Art, Psychology and Morality: The Dionysiac and the Apollonian in Vernon Lee’s *Hauntings*

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1 In her essay “Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art” (first published in 1880), Vernon Lee argues that the “synthetical definiteness” of art resembles the “analytical definiteness” of reason in its “hostility” to volatile phantasmal charm (295). While analytical reason “reduces the phantoms of the imagination to their most prosaic elements,” synthetic art “moulds and solidifies them into distinct and palpable forms” (295). The “definiteness” of art accordingly circumscribes the elusive supernatural through symbolic materialisation, at the expense of the fantastic glamour that “invades our whole consciousness” (310). However, in Lee’s *Hauntings* (1890), which contains four supernatural stories recounted by homodiegetic narrators, the “definiteness” of artworks often dissolves. In all of the four stories in *Hauntings*, art, though initially definite, opens up spectral vistas that collapse subject-object and past-present distinctions. Furthermore, the stories feature uncanny moments when the narrators’ professional objectivity, overwhelmed by elusive artworks, succumbs to untamed instincts. In “Amour Dure,” the historian Spiridion Trepka conjures up, and then yields to, the ghost of Medea da Carpi through portraits as well as letters and historical documents. In “Dionea,” the doctor-writer Alessandro De Rosis attempts, but eventually fails, to pin down Dionea’s mysterious beauty through definite literary and artistic forms. The portraitist in “Oke of Okehurst” and the composer Magnus in “A Wicked Voice” gradually give way to a ghostly charm that overflows the formal boundaries of their art. In *Hauntings*, therefore, Lee dramatises a double disintegration: not only does the “synthetical definiteness” of art liquefy, revealing spectral allure and terror, but the rational basis of the narrators also ends up being unstable. The disintegration of formal palpability and professional rationality eliminates the distance between the narrators and the *objets d’art* they encounter, plunging both into a whirl of supernatural impressions. What in “Faustus and Helena” is capturable by the aesthetic and critical gaze, then, evades definition in *Hauntings* and begins to haunt the narrators as the conflict between irrational fluidity and
rational solidity is unveiled. The power of the supernatural to unsettle artistic definiteness, as I shall demonstrate, has a theoretical basis in Lee’s idea of the “Dionysiac” in *Music and Its Lovers* (1932). Characterised by excess, the “Dionysiac” contrasts with the “Apollonian,” which is supposed to safeguard the rational, formal and emotional structures of *objets d’art*. The conflict between the “Dionysiac,” which is associated with moral malady, and the “Apollonian,” which is associated with spiritual sobriety, brings morality to the forefront. This essay argues that, in *Hauntings*, Vernon Lee dissolves the distinct boundaries of art and lays bare the dualities in the human psyche, and that, in calling artistic and rational definiteness into doubt, Lee broaches a series of moral issues. Firstly, I shall offer an account of some aspects of Lee’s theory of art in order to lay the groundwork for an analysis of the “Dionysiac” and “Apollonian” elements in *Hauntings*. Secondly, focus shall be given to *Hauntings*—and more specifically to “Dionea”—in order to shed light on how the double disintegration of artistic definiteness and rational stability is effected. Thirdly, I shall elucidate, by means of textual details, the moral issues involved in this double disintegration. Concentrating on the intersections between *Hauntings* and Lee’s own theory of the supernatural in art, this essay adopts a more text-based approach and, in doing so, seeks to complement the excellent contextual studies by Stefano Evangelista, Angela Leighton and Christa Zorn, amongst others.

