Literary cosmopolitanism in the age of the League of Nations: Vernon Lee, Daniel Halévy and La Revue de Genève

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Abstract
In 1921, the newly founded French-language periodical, La Revue de Genève, featured an exchange of letters between Daniel Halévy and Vernon Lee in which the two writers articulated contrasting visions of national identity and international literary relations. Reflecting on the traumatic experience of the First World War, Halévy called for literature and the role of the writer to be depoliticized. Lee, by contrast, put forward a politicized model of cosmopolitanism that challenged the renewed emphasis on national sovereignty in the post-war international order. Their exchange sheds light on the tense negotiation of literary cosmopolitanism that followed the Versailles settlement and the establishment of the League of Nations.

Keywords
cosmopolitanism, First World War, Irene Forbes-Mosse, Daniel Halévy, international relations, League of Nations, Vernon Lee, La Revue de Genève

After the First World War, the belle époque came to be remembered – mythicized, even – as an age of cosmopolitan optimism. In his autobiography, for instance, Stefan Zweig described the turn of the twentieth century as marking the zenith of the ‘liberal idealism’ of a cosmopolitan European bourgeoisie that believed in tolerance, open-mindedness, and security (2011: 24). In the final years of the interwar period, in a time of pessimism and despair, Zweig famously dubbed this vision of Europe ‘the world of yesterday’. It is undeniable that this image of the cosmopolitan belle époque is the product of nostalgia and projection, and that it is informed by an often unreflecting attitude towards privilege on the part of writers who moved in wealthy and well-connected social circles.

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Nonetheless, it is also the case that, at the turn of the century, European writers were more mobile and internationally interconnected than ever before, and that this new mobility fostered a cosmopolitan literary culture that was shaken to its foundations by the First World War. The European conflict not only disrupted writers’ ability to communicate with each other across borders because they found themselves unable to travel and limited in their freedom to exchange letters and access foreign presses; it also called into question the cosmopolitan optimism of a recent past that already looked impossibly far away. When the war ended and former enemy nations started to reconnect through political efforts, writers were therefore also tasked with having to rebuild international networks – a challenge that simultaneously entailed practical and symbolic dimensions.

What impact did the war have on European writers who had belonged to the cosmopolitan literary culture of the turn of the century? What private and public challenges did they have to confront when they resumed contact with friends and associates from the other side of enemy lines? How did they envisage the legacy of the cosmopolitan culture of the pre-war years in the present? This essay addresses such questions through the prism of a public exchange between the writers Daniel Halévy (1872–1962) and Vernon Lee (pen name of Violet Paget, 1856–1935) that took place in 1921 in the pages of the international journal *La Revue de Genève* (1920–30). Halévy and Lee got to know each other at the turn of the century as part of a cosmopolitan elite of European intellectuals. As a French and a British citizen respectively, they belonged to two of the winning nations of the First World War but their understandings of the relationship between literature and national identity, and their views on writers’ involvement in international relations in post-war Europe, were profoundly different. In *La Revue de Genève*, they discussed these matters by addressing the current situation of a third writer, their mutual friend Irene Forbes-Mosse (1864–1946). The German Forbes-Mosse, who represented the ‘other side’, remained a silent voice in this asymmetrical exchange that brings to light the uncertainties faced by European intellectuals following the Versailles settlement.

A friend of Proust and a noted essayist and biographer, Halévy was an influential figure in French letters. In the fin de siècle, he emerged as part of a socialist-leaning liberal culture, taking sides with Dreyfus and developing an interest in English and German literature. In Paris, the young Halévy attended the cosmopolitan salon of the English poet and critic A. Mary F. Robinson, who had moved to France following her marriage to the scholar of Persian James Darmesteter (Silvera, 1966: 35–6).1 It is through this literary circle that he also came to know Vernon Lee, with whom he exchanged books, letters and professional contacts. The First World War caused Halévy to move away from socialism and embrace instead a more conservative ideology: he became increasingly patriotic and eventually came out in support of the Vichy regime.

