

Aestheticizing Politics and Politicizing Art: The “Magic Apparatus” of Cinema in Vernon Lee’s *Satan the Waster*

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Vernon Lee begins her unpublished manuscript *Myself* (1917), “[H]ow have I myself come to think what I think about the war? And why in this respect do I skew aside from other folk?” (1) While such an opening question might be a doorway into the newly articulated Freudian unconscious, Lee looks outside as much as in, asking how she has been formed (and deformed) by her cosmopolitan upbringing across Europe. She writes, “Looking into myself . . . I find a tendency to flare up in contradiction. But oddly mixed with it, a clinging to consecrated ideas; a belief . . . in ‘normality,’ an aversion to the new-fangled . . . an aesthetic and sentimental love of the *past* as such” (20-21). Lee’s proclaimed “love of the *past*,” begs the question of how this influential aesthetic theorist, historian, and storyteller came to produce two initially infamous and now obscure antiwar tracts—*The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) and *Satan the Waster* (1920)—that explicitly confronted her twentieth-century present. *Satan the Waster*, which has only recently come back into print in facsimile editions, particularly challenges how this author, perceived as late-Victorian, has been positioned in relation to the modernism of the 1920s.¹ Critics such as Gill Plain, Vineta Colby, and Christa Zorn have acknowledged a “modernist Lee” emerging at the end of her fifty-year career. The example of *Satan the Waster* does more than potentially position Lee as a modernist, however. This text also enables an inquiry into aesthetic ruptures, exacerbated by the war, between nineteenth and twentieth-century forms of representation.

Lee claims to abandon her earlier aesthetic theories, part of her “optimistic late-Victorian heart” (xi), in the face of this unprecedented war rendered comprehensible through both nationalist propaganda and certain strains of modernist culture. At the same time, she continues to argue for the modern intellectual’s nineteenth-century values of humanist atheism,

belief in evolution, and cosmopolitanism. This conflation of old and new is exemplified in Lee's use of a sound cinematic apparatus in the epilogue to the play of *Satan the Waster*. Recent research into the relationship between audio and visual technologies and literary modernism has evidenced how these technologies constructed both the external contexts and the internal formal horizons of modernist aesthetics.² Introducing a cinematic apparatus into the epilogue of *Satan the Waster*, Lee simultaneously presages and deviates from high modernist visions of aesthetic autonomy realized in part through new perceptual technologies.³ The sound cinematic apparatus that appears in this epilogue functions as a means of exposing the "private realities" behind the play's performance of war as Lee claims in her introduction (viii). It also enables Lee to dramatize two perspectives on cinematic technology—both the control of recording mechanisms to enforce a particular viewpoint and the ability of impersonal recordings to undermine the aesthetics of a spectacle that justifies war.

In this article, I will focus on Lee's revision of her aesthetic theory as a result of her horror at the war and its cultural justifications. The play at the heart of *Satan the Waster*, which Lee calls an "allegoric puppet show" in her introduction (1), centers on a Satan who proclaims his central purpose to his chronicler Clio, the Muse of History, as the "waste" of the "precious, rare and sorely needed" and the transformation of virtues, especially self-sacrifice, into vices (11). The antidote to such "waste," Lee claims, is an embrace of a "reality" beyond one's own "anthropocentric" perspective. She writes explicitly in her introduction that the moral of her play is "respect for the other rather than renunciation of the self" (xlix). The performance produced by Satan, his Ballet of the Nations, forwards the argument that each belligerent nation, entrapped within its own nationalist perspective, mirrors the other. The ballet marries the violence of war with aesthetic pleasure to represent this argument. In aestheticizing a spectacle celebrating waste and death, Satan simultaneously reveals and conceals truths about the war. His following behind-the-scenes show, unveiling the "magic apparatus" of the cinematograph with its powerful magic of framing the real, provides other, unaesthetic revelations. The apparent impersonality of this machine in the epilogue anticipates the modernist vision of T. S. Eliot's famous postwar *Waste Land*, published two years later in 1922, as I will explore in my conclusion. By focusing on Lee's revision of her late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century aesthetic theory in light of the war, I contend that *Satan the Waster* provides a new perspective on the tangled nexus of aesthetics, politics, and technology following World War I.

Revisions of Vernon Lee's Aesthetic Theory

In her prose text for *The Ballet of the Nations* and in the drama of *Satan the Waster*, Lee satirizes both the theatricality of the war and theatrical

productions that aestheticize violence such as Diaghilev's notorious 1913 ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* (The Rite of Spring). *The Ballet of the Nations* can, of course, be read as a clever transposition of *The Battle of the Nations*. In its beautiful cruelty, Lee's ballet/battle reminds us that the theater of war, as Paul Fussell has argued, was a model in World War I that could reverse real and virtual between the stage and the battlefield.⁴ George Bernard Shaw also writes in the prologue to his own anti-war play *Heartbreak House* (1919) that the battlefield, being mistaken for the theater, promoted "a frivolous exaltation in death for its own sake, which was at bottom an inability to realize that the deaths were real deaths and not staged ones" (29). Similarly, Lee implicates turn-of-the-century aesthetics that envisioned the glorious arrival of the new through the violent destruction of the old in performances likened to battle. Satan's criticism of his ballet in *The Ballet of the Nations*, for example, could pass for a review of *Le Sacre du printemps's* modern primitivism: "The music is not always very pretty, at once too archaic and too ultra-modern for philistine taste, and the steps are a trifle monotonous. But it gives immense scope for moral beauty, and revives religious feeling in all its genuine primeval polytheism" (15-16). The same might be said not only for the Russian ballet, but also for the productions of modernist movements like futurism.⁵