I. Theoretical Formulations

Vernon Lee’s view of art (in “Faustus and Helena”) as inhabiting a world of “definite” tangibility echoes her friend Walter Pater’s aesthetic views. As Linda Dowling has rightly observed, Pater bases his aesthetic theory on an attack on “religious and philosophical transcendentalism, coupled with his impassioned defense of the rich variety of the visible world” (88). Wrenched from the transcendental realm, art is endowed with palpable boundaries and takes on a vivid resplendence peculiar to the secular world. To Pater, as he makes clear in the “Conclusion” to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), the “success in life” is to “burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy” (210)—that is, to seek the sensuous, rather than intangible, pleasure embodied in art.¹ The notion of art as a tangible form at odds with spectral ethereality finds resonance in Lee’s scientific formulation of the “beautiful” in *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913). In this later work, Lee locates the “beautiful” in the immediately palpable world, in the “Aspect” of an *objet d’art*, which consists of colours and sounds “grouped together into relations” (34). An “Aspect” comprises “qualities of its own and reactions of ours which are actual and present,” as opposed to “Things,” which contain “a far greater number and variety thereof which are potential,” such as memories, thoughts and expectations (15-16, italics mine). Like what Lee calls “art” in “Faustus and Helena,” the “beautiful” in the eponymous treatise is a sensuous composite—a definite “Aspect” with its visible and audible components—explicable through analysing the viewer’s psychophysiological responses. Both “art” and the “beautiful” promise Paterian pleasure within the bounds of the sensuous world but cannot give shape to “the vague, fluctuating impressions oscillating before the imagination” (“Faustus and Helena” 299).

Although Lee contends in *The Beautiful* that the appreciation of beauty concerns “Aspects” (the “actual” and the “present”) rather than “Things” (the “potential”), her aesthetic views occasionally allow for ghostly impalpability, for a charm beyond the actual and the present. In “The Lake of Charlemagne” in *Juvenilia* (1887), for instance, Lee writes that “in
our perceptions of nature and of art there usually exists a kind of phantom of the past” (68). She compares this phantasmal presence to “a harmonic, a sound which we do not disentangle at all in our impressions” (68). A harmonic in music enriches a fundamental tone by loosen ing its discernible structure in a stealthy manner; similarly, the imaginary spectral past in art casts a charming glow over a sensuous artwork by destabilising its formal definiteness and temporal actuality. When revenants are conjured up, the past becomes interfused with the present, and nebulous impressions begin to seep through distinct compositions. The fluctuating apparition, harmonic or phantasmal, directs attention to the borderland between the intelligible and the unknowable, characterised by vague suggestion rather than lucid definition.4 Hence, whereas in “Faustus and Helena” Lee asserts that the temporal and formal certainty of art dispels the supernatural, she enriches this view in her later writings and explores the capacity of the supernatural to haunt and to undermine artistic definiteness.

4 As the supernatural is transformed from a passive victim of palpable form into a haunting presence that dissolves the solid fabric of art, Lee endows the “phantom of the past” with an unsettling power bordering on what she names the “Dionysiac” in Music and Its Lovers. In contrast with the “Apollo nian,” which is essentially “calm, lucid, serene, bracing,” the Dionysiac threatens the structures and norms that govern objets d’art, stirring up feelings that are “excited, overwhelming, spiced with pain, exhausting” (235).5 In a similar, Nietzschean vein, Lee distinguishes between two kinds of audience: whereas “Listeners” engage in an “intellectual and aesthetic activity of a very intense, bracing and elevating kind,” “Hearers” indulge in “emotional and imaginative day-dreams” (33). Although the focus here is on music, the differentiation between the Listener (more akin to the Apollonian) and the Hearer (more responsive to the Dionysiac) is in fact an elaboration on Lee’s earlier distinction between “listening”/“looking” and “hearing”/“seeing” in The Beautiful. The former group is discriminated from the latter by intellectual vigour: “When, instead of merely seeing a colour, we look at a shape, our eye ceases to be merely passive to the action of the various light-waves, and becomes active” (31). The two kinds of responses—intellectual versus imaginative, listening/looking versus hearing/seeing, Apollonian versus Dionysiac—weave in and out of the uncanny moments in the stories in Hauntings. The narrators of these stories are invariably draped in professional garments when they appear on the scene, seeking to appreciate objets d’art from an Apollonian perspective—to “look at a shape.” Two of them are preoccupied with historical narratives: the historian Spiridion Trepka in “Amour Dure” and the doctor-writer Alessandro De Rosis in “Dionea.” The other two, the portraitist in “Oke of Okehurst” and the composer Magnus in “A Wicked Voice,” are themselves creators of art, of the Apollonian sort. The stories underscore the narrators’ failure to accomplish the rational tasks they initially set for themselves: a history of Urbania, a book on gods in exile, a portrait of the enigmatic woman Alice Oke, and a Wagnerian opera Ogier the Dane. The portraitist attempts to grasp the physical contour and psychological makeup of Alice Oke, and Magnus strives to complete his rational opera of epic heroism, yet both are haunted by spectres that elude their grasp. Trepka and De Rosis endeavour to give definite shape to historical events but find themselves entangled in the ghostly “romance” (45) of Urbanian history and in the return of an exiled goddess. In “Dionea,” Lee further complicates the plot by confronting De Rosis with the lurid consequences of another creative failure, that of the Apollonian sculptor Waldemar. The following analysis focuses on the intersections between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian in “Dionea” in order to trace the trajectory Lee adopts to dissolve psychological and formal certainty.
II. Hauntings: Dissolving Definiteness

