. (Also, this phrase is repeated to describe Rose, her cousin: 'Rose was a materialist to her fingers' ends' ((Ibid, p.19)) Leo aspires for a career as a musician scholar at Cambridge, 'I told him [...] that I hadn't the faintest idea of going to the Stock Exchange, or even reading for the bar; that my plan was this: to work hard for my degree, and then stay on, on chance of a fellowship [...] I can't live—I can't breathe in this atmosphere; I should choke. Up there, somehow, it is freer, purer; life is simpler; nobler.' ((Ibid, p.73.)) It is suggested, very subtly, in the 'Epilogue' that this has all been a Romantic impression and he is considered an 'outsider' at Cambridge for his 'hyphenated identity': 'Away in Cambridge Leo paced beneath the lime-trees, a sick, blank horror at his heart.' ((Ibid, p.147.)))

<sup>38</sup> Gail Marshall's summary of Margaret Stetz's article. (Gail Marshall, 'Introduction,' *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. ((Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007)), p. 8.)

Across her oeuvre, Levy presents female figures with limited social status and restricted access to the 'fruits of experience' that late-Victorian London had to offer. Wallowing in what she rejects, this characterisation enables Levy to articulate her dissatisfaction towards the exclusion of women from amenities in the city. In her essay, 'Women and Club Life' (1888), published within the pages of Wilde's *The Woman's World*—which was then known for advocating feminist views on debates concerning cultural life in late-Victorian London—she writes:

The number of professional women of all kinds has increased so greatly, and is still so greatly increasing, that, with a little more *esprit de corps*, women might do a great deal for themselves and for one another. [...We need a] level platform of intercourse for members of the same craft, regardless of distinction of sex [...] but at present I believe the fact of sex to have too great social insistence to render such an arrangement practicable.<sup>39</sup>

Noting that growing female participation within city life found women to be 'controllers of their own resources',<sup>40</sup> she informs us that sexism, 'at present',<sup>41</sup> refused them. In her fiction, where she could not be an outright progressive feminist, she turns to a more subtle form of expression to deliver a hard-edged realism. In her novel *Reuben Sachs*, Levy places her female protagonist, Judith Quixano, 'twenty-two years of age, in the very prime of her youth and beauty'<sup>42</sup> within a choking money-oriented Anglo-Jewish community, based in the centre of late-Victorian London. The Leunigers, a prosperous family within the Jewish community have taken Judith under their wing to support her mother's large family, which 'had grown poorer over the years.'<sup>43</sup> Dependent on their financial support, Judith is debarred from leading the autonomous lifestyle afforded to other characters in the community, despite being more than capable of doing so:

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<sup>39</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' *The Woman's World*, 1 (1888 ), 364-67; in New, 'The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy,' p. 536.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.532.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.536.

<sup>42</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.12.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.18.

'the life, the position, the atmosphere, though she knew it not, were repressive ones. This woman, with her beauty, her intelligence, her power of feeling, saw herself as one of a vast crowd of girls awaiting their promotion by marriage.'<sup>44</sup> Levy juxtaposes Judith's social status with that of the titular character, Reuben Sachs, who on return from a spell of ill-health is welcomed back to 'the greetings in the market place.'<sup>45</sup> In drastic contrast, whilst Judith is left feeling vacant and redundant by the close of the novel, Reuben dies from exhaustion: 'It seems that his heart was weak; he had been overdoing himself terribly, and cardiac disease was the immediate cause of his death.'<sup>46</sup> The demands of modern life pulverize Reuben in his role as Conservative M.P and it is these same pressures, which separate him from Judith, his soul mate. The prospect of marriage for Reuben, particularly to a woman with a dowry of £5000, clashes with his political ambitions: 'he had no wish to fetter himself at this early stage of his career; his ambition was boundless.'<sup>47</sup>

However, fleeting moments of Aesthetic pleasure afford the couple a temporary break from reality and provide an opportunity to articulate otherwise-unspoken emotion. At a music-hall dance it is 'the whirling maze of dancers, the heavy scents, [and] delicious music'<sup>48</sup> that unites them in an intimate moment: 'It was like a dream [...] a wonderful dream.'<sup>49</sup> In this moment, the 'real world,' in which 'thought and feeling [are] kept apart from word and deed,'<sup>50</sup> is suspended and emotional response privileged: 'To Judith, Reuben was no longer a commodity of the market with a high price set on him; he was a piteous human creature who

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.69.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 94. (Music-hall culture was celebrated by Symbolist poets such as Arthur Symonds).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.122.

entreated her with his eyes.<sup>51</sup> Here, Levy is drawing on Pater's idea that music is the highest art form; in *Studies in the Renaissance*, he writes:

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other works of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.<sup>52</sup>

At this moment, the obliteration of the distinction between form and content means that art can only invoke feeling and aesthetic pleasure: the 'matter' cannot be intellectualized because it is, unquestionably, the form or art work itself. However, it cannot last. In Pater's 'Style,' Aesthetic pleasure is afforded to the individual during an ephemeral moment; it may 'ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn,'<sup>53</sup> but once the holiday period is over, the moment dissolves. Once the couple escape into the street, and the music from the hall fades, power relations return to their 'everyday' balance. This begins when Reuben unpins the chrysanthemum from Judith's bodice:

"I am going to commit a theft," he said, and his low voice shook a little. Judith yielded, passive, rapt, as his fingers fumbled with the gold pin.<sup>54</sup>

With this 'deflowering'—an embodied mode of response enacted—the demands of the real world disrupt their union. The highly expressive aesthetic, which Levy deploys in this scene, gradually becomes subordinate to the everyday language of modern London:

It was like a dream to her, a wonderful dream, with which the whirling maze of dancers, the heavy scents, the delicious music were inextricably mingled. And mingling with it also was a strange, harsh sound in the street outside, which faint and muffled at first, was growing every moment louder and more distinct.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.93.

<sup>52</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*, (London: Library Edition, 1873), p.61.

<sup>53</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.93.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp.94-5.

As the noise grows 'louder and more distinct,' the sound, which is, at first, simply indistinct and disruptive, delivers a very clear message. As an anonymous 'voice mounted up, clear in discordance through the mist,'<sup>56</sup> the silhouette of a paper boy, 'a dark figure, [with] a narrow crackling sheet flung across one shoulder,'<sup>57</sup> becomes visible and announces the headline: 'Death of a Conservative M.P! Death of the member for St.Baldwin's!'<sup>58</sup> With this, Reuben returns to his 'every-day tones'<sup>59</sup> and breaks away from Judith, knowing that this means his call to politics has arrived. The 'chrysanthemums, crushed by Reuben's departing feet'<sup>60</sup> symbolises Reuben's departure to office. As Alex Goody observes, in *Reuben Sachs*, 'the voice of the newspaper headlines is not merely the noise of the city, but the inescapable presence of the public world that invades and disrupts the lives of their respective female protagonists, presaging grief and death.'<sup>61</sup>

The way the bulletin arrives 'in discordance through the mist' presages this return to reality and brings the flowing clauses that describe the music-hall scene to an abrupt end with monosyllabic gravity. To this effect, the last words in this scene are delivered as Judith is lowered on the pavement discarding the chrysanthemum:

She picked them up and flung them into the street.  
At the same moment a voice sounded at her elbow:  
"I have found you at last."  
"Is this our dance, Mr. Lee Harrison."<sup>62</sup>

Mr. Bertie Lee-Harrison represents a suitable match for Judith's return to domestic duty. The suggestion that he is bending over Judith at this

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>61</sup> Alex Goody, 'Murder in Mile End: Amy Levy, Jewishness, and the City,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006): 470.

<sup>62</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.96.

moment creates a tableaux of male-female relations, in which marriage is perceived as social promotion, rather than an expression of delicate feeling. Levy seems to be telling her reader here that the fruits of Aesthetic experience do not survive beyond the moment of their initial enjoyment; and those without everyday access to the various amenities of the late-Victorian city are left to feel socially isolated and further removed from its practices. From this, Levy undermines Pater's claim that Aesthetic pleasure is derivative of 'the experience itself,' rather than any material underpinnings that might bring such pleasure into fruition.

To make this point more directly, Levy presents Judith as engaged in a close-reading exercise, which ultimately illustrates that despite gaining from high-art that 'aesthetic satisfaction in that frugal closeness of style,' her sophisticated response is rendered irrelevant and socially useless. Up until the moment that Judith finds herself capable of producing meaning for herself from art, she has been latched onto Reuben's scholarly interests: 'it may be said that she had seen nothing at first hand; had looked at it all, not with her eyes, but with the eyes of Reuben Sachs.'<sup>63</sup> Prescribed by Reuben, the few books which constitute the 'whole of her modest library, some twenty books in all'<sup>64</sup> are dry texts—political and socioeconomic commentaries—which serve to indoctrinate Judith with Reuben's values and beliefs. Knowing no different, 'like many wholly unliterary people, she preferred the mildly instructive even in her fiction.'<sup>65</sup> Her undeveloped faculty for independent thought is the inevitable result of being deprived of texts that bear any literary or aesthetic value and fed, instead, on a limited stock of cultural documents. This imposing narrow curriculum serves to cast her even further into the social margins of late-Victorian life as: 'her

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.108.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

outlook on life was the narrowest; of the world, of London.<sup>66</sup> This narrow outlook, Levy implies, is not made any wider by the Leuniger's faddish penchant for forms of mass culture, the possession of which accrue wealth and status for their owner. At one time, we find 'Lionel and Sidney [...] sleepy and overfed<sup>67</sup> quarrelling 'over the possession of a bound volume of the *Graphic*,<sup>68</sup> a popular late-19<sup>th</sup>-century newspaper. At another time, we learn that 'Books were a luxury in the Leuniger household<sup>69</sup>:

We all have our economies, even the richest of us; and the Leunigers who begrudged no money for food, clothes, or furniture, who were constantly into the status of the theatre, without considering the expense, regarded every shilling spent on books as pure extravagance.<sup>70</sup>

Deemed a decadent frivolity rather than a functional necessity, books do not carry the same use-value as 'food, clothes, or furniture' and, as such, are not granted a place within the Leuniger's household economy. As the theatre projects a reputable social image on its attendants, this public art form is aligned with other useful commodities.<sup>71</sup>

As a result, Judith does not have access to the tools with which she can articulate, or intuit, her despair: 'if at times, she was discontented, she was only vaguely aware of her own discontent.'<sup>72</sup> Yet, after Reuben departs to take up political office, she awakens to the 'intolerable conditions, [of which] she could bear no longer, to lie and let the heavy, inarticulate sorrow prey on her<sup>73</sup> and finds the textual materials to hand no longer sufficient: 'so she scanned the familiar bookshelves, then turned away; there was nothing there to meet her case.'<sup>74</sup> Seeking a remedy and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Going to the theatre in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was more of a social event: the point was to be seen (rather than to see the play).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



faced with no other option, she delves into Leopold's library where she finds literary works that support his Aesthetic vocation. Unable to envision this exercise as a 'hopeful remedy',<sup>75</sup> Judith selects a volume of Swinburne and starts reading *Triumph of Time* 'mechanically by the flickering candlelight.'<sup>76</sup> As this is a private reading experience, Judith's demand for escapism from the banality of everyday existence is delivered as she self-discovers meaning through the musicality of literary form, rather than the text's instructive, doctrinal content:

The rolling copious phrases conveyed little meaning to her, but she liked the music of them. There was something to make a sophisticated onlooker laugh at the sight of this young, pure creature, with her slow-growing passions, her strong-growing intellect, bending over the diffuse, unreserved, unrestrained pages.<sup>77</sup>

Again, Levy draws on the idea that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music' for it is the verbal 'melody' of the well-wrought phrase that aspires to the melodic quality in music. The narrative is able to unhinge itself from the 'matter' of the everyday and speak instead to Judith's personal situation: in this poem, Swinburne implies that the narrator has been abandoned by a soul mate. The speaker is one half of a 'perfect heart, made fast/ Soul to soul while the years fell past.'<sup>78</sup> Through Swinburne's imagery, she is able to understand that feeling can survive above all else and become stronger through its consolidation over time. This is characteristic of Swinburne's Aesthetic verse, as George P. Landow notes: 'Poetry allows Swinburne to transform the sorrows and ravages of time into beauty, and furthermore, it captures — in fact, rescues — certain

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.111.

significant moments from the devouring ocean.<sup>79</sup> For the first time, in this reading exercise, Judith is rescued from the wreckage.

Gaining access to meaning that is not based in concrete, doctrinal concerns, she begins to re-evaluate her perspective of the world: 'the practical if not the theoretical teaching of her life had been to treat as absurd any close or strong feeling which had not its foundations in material interests.'<sup>80</sup> Modern formalist criticism, identifies this function of art; T. J Clarke argues that 'art may have an ideology (in other words, those ideas, images, and values, which are generally accepted, dominant) as its material, but it [...gives] that material [...] a new form and at certain times that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology.'<sup>81</sup> The fact that art gives Judith the opportunity to challenge pre-existing values reflects Levy's attendance to the 'important stress [made] in [...] the arguments put forward by the aesthetes,<sup>82</sup> which Josephine Guy and Ian Small note:

had the effect of making any subsequent claims about the political or moral functions of literature much more difficult to sustain; at the very least they ensured that such functions could no longer simply be taken for granted.<sup>83</sup>

In her 2008 review of 'Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater,' Kate Hext refers to Ian Small's work from twenty-years ago, pointing out that his significant contribution to the field depicts Pater as 'profoundly affected by the contemporaneous crisis of authority and professionalization of universities.'<sup>84</sup> According to Small, the specialisation of disciplines was beginning to pose problems for Pater: his ideas needed to cross

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<sup>79</sup> George P. Landow, 'Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time and His Characteristic Poetic Structure' <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/swinburne/swinburne9.html>> (July 2007) [July 2008].

<sup>80</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.112.

<sup>81</sup> T.J Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848-1851* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 13; quoted in Susan J Wolfson, 'Reading for Form,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61 (2000): 2

<sup>82</sup> Josephine Guy and Ian Small, *Politics and value in English studies: a discipline in crisis?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.163.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Kate Hext, 'Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater: "Antithetical Scholar of Understanding's End,"' in *Literature Compass* 5 (2008): 412.

sociological, economic and political fields (to name only three disciplines), but the tightening of subject boundaries made this difficult.<sup>85</sup> Whilst Pater keeps women excluded in his attempts to challenge institutional operations, his demand for the revision of institutional frameworks in the academy of higher learning is similar, in principle, to Levy's. This internal crisis is of great interest to Levy. She values the movement's endeavour to challenge internal institutional operations. After all, it was (in part) specialization of disciplines that led to the Aesthetes' withdrawal into reverie. Regarded as an enclosed discourse, Aestheticism could not make any explicit intervention into other disciplinary fields. As such, the Aesthetes' intervention into concerns beyond the art object could not go beyond the remit of the individual's interior, solipsistic concerns. This crisis indicates that the tension between art's Aesthetic value and its social utility is an institutional anxiety; it is not reflective of Aestheticism's actual relationship with the outside world. Thus, for Levy, loosening these restrictions would hopefully enable her to self-reflexively draw attention to Aestheticism as always already implicated in the outside world.

Therefore, in *Reuben Sachs*, as is hoped from an engaged Aesthetic reader-response process, Judith's response envisions the subversion of restrictions in the world around her. To use Pater's phraseology, Aesthetic pleasure enlarges Judith's 'sympathies [...] to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world.'<sup>86</sup> As such, Judith assigns a space for idealistic thought within her materially-based Anglo-Jewish community by recognising that her unsolicited relationship with Reuben is 'a reality with rights and claims of its own.'<sup>87</sup> As the

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<sup>85</sup> Pater felt marginalised from Oxford for other reasons too: his personal life, his homosexuality and religious beliefs were all detrimental to his career.

<sup>86</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p. 36.

<sup>87</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.113.

interpretative reading experience facilitates art's intervention into a broader range of disciplines, it becomes a self-referential process:

Where your interests lie, there should lie your duties [...] And if this doctrine applied to friendship, to philanthropy, to art and politics, in how much greater a degree must it apply to love, to the unspoken, unacknowledged love between a man and a woman; a thing in its very essence immaterial, and which, in its nature, can have no rights, no duties attached to it.<sup>88</sup>

Without anxieties over subject specialization, Judith is able to code-switch between the text's multidisciplinary references and self-referential concerns. His anxieties aside, Pater had hoped that engagement with art could recover 'the oppressed, and enlargement of our sympathies with each other.'<sup>89</sup> Yet, exclusionary politics meant that women (and other excluded figures) were not supposed to obtain this sort of remuneration from the text first-hand. It is easy to see why exclusionary politics would come into effect here: Judith is able to challenge Victorian values of marriage in which women play a subservient role. In re-evaluating social codes—having aligned them with her personal concerns—the principles of ethical response appear to be reconcilable with the reach for subjective immersion and readerly enjoyment.

However, the problem is one I have stated: Paterian Aestheticism is 'devoted [...] to the increase of men's happiness,'<sup>90</sup> the emphasis being on the gendered (rather than generic) implications of that operative word. Due to the importance of preserving the pre-existing social values of patriarchal culture, the principles of ethical response and the enjoyment of a reading public are not reconcilable terms in Paterian Aestheticism. As a result, in the novel's 'Epilogue' we find Judith: 'sat [...] absolutely

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>89</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p.36.

<sup>90</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p.36.

motionless— a figure of stone [...] her soul grew frozen and appalled,<sup>91</sup> which emphasises how her sophisticated response to art is rendered irrelevant in everyday praxis. At this point in the novel, the London that Levy describes is 'a dream city that melted and faded in the sunset.'<sup>92</sup> Judith may have gained temporary access to its 'life and sound,'<sup>93</sup> but, ultimately, she is not assigned a permanent active role within it. The paperboy's announcement of 'Death of a Conservative M.P.!' at the end of the novel brings us full circle; the bulletin of Reuben's death symbolises the 'inescapable presence of the public world that invades and disrupts,' and scalps a personal narrative of emotional expression.

Dissatisfaction with this compels Levy to campaign for the inclusion of socially-marginalised figures in late-Victorian Aestheticism's notion of readership. She demands that the pleasures afforded to the cultural elite be extended to a broader range of social groups. In 'Women and Club Life,' she begins her crusade by promoting women as more than equipped to participate in a culture that has excluded them due to outright sexism ruling out the possibility:

What has hitherto been felt as a vague longing—the desire among women for a corporate life, for a wider human fellowship, a richer social opportunity— has assumed the definite shape of a practical demand, now that so many women of all ranks are controllers of their own resources.<sup>94</sup>

In the last passage of *Reuben Sachs*, this 'practical demand' for a new generation of women is registered. The circular narrative form that perpetuates a pessimistic realism gives way to a new idealism, which prophesises change for the next generation:

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<sup>91</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.147.

<sup>92</sup> On Reuben's death, the same cries are heard and disrupt a scene of unidentified intimate lovers: 'A pair of lovers moved along slowly [...] London, was full of life and sound [...] a dream city that melted and faded in the sunset [...] It was a November night [...] and the harsh sound struck upwards through the mist: 'Death of a Conservative M.P.!' (Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, pp. 146-7).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 532.

The ways of joys like the ways of sorrow are many; and hidden away in the depths of Judith's life—though as yet she know it not—is the germ of another life, which [...] shall bring with it [...] hope and joy, that quickening of purpose which is perhaps as much as any of us should expect or demand from Fate.<sup>95</sup>

The idea of 'new life,' represents an optimism that prefigures Oscar Wilde's 'Utopian future for humanity,'<sup>96</sup> which, as Isobel Murray points out, challenged the elitist notions of Aestheticism, campaigning for 'an almost reckless determination that man shall be perfectible, that joy shall be unconfined.'<sup>97</sup>

Like Levy, Wilde would register a demand for wider institutional support and material wealth in extending cultural life to all. As far as Wilde is concerned, for this to happen private property would have to be abolished; in the present political climate, 'the men of culture' are only those who are 'under no necessary to work for a living.'<sup>98</sup> A Socialist ethos would ensure that all can 'choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them and gives them pleasure.'<sup>99</sup> Unlike Pater's use of the word 'man,' Wilde clearly refers to hu(man)kind, turning his attention to those less fortunate and forced into activities 'less congenial to them.' He argues that 'from their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity.'<sup>100</sup> Yet, he notes that because the poor are not connected to a wider sphere of opportunity, private institutions will not relieve them from their impoverished state; they will only serve to maintain it:

It is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from

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<sup>95</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p. 143.

<sup>96</sup> Isobel Murray, ed., 'Introduction,' *The Soul of Man and Other Prison Writers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.xvi.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, in *The Soul of Man and Other Prison Writers*, ed., Isobel Murray, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.<sup>101</sup>

However, as in Levy's work, a piercing optimism ends 'The Soul of Man,' claiming that a new Individualism is an essential part of social evolution. In *Reuben Sachs*, this same idea is inscribed in the image of Judith's pregnancy; in Wilde's journalistic essay, it is asserted more clearly through over-determined statements:

For what man has sought for is, indeed, neither pain nor pleasure, but simply Life. Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. [...] When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. [...] It will be complete, and through it each man will attain to his perfection.<sup>102</sup>

In 'Women and Club Life,' Levy refers to 'the new state of affairs,' which Wilde terms the 'new Individualism,' campaigning for wider distribution of support:

Let it be remembered that, the old state was [...] adapted for the happiness of the chosen few rather than of the unchosen many. To its upholders in these days can only be attributed an unphilosophic disregard of the greatest happiness of the greatest number [...] Let us, then, remember that, while we lose much, we gain, perhaps more, by the new state of affairs.<sup>103</sup>

Here, it sounds very much like Levy is endorsing Socialism. However, this is not wholly accurate.

Levy does not prefigure 'The Soul of Man' in every respect. Wilde very clearly states that 'Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society.'<sup>104</sup> This conversion of private to public wealth, he goes on to state, would oversee the abolition of the institution of private property. In this act, everything would be made

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>103</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' p.538.