The illustrated text from which *Satan the Waster* (1920) is derived, entitled *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915), was composed by Lee with the artist and actor Maxwell Armfield while she was trapped in Britain at the onset of the war (Figure 1). The short *The Ballet of the Nations*, accompanied by Armfield's highly stylized aestheticist drawings, was transformed into *Satan the Waster*—a text-heavy drama with 200 pages of essayistic fragments, Lee's "notes," on the politics and aesthetics of war. Both *The Ballet of the Nations* and the drama at the heart of *Satan the Waster*, ending with "Grand Guignol" bloodshed, present a dance of nations that alludes to the war.⁶ In both works, this performance is produced by Satan and conducted by Ballet Master Death, and all of the characters, from the Virtues in the "Orchestra of Patriotism" to the blind drummer Heroism to the audience of the Ages-to-Come, are allegorical. In subtitling *The Ballet of the Nations* "a present-day morality," Lee references the premodern moral universe that she perceives as undergirding the war while slyly inverting the values of this universe to establish Satan as her text's monstrous anti-hero. The described aesthetics of this performance—in terms of costume, dance, music, and set design—are a jumble of historic references. At the beginning of *The Ballet of the Nations*, for example, Lee writes, "[W]ith the end of the proverbially bourgeois Victorian age, there set in a revival of taste, and therefore of this higher form of tragic art, combining, as it does, the truest classical tradition with the romantic attractions of the best Middle Ages" (1). This pastiche of period aesthetics blunts any conception of historical progress, reflecting,

as Lee writes in her introduction to *Satan the Waster*, the “disproportion” between the “material powers” of modernity and “the intellectual and moral notions handed down” from the past (xli). Lee’s revisions from the 1915 to the 1920 text foreground her growing anxiety about how to represent the war as she transformed her initial beautifully illustrated *The Ballet of the Nations* into *Satan the Waster*, a text which incorporates horrific scenes of lyrical violence into a Shavian drama rife with excoriating ironies.

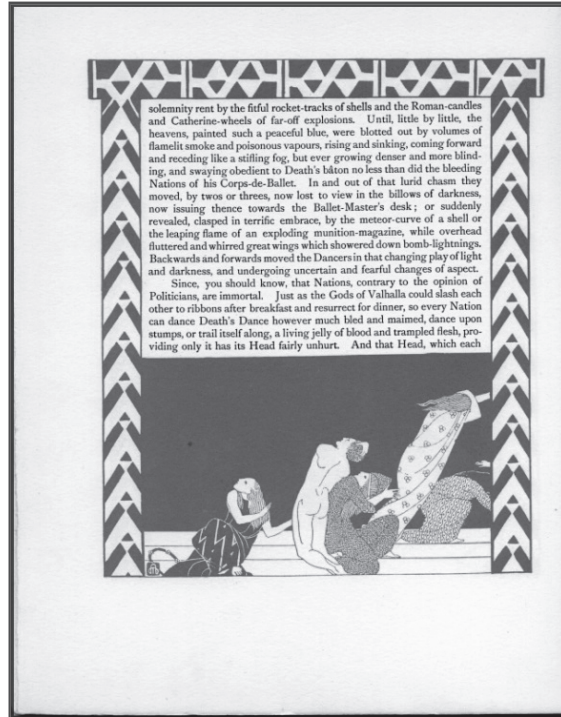


Figure 1. Vernon Lee and Maxwell Armfield. *The Ballet of the Nations* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), 13.

A conflict between Lee’s anti-war vision and that of *The Ballet of the Nations* illustrator Maxwell Armfield precipitated, as Grace Brockington has shown, Lee’s transformation of the earlier text into *Satan the Waster*. *The Ballet of the Nations* contains “not one, but two books, two conflicting interpretations of art’s role in defending international peace” (Brockington 144). Lee’s working relationship with Armfield was determined by shared pacifist commitment, but plagued by aesthetic disagreement. The only performance of the text that forms, with revision, both *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster* was a reading at the beginning of the war for the pacifist organization the Union of Democratic Control (U.D.C.)

at Armfield's Glebe Studios and the Margaret Morris Theatre. Following this reading, Chatto & Windus offered to publish the text and requested that Armfield illustrate it (Brockington 154). Thus, the marriage between author and illustrator, to Lee's ultimate dissatisfaction, was planned by the publisher. Armfield's "art for art's sake" symbolist aesthetics aimed to instill a desire for peace through the therapeutic realization of aesthetic ideals beyond everyday life. Lee, on the other hand, perceived aesthetics as an integral (and integrating) approach to everyday life. Armfield's aestheticism, despite his committed pacifist politics, came too close to aestheticization for Lee.