In “Dionea,” De Rosis is caught, like all other narrators, in the penumbra of Apollonian reason and Dionysiac frenzy. De Rosis’s role as communal physician, former political exile, and scholarly researcher makes him appear an Apollonian paragon, pursuing salutary goals through observation and clarification. His social commitment seems to shield him from the emotional excess, spiritual malady, physical languor, and moral ambiguity that lie at the heart of the Dionysiac. This Apollonian lustre, nonetheless, is not unaccompanied by dark shadows. De Rosis’s scholarly project regarding exiled gods in fact serves to satisfy his escapist fantasy, and when his research yields nothing but vapid data, he laments that “Reality […] is always prosaic: at least when investigated into by bald old gentlemen like me” (102). Once a politico-religious dissident, he still dubs himself “an old republican” (77), “old priest-hater and conspirator against the Pope” (79), commenting on the “love misfortunes” in the local convent in a mocking tone: “It appeared the romancing was more correct than the prose” (86). His tacit excitement at observing “the romancing” surmounting “the prose”—a wish fulfillment he seeks and fails to find in his book project—calls into doubt his professional ethics as a guardian of health and sanity. Indeed, his retirement to the seaside village of Montemirto results not so much from an altruistic wish to serve the local community and to mingle with “good peasants and fishermen,” as from his fear of being labelled an “ignoramus” or a “pedant” by “ministers and learned men and pretty women” (82). Though he repeatedly declares his love for pastoral simplicity, his rapturous remark that the world, “at times, seems to be playing at being poetic, mysterious, full of wonder and romance” (102) illuminates his aspiration after something more irrational, emotional and chaotic. Curiously, De Rosis’s Dionysiac nature beneath the rational veneer shares a similarity with the community he at once serves and taunts. The villagers of Montemirto, with their stringent Catholic belief, display “a certain repugnance” for the waif Dionea because she “is doubtlessly a heathen” (78), but they nevertheless “believe very firmly in the evil eye, in magic, and in love potion” (93).

If both the Montemirto villagers and De Rosis turn out to be psychologically ambiguous, the sculptor Waldemar epitomises the dire tragedy that follows an Apollonian intrusion upon the Dionysiac. Waldemar’s art is Apollonian in that, in conformity with Lee’s definition of art in “Faustus and Helena” and of the “Aspect” in The Beautiful, it is marked by aesthetic definiteness instead of spectral fluidity. The beauty of his art springs from concrete physicality, for it manifests “the divineness of the mere body, the spirituality of a limpid stream of mere physical life” (92, italics mine). Waldemar rejects the female figure because sculpture, in his view, aims to recreate tangible “form,” not impalpable “expression”: “woman is not form, but expression […] The point of a woman is not her body, but […] her soul” (96). Waldemar’s creative failure consists in the desire to impose his Apollonian art on the Dionysiac potential of Dionea, that is, to regulate with formal certainty what is perpetually volatile. Dionea’s suggestive resemblance to Venus, after all, is rooted in the imagination, in what De Rosis refers to as “poetic, mysterious,” rather than in the “mere physical life” of the prosaic world. When the Apollonian intrudes upon the fluctuating realm of the Dionysiac, the result is an incomprehensible lack, which Waldemar seeks to overcome by resorting to the Dionysian approach of human sacrifice. In this regard, Waldemar echoes De Rosis, who fails to complete his treatise precisely...
because he attempts to fulfill—by the Apollonian means of scholarly research—his Dionysiac passion for the “poetic” and the “mysterious.”