Meanwhile, in 1921, just as Halévy gained further prominence as the first general editor of Grasset’s popular series ‘Cahiers verts’, Lee’s public voice was starting to decline. A polyglot ‘English’ writer who was born in France, brought up by German governesses and at home in Florence, Lee had become known in the fin de siècle as an erudite critic whose works spanned aesthetics, fiction, travel writing and cultural polemics. When the war broke out she found herself stranded in England during one of her regular visits. The war thus forced Lee to spend more time in England than she had ever done before. It also forced her to face the ubiquitous spread of radicalized nationalism,
which she abhorred. Lee’s reaction was to become an outspoken pacifist, joining the Union of Democratic Control and making her anti-war views public in a series of periodical articles and in *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-day Morality* (1915, dedicated to Romain Rolland), a political allegory in which the European nations join together in a dance macabre choreographed by Satan. Lee’s pacifist activism had a deeply damaging effect on her reputation in England, where she was socially marginalized and attacked in the press. This enforced marginality suited the cantankerous Lee, who cultivated it as a position of political and cultural resistance (Mahoney, 2013: 315; on Lee’s pacifism see also Beer, 1997; Brockington, 2016; Pulham, 2010). Indeed, when the war was over, Lee kept reiterating her controversial stance. In 1920, she re-issued *The Ballet of the Nations* as part of an eclectic larger work entitled *Satan the Waster*, in which she re-contextualized her political allegory within a long retrospective analysis of the war made up of shorter philosophical and historical pieces. Here Lee spoke openly about the public and personal hostility that her pacifist stance brought on her, and defended her anti-war position as consistent with her liberal cosmopolitan upbringing, which had made her ‘know, admire, love, but also mistrust, several nationalities’ (Lee, 1920: xvii). For her, a cosmopolitan identity consisted of being able to balance ‘love’ and scepticism of all national cultures, including one’s own.

This was the background against which, in June 1921, Halévy published a ‘Lettre à une amie allemande’ (letter to a German friend) in the newly founded French-language periodical, *La Revue de Genève*. The name of the addressee was not disclosed, but Halévy identified her in the text as a friend of Vernon Lee (1921a: 872). The two women, readers were told, had been separated for six years due to the war but were now finally reunited. Halévy had received a note from his German friend sent from Lee’s house, Il Palmerino, a villa on the outskirts of Florence, which had brought back vivid memories of their friendship and of a pre-war past that now appeared to him idyllic but also, as we shall see, fraught.

For those who knew Lee, it was not difficult to recognize in Halévy’s unnamed addressee the writer and translator Irene Forbes-Mosse – an ‘amie allemande’ of the author and a very close friend of Lee’s. Forbes-Mosse is a nearly forgotten figure today, but she enjoyed a measure of success both in Germany and internationally in the interwar years, when some of her work also appeared in English translation. At the beginning of the century, the two women developed an intimate friendship, bonding over their shared artistic interests and their fervent opposition to the British involvement in the Boer War (Sieberg, 2006: 288). After the death of Forbes-Mosse’s second husband Lee renovated a cottage on her land, just opposite Il Palmerino, so that her friend could effectively move in with her; from 1908 until the outbreak of the war, the ‘Häuschen’, as the two women called it, was Forbes-Mosse’s main residence, although for various reasons she had to spend long periods away. During the war years, while Lee was stuck in England and Forbes-Mosse was in Germany and then Switzerland, they maintained an international correspondence that has been edited by Herward Sieberg and Christa Zorn (2014). In September 1919, when Lee finally managed to leave England, she made her way back to Italy via Paris and Zurich, braving the notable difficulties of cross-border travel that remained in place long after the official end of the conflict. In Paris, where she stayed with her old friend Mary Robinson-Darmesteter (now known as Mary Duclaux), Lee
paid a visit to Halévy – a fact to which he refers in his open letter. In Switzerland she was reunited with Forbes-Mosse for only three days – the maximum time the Swiss authorities would grant her leave to remain in the country (Sieberg and Zorn, 2014: 426–7). Forbes-Mosse returned to Florence for the first time in June 1921, and it is at this point that she wrote the letter to Halévy that triggered his public response in the pages of *La Revue de Genève*.

Forbes-Mosse must have written to Halévy about her uncertainty as to whether she should settle back in Italy and about her distress at the humiliating conditions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, a topic that she also frequently mentioned in her correspondence with Lee. Judging from his answer, it seems likely that she even asked Halévy to use his influence in French literary circles to speak out about the upsetting situation in post-war Germany. These issues clearly seemed to be so important to Halévy that he decided to go public. His open letter, the full title of which is ‘Le Rendez-vous toscan – Le refuge des livres. Valéry et Valerius – Sacer vatum labor’, is a meditation on the impact of the war on the affective ties that bind writers across borders and on the public responsibilities of literature in times of peace. Halévy spoke warmly about his friendship with Forbes-Mosse, remembering their exchanges of books before the war and his friend’s enthusiasm for modern French literature; but he rejected her plea that he should sympathize with the defeated Germans. Instead, he recounted his own experiences as a soldier, detailing the brutality and crimes committed by the Germans he witnessed at first hand.