In her introduction to *Satan the Waster*, Lee writes of the earlier illustrated text that "the thing once written, I began to see its shallowness" (vii). This "shallowness" is determined, according to Lee, by the "grandeur of tragedy" intrinsic to "visible performance" (vii). Armfield's images, for example, do not correspond directly to the violence depicted in the text of *The Ballet of the Nations*. Illustrating Lee's sentence that "every Nation can dance Death's Dance however much bled and maimed, . . . a living jelly of blood and trampled flesh . . ." (13), for instance, Armfield visualizes figures looking at (and turning away from) this horrific vision rather than representing the vision itself (Figure 1). When Lee cuts these images in *Satan the Waster*—the visual, aesthetic waste of an early draft—she, like Armfield, explicitly denies the visualizations of the scenes described in the ballet, but, further, she also denies visual representation entirely, depending, instead, on ekphrastic description. The central text of the ballet is relayed to the reader by a sycophantic Clio in *Satan the Waster* rather than through the textual exposition and images of *The Ballet of the Nations*. Thus, Lee further emphasizes the importance of a complicit audience to the continuation of war while introducing the additional allegory of misguided historical recording through Satan's obliging audience member. The spectators of his performance are also the only witnesses of the ballet in *Satan the Waster*. As Lee writes in her stage notes, "[I]t is the author's imperative wish that no attempt be made at showing the Dancing of the Nations" (57). In her 1920 text, Lee also adds a framing prologue in Hell and an epilogue in the theater's green room, both initially published in *The English Review* in August and September of 1919, about a year after the Armistice, to introduce private dialogues between Satan and Clio. She writes in her introduction that the "prosaic" value of the cinematographic machine used in the epilogue is particularly important for countering the "visible performance" of the Ballet of the Nations (viii).

Just as she denies the "grandeur of tragedy" of Armfield's images, Lee also questions the power of written language to convey the truth about the war. The performance of the Ballet of the Nations enacts ironic reversals in which, for example, ostensible virtues such as Loyalty and Justice

play the tune of Satan's Ballet in his "Orchestra of Patriotism" alongside Hatred, Pugnacity, and Bullying. Lee thus makes her argument through a performance that casts doubt on the transparency of language. As she writes in her notes, there is an "unconscious mendacity inherent in all verbal expression" (133). Writing of wartime propaganda, she states that one of Satan's "good jokes" is "getting evil out of the means to good, since language has been and ought to be the chief assistant of human reason" (169). In *Satan the Waster*, Lee accuses words of bearing an inadequate relationship to the truth of a multi-sided "reality." Nevertheless, throughout the war, Lee kept hundreds of pages of pacifist notes, fragments of which surround the drama at the heart of *Satan the Waster*. These fragments of her notes dialogically interpret, like the prefaces to Shaw's plays, the drama at their center. Unlike Shaw's plays, however, *Satan the Waster* has no performance history beyond the U.D.C. reading, so it can be considered a closet drama within a polemic. In this hybrid text, Lee foregrounds her distrust of words in the aftermath of wartime propaganda by refracting her objective assessment of the war through the defamiliarizing allegories of her play.

This textual transformation from *The Ballet of the Nations* into *Satan the Waster* also evidences Lee's questioning of the value of "feeling" and her revision of her aesthetic theory, especially her most well-known contribution to British aesthetics: empathy, or *Einfühlung*, "feeling into," an idea gleaned from the German psychologist Theodor Lipps. Lee, following Lipps, defined empathy in her late-Victorian essays as the projection of the self into an aesthetic object, or "non-ego." This aesthetic relationship between subject and object through empathy was key to Lee's aesthetic theory, and she was critical of contemporary *l'art pour l'art* movements for shirking it. She saw such movements as indicative of the stratification of art and life in modern culture and posited, instead, a practical aesthetics based on an empathetic relation as central to individual and social health. Critiquing *l'art pour l'art* movements as a sign of modern alienation, for example, Lee writes:

[T]he separation of a class of 'artists' (with its corresponding class of 'art-lovers') from ordinary craftsmen and average mankind has always brought about aesthetic uncertainty, since this independent class has invariably tended to what is called "art for art's sake," that is to say, art in which technical skill, scientific knowledge, desire for novelty or self-expression have broken with the traditions resulting from the unconscious sway of spontaneous aesthetic preference. (*Beauty and Ugliness* 32)

While art has ostensibly become separated from everyday life in fin-de-

siècle *l'art pour l'art* movements, Lee maintains in her prewar writing that an integration of aesthetic experience into everyday life is still possible.

Throughout the war, Lee revised her prewar, Lipps-indebted theory of aesthetic empathy, moving from an emphasis on aesthetic identification to an ambivalent advocacy of a perspective based on objectivity rather than a feeling that could confuse aesthetics and reality. In *Satan the Waster*, she transforms her idea of the aesthetic through her critique of aestheticization. Her central concern is no longer the enrichment of life through aesthetic experience, but, rather, an escape from the dangers of what she calls “anthropocentrism,” or the failure to see outside the self. For Lee, mind and body should not be interpolated into a postwar world through an aesthetic stimulation that enables one to live at peace with war.⁷

Lee’s prewar theory of empathy as a complex interrelation between the perceiving subject and the aesthetic object already suggests possibilities for alienation as well as affirmation. Gill Plain argues that the political intent of *Satan the Waster* belies Lee’s aesthetic theory of empathy. In comparing Lee’s aesthetics in *Satan the Waster* to Brechtian aesthetics, Plain claims that a “strategy of distancing discourages empathy and facilitates the recognition of otherness, enabling people to gain a new perspective and resist their manipulation by the puppet masters of war,” adding that the association of women with emotion have blinded critics to “noticing that although she may have mobilized the concept [of empathy], it is a notion completely alien to her literary practice” (14). While Lee’s use of alienation effects through allegory, irony, and the focus on the audience rather than the performance in *Satan the Waster* supports Plain’s thesis, Lee’s idea of empathy is not entirely denied but is reconfigured both in the play itself and in its apparatus of notes. While Plain aligns empathy with the emotional, the human, and Aristotelian catharsis, Lee’s conception of empathy as an identification with the “non-ego” also implies by virtue of its definition alliance with its converse—the inhuman and a lack of cathartic relief. Empathy is the collapsing of distance through projection as the ego sees itself in the non-ego, but its inverse suggests an encounter with the alien, with what Lee endorses as an “interest in *otherness* for its own sake” (*Satan the Waster* 241).