<sup>104</sup> Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, p.3.

public for the greater benefit of all. He claims that 'Socialism wants to get rid of the institution'<sup>105</sup> because firstly, it demoralises the rich: it requires too much upkeep 'that its possession to any larger extent is a bore [...] its duties make it unbearable.'<sup>106</sup> Secondly, he claims that there is no point in simply admitting the poor into private property for 'Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table?'<sup>107</sup> Simply opening the doors of private property would incorporate the poor into the larger institution known as capitalism, but not redistribute its wealth to them and as such, Wilde considers it to be a hollow charitable act 'on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives.'<sup>108</sup> In contrast, Levy, who did not live to see the publication of Wilde's essay, celebrates the concept of extending access to private property (or more specifically, institutions of culture and education with strict admissions policies); she promotes the conversion of it from private to public. Deborah Nord places Levy alongside those who 'understood their own marginality [...] as a product of their socialist politics.'<sup>109</sup> Despite her affiliations with Clementia Black, Eleanor Marx and Dollie Radford, Levy does not endorse Socialism. Beckman provides biographical evidence for this. Levy writes to Vernon Lee in 1886 of her attendance at meetings of the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Fellowship of the New Life (which, according to Beckman, Lee describes 'as if they were tourist attractions'<sup>110</sup>), writing: 'I confess that my own Philistine, middle-class notions of comfort would not be met by their ménage.'<sup>111</sup> A materialist to her fingers' ends, Levy re-negotiates her way through capitalist London.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Deborah Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 183-84; quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.3.

<sup>110</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.131.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Levy to Vernon Lee, (26<sup>th</sup> November, 1886); quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 255.



So, how does all this 'fit' into her re-theorisation of Paterian Aestheticism? As seen in her writings, forms of mass produced art are regarded as belonging to disposable, commodity culture whereas engagement in high culture (one which is separate from the 'everyday') is regarded as important for revising the question: how do we know what we know? The problem with this, however, is that to engage with texts in this way, the reader has to be alone in a place that offers comfortable solitude. As we see in *Reuben Sachs*, Judith is alone late at night when reading Swinburne. In *The Renaissance*, Pater describes the reader engaged in art as locked away in private: 'Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.'<sup>112</sup> This idea is applicable only to the scholar in his exclusive academy. Those 'outside' are refused the right to enter not only the interiority of the academy's four-walls but also the interiority of their own thoughts.

In her poem 'To Lailie (Outside the British Museum),' Levy explains how institutional exclusivity creates both a spatial and intellectual division between those with access and those without. In the poem, the narrator meets her friend on the threshold of the British Museum.<sup>113</sup> In the penultimate stanza, her friend enters: 'To where the marble gods abide'<sup>114</sup> and the narrator goes on her way into the city: 'And I, I went on my way,/  
Well—rather sadder, let us say;/  
The world looked flatter.'<sup>115</sup> Whilst two figures on the steps of the museum create the image of one going in as another leaves, it is implied that the narrator is not granted admission into

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<sup>112</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 235.

<sup>113</sup> Melvyn New thinks this might be a diminutive for Violet Paget, the birth-name of Vernon Lee. However, this is not possible because the poem was published two years before Levy had met her in Florence.

<sup>114</sup> Levy, 'To Lailie,' in New, p. 383.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

the museum. The line 'You passed inside'<sup>116</sup> (with a plosive stress on the word 'passed') is loaded with the suggestion that her friend bears an admissions pass, whilst she does not. In 1884—the publishing date of the poem—an admissions pass was required to enter the library at the museum. The narrator is not given the opportunity and is left to return to the city, which she regards as even more lifeless and monotonous than before. The suggestion that she is 'outside' the institution is made even clearer in that she has not been granted the privileges of intellectual stimulation and so she sinks into a state of indifference in the last stanza: 'I had been sad enough before,/A little less, a little more,/ What does it matter?'<sup>117</sup> According to Beckman, Levy became 'a member of the library at the museum in autumn 1882,'<sup>118</sup> two-years before the publication of her collection of poems entitled *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*, which featured 'To Lailie.' Whilst the narrator's exclusion from the museum might not mirror the author's, she represents Levy's wider sense of exclusion and cultural marginality, a theme that this collection of poems explores; excluded figures stand out as a recurring motif for Levy's dissatisfaction towards elitist notions of readership. Levy insists that the term 'readership' is extended to a growing reading public. This, therefore, means she has to confront the question: how might we appreciate high-art in everyday life?

Levy knows it is hard to create time to read and write in everyday life with various commitments and distractions. In her proposals for civic institutions, she registers a need for a secluded space within them. The

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.79. Levy would have gained admission after her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1882 as she writes in her essay 'Any person above the age of twenty-one, who can induce one householder to vouch for his good behaviour, has the whole collection of books within his easy reach.' (Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' in *The Romance of a Shop*, Susan David Bernstein, ed., (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006)), p.226). In this essay, as I will go onto say, celebrates the accessibility of the library. Yet note, the terms and conditions: the narrator does not necessarily have 'one householder' prepared to vouch for her admittance. In the OED, 'householder' is one who 'occupies' a house as his own dwelling.' In other words, householders were still a restricted group and were male. Also, as I will explain, Levy's essay is counter-propaganda to the negative press that female readers were receiving.

institution that Levy imagines takes features both from the closed-off study (where meaning is left to reverberate against its walls in a sort of theoretical void) and the city streets (where, it seems, a paperboy can disrupt your privacy at any given moment).<sup>119</sup> In her essay, 'Women and Club Life,' Levy describes female club-land as exemplifying this institutional framework. Providing a set of amenities for women in the city, club land acts as a platform between the domestic comforts of the home and the innumerable opportunities afforded by the city. These clubs are different to men's clubs, which had evolved from 18<sup>th</sup>-century coffee houses and often proliferated social attitudes that cast women into the cultural margins. She re-appropriates an existing framework at her disposal. It is quite fortunate that Levy did not live to see George Bernard Shaw's 1898 play, *The Philanderer*, which caricatures a coterie of women who belong to an Ibsen Club, as cigar-smoking, trouser-wearing unwomanly women. This is precisely the type of image which Levy sought to oppose. For Levy, the female clubhouse would not undermine the important role women played within the home or their female concerns. Instead, it would provide a hybrid structure, in which women could step comfortably between the home and the city. Prefiguring the complex social network that professional women enjoy today, at its most resourceful, female club land could afford a wealth of non-familial, occupational contacts that could provide access to different alcoves of the city. Levy reminds us that:

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<sup>119</sup> It is important to note that like the private institution, the late-Victorian streets have been considered a contested space, particularly for women. This is confirmed by Parsons who argues that Levy's 'writings self-consciously debate the freedoms and limitations identifiable with her position as a female and/or Jewish urban observer.' (Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)), p.87). However, Beckman notes that 'Levy was one of the women who inhabited the public spaces of London in the 1880s, and her experiences before and during that decade bring into sharp focus how the changes that gave rise to the so-called New Woman could mark the life of an actual person.' (Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.8). Here, Beckman draws on Judith Walkowitz' description of the New Woman living in late-Victorian London: 'An ability to get around and self-confidence in public places became the hallmarks of the modern woman. Not only could she be seen in the shopping districts of the West End and in the poor neighbourhoods of the East, but she also made an appearance in other public spaces, alone or with friends.' (Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 68; quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.7).

It is all uphill work with her, unless she be somebody's sister, or somebody's wife, or unless she have the power and the means of setting in motion an elaborate social machinery to obtain what every average follower of his calling has come to regard as a right.<sup>120</sup>

In this essay, she states that this type of framework sets the cogs of progressive feminism in motion, particularly for women in the arts. She asks the rhetorical question: 'what woman engaged in art, in literature, in science has not felt the drawbacks of her isolated position?'<sup>121</sup> Club-life equips women with the resources to write in private but also with a wealth of contacts (afforded by the club) to take this work to the literary marketplace.

Levy finds a similar model in the British Museum Reading Room. In her article 'Readers at the British Museum' (April, 1889) she captures the imagination of young females subscribed to *Atlanta: Every Girl's Magazine* by celebrating this civic reading space as a haven for the 'motley crowd'<sup>122</sup> engaged 'in various stages of industry and idleness.'<sup>123</sup> She takes the young readers on a tour of the Reading Room starting from a perspective they may have seen on a visit to the British Museum:

Those readers of *Atlanta* who have been to the British Museum will probably have obtained a momentary glimpse of the great Reading Room, with its book-lined walls, its radiating rows of seats, and its characteristics, suggestive scent of leather bindings.<sup>124</sup>

Those under twenty-one were not granted admissions passes and so the readers of *Atlanta* rely on Levy to be their guide. Before going on to treat this essay as accurate cultural documentation, we must remember to whom Levy is talking and why this is important. According to Ruth Hoberman, whilst the library had not closed its doors to women since it

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<sup>120</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' p.536.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. (In the conclusion of my thesis, I will consider the unwritten economic factors that Levy does not address. All clubs, by definition, are exclusive, which poses problems for the term 'public' or 'reading public,' which is an all-encompassing term).

<sup>122</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' p. 221.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' pp. 220-1.

granted them admission in 1856 (an important date for the British Empire), female readers had been given a negative press:

But 'mecca' or 'blessed fount' though it might be, the reading room was also an intensely contested space, as readers competed for scarce seating; officials debated who could be excluded to make more room; and the popular press depicted the room as inappropriately overwhelmed by women's bodies.<sup>125</sup>

With a group of young girls who know no different, Levy uses *Atlanta* as a forum to challenge this propaganda and encourage a future generation of women to become enthused readers. To this end, her depiction of its admissions policy and its accommodative atmosphere is a rosy one; she shows a scene of co-operation, of people from all walks of life working side-by-side: 'As for the readers who come and go in these various apartments, they include, as I have said, all sorts and conditions of men and women.'<sup>126</sup> Drawing a deliberate allusion to 'O God, the creator and preserver of all mankind, we humbly/ beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men'<sup>127</sup> in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Levy suggestively compares the room to a religious institution in which all are equal in the eyes of the authorities. This contradicts scenes of overcrowding, portrayed in the press, an issue which may have deterred—or even debarred—Levy's narrator in 'To Lailie' (who we assume is female) from entering. Hoberman says that overcrowding often gave certain journalists an opportunity to criticize women readers: 'The overflowing of women from their designated area deprived the men of their seats, these articles

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<sup>125</sup> Ruth Hoberman, "'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead": Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929', in *Reading Women : Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, ed. by Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p.172.

<sup>126</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' p.227.

<sup>127</sup> Church of England, *The Book of common prayer: With the Psalter Or Psalms of David, Pointed as They are to be Sung in Churches; and the Form of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons*, (Harvard University: Harvard University Press, 1831), p.47.

suggest; other accounts imply the women deprived the men of their minds, as well.<sup>128</sup>

Another sign that Levy knew the library did not always accommodate a common ground between men and women can be seen in her short story, 'The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum' (1888). In this narrative, a professor 'pouring over manuscripts'<sup>129</sup> is distracted by the presence of women in the library: 'It's the women—they've no business to have women here at all.'<sup>130</sup> Levy challenges this stereotypical attitude by deploying a self-conscious style (a hallmark of Jamesian fiction), which Levy felt was the 'offensive attitude of critic and observer.'<sup>131</sup> As is a characteristic formal feature of James' style, the whole narrative is a collective body of fragments composed by one observer's impression. This is offensive to Levy because it implies that meaning is as reliable as the observer's pre-existing ideological beliefs: the perceived object is simply a means to the gazer's end and it does not link us to the broader picture. In the story, Levy deploys this technique to challenge negative attitudes towards women readers. Women users in the library are objects for male users to project the notion that women bear no role within public life. In the story, the professor scorns a woman 'standing near him at the outer circle of the catalogue desks,<sup>132</sup> yet then, she disappears: 'Strange! His seat was the last row towards the centre of the room; she had been, therefore, quite near him, and he heard no sound.'<sup>133</sup> This raises a never-ending array of questions: is the professor too short-sighted to see beyond his notes?; was the woman really there at all?; was

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<sup>128</sup> Ruth Hoberman, 'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead,' p.174.

<sup>129</sup> Levy, 'The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum,' in New, p. 432.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Levy, 'The New School of American Fiction', in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*, ed. by Melvyn New (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993 ), p. 512.

<sup>132</sup> Levy, 'The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum,' in New, p. 432.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

she there and simply left quietly without the professor knowing because women were not disruptive?; is the professor simply going mad? These questions are vacuous and serve to mock the negative attitude that women were receiving from male users and the press.<sup>134</sup> For these reasons, it is probably best to read her essay 'Readers at the British Museum' as giving us an insight into her definition of an ideal civic institution, rather than providing specific, accurate historical evidence of the reading room's current operations. In her job as tour guide, she lures the girls 'Under the great dome,' through its collections and extensive history.

Approaching the article as a promotional guided tour is useful for ascertaining the shape of Levy's ideal civic institution. According to her account, this space would foster a wider reading public and blur distinctions between social differences: 'rich and poor, old and young, competent and incompetent, the successes of life and of literary may be met beneath the dome in indistinguishable fellowship.'<sup>135</sup> Whilst not every user is expected to be engaged in demanding exercises of reading or writing, the layout of the room itself provides scope to do this:

The vast, circular apartments, whose aspect is no doubt familiar to many of my readers, can accommodate at the present day no less than 460 readers. The desks and tables are models of comfort and convenience; the lighting is by electric light; and so carefully is the temperature regulated by means of an elaborate ventilating apparatus.<sup>136</sup>

She takes the architectural features of the room to make the claim that it provides a complex reification of literary spaces in which a private textual practice can be conducted within— and supported by—a public network.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Published in *The Woman's World*, Levy once again had a forum to challenge sexist attitudes and campaign for women's rights.

<sup>135</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' p. 227.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>137</sup> This framework that Levy outlines in 'Readers at the British Museum' and 'Women and Club Life' are dramatised in her 1888 novel, *The Romance of a Shop* in which four sisters set up a

Without any disruptions or problems with overcrowding, this idealistic assessment is probably correct. Figure 1 (below) shows the architectural space to which Levy is referring. As you can see, the circular, dome-like shape of the room provides an over-arching structure that brings readers together at their individual desks. Thus the room's architectural features draw together the expansiveness of an actual communal reading environment and the confined interiority that we associate with private and solitarily attentive reading. This anticipates Henry James' iconic 'house of fiction,' which associates 'fictional buildings with fiction-as-building.'<sup>138</sup> However, Levy moves far beyond James' analogization of domestic space, which associates fictional and non-fictional writings as part of a literary culture that bears the same divisions of the private home space: its architectural features are 'windows at the best. But mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life.'<sup>139</sup> In contrast, as I will address further in the latter part of this chapter, Levy imagines architectural features that connect readers together in a public space.<sup>140</sup>

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photography business from within their central London home. Effectively welcoming the business world of late-Victorian London into their home, despite knowing 'little of the world, and of the complicated machinery necessary for getting on in it,' they are granted 'glimpses of a world more varied and interesting than their own.' The sisters can alternate between roles in the home and in the city, and so avoid the assignment of rigid identity categories that their duty to the familial home all too often imposes. (All quotes cited here: Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, Susan David Bernstein, ed., ((Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006)), p.135).

<sup>138</sup> Victoria Coulson, 'Prisons, palaces, and architecture of the imagination,' in *Henry James Studies*, ed., Peter Rawlings (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.170.

<sup>139</sup> The quote reads: 'These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life.' (Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, ed., Richard Blackmur (New York: Scribners, 1962), p.46; quoted in *ibid*, p.176.

<sup>140</sup> In fact, had she lived to read James' notion of the 'house of fiction,' she may have regarded it, along with other feminist critics, as exploiting 'a location at once disparaged and permitted as a separate sphere for the feminized activity of art.' (*Ibid*, p.178).





Figure 1- *British Museum Reading Room*

The idea that the library links readers to a wider context and community recurs in George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. Throughout Gissing's novel, the British Museum Reading Room features as a place that affords the individual with a space to work but also to people-watch: 'People who often work there necessarily get to know each other by sight. In the same way I knew Miss Yule's father when I happened to pass him in the road yesterday.'<sup>141</sup> In Victorian fiction, it is an iconic space that bridges the gap between the solitary reading experience and the usual processes of everyday life. Judith does not visit the British Museum and its absence in *Reuben Sachs* serves to illustrate why this space is needed for socially marginalised figures. For real life Judith Quixanos, the room provides a space to activate socially-engaged responses to art in the immediate context of city life. Furthermore, it provides important links to late-Victorian publishing; it connects readers and writers to the resources of the book trade. As a 'general workshop, where in these days of much reading, much writing and competitive examinations, the great business of book-making, article-making, cramming, may be said to have their headquarters,'<sup>142</sup> the 'genuine student who loves knowledge for its own

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<sup>141</sup> George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed., John Goode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 20.

<sup>142</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' p. 222.

sake<sup>143</sup> has immediate access to the machinery driving the book market. This is, of course, useful for Amy Levy to not only read and write but also to network and publish. Levy's idea of a private Aesthetic praxis within public life accounts for the complex intersection between spatial, social and textual practices. While there is the clear-cut framework of private-within-public spaces, Levy envisions the room as providing further dimensions that bring different activities—typically considered polarised—together under one roof. In 'Radical Readers at the British Museum,' Susan David Bernstein argues that Levy 'redefines the Reading Room as a multi-dimensional space for apprehending different kinds of truth'<sup>144</sup> and envisions 'a multipurpose space, a knowledge factory, a club, a workhouse, thus melding together public and private, working and middle classes, scholarship and commercial production with social exchange.'<sup>145</sup> This interface of public space, subjective reading processes and conditions, and availability and accessibility of knowledge, figures a dynamic intersection that we do not usually associate with Aestheticism as a paradigm of potentially removed and individually cultivated sensibilities. Facilitating complex intersections beneath one roof, Levy hopes to draw further attention to the fact that cultural activities associated with Aestheticism are always already implicated within the social world against which it defines its most hermetic principles. Crucially, she hopes to align Aestheticism's fields of reception within the practices of 'the complex world [...] full of such fine problems.'<sup>146</sup> This, she hopes, will enable the common reader to reconcile socially- or ethically-engaged modes of response with the reach for subjective immersion or readerly enjoyment.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Bernstein, 'Radical Readers at the British Museum,' p.19.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> Levy, 'The New School of American Fiction', p. 513.

In "'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead": Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929,' Ruth Hoberman argues that:

Representations of women readers in the reading room respond in complex terms to the behaviour of actual women as well as to the layout of the room itself, as they serve to articulate shifting and conflicting views of the relationship between women and public life.<sup>147</sup>

'Readers at the British Museum' provides Levy's complex response to 'the layout of the room itself,' allowing her to envision a room which provides the reader with an individual desk within a public setting and that provides access to a wide variety of resources. Levy is careful not to pinpoint the woman visitor as the only beneficiary of this reified literary space and in doing so, integrates women's reading practices into a gender-neutral space, or at least, into a space that does not assume a threat from either masculine or feminine figures. Whilst referring to instances of disruption, she does not allude to specific types of reader; she simply condemns individuals who takes advantage of the library's open access, writing:

The room's very availability [...] has brought about such frequent abuse of the privilege of reading at the library, where many people have no scruple in taking up the time of the officials, or crowding out genuine workers from the desks in pursuit of such futilities as answers to word-competitions, chess-problems, or mere novel-reading.<sup>148</sup>

There is no mention of a gender battle here. Later Virginia Woolf would refer to scholarship within the reading room as 'a thought in the huge bald forehead',<sup>149</sup> thus depicting the dome as 'a recurring image for the conflation of knowledge and masculinity.'<sup>150</sup> As Woolf could not envision the reading room to be a gender-neutral space in the way that Levy could, she, along with other Modernist writers, would 'conceptualise themselves

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<sup>147</sup> Hoberman, "'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead": Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929', in *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, ed. by Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley (Toronto ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 171.

<sup>148</sup> Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum,' p.226.

<sup>149</sup> Hoberman, 'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead,' p.186.

<sup>150</sup> Hoberman, 'Women in the British Museum Reading Room During the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: From Quasi-to Counterpublic', *Feminist Studies*, 28 (2002): 507.

as outsiders, and write, insistently and productively, in rooms of their own.<sup>151</sup> From a slightly different position which was far more socially marginalised, Amy Levy, unlike Virginia Woolf, could not afford to turn her back on this civic institution. Woolf's ideas return us to elitist notions of private property and away from a space for cultural praxis in public life. Whilst Levy's account of the reading room might be over-determined and optimistic, it stems from her conviction that a wider support network was needed to meet economic and social expansion within late-19<sup>th</sup>-century capitalist London. In 'Women and Club Life,' Levy writes: 'We are in England, not in Utopia; it is the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and not the Golden Age.'<sup>152</sup> Further to this, by writing for *Atlanta*, her over-determined account of the reading room is pitched to a future generation of female users. Aware that her young readers knew no different, Levy hoped to 'sell' this optimistic account by way of encouraging their participation in the future. As a seven-year-old girl at the time this article was published, Virginia Woolf may well have been subscribed to *Atlanta*. Yet, as evidenced by Woolf's statement 'A Room of One's Own,' female writers of Modernism would reverse Levy's efforts to disrupt the traditional understanding of women's literature as 'domestic' or as symbolised from the Victorian period through into Modernism by the literary trope of the female artist claiming her own private space.

This observation extends into the wider differences between Amy Levy's commitment to pre-existing cultural frameworks at her disposal and Modernism's outright disregard for its cultural inheritance. As Angela Leighton observes, the very form of writing such as Woolf's would claim to

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<sup>151</sup> Hoberman, 'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead,' p.188.

<sup>152</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' p.537.

'dismiss its Victorian antecedents.'<sup>153</sup> Whilst Levy proposes that a wide range of human experience ought to be implicit and embedded in the texture of literature, Modernism would fear that the interchange between human experience and its artistic representation was on 'the verge of extinction.'<sup>154</sup> Modernist artists would strive to disassociate their work from public modes of reception for fear that public modes of response had become the art object itself. According to T.J Clarke, Modernism perceived 'qualities of intensity, depth, directness, vividness [...as] outlawed, or worse still, vulgarised and commodified, so that everywhere miniaturised and compressed kitsch images of them whirl by in the ether of information, as background to buying and selling.'<sup>155</sup> As such the Modernist aesthetic would resist public fields of response, so 'orange is blue, and pink is sea-green. And all the colours of the rainbow are black.'<sup>156</sup>

In contrast, Levy could not afford to resist public modes of expression and as such, her aesthetic is anchored to the everyday. As Karen Weismann notes, 'reality establishes the parameters of her voice.'<sup>157</sup> This is marked by Levy's acceptance of acknowledged fields of reception in late-Victorian England: she works within the boundaries of hermetic notions of readership. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Levy speaks to a readership—as it was then spuriously understood—but in doing so, articulates her dissatisfaction with it. This authorial strategy is evident throughout *Reuben Sachs*. Each chapter is preceded by an epigraph plucked from the breadth of the English literary canon. Drawing on a largely male selection of writers—including Tennyson,

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<sup>153</sup> This phrase is used in Angela Leighton, 'A guilty footnote: "Some like coffee, some like tea and some are never bored by Vernon Lee,"' *TLS*, (12 September 2003). (Though in practice, of course, it didn't. Woolf's style was, famously, parasitic on that of Pater).

