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Wyndham Lewis, 'Workshop', c.1914–15. By permission, The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

# The Wyndham Lewis Society

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# Editorial

*Louise Kane*
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It is with a sense of inevitability that we open this number of *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies* for 2022-23 with a mention of the centennial aspect. 2022 was, of course, one hundred years post *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, one hundred years after modernism's oft-cited apex, and one hundred years after Wyndham Lewis found himself issuing the second number of *The Tyro*. But what happens when we move away from the centenary of 1922 and into a new year: 2023? And what can we say about its centennial counterpart: 1923? By comparison to the previous year, 1923 has been framed as relatively unnoteworthy for modernism, a year that represents a supposed slowing down of momentum, one which passes by with a whimper, rather than with the 'bang' of the previous year.

Of course, we know that this is an inaccurate picture; in reality, most modernists, Lewis included, had little awareness of 1922 as a year particularly different to any others they had lived through. By 1923, Lewis had started his portrait of Edith Sitwell and was concentrating increasingly on developing his painting. The point is that time went on, life went on; just as we have moved from 2022 and into 2023 with little thought for the passing of another year, so too did Lewis move from 1922 into 1923.

The topics covered in this issue of the journal are also suitably free from time labels and the illusion of a false divide between Lewis's early experiments and later works. The first essay, Cooper Casale's "Strong Shapes: The Case for Black Vorticism," draws Lewis's Vorticism into dialogue with a surprising counterpart: the Vorticism of W. E. B. DuBois, the Pan-Africanist civil rights activist, and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Vorticism, Casale argues, is a movement defined by strong shapes, and Du Bois's vortex, which "visualizes an upwardly mobile Black community in the American south"—is a strong shape that "predates Lewis' Vorticism." In its wide-ranging comparative analysis of the dialogic nature of Lewis's and DuBois's movements, Casale's essay reminds us of the need to move away from scholarly considerations of modernism as composed of "atomized communities of avant-gardes."

The next essay—"Individuality and Mass-Production: *The Revenge for Love* (1937) and the Grotesque Commodified Body" by David Cruickshank—offers another re-reading of the avant-garde, particularly in terms of the relationships

between mass production, art, politics, and the individual. Cruickshank argues that Lewis's principal concern is with "the commodification of the individual (artist) by the capitalist system, and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of resisting or overthrowing such systems." By considering Lewis in relation to a concrete political reality that he stands against, rather than potential alternative systems that he equivocally espouses or rejects, Cruickshank challenges the persistent, reductive framing of *The Revenge for Love* as a right-wing anti-Communist polemic. For Cruickshank, Lewis's purpose is to illustrate the powerlessness of the individual to "self-govern" when "dehumanized and rendered mechanical" by the "external, mechanical forces [... of] capitalist society".

Scott Klein's "Trigger Warnings: Rape, Responsibility, and Narrative Affect in Tarr" jumps back to the 1910s in its probing discussion of one of *Tarr's* most controversial and debated scenes. Like Cruickshank's essay before it, Klein explores Lewis's depictions of the female human body and frames his inquiry with a fascinating set of questions:

> What if one's experience of the work of fiction is negative? That negativity can be aesthetic. One can be disappointed in the quality of the book. But there is a more complex kind of negativity possible in the reading experience. What if one objectively considers the work one has read to be of high aesthetic merit, yet one leaves the fiction dismayed, even shaken or horrified?

Ultimately, Klein's conclusion that "the contexts I have described allow us to consider the rape as a crisis of narrative and of interpretive paradox" is one that leaves another question in its place that is as difficult to answer as those listed above: "Where, then, does this leave the reader of Tarr, in terms of the affect of the text and the potentially triggering aspects of the scene of rape?"

The final essay, Nathan Waddell's "Elements are VERY GLIB: Challenging the Convenience of Metaphor in the Critical Reception of BLAST," offers a similar close focus on the reading experience wrought by another of Lewis's 1910s publications: *BLAST* magazine. What follows is an insightful reading of the various atmospheric metaphors relating to the elements—a condition Waddell describes as "elementality"—and the ways they impact this reading experience. Crucially, Waddell cautions against using the metaphors to impose a false unity onto the jarring reading experience that *BLAST* provokes. To read the metaphors as part of a cohesive strand of the magazine would be "to misrepresent the supposed 'unity' of BLAST" and to "muddy the extent to which the magazine can or should be aligned with the ideas and attitudes of Lewis, its blaster-in-chief."

This issue is also distinguished by a veritable banquet of book reviews: eight in total. These extend from monographs entirely dedicated to Lewis - *Wyndham Lewis's Cultural Criticism*, by Nathan O'Donnell – to more sweeping cultural

surveys in which he plays a key walk-on part – *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881-1922*, by Rebecca Beasley. Between the two poles, our reviewers tackle a range of monographs and edited collections in which widely varying aspects of Lewis's work - automatism, obscenity, print culture, parody, insect life – are explored via dedicated chapters. This eclectic profusion of new scholarly material suggests that Lewis's writing is once more proving a stimulating prism through which to scrutinise the broader concerns of his age.

As we hope you will agree, the contents of this issue highlight the diversity of Lewis's polymedial, polyvocal *oeuvre,* without attempting to impose the false sense of unity to which Waddell's essay alludes. As we know, reading Lewis is rarely a unified experience, but the essays contained in this number of *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies* offer ways of bringing his complex and sometimes contradictory outputs from the 1910s, '20s, and '30s, into dialogue with one another and, crucially, into dialogue with you, our modern-day readers.

The Editors

# Trigger Warnings: Rape, Responsibility, and Narrative in *Tarr*

*Scott W. Klein*

## I.

Ah, the intellectual life! I may need advance warning if upsetting books or ideas threaten my very being by coming too close, breathing on my face, my brain, like unwholesome dogs.

Ian McEwan, *Nutshell*[1]

What does a novel owe us? Even to ask the question is to posit a system of readerly values and exchanges: to pick up a work of fiction is to exhibit a kind of lack, and through that lack a desire either for repetition or addition. If the book is to be reread, the reader hopes to reexperience a pleasure (however experienced or defined) that may have faded into a memory of the novel's quality, or its affect, without remembrance of the detail of plotting or characterization. When facing a new book, readers anticipate a combination of both pleasure and novelty, an experience of pleasure in the experience both of the moment—of reading itself—and a preliminary yet retrospective sense that having finished one would have added both to one's experience of literature and, if the book is sufficiently worthwhile, to one's knowledge of oneself and perhaps of the world.

But what if one's experience of the work of fiction is negative? That negativity can be aesthetic. One can be disappointed in the quality of the book. But there is a more complex kind of negativity possible in the reading experience. What if one objectively considers the work one has read to be of high aesthetic merit, yet one leaves the fiction dismayed, even shaken or horrified? There is, of course, negative aesthetic pleasure to be had from the horrific when it is well described: this as true of the infernal poetry of Dante as for the negative metaphysics of Samuel Beckett. But that negative affect takes on special meaning more generally in the contemporary academic world, where sensitivity to student reactions to potentially disturbing reading and other aesthetic materials has come under significant societal and political scrutiny. The argument, pervasive in recent years in the academies of the UK and the US, has been that certain materials can be "triggering" for students. It might resonate with past personal experience in such a way as to be potentially psychologically harmful, and therefore instructors should provide students with "trigger warnings"—alerts

in syllabi and the like—that material to be covered in a course may be not only disruptive or distressing but, for some, actively traumatic.

This relatively new classroom dynamic becomes particularly problematic when teaching Modernist and contemporary literature. For some of this literature, potentially triggering material is often racial, particularly use of derogatory language or scenes of racialized violence. But in most cases, at least in Modernist literature, such triggering material is often sexual, and deals with scenes of sexual violence. This should not surprise. Not only were the authors of the Anglo-American modernist period keen to disrupt received ideas about sexuality and sexual behavior; they often portrayed such scenes of sexual transgression as part and parcel of their narrative methods. And, as such, recent criticism of the post–"#MeToo" era has tended to reexamine scenes of modernist sexuality—such as the seduction of the typist by the young man carbuncular in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922)—through new lenses.[2] Even the legality of publication of such works in the US has historically depended on the ability to gauge the emotional effect of such texts on the average, if intelligent, reader—negative affect apparently being more proof of aesthetic integrity than positive.[3]

But there's irony in this situation. The very idea of the trigger warning is related to the more generally medical diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition earlier called "shell shock" and then "battle fatigue," and originally confined to the experience of soldiers in war. But few object to the actual representation of battle experiences, or of characters who suffer from war's aftereffects, in modern literature. Literary characters who actually suffer from PTSD, such as Septimus Warren Smith in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), or Tayo in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), seldom cause raised eyebrows or student discomfort. What does cause discomfort is sexual violence—a realm distinctively different from the literal battleground. And—not ironically—the diagnosis in the medical field of PTSD has migrated from being originally and exclusively a wartime malady to becoming a diagnosis for women who have suffered sexual abuse. Judith Herman has argued that the nineteenth-century diagnosis of "hysteria" in women by theoreticians such as Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud was an early example of PTSD from sexual trauma gone misdirected and misdiagnosed. In modern society, Herman notes that "the most common post-traumatic stress disorders are not those of men at war, but of women in civilian life" (1997, 10, 28). In this context, Sarah Colbert asks, "should anyone be surprised that one of the most frequent trigger warning requests is for rape and violence against women?" (2017, 9).

This issue poses particular challenges when teaching Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*. For not only does the book present a generally dyspeptic of view on human actions and their consequences; its plot hinges crucially on a disturbing scene of sexual violence, where the sociopathic German art student Otto Kreisler rapes

Frederick Tarr's "official fiancée" Bertha Lunken. For first-time readers the scene can be deeply shocking. It serves as the central panel of a set of three virtuosic set pieces in the novel featuring Kreisler and violence. The first is the dance scene at the Bonnington Club, where Kreisler dances with futuristic violence amid the "bourgeoise bohemians," and the last is the scene of the mismanaged duel with Soltyk. Both are black-comic in their admixture of aggression and absurdity. The rape scene, however, presses the boundaries of fictive discourse well beyond these bounds. I have had otherwise voluble students shut down in the classroom, unable to discuss what they find so disturbing about this scene. One male student simply said, with some puzzlement, "Up until this scene I thought this was a comedy." And once a young woman in the class looked so deeply uncomfortable during the entire discussion that I wondered whether this was a case where the text in question was, in fact, touching unhappily upon an experience from her past—a situation for which a trigger warning might have been a cogent preparation.

What makes this scene so uniquely distressing, even among other literary descriptions of rape? It is unusually explicit for a novel of the time. Novelistic decorum had typically required that rape be hidden between the lines, a matter of implication rather than exposition, either omitted from narrative representation entirely or swathed in euphemism. Thus the rape in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), fallen into the gaps in epistolary correspondence, or in Heinrich von Kleist's "*The Marquise of O…* (1808) where the key act of the novella is occluded by an ellipsis, a mere dash in the middle of a sentence.[4] Even in the most prominent treatment of sexual assault in Lewis's near-contemporary English literary world, the marital rape of Irene by Soames in John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (1906), the narrative depends on a series of narrative displacements: temporal ellipsis, euphemism, and even grammatical redirection from the important act of night to the unimportant act of the next day: "The morning after a certain night on which Soames at last asserted his rights and acted like a man, he breakfasted alone." The vague decorum of the phrase "a certain night" reminds us that within this fictional world, and the real social world, such acts are literally unspeakable. Soames thinks further, "One thought comforted him: No one would know—it was not the sort of thing that she would speak about" (Galsworthy 1995, 249–50).