The artistic integrity of Waldemar, the religious solidarity of Montemirto, and the rational pursuit of De Rosi are thus all undermined by lurking Dionysiac elements. However, the confrontation between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac occurs not only in the human psyche but in artistic representation as well. De Rosi draws upon preexisting mythological, religious and artistic models in order to display Dionea as a definite artifact—only to create ambiguity and contradiction. From the outset, the allusion to “a baleful goddess of beauty” arising from the sea “wicked in its loveliness” (77) defines Dionea as a dangerous reincarnation of Venus. De Rosi’s observation of Dionea, tinged with his Dionysiac fascination, is concentrated on roses, myrtles and pigeons, all of which recall the cult of Venus. As if not satisfied with this mythological approach, De Rosi seeks to pin down Dionea’s fluctuating image in Catholic terms, portraying her as “Devil” and “the Evil one,” who profanes the “sacred garments” of the Madonna and the “most Holy Sacrament” (84-5). “Wicked” (77, 84, 87) in both mythological and Catholic senses, Dionea is contrasted with Waldemar’s wife Gertrude—the only female that has modelled for the sculptor—whose “limpid” (95) quality conforms to Waldemar’s “limpid” (92) Apollonian art. While Gertrude resembles the unimaginative “Memling Madonna” and “mediaeval lady” (95), Dionea is compared to “Leonardo da Vinci’s women” (84) and to the femmes fatales of “Burne Jones or Tadema” (82). Nevertheless, the enigmatic women of Leonardo, Jones and Tadema, evocative as they are, fail to capture the spectral charm of Dionea, and they only constitute another example of De Rosi’s drawing on preexisting images to present what is fundamentally fluctuating. De Rosi’s delineation of Dionea through pagan, Christian, and artistic lenses is not merely an Apollonian attempt to define, and thus to circumscribe, Dionea’s elusory glamour. His appropriation of stock imagery—Venus, the Devil, femmes fatales—as interpretive and descriptive devices also forms a contrast to Lee’s ideal of approaching art through untutored intimacy. De Rosi’s employment of cultural learning demonstrates that the Apollonian effort to derive satisfaction from formal definiteness is dangerously close to pedantry. This mediated artistic response deviates significantly from Lee’s own mission, in Belcaro (1881), to “justify that perfectly simple, direct connection between art and ourselves” (13).

As Stefano Evangelista has pointed out, Lee typically elucidates her “direct connection” to art “through a negative process of un-reading and un-learning the prescriptive strategies encountered in the course of formal education” (British Aestheticism 62). The process of “un-learning” is best illustrated by the reversal of the hierarchical relationship between the model and the statue in “Dionea,” which prompts De Rosi to realise the impossibility of containing Dionea in premeditated forms of art. Watching Waldemar building up the statue of Venus modelled on Dionea, De Rosi initially remarks that Dionea’s earthly beauty is eclipsed in comparison with the eternal beauty of Venus embodied in art. He wonders “whether a village girl, an obscure, useless life [...], can be weighed against the possession by mankind of a great work of art, a Venus immortally beautiful” (98). However, Waldemar inevitably fails to impose his concept of Venus—his learning—on Dionea’s body, just as De Rosi fails to characterise Dionea by mythological, religious and artistic conventions. Waldemar’s failure leads De Rosi to disprove the “Ideal in Art” in the story of Zeuxis, who extracts beautiful features from imperfect individuals to form artistic perfection (100). Individuals now possess a phantasmal charm that eludes the perfection of art. The process of “un-learning” is complete when cultural forces capitulate.
to an “obscure, useless life,” that is, when Waldemar’s Venus pales in comparison with Dionea, who defies all forms of cultural imposition. The “superiority of the model over the statue” (100) dawns upon De Rosis when all conventional methods of delineating beauty prove futile to tame Dionea’s Dionysiac wildness. Dionea—whose name recalls both “Dione” the mother of Venus and “Saint Dione” the virgin martyr (80)—resists definition, being herself an imaginative artwork that imbibes diverse cultural references without claiming any allegiance. Significantly, immediately before Waldemar’s final gesture of despair, Dionea—hitherto an enigmatic woman in Leonardo, Burne Jones and Tadema, a reincarnation of Venus, and the Devil of the Catholic religion—takes on a saintly aura, “like a Madonna of Van Eyck” behind “a great curtain of dull red brocade” (103). Lee ultimately leaves Dionea’s identity fluid. Even the doves that align her with Venus have potential connections with the Christian virtue of St Francis, whose name recurs throughout the story (79, 81, 84, 84). As Christa Zorn has argued, Dionea’s “natural sympathy with nature, symbolized by her entourage of white doves, suggest synecdochical identification with both Aphrodite and St. Francis” (151).