<sup>154</sup> T.J Clark, 'Madame Matisse's Hat', *London Review of Books*, 14 August 2008, p.32.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Weisman, 'Playing with Figures,' p.60.

Matthew Arnold, Lord Byron, Goethe, Shakespeare, Swinburne and R.L. Stephenson—Levy panders to the idea of a homogeneous literary canon.<sup>158</sup> Yet, what this novel offers to the tradition challenges canonical expectations. In her essay, 'The Jew in Fiction' (1886), she campaigns for a more inclusive literary tradition, writing: 'It is curious, that, while the prominent position of the Jew is recognised as one of the characteristic features of English social life of the present day, so small a place should be allotted him in contemporary fiction.'<sup>159</sup> *Reuben Sachs* marks Levy's re-negotiation of the literary tradition: she works within it but introduces Jewish content. In the novel, she challenges canonical depictions of Jewish culture, mocking 'that elaborate misconception'<sup>160</sup> in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*.<sup>161</sup>

As is the case with her campaign to extend exclusive institutions into public ones, Levy's writings continually work with pre-existing materials at her authorial disposal before extending them; she works with canonical materials only to revise them. However, Melvyn New's edition of Levy's collected works undermines this idea, writing:

I believe that Levy's poetic voice is often too derivative and insubstantial to warrant reprinting until such a time as every scrap and fragment belonging to her becomes of interest. Hence the omission of 'Medea' and some thirty other poems from the present collection.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>158</sup> She even assumes a readership well-versed in these writers: on the initial publication of *Reuben Sachs* in 1889, citations do not support these epigraphs.

<sup>159</sup> Levy, 'The Jew in Fiction', in Bernstein, p.175. (This point is central to Nadia Valman's chapter on Amy Levy 'Fin-de-Siecle radical romance' in *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century literature*. Valman argues that Levy's critique of Jewish culture and 'the tension between the Jew's "tribal" and "wider" loyalties provided for new dynamic narrative fiction.' (Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century literature*, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)), p.78.)

<sup>160</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.63.

<sup>161</sup> Julia Neuberger puts this into context for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader: 'the novel must be seen in some senses as a riposte to George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which had been published in 1876 when Amy Levy was fifteen [...] *Daniel Deronda* shows its hero eventually setting off for Palestine with [...] passionate idealism [...] Almost all the Jews in *Daniel Deronda*, whether settled in the East End, or yearning to go to Palestine, have a certain Eastern glamour. It is not simplistic to see Amy Levy's novel as the reply, by a Jew, to George Eliot's intensely romantic vision of Anglo-Jewry. The description of different types of Victorian Jews in *Reuben Sachs* is written with consummate skill, by a still very young writer.' (Julia Neuberger, ed., 'Introduction,' *Reuben Sachs*, ((London: Persephone Books Ltd, 2001)), p.xiii.)

<sup>162</sup> New (ed), *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.14.

He misses the point: it is only the skeleton of Levy's work that is derivative. She draws on a body of inherited material and seeks to re-appropriate it. In 'Medea,' an example cited in my introduction, Levy seeks to (re)appropriate the Medea myth, which was receiving renewed critical attention in the late-Victorian period. Common versions of the myth depict Medea as a malevolent and violent female figure who persecuted others—particularly men—without reason. This goes against the grain of feminist thought and as Edward Philips notes, Amy Levy's portrayal of Medea seeks to rediscover her as 'a resource of resistance and a narrative of displacement, through which she could examine the gender and racial politics of the late Victorian period and her own status as a culturally marginalised Other.'<sup>163</sup> So, whilst appearing to be offering simply another version of the Medea myth, she is engaged in a much more complex exercise. In the first stanza, Levy gives Medea a voice: this is markedly different to other appropriations in which she is a peripheral presence and her alleged victims are the narrative focus.<sup>164</sup> As the monologue form of Medea's speech suggests, she is alone and suffering from social exclusion. She feels 'confined/ In limits of conception'<sup>165</sup> and as such, Levy strives to set the record straight by depicting her as a victim of her social isolation. Towards the end of the poem, she questions: 'Why am I here? Why have I fled from death?'<sup>166</sup> The other speakers in the poem suppose her dead, but having evaded it, she enters a new space somewhere between life and death; it is a space that is lost

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<sup>163</sup> Edward Philips, 'Amy Levy's "Medea": Hellenism and Anarchy', in *Medea: Mutations & Permutations of a Myth* (University of Bristol, July 2006), p.1.

<sup>164</sup> For an example of how Medea is at the periphery of the other narratives, see Vernon Lee's spoof 'Medea,' 'Amour Dure.' I will discuss this story in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>165</sup> Levy, 'Medea (A FRAGMENT IN DRAMA FORM, AFTER EURIPIDES),' *A Minor Poet And other Verse*, (T. Fisher Unwin: London, 1891), p.35.

<sup>166</sup> Levy, 'Medea,' p.56.

to language, but at the same time, dependent on it. This accounts for her questioning sense of dislocation. As Jeanette Winterson has noted in a recent article in *The Times*: 'I suppose the writers who find a way of saying what resists all saying, find a way into the empty space and the points of light, allowing death to be both the wholly private and personal experience it must be, and yet a collective happening.'<sup>167</sup> Levy presents Medea with the task of finding her way through an empty space in order to articulate her social displacement: without an audience, but with the tools with which to address one, she is left to 'go [...] forth/ Into the deep, dense heart of the night—alone.'<sup>168</sup>

This is symbolic of Levy's own plight. Evidently 'a controller of her own resources,' she deploys language to address the tradition from which she feels excluded with commendable precision; but her feminist concerns sit in direct tension to established forms, thus creating a sense of narrative displacement. As Goody notes, in Levy's writings: 'the traditional or classical sits in tension with the modernizing force of the subject matter and point of view.'<sup>169</sup> In 'Cambridge in the Long,' this tension is drawn closer to Levy's personal experiences of social exclusion. The question 'why am I here?' recurs as she looks at the University whilst lying on the college grass. She understands it is not the place that is alien—it is 'known of old and dear'<sup>170</sup>—but rather, the modernizing forces of the city that have changed and threaten to de-familiarise convention. At the end of the poem, she writes: 'The strenuous life of yesterday/ Calleth me back

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<sup>167</sup> Jeanette Winterson, 'Jeanette Winterson looks to books to shed some light on grief,' *The Times*, (Friday, May 16, 2008).

<sup>168</sup> Levy, 'Medea,' p.57.

<sup>169</sup> Goody, 'Murder in Mile End,' p.471.

<sup>170</sup> Levy, 'Cambridge in the Long,' in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.397.



again.<sup>171</sup> In her posthumously published collection of poems, *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*—in which ‘Cambridge in the Long’ appears—she celebrates the city as fertile ground for her creative development<sup>172</sup> as the first half of the collection’s epigraph states: ‘Mine is an urban Muse.’<sup>173</sup>

This asserts a challenge to the neo-Bucolic belief that the rural is the *mis-en-scene* for literary inventiveness and as such, finds her participating within the Baudelairian tradition, which, through metropolitan reverie, had already begun to overwrite the recessive idea that the city is detrimental to creativity. Yet, Levy has to initiate a reworking of the tradition in which she wants to participate. Baudelaire had accounted for ‘the trope of the male flaneur [which] can encompass an urban cultural field, populated with figures that vary from the literary bohemian, the tourist, the exile, and the rag-picker to the institutions of state power.’<sup>174</sup> He had not, as Parsons notes, accounted for the New Woman figure, who demanded ‘greater access to public urban spaces.’<sup>175</sup>

Consequently, the city largely remained the domain of the male writer, who observed the New Woman, in the same way as a prostitute, as spectacle and subject for masculinist, naturalistic study. The modern woman, living and working independently in the city, was a new visible presence in its streets [...] the meaning of the label ‘public woman’ was not so much redefined as doubled, and the modern woman was herself classed as deviant.<sup>176</sup>

In claiming that her muse is an urban one, Levy attempts to preserve her creativity and intellectual integrity whilst stepping out of the home and the generic constraints of domestic fiction to which female writers had been all-

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> In her poem, ‘A London Plane-Tree,’ this is symbolised by the plane-tree, which thrives in the city, unlike the other trees: ‘Green is the plane-tree in the square,/ The other trees are brown;/ They droop and pine for country air;/ The plane-tree loves the town.’ (Levy, ‘A London Plane-Tree,’ in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.385.

<sup>173</sup> This is a couplet from Austin Dobson’s Poem, ‘On London Stones’: ‘Mine is an urban Muse, and bound/ By some strange law to paven ground.’ As Parsons notes: ‘In Dobson’s poem, these words are spoken by the poet-persona who wishes for country air to purify and inspire his imagination but, once there, finds that his muse can only survive in the city.’ (Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p.89).

<sup>174</sup> Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p.82.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.83.

too-often shackled. Yet, as Parsons argues, Levy's 'identification of herself as an urban woman with an urban muse [...] is also a wishful one.'<sup>177</sup> Levy is aware of her entrance into a tradition to which she does not really belong.

As a result, often her female speakers get lost in the city streets; enter 'the deep, dark night—alone.' This 'getting lost' links to a wider observation made by Karen Weismann: she argues that Levy 'highlights the inextricable relationship of the conditions of reciprocity to the meaning of one's subjectivity.'<sup>178</sup> Levy's city-born subjectivity is lost within the male-centric Baudelairian Aesthetic tradition: it cannot engage in the same sort of metropolitan reverie; instead, it can only register Levy's anxiety of being unsafe within the city. Therefore, Levy exposes her figures to the city's dangers. In *The Romance of a Shop*, this is documented with brutal realism. When Gertrude goes to her first photography shoot, her emotional faculties are stultified, literally blinded by the flash of the camera: 'the tall, stooping, sinewy figure [...] formed a picture which imprinted itself as a flash on Gertrude's overwrought consciousness, and was destined not to fade for many days to come.'<sup>179</sup> Here, modernizing advancements of city life redefine Gertrude's female subjectivity. Gertrude becomes subject to a new aesthetic sensibility in which feeling is produced from the same forces that are considered dangerous, particularly when exposed to women. The flash which imprints itself on Gertrude's consciousness is a metaphor for Levy's re-configured aesthetic sensibility. In her poem, 'Alma Mater' her speaker declares: 'The city I do love the

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>178</sup> Weisman, 'Playing with Figures,' p.69.

<sup>179</sup> Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, ed., Susan David Bernstein, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), p.87.

best/ Wherein my heart was heaviest!<sup>180</sup> Her aesthetic sensibility is anchored to the Baudelairian tradition but as a female Jew, Levy is marginalised and oppressed by the site that resources the tradition's creativity. Throughout her works, Levy strives to reconcile this tension: she demands that women be ascribed a space not only in the city but also in the literature that represents it. This brings us back to Levy's ideal institutional model—as perceived in the British Museum Reading Room or the women's club—which acts as platform between domestic and urban life; marginalised and public figures. In her campaign for a wider literary culture—one that promotes the diversity of city life—Levy asserts that socially inclusive institutions (such as libraries and reading rooms) must be provided within the metropolis.

To furnish her campaign, in her essay 'The New School of American Fiction,' Levy undermines Henry James' hermetic narrative style. As could be seen in 'The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum,' the perceived object merely serves as a means to the gazer's ends: the aesthetic fails to link us to a broader sphere of meaning; it resists public modes of reception. The same happens in James' *The Tragic Muse*: the actress Miriam Rooth is portrayed through the perception of others. Rather than address the concerns of the actress, these accounts serve to reinforce the pre-existing ideological beliefs of the characters who observe her. All this, Levy feels, enables James to create narratives that are totalizing and finite: meaning is dismembered from the perceived object. She argues that James' narrative style limits us to a mere 'fragment of the eternal

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<sup>180</sup> Levy, 'Alma Mater,' in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.395.

truth we are contemplating.<sup>181</sup> For Levy, the fragmentary ending renders James' narrative provincial because it does not account for the diversity of city life; its 'simplicity and moral greatness'<sup>182</sup> is all-too-easily reached. As a result, she attempts to write James' works out of city literature by branding his urban aesthetic provincial for: 'what may fairly be complained of is that intense self-consciousness, that offensive attitude of critic and observer, above all that aggressive contemplation of the primrose which pervades his work.'<sup>183</sup> Failing to account for a growing array of concerns—the ever-growing concerns of an increasingly diverse readership—Levy considers it a degenerative literature: 'And in this finiteness lies the germ of decay. This is the heaviest charge we make against the new literature; it is a literature of decay.'<sup>184</sup>

Unlike James' idiosyncratic narrative, Levy links her writings towards other narratives, other spheres of meaning. The end of *Reuben Sachs* is perhaps the best example of this: she takes the focus away from Judith's perspective and towards a more philosophical, questioning ending that addresses a future generation: 'The ways of joy like the ways of sorrow are many; and hidden in the depths of Judith's life—though as yet she knows it not—is the germ of another life, which shall quicken, grow, and come forth at last.'<sup>185</sup> The word 'germ' here is a term that James uses in his self-criticism to describe the origins of his narrative plot. To give way to another 'germ,' another narrative, undermines James' closed-off fragmentary ending. Thus, Realism, for Levy, is the embodiment of a broad network of narratives. This forms part of Levy's campaign to

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<sup>181</sup> Levy, 'The New School of American Fiction', p.512

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.517.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 512.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.517.

<sup>185</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.148.

account for a wider reading public: a network of different meanings addresses the diverse concerns of an eclectic reader-response network. The material extension of this can be seen in her ideal civic institution, the Reading Room at the British Museum. As discussed, the room provides a 'multi-dimensional space for apprehending different kinds of truths.'<sup>186</sup> Not only does it embody Levy's campaign for a wider reading public, it accounts also for the mechanics of literary production, which brings the 'germs' of these narratives into fruition. She hopes this will prompt a literary tradition which promotes the diversity of city life.

Levy's attempt to promote a heterogeneous readership and a representatively diverse canon neatly coincides with developments in the late-Victorian publishing industry. John Feather observes that late-Victorian publishing had to start 'conducting its affairs in a businesslike manner [...] dealing with different interest groups within it and around it.'<sup>187</sup> This ties in well with her envisioning of a reader-response network at the Reading Room at the British Museum, which she celebrates as a headquarters for the book-making industry. For in demanding institutional support and material wealth in the consumption of art, she registers a demand for this level of support in the production of it. Her acute understanding of the complex intersections between spatial, social and textual practices within her re-theorisation of Aestheticism, prepares Levy for the rapid developments in the literary market. According to Margaret D. Stetz, this self-conscious awareness was essential for writers who wanted to command the late-Victorian market; they 'had to be aware of

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<sup>186</sup> Bernstein, 'Radical Readers at the British Museum,' p.17.

<sup>187</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, (London: Routledge, 1988) p.179; quoted in Margaret Stetz, 'Publishing industries and practices,' in Gail Marshall, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.113.

the market that might engulf or support them.<sup>188</sup> To a certain extent, the interplay between her fiction and non-fiction provides a way for Levy to assert her responsiveness to changes in the marketplace. The interchange between her novels and journal articles finds Levy constructing a self-referential presence in the literary marketplace of which her works would span the breadth. Furthermore, Levy's authorial strategies coincide with the 'promotional relationship between journalism and literary publishing,'<sup>189</sup> which Stetz feels 'was crucial to the 1890s.'<sup>190</sup>

Behind the scenes, Levy's awareness of the literary market is evidenced through her attention to the material embodiments and textual conditions of her own work. In a letter to Macmillan dated three months before the publication of her second novel, Amy Levy writes: 'in the matter of binding [...whilst] *The Aspern Papers* with its double gold lines and dark cloth very nicely got up [...] dark red cloth, not blue [would be more suitable] for *Reuben Sachs*.'<sup>191</sup> In the end, Macmillan opted for a dark green cover, but nevertheless, Levy's letter shows her considering how the binding could affect the novel's critical reception and convey its intertextual relationship with Henry James' popular novella, published a year earlier by Macmillan. Like *The Aspern Papers*, *Reuben Sachs* became widely available in the form of a one-volume novel. This finds Levy responding to the technological developments affecting the production of printed texts in the late-19<sup>th</sup>- century, particularly 'the factory-like conditions of mass production created by high-volume and high-speed papermaking, typesetting, printing and binding.'<sup>192</sup> There is nothing to suggest that

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<sup>188</sup> Gail Marshall, 'Introduction,' *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>189</sup> Margaret Stetz, 'Publishing industries and practices,' p. 127.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Letter from Amy Levy to Macmillan (October 29, 1888); quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p.143.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

Macmillan forced Levy to produce a one-volume novel, but she would have known that this short literary form could best command the market, meeting not only developments in production but also in consumption. As Oscar Wilde's review confirms, Levy successfully works within the limitations of the one-volume form: 'its absence of any single superfluous word, make it, in some sort, a classic.'<sup>193</sup> In this way, Levy's work is representative of the one-volume novel marking the sell-by-date of the labyrinth sentence and death of the three-decker novel.<sup>194</sup> Accordingly, Levy extends readership to those with less time to properly engage with this antiquated, complex aesthetic.

Levy's command of the marketplace is further evidenced by the way she perceives the publication of her first two novels, *The Romance of a Shop* and *Reuben Sachs*.<sup>195</sup> In a letter to Vernon Lee, in the months preceding the publication of both, she writes:

I am working hard, correcting proofs & writing. I think there is some stuff in the novel on wh. [*sic.*] I am at work, but I don't care much for the other one [...]. You mustn't pitch into me about it—it fills its own aims, more or less & I have purposely held in my hand.<sup>196</sup>

Published within three months of each other, Levy sought to profit from the closely-timed publication of her works: provided that *The Romance of a Shop* gained positive reviews and sales, 'the way [would be] paved for Reuben.'<sup>197</sup> It is clear that Levy considered *Reuben Sachs* to be her most serious novel, accomplishing more than its predecessor, which she

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<sup>193</sup> Wilde, 'Amy Levy,' in *The Woman's World* (1890): 52.

<sup>194</sup> The death of the three-decker novel is a complicated process: whilst it was sudden, it cannot be linked to any direct cause. For example, texts had been mass produced some twenty to thirty years before the three-decker fell off production lines. Perhaps my sociological argument about a metropolitan readership—with less time on their hands—is more convincing than an economic one.

<sup>195</sup> *The Romance of a Shop* was published by Fisher Unwin in early October 1888. *Reuben Sachs* was published by Macmillan in January 1889.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from Amy Levy to Vernon Lee, in Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 268.

<sup>197</sup> In a letter to her friend Katie Solomon in November, 1888, she writes: 'The reviews [for *The Romance of a Shop*] continue mildly good, but as they are evidently written by fools I don't much care, except for sales purposes; & it's as well to have the way paved for Reuben.' (Ibid., p. 270).

regarded as nothing more than a successful submission to the commercial demands of late-Victorian publishing.<sup>198</sup> The fact that the novel would be published by Macmillan was appropriate. As John Feather maintains, Macmillan, 'were committed to publishing serious books as a serious business proposition'<sup>199</sup> and this ethos would frame the novel's critical attention. For its potentially offensive, subversive Jewish content, it is apt that Macmillan did not allow their 'political and religious opinions'<sup>200</sup> to 'prevent them from publishing worthwhile books which could make a profit.'<sup>201</sup> It was inevitable that the novel's publication would attract a degree of controversy.<sup>202</sup> For Macmillan this unreserved strategy 'was seen as the key to success in the market;<sup>203</sup> furthermore, they were aware that controversy could generate sales.

Under Macmillan, the novel became widely available. As the range of prices advertised in national newspapers at the time illustrates, Macmillan 'was highly responsive to demand, able to create luxury editions or the cheapest form available to the mass market.'<sup>204</sup> For instance, the *Daily News* advertised the novel as six shillings for the first edition, whilst *The Pall Mall Gazette* advertised the second edition at three shillings and six pence.<sup>205</sup> The appendage, 'one of the most charming of the cheap

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<sup>198</sup> Levy was aware of what Guy and Small describe as: 'the late nineteenth-century literary market was ruthlessly competitive and commercial, and that professional writers who needed to earn a living with their pen were in no place to resist or even contest those values.' (Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde's Profession, Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* ((Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000)), p.10).

<sup>199</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2006), p.104.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> As a loyal contributor to *The Jewish Chronicle*, it is remarkable that the publication did not review Levy's work; they probably did not want to create hostility towards Levy and her future contributions.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Marshall, (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>205</sup> As Simon Eliot informs, 'For the historian the price of a book is a very revealing piece of information [...] it can suggest something of the costs of materials and production, the nature and size of the publication, the length of the print run and often, and most important, the market at which the book was aimed.' (Simon Eliot, *Some patterns and trends in British Publishing 1800-1919*, ((London : Bibliographical Society, 1994)), p. 59).



editions,<sup>206</sup> to the *Pall Mall* advertisement goes on to suggest the availability of some less charming editions on the market. Representing a relatively new media phenomenon, the advertisements of *Reuben Sachs* in newspapers and periodicals demonstrate the way in which Macmillan's business ethos advocated 'the sort of promotional arrangement between journalism and literary publishing,' to which I have referred already. As mentioned, this coincides with the interplay between her fictional and non-fictional works: manipulating both forums, she accepts the marketing conditions required to assert her presence to a broad audience. It represents the way Levy's writings deftly blend forms of mass produced culture with those of high-art. For her readers, her economic one-volume form meets consumer demands but as her attention to 'that frugal closeness of style' illustrates, she does not bow out of Paterian Aesthetic circles. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this point is the contrast between Levy's *Reuben Sachs* and *The Tragic Muse* in which James attempts to elevate the novel to the status of high-art by engaging in a complex compositional process.<sup>207</sup> Common in three-decker novels such as James' *The Tragic Muse* are sentence constructions such as:

Moreover he pitied her for being without the interests and consolations he himself had found substantial: those of intellectual, the studious order he considered these to be, not knowing how much she supposed she reflected and studied and what an education she had found in her political aspirations, viewed by him as scarce more a personal part of her than the livery of her servants or the jewels George Dallow's money had brought.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> 'Today's New Books,' *Pall Mall Gazette*, (July 30, 1889).