There are both social and literary proprieties. Rape is a thing—perhaps the thing—that can be neither confessed nor described. And in some regard one may come to Lewis with preconceptions: of presumed misogyny, or at least insensitivity to the experience of his female characters, and with the awareness that Lewis, at least as early as his short story "Cantleman's Spring Mate," at times equates male sexuality with violence.[5] Yet the scene of rape in *Tarr* concludes with one of Lewis's most memorable descriptions—that of Bertha's vision of four simultaneous versions of Kreisler, trapped (as it were) in the psychological

frame of her sexual trauma. And this itself is potentially disturbing, as it may be read as distracting from ugly reality by redirecting to linguistic virtuosity. But it also suggests the superimposition of various incompatible views. Can one see this as a metaphor for the various ways in which readers can construe the passage? For there are four possible different interpretations of the act, all of which may be supported by the text, and none of which can be wholly dismissed by the evidence presented in this scene or in supporting parts of the novel.

> (1) Kreisler is the sole perpetrator of an act of unalloyed violence, and as such is to be condemned absolutely and categorically.
> (2) Bertha "should have known better"—she should not have put herself into the situation of being alone with Kreisler—of posing nude for a man (even an "artist") whom she knew too little about, and for a man who has the reputation of being both highly sexual and unstable. This interpretation adheres to the all-too-typical antifeminist rape narrative that puts blame on the (inevitably female) victim—but it cannot, simply for that reason, be dismissed out of hand within the world of the novel.
> (3) The act was inevitable, a matter of fate. Neither Kreisler nor Bertha therefore bear any culpability—or, indeed, will—in the matter.
> (4) A kind of palimpsest of the first three possible interpretations: the act as described is undecidedly ambiguous. There is arguably at least some blame (or miscommunication, or mixed intentions) on both sides. Fate also bears a part in the procedures (if we can give "fate" credence as a meaningful concept in human interactions). Therefore, assigning absolute blame and finding any moral significance in the rape (and therefore the scene) is impossible—even Bertha finds herself incapable of doing so.

Interpretations 2, 3, and 4 (even if faulty) are unavoidably disturbing to the contemporary sensibility—but the novel provides (sometimes-self-contradictory) supporting evidence for each of them. How does Bertha fit into this matrix of schemata, or morality and knowledge, intent and partial culpability? How does the narrative either endorse or undercut the weight of her experience? And does the novel (or any novel) owe the reader advance warning about the interpretive crises it may trigger? By examining, first, images of guns and attack, and then the ethical patterns of cause, effect, and warning among the novel's major characters, we may see that Lewis and the narrative of *Tarr* places the reader metaphorically in the position of Bertha, as the target of malicious surprise and narrative ambush. And in doing so, *Tarr* interrogates the relationship between the rhetorical practices of the avant-garde and those of the realist novel, and the way in which *Tarr*—and the character of Tarr himself—occupies an uneasy ground between the two.

## II.

How can people aim guns at each other. Sometimes they go off.
James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.1193-4

Triggers, to state the obvious, are found on actual guns. Given the scarcity of guns in the canonical English novel—one thinks perhaps of the rifles in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), or the gun with which Decoud commits suicide in Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904), or the weapon with which the youthful Gerald is said to have killed his brother in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920)—firearms are surprisingly prominent in *Tarr*. Kreisler threatens to shoot himself in his letter to his father, saving the phrase "shoot myself" for last for maximum rhetorical effect (*T2* 142).[6] After his rape of Bertha, Kreisler appears at her door and in a fit of probably inauthentic remorse makes similar claims about shooting himself (172). Bertha generally associates Kreisler with violence by pistol. She fears that her telling Tarr about the rape might lead to Tarr's death, that "her beloved Sorbert might be shot by that brute," transforming in her reverie the romanticized suicide of Goethe's Werther into death by attack from without (189).

Lewis's association of Kreisler with guns becomes clearest during the climactic sequence of the duel between Kreisler and Soltyk. Lewis presents the choice of weapon initially as a matter of alternatives: "Satisfaction at the sword-point or with army pistols" (224). Tarr himself, having witnessed part of the initial altercation between the duelists, wonders if using guns would be going too far, asking himself "Would this state of things justify the use of a revolver?" (222). Lewis cares enough about these distinctions to make clear further that not only do Kreisler and Soltyk duel with guns, rather than with swords, but they use semiautomatic Brownings—weapons associated with police enforcement and with war—rather than traditional single-loading dueling pistols. Even before the duel, Kreisler and Bitzenko lay in wait for Soltyk "silently and intently, laying their plans like a pair of gunmen" (220)—which indeed they soon will be during the duel, even as the simile treats them as gangsters from an American detective story who are planning a heist or ambush.

"Like a pair of gunmen": the simile suggests likeness—at the moment, Kreisler and Bitzenko aren't really "gunmen"; they only act like them—but the narrative will soon turn figuration into reality. Tropes of gunplay that mix different forms of figuration with weapons have already appeared in other sections of the novel. On the first page of *Tarr*, we are told that the novel's Parisian setting is haunted by "inconceivably generous and naïve faces," but that we are not "in a Hollywood camp of pseudo-cowpunchers (though 'guns' tap rhythmically the buttocks)" (7). We are not in the realm of the early Hollywood western, where people play-act with guns; weapons are presumably props and therefore presumably fake. We are on the streets of Paris, where the "guns" in question are pickpockets—unquestionably

real, and unquestioningly a threat (to one's pocketbook, if not one's life). Which "gun" is more dangerous? The fake gun of the film, which gives the (naïve) illusion of reality, or the actual "gun" of the streets, whose name is metaphor but whose danger is real?

Real, as well as metaphorical, guns in *Tarr*, in other words, tend toward association with Kreisler, but not exclusively so. Anyone on the streets of Paris, the novel tells us at opening, could be a "gun"—a threat to one's safety and even bodily integrity (given that most people would presumably prefer that their buttocks not be "tapped" by strangers). Even Tarr uses the metaphor of the marksman in his defense of his attitude to life and art. Toward the beginning of the novel, he says to Butcher:

> My little weapon for bringing my man to earth—shot-gun or what not—gave me good sport, too, and was of the best workmanship: I carried it slung jauntily for some time at my side—you may have noticed it. But I am in the tedious situation of a crack marksman who hits the bull's eye every time. (30)

The duelist, the sharpshooter, the marksman: all imply intentional violence amplified by the major technological advantage offered by firearms over other kinds of handheld weapons: the ability to maintain distance from one's targets. This distance makes the gun impersonal compared to the sword.[7] Kreisler registers this distinction in a fit of nearly psychotic rage during the duel, questioning whether the tactile immediacy of swords would go further than the pistol to satiate his blood lust: "because he loved [Soltyk] he wished to plunge a sword into him, to plunge it in and out and up and down! Oh why had pistols been chosen?" (236). Kreisler weighs, in other words, whether he would rather be a sharpshooter or a buttock-tapping "gun"—an attacker who makes no personal contact with his adversary, or one who yearns for bodily contact—and direct bodily violation—as an essential component to psychologically satisfactory revenge.

Kreisler marvels at the mechanical ingenuity of the gun as he attends to the nearly magical effect of the gun's trigger: "he, Kreisler, lifts his hand, presses a little bar of steel and the other is swept away into the earth" (236). In the novel's one reference to a literal trigger, Kreisler contemplates, in one instant, a concatenation of ideas. The trigger causes harm, even a gleeful harm on the part of the one who presses it; it causes that harm from a safe distance for the wielder; and it lays out the clearest kind of cause and effect. "[The] other is swept away into the earth," he thinks (or the narrator thinks through him), using a notably passive construction. Nor does Kreisler much care about the eschatological effect of the trigger: "Heaven knows where the insulting spirit goes to! Heaven cares!" (236). Kreisler does not worry about the trigger's destructive results. The only entity that might care is an unknowable moral

force, implicitly detached from Kreisler, that might—or might not—exist somewhere else in the universe.

**III.**

"Art and sex—the real thing— … make tragedies and *not* advertisements for health-experts of happy endings for the Public or social panaceas."

Tarr

But do such moral forces exist in the universe? Morality, no less than narrative, depends upon there being a clear relationship between cause and effect—and the main characters of *Tarr* differ in their beliefs about the subject. According to Tarr, both art and sex are directly subject to the laws of cause and effect: they make things, and those things are tragedies. Even one's current state is a predictable result of the trajectory of the past. When Tarr decrees to Hobson that "The Present is the furthest projection of our steady appetite" (13), he may be indulging in performative bluster, but he also implicitly endorses the rules that, more generally, underlie realist narrative. Characters in realist fiction typically behave according to what D. H. Lawrence called a "certain moral scheme"; traditional plot, to be believable, depends on psychologically plausible reactions by characters to preceding events, effects congruent with causes, and, as E. M. Forster would have it, causality overshadowing mere time-sequence (Forster 1976, 87; Zytaruk and Boulton 1981, 182). In *Tarr*, characters disagree about the meaning of causality. Kreisler believes that his life unfolds according to *Shicksal* (fate). And while the larger narrative may hold that belief up to comic scrutiny, it also partly endorses it. The narration itself describes Kreisler moving with "fatal, martial monotony" (152) and introduces him with the chapter heading "DOOMED, EVIDENTLY" (64), and notes the Nature that "had pushed Kreisler to a certain course" (233). Kreisler is acting according to the clichés of German Romanticism, and whatever he attempts to plot always goes furiously awry—cadging money from Vokt, seducing Anastasya, the duel, even the potential epiphany of his suicide. His insistence that the noose around his neck will lead to a "last moment … of realization" gives way to his actual demise: "the last thing he was conscious of his tongue" (251).

Yet despite—or perhaps because of—his entropic existence, Kreisler is the one character in *Tarr* who is utterly consistent. This consistency is legible by the other characters, who are fully aware of his attitudes and behaviors. His peers recognize his reputation for womanizing (however mythologized) and for financial imprudence at the start of the novel; his propensities for violence become clear at the Bonnington Club dance; Anastasya claims later that she was well aware of Kreisler's interest in her at their initial meeting. As *Tarr*'s

most amoral character, Kreisler is also the one character who has no need to hide behind a paradoxical persona.

This marks him out starkly from almost all of *Tarr*'s other Parisians, whose behaviors Lewis typifies (with the exception of Bertha) by three related causal characteristics: they tend to strategize their interactions with other people in advance; they typically do so with the intent of surprising those people and turning them into unsuspecting victims; and they do so to inflict the maximum degree of harm. They are prone not only to aggression but to sneak attacks—snipings and ambushes. A large section of Part 1, for instance, deals with Tarr's initial attempt to break up with Bertha. It tracks his prolonged preparation for springing upon Bertha his "*new feeling of indifference as regards yourself*" (52)—an act the narrative calls a "barbaric effort" (54). The initial Vorticist description of Anastasya calls her "full of insolent strategies" (84), and she described how she plotted to be kicked out of her family home by intentional attacking the house itself, covering it with "troublesome images" so her family "simply had to get rid of me" (89).