In “Faustus and Helena,” Lee argues that the artist, “dragged by an irresistible longing to the display of his skill, to the imitation of the existing and to the creation of beauty, ceases to strain after the impossible” (305). In each of the stories in Hauntings, however, the Paterian focus on sensuous objects—on the “possible”—yields to imaginative association, which, as “Dionea” illustrates, renders the objets d’art unstable. The narrators attempt to “strain after the impossible” in an Apollonian manner and to come to terms with the overwhelming power of the Dionysiac. Though their professional rationality finally dissolves and their Apollonian projects eventually miscarry, their narratives successfully convey ghostly charm by allowing the Dionysiac to assert its presence, both in art and in the psyche. The objets d’art in the stories—Dionea under the aesthetic gaze of De Rosis and Waldemar, Medea in sculpture and painting, Alice Oke in an unfinished portrait, and Zaffirino in a penny print—turn out to be of the Dionysiac kind. As the Dionysiac potential in art is unleashed, the narrators also turn out to be more akin to “Hearers,” who revel in “emotional and imaginative day-dreams,” than to Apollonian “Listeners,” who appreciate formal beauty in an intellectual way. De Rosis, as argued above, seeks poetic mysteries despite his serious social functions and feels “a certain admiration and awe” (94) towards Dionea notwithstanding his stigmatisation of her in pagan and Catholic terms. Trepka acknowledges the Polish and romantic nature behind his German and pedantic semblance—“When I came to Italy first, I looked out for romance” (54)—and dismisses the Bavarian professor of mediaeval history as an “old pedant” (61). The portraitist in “Oke of Okehurst” adopts an Apollonian approach to Alice Oke by pursuing “her physical image, her psychological explanation” (117) but confesses that he derives “a morbid and exquisite pleasure” (128) from the mystery of the past. Similarly, Magnus, who claims to retain his “reason” (155) even though under Zaffirino’s spell, alludes to his “boyish romantic dreams, when [he] read Swinburne and Baudelaire” (162) and feels himself “dissolve” (167) and “melt” (179) when confronted with languishing beauty. The Apollonian pursuit of artistic definiteness inevitably crumbles and the pedantic lenses—Trepka’s historical training, De Rosis’s pagan, Christian and artistic learning, the portraitist’s physical and psychological study, and Magnus’s musical research—are set aside when their psychological duality renders them susceptible to ghostly ambiguity. When “the separate life of objects” (Mahoney 50) is acknowledged, proving as Dionysiac as the narrators’ psyche, formal certainty dissolves into a plurality of shifting metaphors. Retaining her spectral allure, for example, Medea metamorphoses
into a “scorpion surrounded by flames” (48), a blood-sucking “leech” (52), a beautiful but ferocious “tigress” (56), and a “bogey” on a he-goat (59). Alice Oke, similarly, eludes definition and partakes of the aesthetic and moral qualities of animals as different as a “peacock” (114), a “stag” (114) and a “snake” (149).