<sup>207</sup> Published in 1890, the novel appeared at a time when James' sales had not been doing very well. 'When it came to book publication in Britain (no British magazine having taken it on), James' shaky position was brought home to him in March 1890. Macmillan, his English publisher through the 1880s, had not done very well out of James' books, and offered, even when pressed, only a £70 advance on the grounds of James' unprofitability, compared with £500 on *The Bostonians* and £400 on *The Princess Casamassima* [...] The book came out in England and the US in June 1890, and William James wrote enthusiastically—only doubting it would be a bestseller: "As for the question of the size of you public," he said, "I tremble." (Philip Horne, ed., 'Introduction' in *The Tragic Muse* ((London: Penguin, 1995)), p.xii).

<sup>208</sup> Henry James, *The Tragic Muse*, ed., Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 1995), p.285.

In contrast, in Levy's single-volume novels, shorter sentences are much more common. This quote here is similar to my example of James in both content and length, but is broken into shorter sentences:

The practical, if not the theoretical, teaching of her life had been to treat as absurd any close or strong feeling which had not its foundations in material interests. There must be no undue giving away of one's self in friendship, in the pursuit of ideas, in charity, in a public cause. Only gushing fools did that sort of thing, and their folly generally met with its reward.<sup>209</sup>

Levy is less concerned with stylistic complexity and more concerned with extending Aestheticism to a broader reading public. By negotiating her creativity and intellectual integrity through the shorter novel-form, Levy provides aesthetic satisfaction to those outside both its limited notion of readership and its supportive yet exclusive institutional settings.<sup>210</sup>

A materialist to her fingers' end, Levy articulates her statements on readership, purism and textual practice by reworking pre-existing materials at her disposal. She re-theorises Aestheticism by using its subversive designs as a means to her own end; she extends the private institution to the public by taking features from the closed-off study and the city streets; she initiates a gendered reworking of the Baudelairian Aesthetic tradition and then, she goes on to ensure that these statements are delivered to a broader reading public by commanding the resources of the literary market. Brought together, this multi-layered strategy enables Levy to re-theorise Paterian Aestheticism in a way that both critiques and exemplifies her authorial aims. The interplay between her fiction and non-fiction is important for

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<sup>209</sup> Levy, *Reuben Sachs*, p.112.

<sup>210</sup> This is not to say that all one volume novels were concise: this is seen in the 'purple passages' in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

supporting this endeavour. In her critical works such as 'The New School of American Fiction' Levy self-consciously asserts her view that an all-too-intellectualized form of writing disconnects with the 'everyday' and resists being accessible to a broad reading public. When assigning her fictional works to the mass market, Levy's negotiations with it exemplify her desire to co-operate with the types of readers anticipated within it. The form of her works embodies a more accessible aesthetic that might accommodate a broader class of readers. Beyond her concerns with form, this interplay works on a socially referential level: her essay 'Women and Club Life' defends female participation (or a female voice) within the arts and this same demand is suggestively registered right across her fictional works. Not only does this interplay demonstrate the way in which Levy was aware of the interdependent relationship between theory and its material extensions, this interplay testifies that Levy is a 'controller of her own resources.' This draws us back to her demand for society's recognition of female participation within late-Victorian urban life. She reminds us that: 'No great performance in art or science can justly be expected from a class which is debarred from the inestimable advantages of a corporate social life.'<sup>211</sup> In stating this, she removes women from being consigned to domestic fiction and paves the way for their entrance into new genres as professional writers, who benefit from a strong awareness of a modern market that 'might engulf or support them': 'But it is to the professional woman, when all is said, that [all this...] offers the most substantial advantages.'<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' p.533.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p.536.

This study presents Amy Levy as a writer who took every precaution whilst negotiating her way through late-Victorian literary culture, with a view to making it 'better and fuller' for a broader range of readers and writers. In checking how fool-proof Levy's authorial campaign is, however, we must ask the question: are her ideas of the institution over-determined? Is she too optimistic about the role that the institution can play in extending participation in literary culture to a broader public? Her suicide and posthumous fall from print seem to confirm the rhetorical tone of these questions. Furthermore, the literary trope of the female artist claiming her own private room overwrites Levy's campaign. Does Levy deserve her relative obscurity, which is inferred in her title as Minor Poet? In her poem, 'A Minor Poet,' she writes: 'Why play with figures?'<sup>213</sup> This is a good question, which rhetorically implies that there is no point in re-negotiating fixed forms, for the 'The world's a rock, and I will beat it no more.'<sup>214</sup> Yet, despite asking this question, across the breadth of her oeuvre, this is exactly what she does. Perhaps posterity was not a key priority for Levy; instead 'playing with figures' provides a way to survive as a writer in the late-Victorian city, in which mobility was key. The first stanza of her Baudelairian poem 'Ballade of an Omnibus' reinforces this concluding point of my first chapter:

Some men to carriages aspire;  
Some mount the trotting steed, elate.  
I envy not the rich and great,  
A wandering minstrel, poor and free,  
I am contented with my fate—  
An omnibus suffices me.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Levy, 'A Minor Poet,' in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.372.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Levy, 'Ballade of an Omnibus,' in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p.386.

Chapter Two: The art of reading: the role of the scholar and the reading public in Vernon Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism

In a relatively recent article in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Angela Leighton notes: 'With "a new aesthetics" in the air, "beauty" a word again to be conjured with, and the role of the intellectual being reassessed, Vernon Lee would seem to have found her moment.'<sup>216</sup> In the context of discussing the works of Vineta Colby and Christa Zorn—both Lee scholars seeking to recover the seemingly forgotten turn-of-the-century writer into the canon—Leighton suggests that Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism complements the aims of contemporary scholarship. In her wide-ranging body of critical and fictional works, Lee seeks to challenge the hierarchies that govern literary culture and, towards the end of her career, expresses little regard for how this might affect her relationship with a readership undergoing 'a profound shift in tastes and interests at the turn of the century'<sup>217</sup>: 'I know my writings tend more and more towards the soliloquy.'<sup>218</sup> Accepting her place 'outside' the overarching tastes of the late-Victorian reading public, Vernon Lee furnishes the contemporary critic's campaign for the redefinition of canon formations through the recovery of forgotten writers. Leighton concludes the article stating:

If the idea of Lee as 'Victorian Female Intellectual' still remains to be explored, so too, by implication, might that of the intellectual today: remembering Vernon Lee at the beginning of the twenty-first century might offer some ways to reconsider the complexities of the former as well as the difficulties of the latter. In the end, Lee's voice may not be among those in high prophetic wilderness, but whichever room it comes from, it is still [...] well worth a rehearing today.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Angela Leighton, 'A guilty footnote: "Some like coffee, some like tea and some are never bored by Vernon Lee,"' *TLS*, (12 September 2003).

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Lee to Maurice Baring (25 January 1906); quoted in Vineta Colby, *The Singular Anomaly. Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century*, (New York & London: University Press, 1970), p.293.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

Leighton's employment of the word 'rehearing' aptly echoes Vernon Lee's description of the way the reader ought to behave. Through what Lee terms 'reiterated perception',<sup>220</sup> the 'reader' participates in a process that demands repeated consultation with the aesthetic object. It is expected that during each 'rehearing' the perceiving subject will refine his (or her) initial affective response: 'we may have to substitute for the old picture of the printed page left ("registered") in consciousness, a movement originally set up in the act of first perception, and repeated with variations, in every subsequent or reminiscence.'<sup>221</sup> This, Lee argues, creates the preconditions for the reader to understand the cultural context of the art object and to attend to the writer's concerns, a relationship which Lee feels 'complete[s] [a] work of literary art.'<sup>222</sup> If we think of contemporary scholarship (and the readers it will seek to guide) as analogous to this 'single' reader engaged in 'reiterated perception,' Leighton's proposal for Lee's deserved 'rehearing' would confirm not only that 'Vernon Lee would seem to have found her moment' but also that many of the methods we use in the act of 'recovering' writers of the past are similar to those used by Lee herself.

In her attempts to ground our understanding of cultural art objects, she campaigns for the revival of 'evocations and personalities'<sup>223</sup> from their originating historical moment(s). In her recent literary biography of Edith Wharton, Hermione Lee introduces Vernon Lee, Wharton's acquaintance, by succinctly summarising her distinctive historiographical style of writing: 'She loved to lure the reader into a historical moment through evocations

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<sup>220</sup> Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1913), p.53.

<sup>221</sup> Quoted in Beer 117-18.

<sup>222</sup> In the *Handling of Words*, Lee writes: 'I conceived the actual book or poem or essay to be but a portion of the complete work of literary art, whose completion depends upon the response of the Reader to the suggestions of the Writer.' (Lee, 'On Style' in *The Handling of Words*, p.35).

<sup>223</sup> Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p.99.

and personalities, and then let the figures of the past linger like ghosts.<sup>224</sup> As David G. Rowlands notes in his eccentric introduction to his 2002 edition of *Hauntings*, Lee is at her most 'outstanding'<sup>225</sup> in her supernatural tales because this particular literary form provides a forum to 'bring [...] the ghosts of the past so completely into the present.'<sup>226</sup> Lee uses the supernatural to forge a sense of interaction between the reader and the writer because the extent to which these ghosts haunt 'is dependent at least as much on your imagination as on that of the author.'<sup>227</sup> Interaction between the reader and the writer is crucial to Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism because it enables us to interrogate how we know the past, and the extent to which the past can be made present to us.

In this chapter, I will examine the way Lee's critical work persuades us to think about the affective dynamics of literary engagement from a perspective which takes into account the complex three-way relationship between the writer, reader and art object. This reader-response framework, in both her fictional and critical works, amounts to a performative aesthetic. In *The Gospels of Anarchy* (1908), Lee conceived that 'in such of us as not merely live, think and feel what life is and might be, there is enacted an inner drama full of conflicting emotions, long drawn out through the years, and, in many cases, never brought to a conclusion.'<sup>228</sup> As I will examine, this 'enacted inner drama' is most theatrical in her supernatural tales, in which Lee's performative aesthetic works to review the assumed relationship between aesthetic form and its social utility. The generic characteristics of the supernatural enable Lee to

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> David G. Rowlands, 'Introduction' in Lee, *Hauntings: the supernatural stories*. (Ashcroft, B.C.: Ash-Tree, 2002), p.ix.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (1908). (Doylestown, PA: Wildside Press, 2006), p.9.

initiate the link between aesthetic value (as she defines it) and what it unexpected.

Shafquat Towheed's recent work on Lee's relationship with her reading public points out that whilst 'the interaction, even interdependence, of her fictional and non-fictional writing is indisputable [and productive...]' Lee wrote and published in a continuously evolving literary marketplace where the open fields of writing were becoming increasingly crowded and specialised.<sup>229</sup> I will consider Towheed's view that Lee's response to the 'conflicting demands of artistic esteem versus commercial value'<sup>230</sup> determines her relationship with her reading public and at the same time initiates the 'evolution of her often ambivalent aesthetic, critical and moral response to the purpose [of writing and reading]'.<sup>231</sup> I will examine how Lee's own attempts to cross disparate disciplines and modes of writing in her re-theorisation of Aestheticism challenges the idea that art's role is restricted to 'the palace of art alone'<sup>232</sup> and how, in offering an alternative role, she attempts to demonstrate art's position within a fluid, multi-disciplinary cultural arena.<sup>233</sup>

I will study the way she directs responsibility to the reader and the writer, arguing that their co-operation in overcoming the boundaries which separate them as individual participants in the praxis of aesthetic

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<sup>229</sup> Shafquat Towheed, 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions": Vernon Lee, Popular Fiction, and Theories of Reading,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 60:2 (2005): 201.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Kate Hext, 'Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater: "Antithetical Scholar of Understanding's End,"' in *Literature Compass* 5 (2008): 412. Hext uses this phrase to comment on the way scholarship concerned with the works of Walter Pater has 'succeeded in [...] highlighting that Paterian aesthetics are not explicable within the palace of art alone.' According to Hext, this registers 'shifting cultural contexts' in our renewed understanding of Pater's aesthetics' (Ibid) and in the same way, as Angela Leighton notes, our understanding of Lee's aesthetics benefit from this too. Lee's relationship with Paterian Aestheticism is complex and an examination of this will enrich our understanding of Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism. In fact, in the article, Hext suggests that Lee's quest for an infinitive, inconclusive Aestheticism is similar to Pater's. (See Kate Hext, 'Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater,' p.418).

<sup>233</sup> In this context, I will discuss the influence of Ian Small's work later in this chapter.



engagement (especially languid reading habits), will ensure that art is returned to (what she regards) the 'living flexibility of human knowledge.'<sup>234</sup> For if Amy Levy is most concerned about how we might create a broader, more socially inclusive literary culture, Vernon Lee is concerned about how the relationship between a given reader and a given writer affects our engagement with the art object. As I will argue, Lee goes onto prescribe the sort of relationship that should be obtained between the reader and the writer. In attempting to create precise pre-conditions for the ethical praxis of aesthetic consumption, Lee campaigns for the reader to co-operate with the writer, to become the writer's accomplice. As Kristin Mahoney notes, Lee hopes that this sort of relationship will 'lead to the loss of mastery, dominance and control on the part of the subject.'<sup>235</sup> In this way, Lee demands that the art object is not subordinated to the fluctuating whims of the public; she demands that its historically-specific locus—which includes the concerns of the artist—is taken into consideration. As I will spend most of this chapter explaining, she challenges any constraints that might hamper readerly co-operation.

As such, I will consider the way Lee brings together ideas of co-operation, interaction and fluid systems of knowledge in her attempt to recover 'the ghosts of the past.' The 'loss of mastery' in this act of 'recovery' is productive for feminist critics such as Talia Schaffer (and critics of queer theory such as Stefano Evangelista) who seek to understand the gendering of Aestheticism and rethink the role of those considered 'outsiders' by their literary culture. Furthermore, it raises

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<sup>234</sup>Shafquat Towheed writes: 'In *Baldwin* she argues for the living flexibility of human knowledge—that our minds are "neither empty nor inactive," that they are filled with "already assimilated contents" and yet, despite the surplus of information and experience around us, still capable of the instinct of "fresh assimilation" (Lee, *Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations* ((London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1886)) *Baldwin*, p. 301),' in Shafquat Towheed, 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions,"' p. 236.

<sup>235</sup> Kristin Mahoney, 'Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption,' in *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*. 48 (Winter 2006): 43.

questions of retrospective periodization: as I will discuss in greater depth later in this chapter, directing mastery away from the subject is a technique deployed by Modernism to promote Aesthetic autonomy. Whether we ought to consider Lee as a Victorian, post-Victorian or Modernist writer is brought into question. Towards the end of this chapter, I will endeavour to consider the importance of retrospective periodization in terms of our understanding of Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism. Studying Lee in this way will, of course, be in line with those other modern critics who wish to 'recover' her, and will extend my depiction of her as a writer who seeks to revise our understanding of Aestheticism. As the theories Lee endeavours to revise are once again being reassessed, it would seem, as Leighton notes, she has 'found her moment.' However, whether Vernon Lee is a writer worthy of a 'full recovery'— which would draw her into a canon that underpins our understanding of Aestheticism— will be a point I will also consider in the latter part of this chapter.

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In Walter Pater's 1889 essay 'Style,' the idea that an engaged aesthetic response is exclusive to the 'scholar and his scholarly conscience' is problematic for Lee. As discussed in chapter one, Amy Levy also articulates her dissatisfaction towards the insularity and social elitism of Paterian Aestheticism, calling for its extension into a broader range of public contexts. Lee's feeling of discontent towards Pater stems from a slightly different concern. The degree of mastery that Pater lends to the scholar and the system to which he belongs is a great source of anxiety to Lee. In 'Style,' Pater says: '[the scholar's] sense of fact, in history, especially, and in all those complex subjects which do but lie on the borders of science, will still take the place of fact, in

various degrees.<sup>236</sup> This finds Pater suggesting an empiricist notion of history (the idea that history could be a science). In suggesting this, paradoxically, he moves history away from science (as it was then understood) and towards a more personal notion of facts as defined by the scholar's persona. This pushes us towards Pater's idea that 'your historian, for instance'<sup>237</sup> must gather his sense of 'truth' by a 'must needs select'<sup>238</sup> approach:

Your historian, for instance, with absolutely truthful intention, amid the multitude of facts presented to him must needs select, and in selecting assert something of his own humour, something that comes not of the world without but of a vision within.<sup>239</sup>

Asserting his 'own humour,' the scholar's engagement with cultural artefacts (whether a novel, portrait or concerto) is determined by a solipsistic human experience.

In 'On Style' (1913), an essay published in *The Handling of Words* (1923), Vernon Lee writes: 'Pater [demonstrates...] the tendency to note [...] the emotion caused by an object in himself [rather] than [...] reproduce the object and trust [...] its reproducing [...] impressions.'<sup>240</sup> The idea that the concept of 'truth' is determined (when understood in the context of Pater's quasi-scientific language of fact) by the individual scholar's interior 'vision' is problematic for Lee who felt that art went beyond the individual and that aesthetic value did not rest with his or her hedonistic desires.<sup>241</sup> As the essays in Philip Dodd's *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact* argue, Pater's Aesthetic rests on 'the objective "givens" of experience (ideas or individuals), and [...ensures that he can] co-opt or turn that Other[ness of the text] into a reordered reflection of his

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<sup>236</sup> Pater, 'Style,' in *Appreciations*, (London and New York: Macmillan and Co.,1890), p.5.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p. 39.

<sup>241</sup> As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, Vernon Lee does not fully consider the broader implications of Pater's work.

own image.<sup>242</sup> Brought about by the scholar's personal selection of facts, this 'reordered reflection' objectifies his personal experience. This engenders an Aestheticism that confirms the status, values and identity of its practitioners.

Sharpening her knife, in 'On Style,' Lee attacks Pater for what she sees as a methodologically-groundless theorisation of Aestheticism, arguing that he 'seem[s] to pass in a trance through the steps of an argument and awake only at its conclusion.'<sup>243</sup> Lee has a point. The word 'truth,' for instance, appears nineteen times in 'Style' and we are told that without it 'there can be no merit, no craft at all.'<sup>244</sup> However, Pater never defines it: he either repeats it or points us in the direction of synonymous phrases, such as the scholar's sense—and the scholar's modification—of facts. Furthermore, Pater's essay contains very few signposts and he spends little time directing his reader (or more specifically, his tutee) through his argument: he expects us to keep up right from the beginning where he employs a labyrinthine ten-clause sentence.<sup>245</sup> The form of Pater's 'Style' registers the underpinnings of his theorisation of Aestheticism. As Lee notes: 'In Mr. Pater's [work...] it is quite impossible to say where style begins and subject ends.'<sup>246</sup> In assuming his reader to be a scholar, Pater claims that a sophisticated response to art is acquired with difficulty through the 'objective' application of high-level training to his sensory response. Lee regards his reconciliation of the purely sensual and the systematic as preconditioning an artificial aesthetic from which: 'out of

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<sup>242</sup> Gerald Monsman, 'Introduction: On Reading Pater', in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, ed., Philip Dodd (London: Cass, 1981), p.4.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p.6.

<sup>245</sup> 'Since all progress of mind consists for the most part in differentiation, in the resolution of an obscure and complex object into its component aspects, it is surely the stupidest of losses to confuse things which right reason has put asunder, to lose the sense of achieved distinctions, the distinction between poetry and prose, for instance, or, to speak more exactly, between the laws and characteristic excellences of verse and prose composition.' (Pater, 'Style,' p.1).

<sup>246</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.39.

a mist [...] arises a vision, exquisite, but reduced to the bare essentials, all else blotted away.<sup>247</sup> She feels that Pater persuades the individual to relinquish his complex, subjective and sensual aesthetic response to a process that 'reduces the phantoms of the imagination to their most prosaic elements'<sup>248</sup>: 'There are men who with the utmost psychology and the subtlest connections of moods, are yet, like Browning, far more objective than subjective.'<sup>249</sup> Lee feels that those who engage in 'that orderly vision of detail'<sup>250</sup> engage in what 'sometimes almost amounts to visual hyperaesthetica.'<sup>251</sup> By referring to a 'visual hyperaesthetica,' Lee feels that the imagery of Pater, Browning et al is too intellectualized and as such, belongs to the elitist academic institution that selects and excludes. Her reference to 'men' indicates her recognition that integral to this institution was a male-dominated hierarchy that would exclude her.

In response to her acute awareness of this, at the beginning of her writing career, Vernon Lee (born Violet Paget) adopted her pen-name ('as containing part of [her] brother's and [...] father's and [...] own initial's is H.P Vernon-Lee'<sup>252</sup>) because it had 'the advantage of leaving it undecided whether the writer be a man or a woman.'<sup>253</sup> Hardly a new strategy, this can be seen as her tentative attempt to participate in a professionalised literary culture without directly pandering to its male-dominated hierarchies or relinquishing her critical interests. A few months prior to making this decision, and a fortnight before her eighteenth-year, she

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Lee, 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art' (1880, 1881), in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, David G. Rowlands (ed.), (Ashcroft, B.C: Ash-Tree Press, 2002), p. 355.

<sup>249</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.40.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p.39.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p.39.