Later, Anastasya declares to the Liepmann circle that Kreisler's behavior at the dance stemmed from his attraction to her and not to Bertha, an announcement she intends to surprise and wound Bertha: "it had been an irritated exhibition of frankness as immodestly presented as possible, to shock this little bourgeois fool" (252). This kind of social insult, often between women (and often covered with a duplicitous smile), is admittedly part of the history of the novel of social satire.[8] In *Tarr*, however, these intentional woundings expand to include metaphysical social surprise, and even slippage into material objects. Bertha creates one of these moments of social discomfort, for instance, when she refuses to stop talking about Kreisler to the other women, and Lewis suddenly describes them as physically vulnerable, "like people surprised naked, with no time to cover themselves" (150). Kreisler's father delays his payment of an allowance, with strategized results: he "had infuriated his son, calculating on such effect" (68). Ultimately his letters take on their own life as vehicles of surprise and strategized attack. His final letter, we are told, arrives via the concierge "with the malignity of a little, quiet, sleek animal" (141). Even a letter from Tarr to Bertha nearly tempts Bertha to metaphorical suicide (she "suddenly flung herself down upon the sofa as though it had been rocks and she plunging down on to them from a high cliff") as though the letter were a malicious extension of Tarr himself – "the letter of his began to molest her" (160).

The word "molest" draws us closer to the question of rape: what is the moral distinction between the world of Kreisler, where physical actions are either unwilled or "inevitable," and the world of Tarr and Anastasya (and others), where the intentional infliction of emotional pain is a kind of social gamesmanship, even itself a kind of molestation? Because Kreisler takes

no personal responsibility for what he does, he feels no guilt for his actions. Anastasya in her different way also endorses an amoral view of the world. She flirts (at least while drunk) with a Nietzschean endorsement of the Absurd. As she says to Tarr toward their raucous dinner at the end of the novel, "Ha! Ha! We're in life my Tarr: we represent absolutely nothing, thank God!" (270). To believe in nothing may be the opposite of believing in fate, but it leads to the same end: in the absence of free will or meaning, one bears no responsibility or guilt for one's actions.

Neatly, the novel places Tarr thematically, in some respects, midway between Kreisler and Anastasya on the question of causality. He is, on the one hand, a metaphorical sharpshooter and creator of intentional harm, and on the other, a self-proclaimed Nietzschean superman. But the narrative tells a more nuanced story. When Tarr first speaks to Kreisler about Anastasya, his remarks strike Kreisler as a veiled attack. Kreisler feels that Tarr "was beginning to get at him with Anastasya" (199). Tarr has crossed an ethical line, and, although it is unintentional, the narrative holds him to account. "There is a point beyond which we must hold people responsible for accidents: innocence then loses its meaning. Beyond this point Tarr had transgressed" (199). Later, in confronting Kreisler again, Tarr recognizes that his favorite realms of space and rooms carry moral weight. He thinks of Kreisler: "He must not be again sought, though, on his own territory; the moral disadvantage of this position, on a man's few feet of most intimate floor space, Tarr had too clearly realized to repeat the experiment" (211). Although still couching his approach to Kreisler in terms of strategy and confrontation, Tarr thinks here of moral advantage and disadvantage as ethical categories. He comes to realize, in a way that Kreisler and Anastasya apparently do not, that behaviors have consequences.

Three of the novel's four major characters—those who cluster around Bertha, but not Bertha herself—thus give us three possible moral frameworks for understanding events in the narrative. There is fatality; there is meaninglessness; and there is the paradoxical middle ground represented by Tarr, where both the ethical weightlessness of fatality and meaningless are joined by at least the possibility of moral insight—although still allied to social and aesthetic strategies of intentional upset and power. When Tarr begins to suspect that there is more behind the relationship of Kreisler to Anastasya, he "began to scent another mysterious muddle" (200). Both a "mystery" and a "muddle" are forms of enigma—but a "mystery" presumably has a solution and can be solved, whereas a "muddle" can never be made right. Are the varied narrative relations between cause and effect, morality, and responsibility in *Tarr* a mystery or a muddle? Are they a set of puzzles to be solved—by its readers or by its characters—or a hopeless morass?

## IV.

Why should the private pleasure of some one
Become the public plague of many more?

Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*

The novel's fourth main character is Bertha, and her experience as victim is in a sense the "test" for the adequacy of the moral frameworks represented by the other characters—as well as the subject of a specific kind of narrative, which both adheres to and at times apparently counters her point of view. The scene of Kreisler's rape of Bertha adheres in some respects to received literary proprieties. The word "rape" in fact never appears explicitly in the passage, in keeping with similar reticence by authors of Lewis's time, who found it allowable to use the legal term in nonfiction or correspondence but not in novels or plays.[9] In this immediate context, however, the narrative describes the action merely as a "trick," a "struggle," finally a "last disrespectful attack" (164–65). This air of partial euphemism is underlined by the narrative's refusal to describe the act itself, only its aftermath. The narrative describes this aftermath in part as though what has happened was a kind of play acting, rather than a matter of lived experience: "An iron curtain rushed down upon that tragedy" (167). The language remains nonspecific. What happened in the moment is described as "what had occurred," "such things," or "this act"; even the term "this last disrespectful attack" (165) is semi-euphemistic. But it would be a mistake to explain away this indirection as merely narrative propriety. In other ways, Lewis goes out of his way to make the description of rape more brutal than the literary norm. Indeed, in his 1928 revision of the 1918 version of the novel, he intensifies the violence by adding the description "she lay convulsed upon her back, her mouth smeared with blood" (164). The sexual assault in *Tarr*, in other words, is no literary muddle such as, say, the possibly hallucinated assault on Adela Quested in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). There is no doubt about what has occurred.[10]

The refusal to name rape as such rather underlines what makes this sequence so unusual as a literary description of sexual assault. The sequence is seen entirely from the point of view of the assaulted woman, and reflects her attempt to come to terms, in the moment, with the trauma she experiences. "What had occurred," for instance, is a nearly empty phrase used by a mind searching for vocabulary to describe an event that is both unexpected and inexplicable. The phrase "disrespectful attack" shows Bertha still trying to formulate words adequate to rape—"attack" is straightforward enough, but "disrespectful" suggests Bertha's lingering attempt to categorize that attack within the bounds of her received nineteenth-century Romanticism, in which relations between men and women follow codified social rules. Even when

she is able to think that the figure of Kreisler had "flung itself upon her and done something disgusting" (167), she is able to face at some level the reality of the act, but cannot name it. It is a "something" done to her by a disassociated entity—not even Kreisler himself embodied as a male, but by "the figure of Kreisler" reduced to an ungraspable and malevolent "it."

This disassociation, moreover, belongs not merely to Bertha but also to the narrative. This dissociation reveals itself—not surprisingly in Lewis—by the sequence's sudden disruption of narrative time. Until the rape, the novel's narration has preceded more or less chronologically, only turning back the narrative clock to begin with Kreisler's morning after Tarr's, and with a flashback to "nine months previously" for an insight into Kreisler's pre-Parisian life (69). The rape sequence is the first time in the novel where the narrative flashes forward, where we see the aftermath of an event before understanding the causes. And at the end of the sequence—the narrative no longer easily separated from Bertha's point of view—space itself appears to split, as Kreisler comes to appear as four separate beings "side by side and unconnected" (167). Bertha sees him as a series of "precipitate states" that exist "each in a complete compartment of time of its own" (167). Time and space bleed into one another, for a "compartment" is invariably a space create by partition. The sequence as a whole is bookended by the disruption of categories: of understanding, of the fundamental categories of human experience, of narrative proprieties. Both Bertha's psyche and the narrative that reflects it become disrupted and fragmented.

These temporal and spatial disruptions mirror other avant-garde narrative discontinuities. Things happen, but they do not coalesce into a logical sequence. At the end of the passage, Bertha summarizes her experience to herself: "She had come there, got what she did not expect, and must now go away again" (167). Bertha only finds thinkable what preceded the rape, and what follows. The act itself is defined only by its unthinkability—it was "what she did not expect." There is no apparent cause and effect between her arrival, her departure, and the violation. The rape overall is defined as a breaking of logic, both within Bertha's psyche and within Lewis's narrative style. It is the thing suspended in the middle—of the narrative, of the sentence—that does not make sense. Bertha thinks of this explicitly: "What had occurred was senseless, there was not a visible pinhead of compensation" (165). Further, in assessing Kreisler's earlier behavior, she thinks, "This was the end of all explanations" (165).

But even this supposedly explanatory phrase is ambiguous. Does Bertha mean that the rape is the final irrational act that gives the lie to all previous "explanations"? Or does it mean that it is the logical endpoint of such explanations? Bertha is tormented by the possibility that the rape was not wholly senseless but occurred according to a logic that she did not herself recognize. Only after the fact, the narrative tells us, "She recognized the logic

of this act—more repulsive by far than its illogic" (165). The paradoxical doubleness of this observation—that actions can be foreseen from causes, and that they cannot—carries over to formulations in the narrative. The narrative tells us that Bertha's initial attempts to fight off Kreisler, her "defensive prowess," "disappeared in the whirlpool towards which they had both with a strange deliberateness and yet aimlessness, been steering" (167). This image of the whirlpool, or vortex, suggests disturbingly not that Bertha is an entirely hapless woman wholly victimized by a pathological Kreisler, but that they are "both" part of a process that is simultaneously illogical—"aimless"—and paradoxically logical, as though they have both acted with a "a strange deliberateness." Even at the most brutal moment of description, Lewis writes that in their sexual struggle they act as though they were "confederates beneath the same ban of the world's law" (164). This phrase seemingly suggests that the rape is a kind of mutual performance. It makes the rape seem a joint act.

Moreover, Bertha attempts to take the blame for the attack entirely upon herself. "It was my fault," she says to Kreisler when he turns up at her apartment thereafter in a fit of remorse (173)—and while this simply may be a rhetorical maneuver to get rid of Kreisler without further argument, it echoes several earlier moments where Bertha makes excuses for Kreisler's behavior.[11] Her assumption of blame, although it may be merely a defense mechanism in the moment, further bleeds into Bertha's sense that the rape was inevitable. "Oh what a fool she had been, for this was a dark insult," Lewis writes, "the *Shicksal*, the Shicksal had spat in her face" (165). She begins with self-accusation: she was a fool for not realizing the dangerous situation in which she has put herself. Paradoxically, however, she ends her thought by blaming *Shicksal*—the German word for "fate." This thought, in most philosophic frameworks other than that of Boethius, is self-contradictory. Either one bears responsibility for one's actions and suffers the willed actions of others, or fate determines the course of human events. There is no middle ground.[12]

Part of the virtuosity of this passage, of course, is that its fragmentation and paradox marks avant-garde textual practice while simultaneous imitating the psychological realism of Bertha's mental processes under trauma. She is desperate for an explanation, and her mind flickers between possible alternatives: the rape is Kreisler's fault; it is Bertha's fault; it was inevitable. Lewis writes earlier, indeed, that "she had trusted too much in Fate" (45), and Lewis has associated the word *Shicksal* throughout *Tarr* with both her and Kreisler's (wanting) German Romanticism.

Yet the narrative refuses to allow us to dismiss Bertha's turn to "fate" as a mere reflection of her already-satirized worldview. The sequence begins, in fact, with "Destiny" as its subject rather than Kreisler: "Destiny had laid its trap in the unconscious Kreisler. It had fixed it with powerful violent springs.—Eight days later [dating from the Observatoire meeting] it snapped down upon

Bertha" (162). This is not yet Bertha's point of view. The narrative itself presents "Destiny" as an autonomous entity, an "it" that invades Kreisler and takes the place of his volition. Destiny effectively obviates, or at least mitigates, his responsibility. For if the trap of Destiny has caused the rape, and Destiny is not simply a Romantic illusion, is anyone actually to blame?