Halévy’s point was that, at that moment in history, writers should not engage in a game of recriminations; rather, they should step out of the political sphere altogether, leaving that to professional statesmen and diplomats. On that basis, he put forward a theory of the ‘refuge des livres’, which argued that post-war international literary relations should be rebuilt on a dialogue unpolluted by the toxic discourse of war politics. As the highest example of this apolitical aestheticism Halévy cited the work of the French poet Paul Valéry, whom he ‘introduced’ to Forbes-Mosse (that is, to the readers of *La Revue de Genève*) passionately and with plenty of textual examples, as the rightful inheritor of the formally complex and disengaged Symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Valéry who, like Halévy, had been formed in the cosmopolitan literary environment of fin-de-siècle Paris, had given up publishing for nearly 20 years but had broken his ‘long silence’ during the war with his 1917 poem ‘La Jeune Parque’ (Halévy, 1921a: 880). Halévy first discovered this poem shortly after the end of the war, at a reading held in La Maison des Amis du Livre, in Paris, and came to see it as a bridge between the liberal cosmopolitan culture of the turn of the century, identified with Symbolism, and the peace effort in the present.

In order to appreciate the significance of Halévy’s letter, it is important to contextualize it within the distinctive profile of *La Revue de Genève*. Launched in 1920 and appearing intermittently until 1930, this Swiss French-language monthly was set up with the explicit mission of re-establishing a dialogue between European nations after the war. Its editor, the Swiss critic Robert de Traz, described the journal as a joint international effort to rebuild a world in ruins by helping the nations to form a closer knowledge of each other and, in this way, to develop bonds of collaboration and friendship (1920: 3–7). Recognizing that there are and always will be fundamental differences between the
nations, *La Revue de Genève* would encourage a free and constructive exchange of ideas by practising impartiality, scepticism and freedom of expression: its aim was not to preach ‘une doctrine de conciliation obligatoire’ (a doctrine of obligatory reconciliation), but rather to provide ‘l’occasion de rencontres’ (the opportunity to meet again) or, simply, to juxtapose different points of view (Traz, 1920: 3). Traz summarized the journal’s ethos as international but not internationalist, explaining: ‘Il ne s’agit pas, aujourd’hui, d’abolir les variétés spécifiques de l’humanité, il s’agit de les accorder’ (Traz, 1920: 5). In order to carry out this diversifying agenda, each issue included a section dedicated to ‘chroniques nationales’, in which contributors were encouraged to speak from the unique perspective of their countries. Indeed, Traz believed that patriotic pride had a particularly important role to play in the aftermath of the war: while national sentiment had formerly been associated with hostility and violence, it was now to be relaunched in a detoxified form, as it were, as part of the mission of international reconstruction that celebrated the variety-within-unity of world nations. The journal thus explicitly saw itself as supporting the diplomatic and political work of the League of Nations, which was set up as a global peace-keeping organization after the war and, from the autumn of 1920, was also based in Geneva: it aimed to enable the League’s delegates, posted in Geneva, to engage with a wide range of international public opinion represented in the journal’s articles; at the same time, it furthered the League’s mission of promoting dialogue and understanding between peoples and of overseeing the smooth resumption of the mechanisms of international diplomacy and free trade, developed in the course of the nineteenth century, that the war had severely disrupted (on the League of Nations see Steiner, 2005: 349–86). The language of diplomacy and conciliation in Traz’s editorial echoed the rhetoric of the League’s Covenant.