At the end of her notes in *Satan the Waster*, Lee writes

Thinking over the war, and trying to understand its spiritual phenomena, would have cured me of any anthropocentrism of any kind . . . [F]eeling and striving have a warm, an inner, an intimate quality; while on the contrary *seeing* (especially mental seeing) is somehow extraordinarily cold, external, a sort-of half-way meeting point between what is and what is not ourself. (299)

While Lee still regards the “intimate quality” of subjective feeling as integral to a sane connection to the world, her hesitancy regarding seeing (with words like “somehow,” “sort-of,” and “half-way”) suggests an ambivalent promotion of incomplete projection, or a cleavage between subject and object. When one’s will is defined in terms of the self, rather than through others, Lee implies, this “cold” seeing might be necessary to undermine the centrality of one’s own perspective. As a response to the aestheticization of war, Lee emphasizes the externality of seeing against the intimacy of feeling, an externality reflected in her distancing aesthetics in *Satan the Waster*. Lee’s externalized vision is like empathy in its projection between subject and object but, meeting at the “half-way point,” the empathetic projection is not completed. The object maintains its otherness. Following the war, Lee wrote, such a maintenance of otherness through an external perspective is the only means of avoiding “*will-tension*,” the subsuming of “things, processes and persons” to “our desires” (299).

In engaging the distancing-effect of an apparently objective vision in her epilogue, Lee provides an alternative perspective on the cinematic medium that had increasingly become regarded as an art form in the 1910s and 1920s. This apparatus, controlled by Satan, reveals the elaborate behind-the-scenes architecture of the war. At the same time, Lee suggests that this recording machine can capture reality and potentially decenter its spectator to promote pacifist ends. David Trotter has recently argued that modernist writers were interested in the cinematic medium not for its aesthetics, but, rather for the “neutrality” of the medium’s inhuman vision (9). While Trotter overlooks the value of cinema as an explicitly aesthetic medium for many modernists, Lee’s approach toward cinema exemplifies Trotter’s claim that interwar writers valued cinematic “neutrality.” Lee represents cinema as a recording medium rather than an aesthetic medium not only to forward her own pacifist argument through Satan’s ironic demonstration but also to provide a model for an inhuman perspective that defies aesthetic appeal.

The Recordings of the “Magic Apparatus”

In the epilogue to *Satan the Waster*, the figure of Gabriele D’Annunzio, the decadent Italian writer cited by Walter Benjamin as a forefather of fascist aesthetics, reveals the dangers of a fin-de-siècle *l’art pour l’art* ethos. As a presumably Italian citizen in the epilogue states, “[O]ur people don’t mind cut-off hands or gouged-out eyes . . . [O]ur most celebrated living *littérateur* has some in each of his works” (96). Lee further accuses D’Annunzio in an earlier article of producing “an art so far too separate from life, disdainful and disdained by life’s purposes and creeds [so that] it is a marvelous instrument for expression with little or nothing to express” (3). Lee’s representation of the cinematic medium in *Satan the Waster* recalls the well-known conclusion to Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Its

Technological Reproducibility” in which he claims that proto-fascists like D’Annunzio and F. T. Marinetti expect war to gratify “a sense perception altered by technology . . . [Humankind’s] self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as an extreme aesthetic pleasure. *Such is the aestheticizing of politics as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art*” (42; italics in original). Benjamin casts the mass medium of cinema as the agent for a dialectic overcoming of this fascist “aestheticizing of politics.” For Lee, however, the cinematic medium is important not for its potential to energize the masses, as it is for Benjamin, but for its potential to capture an unaesthetic reality in response to the aestheticization of war. Lee introduces the cinematic medium into her anti-war play not only to “display a sequence of distinctly U.D.C.-shaped preliminary scenes,” as Patrick Wright puts it (113), but also to critique the aesthetic spectacle of the ballet using what Benjamin calls the “optical unconscious,” or “another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye” (37). In *Satan the Waster*, the cinematic medium exposes the causes of the war through the framing of “real Reality” (66). At the same time, this reality does not always stay within its frame.

According to the stage directions, the productions of Satan’s “magic apparatus,” a cinematograph synchronized with a gramophone, would be the only visual and aural spectacle that an audience would share with Satan, Clio, and their entourage of the Ages-to-Come. This “magic apparatus,” described by Satan to Clio as the “paltriness of the mysterious machinery behind the ballet,” and “one of my finest bits of poetic irony,” (106) reveals the scenes taking place around dinner tables, in boardrooms, and in factories that initiate and support the spectacle of the ballet. While the figures in these sound films might be “mere humble specimens of the Investor, the Homo Ecomonicus who sways the modern world,” they are also the world’s “Supermen,” the true “Heads of State” (64). Initially, however, Clio cannot perceive this show. The stage directions read that the apparatus projects instead “[v]iews of buildings, rather out of perspective, jerk[ing] across the screen. People come in and out, showing more of their boot soles than one usually sees; and voices gabble nasally on the gramophone” (66). When Clio becomes angered at these disjointed images and sounds, Satan acknowledges that, “real Reality...is boring, nine-tenths of it at least, and therefore unrecorded” (66). In order to compose these fragments into a sequence, to make sense of them, Satan has to “manipulate Reality” for Clio, and “make the recorded acts and words which were scattered, interrupted, or too long drawn out gather up into scenes intelligible to a critic of the drama like you” (67). Satan adjusts the machine to enable Clio, the recorder of monumental history, to see recordings from the “magic apparatus,” revealing the causes of war through focusing and editing this capture of “Reality.” The bodiless heads that remain at the end of *The Ballet of the*

Nations, after the limbs have been rent, are, Satan claims, mere cardboard stylizations compared to these images of “Heads of State.”⁸ The gramophone, “marked ‘His Master’s Voice,’” wheezes throughout the screening and Satan frequently stops to change the disc, but Clio is nevertheless delighted by his magical revelation of the real once her vision and hearing have been ordered.⁹ The perceptions enabled by Satan’s “magic apparatus” expose the ballet as spectacle and, in the process, construct another, less aesthetic narrative determined by this new medium.