<sup>252</sup> Lee in letter to Mrs. Jenkins (6 April 1875), in Irene Cooper Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, (London: Privately Printed, 1937), p.49; quoted in Sophie Geoffroy (ed.), 'A Vernon Lee Chronology,' *The Sibyl: A Bulletin of Vernon Lee Studies* 1 (Spring 2007) [July 2008] <[http://www.oscholars.com/Sibyl/one/The\\_Sibyl\\_Chronology.htm](http://www.oscholars.com/Sibyl/one/The_Sibyl_Chronology.htm)>.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

wrote: 'I know that writing must be my profession as well as my pleasure [...] I am quite in earnest: literature *must* be my profession, and the sooner I begin, the better—so at least it seems to me.'<sup>254</sup> By pointing out Pater's esoteric style, Lee exposes Pater's elitist endorsement of the scholar and effectively undermines his theorisation of Aestheticism.<sup>255</sup> In doing so, she propels her serious re-theorisation of Paterian Aestheticism and formulates the groundwork for a sophisticated attack against the wider injustices of late-19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20<sup>th</sup>-century literary culture.

In contrast to Pater's impenetrable style, Vernon Lee seeks to establish an intimate connection with her reader. In the introduction to *Belcaro* (1880), Lee writes:

A little while ago I told you [...] I wish I could give you what I have written in the same complete way that a painter would give you one of his sketches; that a singer, singing for you alone, might give you his voice and his art [...] This book is intended to be really yours; yours in the sense that, were it impossible for more than one copy of it to exist that one copy I should certainly give to you.<sup>256</sup>

We imagine that Lee is closely acquainted with this particular reader to whom she writes directly in the second-person, especially as she dedicates 'this collection of studies'<sup>257</sup> to 'the first and earliest'<sup>258</sup> of her readers. When considered in the context of Lee's literary career, however, it is more likely that this unidentified reader is in fact her late-Victorian readership. Published in 1880, to her contemporaries 'a little while ago' would have been the 'earliest' stage of Lee's writing career, which began in 1875 with

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<sup>254</sup> Lee in letter to Mrs Jenkins (2 October 1874), in Irene Cooper Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, p. 40-1; quoted in Geoffroy (ed.), 'A Vernon Lee Chronology.'

<sup>255</sup> R.M. Seiler reminds us of Lee's belief 'that she could determine the essential peculiarities of Pater's "temperament and modes of being" at any given time by studying the style of a passage that he was writing (see "The Handling of Words: A Page of Walter Pater," *Life and Letters*, 1933); quoted in 'Walter Pater Studies: 1970-1980,' in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, p.93.

<sup>256</sup> Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*, (London: Unwin., 1881), p.1.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

publications in a range of heavy-weight literary periodicals.<sup>259</sup> The types of journals in which she published at this time reveal the audience to which Lee referred. One of her earliest publications 'The Art of Singing, Past and Present' appeared in the *British Quarterly Review*, a publication, which, according to R. V. Osbourn, catered for 'the Nonconformists in that intelligent and educated section of the middle class which Emerson described as a "perceptive minority" opposing and counteracting the "practical majority."' <sup>260</sup> On the brink of her first period of major literary success, marked by over twenty-six publications between 1880 to 1884, that small group of readers that followed her during this development phase would have been considered her 'first and earliest.' Furthermore, Lee's attempt to forge a close relationship with her reader would confirm that her dedicatee is, undoubtedly, her own ideal reader.<sup>261</sup> In 'On Style,' Lee stipulates that the role of the writer involves engaging the reader to a level that sustains his attention and directs him towards the intended emotion:

[The Reader] has to be kept awake, always kept awake, and kept awake whenever a new turn is coming, so that much of the craft of writing consists in preventing the Reader from anticipating wrongly on the sense of the Writer, going off on details in wrong directions, lagging behind or getting lost in a maze of streets. Few persons realize that the Writer has not only to make his Reader think or feel the right thing, but also to prevent his perpetually thinking or feeling the wrong one.<sup>262</sup>

Thus, Lee prescribes a co-operative Aestheticism that guides the reader through the 'maze of streets' and one that includes signposts within a complex configuration of sentences. Lee's stylistic manoeuvres strive to accommodate the reader through her work in which she deploys form to

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<sup>259</sup> The best example of this is: "The Art of Singing, Past and Present," *British Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1880. This is later followed by "The Responsibilities of Unbelief: A Conversation between Three Rationalists". *Contemporary Review* 43 (May 1883): 685-710.

<sup>260</sup> R. V. Osbourn, 'The British Quarterly Review,' *The Review of English Studies*. (April, 1950), p.147.

<sup>261</sup> This sort of imposed viewpoint would have been welcomed by the *British Quarterly Review*, which 'was a sectarian review.' (Ibid.)

<sup>262</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' pp. 41-2.

demonstrate her instruction to the writer. Thus Lee's deployment of the second-person in *Belcaro* works towards the exposition of her critical interests: 'the relations between the Writer and the Reader.'<sup>263</sup> As can be seen here, Lee characterises the writer and the reader as singular figures bound in an interdependent relationship in which 'all literary problems, all questions of form, logic, syntax, prosody, even of habit and tradition, appear [...] to depend.'<sup>264</sup>

By characterising the writer and the reader as singular figures, Lee can make investigations into generic textual practice, without worrying about the social class of the participants involved. This can be seen in 'The Handling of Words' (1923), in which she writes:

Each Reader, while receiving from the Writer, is in reality reabsorbing into his life, where it refreshes or poisons him, a residue of [his] own living; but melted into an absorbable subtleness, combined and stirred into a new kind of efficacy by the choice of the Writer.<sup>265</sup>

The terms 'Reader' and 'Writer' cloak these two figures with a veil of anonymity, ensuring that we consider their interaction as dictated by 'space-perception and empathy [...and an] aesthetic imperative [that] is not only intelligible but inevitable.'<sup>266</sup> However, whilst this may enable her to gloss over social divisions, such as class, she assumes that the relationship between the reader and the writer is distinguished by the coming together of two 'wholly different' subjectivities. In *The Handling of Words*, she writes, the reader's mind entertains 'a living crowd of thoughts and feelings'<sup>267</sup> that 'exist [...] on their own account and in a manner wholly different from that other living crowd of thoughts and feelings, the

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Lee, *The Handling of Words*. (ed.) D. Seed. (Lewistown: Edward Mellen Press, 1992), p.79.

<sup>266</sup> Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 154.

<sup>267</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.64.



mind of the Writer.<sup>268</sup> Fusing together 'living crowds,' Lee allows for the connection of sprawling associations and social divisions. Unlike Pater who unites the scholarly writer with the scholarly reader, Lee seeks to move away from this insular relationship. However, it is not that images of crowding impressions are not accounted for in Pater's work. In 'The Renaissance' such images appear: 'Experience,' he writes, 'already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without.'<sup>269</sup> However, whilst Lee allows for the release of 'the living crowd' of impressions, Pater keeps these images locked up in the scholar's own mind: 'Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.'<sup>270</sup> The self-contained nature of Pater's ideas led Thomas Hardy, for instance, to regard him as 'one carrying weighty ideas without spilling them.'<sup>271</sup>

In his essay, 'Pater's Criticism: Some Distinctions,' Ian Small argues that Pater fails to 'account for art as a social phenomenon'<sup>272</sup> due to the way disciplines in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century were organised: art and life were thought separate and as a result, 'the problem for Pater [...] was how to accommodate the concept of an aesthetic object with the notion that art has a produced element in it.'<sup>273</sup> Small says the failure of this synthesis 'had nothing to do with the compatibility or incompatibility of the theories in themselves, but from which (for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century mind) they derived

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 235.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, ed., Michael Millgate, (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.187.

<sup>272</sup> Ian Small, 'Pater's Criticism: Some Distinctions', in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, (ed.) Philip Dodd (London: Cass, 1981), p.37.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p.35.

their validation.<sup>274</sup> As mentioned in my first chapter, Kate Hext observes that Small depicts Pater as 'profoundly affected by the contemporaneous crisis of authority and professionalization of universities.' If we take this view, we draw on a distinct advantage that Lee as a well-educated 'outsider' of the academic institution had over Pater as an academic who found the institution's discipline organization restrictive. As Shafquat Towheed observes, Lee found that 'the very lack of definitive empirical evidence [...] became a creative stimulus rather than a source of anxiety.'<sup>275</sup> In contrast, Pater's psychological aesthetic bears an 'evasive and provisional quality'<sup>276</sup> when faced with the task of crossing 'definitive empirical' fields. Uncomfortable with branching out to a sociological model, for instance, Pater relies upon a theory of perception that never goes beyond the individual's personality and his solipsistic concerns.<sup>277</sup>

Without the same level of anxiety, Lee is able to push aesthetic value beyond the 'individual in his isolation' and the frame that visually contains the art object. As Catherine Maxwell notes, in contrast, Lee returns the 'one-dimensionality of the text into its multi-dimensional origin in life.'<sup>278</sup> In 1895, Vernon Lee says: 'For art and thought arise from life; and to life as principle of harmony they must return'<sup>279</sup> and later, in *The Tower of Mirrors*, she would go even further to say: 'our modern

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Towheed, 'The creative evolution of scientific paradigms: Vernon Lee and the debate over the hereditary transmission of acquired characters,' in *Victorian Studies* 49:1 (December 2006): 44.

<sup>276</sup> Ian Small states that Pater's critical practice bears a 'peculiarly evasive, provisional quality.' (Small, 'Pater's Criticism,' p.37).

<sup>277</sup> Ian Small says, 'Other explanations of human behaviour—like these models that seek to account for corporate or collective human activity or human actions that are not related to stimulus-reception—simply could not be accommodated into this biological model. And, because in a nineteenth-century biological model human activity is constituted by a series of functional responses, contemporary accounts of aesthetic response validated by it had necessarily to fail to account for art as a social phenomenon'. (Ibid).

<sup>278</sup> Christa Zorn, 'The Handling of Words: Reader Response Victorian Style' in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture*, Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (eds), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.185.

<sup>279</sup> Lee (1895); quoted in *ibid.*, p.260.

imagination and dramatic sympathy go far beyond such merely human stories.<sup>280</sup> Christa Zorn points out that this sees Lee engaging with the aesthetic problems of her period, reminding us of Thomas Hardy's fear 'that language might be turned into something dead if treated as a thing "crystallized" at an arbitrarily selected stage and denied both its past and future.'<sup>281</sup> Zorn observes that 'by treating the subjectivity of reader and writer as two sides of the same process mediated by the text [...Lee] challenges an important concept in contemporary philological studies, which construed the text as an object artificially separated from its content or the reader.'<sup>282</sup>

At this stage, the Paterian critic would be within his rights to accuse Lee for failing to underpin her 'creative trafficking [...] between fields' with an organised methodology. In the 1980s, Gerald Monsman noted that 'what saves Pater [...] is his idea of] the half-creating "imaginative sense of fact" that synthesizes a divergent welter of sources into the most powerful personal manifesto of its generation.'<sup>283</sup> Put another way, Pater effectively weaves his sources together by remaining within the remit of 'imaginative reason' to which, he feels, Aestheticism is accountable: 'art no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye, the ear only; but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the "imaginative reason"'.<sup>284</sup> Kate Hext argues that this self-contained aesthetic finds Pater philosophically grappling with modern issues, as belying:

his prose with all its inconsistencies and confusions [...is]  
a sincere and troubled attempt to come to terms with

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<sup>280</sup> Lee, *The Tower of the Mirrors and Other Essays on the Spirit of Places*, (London: John Lane, 1914), p.4.

<sup>281</sup> Christa Zorn, 'The Handling of Words,' p. 177.

<sup>282</sup> Christa Zorn, 'The Handling of Words,' p. 180.

<sup>283</sup> Gerald Monsman, 'Introduction: On Reading Pater', in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, (ed.) Philip Dodd (London: Cass, 1981), p.5.

<sup>284</sup> Pater, *Studies in the History of Renaissance*, p.88.

post-Darwinian modernity. Pater was too acutely aware of the world's "unstable, flickering, inconsistent" impressions to acquiesce to the "facile orthodoxy" [...] on which philosophical theory rests.<sup>285</sup>

In contrast, Lee does not pause to agonize over the distinctions between disciplines; or rather, between what is known and what is unknown. Throughout her work, she repeats the idea that 'the charm of the known is actually enhanced by that of the unknown.'<sup>286</sup> In *The Enchanted Woods*, Lee writes: 'my growing belief is that the journeys richest in pleasant memories are those undertaken accidentally, or under the stress of necessity'<sup>287</sup> and that 'life itself is a journey from an unknown starting part to an unknown goal.'<sup>288</sup> It is at this point that Lee moves away from the scholar and the institution, claiming that our expedition is all the richer as an unguided and 'uncalculating'<sup>289</sup> adventure. In contrast to Pater's individual who remains locked away as 'a solitary prisoner,'<sup>290</sup> Lee insists that we 'move along [...] the roads which cross and recross one another in endless intricacy.'<sup>291</sup> For Lee, it is the journey of experience and the fruits gathered along the way that bear value, rather than the experience as an end in itself: 'All we can do, while thus travelling we know neither whence not whither, is to keep our eyes clear, our feet undefiled, to drop as much useless baggage as possible, and fill our hands with fruits and herbs, sweet or salutary, of the roadside.'<sup>292</sup> As with Levy's work, Lee's contrasts with Pater's assertion: 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end [ . . . ] To burn always with this hard, gem-like

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<sup>285</sup> Hext, 'Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater,' p.418.

<sup>286</sup> Lee, 'On Modern Travelling,' p.65.

<sup>287</sup> Lee, *The Enchanted Woods*, (London & NY: John Lane, 1905), p.8.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance Studies*, p. 235.

<sup>291</sup> Lee, *The Enchanted Woods*, p.9.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

flame, to maintain this ecstasy is success in life.<sup>293</sup> Whilst Levy is opposed to Pater's complete emphasis on the process of gaining Aesthetic pleasure and turns her attention towards the resources that would make it possible, Lee is still concerned with this process itself. She feels that this statement adds to Pater's self-serving and self-contained Aestheticism for the only person who can account for the whole experience is the individual that lives it. Kate Hext notes that this passage, which appeared in 1873 in the 'Conclusion,' 'caused a furore in the conservative press that permanently tainted Pater's career'<sup>294</sup> and 'the response of the Oxford establishment made matters worse'<sup>295</sup> because the assertion that 'experience itself is the end' 'directly contradicts the location of value in Christianity in the heavens [...and] smacked of unbridled hedonism in the contemporary climate of moral reserve.'<sup>296</sup>

It leads us to his idea that a pure Aestheticism is distant from notions of morality and thus, higher than all other forms of expression. In this way, values of good and evil are defined by the scholar's values, rather than a higher priesthood. In a similar way, Lee's Aestheticism does not serve a higher authority and undermines the Christian notion of fate by alluding to life's voyage as child's play: 'the maps we make for ourselves are the mere scrawlings of fanciful children.'<sup>297</sup> The emphasis here is on 'we make,' which carries the connotations of a collective experience and undermines the imposition of a superior notion of power. Wandering through life in this child-like way, Lee insists, does not result in apathy. Instead, it means stripping back our own hedonistic desires and welcoming

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<sup>293</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion,' in *The Renaissance* (1873), (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.152; quoted in Kate Hext, 'The "Illusive, Inscrutable, Mistakable" Walter Pater: an Introduction,' *The Victorian Web* (05 July 2007) [28 July 2008] <<http://victorianweb.org/authors/pater/bio.html>>.

<sup>294</sup> Hext, 'The "Illusive, Inscrutable, Mistakable,"' <<http://victorianweb.org/authors/pater/bio.html>>.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Lee, *The Enchanted Woods*, p.9.

an ecological awareness of the world around us. The notion of travelling to Lee did not mean collecting stamps on a passport. Often the most stimulating adventure could be found on one's doorstep, or in a neighbouring field. It is more a philosophy, rather than a pursuit metered by miles (or any other empirical measurement) and it is an outlook on life that she would transport with her throughout her eclectic oeuvre.

In 'On Style,' Lee argues that the writer ought to exhibit this ecological awareness by deploying a style that accommodates the reader's alterity. In the same way that Pater 'expositions' his subject matter in 'Style,' as in Lee's *Belcaro*, the formal dimensions of 'On Style' rehearse her moralizations on Aestheticism. Deploying a meticulous written style, she explains her terms and methodological techniques to the reader. In the opening sentence, she introduces her topic with a sentence that seeks to establish a cohesive relationship with her reader: 'I must begin by saying that what I am about to attempt will be, at best, a very partial account of the great thing we mean by Writing.'<sup>298</sup> Whilst Pater sets out his thesis in the third-person with generic language (with phrases such as 'all progress,' 'the distinction,' 'the laws'), Lee uses personal and direct language. Her use of the pronoun 'we,' for example, unites her authorial persona with the figure of the reader, and her employment of tentative expressions (such as 'very partial account') work to convey an unassuming tone that does not claim superiority. She then goes on to explain the form which her argument will take: 'lines will connect or not connect, and certain tracts will occupy a greater or smaller portion of the visual field.'<sup>299</sup> She warns her reader it is possible that 'items [will be] omitted, telescoped,

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<sup>298</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.34.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

enlarged, or made conspicuous<sup>300</sup> and makes painstaking efforts to explain her reasoning for providing definitions of terms:

Just now I will merely sum up, for the easier following of what must necessarily be disjointed remarks, that I conceive Writing to be, spiritually: the art of high and delightful perception of life by the Writer; and technically: the craft of manipulating the contents of the Reader's mind. Hence I consider Writing as, in very special sense, an emotional art.<sup>301</sup>

Whilst it comes as no surprise that Virginia Woolf—who is bracketed with the Modernists, a slightly later generation of writers—would regard Lee's writings as overly verbose; the deployment of form in her work demonstrates its instructive content. According to Zorn, Lee is able to assume an ideal reader—who she hopes will become her accomplice—via 'her unravelling of a text through a virtual reader.'<sup>302</sup>

Further to this, Shafquat Towheed's precisely entitled article, 'The creative evolution of scientific paradigms: Vernon Lee and the debate over the hereditary transmission of acquired characters,' quotes Lee's declaration that "“physiologically transmitted tendencies” constitute “themselves as responses to changing environments and needs, so that their transformation may be expected as a result of the very movement of things which has produced them.”"<sup>303</sup> Towheed perceives Lee's psychological Aestheticism as one of her 'multiple creative adaptations of scientific ideas'<sup>304</sup> in which she seeks to 'demonstrate her commitment to a creative [...] and critically rigorous heurism'<sup>305</sup> through the 'productive and creative trafficking between [disparate...] fields.'<sup>306</sup> In *The Beautiful*

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.35.

<sup>302</sup> Zorn, 'The Handling of Words,' p.186.

<sup>303</sup> Lee, *Proteus, or the Future of Intelligence*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1925.) pp. 62-63; quoted in Towheed, 'The creative evolution,' p.52.

<sup>304</sup> Shafquat Towheed, 'The creative evolution,' p.56.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Shafquat Towheed, 'The creative evolution,' p.33.

(1913) she says that it is our natural 'aesthetic instinct'<sup>307</sup>—that which is underpinned by 'our perceptive and empathic activities'<sup>308</sup>—that raises aesthetic value 'to a level which can only be spiritually, organically, and in so far, morally beneficial.'<sup>309</sup> In this work, Lee seeks to study the way 'Art has many and various uses both to the individual and to the community,'<sup>310</sup> which are 'independent of the attainment of Beauty.'<sup>311</sup> It is in noting this that she observes that in the formation of aesthetic value, the interdependence of art and life is vital, not only on a philosophical level but also on a level that goes beyond the interior mind that governs Paterian Aestheticism:

It is possible and legitimate to be interested in a work of art for a dozen reasons besides aesthetic appreciation; each of these interests has its own sentimental, scientific, dramatic or even money making emotion; and there is no loss for art [...] if we fall back upon one of them when the specific aesthetic response is slow or not forthcoming. Art has other aims besides aesthetic satisfaction [and these] will not come any the quicker for turning our backs upon these non-aesthetic aims.<sup>312</sup>

This returns us to Lee's notion of 'reiterated perception' in which further consultations with the art object furnish 'the first act of perception' with insights from other (non-aesthetic) disciplines.

Therefore, throughout a process that resists finality, Lee posits a three-way interpretative model of interaction, which privileges a collective response, rather than a singular perspective. Commitment to this transactional interpretative model, Lee feels, is socially-useful for it draws the individual into a communal understanding of the art-object from the world beyond it: 'what is the use of Art? [...] Art has many and various uses both to the individual and to the community each of which uses is

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<sup>307</sup> Lee, *The Beautiful*, p.154.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9.



independent of the attainment of Beauty.<sup>313</sup> It is in this sense that the individual engaged in the art object gains a highly-refined sensitivity to self-to-world relations. 'For Lee,' Burton and Fraser note, 'art goes beyond its apparent visual boundaries to suggest other narratives, other meanings.'<sup>314</sup> As I will soon discuss, Lee's supernatural tales effectively conceptualise the collapse of these 'visual boundaries' and, as Angela Leighton notes, 'thus become [...] for Vernon Lee an expression, not of otherworldly supernaturalism but of this-worldly aestheticism.'<sup>315</sup>

However, before starting to examine how these ideas are dramatized in her supernatural tales, we must stall, as Lee does, to consider the level of co-operation required from the reader and how this affects 'his' role in ascertaining aesthetic value (as Lee defines it). In the same way that the writer must show willingness to impart his emotions to the reader, the reader must be willing to engage with these imparted emotions. For Lee, 'the very worst attitude towards art is that of the holiday maker who comes into its presence with no ulterior interest or business and nothing but the hope of an aesthetic pleasure for its own sake.'<sup>316</sup> Lee holds a cynical view of the 'virtual' reader or, more specifically, the individual responsible for co-operating with the pre-conditions required for a certain mode of aesthetic response. In *The Beautiful*, for example, she asserts that 'blank despondency [is] characteristic of so many gallery goers'<sup>317</sup> and in 'On Style' she assumes that 'the Reader is perpetually on the point of stopping, of turning round,

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>314</sup> Nick Burton and Hilary Fraser, 'Mirror Visions and Dissolving Views: Vernon Lee and the Museological Experiments of Patrick Geddes,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 28, 2, (June 2006): 147.