In its ambition to combine high-quality content with an attempt to improve international relations, *La Revue de Genève* looked back to *Cosmopolis* (1896–8), a pioneering international journal that briefly flourished in the 1890s, when it attracted a highly prestigious list of contributors from several European countries, including Lee. Like *Cosmopolis*, each issue of *La Revue de Genève* was divided into three sections which, in the case of the latter, were respectively dedicated to cultural items (a broad category that included literature, criticism, history and politics), national affairs and international affairs. The key difference was that *Cosmopolis* was written in three languages (English, French and German) and adopted multilingualism as one of its founding principles, while all the articles in *La Revue de Genève* were printed in French. In setting out the journal’s mission, Traz was somewhat cavalier about this point, speaking of translation as the only ‘intermédiaire’ between the undiluted and uncensored voices of his international contributors, as though translation created conditions of equivalence that did not involve cultural as well as political imbalances (1920: 3). In fact, as Jeanne-Pierre Meylan has pointed out, the journal’s language policy was a way to hold on to the ideal of a francophone Europe that was becoming increasingly anachronistic (1969: 8). *La Revue de Genève* thus came into being as one of the last large-scale attempts to reverse the decline of French as the lingua franca for European writers and intellectuals.

It is worth pointing out, however, that, as an international language, the translated French of *La Revue de Genève* embodied a different literary geopolitics from the native French identified with Paris, which Pascale Casanova has famously if controversially
designated as representing the Greenwich meridian of literature for the whole of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth (2004: 87–91): the French that Traz broadcast as the spiritual language of Europe was closely associated with the unique geographic and cultural identity of the city of Geneva (significantly not a capital city and part of a neutral country), which he romantically conceived of as a bridge between Latin and Germanic Europe, and described as ‘dans une même proportion fidèle à son caractère national et préoccupée de l’humanité entière, jalousement particulariste et audacieusement universelle’ (1920: 6). Even more ambitiously, according to Landry Charrier, the Swiss model of neutrality provided Traz with the inspiration for his pioneering idea to use the journal as a vector of a united Europe (2009: 366 and passim). Be that as it may, translation was a high point of La Revue de Genève, which issued French versions of works by, among others, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Arthur Schnitzler and Virginia Woolf. As this very prestigious partial list shows, La Revue de Genève took literature extremely seriously as a medium for international dialogue and for the work of cultural reconstruction that it aimed to carry out.

Halévy’s letter was part of the ‘chroniques nationales’, to which he was a regular contributor. Indeed, both his defence of a patriotically French point of view regarding the treatment of Germany in the post-war settlement and his enthusiastic championing of Valéry exemplified the editor’s intention that items in this section should embody ‘le témoignage, peut-être passionné, d’un autochtone’ (Traz, 1920: 4). His letter, however, also offered a very personal take on the trope of ‘rencontres’ that sat at the heart of the journal’s international mission (1920: 3). The ‘Rendez-vous toscan’ of the title simultaneously referred to the reunion between Forbes-Mosse and Lee, which Halévy witnessed from a distance, and to his own memories of the pre-war past triggered by Forbes-Mosse’s letter. The space where both ‘rencontres’ took place was Lee’s Florentine home, Il Palmerino, which for Halévy symbolized a nineteenth-century model of cosmopolitanism based on private bonds between members of the European cultural elite. The triangular friendship between the French Halévy, the German Forbes-Mosse and the cosmopolitan Anglo-Italian Lee opened up, in Halévy’s memory, to a whole European network of intellectuals that used to gather chez Lee, and which comprised, among others, the already mentioned Mary Robinson and the English novelist Ouida, the French writer and critic Paul Bourget, Italian intellectuals Giuseppe Prezzolini and Gaetano Salvemini – both of whom would shortly be pushed into exile by Fascism – and the German liberal economist Lujo Brentano, who was Forbes-Mosse’s cousin. Several of these people would in fact become close to the League of Nations, exemplifying the overlap between the networks of Il Palmerino and La Revue de Genève.

To Halévy, however, Lee’s home represented rupture rather than continuity. It was the embodiment of an old Europe of salons and causerie that the war had now consigned to the past (Halévy, 1921a: 872–3). While Halévy valued this past as providing psychological comfort, he was also aware that, after the war, its memory was a means of escaping the reality of the present. It followed that Lee’s return to Italy and Il Palmerino represented a desire to hold on to out-dated cosmopolitan practices and ideals enshrined in a nostalgic vision of the past, which were no longer tenable in the altered climate of the post-war years. As a contrast to the backward-looking image of Lee’s home, Halévy
described the recently established Parisian bookshop of Adrienne Monnier, where he first encountered Valéry’s verse, as a model version of a new post-war salon culture that, significantly, brought literature to ‘combattants’ and ‘permissionaires’ (Halévy, 1921a: 883). Halévy’s critique of Lee therefore redeployed the charge of anachronism that, as we have seen, was levied against her pacifism in Britain. By contrast, his letter performed an almost ritual function of severing the ties with Lee’s world of yesterday, to borrow Zweig’s famous phrase, in order to embrace instead a new, post-war way of making literature that left political engagement to professional politicians and diplomats. Halévy therefore put before Forbes-Mosse an impossible choice between retreating into Vernon Lee’s attractive dream of a cosmopolitan past and plunging into a future of apolitical writing represented by Valéry.