The first fifteen film sequences that Satan shows to Clio in the epilogue depict the causes of the war, slipping in and out of thinly veiled allusions to wartime incidents. Lee describes the setting and characters with each disc change in stage directions, and then proceeds to relate their dialogue (without any further visual description), revealing the economic and political impetuses behind the war as well as their cultural supplements. These sequences express Lee’s belief that the war resulted from oligarchic planning within England, Germany, France, and other involved Western nations to justify continued economic growth and undermine democratic and socialist movements. Lee further represents the cultural and religious supplements that she perceives as supporting these powers in a sequence, for example, in which a Vicar persuades his mother to buy stock in armaments rather than apples. Satan’s structuring of these imagined documentary sequences builds Lee’s argument through the cross-cutting possibilities of early film narrative. For instance, a sequence in which sugar, iron, steel, and cotton manufacturers beg their Minister to start a European war in order to expand their access to the colonies’ markets is followed by a sequence in which the assassination of the “Heir-Apparent of the most Ancient and most Christian Empire of Felix-Nube” (or Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) is announced to a stunned Emperor Wilhelm as an exhortation to war.¹⁰

Lee structures these sequences according to the still relatively new cross-cutting logic of film narrative, the only stylistic cinematic device that she suggests in the script of her epilogue. In her introduction, she writes that reality “requires successive and various orientations and focuses, requires the telescope and also the microscope” (xxxiv). However, there are no long shots or close-ups within imagined shots in the epilogue. She does call attention to the technological possibilities as well as constraints of the cinematic apparatus both in the first part of the epilogue when Satan must organize its mechanical recordings for his audience, and also in Satan’s segue from the first fifteen sequences depicting the causes of the war to the final seven “taking place behind the World’s Stage when the Ballet is already raging” (95). As the “magic apparatus” transitions from the pre-war buildup to wartime developments, the machine moves too quickly for comprehension. Satan tells Clio, “What’s coming ought to be

reeled off at a tearing pace, but I shall slow my machine so that you may be able to follow . . ." (92). The rhythms of the machine reflect the chaos of the war. Satan proceeds to tame the apparatus to show Clio fighting over colonies and the refusal of "peace without victory" (101). However, the cinematograph and the gramophone also capture and display beyond what Satan intends—an off-screen cry for "peace and bread," for example, nearly ends his presentation. Another dimension of reality intercedes into Satan's exhibition in the recorded voice of an unscreened, human opposition to the war. Satan dismisses this cry, the harbinger of the 1917 Russian Revolution, as "a wrongly placed disc which doesn't belong to the set of the Heads of the Nations," demonstrating his shaping of "real Reality" through editing (101).

Satan changes the disc in his "Heads of the Nations" set once more before the apparatus breaks down entirely with cries for peace guaranteed by fighting to the last ("Last man! Last penny! Last drop of blood! Last war!" (106)). This final disc shows discussions of the Russian Revolution crosscut with devolving international peace talks and the criminal trial of the lesbian dancer and suspected German spy Maud Allan. The film ends as the machine becomes a "Babel" of voices and images, the montage quickening and threatening to become again incomprehensible, auditory and visual noise, a "horrible row" as Clio and the Ages-to-Come cry. Satan apologizes, stating that it will "take fifty years in fifty archives to clear up the muddle" (106). Lee implies that the productions of the cinematic apparatus that wind up in the archives will be framed in terms of a comprehensible and well-rendered narrative just as the ballet transforms war into an aesthetic experience. The uncontrollable montage of images and the intrusion of off-screen sound, however, introduce other aspects of reality into Satan's carefully curated version. The referential power of the cinematic image and recorded sound give archival film, however framed, a direct indexical claim to an otherwise inaccessible reality. The babble of aural and visual perspectives, furthermore, points to the ultimate incomprehensibility of reality. While art provides "the dots on the i's; the focuses, the intensifications and steadyings" (181), reality is the "*more . . . beyond our delimitations, beyond our momentary focus*" (175). It is this "real Reality" that can be captured by the camera eye and gramophone ear even as propaganda films shape, or fake, this cinematic capture for persuasive purposes.

At the conclusion of the epilogue, the "blind boy," Heroism, awakens and throws the skeletal figure of Ballet Master Death, who has been sleeping drunk on his chest, from the stage. While Heroism begs for "some kindly surgeon to cut away at last the veil of blindness from my eyes!," Ballet Master Death, as the stage directions read, "*wheezes responsively like a broken bellows*" (109). The final scene of the epilogue thus alludes back to the productions of the sound cinematic apparatus with Ballet Master Death's wheezing recalling the gramophone's punctuating wheeze. The

final words of this performance are Satan's. He announces, "And if, by any chance, that Blind Boy should be surgoned into seeing . . . why, then, this will have been the last of our Ballets of the Nations!" (110). It is vital to Lee's pacifist argument that Heroism be presented with the possibility of vision only after Clio has witnessed the workings of the "magic apparatus"; Lee suggests that its recordings might not only reveal the "real" material behind the ballet, but might also defy this performance's interpellating aesthetic power. A disorienting vision accompanied by the wheezing voice of the gramophone provides a possible model for subverting an aesthetically appealing illusion suturing the spectator into war. The incoherent visions and sounds emerging from the machine at the beginning and end of the epilogue allude to the multiple sides and angles of a reality that pushes back against the limitations imposed by Satan's framing of this real footage. Lee uses this framing to expose the motivations behind the war as well as to emphasize Satan's diabolical pleasure in them. At the same time, as the off-screen call of protest that nearly derails Satan's screening evidences, the machine can capture more than what is intended to be shown.