<sup>315</sup> Angela Leighton, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism, and "Vernon Lee,"' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28 (2000): 2

<sup>316</sup> Lee, *The Beautiful*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

or going off at a wrong turning, let alone his yawning from side to side.<sup>318</sup> In 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions": Vernon Lee, Popular Fiction, and Theories of Reading,' Towheed examines the way 'Lee's practice of fiction shaped, and was shaped by, her understanding of the relationships between writers and readers, between novelists and critics, and between intellectuals and the marketplace.'<sup>319</sup> He notes that Lee perceived the mass market as breeding a 'potentially vast and [...] unruly' cluster of readers. Yet, as he goes on to note, this was the least elitist and financially-appealing alternative to the "'neatly systemized'"<sup>320</sup> academic market in which, as Lee writes in *Belcaro*, the "'scholar's copy book [is handed...] over to his fellow-pupils, who may have understood as much of the lessons as himself."<sup>321</sup> Christa Zorn argues that Lee was 'caught between the emergence of mass consumerism on the one hand and withdrawal into academic elitism on the other.'<sup>322</sup> As I will discuss in more detail towards the end of this chapter, Lee attempted to delineate a third dialectal position between these public personas and came to be regarded as a public intellectual on a broad range of subjects.<sup>323</sup>

Lee expressed anxiety towards the reader and 'his' refusal to participate co-operatively: on the flip side of the overly-qualified scholar deploying formulaic reading techniques, we find the 'ordinary' lay reader and 'his' lazy habits. She identifies many detrimental manifestations of the reader's lack of co-operation in the slovenly act of reading, writing: 'stupidity manifests itself most frequently in laying hold of the wrong portion of a page or a sentence, just as inattention shows itself worst in

<sup>318</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.41.

<sup>319</sup> Towheed, 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions,' p. 201.

<sup>320</sup> Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 5; quoted in Towheed, 'Theories of Reading,' p.219.

<sup>321</sup> Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 5; quoted in Towheed, 'Theories of Reading,' p.216.

<sup>322</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee: aesthetics, history, and the Victorian female intellectual*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, c2003), pp. 9-10.

<sup>323</sup> Stefan Collini notes that this 'term [...] refer[s] to those figures who did more than address a specialized or discipline-based public.' (Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)), p.231).

perceiving only one word isolated and in straggling off after the unimportant, so that the important can never be overtaken.<sup>324</sup> Here we learn that Lee's notion of a co-operative Aestheticism is prescriptive and quite coercive in what it demands of the reader. The words 'wrong,' 'inattention' and 'unimportant' are revealing as they imply the opposite: there is, she implies, an attentive and correct way of reading. This reveals to us the underbelly of Lee's attempt to extend Aestheticism to a wider portion of the reading public: harnessed by prescriptive instruction, her idea of an innate Aestheticism is less tenable.

Introducing 'empathy' into art historical discourse 'with its clear privileging of the emotion,'<sup>325</sup> Lee seeks to validate intuitive and descriptive responses to art. However, by prescribing a set of codes and laws, Lee instigates a counter-intuitive response and brings this idea into question. Whilst Pater's idea that the lay reader is short of the proficiencies to reach an engaged level of sophistication accounts for an elitist Aestheticism, it serves to rule out the contradictions that Lee has to tackle in accounting for an Aestheticism that claims to welcome the 'everyday,' 'ordinary' individual reader. Examining Lee's appropriation of 'empathy,' we learn that in order for it to be a workable stimulus for 'perceiving the movement in its lines and physically empathising with that,' it must be combined with a degree of instruction. If the 'right portion of the page' is not 'perceived,' empathy as a natural faculty that validates a high-level response to art becomes redundant. In this way, underpinning the reader's role is a series of conditions and responsibilities. In the next part of this chapter, I will examine the way Lee seeks to define the role of the reader and enforces upon him the responsibilities that she outlines in her critical works. I will

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<sup>324</sup> Lee, 'On Style,' p.42.

<sup>325</sup> Mary Patricia Kane, *Spurious Ghosts: The Fantastic Tales of Vernon Lee*, *Lingue E Letterature Carocci*; 35 (Roma: Carocci, 2004), p. 24.

assess how she is able to coerce the reader into a co-operative engagement with the aesthetic by subverting the practices of 'this-worldly Aestheticism' with the emergence of other-worldly phenomenon.<sup>326</sup> I will examine how she uses the ghost story as a forum in which she can enforce justice upon practitioners who threaten to violate Aestheticism as a communal and fluid process.

In Lee's, 'A Wicked Voice,' this figure appears in the form of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Norwegian composer, Magnus who has moved to Venice to compose his Wagnerian-styled opera, *Ogier the Dane*. However, in the meta-narrative that frames Magnus' tale, we learn through his melodramatic exclamations of grief that he has become an active participant in the rustic traditions of Venetian folk culture and in turn, estranged from the Germanic traditions of Wagner:

They have been congratulating me again today upon being the only composer of our days [...] who has despised the new-fangled nonsense of Wagner, and returned boldly to [...] the supremacy of melody and the respect of the human voice.<sup>327</sup>

He claims that all this has been wrought against his will by way of a spell that has bound him to listen to the haunting vocals of the castrato 'singing-masters of the Past'<sup>328</sup>: 'O execrable art of singing, have you not wrought mischief enough in the past, degrading so much noble genius, corrupting the purity of Mozart.'<sup>329</sup> In the composer's re-telling of his 'maladies',<sup>330</sup> Magnus reports that he is haunted by the melodramatic vocals of the historic castrato, Zaffirino, at unforeseen intervals. Feeling, 'enslaved,' he 'despise[s] and loathe[s] the music [...that he is] forced to compose, and

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<sup>326</sup> Angela Leighton asserts that for Lee the 'ghost story thus becomes [...] an expression, not of otherworldly supernaturalism but of this-worldly aestheticism.' (*Angela Leighton, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism, and "Vernon Lee,"* p.2).

<sup>327</sup> Lee, 'A Wicked Voice,' in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, (ed.) David G. Rowlands, (Ashcroft, B.C: Ash-Tree, 2002), p.87.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

the execrable power that forces [him].<sup>331</sup> In attempting to reassure himself that this supernatural ordeal will come to an end, he refers to a superstitious myth that his 'old nurse, far off in Norway'<sup>332</sup> once told him, in which werewolves 'aware of their horrid transformation'<sup>333</sup> are able to look for a 'means to forestall it.'<sup>334</sup> It is ironic that in his attempt to convince himself of his return to Wagner, he draws on a myth plucked from folk-lore. The fact that Magnus appears unaware of this paradox suggests that the transformation has already taken place and the opportunity to 'forestall it' has gone.

Those knowledgeable of Lee's opinion of Wagner, would have been aware that she had much more in common with the tastes of the Venetian public, for she disliked 'the element of degenerate priesthood'<sup>335</sup> in his music, regarding it as engendering a type of 'self-complacent [...] auto-religion.'<sup>336</sup> All this, she felt, subjected the crotchet-by-crotchet, Wagnerian aesthetic to an 'extreme slowness of vital tempo,'<sup>337</sup> leaving the listener 'devitalised as by the contemplation of a slug.'<sup>338</sup> In contrast, Zaffirino's spontaneous and emotively-charged cadenza revitalises the listener by resetting the link between aesthetic value and formulaic expectation. In the tale, Lee deploys the melodramatic aesthetic to 'purify' Magnus who so heavily relies on the systematic, 'auto-religious' measurements of creative esteem of the Wagnerian tradition. In 'The Riddle of Music,' Lee writes: 'why, from time immemorial, music has been considered sometimes as an art which enervates and demoralizes, sometimes as one which disciplines, restrains and purifies.'<sup>339</sup> For Lee,

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Lee quoted in Angela Leighton, 'A guilty footnote,' *TLS*, (12 September 2003).

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Lee, 'The Riddle of Music,' *Quarterly Review*, 204 (1906), p.226.

forms of art that 'discipline, restrain and purify' result from 'the subjection of the emotional cry or the spontaneous imitation to a process of acoustic measurement'<sup>340</sup> and thus, in 'A Wicked Voice,' whilst the Wagnerian compositions feature as that which 'enervates and demoralizes,' the rustic Italian castratos work to 'purify.' As Magnus melodramatically proclaims, Zaffirino's vocal shrills are 'not invented by the human intellect, but begotten of the body, and [...] stir [...] up the dregs of our nature!'<sup>341</sup> Here, the phrase 'stirs up the dregs' carries the connotations of a deep-cleansing exercise that removes the gritty particles and purifies the soul. This is wrought through the unification of the aesthetic and the body in Zaffirino's 'wicked, wicked voice, violin of flesh and blood.'<sup>342</sup> Emphasizing the moralizing design of the melodramatic aesthetic, Lee appears to subject Magnus to the constant re-telling of his tale. This sees Lee adopting the narrative technique that the Romantics deployed to enable the solipsistic individual to seek redemption through a cyclical, confessional re-telling of guilt:

And meanwhile, my only relief consists in going over and over again in my mind the tale of my miseries. This time I will write it, writing it only to tear up, to throw the manuscript unread into the fire. And yet, who knows? As the last charred pages shall crackle and slowly sink into the red embers, perhaps the spell will be broken, and I may possess once more my long-lost liberty, my vanished genius.<sup>343</sup>

However, Lee puts an ironic spin on this narrative form: through the constant re-telling of his tale, Magnus moves further away from the Germanic traditions of Wagner and becomes more involved in the rustic

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<sup>340</sup> Lee, 'Chapelmaster Kreisler: A Study of Musical Romanticists,' in *Belcaro*, p.117.

<sup>341</sup> Later, on inspecting his portrait, he notes how Zaffirino inspires the same mode of response that he experienced when reading writers of the Aesthetic movement: 'That effeminate, fat face of his is almost beautiful, with an odd smile, brazen and cruel. I have seen faces like this, if not in real life, at least in my boyish romantic dreams, when I read Swinburne and Baudelaire.' Baudelaire and Swinburne are writers of the Aesthetic movement 'locked up in the plangent, melodious musicality,' from which Swinburne gained a reputation as 'the enfant terrible who shocked Victorian respectability.' (Laurence Lerner (ed.), 'Introduction,' in *Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, ((London: Orion, 2003)), p.xiii).

<sup>342</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.104.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

traditions of Venetian folk lore. The transformation is complete: the fact that his tale resists publication means that for as long as he persists in re-telling his story, Magnus will continue to partake in the oral tradition and be removed completely from the Germanic tradition.

In late-Victorian England, Wagner had become an unpopular figure and the butt of satire. Likewise, those that followed him would have been subject to the same ridicule; thus Lee's gamely readers would have identified Magnus as a figure set up to be mocked. Also, these readers would have recognised Magnus as one who partook in the late-Victorian fashion of travelling to Venice as part of a hub of artists hoping to further their body of creative work.<sup>344</sup> Lee sought to challenge this activity as a faddish whim for the furtherance of the Wagnerian artist and his prosaic ways. In 'On Modern Traveling,' with disdain, she writes: 'The Oxford or Cambridge man [...] will have similar raptures in some boarding-house at Venice or Florence, raptures rapturous in proportion almost to his ignorance of the language and the people.'<sup>345</sup> Referring back to Lee's idea that "'physiologically transmitted tendencies" constitute "themselves as responses to changing environments and needs, so that their transformation may be expected as a result of the very movement of things which has produced them," we can presume that Magnus' decision to move to Venice to pursue his love for Wagner will be a wholly unproductive one. The surrounding Venetian landscape affects Magnus emotionally and spiritually: 'Venice seemed to swelter in the midst of the waters, exhaling like some great lily, mysterious influences, which make

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<sup>344</sup> Some might have viewed Lee's travels and subsequent writings in this way too but on the publication of *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, Lee had the advantage of being a full-time resident in Italy since 1873. As mentioned in the introduction, she became a tour-guide rather than a tourist to writers.

<sup>345</sup> Lee, 'Modern Travelling', in *Limbo and Other Essays*, (Doylestown, PA: Wildside Press, 2004), pp.71-2.

the brain swim and the heart faint.<sup>346</sup> This description, which opens Magnus' tale, foreshadows Lee's investigations into the notion of *genius loci*, developed primarily in her work, *Genius Loci: Notes on Places*, which concludes that creative genius is place-specific. In 'On Modern Travelling,' she writes: 'My main contention then is merely that, before visiting countries and towns in the body, we ought to have visited them in the spirit; otherwise I fear we might as well sit at home.'<sup>347</sup> In order to 'possess once more [...his] vanished genius,' Magnus will have to stop festering away in the Venetian country-side: 'Recovery? But have I recovered? I walk, and eat and drink and talk; I can even sleep. I live the life of other living creatures. But I am wasted by a strange and deadly disease. I can never lay hold of my inspiration.'<sup>348</sup> The cyclical Romantic narrative form of Magnus' tale and the notion of *genius loci* (which, again, is a re-working of a Romantic trope) are interdependent: without respect for his immediate surroundings, Magnus is subjected to a course of redemption that 'disciplines, restrains and purifies.'

For Lee, the modern traveller commits 'something almost super-humanly selfish in this rushing across countries without giving them a thought'<sup>349</sup> and in living up to this reputation, Magnus must be brought to justice. Determined to uphold his preformed impressions of Venice as a place suitable to compose his opera, Magnus seeks to preserve the link between aesthetic value and formulaic expectation. In Lee's attempt to reset this link, she must enforce an overpowering sense of dislocation on Magnus. Referring again to 'On Modern Travelling,' Lee states:

It is always during our first sojourn in a place, during its earlier part, and more particularly when we are living

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<sup>346</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.88.

<sup>347</sup> Lee, 'On Modern Travelling,' p.64.

<sup>348</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p. 104.

<sup>349</sup> Lee, 'On Modern Travelling,' p.66.



prosaically at inns and boarding-houses that something happens [...] which shows the place in a particularly characteristic light, and which never occurs again. The very elements to perform for the benefit of the stranger.<sup>350</sup>

In 'A Wicked Voice,' Zaffirino's haunting vocals illuminate 'the place in a characteristic light' for the benefit of Magnus. The moralizing design of Zaffirino's melodramatic aesthetic works to assert Lee's re-working of *genius loci* and ensures that his artistry responds to the concerns of his local environment: whilst he might not be able to return to the Wagnerian style when in Venice, he could collaborate with its rustic traditions in order to recover. Under the notion of *genius loci*, artistic concerns that lie outside those of the culture they inhabit are stultified.

On his arrival in a 'breathless'<sup>351</sup> Venice, Magnus' description of his 'fellow artists' boarding house'<sup>352</sup> suggests that it is a fruitless destination for others seeking to develop their creative work:

I see my fellow artists' boarding house. The table on which they lean after supper is strewn with bits of bread, with napkins rolled in tapestry rollers, spots of wine here and there, and at regular intervals chipped pepper pots, stands of toothpicks, and heaps of those huge hard peaches, which nature imitates from the marble shops of Pisa.<sup>353</sup>

The scene is one of tourists on holiday, an image that is reinforced by his sense of disorientation: cheap tourist tack is a replica of nature, not, as Magnus would have it, the other way around. Magnus maintains that he is dragged away from his opera by the faddish interests of his fellow boarders who make him real-off his disposable scraps of trivia about art objects given to him by an 'American etcher [...] knowing [him] to be mad about eighteenth-century music and musicians.'<sup>354</sup> In this particular case, it is the portrait of the singer, Zaffirino; a cultural object of great importance to

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

the neighbouring Venetian natives who revere the castrato highly but who is of little significance to Magnus. His interest on this subject extends no further than that which he can find 'out of a battered little volume called'<sup>355</sup>:

*The Theatre of Musical Glory; or, Opinions upon the most Famous Chapel-Masters and Virtuosi of this Century, by Father Prosdocimo Sabatelli, Barnalite, Professor of Eloquence at the College of Modena, and Member of the Arcadian Academy, under the Pastoral name of Evander Lilybaen, Venice, 1785, with the approbation of the Superiors.*<sup>356</sup>

Lee's inclusion of this long-winded patter emphasises the artificial, irrelevant nature of the scholarly framework that underpins Magnus' despondent engagement with the portrait: 'And I hear my own voice, as if in the far distance, giving them all sorts of information, biographical and critical.'<sup>357</sup> The 'battered' state of this history book suggests Magnus' dependency on it and other scholarly materials that underpin his claims to have a 'mad'<sup>358</sup> interest in 'eighteenth-century music and musicians.'<sup>359</sup> This suggests that Magnus is exactly the type of systematic scholar that Lee seeks to bring to justice: he simply hands over his 'copy book [...] to his fellow-pupils, who may have understood as much of the lessons as himself'<sup>360</sup> and regards his solipsistic interests as more important than that which is vivid within his immediate surroundings.

Before Lee brings Magnus to justice, she plays with him, teasing his pretentious restlessness: 'At last the whole lot of them are on the move. I shall be able to get some quiet in my room, and to work a little at my

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., pp.88-9.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*, (London: W. Satchell and Co., 1881), p.5; quoted in Towheed, 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions,"' p. 5.

opera of *Ogier the Dane*. But no! Conversation revives, and, of all things about the singer, that Zaffirino, whose absurd portrait I am crunching in my fingers.<sup>361</sup> This teasing develops into mockery as he is forced to imitate an eighteenth-century Venetian song, which then descends into a farcical imitation of the great melodramatic castrato, Zaffirino:

I sing it, mimicking every old-school grace; shakes, cadences, languishing swelled and diminished notes, and adding all manner of buffooneries, until the audience, recovering from its surprise, begins to shake with laughter; until I begin to laugh myself [...] my voice finally smothered in their dull, brutal laughter.<sup>362</sup>

The scholar's attempt to imitate a piece of virtuoso improvisation catapults Magnus out of his comfort zone: not usually included as part of a written score, the virtuoso is designed to showcase a musician's particular talents. With no books to hide behind, his talents prove subordinate to that of the great masters. His juxtaposition to the portrait of Zaffirino during this performance ('I set to singing; the only thing which remains before my eyes being the portrait of Zaffirino [...] with its wicked, cynical smile'<sup>363</sup>) serves to intensify his sense of subservience to Zaffirino and from that moment, Magnus learns the true meaning of the term 'great master.' In a pitiful act of frustration, 'to crown it all' Magnus shakes his fists at the portrait, exclaiming: "'Ah! You would like to be revenged on me also!'"<sup>364</sup> And thus, the intensification of revenge imposed on Magnus increases. As he falls 'once more to meditating on [his] opera,' he is haunted by what he disregards as 'singing exercises! It seemed too ridiculous for a man who professedly despised the art of singing.'<sup>365</sup> Whilst revered by the

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>363</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.92.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p.96.

Venetian public, the melodramatic vocals of the historic castrato, Zaffirino, frustrate the musician-scholar.

Resisting material form, Zaffirino's voice cannot be controlled by the scholar; Magnus cannot methodically manage his subjective response to the melodramatic aesthetic with a view to imposing his own scholarly designs on it. As a result, he is forced to discard his systematic designs (that would enable him to 'assert something of his own humour, something that comes not of the world without but of a vision within.'<sup>366</sup>) and instead to respond with raw emotive energy on each interval that Zaffirino decides to haunt with his tones, which float subtly and ephemerally: 'veiled, as it were, in a subtle, downy wrapper.'<sup>367</sup> In one last ditch attempt to regain a sense of authority, Magnus destroys the only material trace of the singer, 'the portrait of Zaffirino, which [his] friend had pinned against the wall':

I pulled it down and tore it into half a dozen shreds. Then, already ashamed of my folly, I watched the torn pieces float down from the window, wafted hither and thither by the sea breeze. One scrap got caught in a yellow blind below me; the others fell into the canal, and were speedily lost to sight in the water.<sup>368</sup>

However, this materially destructive act does not banish the voice; instead, it intensifies the very ephemerality that characterises its unique form and leads to its most theatrical showcase yet: 'My arteries throbbed! How well I knew that voice! It was singing, as I have said, below its breath, yet none the less it sufficed to fill all that reach of the canal with its strange, quality of tone, exquisite, far-fetched.'<sup>369</sup> Grasping the imagination of the Venetian public ('the old palaces re-echoed with the clapping. Thank you, thank you! Sing again—please sing again. Who can it be?'<sup>370</sup>), the event adds another layer of mystery to the folk-lore tradition, which perceives 'a

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<sup>366</sup> Pater, 'Style,' p.5.

<sup>367</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.95.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

lack of empirical knowledge as a creative stimuli, rather than a source for anxiety.<sup>371</sup>

This is furthered by Magnus' mentioning that the event resists all types of scholarly systems of creative esteem: 'The strangest thing in this strange business was, that even among those learned in music there was no agreement on the subject of this voice: it was called by all sorts of names.'<sup>372</sup> The voice resists the imposition of categorisations of knowledge as wide-ranging as history, gender and style in the mention of the debates which subsequently took place in the area: 'people went so far as to dispute whether the voice belonged to a man or to a woman: everyone had some new definition.'<sup>373</sup> The fact that all this humbles Magnus to silence shows how this art form is serving as a reforming, moralizing leveller: 'In all these discussions I, alone, brought forward no opinion. I felt a repugnance, an impossibility almost of speaking about that voice.'<sup>374</sup> It humbles the world of scholarship in a more general sense and the enforcement of the place-specificity of this occurrence turns our attention dramatically towards Lee's *genius loci*. As Christa Zorn notes, Lee demonstrates her awareness of the 'hidden accretions or layers of history that have built up around a particular locale.'<sup>375</sup> The historian that fails to consider the actual conditions of aesthetic production treads on the wrong path.

However, treading on the right path, on the actual site of a culturally historic event can prove dangerous as the historian in Lee's 'Amour Dure' treacherously discovers. In this tale, the Polish historian,

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<sup>371</sup> Towheed, 'The Creative Evolution of Scientific Paradigms,' p.44.

<sup>372</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.97.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham, eds., *Haunting and other fantastic tales*, (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2006), p.14.