No wonder Lee was piqued by this appropriation of her self and her home. On 20 June 1921, she wrote a reply to Halévy, which he then made public in the August issue of La Revue de Genève. Lee made no secret of the fact that Halévy’s words had upset both Forbes-Mosse and herself, reproaching him for his tactlessness in light-heartedly celebrating the rise of a French poet to a German friend at a time when her country was being humiliated by the winners. Regarding Halévy’s treatment of her home as ‘un symbole de la pensée et de l’art cosmopolite et ami des années d’avant-guerre’, Lee was both flattered and irritated (Lee, 1921: 176). Deep down, Halévy’s description of Il Palmerino as populated, in Lee’s paraphrase, by ‘spectres d’intellectuels vivants aussi bien que de morts’ chimed with her own impressions on coming back to her home after the war (Lee, 1921: 176). In a letter to Logan Pearsall Smith, she recorded the feeling of having herself become a ghost, ‘looking on – and as little as possible of that – on a world one no longer belongs to & has no duties towards’ (Lee, 2008: 705, quoted in Mahoney, 2013: 313). However, she also believed that that ghostly world held an important message for the present: namely, that the real failing of her ‘home cosmopolite’ and the people who gravitated towards it was that they spent too much energy on ‘sujets plus élevés et moins épineux’, instead of taking concrete action to prevent the war and what she calls the ‘salissures de guerre’ (Lee, 1921: 176). Indeed, from among their shared pre-war circle, she singled out two French authors – Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès – as examples of writers who had betrayed cosmopolitan idealism by becoming active agents of war propaganda. The choice was pointed, for Bourget was one of the visitors to Il Palmerino mentioned by Halévy, while Barrès was a former Symbolist turned nationalist, whose chauvinism Lee had already condemned in print before the war (Lee, 1912). Lee now regretted that the cosmopolitan intellectuals of the turn of the century had in fact practised too much of that ‘détachement aimable’ (‘amiable detachment’) that Halévy advocated for the present, and which she instead branded a collective act of political failure (Lee, 1921: 176). Borrowing Dante’s famous condemnation of Pope Celestine V’s inability to take a stance against the corruption of the medieval Church, she labelled this failure to oppose war as the ‘gran rifiuto’ (great refusal) of her generation.

Given these premises, it is no surprise that Lee also completely overturned Halévy’s theory of the ‘refuge des livres’, arguing instead that post-war international relations should resume on the basis of a politicized cosmopolitanism that did not shy away from asking difficult ethical and political questions, and from broaching uncomfortable subjects, including recriminations:
Il y a des sujets (et je peux sympathiser avec votre répugnance d’homme bien élevé) auxquels vous ne voulez pas qu’on touche. Cette façon délicate de restreindre la discussion aux sujets transcendants et immortels de l’art et de la littérature rendrait sans doute notre entretien cosmopolite plus digne d’un charmant salon. Mais, hors de ce salon, les officiers et les journalistes par qui nous nous laissons gouverner profitent de notre ignorance et de notre détachement pour répéter en les multipliant les folies internationales dictées par la rapacité, la mégalomanie ou la panique, et qui mènent les nations inconscientes à la guerre, et qui les ont conduites après la guerre à cette paix.12 (Lee, 1921: 179)

While Halévy’s idea of the ‘refuge des livres’ put writers in a passive position vis-à-vis the political class, Lee called for literature to take an active role in society by promoting the free exchange of ideas and undoing nationalist prejudice. This difference is important because it enabled Lee to reverse Halévy’s charge of nostalgia and, at the same time, to argue that his supposedly depoliticized ideal, which was dominated by writers’ silence and loyalty to the nation, masked an undercurrent of nationalism: ‘Les haines ne s’apaiseront pas, les difficultés ne se résoudront pas, et tant qu’elles dureront, nous devrons un appui loyal aux hommes d’état qui nous dirigent’ (Halévy, 1921a: 875).13 Halévy’s backward-looking model for the writer was as a loyal courtesan, following the examples of Molière and Racine. The courtly culture of Louis XIV, he claimed, was able to reconcile patriotic sentiment and openness towards other literatures, while the conflation of patriotism and hatred towards foreign ideas was a ‘bassesse moderne’ (‘modern iniquity’) (1921a: 876). Lee, however, was highly sceptical of this attempt to revive a higher patriotism. As she had argued in Satan the Waster, the best way to promote international understanding after the war was to continue to expose patriotism as a false morality that was complicit in the collective egocentrism, stifling of independent thought and distortion of reality that she associated with the conflict that had just come to an end (Lee, 1920: xiv and 236).