Although it is akin to the new technologies that enabled the war, the "magic apparatus" in *Satan the Waster* not only exposes realities behind the spectacle of the war, but also represents the limitations of aesthetics in a postwar world through these recordings of reality. In the notes to *Satan the Waster*, Lee writes:

All this amounts to saying that machinery has grown and mankind has grown not so much with, meaning proportionately, as *into it*. Mankind's thought and imagination and will and effort have grown, precisely fitted, to that machinery's requirement; grown thanks to machines themselves, to telegraphs, telephones, marconigrams, and even those latest mechanical toys which display to all belligerent stay-at-homes bowdlerized battles and film-faked atrocities almost at the very minute of their taking place. Nor by positive methods only, but by more potent negative ones of omission and suppression: ideas, wishes, facts allowed diffusion only insofar as their diffusion increases, without producing friction, the immeasurable, complicated automatism of our thoroughly mechanized existence. (127)

Elsewhere in her notes, cosmopolitan Lee sees the usefulness of modern communication technologies interconnecting the world, uniting "labour with labour, science with science, education with education, womankind with womankind" (118). However, this growth of possibility opened by

new technologies also becomes a reduction to the automatic. Body and mind are instrumentally shaped from without by these media. “[T]hose latest mechanical toys” construct the one-sided nationalist perspective that enables war and its audience of “belligerent stay-at-homes.” The battles brought to home front theaters in this widely filmed war are likewise trapped within their circumscribed framing as the medium’s claims to virtual immediacy enable a confusion of the fictional and the real with “bowdlerized battles and film-faked atrocities.”¹¹

Fortunately, individuals, gifted with an aesthetic sensibility, might also surpass this constrictive instrumentality through evolution:

In this automatism, in all other respects more like a machine than a living organism, there lurks, however, the saving grace of sensitiveness to pain and pleasure; and hence the power of adaptation. This being so, we may be sure that, even at this moment, there is evolving some small unsuspected organ or quality, most likely a by-product even as the human hand and jaw and hence the human brain were once by-products of adaptations in lower creatures; some unseen factor destined to alter for the better this dreadful latter-day organism wherein man’s muscles and man’s mind, and the sinews and food and lubricants of machines, are interlocking coordinated parts, and whose latest achievement we can watch in our war. (129)

The aesthetic, “the saving grace of sensitiveness to pain and pleasure,” continues to work through the evolving body, if not through the mind trapped by applied science and the one-sidedness of nationalism. In her notes to *Satan the Waster*, Lee suggests that modern technology enables a limited perspective through suppressing otherness; however, she also posits that the human capacity for the aesthetic contains the potential to produce a different kind of feeling, thinking, and being between technology and the human sensorium. For Lee, aesthetic experience is both innate and historical. Her empirical physiological studies of art reception in *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912) forward the idea that the experience of the aesthetic takes place in the body as well as in the mind. She emphasizes that both psychology and physiology are mediated by the subject’s environment and, in this sense, perception, and aesthetics, are always historical and, hence, can be transformed, reversed, and dialectically synthesized. Manipulated by the exhibitor Satan, the cinematograph and the gramophone in *Satan the Waster*, examples of applied science, expose unfiltered reality in moments of unintentional cinematic capture. These moments of visual and auditory

exposure beyond Satan's narrative suggest an expansion through evolution into a new relation between human perception and the reality "beyond our delimitations" (175).

Lee's choice of a sound cinematic apparatus for her script in this epilogue is telling not only for the obvious reason that it enables her to write out the dialogues that unveil her explanations of the war. While we cannot underestimate the practical value of this medium for representing both propagandistic control over narrative and Lee's understanding of the architecture of the war, I would note that her choice skirts aesthetic conceptions of the cinematic medium by including sound recording in an era dominated by silent cinema. Lee's few pre-war writings on the cinematic medium focus on its scientific rather than aesthetic value.¹² In her short 1913 introduction to psychological aesthetics, *The Beautiful*, for example, she presents the "cinematographic" as either a technical way of seeing or as a scientific means of measuring vision opposed to aesthetic experience. Lee's invocation of this apparatus in *Satan the Waster* is also untimely—her play is neither early enough to directly reflect the prevalence of patented synchronized-sound film machines like Léon Gaumont's Chronophone or Thomas Edison's Kinetophone, generally out of use by 1914, nor late enough to reflect the rise of sound cinema technologies in the late 1920s. Although (silent) cinema had become regarded as an aesthetic medium by 1920,¹³ Lee instead references a sound cinematic apparatus from a period which celebrated the technological marvel of cinema rather than its aesthetics. In doing so, she affirms her late-Victorian reputation even as her introduction of the cinematographic machine to question aesthetic values can be constellated within modernism.