These paradoxes are the source of much of the discomfort posed by this passage to readers of *Tarr*. The passage makes rape realistically brutal, but it does not allow for easy literary moralizing. Bertha is not idealized as a paragon of purity, as a symbol or a myth like a Lucretia or a Helen of Troy. Nor is the rape simply presented as an act of violence by a man against a fully helpless woman such as, say, the presumed rape of Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) which would seem to beg for what Erin A. Spampinato has called a "juridical" reading, where the reader feels obligated to sift evidence, to make legal rather than ethical sense of the act.[13] The scene is rather a complex and undecidable (and psychological nuanced) portrait of an event that cannot be easily understood according to received ethical or literary templates. Neither Bertha as victim nor the reader can determine whether the rape takes place in a universe of moral causality or of meaninglessness, whether it is a practical joke or a tragedy. (Afterward, indeed, Bertha thinks of the indifference of nature, and "the importance of our human actions! Is it more than the kissing of bricks?" [168]). In this respect the passage's stylistically and generically self-contradictory description of rape represents an act of aggression not only against Bertha but also against its readers. The scene constitutes what was often called, in the days of high theory, an aporia. It is a Gordian knot that triggers the reader precisely because it raises interpretive questions that have no answers.

## V.

If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on a wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there.

Anton Chekhov, quoted in S. Shchukin, *Memoirs*

As this narrative attack seems to be intentional, how can we contextualize it within the range of Lewis's aesthetics? Except for the pre-Vorticist *Mrs. Dukes' Million* (1908–1909), *Tarr* represents Lewis's first attempt to come to terms with the extended narrative of the novel as a form. Certainly aggression against the reader or observer is nothing new in, say, the theater. Avant-garde performance may be said to depend upon various alienation effects, from Brecht to Artaud. Avant-gardism in general depends on discontinuity and shock as much as the realist novel may be said to depend on continuity and psychological consistency.

In the manifestos of *Blast*, certainly, Lewis places his performative desire to disrupt front and center—to "Stir up Civil War among peaceful apes" (*B1* 31) as well as directly attacking his audience: "CURSE those who will hang over this Manifesto with SILLY CANINES exposed" (*B1* 17). Even in *Tarr*, the world of art similarly makes no apologies for its practitioners' behaviors or attitudes. A minor character such as Vokt, for instance, flings and pummels his subjects on the canvas in a way "he had never been able to treat people … in any other walk of life." Vokt takes no responsibility for his actions. He is explicitly determined not to "apologize for his brutal behaviour as an artist" (70).

But apologies come after acts of brutality—advance warnings, by definition, come before. If the novel depends on psychology and continuity, does Lewis provide sufficient warnings before Kreisler's act of brutality, and what would count as "sufficient"? Lewis makes it clear in *Tarr* that Bertha is aware of various signs of the danger that Kreisler poses to her. There is a "hazardous quality" to her initial agreement to meet Kreisler at the Café de l'Observatoire; she even wonders "was she quite responsible for her actions?" (155). Her decision to continue to see Kreisler is a kind of "cumulative obstinancy"—rather than be warned off by the results of her initial mistakes, she repeats them to make them seem intentional (155). Elsa van Arnim warns her explicitly against Kreisler, telling her "he's a vicious brute, but above all a brute, simply" (156). Her warning, however, falls on largely unreceptive ears: Lewis writes, "She was talking to a child. She offered it advice but it must take it or leave it" (157).

Bertha recognizes her naïveté only in retrospect. After the rape she realizes there had been aspects of Kreisler's behavior that had indeed led to her "being assailed by sudden anxieties" (165)—by Kreisler's request to draw her naked torso, by his peculiar comment that her "arms are like bananas." But by the time that Kreisler's smile becomes an explicit warning, "his grin … become now an even lurid danger-signal" (166–67), it is too late to react defensively to the abundant signs she has been given. The rape is a fait accompli.

Within the narrative, Bertha fails to heed both implicit and explicit warnings. But what of the reader? Lewis also provides another kind of warning in advance of the rape. In chapter 7 of Part IV, Lewis describes an earlier encounter between Kreisler and Bertha that he suffuses with imagery of rape. As Bertha metaphorically becomes one with the integrity of the building that protects her, she thinks of Kreisler: "He was a bandit, a house-breaker, after all a dangerously violent person," and the narrative describes her attempt to protect herself from him as a kind of rape in advance of fact. The imagery is of denuding and penetration: "the clothing of this décor was a kind of nakedness," Lewis writes, "But he had burrowed his way through … and would soon be at herself; he would be at her! He would be breaking into her: she did not wish him inside" (159).

The experience within the narrative is a warning for Bertha, but the metaphoric language *of* the narrative can only be interpreted by the reader. It is a kind of warning through metaphoric foreshadowing—which is the closest rhetorical device of warning that a narrative can deploy short of explicit announcement. Just as Bertha can only make partial sense in retrospect of the signs she failed to heed earlier, so can the reader only fully understand Lewis's preliminary imagery after the literal attack. And to underline the linkage between Kreisler's attack on Bertha and the imagery of guns planted earlier in the novel, Lewis describes Bertha's preliminary feelings of being under siege by Kreisler in terms of ambush and armaments: she stands behind the curtains of her house "with the emotions of an ambushed sharp-shooter" (159). Like the passage's images of penetration, this image of a gun takes aim at the reader, not at Bertha. Only readers, who are naïve by definition until they finish the novel, can be warned by literary metaphor.

In this respect the rhetoric of warning in *Tarr* differs from the rhetoric of *Blast*, which is also to say that it marks the difference between the avant-garde rhetoric of the manifesto and the realist rhetoric of the novelist. We can see Lewis struggling with how much he wants to warn the reader both in the context of the versions of *Tarr* and the narrative itself. In the serial version of *Tarr* published in the *Egoist* and in both the 1918 American and English editions, Lewis accompanied his text with explicit instructions on how to interpret Kreisler (as a reflection of prewar Germany, not of the time of the war itself) and Tarr himself (as a carrier of Lewis's aesthetic ideas, but not as a paragon of personal interrelationships). What had been an epilogue in the *Egoist* becomes a prologue in the American edition, and is divided into both a prologue and an epilogue in the 1918 English edition—as though Lewis is experimenting with giving readers hints on his novel's rhetorical framing up front versus after the fact.[14] The Prologue to the 1918 English edition literally calls itself a warning: "So much by way of warning before the curtain rises" (xii). Yet by the 1928 edition he had decided to eliminate this material entirely. Lewis no longer wanted the reader to approach the text with contextualizing framing.

And yet *Tarr* begins with warnings that are as pervasive as they are nonetheless equivocal. The novel begins: "Paris hints of sacrifice. But here we deal with that large facet known to indulgent and congruous kind" (7). The first sentence warns—"hints"—of sacrificial behavior to come. We will learn, in time, that not only does Bertha tend toward sacrifice, but that Part VI of the novel will be called "HOLOCAUSTS" (2). As soon as Lewis appears to warn, however, he redirects attention. The "But" of the second sentence erases the questions raised by the first—"Sacrifice of what kind? On whose part?"—to suggest that the text will instead explore the more anodyne aspects of Paris that lie inside the narrative but outside the novel's warning. In another reversal, however, the opening section ends with a description of the "most permanent

tableaux" of Paris as "disheartening and admonitory as a Tussaud's of the Flood" (7). The characters of Paris, in metaphor, become wax figures of the world just before the biblical apocalypse—and is there any greater warning possible than the biblical admonition to change one's ways lest they lead to mass destruction?

In *Tarr*, in other words, Lewis moderates the overt admonitory rhetoric of *Blast* into a novelistic use of foreshadowing as readerly warning.[15] But such foreshadowing is perhaps knowingly insufficient. It is general; it is at times misdirective; it can in many instances, paradoxically, only be recognized as foreshadowing in retrospect. These general cultural warnings apply to the larger world of Paris, which is immediately marked as outside the concerns of the narrative, and which is also largely ignored within the frame of the novel by its characters. They, Lewis tells us, are "largely ignorant of all but their restless personal lives" (7). And it is in these personal lives—the worlds of social interaction, of artistic practice, even of rape—where things happen beyond the reach of warning, suddenly and inexplicably. This is a world where a character like Kreisler can "appear with a startling suddenness sometimes out of the fog of Time and Space" (158). And that ability to startle, that suddenness, can be read as both a function of character behavior and as an aspect of the narrative's aesthetic intentions.

## VI.

BLAST HUMOUR
Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness,
Arch enemy of REAL, conventionalizing like gunshot …

*Blast 1*

Where, then, does this leave the reader of *Tarr*, in terms of the affect of the text and the potentially triggering aspects of the scene of rape? The contexts I have described allow us to consider the rape as a crisis of narrative and of interpretive paradox. Images of ambush and the gun appear as a recurrent metaphor for human interaction in the novel; the scene of rape represents a comparable locus of attack, both against Bertha as a woman and as an aporetic attack on the reader. And alongside and within that metaphoric treatment of ambush, the narrative of *Tarr* gives us two different ethical ideas of cause and effect embodied by the novel's male characters. For Kreisler, the ambush is an amoral, even technological, event in which the trigger and the gun distance him from his victim. For Tarr, his aesthetic and personal marksmanship, however comparably destructive, allows for at least the possibility of ethical self-reflection, the ferreting out of meanings among muddles.

Kreisler, in other words, represents the aesthetic of the unreconstructed avant-garde—Futurism, certainly, but also the Vorticist manifesto—where

pugnacious effect is everything, and where continuity, moral or narrative, takes a back seat to hyperbole and rhetorical point-scoring. Tarr represents, on the other hand, a character caught, like Lewis himself, between being an avant-gardist but also, in a sense, becoming something like a burgeoning novelist—that is, he wants to shock with the technological insouciance of a Kreisler, but finds himself all too often imbricated in the messy ethics of the world. He is forced to recognize that behaviors have real psychological and moral effects. His plots to hurt other people—mainly, it must be said, Bertha—have consequences. The plot of the novel depends on them.

*Tarr*, in short, both does and does not warn the reader to expect such narrative shocks and challenges. We can think of the rape scene as an example of narrative realism, one of the few sections of the novel that takes Bertha's point of view and shows empathy to her psychological state and the harm done to both her body and mind. On the other hand, we can think of the scene as a virtuoso set piece of avant-garde prose that maintains a skeptical and even cruel view of Bertha—for instance, Lewis calls her tears "inane" (165) after the rape—that puts the reader into an untenable interpretive position. If the subject matter is potentially triggering, so is the self-contradictory morass of interpretations into which Lewis places the reader. And its sudden appearance in the text comes with only the most equivocal of warnings. Its refusal to give way to ameliorative interpretations, on either Bertha's part or the reader's, is part of the novel's plot against the audience. The scene's intent to disturb is part of its aesthetic and ethical agenda.