III. Morality in Question

10 The Dionysiac undercurrents in Hauntings deviate from both dryasdust scholastic pedantry and Apollonian formal certainty, running through the dark recesses of art and the human psyche. Because of this imaginative deviation, art is no longer a purely sensuous phenomenon that accords with Pater’s formulation in the “Conclusion” to The Studies in the History of the Renaissance and with Lee’s definition in “Faustus and Helena.” In Hauntings, when formal definiteness liquefies into reveries unfettered by morality, art breaks free from its concrete bounds and takes on extrasensory moral significance. Indeed, notwithstanding her early attack on moral Ruskinism in Belcaro, Lee remained sensitive to moral issues in most of her aesthetic and fictional writings, to such an extent that she was accused of “Puritanism” in an anonymous review by Pater in the Pall Mall Gazette (5 August 1887). As Vineta Colby has contended, the “struggle to be an Apollonian when by instinct one is drawn toward the Dionysiac is a metaphor for Vernon Lee’s lifelong struggle for the health of the soul” (216). In Hauntings, the Apollonian struggle for “the health of the soul”—for moral well-being—is impeded when Trepka acknowledges his wildly romantic nature, when De Rosi uncovers his mythopoeic yearning, when the portraitist yields to his “morbid and exquisite pleasure,” and when Magnus falls victim to his emotional susceptibility.

11 In “Oke of Okehurst,” the contrast between Dionysiac malady and Apollonian salubrity is fleshed out in William Oke and Alice Oke. William, a model of Victorian morality, is “serious, conscientious, slow-brained, representative of English simplicity and honesty and thoroughness” (140). Preoccupied with “the work of a land agent and a political whip, reading piles of reports and newspapers and agricultural treatises” (117), William is characterised by “admirable good health and strength” (110) and by a “good healthy face” (117). William’s moral well-being and social commitment constitute a contrast with Alice’s “wretched health” (132) and her Narcissistic indulgence in “self-engrossed vanity,” “shallowness,” “poetic vision,” and “love of morbid excitement” (140). Alice’s moral ambiguity tacitly invades William’s moral assuredness and casts a moroseness on his appearance—a listless, puzzled look” (110). The sabotage of respectable morality by lurking asocial forces finds an appropriate emblem in the “small black carved frame” in the yellow room, in which the narrator expects to find “a head of Christ or of the Virgin Mary” but only discovers the “wistful, melancholy face” of the phantom lover Christopher Lovelock (128). In this petit objet d’art, religious and, by extension, social respectability is surreptitiously usurped by phantasmal amorality, which bursts into view when the frame curtain is opened, i.e. when the semblance of artistic definiteness is removed. Ironically, Alice handles this spectral object with an awe that borders on Christian piety: “Mrs. Oke took the miniature religiously off its stand” (128).

12 “A Wicked Voice” also illustrates Lee’s concern with the moral potential of art, and its very title, in Angela Leighton’s words, underlines the ambiguous “space between beauty and morality” (“Ghosts” 4). In her aesthetic treatises, Lee expresses revulsion against the emotional excess of Wagner, whose music violates “the privacy of the soul” (Laurus Nobilis...
137) and therefore approximates the Dionysiac. In “A Wicked Voice,” by contrast, Magnus imagines the salubrious vigour of Wagner and disdains the Dionysiac languor of eighteenth-century music, which brings about “a moral malaria” (156). To Magnus, eighteenth-century music, epitomised by the castrato Zaffirino, induces “the strangest of maladies” (155) and “stirs up the dregs of our nature” (156). The “voluptuous phrases” and “florid cadences” of eighteenth-century music join the “mysterious influences” (156) of Venice in emitting a “miasma of long-dead melodies, which sickened but intoxicated my soul” (163). Indeed, the Dionysiac imagination in *Hauntings* gradually loosens the hold of morality on the narrators’ Apollonian pursuits, creating an illusion of moral ambiguity. Magnus’s moral reason demands that he dismiss Zaffirino as a “wicked and contemptible wretch” (181), yet he repeatedly characterises Zaffirino and his voice as “beautiful” (162) and “sweet” (164, 170, 171, 177, 179). Trepka feels that he is “turning novelist instead of historian” and refuses to condemn Medea in moral terms, insisting that to “suppose Medea a cruel woman is as grotesque as to call her an immoral woman” (57). De Rosis nourishes “an admiration and awe” (94) towards Dionea, which, like Trepka’s fascination with Medea, develops into a fiercely protective attitude, irrespective of her supposed wickedness. Whereas De Rosis feels sorry for Father Domenico, a victim of the “love epidemic” (86), he execrates Sor Agostino, who turns out to be just another victim but who misdirects his love towards Dionea. Sor Agostino’s passion for Dionea is denounced as “sacred madness” (90)—a phrase that endows the profaned Dionea with a holy quality. Dionea’s transformation from the wicked cause of a love epidemic into the holy victim of a sacrilegious act veils her amoral/immoral potential in a tacit manner, just as religious morality is silently usurped by Lovelock’s spectral allure in the “small black carved frame” in “Oke of Okehurst.”