Spiridion Trepka is sent on a travel scholarship to investigate the ancient town of Urbania, forgotten of mankind, towered and battlemented on the high Apennine ridge.<sup>376</sup> The diary-form that this tale takes finds Lee responding to the vast numbers of journals on Italy produced by scholar-tourists in the late-19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20<sup>th</sup> -century. Edith Wharton's *Italian Backgrounds*, for example, reworked long passages from [her] diary, especially the descriptions of the country about Syracuse.<sup>377</sup> Hermione Lee provides details of how in 1894, for example, Wharton wrote an essay:

which told, with relish of her discovery [...] that some little-known terracotta figures at the monastery of San Vivaldo [...] which had been thought to be minor seventeenth-century work, were probably earlier, perhaps late, fifteenth-century, a reattribution confirmed by an "expert" museum-curator in Florence. This discovery set the tone for her writing on Italy; she was writing on Italy; she was transforming herself from eager tourist to cultural expert.<sup>378</sup>

This transformation from 'eager tourist to cultural expert' is the ambition of Spiridion Trepka, who is nonetheless conscious of the pretentious and artificial nature of his quest. In the first diary entry, he questions the moral implications of researching in a country to which he does not belong:

Is this folly? Is it falsehood? Am I not myself a product of modern, northern civilisation; is not my coming to Italy due to the very modern scientific vandalism, which has given me a travelling scholarship because I have written a book like all those other atrocious books of erudition and art-criticism? Nay, am I not here at Urbania on the express understanding that, in a certain number of months, I shall produce just another such book?<sup>379</sup>

Sent to Urbania with a view to publishing his historical findings, places the age-old pressures of late-19th-century publish-or-perish print culture on Spiridion and thus renders his investigations into the cultural past as forced and artificial. Acutely aware of this, the historian refers to scholarship as

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<sup>376</sup> Lee, 'Amour Dure,' in *Hauntings*, p.7.

<sup>377</sup> Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p.86.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Lee, 'Amour Dure,' in *Hauntings*, p.7.

that 'modern scientific vandalism'<sup>380</sup> to which he is subjected as a professional academic. In this way, Spiridion is the opposite of Magnus: whilst the musician attempts to ignore his surroundings, the historian yearns for a scholarly understanding of Urbania's cultural past. The juxtaposition of the two tales is a warning: whilst the Venetian past powerfully seduces Magnus, the history of Urbania will violently resist Spiridion. As Miriam Elizabeth Burstein comments: 'Working in the archives, fiddling with old manuscripts, listening to family lore: all of these activities lead the researcher to *yearn* for the past, to invest it with a maddening charge that, in turn, explodes violently into the present.'<sup>381</sup>

Cue Medea, who, as an ancient figure with a complex and rebellious psychology, Spiridion discovers as a rich source for his investigations into the Urbanian past. In his initial research into 'this woman's history,'<sup>382</sup> the historian perceives this troubled, violent figure through rosy-coloured spectacles and relishes in the fact that he is participating in a feminist act of recovering a forgotten female figure into the framework of modern scholarship:

This history of Urbania is not without its romance, although that romance (as usual) has been overlooked by our Dryasdusts. Even before coming here I felt attracted by the strange figure of a woman, which appeared from out of the dry pages of Gualtero's and Padre de Sanctis' histories of this place.<sup>383</sup>

His claim that his research into Medea's history is part of an instinctive yearning for the past— one that stems back to his time in Berlin— is undermined by the fact that it has taken him almost one-month since he arrived in Urbania to act on this impulse. Instead, Spiridion is lured towards Medea because research into Euripedes' notorious antagonist

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, 'Historical ghosts,' *The Little Professor* (February 18, 2007) [15 June 2008] <[http://littleprofessor.typepad.com/the\\_little\\_professor/2007/02/page/2/](http://littleprofessor.typepad.com/the_little_professor/2007/02/page/2/)>.

<sup>382</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.9.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

poses itself as a niche in the academic world of which he could take advantage. After hours spent in the archives and studying books which narrate an appropriate history of Medea, he constructs a body of research that offers him a sense of the figure towards whom he claims to be intuitively drawn: 'In my walks, my mornings in the Archives, my solitary evenings, I catch myself thinking over the woman. Am I turning novelist instead of historian?'<sup>384</sup>

From here-on-in, Spiridion's historical findings take on a fictionalised quality; he justifies his blurring of fact and fiction with the idea that it enables him to acquire a better understanding of the morality of the past. This Paterian-type of enquiry into the past is an act of appropriation that allows the scholar to reconfigure 'fact' with his sense of it:

And still it seems to me that I understand her so well; so much better than my facts warrant. First we must put aside all pedantic modern ideas of right and wrong. Right and wrong in a century of violence and treachery does not exist, least of all for creatures like Medea.<sup>385</sup>

Here, Spiridion's act of pushing 'all pedantic modern ideas of right and wrong' to one side is an implicit jab at Pater's notion that the boundary between good and evil is defined by the scholar's sense of fact. Lee re-defines Pater's emphasis on the reader as making investigations into the past through his close relationship with the written word.<sup>386</sup> Lee argues that 'You find everywhere your facts without opening a book.'<sup>387</sup> Providing an example of her own investigations into the historical-specificity of medieval art and how it 'was influenced by the remains of antiquity, came

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> It is important to note here that Pater did not just open books, he, too, visited churches and galleries. For example, in the winter of 1882/3 he visits Rome and when at Oxford he spends his vacations abroad with his sisters, travelling through Germany, France and Italy. That Pater could not travel more was through a lack of money. In the conclusion, I will interrogate Lee's ideas of travel and tourism a little more closely because she could *afford* to live there and immerse herself 'intuitively' in the culture that Pater could not afford.

<sup>387</sup> Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in the Renaissance*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884), p.19; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.141.



like a flash during a rainy morning in the Pisan Campo Santo; the working out and testing of that explanation in its details was a matter of going from one church or gallery to the other.<sup>388</sup> As far as this premise to Lee's expansive thesis goes, the role of the reader does not gain an ecological or historically-sensitive awareness of the art object if locked away in a library or other insular institution such as the University scholar's study.

And the joke is on Spiridion. After his bookish investigations into Medea, he decides that he is attracted to her and must recover her at the specific site of historical activity. This is utterly ridiculous: his desire to recover a rebellious heroine who had her wicked way with a number of victims shows that he has not fully acknowledged the powerful notoriety of his historical subject. Had he an intuitive understanding, he would stay well away and not pursue his subject with such violent determination. Furthermore, Lee places Spiridion's (re)appropriation of the Medea myth in stark contrast to late-19<sup>th</sup>-century feminist thought. As quoted earlier, Edward Philips notes that Amy Levy's portrayal of Medea had sought to rediscover her as 'a resource of resistance and a narrative of displacement, through which she could examine the gender and racial politics of the late Victorian period and her own status as a culturally marginalised Other.' In this way, Spiridion's failure to recognise the feminist narrative within the Medea myth is representative of late-Victorian society's failure to recognise that women's power inheres in the female body and as such, female figures cannot be subjected to modes of patriarchy in which male desire is satisfied by feminine subservience. 'Amour Dure,' Lee's meta-narrative of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century appropriations of historical figures, is a mocking allegory addressed to late-19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal culture: remaining insular in the act of reading can be dangerous, even deadly. This becomes dramatically

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

apparent at the end of the tale, which as Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pullman explain 'ends abruptly with Trepka's official and unofficial histories incomplete, his diary ambiguous, and the mystery of his strange romance and its consequences unresolved.'<sup>389</sup>

The lead-up to this abrupt ending finds Spiridion's obsession escalating out of control as he determines to meet Medea, believing that she is communicating with him. Just as Lee mocks Magnus for his sense of superiority, she teases Spiridion for his misguided attempt to locate the historically-specific site of Medea's crimes:

We returned home late, my companion in excessively bad humour at the fruitlessness of the expedition [...] I sang and shouted, to my companion's horror. This will be a bad point against me if reported at Berlin. A historian of twenty-four who starts and sings, and that when another historian is cursing at the snow and the bad roads.<sup>390</sup>

The fact that Spiridion's first failed attempt to visit the site results in a childish tantrum confirms that he had assumed that the exercise would be a somewhat exhilarating scholarly excursion where he could conduct an orderly, rational investigation. In her essay 'On Modern Travelling,' Lee states her 'plea against our modern, rapid, hurried travelling: there is to decent minds a certain element of humiliation therein, as I suspect there is in every *royal road*.'<sup>391</sup> If we remember, at the beginning of the tale, a disaffected Spiridion refers to modern scholarship as 'scientific vandalism.' Lee adds a new twist to this: the scholar's vandalising of the past, leads to the past's violent vandalising of the scholar. In the end, Medea, whose ghost eventually manages to lure him into her trap, kills Spiridion:

A step on the staircase! It is she! it is she! At last, Medea, Medea! Ah! AMOUR DURE—DURE AMOUR!

NOTE—Here ends the diary of the late Spiridion Trepka. The chief newspapers of the province of Umbria informed

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<sup>389</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, p.12.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>391</sup> Lee, 'On Modern Travelling,' p.66.

the public that, on Christmas morning of that year 1885, the bronze equestrian statue of Robert II had been found grievously mutilated; and that Professor Spiridion Trepka of Posen, in the German Empire, had been discovered dead of a stab in the region of the heart, given by an unknown hand.<sup>392</sup>

The editorial insertion that brings about this abrupt ending brings us full circle: it is evident that, with the level of detail included in this note, the events of Spiridion Trepka are now in the hands of another scholar, who has compiled a book entitled: 'Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka.'

The abrupt, detached tone of this peripatetic, editorial gloss contrasts with the short, emotively frantic tone of the scholar as he writes of his alarmed pleasure at coming face-to-face with Medea. Oblivious to the dangers of venturing into the past unguided, in selecting and editing extracts from Spiridion's diary, this peripheral editor is letting himself in for a similar moralizing experience. The supernatural—that which goes beyond the boundaries of scholarship—enables the ghosts of the past to seek vengeance for the crimes of modern solipsistic and systematic academic. The scholar-tourist serves as an easy target for Lee's ghosts: the haughty genius on a Romantic sojourn who fails to suspend his values wrought from 'modern, northern civilisation' is confronted with a moralizing, reformative aesthetic experience that gives a dramatic sense of immediacy to his investigations and makes his emotive response central to it. The failure to go beneath the superficial qualities of the aesthetic (i.e. form), or the failure to 'rehear' the emotive undertones that lie beneath, results in an artificial response that simply reverberates the values of the solipsistic individual. There again, as Spiridion's death in 'Amour Dure' testifies,

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., p.30.

those who manage to go beneath, to access the historically-specific site, must do so in response to an intuitive, natural impulse.

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My readings of Lee's tales assume that they are, as Zorn writes, 'extensions of her historical project, a visual display of the way she perceived history: subjective, incidental, and full of surprises.'<sup>393</sup> In agreeing with Zorn on this, I too perceive Lee as writing 'from a highly self-conscious position'<sup>394</sup> and using fiction as a forum to rehearse ideas developed in her critical works. In the case of her supernatural tales, this makes for a dense, rather inaccessible style of writing more closely associated with an academic, rather than the mass market. Unlike in 'On Style,' throughout 'Hauntings,' her concise economy of style is lacking. In the complex fifty-nine word sentence that opens 'The Wicked Voice,' for example, the narrative drips with academia, dropping in names of high-art composers. Whilst the complexity of Magnus' first-person narrative allows the reader to enter into his insular academic world and the sentences do shorten when he responds intuitively to Zaffirino's singing, the narrative is not directed towards the lay reader (to those ignorant of the academic references) and thus, the joke is lost on those outside the world Lee's historical project sought to criticize. This lack of accessibility is noted by *The Graphic*, a popular weekly newspaper, which 'by the 1880s [...] was selling up to 250,000 copies per week'<sup>395</sup>:

We need not say that throughout these sketches [...] there are all manner of psychological suggestions which are none the less effective for seeming a great deal more

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<sup>393</sup> Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), p.141.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>395</sup> 'About this Publication: The Graphic,' in *19th Century British Library Newspapers Publication Issues* (16 July, 2008) [25 July, 2008] <<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn/publicationSearch.do?month=LabelValueBean%5BMarch%2C+03%5D&queryType=PH&inPS=true&year=1879&type=getIssues&prodId=BNCN&currentPosition=0&userGroupName=univnott&searchTerm=Graphic&index=JX&docPage=aboutpublication>>.

profound than they are. Had Vernon Lee only been able to catch some of the secrets of those French masters of the "Conte" [...] some of their conciseness, their precision, their self-restraint, and their manner of making every touch tell, her fancies are intrinsically good enough to have obtained real value. As it is, these requisite qualities of the true "Conte" are those in which she is most lacking, and to humour she does not aspire.<sup>396</sup>

Lee's lack of subtlety may be down to Martha Vicinus' observation that 'repeatedly [...] she stops to speak directly to the reader, to remind him or her of their shared point of view.'<sup>397</sup> Even Amy Levy criticized *Amour Dure* in a letter to Lee, suggesting that it 'loses [to her other work the *Phantom Lover*] by being split up into parts.'<sup>398</sup> The reviewer at 'The Graphic' is in agreement with the critic at *The Daily News* who argues that 'the stories are told with a certain wealth of generous words, but the eerie touch of the master hand is missing that alone has power effectively to deal with the unearthly.'<sup>399</sup> It is only once the academic context of the stories is understood and the complex style decoded that Lee's wit and narrative chill can be fully appreciated. David G Rowlands notes something similar: on a second reading of Lee's tales, he 'found a lot more in it than [...he] had hitherto,<sup>400</sup> he 'had been put into the right frame of mind, and that is what you need to appreciate fully the fantasy tales of Vernon Lee: the right frame of mind.'<sup>401</sup>

The interdependence of her fictional and critical works is undisputed within recent scholarship and even Lee herself acknowledged this: 'I have written, for the last ten years with the determination never to write a thing

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<sup>396</sup> 'New Novels,' *The Graphic*, (Saturday, June 7, 1890).

<sup>397</sup> Martha Vicinus, "'A Legion of Ghosts:' Vernon Lee (1856–1935) and the Art of Nostalgia,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10.4 (2004): 603.

<sup>398</sup> Letter from Levy to Lee, (February 1887); quoted in Beckman, Amy Levy, p.260. Levy and Lee shared works in progress; this letter was composed three years before the first publication of the tale in *Hauntings*. Lee clearly didn't listen to Lee as the title still splits the narrative into individual diary entries. However, in a letter earlier that year, Levy did express interest asking 'Did Medea da Carpe ever really exist?' (258) This question, however, reminds us that her stories stimulated academic questions, rather than spook its reader.

<sup>399</sup> 'Novels,' *Daily News*, (Tuesday, October 21, 1890).

<sup>400</sup> Rowlands (ed.), *Hauntings*, p. x.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

which did not happen to interest me at the moment, with the desire to prevent myself getting into intellectual ruts.<sup>402</sup> Vernon Lee referred to this as the pretext for her fall to literary obscurity in the early twentieth-century, claiming that her intellectual autonomy distanced her writings from the tastes of the popular mass market:

It is certain that I can never imagine what I write being read, still less by anyone in particular. I know my writings tend more and more toward soliloquy. It gives, perhaps, a certain freedom and decency, but sometimes, not often, it makes one feel a bit lonely.<sup>403</sup>

Lee sought to ensure that her writings asserted her authoritative views throughout an oeuvre spanning over half a century at every stage of the publishing process. As Colby informs us, on 18 December 1901 Lee wrote to her loyal publishers T. Fisher Unwin to state: 'I greatly object to the hawking round literature agents, syndicates, and similar arrangements;<sup>404</sup> this, according to Colby, saw her refusing to 'work with literary agents [...and] prefer[ing] to handle all business matters directly with her publishers.<sup>405</sup> Even on the publication of her novel *Miss Brown*, Lee regarded alterations to the text as 'an insane notion'<sup>406</sup> and made her feelings known to her publisher, Blackwood, asserting 'I am kittle cattle to drive.'<sup>407</sup> The fact that her publishers tolerated such staunch standards was, as Colby writes, not because they saw significant profit but instead 'because she was a prestige writer.'<sup>408</sup> Not even Lee expected her work to make a fortune, writing in a note to her half-brother: 'Of course I have played my cards as badly as I could have done with regard to securing a

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<sup>402</sup> Lee to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 31 August 1893; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.9.

<sup>403</sup> Lee to Maurice Baring (25 January 1906); quoted in Vineta Colby, *The Singular Anomaly*, p.293.

<sup>404</sup> Lee to T. Fisher Unwin (18 December 1901); quoted in Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography, Victorian Literature and Culture Series* (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p.308.

<sup>405</sup> Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.308.

<sup>406</sup> Lee in letter to her mother (26 July 1884); quoted in Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.97.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

public.<sup>409</sup> The fact that she 'was motivated more by pride than by financial need,<sup>410</sup> is probably a fair assessment.

Yet, to assume that Lee's license to write for 'intellectual privilege' rather than financial return sees her advocating the Decadent tradition, which was all-too-often aloof to a potentially vast reading public, is possibly an unfair assessment. Vernon Lee sought to find a third-way between the intellectual privileges of the literary elite and the popular tastes of the marketplace, claiming in a letter to Karl Pearson, dated 1888, that she regarded 'the privilege of comparative freedom for want of leisure, of education [...] for the benefit of others.'<sup>411</sup> In a similar way to Amy Levy, Lee noted the importance of financial wealth in the production and consumption of art, but she claimed that to achieve this, all that is needed is a frugal, simple lifestyle on the part of the individual. On recognising that she 'has no public,<sup>412</sup> in a letter to home in 1893, she writes, 'I think it better to restrict my expenditure than to increase my income.'<sup>413</sup> In *The Enchanted Woods* she goes on to write that this level of frugality can be achieved by 'putting to profit of what is within our grasp,<sup>414</sup> stating: 'enchanted woods are rare [...] they are most often within a stone's-throw of the dear homes of every day; nor is it needful to travel very far afield in order to find them.'<sup>415</sup> She instructs her reader to 'stay at home, explore the surrounding ten miles (and no pleasure of travel is keener than that of the first hundred yards of the eleventh mile from home), promenade round one's garden or bedroom.'<sup>416</sup> This response differs to Levy's in that it does

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<sup>409</sup> Lee in letter to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 31 August 1893; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.9.

<sup>410</sup> Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.308.

<sup>411</sup> Lee in letter to Karl Pearson (3 March 1888); quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.10.

<sup>412</sup> Lee in letter to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 31 August 1893; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.9.

<sup>413</sup> Lee in letter to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 31 August 1893; quoted in Sophie Geoffroy (ed.), 'A Vernon Lee Chronology' *The Sibyl: A Bulletin of Vernon Lee Studies* 1 (Spring 2007) [July 2008] <[http://www.oscholars.com/Sibyl/one/The\\_Sibyl\\_Chronology.htm](http://www.oscholars.com/Sibyl/one/The_Sibyl_Chronology.htm)>.

<sup>414</sup> Lee, *The Enchanted Woods*, p.10.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

not demand for the extension of institutional admission, arguing that the individual's intuitive appreciation of the resources to hand within his local community will lead to the discovery of a self-made space within which he can unearth the time to engage in the aesthetic and gain intellectual pleasure.<sup>417</sup> Ever the idealist, Lee does not make any demands of actual communal institutions in which this philosophy could be applied; instead she locates these spaces outside—or on the edge—of the city. Unlike Levy, the realist, who demands that centres for all are set up in central municipal locations, Lee locates these spaces in rural and suburban areas: 'enchanted woods [...] lie in many parks and girdle many cities; only you must know them when you see them, and submit willingly to their beneficent magic.'<sup>418</sup> Whilst Levy locates her Individualist philosophy within a material institution into which all classes can physically stumble, Lee does not make it as easy.<sup>419</sup> She demands that the individual starts with a sense of intellectual and moral responsibility, and once this is achieved the space for aesthetic pleasure will materialise. This quickly translates into Lee's idea that the reader is responsible—and accountable—for achieving his own aesthetic pleasure. The interdependence of our critical and imaginative faculties is essential in Lee's school of Aestheticism.

When assessing the broad spectrum of her oeuvre, it seems that her critical writings seek to persuade us—and at times, coerce us—into practising this level of intellectual responsibility when reading her fictional works. On an abstract level, her theorisation is convincing, but the fact that she works on too many idealistic and immaterial givens, weakens its credibility. In reality, her writings fail to live up to her three-way

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<sup>417</sup> In the conclusion of my thesis, I will consider how Lee's ideas, unlike those of Levy, accommodate the simple woman with no dependents and her 'local community' extended across the continent, including cultural celebrities such as Wilde, James and Pater.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>419</sup> Angela Leighton writes: 'Lee was in many ways a daughter of the Enlightenment: forthright, upright, a rationalist and atheist, whose writing, with the exception of her ghost stories, is driven by a kind of busy and honourable concern for abstract truth.' (Angela Leighton, 'A guilty footnote,' *TLS*, ((12 September 2003)))



transactional model of interpretation in which aesthetic value is attained during a process in which writer, reader and art object negotiate a shared intuitive and subjective understanding. With a sense of solipsism at the end of her career and feeling isolated from a literary culture which had moved onto Modernism, she felt that her ideal reader (one that would interact with her ideas) was missing: 'it makes one feel a bit lonely, as if [...] inside a cupboard.'<sup>420</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Lee felt compelled to present her ideas within the supernatural genre, which, as Zorn notes, offered the 'transgressive possibilities of the fantastic'<sup>421</sup> in which the 'reader, or narrator, hesitates between a natural and a supernatural explanation.'<sup>422</sup> This space, one that is neither embedded in reality nor far removed from it, is useful for Lee to present her ideas. She can use supernatural agency as a means to extend her historical project and discard of the 'I' subject position, which dominates her critical works: Medea's rebellious feminism and Zaffirino's melodramatic vocals manipulate us into empathising with her project. The effect is more subtle than if she were to direct us towards a realist narrative: instead, she directs us towards a more complex narrative, which challenges the reader's expectations of form and accessibility. Whilst the supernatural is a sub-genre of popular fiction in the hands of figures such as M.R. James, Lee uses it as a forum to extend her ideas in a way that masks authorial agency. She is not subject to generic expectations, which cater for the whims of the reading public.<sup>423</sup> Prior to the publication of *Hauntings, Miss Brown*, Lee's attempt at a novel for the mass market had been regarded as

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<sup>420</sup> Lee to Maurice Baring; quoted in Colby, *The Singular Anomaly*, p.293.