What, then, does a novel owe us? The briefest answer is: nothing. Narrative bears no responsibility to warn the reader about, or shield the reader from, horrifying context—indeed, the shock of that material may be part of the novel's aesthetic integrity. The rape scene in *Tarr* may leave some readers feeling adrift and upset, even violated: like Bertha, the reader may feel that she "had come there, got what she did not expect, and must now go away again" (167). But this is a kind of authorial marksmanship, one that takes responsibility for the ambush. Some art is upsetting—and some art intends to upset. We, as readers, enter upon a literary work on the author's terms. We are, as it were, trespassers. And, as trespassers, it behooves us to understand the rules, even the lawlessness, of the lands we enter. After all, as Tarr warns Hobson: "But you have trespassed here, and you must listen. I cannot let you off before you have heard, and shown that you understand. If you do not sit and listen, I will write it all to you in a letter. YOU WILL BE MADE TO HEAR IT!" (17).

This is Tarr behaving as the avant-gardist, as the believer in his own kind of cause and effect, in the didacticism of the kinds of explicit warning that *Tarr* refuses to offer. It suggests that if we as readers trespass on traumatizing materials in *Tarr*, or its ethically undecidable scene of rape, we leave ourselves—perhaps necessarily without warning—open to ambush, to the narrative

ramifications implied by the metaphor of the trigger and the gun. Whether or not we are listening for the gunshot aimed in our direction in *Tarr*, we will be made to hear it.

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## Endnotes

1 My thanks to Nathan Waddell for providing helpful advice on an earlier version of this essay, and to Karen Potvin Klein for her expert copyediting.

2 See cluster on this in *Modernism/Modernity*, 2000, https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/metoo-modernism.

3 One think of the Woolsey decision, which allowed the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* in America on the grounds that the sexuality in the book was "somewhat emetic" rather than "an aphrodisiac." Joyce (1961), xii.

4 In *Clarissa*, the fact of rape ("this black transaction") presumably occurs before the shortest letter in the novel, where Lovelace writes simply: "The affair is over. Clarissa lives." Richardson (1985), 883. See also Kleist (2003).

5 See from the conclusion of the story, as Cantleman "turned to the devouring of his mate. … He felt that he was raiding the bowels of Nature." *The Little Review* (October 1917): 13. Lewis's later revision of the story makes this even more explicit: "He bore down on her as though he wished to mix her body into the soil." Lewis (1967), 310. One notes that *The Little Review* advertised itself as "A Magazine of the Arts: Making No Compromise with the Public Taste."

6 All further parenthetical references are to *T2* unless otherwise noted.

7 This was, of course, the signal discovery of late nineteenth-century British warfare, arguably beginning in 1893 in southern Africa, where British colonial police armed with guns were able to slaughter fifteen hundred Ndebele warriors, losing only four of their own men in the process. See Ferguson (2003), 188.

8 In the feminine social circles frequented by Balzac's Eugéne de Rastignac, for instance, it is it a truism that "there's always a friend… twisting a dagger in your heart and asking you to admire its handle." Balzac (1994), 62.

9 In 1912, for instance, George Bernard Shaw complained that contemporary marriage law "allows her husband to commit abduction, imprisonment, and rape upon her." Shaw (1913), 38. Although Galsworthy was unwilling to use the word "rape" in *The Man of Property*, his correspondent Edward Garrett does not censor himself in correspondence about the novel in progress, writing: "Personally *I* think Irene goes too soft, in and after the rape scene." Garnett (1934), 71. Curiously, the word "rape" does appear once in *Tarr*, but in a displaced context where the subject is Tarr and the meaning is closer to the archaic meaning of the word as "theft": when Tarr attempts to break up with Bertha in Part 1, he thinks of his attempt to disillusion her as an "attempted rape of her fairy drapery" (59).

10 It is, of course, possible that Lewis was taking advantage of presumably less stringent literary censorship in the 1920s after the publication of, say, Lawrence's *Women in Love* and Joyce's *Ulysses*.

11 Bertha thinks "She would take the blame herself" for Kreisler's behavior to her on the street after the Bonnington dance (143) and later partially absolves Kreisler of responsibility to the members of the Liepmann circle, saying "I don't think he was really accountable for his actions" (150).

12 In *The Consolation of Philosophy* (523 AD), Boethius posits that God may be able to see into the future to observe what man will choose to do, without influencing free will in any way. The resolutely secular perspective of *Tarr*, of course, renders such possibilities moot.

13 Spampinato argues against literary readings that are mainly adjudicative, which she defines as "the practice by which literary critics have tended to treat literary rape as if it were real and understood their primary responsibility as readers to lie in the adjudication of what happened as if in a court of law." Spampinato (2021), 124.

14 See *The Egoist* 4, no. 10 (November 1917): 152–53; Lewis (1918), ix–xii, 319–20; and *T1* 13–15.

15 Hints of sacrificial and apocalyptic rhetoric will be picked up by other aspects of the text to come—when Tarr described Hobson, say, as part of "the lost generations described by Chekov over again, that any resolute power will be able to wipe up over-night, with its eyes shut" (21) or when Lewis calls Tarr's treatment of Bertha a "comic Armageddon" (50).

# Strong Shapes: The Case for Black Vorticism

*Cooper Casale*

## *Introduction: Racialized Shapes*

In 1900, the year W. E. B. Du Bois delivered "The Exhibit of American Negroes" to the Paris Exposition, Vorticism's founder, Wyndham Lewis, was eighteen. Strong shapes were his favorites. In *BLAST 1* (1914), he writes that "the Modern World is due almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon Genius,—its appearance and its spirit" (*B1* 39). How exactly "Anglo-Saxon Genius" appears is unclear. In what theater of "the Modern World" is the spirit of that genius most recognizable? Ezra Pound insists that "RACE-MEMORY" must challenge and renarrativize the "PLACID, NON-ENERGIZED FUTURE" (*B1* 158). It's a familiar ultranationalist argument. What was lost—or stolen—in the past cannot make a future. It's in the proving ground of the present that the mettle of a race is tested. Yet the stubborn fact remains: Du Bois's vortex, which visualizes an upwardly mobile Black community in the American South, predates Lewis's Vorticism. It's actually Vorticism that looks like Du Bois's exhibit. In Du Bois's sociological imagination, the vortex does not plunge down, as it does in *BLAST*, but rather opens into the promise of a rising Black future. Nevertheless, the cross-current becomes a critical point of contact between two avant-gardes that ostensibly couldn't be further apart.

The instance also represents a crucial high-modernist interest. When we talk about the modernist project, as well as the atomized communities of avant-gardes that contributed to that project, we are often talking about shapes. The through-line that connects what Jed Rasula calls high modernism's "sprawl of clans" (2016, 51)—cubism, surrealism, symbolism, Dadaism, futurism, Vorticism, and so on—is the aesthetics of the shape. "Aesthetic Modernism has many gods," writes Alois Martin Müller. "It is a polytheistic complex, and like the Olympian gods, the gods of the avant-garde make war on one another" (1990). This essay will investigate one such theater—the vortex. By expanding our interpretations of the vortex to also include the ways in which Black artists used it to represent an emerging Black visibility, we produce a different understanding of Vorticism's place in the modernist epoch, not as a short-lived polemic associated only with Lewis's little magazine *BLAST*, but a means of visualizing and interpreting the new modes of cultural production that define aesthetic modernism itself.

That white artists are intertwined with Black cultural production is clear. Pound routinely located the doctrinal disruptions of standard English along the color line. Indeed, a great deal of Anglo-modernism depends on what Pound calls, in relation to boot polish, "BLACKING" (*B1* 53). By interpreting the conspicuous displays of white "blacking," we must also expand the boundaries of visual aesthetic modernism to include actual Blackness and its modes of cultural production. If "The Exhibit of American Negroes" (1900), got to the vortex first, narrativizing modernity through the visibility of the Black body, then the cosmopolitan drive of that Black visual avant-garde—which unspools the vortex, decolonizing Black subjects by insisting on the actual data of Black upward mobility—inevitably anticipates and counters the whirlpool of Lewisian Vorticism, which pulls the white hangers-on of Victorian London into its orbit, and sinks them in it. In their book *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits* (2018), Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert observe that "The Exhibit of American Negroes" features an explicitly "modernist design," which reflects "Du Bois' interest in representing the Black South as an integral part of modernity, a 'small nation of people' who shared more in common with the broader, future-oriented 'thinking world'" (14). Du Bois's sociological laboratory enabled a new kind of intentional modernist community complete with its own vortical avant-garde. By interpreting the points of contact and divergence between Lewis's and Du Bois's use of the vortex as one such "modernist design," we break ground on a new site of postcolonial reason: Black Vorticism.

That Du Bois worked in an explicitly visual register is unsurprising, as the visibility of Black economics had emerged to contend with white assumptions of Black pathologies. The economic facts of Black American life dispelled the pervasive notion of Black disorder to which racial stereotypes owed so much of their character. Yet the most striking aspect of the exhibit was the prismatic way in which Du Bois visualized his data. "He understood what Duke Ellington expressed thirty years later," writes Aldon Morris. "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got swing" (2018, 21, 23). One portrait titled *Assessed Valuation of All Taxable Property Owned by Georgia Negroes* employs a striking palimpsestic form, which, while statistically conclusive, is aesthetically tricky. It is, from the first, a space of play, possibly lending some of its aesthetic character to Bruno Abdank-Abakanowicz's spirograph, a toy whose interlocking wheels produce hypotrochoids and epitrochoids. This portrait asks the viewer to work the wheels themselves. If grafted onto three-dimensional space, the figure "would take a conical form, a vortex" (National Museum). The cone's deepest section corresponds to the least taxable property and vice versa. We read the portrait from the inside out, climbing out of the cone, passing through generations of economic improvements. The spiral uncoils. What was captured therein escapes. More interesting, however, than how we should read Du Bois's figures, is what they enable when we choose to consider these portraits also as aesthetic

objects: a series of striking vortical figures that are themselves rich sites of aesthetic observation and modernist research.

Much has been said about Anglo-modernism's appropriative element. While Pound was undoubtedly interested in Blackness as an aesthetic shortcut to progress, for Lewis, Blackness was less grammatical or aesthetical than historical. Echoing the nineteenth-century Young Hegelian Max Stirner, Lewis associates Blackness with a precultural barbarism, an antiquity based on the material surface of the world, rather than the pure spirit of liberalism that forged the abstract fictions of nation, state, and municipality in its white bourgeois image (Stirner 2005, 67). In *Paleface* (1929), Lewis writes that "the example [white people] have set to all other peoples of the world has been unfortunately enough in its mechanically sterility. . . . Let us draw back in time. Let us keep our noses well in the air. It is the White Man's Burden!" (*P* 22). Lewis objectifies not the aesthetics of Black expression but the pathologies he associates with Blackness. It encodes, for him, precultural freedom, an exit from liberalism. "The negro was in vogue," bemoans Langston Hughes, as white patrons began patronizing Black jazz clubs to see musicians like Duke Ellington (Hughes 1993, 228). Lewis observes that the problem of the "Dark Demon," Lewis's term for the fetish character of so-called African primitivism, had, in his view, become a "pet vice" for white artists (1969, 154). The African masks Picasso famously paints onto the women of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) were becoming a standard of progress for white artists. When Lewis asked the Guyanese painter Denis Williams about the "Piccasoan" quality of his paintings, Williams responded: "It is not a case of my going to Picasso, Picasso came to Africa and to me" (Lewis 1949).