To conclude, the intermingling Apollonian and Dionysiac elements in *Hauntings* undermine the concrete fabric of art and dissolve the stability of the human psyche, casting an ambiguous light on morality. In the wake of Pater, Lee defines art as a sensuous phenomenon, whose structural definiteness and formal palpability constitute a stark contrast to the fluctuating, hazy, and fluid realm of the supernatural. However, both Pater (e.g. in “La Gioconda”) and Lee (e.g. in “The Lake of Charlemagne”) acknowledge the existence of spectral glamour in individual works of art. The ghostly “perpetual life” of Pater’s Mona Lisa and the “phantom of the past” in Lee’s aesthetic perception open up a twilight area where the Dionysiac confronts the Apollonian. Whereas Pater focuses on individual *objets d’art* in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Lee in *Hauntings* concentrates on the duality inherent both in the human psyche and in art. Lee’s narrators—engaged in intellectual activities of the Apollonian kind—initially stick to the sensuous, palpable and explicable aspects of the *objets d’art* they encounter. Their Apollonian stance comes close to pedantry when they attempt to impose preexisting conceptual models—in the case of De Rosis, pagan, Christian, and artistic forms—on the elusive qualities of their *objets d’art*. The narrators’ scholastic pedantry and Apollonian attention to formal tangibility fail to define the Dionysiac elements that insidiously dissolve artistic definiteness. The narrators themselves prove psychologically unstable when their professional rationality is debunked and when their romantic, irrational and “morbid” nature is exposed. This artistic and psychological duality introduces the theme of morality. While Lee expresses concerns about the amoral/immoral potential of sensuous beauty in such works as *Miss Brown* (1884) and *Juvenilia* (1887),¹¹ she sheds light on the “moral malaria” that follows the double dissolution of rationality and artistic definiteness in *Hauntings*. To Lee, both extreme
sensuousness and spectrality involve the undermining of Apollonian morality by Dionysiac amorality/immorality. In *Hauntings*, therefore, Lee probes into a psychological, artistic and moral space of twilight ambiguity—a space that her stark contrast between art and the supernatural in “Faustus and Helena” does not fully reveal.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


NOTES

1. The conflict between ghostly intangibility and artistic “definiteness” recurs in the preface to “Oke of Okehurst,” where Lee remarks that “to write is to exorcise, to dispel the charm” (105).

2. As Nicole Flurh has argued, each of Lee’s ghost stories “follows a similar trajectory, figuring its narrator as an observer of life and then tracing the process by which his aesthetic or critical distance is dismantled” (287).

3. Indeed, Lee’s treatment of objets d’art in Hauntings bears a striking resemblance to Pater’s “La Gioconda” in his Studies in the History of the Renaissance, in which formal certainty gives way to a ghostly sense of the Mona Lisa’s “soul with all its maladies” (118). Even though their aesthetic views are predominantly sensuous, Lee in Hauntings and Pater in “La Gioconda” both acknowledge the existence of something spectral behind the “definiteness” of individual artworks.