During the war Lee and Forbes-Mosse had started to suspect Halévy of having gone over to the ‘enemies’, that is, to the nationalist camp. Forbes-Mosse wrote to Lee that she feared Halévy had in fact already ‘belonged to the bellicose lot before the war’ (Sieberg and Zorn, 2014: 345, underlining in original).14 Now, Halévy’s lecture on Valéry seemed tainted by an ill-conceived cultural chauvinism that transferred the mentality of war victory onto the literary sphere: it is as if he wanted to demonstrate the superiority of French literature to the German Forbes-Mosse. By doing so, Halévy potentially betrayed one of the main objectives of La Revue de Genève, which was precisely to rebuild Franco-German cultural relations. Lee had always been very sensitive to Germanophobia and keen to correct it by showing that in Germany, just as in Britain and France, there were plenty of voices that spoke up for tolerance and liberalism: well before the war, for instance, she had published an English translation of a letter to the Antwerp Free Trade Congress by Forbes-Mosse’s cousin, Lujo Brentano, who appealed to the English and the Germans to work together for the international peace cause (Lee, 1910). Lee now detected a nationalist sentiment at work in Halévy’s portrayal of Valéry (or Paulus Valerius, as he also fancifully called him) as embodying an exquisitely French classicism that saw itself as the legitimate heir of the Latin tradition. By contrast to this ideal of literature rooted in national heritage, Lee’s example of the sustaining power of the arts in
the face of conflict was her experience of an English audience enraptured by a performance of Mozart’s *Magic Flute* ‘pendant les plus sombres jours du printemps de 1918’ (1921: 177). The attentiveness and appreciation of that English audience for Austro-German music were, for Lee, a powerful symbol of the cosmopolitan spirit that the arts ought to foster. Repeating another argument that she had often used in her pacifist writings, she stressed the need not only to understand but to ‘sympathiser avec nos adversaires’ (‘sympathise with our adversaries’) – a need that had become even more important now that the war was over (1921: 177). The route towards the reconstruction of a liberal cosmopolitan culture in Europe must start from collective acts of imagination that took individuals beyond the horizons of expectations of their national loyalties and identities. This is where Halévy fell short for her.

Especially at this historical moment, therefore, Lee believed that literature should renew its commitment to scepticism and radical thought; and that the loyalty of the writer should not be to politicians or to any single nation but to the Republic of Letters:

> Contre ces infidèles gérants des destinées du monde, nous n’avons qu’un moyen de défense: l’échange libre et constant de savoir et de bonne volonté entre individus des différents pays. Eux seuls forment la substance vivante d’une Ligue des nations, qui, sans cela, ne serait qu’un simple camouflage doctrinaire, abritant l’intrigue diplomatique et la violence militaire qu’elle était destiné à faire disparaître.16 (1921: 179)

In rebuilding international relations, intellectual and affective bonds between individuals, such as herself and Forbes-Mosse, should be viewed as operating outside the paradigm of national identity. The provocative reference to the League of Nations sounded a note of scepticism about the very mission of *La Revue de Genève*, which Lee, in conclusion, cautiously welcomed as

> un centre de réunion où tous ceux qui, dans les diverses nations, ont été fait plus sages, plus tristes et plus humbles par la guerre, puissent exposer les uns devant les autres, les espoirs sérieux qu’ils ont encore en commun et même les malentendus et les griefs qui doivent être découverts et dissipés, s’il est encore quelque espérance ici-bas pour les hommes et les femmes de bonne volonté, à quelque nation qu’ils appartiennent.17 (1921: 180)