The modern artist is thus fashioned in the image of the imperial cartographer. To "make it new" required a global system of plundering aesthetically *new* objects and masks. Despite his misgivings, Lewis couldn't resist. In *BLAST 2* (1915), he calls Jacob Epstein's *Rock Drill* (1913), a vortical readymade that literally fashions primitivism into a tool, "one of the best things [Epstein] has done. The nerve-like figure perched on the machinery, with its straining to one purpose, is a vivid illustration of the greatest function of life" (*B2* 77). The rock drill bore into "the civilized hidden snares" that had, to Lewis, snuffed out the art impulse (*B2* 22). The tools of African primitivism, for white artists, enabled a refutation of the Victorian inheritance and the cosmopolitan energies that it engendered. Borrowed Blackness challenged Lewis's own economic alienation as the bored inheritor of colonial power.

For Du Bois, access to precisely the same economic and social capital Lewis spurned was essential to dispelling the imagination of Black disorder. James Weldon Johnson notes in his essay "The Dilemma of the Negro Author" (1928) that white audiences wanted to see African Americans as either "a simple, indolent, docile, improvident peasant; a singing, dancing, laughing, weeping

child," or as "an impulsive irrational, passionate savage, reluctantly wearing a thin coat of culture" (379). While Lewis's Egoism corresponds with a bored, post-Victorian English bourgeoisie, what Léopold Sédar Senghor calls "Negritude," a Black diasporic practice in the 1930s, locates Blackness as proximal to the proletariat to legitimize it: "The white man is the symbol of capital as the Negro is that of labor. . . . Beyond the black-skinned men of his race it is the battle of the world proletariat that is his song" (Sartre 1948, xl). Ironically, Lewis agrees; he writes that "the Negro is racially a sort of *Proletariat*" (*P* 35). Here, class encodes race and race becomes the residue of capital, a product of the division of labor. Claude McKay argues in *The Crisis*, the print organ of the NAACP that Du Bois edited, that Senghor's proletarian Blackness may be reductive: "The Negro in politics and social life is ostracized only technically by the distinction of color; in reality the Negro is discriminated against because he is of the lowest type of worker" (1921, 102).

That class is dilated to include race also helps describe Lewis's conflict with the nullity of bourgeois "Victorian Vampires" of which he is a resigned example. If Black subjects bear the ontological distinction of "the lowest type of worker," Lewis's monied rebellion, his "little conspiracy" (Lewis 2010, 122), recognizes what Marx refers to as the "sham existence" of the proprietary class: "The proprietary class and the class of the proletariat experience the same alienation. But the former class feels at ease and justified in this alienation, recognizing in it its source of power and the basis for a sham existence. Contrarily, the latter class feels destroyed in this alienation, recognizing in it its helplessness and the inhumanity of its existence" (Lukács 1970, 145).

We can perhaps revise Marx's dialectic to accommodate race. Lewis's Vorticism and Black Vorticism both evade capture, but just because they run away doesn't mean they run in the same direction. Lewis's vortex coils down, pulling London into the same maelstrom that sinks Phlebas the Phoenician in *The Waste Land*—a man of letters who enters the whirlpool and drowns. Black Vorticism, however, unspools the vortex, as the facts of Black upward mobility undo notions of its ascribed disorder. The linguistic whirlpool of M. NourbeSe Philip's long poem *Zong!* (2011), which describes the 1781 Zong massacre, floats the drowned enslaved histories back up to the surface. Philip's linguistic whirlpool explores drowning as a kind of thirst that kills—a baptism in the wa ter of want. (2011, 4)

In this whirlpool, the drowned float back, and the dead surface. While Lewis devoted his own rock drill to destabilizing his peculiar upper-class resentment, Black Vorticists were—and still are—building their own.

### *The Neighborhood: White Space and White Spaces*

In *America & Cosmic Man* (1948), Lewis copies out a note for a speech Woodrow Wilson delivered on January 1, 1911. The note provides a taxonomy of American political organization:

> RADICAL—one who goes too far.
> CONSERVATIVE—one who does not go far enough.
> REACTIONARY—one who does not go at all.
> PROGRESSIVE—one who (a) recognizes new facts and adjusts law to them; and (b) attempts to think ahead constructively. (*ACM* 82)

The Reactionary, Lewis observes, indulges in their strict commitment to inaction. There is, then, indulgence, a kind of gluttony, in staying put. Both inaction and overreaction require conscious choice. For Lewis, "it is very difficult to respect a Progressive," because progressivism is rote: a nerve reaction to the latest iteration of the national program—a "soggy platitude" (83):

> The man who does not want to go anywhere we can understand—who does not want to go places, because all places at bottom are much the same. We can understand the man who wants to go where no man has ever gone before, where men say it is impossible, and highly unsuitable, to go. But what frankly can one say about the man who just wants to go as far as he is pushed? (82–83)

The new solutions of the progressive program are only the old ways heated back up. Progressives are always one step behind, fitting old solutions to new problems. Progressivism achieves only reversion, a return to automatic thinking and thoughtless subordination—a new feudal arrangement of the world. The progressive reforms of the Victorian era had succeeded only in creating serfs out of the middle class. Individuality and peculiarity had been liquidated to erect the municipal lordships of neighborhood, state, and nation. What can be said about those who only go as far as they are pushed when everyone is being pushed in the same direction? What emerges is, to Lewis, only "vegetable humanity"—the ontology of the middle class, which posits community in isolation, peculiarity in uniformity (*B1* 15). Tarr observes:

> A breed of mild pervasive cabbages has set up a wide and creeping rot in the West of Europe.—They make it indirectly a peril and tribulation for live things to remain in the neighbourhood. You are systematizing and vulgarizing the individual.—You are not an individual. You have, I repeat, no right to that hair and that hat. You are trying to have the apple and eat it too.—You should be in uniform, and at work. (*T1* 17)

At its most elemental, Vorticism is a lateral condemnation of "the neighbourhood"—an intentional organization of "mild pervasive cabbages." Liberalism had succeeded in decoupling the neighborhood from a specific place. Now the neighborhood was everywhere. Cosmopolitanism, the victory of progressive reform, had made neighbors out of everyone. "We all are sicknesses for each other" remarks Tarr (61)—stuck with each other, catching the same cold. Even the ostensibly countercultural and polemical dwindles into nullity and politeness. Tarr challenges his captive audience in some café to "observe how we ape the forms of conventional life in our emancipated Bohemia" (*T2* 19). Now, everyone, the bohemian and the worker, wore the same uniform, went to the same job, and rode steerage in the same boat.

A portrait of Alfred Stieglitz, taken by Gertrude Käsebier, illustrates a crucial way in which Vorticism and other related avant-gardes, which found their homes in the little magazines of modernism, represent "the forms of conventional life." White as a ghost, he's hardly there—a shade of his own portrait. Modernist art, so interested in portraying lack, finds absence everywhere. In Vorticist art, people lose their skin. The skeleton breathes. In the name of progress, its ruined machinery coughs steam. The bare mechanical leg of Lewis's 1912 painting *The Enemy of the Stars* (fig. 1) turns human parts into little engines. The rest is negative space—white space, the residual paper. That Vorticism depends on the ways in which its practitioners read white space as a deliberate coupling of racial performance and aesthetic technique complicates definitions of "white space" as an ostensibly agnostic aesthetic term. Indeed, the first printed use of the term arrives in 1888, just as the Victorian period is ending and early modernism is beginning (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2004). The term's first printing also coincides with the beginning of Stieglitz's career. His photo *The Steerage* (1907) captures the sterilization of white spaces. On the bottom deck, women fuss with their laundry. A woman's hood is down, and she stares past the camera, looking bored. Above, the men, reduced to vague shapes that block the light, seem content with their standing room. Toward the back, as the camera begins to lose its focus, the men look more like little buildings, a human skyline. Indeed, Stieglitz's most important work would become his photographs of skyscrapers. Hart Crane, in his first collection of poetry, *White Buildings* (1926), writes about "white cities" as though nobody had built them. Skyscrapers had merely blinked into existence.

> I meet you, therefore, in that that eventual flame
> You found in final chains, no captive then—
> Beyond their million brittle bloodshot eyes;
> White, through white cities passed on to assume
> That world which comes to each of us alone. (lines 46–50)

The chains are empty. There's no prisoner left to capture. The "white cities," full of "stenographic smiles and stock quotations" (line 6), which come "to each of us alone" are the poor inheritance of a culture, "the body of the world" (line 48) that has lost its will or its ability to create.

Spencer Gore's painting *Brighton Pier* (1913), included in *BLAST 1,* connects Stieglitz's photography to the Vorticist rejection of "vegetable humanity." The original painting charms in balmy pastels, while the printed version is dark, smeared, and brooding. The abstraction of Paul Cézanne's still-life paintings, which made the original *Brighton Pier* so depthless and instant, is redoubled here. The darker pastels change to shadows, the people to ghosts. The pier and the sky, both rendered in similar shades of pastel blue, turn white. "It is essential to approach [Vorticism] from the first as a retraction from experience and a correction of contemporary weaknesses in art" (line 4). To cleave a difference between Lewis and those "contemporary weaknesses," Vorticism is dogmatically conspicuous. It rejects the bonds of neighborliness.

Lewis's periodical *Tyro* sustains and augments *BLAST*'s hyper-conspicuous style by dedicating itself entirely to, very literally, getting in someone's face. The Tyros are all about faces. By fitting each Tyro with the Black mask of minstrelsy, the Tyro snuffs out the "white demon," obfuscating any trace of the physiognomy of white faces. Lewis wanted white London to get a good look at itself. The simpering faces of the Tyros echoed "the transformations of time and space wrought by the age of steam," which intensified racial visibility by making urbanization possible (Daly 2016, 404). Lewis argues that a growing interest in Black art driven by the fetish character of so-called African primitivism risked turning out white artists. Blackness, "The Dark Demon" of the cosmopolitan program, had run "Anglo-Saxon Genius" underground. The "white demon" must therefore pour "a cold a bath as possible" on the over-excitable white artist. "The Daimon of the white man, the authentic one, I mean," must be "as compelling as the 'dark' [one]" (Lewis 1969, 147).

Robert McAlmon's poem "White Males," included in the first issue of *Tyro* (1921), insists that cosmopolitanism inevitably degrades "racial purity":

> There would be no more white males.
> None so clear a white as these.
> Only some tinged with gray—dusty.
> But I could not watch them rush to the forest forever—
> Not one did I see arrive there—
> A cloud or night or blackness always intervened.
> I saw them rush forward and disappear,
> And then saw no more of them. (*TY1* 6)

The poem's white horses represent vanishing racial difference. "There [will] be no more white males," McAlmon warns, as increasing Black and white proximity will make interracial couplings inevitable.

> White stallions dashed by.
> I could see their teeth gleaming
> Through their lips as they sneered
> With death-laughter upon them. (*TY1* 6)

The dark mask of the Tyro—a composite caricature made of Blackness and Jewishness—that Lewis fits onto each Tyro, affixes comic "death-laughter" unto white faces. Produced the same year (1920–21), two Tyros—*A Reading of Ovid* and a self-portrait called *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro*—share the same darkened complexion, the same broad, long nose, and a nearly identical baleful smile (figs. 2 and 3). Pound's 1918 remark that Lewis "is a collection of races" proves accurate (Edwards 2000, 194), as is an old promise from *BLAST 1*, that "dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World" (*B1* 134). The Tyros synthesize racial difference into the same vulgar composite of experience: the organization of the neighborhood itself. The Tyros examine how conspicuous insult, by making the neighborhood mean, recasts goodwill and brotherhood as illusory and politically expeditious to a bourgeoisie that needs everyone to get along. What is an insult if not a sudden eruption of what civility has only submerged and failed to extinguish? T. S. Eliot writes in *Tyro 1*: "What is sometimes called 'vulgarity' is . . . one thing that has not been vulgarized" (*TY1* 2). Vorticism's insults, its misdeeds, and even its bad, humorless jokes navigate the outer reaches of the civility that the bourgeoisie has forged to maintain its own futurity. To Eliot, what seemed vulgar, or in bad taste, only seemed so because it had not yet been accounted for by the process of cultural reification. In Lewis's often noxious politics, insult, xenophobia, and racism are merely residues of civil society, an intentional obliteration of the cul-de-sac sweetness of the neighborhood that had only hidden hate.