4. The ghostly quality, hazily uncertain yet recalling a faded bodily existence, renders the structural certainty of art dubious and always underlies Lee’s understanding of art. Angela Leighton has explored the parallels between Lee’s aesthetic and her idea of the ghostly, positing that the aestheticist emphasis on style contributes to a ghostly impression of form: “Perhaps the very nebulousness of aestheticist positions, with their emphasis on style rather than content, form rather than matter, suggests a world of shifting outlines and effects” (On Form 102).

5. Lee, as Vineta Colby makes clear, opts for the Apollonian but often allows the Dionysiac to emerge in her works: “She refuses to read meaning into a musical composition, but more often than she realizes, her emotions deflect her attention from the purely formal aspects of the piece” (215). “Meaning” or “emotions” (the Dionysiac) and the “purely formal aspects” (the Apollonian) are not always mutually exclusive in Lee.

6. Although the aesthetes sought to explain the sensuous aspect of objets d’art, their approach was distinctly anti-pedantic. Even those who wrote within the academy attempted to preserve the direct connection between art and themselves: “Even though several aesthetic critics wrote, like Pater, from within the academy, their use of impression and imaginative reconstruction took the knowledge of antiquity out of academic institutions” (Evangelista, “Vernon Lee” 32).

7. The idea of the superiority of the model also occurs in “Oke of Okehurst”: “Titian’s and Tintoretto’s women must have been miles handsomer than they have made them.” (114).

8. St. Francis, who takes pity on doves and preaches to them, constitutes a background image when De Rosis portrays Dionea feeling into (“empathising with,” in Lee’s aesthetic term) the doves and “hopping about, flapping her arms slowly like wings, and raising her little head with much the same odd gesture as they.” It is ironic that the “good Sisters” of the Convent of the Stigmata should “abominate these pigeons” adored by their patron saint (81-2).
9. As Catherine Maxwell has pointed out, “imaginative association,” to Lee, “is itself phantomising, and overlays the present moment or object of perception with traces of ghosts” (215).

10. Lee’s definition of art in “Faustus and Helena” is essentially Paterian because art here is marked by palpable sensuousness and untouched by unaesthetic concerns. In The Beautiful, however, Lee differentiates the formal aspect of “the beautiful” from “art” itself, which contains “utilitarian, social, ritual, sentimental, scientific and other aims” (100). Art, as defined in The Beautiful, encompasses both aesthetic and non-aesthetic attributes.

11. Miss Brown contains Lee’s moralistic views concerning the risks involved in one’s irresponsible indulgence in art. In Juvenilia, Lee insists that moral responsibility should be considered alongside artistic pleasure; beauty itself cannot bring about personal improvement: “unfortunately to live with the daisies and statues means no longer to be like unto them” (10).

ABSTRACTS

Cet article montre que la théorie de l’art et du surnaturel de Vernon Lee élaborée dans son essai « Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art » (1880) — une théorie fondée sur l’opposition entre la forme concrète de l’art et le charme fluide des fantômes—ne rend pas justice à ses histoires de revenants. Dans Hauntings (1890), qui se compose de quatre histoires surnaturelles, Lee dépasse l’opposition théorique entre l’art et le surnaturel. Effaçant les limites qui séparent l’art du surnaturel, Lee illustre aussi un effacement des limites qui gouvernent respectivement l’art et l’esprit. Au fond de la double désintégration de la rationalité professionnelle et de la tangibilité de l’art se trouvent ses idées de l’apollonien et du dionysiaque. L’apollonien garde les structures formelles et émotives de l’art, alors que le dionysiaque promet l’excès. Les intersections entre l’apollonien et le dionysiaque dans Hauntings éliminent la distance entre les narrateurs homodiégétiques et les objets d’art qu’ils rencontrent, plongeant tous les deux dans un tourbillon fatal des impressions surnaturelles. Enfin, des problèmes moraux se mettent en évidence quand la forme concrète de l’art et la certitude rationnelle des narrateurs s’effondrent. Cet article examine, d’abord, des formulations théoriques de Lee qui concernent l’art et le surnaturel, ensuite, la dissolution de la stabilité rationnelle et de la forme concrète de l’art dans Hauntings et, finalement, les problèmes moraux qui s’impliquent dans cette double désintégration.

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