Lee appreciated the effectiveness of the international review as a network to reunite writers and as an organ of spiritual healing for Europe, but continued to uphold the symbolic and actual value of her ‘home’ – a word that stands out in the letter for being always given in English within the French text, as though to emphasize its cosmopolitan nature. In the light of her own experience of isolation during the war, Lee was worried about a future in which international relations between writers would be transacted exclusively through the medium of print, and argued instead that writers should go back to the practices of mobility, travel and personal contact that were formative for her generation. In 1915 she had written to Forbes-Mosse that ‘As soon as this horror is over we must meet, and meet at Palmerino’ (quoted in Sieberg, 2006: 303). Towards the end of the war, she poured out her nostalgia to Forbes-Mosse: ‘I am fairly well but very heartbroken and longing for Italy, my house (with you in it again!) and for the Past. Since one does not
dare think of a Future any longer’ (Sieberg and Zorn, 2014: 399). As the war widened the gulf between the present and the past, her ‘home’, with Forbes-Mosse’s ‘Häuschen’ as an integral part of it, acquired a new power of resistance for Lee, as capable of sustaining a cosmopolitan culture that operated through the rituals and ethics of hospitality, independent of the sense of nationality promulgated by official treaties. Aside from an unself-conscious discourse of privilege, there was a heavily gendered element to Lee’s cosmopolitan nostalgia: as her letters to Forbes-Mosse make clear, Il Palmerino stood for women’s freedom to build international friendships in domestic spaces that were not bound by the rules of men and heterosexual domesticity. Even if, in the end, Forbes-Mosse decided not to settle back in the Häuschen, this affective dimension was also something that Lee wanted to salvage from Halévy’s claim on Forbes-Mosse.20

The cleft between Lee and Halévy’s vision of the public role of the writer in post-war Europe crystallized around their radically different views on the Treaty of Versailles. For Halévy the treaty was sacrosanct – not only in its conditions but also in the idea of national identity and international relations that it upheld. By contrast, Lee saw it as an unfair treatment of Germany and, as she put it in Satan the Waster, as ‘sufficient demonstration to Posterity that the world is still taking part in Satan’s Ballet’ (1920: xliv). While she was not as outspoken in her letter to Halévy, it is easy to feel her worry that, by upholding the principle of national sovereignty, the Versailles settlement and the League of Nations would fuel divisive nationalisms in Europe that would, in effect, extend the ethos of the war into peacetime. Lee’s perceived Germanophilia attracted immediate condemnation no less than during the actual conflict. In a brief ‘post scriptum’ to their public exchange published in October 1921, Halévy accused Lee of political inconsistency and of having systematically misjudged Germany’s bellicose intentions and its threat to other European nations since before the war; he added that ‘un traité est chose sacrée, charte fondamentale, et la signature engage d’honneur le vaincu’ (1921b: 560).21 Even Robert de Traz, in his editorial introduction to Lee’s letter, felt the need to distance La Revue de Genève from Lee’s claim that Germany had been ‘traqué et insulté’ (‘hounded and insulted’) after the armistice, and presented the correspondence between Lee and Halévy as consonant with the journal’s intention of showcasing divergences of opinion so that, in post-war international relations, ‘chacun reste fidèle à sa race, devienne profondément ce qu’il est’ (Traz in Lee, 1921: 174).22 This summary was reductive and unfair to Lee, whose point was precisely that she did not want to have a national voice.

In the same brief introduction, Traz quoted a positive endorsement of Satan the Waster by George Bernard Shaw, who praised Lee’s book as proof that ‘it is possible to be born in England [sic] and yet have intellect, to train English minds as well as English muscles’ (Traz in Lee, 1921: 174). Although Traz stopped there, Shaw had gone on to characterize Lee, in more ambiguous terms, as belonging ‘to the old guard of Victorian cosmopolitan intellectualism’ (Shaw, 1920: 760). In her brief appearance in La Revue de Genève, Lee’s old-fashioned cosmopolitanism acted as a foil for Halévy, who became one of the most prolific and powerful contributors to the journal (Meylan, 1969: 143–51). Lee’s name, by contrast, never appeared again in the pages of La Revue de Genève, which, for its coverage of English literature, looked to a younger generation of authors that included T. S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, guided by the expertise
of its English correspondent (from 1923 until 1926), the writer John Middleton Murry. In their public exchange of 1921, Lee and Halévy articulated competing visions of cosmopolitanism in the fluid and anxious field of international literary relations created by the end of the war. Halévy’s hinged on an idea of depoliticized aestheticism and it safeguarded a close bond between literature and national identity that suited the ethos of La Revue de Genève. Conversely, Lee’s ideal challenged the renewed emphasis on national sovereignty of the Versailles treaty and the League of Nations by questioning the very notion of national loyalty as alien to the work of the writer. Their clash brings to light the fragility of international literary relations at the time of the post-war settlement, caught between different understandings of national identity and of the legacies of the past.