Despite *BLAST* and *Tyro* being relatively small periodicals, even as far as modernist magazines go, the Vorticist argument survived within and beyond high modernism. Lewis's own recollection of Vorticism as "a program rather than an established fact" invites us to recontextualize Vorticism as not a single art movement, but rather a shared aesthetic technique that revels in conspicuous insult and outburst (Bond 2012, 34). Vorticism is "a provocative spectre," writes Robert Bond, "a semi-formed cultural undercurrent" that morphs chimerically throughout the twentieth century (2012, 34). William Carlos Williams's 1923 manifesto *Spring and All* sustains Vorticism's obliterative potential: "To it now we come to dedicate our secret project: the annihilation of every human creature on the face of the earth" (2011, 5). H. P. Lovecraft, a writer of horror,

was drawn to the polemics of the modernist argument, especially the radical potential of the vortex or spiral:

> In art there is no use in heeding the chaos of the universe. . . . I can conceive of no true image of the pattern of life and cosmic force, unless it be a jumble of mean dots arrang'd in directionless spirals. And so far are real dots and actual curves from depicting the utter formlessness and emptiness of life and force. (1965, 1.261–62)

To Lovecraft, Vorticism's subversive potential isn't its surrender to "chaos," but its application of it. Vorticism is "true" because it gives "curves" to "formlessness." Vorticism pulled into view the "emptiness of life" that was once only immaterial. In *Tarr*, Lewis's character Otto Kreisler observes that "his weakness drew him on, back into the vortex: anything at all was better than going back into that terrible colourless mood" (*T2* 108). The vortex becomes a means to represent a lack, a special sinking feeling.

It's not a coincidence that the modern infinitive form "to spiral" arrives in the early twentieth century, concurrently with the same modernist argument that interests Lewis, Williams, and Lovecraft. The earliest printed use of "spiraling" in the modern pejorative sense, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is by Hart Crane, in 1922. Crane writes in a letter: "Under the influence of aether and amnesia my mind spiraled to a kind of seventh heaven of consciousness" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2004). Google Ngram viewer shows that adjacent phrases such as "spiraling down" and "downward spiral" grow steadily in popularity, until they explode in the 1990s. By the time of the release of Nine Inch Nails' 1994 masterwork *The Downward Spiral*, recorded in the same house where the Manson murders occurred, the death drive represented by the vortex felt familiar enough to be a kind of generational banner. A compilation of remixes titled *Further Down the Spiral* (1995) even features a haunting image of a severed coiled rope for its album cover. On the last song of *The Downward Spiral*, "Hurt," Trent Reznor sings: "You can have it all / my empire of dirt." Reznor's articulation of the spiral echoes Lewis's. The dulled imperial mind has very little with which to build a self. It's entirely possible to read Vorticism as a postcolonial contradiction: imperialism critiqued from the perspective of the bored wielders of a languishing English colonial power. The Vorticists and their progeny liquidated their colonial past—an "empire of dirt"—to give up on the dream of an enduring English future. One can't help but consider Hazel Moates's reproach for modernity in Flannery O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* (1952): "Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it" (165).

### *Ships at a Distance: Toward a Black Vorticism*

Fred Moten argues that Blackness represents an "irreducibly disordering, deformational force," which is nevertheless "absolutely indispensable to normative order, normative form" (2008, 180). Moten contends that "the strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms is essential not only to contemporary Black academic discourse but also to the discourses of the barbershop, the beauty shop, and the book store" (178). Langston Hughes's observation that "the negro was in vogue" in 1920s Harlem is thus more spite than pride. A cosmopolitan interest in Black art, driven by new media and profiteering, did not obviate hundreds of years of colonial exploitation. Hughes's poem "Cubes" (1934) is a damning censure of the new forms of modernism and the emerging mainstream markets that drove them. The final stanza of the poem reads:

> Of course, the young African from Senegal
> Carries back from Paris
> A little more disease
> To spread among the black girls in the palm huts.
> He brings them as a gift
>  disease—
> From light to darkness
>  disease—
> From the boss to the bossed
>         disease—
> From the game of black and white
>  disease
> From the city of the broken cubes of Picasso
>  d
>  i
>  s
>  e
>  a
>  s
>  e. (22)

The broken cubes of Picasso are, to Hughes, paradigmatic of an increasingly atomized—and cubed—modernity. To be a modern subject, filled with all the sensibilities of a modern consumer is to very literally be diseased. "At one level, the poet offers a trenchant critique of modernist art as a 'disease,'" writes Seth Moglen. "The poem suggests that the revolutionary aesthetic practices of his generation—practices for which Picasso's cubism stands as symbol and model—should be recognized as symptomatic expressions of a global system of exploitation that was deforming the lives of people around the world" (2002,

1192). Yet the poem's engagement with the formal experimentation of high modernism indicates both condemnation and culpability in equal portions. In Hughes's poem, "the young African from Senegal / Carries *back* from Paris / A little more disease" (emphasis mine). "The young African from Senegal" was in Paris to begin with, participating in the generation of new art forms now considered so elemental to the modernist project.

The work of Aaron Douglas, a visual artist often associated with the Harlem Renaissance, establishes what we may begin to understand as Black Vorticism. Both analogous and opposed to Lewis's sense of the vortical, Douglas's work applies the instantaneity of Lewis's vortical techniques and the depthlessness of Paul Cézanne's work to depictions of Black subjects. Douglas's work, included in James Weldon Johnson's book of poems *God's Trombones* (1927), sustains the fury and polemics of Lewis's Vorticism, supplementing it with a fraught cosmopolitanism that is equal parts joy, humility, and fear. The final illustration of the book, *The Judgment Day* (1939), depicts a series of figures waiting in what seems like a mixture of these affects. Douglas's avoidance of color, his choice of muted purples and greens, illuminates the less visible, or as Lee VanDemarr notes of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, what we both "want to look" at and "want not to look" at, as we are drawn more deeply into the American racial landscape (Scruggs and VanDemarr 1998, 136). Johnson's poem, which accompanies Douglas's painting, explores the liminal zone between what we want to look at and what we want to turn away from:

> And I feel Old Earth a-shuddering—
> And I see the graves a-bursting—
> And I hear a sound,
> A blood-chilling sound.
> What sound is that I hear?
> It's the clicking together of the dry bones,
> Bone to bone—the dry bones.
> And I see coming out of the bursting graves,
> And marching up from the valley of death,
> The army of the dead. (Johnson 2018, 54)

Defining "the army of the dead" is a quintessentially vorticist exercise. Certainly, "the army of the dead" is adjacent to the "feeble Europeanism" Lewis blasted in 1914 (*B1* 36). Likewise, the "clicking together of bones" echoes the machines that appear everywhere in *BLAST*. Yet, where Lewis hears the blast of steam as righteous, Johnson hears the clicking of bones—the little machines of the human body—as the death rattle of the human race.

The poetry of Henry Dumas, so often called associated with the afro-surrealist movement, represents a crucial overlap of Black avant-gardes. Johnson's "army of the dead" also marches through Dumas's poem "Kef 12":

> Take away the shape from the metal, sun.
> They are like stone, these people.
> Now make them lava. (Dumas)

The metal of the industrial age loses its shape. The people, frozen into stone, become lava. Here, form, racial and aesthetic, melts. A kind of terraforming occurs, as the lava softens into soil. "Dumas's is a world in which the broken glide by in search of the healing element," writes Amiri Baraka. "The very broken quality, almost to abstraction, is a function of change and transition" (1988, 165). Black Vorticism replaces the Anglo-modernist progress narrative of the second industrial revolution with lava, thickening "change and transition"—"a healing element." Afro-futurist music represents another such overlap. Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941) and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), both epoch-defining epics of chamber music, are disrupting in their antagonistic sense of tonality and timbre, yet their rebellion is contained by that chamber. Paul Griffith notes that "Messiaen's music," as angular and dissonant as it is, "is most frequently tied to a pulse, which insists that all moments are the same" (1985, 15). Afro-futurist work such as Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959), by replacing chordal harmony with complex melodic counterpoint bereft of standardized pulse or tonal center, escapes the chamber, a seat of white cultural power. It's no coincidence that Messiaen writes *Quartet for the End of Time* and Ornette Coleman writes *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, for representations of whiteness and Blackness are oriented toward different understandings of time. The intersecting Black avant-gardes do not, as Lewis does, blast aspects of their inheritance, but rather source a forward-looking Blackness from a stolen past (see also Carrington [2016]). At the same time, they fear that Du Bois's double vision of Black subjectivity may never be made one vision, that Blackness may never arrive. Zora Neale Hurston begins her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) in dogged expectation: "Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board" (1). Blackness, as many Black Modernists understood it, is at once a past and a horizon. It demands access to its own past and a pathway into futurity.

Visualizing Black futures is a crucial concern for Black avant-gardes. James Van Der Zee's interest in the "determined optimism" of the portrait form articulates an important difference between the haunted white spaces of Anglo-modernism and the hyper-conspicuousness of the Black body in Black modernism (Thaggert 2010, 23). Van Der Zee's photography portrays the Black body as aesthetically "new," to commandeer Pound's familiar dictum. Miriam Thaggert argues that his portraits render "temporally and aesthetically distinct representations of Black life and bodies undermine assumptions about the Black body as 'non-art'" (2010, 23). Van Der Zee's subjects are always rendered with extreme clarity, the environment behind them only

an accident. One can't help but think of their creepy yearbook photograph, complete with a background of fake foliage. It's only the body that's important. In one photograph of a boxer named Bobby Sabu, dated 1954, Van Der Zee goes as far as erasing the background entirely. The photograph invites us to recontextualize the Black erasure and its relationship to Black subjectivity. Besides the boxing ring's ropes, which Van Der Zee seems to have drawn on himself after the photo's development, Sabu stands alone in a posture of proud defiance. Yet the ropes complicate Sabu's defiance. They remind us that Sabu is, to borrow from the language of photography, captured there. We know he is in a boxing ring because that's where boxers go. He'd become less of a boxer without the gloves, the boots, and the ropes that keep him there and not in the parking lot. Assuming the ropes were added late in the photo's development—a common trick of Stieglitz's photo secessionist movement—Van Der Zee asks whether the boxer or the ring came first. The answer is the boxer, of course, but his relation to the ring remains nevertheless fixed and total. The internment of Black subjectivity represented by the unreal ropes collapses around the real Sabu. He outruns his ropes.