Lee distinguishes the "reality" of cinematographically-captured visions and sounds, the framing of the "real" through the "magic apparatus," and the "homogeneous . . . corroborating" effects of art in *Satan the Waster* (181). She thus questions her prewar, holistic conception of the aesthetic, using both aestheticized spectacle and an unaesthetic encounter with reality, realized through the orchestration and editing of a protagonist invested in wasting human life. With her representation of a seemingly impersonal perspective through the cinematograph in her epilogue, she presages T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, written two years later in 1922. Like Lee's, Eliot's text also engages the trope of waste tacitly reflective of the inconceivable wastes of the war. Reading these two texts together, we find an unconsidered resonance, and telling dissonance, between Lee's and Eliot's postwar aesthetics.

The Modernist Waste Lands of Vernon Lee and T. S. Eliot

Tim Armstrong writes of *The Waste Land* that Eliot "cannot (and Pound cannot) 'edit out' all the waste, because it is waste material; both the abject

and a valuable surplus which enables culture to continue, creating its own moment as it orders its abjection. There can be no production without waste" (71). As Armstrong further notes, *The Waste Land* refers both to the "Unreal City" and to the process of writing, to the collection of voices and visions—a collection over twice as long until Ezra Pound edited it down. Eliot's postwar poem also responds elliptically to the wastes of war, particularly to its most abject waste—human bodies. For Eliot, waste might also prove generative. As he writes in the first section of *The Waste Land*, "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (39). While there is nothing generative in Satan's wasting of human life and purpose, Lee also invokes the garden metaphor. The war has brought forth in "these spiritual gardens we used to cultivate," she writes, thoughts like "weeds" which had been present but plucked before the war (x). The waste of war, for Lee, thus brings forth critiques of the modernity that produced it. Her perspective on "waste" in these notes recalls her earlier description of the "Wastefulness" of the medieval period in her nineteenth-century book of historical essays *Euphorion* (1884) as "time, thought, and feeling refused to the realities of the world, and lavished on the figments of the imagination" (447). In *Satan the Waster*, these "figments of the imagination" have transformed into a nationalist chauvinism orchestrated by Satan. Waste, according to both Lee and Eliot, is the product of a technological modernity dislocated from a corresponding intellectual apparatus.

The Waste Land balances the discarded ephemera, the waste, of postwar, urban mass culture with mythic allusions. Eliot writes of London's "swarming life," an urban mass that "lives in the awareness of the observing eye" without thought or feeling, with only automatic perception like the typist turning on her gramophone who "smoothes her hair with automatic hand" (44). Lee also posits the "awareness of the observing eye" as characteristic of an alienated modern subject reduced to the status of an automaton. Unlike Eliot, however, she looks to this "awareness" for its own inherent possibility rather than invoking a mythic outside to this modern state of being. For Lee, this eye can cast itself into the "half-way meeting point between what is and what is not ourself" (299). *The Waste Land* induces the yearning for salvation, while the atheist Lee emphasizes evolution over salvation in *Satan the Waster*. Lee argues that all human knowledge is partial and is capable of expansion only through the embrace of otherness. While, for Eliot, art is inhumanly organic in its impersonal tradition, for the late-nineteenth-century Lee aesthetics are the organic hinge between the human and the inhuman, determined both through the immediate response of the body and the mediating response of the mind.

Eliot invokes Lee once in his poem, in the discarded "Fresca" section. This passage sharply critiques fin-de-siècle decadence and its manifestations of *femme fatale* femininity as well as women poets. Eliot writes:

For varying forms, one definition's right:
 Unreal emotions, and real appetite.
 Women grown intellectual grow dull,
 And lose the mother wit of natural trull.
 Fresca was baptized in a soapy sea
 Of Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee. (26-7)

Eliot conspicuously feminizes fin-de-siècle aestheticist and impressionist movements in this wasted passage, ignoring the internal tensions between these proper names. Vernon Lee stands with John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater as the “soapy” sentimental force of modernity. Lee, however, concurrently revised her own thoughts on aesthetic production even as Eliot referred to her as the waste of the last generation. Eliot’s dismissal of Lee in *The Waste Land* is a dismissal of the ostensibly feminized decadent culture of the last century and asserts the fragmentation of modernist traditions between the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. These traditions can be conceived through their introduction of impersonal perspective—while Eliot adopted impersonality as an ahistoric aesthetic value, Lee, instead, dramatized it as an aesthetic crisis indivisible from history.

The voice of *The Waste Land* is transcendently outside of the world it lives within. As a pacifist, and female, witness to war, on the other hand, Lee herself occupies a liminal position, and her marginalized voice informs the outsider’s perspective of *Satan the Waster*. Gillian Beer asks, comparing the poor reception of *The Ballet of the Nations* and *Satan the Waster* to the reception of the British soldier poets of World War I, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, “Soldiers have a blood-bolstered authority. But a non-combatant woman, a writer on aesthetics, what does she [have] here?”¹⁴ Her response is that Lee’s authority lies, paradoxically, in her lack of authority, in being outside “the palisade of nationality, patriotism, community, even humanitarianism” (109).¹⁵ A parallel to this positioning can be found in the sound cinematic apparatus’s external visions and sounds in the epilogue to *Satan the Waster*, although at the time of *Satan the Waster*’s composition Lee remains as ambivalent about this apparatus as she is about traditional forms of aesthetic production. Lee once modeled her aesthetic as an organic force forming itself through the human body with empathy and rhythm, adjusting it to its environment from within and without. The aesthetic organism opposes the aestheticized automaton, a body grown *into* its machines rather than through and beyond them. While Lee’s earlier aesthetics proposed that sensuous human perception could enable empathy between subject and object, in *Satan the Waster*, modernity’s dislocations make a “cold” vision necessary to overcome the threat of aestheticization. The calibration of interior and exterior space that had formed Lee’s aesthetic theory until the war thus required reconceptualization. The nationalist ideologies and advanced technologies of World War I, made meaningful

through propaganda, proved what Lee perceived as “anthropocentric” expansion. Modernist movements endorsing war and the blasting of the past complemented this nationalist project, Lee suggests, with their own implicitly pro-war agenda.