<sup>421</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.140.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Lee claims to resist mass market categorisations across her oeuvre, writing in 1883 that 'the Essayist is an amphibious creature, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl.' (Lee, *Ottolie: an eighteenth century idyl*, (London : T. Fisher Unwin, 1883), pp.7-8; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. xvii).

an outright attack on the Aesthetic movement, receiving this review from Henry James on 12 December, 1884:

It is her first attempt at a novel, so it is to be hoped it may be her last. It is very bad, strangely inferior to her other writing, & (to me at least) painfully disagreeable in tone. It is in three thick vols.; so I can't send it to you; but it will be probably reprinted by some one in the U.S. & then you will look at it & recognize what I mean. It is violently satirical, but the satire is strangely without delicacy or fineness, & the whole thing without form as art. It is in short a rather deplorable mistake to be repented of.<sup>424</sup>

Towheed puts this down to the fact that Lee became 'enmeshed in the traffic of ideas between scientific and cultural discourse,<sup>425</sup> and this could not be practised in the sort of fiction that pandered to the mass market. Rather than 'espouse a populist readership for her work,<sup>426</sup> Towheed states that Lee is found 'preferring to address her intellectual peers rather than channelling her ideas about heredity [for example] into polemical fiction.<sup>427</sup> As a public intellectual, she sought to provide an informed response to matters that concerned her, rather than matters popular or accessible to the masses. Thus, by the end of her career, her writings tended to be appreciated by a 'small and loyal readership,<sup>428</sup> which, by and large, consisted of her intellectual, middle-class peers.<sup>429</sup>

Despite feeling removed from Modernism's aims that privileged aesthetic autonomy within class structured institutions, it is interesting that Lee's relationship with her reading public resembles Lawrence Rainey's assessment of Modernism:

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<sup>424</sup> Henry James in letter to T.S. Perry (12 December, 1884); quoted in Leon Edel, 'Henry James and Vernon Lee,' in *PMLA*, 69, 3 (June, 1954), pp. 677 (677-678).

<sup>425</sup> Towheed, 'The Creative Evolution of Scientific Paradigms,' p. 33.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>428</sup> Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.308.

<sup>429</sup> Richard Posner writes: 'a successful academic may be able to use his success to reach the general public on matters about which he is an idiot' but whilst 'the market for public intellectuals is becoming dominated by academics [...] the growth of academic specialization has made it increasingly difficult for academic to fill the public-intellectual role.' (Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: a Study of Decline* ((Cambridge, Mass.: Havard University Press, 2001)), p.51; quoted in Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds*, p.241).

Modernism's ambiguous achievement [...] was to probe the interstices dividing that variegated field and within it a strange and unprecedented space for cultural production, one that did entail a certain retreat from the domain of public culture, but one that also continued to overlap and intersect with the public realm in a variety of contradictory ways.<sup>430</sup>

Whilst wanting to challenge the elitism of Paterian Aestheticism, Lee does not bring to an end the social stratifications which shaped the reading public. In this way, Lee rolls out the carpet for a new breed of the literary elite, which Rainey describes as, 'an emerging group of suburban consumers who rejected equally the "low vulgarity" of the popular halls and the contemplative ethos of traditional, autonomous, or "high" art.'<sup>431</sup> In Angela Leighton's article, 'A guilty footnote: Some like coffee, some like tea, and some are never bored by Vernon Lee' the titular quote is the Bloomsbury group's Lytton Strachey acknowledging Lee's appeal to a portion of the early twentieth-century English middle-class. Interesting then that Rainey points out that it was in 1906 (a year that Lee continued to publish, with the second edition of *Hauntings* and non-fictional works such as *The Spirit of Rome* and *Sister Benvenuta and the Christ Child: an Eighteenth Century Legend*) that 'finally, the first appearance is reported of the word 'middlebrow,' a term that acknowledges not just increasing stratification but also increasing interchanges among different cultural sectors.'<sup>432</sup>

Her staunch status as public intellectual, which survived the pressures of the mass market and unattainable privileges of high Aestheticism, sees Lee exercising a new strategy of authorial self-construction that would become typical of writers attempting to

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<sup>430</sup> Lawrence S. Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

'accommodate a rapidly changing configuration of cultural institutions.'<sup>433</sup>

Although Lee's garrulous and overly-descriptive style remained Victorian, her authorial strategies on the marketplace anticipated—and partook in—the Modernist movement. In reviewing Vineta Colby's work, Angela Leighton asserts:

Perhaps the twentieth century won her over, turning her from 'an aesthetic-Puritan-Victorian into a freethinking modernist, ready to accept and even to embrace radical social change.' The sense of that change, in Lee's own life, and in the awe-inspiring historical events through which she lived, is the intriguing and ambitious subject of this biography.<sup>434</sup>

I do not think it was the twentieth century that made her 'a freethinking modernist.' She could perhaps afford to be more outspoken on her views on authorship and readership, but, she had articulated these views consistently throughout her whole writing life. Perhaps Vernon Lee's oeuvre exemplifies how Modernism (as we know it today) was the inevitable upshot of the Fin-de-Siècle period in which writers had sought a middle-way between high and low art forms. The fact that her style of writing remained Victorian (an issue I shall address in a moment) and did not pander to that of Modernism perhaps strengthens this claim: as far as she was concerned, she was carrying on as normal, even if it meant refusing to satisfy new literary tastes.

Across her writing career, Lee strives for the reader to become her accomplice. Rather than espouse new theories on the art of reading, her reader must sympathise with those that she outlines in her critical works.

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., p.5. (Nicola Humble's more recent account of 'middlebrow' as a working term that 'fractured' the 'binary opposition' between high and low culture differs slightly from Rainey's. She writes 'The term "middlebrow" is a derivative of 'highbrow,' a slang label for intellectuals which seems to have origination in America in 1911, and which, according to Robert Graves, was popularized in England by H.G. Wells. 'Highbrows' quickly gave birth to 'lowbrows' with the first recorded example of the latter occurring only two years later. It took nearly two decades for this simple binary opposition to be fractured by the concept of the middlebrow.' ((Nicola Humble, *The feminine middlebrow novel, 1920s to 1950s: class, domesticity, and bohemianism* ((Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001))), p.9)).

<sup>434</sup> Leighton, 'A guilty footnote,' *TLS*, (12 September 2003).

This means that to fully appreciate her fiction we must understand her work as critic and aesthete. Crucially, Lee's reader is dependent on the critic and 'his' guiding hand. Provided that the correct 'portion of the page' is obtained and followed, constructing meaning from the text is an accessible practice. However, privileging the wrong portion, the reader veers too far away from the writer and the text's meaning. Despite claiming that 'the maps we make for ourselves are the mere scrawlings of fanciful children,' the practices deployed in her literary career reveal to us that Lee does not trust her reader to self-construct meaning without interference from a more knowledgeable escort. Thus, throughout, Lee uses the authorial first-person ('I') to direct her reader towards herself. She then locks the reader onto her subject position by deploying the direct second-person address ('you'). Earlier, I argued that her use of communal personal pronouns can be deduced as Lee's attempt to convey an unassuming, non-authoritative tone. Dissolving the boundaries between the reader and the writer so that their subjectivities are 'melted into an absorbable subtlety, combined and stirred into a new kind of efficacy' might, in theory, prefigure a transactional, shared response to the aesthetic. However, in practice, whether she intended to or not, this refusal to veil her authorial subjectivity asserts an egocentric voice that the Modernists would seek to mask. As Virginia Woolf stated in her 1925 work *Moments of Being* 'surface manner allows one to say a great many things which would be inaudible if one marched straight up and spoke out.'<sup>435</sup>

For the Modernists, the role of the reader would be to focus on the art work itself, rather than the writer and thus they discarded a historicism that had been so central to Lee's Aestheticism. In 1925, Woolf wrote:

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<sup>435</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. ed., Jeanne Schulkind (London: Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1976), p.126.

Let them take a wider, a less personal view of modern literature, and look indeed upon writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building, which being built by common effort, the separate workmen may remain anonymous [...] Let them slam the door upon the cosy company [...] and the discussion of that fascinating topic—whether Byron married his sister—and [...] say something interesting about literature itself.<sup>436</sup>

This departure from the specific historical conditions of art is achieved through detached, impersonal language that directs the reader towards aesthetic form rather than the reader or writer's relative subject positions. In 1908, Woolf writes that 'if [Lee] were to concentrate her mind upon the task of seeing any object as exactly as it can be seen there would be no time for these egotistical diversions.'<sup>437</sup> Woolf does not subject the common reader to the responsibilities to which Lee's must attend:

The common reader differs from the critic and the scholar [...] He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing.<sup>438</sup>

For Lee, this process is morally irresponsible: it too liberally allows the reader to construct meaning without attending to the specific conditions of its production. Woolf, however, is confident that literature 'takes us and reads us'<sup>439</sup>: 'For we are apt to forget [...] how great a power the body of literature possesses to impose itself: how it will not suffer itself to be read passively, but takes us and reads us; flouts our preconceptions; questions principles which we had got into the habit of taking for granted.'<sup>440</sup>

In contrast, Vernon Lee could not afford to let aesthetic form do all the talking. A close relationship with her reader and an overt personal

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<sup>436</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, (ed.) Andrew McNeillie (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1984), p.241.

<sup>437</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Sentimental Traveller'; in Vernon Lee, Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.74.

<sup>438</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p.1.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*

investment in her subject matter would mean that she could steer the reading public directly towards a new space that would willingly provide admittance to all, so long as readers did not expect Aesthetic principals to be compromised. Lee would be regarded by her publishers as a 'prestige writer' and public intellectual, carving a third-way between the two poles of a literary culture from which she felt excluded. The idea of a high Aesthetic was tarred with the brush of the exclusive, male-dominated academic institution but she considered the idea of stooping to the 'low' cultural forms of the mass market beneath her. Despite responding to early-twentieth-century Modernist pressures, Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism deploys 'overwrought Victorian morality and exhausting elaboration.'<sup>441</sup> As Christa Zorn notes, it was this that 'embodied the tradition from which the modernists wanted to divorce themselves.'<sup>442</sup> Yet, the 'small and loyal readership' that would endure until her death in 1935 would testify Lee's ability to command a public that was perhaps not as ready to 'dismiss its Victorian antecedents'<sup>443</sup> as was supposed.

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<sup>441</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p.75.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> Angela Leighton, 'A guilty footnote: "Some like coffee, some like tea and some are never bored by Vernon Lee,"' *TLS*, (12 September 2003).

Conclusion: The cost of Aestheticism: the socioeconomic sub-text of Levy and Lee's writings

But the great thing about a genuine 'public'—as opposed to an audience limited to members of a profession, guild, party, or similar pre-determined group—is that it is in principle open to anyone.<sup>444</sup>

-- Stefan Collini

My thesis has examined how Amy Levy and Vernon Lee sought to extend Aestheticism to a broader reading public. Stefan Collini's recent contribution to the field of literary reception, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians and Publics*, states that the term 'public' is all-encompassing and above all, implies a non-specialist audience. Throughout both writers' works, it would seem that they too are working towards this definition. In Levy's 'Women and Club Life,' she refers to a 'wider human fellowship' and criticises the selective elitism of 'the chosen few rather than the unchosen many.' This rhetoric aspires to the 'principle [of a 'public' being] open to anyone.' Across Lee's work, the figure of a non-specific, given reader recurs ('this book is intended to be really yours') and it appears that this elected figure can be plucked from any social background provided he (or she) attends to the historically-specific locus of the text and becomes the writer's accomplice. Furthermore, by assuming art's role within the 'living flexibility of human knowledge,' Lee unhinges Aestheticism from the constraints of the institutional crisis with which Pater contended. In principle, both writers' notions of Aestheticism are open to a reading public in the broadest sense. Yet, as I will address in this concluding chapter, significant tensions underlie these claims.

Despite both attempts to create a more socially-inclusive Aestheticism, Levy and Lee's detachment from the socioeconomic realities

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<sup>444</sup> Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.2.



of working-class life becomes apparent in their accounts. As an educated member of middle-class London, Levy envisions Aestheticism's extension to another pre-determined group: the professional woman. Arguably, her desire to extend Aestheticism to a broader reading public ends where her middle-class priorities begin. For example, in economic terms, Levy's account of female clubs is curiously naive: all clubs, by definition, are exclusive and generally demand a membership fee along with other indirect monetary commitments. I will consider the ramifications of this and consider whether the term 'public' (as Stefan Collini describes it) can apply to her work. For Vernon Lee, the term 'upper-middle class' might be more appropriate: she could afford to travel and was surrounded by culturally elite figures (including Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Edith Wharton and Walter Pater). In this chapter, I will consider a broad tension that arises from her social status. The distinction between 'how' one knows and the extent to which the acquisition of knowledge depends on the ability to 'buy into' another culture is a tension that is not reconciled in her work. Overall, this chapter will tie my thesis together by addressing the economic demands that are implicated in both writers' attempts to extend Aestheticism to a wider public.

In Levy's 'Women and Club Life' there is one example that shows Levy considering how the club might function as 'a social centre for women to whom the ordinary social advantages are not easily accessible.'<sup>445</sup> She cites the Somerville Club in Oxford Street in which the 'Reading room, library &c., are provided, as at other clubs, and refreshments can be obtained at very moderate charges.'<sup>446</sup> She explains that this club 'aims at combining the usual advantages of the club proper with those of the class

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<sup>445</sup> Levy, 'Women and Club Life,' p.535

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

or college; organising debates, lectures, and social evenings for the benefit of its membership.<sup>447</sup> It is evident that this club assumes a membership that would have both time and energy to make use of its facilities. For the working-class woman, evenings might be spent in the factory or looking after her family; generally, she did not have the same familial support as Levy's professional woman. Similarly, Levy's idea that club-land offers the 'chance of seeing something of A or B or C apart from her sisters, her cousins, and her aunts'<sup>448</sup> works on the assumption that members have a stable, supportive home-life (those disposable family members are, it seems, 'all excellent people [...] but with whom we personally have nothing in common, and acquaintance we have no desire to cultivate.'<sup>449</sup>) What about the young woman brought up in an orphanage or, the single mother with dependents? As suggested in my first chapter, these questions can be applied to Reading Room admissions as well: access to the civic institutions that Levy cites depends on a supportive, middle-class background, and men (who control that access).

In fairness, Levy accepts that 'it is to the professional woman, when all is said, that the club offers the most substantial advantages.' Her essay addresses socioeconomic conditions by alluding to Utilitarian rhetoric throughout: the statement 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' is taken from John Stuart Mill's critique of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism. Mill's philosophy is 'grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being'<sup>450</sup> and as such, the belief that 'the improvement of mankind [...] demands a balance of individual freedom and social unity

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid. These latter are drawn from all classes of society; the annual subscription is ten shillings.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, on Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*, Geraint Williams, ed. (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), p.79.

which is the key to his utilitarian philosophy.<sup>451</sup> Levy incorporates the notion of female participation into Jeremy Bentham's idea of ethical individualism through assertions such as: 'the desire among women for a corporate life [...] has assumed the definite shape of a practical demand' and 'The woman who owns no interest beyond the circle of home...is, alas! Too expensive a luxury for our civilisation; we cannot afford her.' Here, Levy points out that this period of socioeconomic change opens new doors for the professional woman who is equipped with the skills to readjust. Such readjustment would not have been possible for the working-class woman for, as Christopher Harvie and H.C.G. Matthew point out: 'for the working person "readjustment" usually meant misery. It was during the 1880s that the word "unemployment" was given its modern meaning.'<sup>452</sup>

Club-land is a social utility for the middle-class: it is for those without social networks as a birth-right but who have the required support to pursue pleasurable activities and build-up useful contacts in the process. This relates to John Stuart Mill's redefinition of Utilitarianism. He corrects those who 'use the term in that restricted [...] sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure [...] Those that know anything about the matter are aware that [...] it is not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure.'<sup>453</sup> He refines Bentham's Utilitarianism by asserting that the quality of pleasure is more important than the quantity of it. In regarding some forms of pleasure as qualitatively better than others, Mill's view is in some senses Paterian.<sup>454</sup> After all, the corollary of this is that some individuals have a greater capacity than others for experiencing pleasures

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<sup>451</sup> Geraint Williams, 'Introduction' in *Utilitarianism*, p.xxxviii.

<sup>452</sup> Christopher Harvie & H.C.G Matthew, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.92.

<sup>453</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p.6.

<sup>454</sup> Mill writes: 'It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.' (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p.8).

of high quality. In this way, Mill endeavours to reconcile the polemical idea that social utility and aesthetic pleasure are opposed terms; he insists that the former can be redeemed from the latter. Levy attempts to negotiate between the same fields to which Mill refers. Across her works, she shuttles between aesthetic perfectionism and social utility, which finds her channelling social references through the formal dimensions of high-art. In a similar way, Levy's idea of club-life fits into Mill's Utilitarianism: both align pleasurable activity with social value. In the club, middle-class women could engage in cultural activities more commonly practiced by the leisured classes, but in doing so, contribute to society (sharpen their skills to step from domestic life into professional careers).

Thus, Levy extends Aestheticism's fields of reception to the middle-classes, but no further. Indeed, when thinking about how we might categorise Levy as a writer, she cannot be accused of participating in Decadence (and its 'art for art's sake' mantra), nor can she be associated with New Woman writings (and its 'art for life's sake' philosophy). Instead, Levy's work prefigures feminine middlebrow fiction, which 'worked to remake its readers in its own terms'<sup>455</sup> by fracturing 'the simple binary opposition' between high- and low-art forms.<sup>456</sup> In her attempts to extend Aestheticism to a wider reading public, she works within fields of reception that were becoming increasingly variegated. As such, it seems unworkable for her to address a public in the broadest possible sense.

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<sup>455</sup> Nicola Humble, *The feminine middlebrow novel*, p.9.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid. (This draws us back to her relationship with the literary market: high-art aesthetic mediated through low-cultural forms. Outside her academic reception today, Levy appears to be received in this way. Her novel, *Reuben Sachs* is published by Persephone press, which celebrates its reprints of forgotten women's classics. However, at a flat-price of £10 for every book printed ((which can increase to £15 with postage, gift-wrapping and packaging)), the readership is distinctly middlebrow. This might hamper Julia Neuberger's hopes for *Reuben Sachs* to spawn a 'wide circle of admirers.' ((Julia Neuberger. ((ed.)) *Reuben Sachs*, ((London: Persephone Books Ltd, 2001), p. xviii.)))

For Levy, this middle-way provides a means to preserve her intellectual integrity within the mass-market. As argued in chapter two, for Vernon Lee, this middle-way facilitates a more self-serving purpose: as, by most accounts, her publishers allowed her to write for intellectual pleasure, she did not need to look upon her works as products of the mass-market. In most respects, Lee resists the pressures of the mass market and the whims of popular taste. This gives her a distinct economic advantage and freedom to 'remake readers in her own terms.' Yet, it also means that, unlike Levy, she does not even partially account for many of the economic factors on which her ideas depend. Here, I will press harder at Lee's ideas of travel and tourism, considering some of the unwritten expenses that clock-up over the course of her oeuvre. In *The Enchanted Woods* (1906), her guideline to 'stay at home, explore the surrounding ten miles (and no pleasure of travel is keener than that of the first hundred yards of the eleventh mile from home), promenade round one's garden or bedroom,' addresses an audience who had access to such facilities. Those with their own garden or bedroom would have belonged to the middle- or upper-classes. Furthermore, the concept of promenading would appeal only to those who could afford such leisured-class indulgence. The fact that Lee remained childless and unmarried perhaps underpins her compulsion to promote the 'simple life.' Her model of the frugal, simple life fits the lifestyle of the independent middle-upper-class woman but does not really suit those with class-impinged infringements; for these women, the 'simple life' was simply not an option.

This makes her notion of a self-made space for accessing aesthetic pleasure problematic for a 'reading public' in the broadest possible sense: she argues that 'enchanted woods are rare' but made affordable by the individual's intuitive appreciation of resources to hand. Unlike the ordinary

individual, Vernon Lee could afford to 'explore the surrounding ten miles': the sales from her catalogue of books (by 1906, she had been publishing for 31-years) would have made for a comfortable living and she had the Italian countryside to explore (as well as family and friends to visit across Europe). Thus, her emphasis on the importance of immersing oneself 'intuitively' in the art-work's historically-specific culture is perhaps a privilege restricted to the upper-classes. It would have been far cheaper to open books—even if it meant struggling for a pass at the British Museum—than forking out time and money to travel. Perhaps the fact that Walter Pater spent more time with books than outdoors (due to a lack of funds) confirms this. Her treatment of figures such as Magnus and Spiridion is coercive and hypocritical: she imposes the privileges of her own social background onto her ideal reader.

Unlike Levy, Lee's re-theorisation of Aestheticism could afford to shuttle further towards art as valued for providing aesthetic pleasure and further away from art as valued for its social utility: her writing career does not appear to depend on a negotiation between the two as much as it does for Levy. On the one hand, the interdependency between her fictional and critical works asserts a compulsion to guide her reader through moments of aesthetic pleasure. On the other hand, it suggests a freedom to self-consciously switch between promoting moments of intense aesthetic pleasure and moments of direct academic instruction. In other words, she can shuttle between the two at her own leisure. Thus, whilst her criticism would appeal to a nonconformist, sectarian readership, her fiction could be compositionally complex and dispose of mass market forms only when it would complement her intellectual agenda. Lee answers the question of whether she commanded a 'reading public' for us: she knew her inconsistent mediation between modes of social utility and aesthetic

perfectionism meant that she poorly commanded the literary mass market. This conclusion serves to warn Lee's future readers: Lee might appear to be loose with her terms and in turn, appear to welcome any individual reader to become her accomplice; but do not be deceived. This unspecified reader not only has to become empathetic towards Lee's views, he or she also has to share Lee's socioeconomic background in order to become a practitioner of these.

This sheds a fresh light on what the term 'New Aestheticism' means: whilst it extends our more traditional definition of Aestheticism—by enabling us to consider a broader range of socially-marginalised figures as actively participating within it—this revised definition still regards Aestheticism as a movement that selects and excludes. As far as Amy Levy and Vernon Lee are concerned, the term 'public' is something of a misnomer; their oeuvres are not, in principle, open to anyone and depend on an assumed, pre-determined group. To refer to Shrimpton once again: 'Art for Art's Sake is not a mark of triviality [...] it is the guarantee of their professional and intellectual integrity.' As figures on the outskirts of accepted notions of readership, Levy and Lee's participation in Aestheticism allows socially-engaged references to be asserted through a form most closely associated with high-levels of creative esteem. For Levy and Lee, securing professional and intellectual integrity is an important authorial strategy.

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