Dedication
This article is dedicated to Federica Parretti and Stefano Vincieri, who have kept alive Lee’s cosmopolitan hospitality at Il Palmerino.

Notes
1 In the 1880s Robinson and Lee were in an intimate relationship, which was brought to a traumatic halt when Robinson got engaged to Darmesteter. Halévy would later pay homage to Robinson in his book Les Trois Mary (1959). Halévy’s letters to Lee are preserved as part of the Vernon Lee Papers in Somerville College, Oxford. I would like to thank Christa Zorn for sharing with me her research on Lee.
2 ‘Nowadays, it is not a matter of abolishing the different types of humanity, but of building bridges between them.’ All translations are my own unless specified.
3 See The Covenant of the League of Nations (n.d.).
4 ‘in equal measure faithful to its national character and caring for the whole of humanity, jealously local and audaciously universal’. Traz would later expand on these ideas in his book L’Esprit de Genève (1929).
5 ‘the possibly passionate testimony of a native author’.
6 ‘nous ne venons pas prêcher une doctrine de conciliation obligatoire, mais simplement fournir l’occasion de rencontres qui ne se produiraient pas ailleurs’ (‘we do not wish to preach a doctrine of compulsory conciliation, but simply to create the opportunity for encounters that would not occur elsewhere’).
7 Monnier established La Maison des Amis des Livres in 1915; in the 1920s, her journal Le Navarine d’argent played an important role in introducing English and American literary Modernism to France.
8 ‘a symbol of friendly cosmopolitan thought and art of pre-war days’. The English translation of Lee’s letter is taken from a manuscript version written in fair hand, which is now preserved as part of the Vernon Lee Collection at Colby College, C1B, box 2.
9 ‘ghosts of living as well as of dead intellectuals’.
10 ‘more exalted, less contentious subjects . . . war-pollutions’.
11 In the third canto of the Inferno, Dante encounters the soul of Celestine V among the ‘ignavi’ (those who never took a definite stance in life); in 1294 Celestine renounced the papacy after only a few months in office.
12 ‘There are subjects – (and I can sympathize with your wellbred [sic] shrinking) which you will not allow to be touched upon. Such delicate restriction of discussion to the transcendent and immortal topics of art and literature may make our cosmopolitan intercourse more worthy of a charming salon. But outside that salon those officials and journalists whom we allow to
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govern us are taking advantage of our ignorance and our indifference to repeat tenfold the rapacious or megalomaniac or panic-stricken international follies which led all the nations guilelessly into the war, and have led them out of the war into this peace’ (underlining in original).

13 ‘Hatreds will not be subdued, difficulties will not be resolved and, as long as they last, we owe a loyal support to the statesmen who lead us!’

14 Forbes-Mosse to Lee, 15 April 1916.

15 ‘during the very worst days of spring 1918’.

16 ‘Against these untrustworthy stewards of the world’s destiny, we have no true defence except the free and constant intercourse of knowledge and goodwill among the individuals of different countries. Only they constitute the living substance of a League of Nations which would otherwise be a mere doctrinaire sham, screening the diplomatic intrigue and military violence it was intended to bring to an end.’

17 ‘a true meeting place where those of all nations who have been made wiser, sadder and humbler by the war, may lay before each other the honest hopes they still have in common and even the misunderstandings and grievances which must be dispelled and atoned, if any hope is to remain for honest men and women of any country.’

18 Lee to Forbes-Mosse, 14 April 1915.

19 Lee to Forbes-Mosse, 5 March 1918.

20 In the early 1920s, Lee would find an ingenious way of preventing the requisition of Forbes-Mosse’s belongings by the Fascist government, which had decreed the confiscation of ‘enemy possessions’ in Italy: she ‘claimed’ her friend’s furniture as compensation for the rent that Forbes-Mosse had not paid her during the war years, and eventually arranged for it to be shipped back to Switzerland (see Sieberg and Zorn, 2014: 434-35).

21 ‘a treaty is a sacred thing, a fundamental document, and its signature binds the loser in honour’.

22 ‘hounded and insulted. . . each one should stay faithful to their race, should fully become what they are’.

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