Considering these political and cultural shifts, Lee transformed her late-nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. *Satan the Waster*, while not dispensing with an ideal of “art for life’s sake” entirely, nevertheless puts forth the protest that the abstracted, cacophonous fragments emerging from the cinematograph and gramophone are truer in their revelation of reality than the carefully constructed spectacle of the ballet, a spectacle rendered beautifully in Armfield’s initial illustrations for *The Ballet of the Nations*. Lee, the late-Victorian aesthetic theorist, endorses the unaesthetic value of cinema as a medium through which to access reality even as she employs it as a rhetorical device to explain her own narrative of the war through Satan’s demonic exhibition. The power of this medium is that it can simultaneously be framed and indifferently record images and sounds to demystify aesthetic investment in a politically dangerous vision. Lee, undermined by Eliot, developed an exceptional critique of aesthetics in the wake of the war through similarly emphasizing the impersonal in *Satan the Waster*, albeit with much more uncertainty.

Notes

1. *Satan the Waster* was out-of-print for decades following its 1930 reissue by the original publisher John Lane. Beginning in 2010, several publishers focused on reprinting texts in the public domain, Nabu Press, Kessinger Publishing, and General Books LLC, have reprinted facsimile editions of the text.
2. See Armstrong (1-10), Danius (1-54), and Goble (1-26).
3. As Stanley Cavell claims in *The World Viewed*, for example, cinema embodies the autonomy that literary modernists often prescribe. Any media, like the cinematograph, “based upon successions of modern world projections do not . . . have to establish presentness to and of the world: the world is there. They do not have to deny or confront their audiences: they are screened. And they do not have to defeat or declare the artist’s presence: the object was always out of his hands” (118).
4. See Fussell (191-230).
5. F.T. Marinetti, whose 1909 “Futurist Manifesto” had inspired controversy throughout Britain and Europe, often sped through the streets of Florence in a motor car, distributing futurist pamphlets calling for the modernization of Italy’s cities. Simultaneously, Lee resided somewhat reclusively in a British expatriate’s community living in Florence for its Renaissance past.
6. Lee compares the war to “some ghastly ‘Grand Guignol’ performance” in her introduction to *Satan the Waster* (vii), referencing the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Parisian theater that specialized in naturalist plays with horrific themes.

7. Lee's reevaluation of her late-Victorian aesthetic theory in *Satan the Waster* suggests an alienated aesthetics akin to what another German aesthetic theorist, Wilhelm Worringer, called, in his 1908 aesthetic treatise *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy), "self-alienation" as an aesthetic end during periods of disruption rather than the "self-affirmation" defined by aesthetic empathy. There is, however, no evidence that Lee was influenced by Worringer in *Satan the Waster*, although she was certainly familiar with his work, as she disagrees with his 1908 thesis in her 1912 *Beauty and Ugliness*.
8. The "head" of each nation is also what continues to survive in the Ballet, even as the limbs are torn off and the body is disemboweled.
9. "His Master's Voice" refers to the trademark image of the British Gramophone Company and the American Victor Talking Machine Company—a depiction of the fox terrier Nipper gazing into the bell-mouth of the machine at the sound of his master's voice. Virginia Woolf also uses this reference in her diaries to describe Hitler's voice on the radio (5: 204). Apparently, the marketing slogan provided an apt analogy for disembodied, monologic communication through audio technologies.
10. In the sequences of the epilogue, Lee uses thinly-veiled references to actual political figures and events. In this case, for example, "Felix-Nube" ironically recalls the Latin saying "Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube" ("Let others make war; you, fortunate Austria, marry") that originated with the Habsburg marriages of the late-15th-century.
11. This fear was informed by the use of what Walter Lippmann called in *Public Opinion* (1922) media "fictions" from the Boer and First World Wars. These filmed "fictions," Lippmann maintained, manipulated not only public perception, but also the public memory of these wars.
12. Lee's extensive collection of unpublished antiwar writings, archived in Colby College's Special Collections, make no extended or substantial references to film. Her representation of this medium in the epilogue to *Satan the Waster* is thus particularly surprising.
13. The aestheticization of the (silent) cinematic medium through the 1910s is evidenced, for example, by the early film theory texts Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay* (1916) and Victor Freeburg's *The Art of Photoplay Making* (1918). Interestingly, Münsterberg's theories of applied psychology influenced Lee's conceptions of "psycho-physiological aesthetics" evidenced in *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912). Freeburg, in turn, adopted Lee's writings on aesthetics for his film theory. See Marcus (216-20).
14. Reviews of *Satan the Waster* were more mixed and less censorious than Lee implies in her introduction to the text. Shaw's laudatory review, "A Political Contrast," published in *The Nation* is, unsurprisingly, particularly positive, as he claims that Lee "kept her head when Europe was a mere lunatic asylum" (758).

15. Virginia Woolf's pacifist argument in *Three Guineas* (1938) provides a modernist analogue to Lee's wartime positioning with the "Society of Outsiders." As Beer points out, Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), also recalls *Satan the Waster's* generically hybrid questioning of performance, aesthetics, politics, and media.

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