Claudia Rankine, in *Citizen* (2014), recognizes a similar quality in Black internment. In a passage about Serena and Venus Williams, the lines of a tennis court become the ropes of a boxing ring, only displaced: "They win sometimes, they lose sometimes, they've been injured, they've been happy, they've been sad, ignored, booed mightily, they've been cheered, and through it all and evident to all were those people who are enraged they are there at all—graphite against a sharp white background" (ch. 2). Rankine's description of the Williams sisters applies equally to Lewis's representation of a boxing match. In his painting *Boxing at Juan-les-Pins* (1929), Lewis insists that the Black boxer is somehow safer in his ring—his cage—than outside of it, as if to say the real fight starts after the match is over and everyone has gone home (fig. 4). This is only a warm-up. For a community whose hypervisibility marks up America's "white background," lines—such as the ropes of a boxing ring, the service line of a tennis court, the imaginary racial borders that gerrymandering has carved through communities—become visible as well. Lines and borders mean a great deal to someone who is not supposed to be where they actually are. "Prison is not a place you enter," writes Rankine. "It is no place" (ch. 2). Du Bois's concept of the color line is no more a line than Rankine's prison. Yet it's there all the time. People die for it. They die because of it.

Just as the long line of a spiral coils down, it must inevitably unravel back out. While the spiral helps Lewis theorize the ways in which the global neighborhood had run peculiarity underground, Du Bois's spiral climbs up and out, uncoiling into a horizon of Black excellence; it expands and takes up white space. Tarr's observation that "we all are sicknesses for each other" is thus revised. In "The Exhibit of American Negroes," Du Bois proves community

can still be reparative against a system of racial subordination that results in an unequal distribution of capital and land (Morris 2018, 21, 23). In Du Bois's portraits, Black Americans have purchasing power. They work many of the same jobs white workers do. More than any of the other portraits, this fact—as well as the striking spiral employed to represent it—posed the greatest challenge to the insulated safety of white middle-class life. Shawn Michelle Smith writes that Du Bois hoped to destabilize the images of "negro criminality" that worked to "consolidate a vision of white middle-class privilege at the turn of the century" (2000, 583). "The Exhibit of American Negroes" illustrated the absolute political necessity of shaking "a racialized class warfare" that the perceived criminality of the black body came to represent in the prejudicial vision of middle-class white America. "Du Bois explicitly challenged dominant and extreme white perceptions of 'negro criminality,'" writes Smith, "particularly the tenets that 'the negro element is the most criminal in our population'" and that "the negro is much more criminal as a free man than he was as a slave" (583).

The effectiveness of Du Bois's visualization of Black homeownership is twofold. It is one compelling way to illustrate a shared, normative value system. Yet, Black homeownership also posed a significant threat to middle-class privilege, because those homes inevitably took up space—white space. Du Bois's data map of where Black Americans call home—another spiral—challenged the insulation of white middle-class life. The spiral uncoils as Black Americans move out of the country, culminating in a hooklike figure, as though the whole graph swung on a kind of pendulum, swinging. Read alongside the last spiral, the facts of Black upward mobility emerge: Black Americans have moved to the city; they own property in white spaces. President Trump's appeal to white Americans to let him save the suburbs gestures toward a familiar anxiety in white America. "Would you like a nice low-income housing project next to your suburban beautiful ranch style house? I saved your suburbs" (Reston 2020). The fact of Black purchasing power and homeownership, to appropriate Lewis's language, blasts the hermeticism of white spaces. The Black Vorticist proclaims, with Frantz Fanon, their right to exist, to walk easily over the color line and back: "Get used to me," they say, "I am not getting used to anyone" (Fanon 2008, ch. 5).

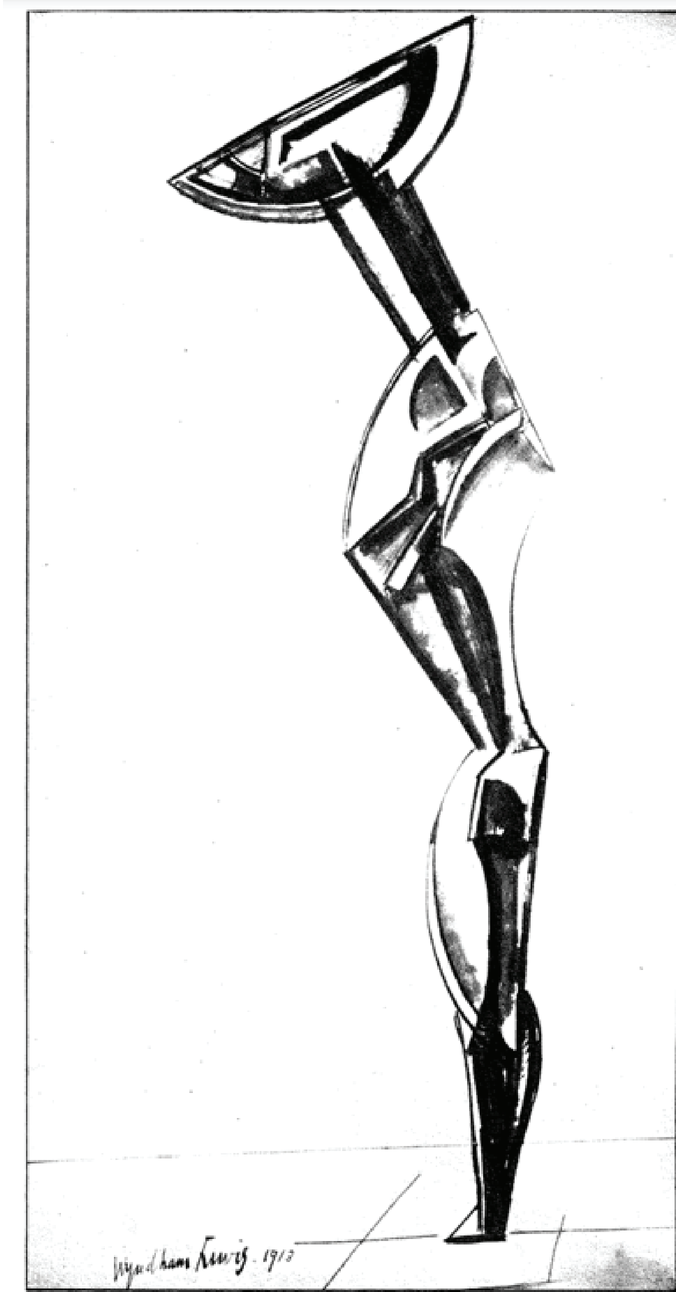


**Fig. 1.** Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy of the Stars*, 1913, in BLAST 1 (1914), edited by Wyndham Lewis (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).

**Fig. 2.** Wyndham Lewis, *A Reading of Ovid*, 1921, oil on canvas, in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

**Fig. 3.** Wyndham Lewis, *Mr Wyndham Lewis as 'Tyro'*, 1921, oil on canvas, in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

**Fig. 4.** Wyndham Lewis, *Boxing at Juan-les-Pins*, 1929, watercolor and gouache over pencil and ink, in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

## Endnotes

1 We know that Lewis's familiarity with DuBois extended at least to a reading of the latter's novel Dark Princess (1928), which is discussed in Paleface (1929) in relation to a reference to Vorticism made by one of the novel's characters. Many thanks to Paul Edwards for directing my attention to this.

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# Individuality and Mass Production: *The Revenge for Love* (1937) and the Grotesque Commodified Body

*David Cruickshank*

Lewis's employment of the body is both a controversial and a commonplace topic in critical responses to his work. Numerous studies on Lewis, by critics such as Timothy Materer, Kelly Anspaugh, Francesca Orestano, and Robert Chapman, have used the word "grotesque" to describe his satirical, unsettling depictions of the body in both his literature and painting.[1] Yet few critics explain how and why Lewis uses grotesque bodies, and those that do are in frequent disagreement as to whether Lewis's bodies are humorous or horrible.[2] *The Revenge for Love* (1937, henceforth *RL*) although it is not overtly a "bodily" work, nevertheless uses the body to explore the place of the individual (artist) in a shifting interwar society. *RL* follows communist revolutionary Percy Hardcaster, deformed while attempting to escape from a Spanish prison for producing communist propaganda, and his return to London where he meets the impoverished artist Victor Stamp and his partner Margot, who are inadvertently drawn into the intrigue of the London communists. Stamp's decision to give up a job forging van Gogh paintings prompts the fake communists to set him up as a pawn in a diversionary gunrunning operation in Spain. Margot follows Victor, and both apparently die attempting to escape to France.

Critics like Fredric Jameson argue that Lewis's individualist politics, as he expresses them in *RL*, are inherently fascist. Andrzej Gasiorek (2004, 96–97), providing one of the most comprehensive analyses of the grotesque in *RL*, goes so far as to argue that the novel's use of "grotesque modes enables it to mock the scientific jargon in which Marxist rhetoric is couched," degrading their utopian ideals with their instantiation in a debased revolutionary reality. However, I argue that reading the text as an explicitly anti-communist polemic misses the text's much greater concern with *capitalist* systems of control: specifically "mass" culture. Drawing on Paul Edwards's (1998, 130–31) idea that *RL* "is about the impotence of art reduced to a commodity, and the destructiveness of political ideals compromized by self-deception," I argue that *RL* is primarily concerned with the commodification of the *individual* (artist) by the capitalist system, and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of resisting or overthrowing such systems. Capitalism, Lewis argues, turns the very idea of revolution and newness into a product to be sold back to would-be revolutionaries that reinforces the system

they attack. As Joseph Conrad (1925, 90) argued, the masses are "perpetually duped by false appearances" of "whatever political illusion the future may hold": a manufactured idea that commodifies individual identity, turning people into homogenized demographics.

While Lewis never directly refers to Conrad's work, he aligns himself with Conrad's ironizing of revolutionary "action" in a canceled section of a letter to H. G. Wells, where he claims that Wells writes of the

"'power', 'force' and 'action' that has infected so many people today. You, if I may say so, could do this wonderfully well: so could Joseph Conrad. However I myself, am highly qualified to do it, also" (Rose 1963, 301n).

*RL* sheds light on Lewis's own struggle to find a place for his art in what he saw as a society swayed by popular opinion, manipulated by advertisement, and "infected" by mass media with a mechanical speed and precision that demands the individual become a machine if they hope to compete (Jameson 1979, 4, 21). In *RL*, bodies are converted into assembly lines, cars, and cardboard cut-outs, showing the power that capitalist society possesses over our ability to self-express and self-govern even our own bodily reality. By controlling the body, all expressions of individuality come to be expressions of profit. How can an individual exist within a society dominated by mass production and mass appeal? I will explore how *RL* employs these grotesquely hybrid bodies to make visible this commodification, and what such commodification means for revolutionary action. Lewis's bodies translate the invisible and inexpressible social pressures into a visual conversion of human into object, embodying this process to defamiliarize it.

We must first determine how Lewis understood and responded to the capitalist and communist ideals he explores throughout *RL*. Despite his repeated protestations in his 1937 autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering*—contemporaneous with *RL*—that "I am not one of those who believe that either 'communism' or 'fascism' are in themselves the solution to anything" (16), that "you will look in vain for any propagandist lesson in it. It is as an artist I am writing" (18) and that the suspicion "that an infernal machine was hidden in the midst of the light-hearted mockery of my propaganda was to me fantastic" (115), he nevertheless makes his political stance on capitalism very clear: "

> [the death of Gaudier-Brzeska] provoked a lesson of hatred for this soul-less machine, of big-wig money-government, and these masses of half dead people, for whom personal extinction is such a tiny step, out of half-living into no-living, so what does it matter?" (115).

This language of "big-wig money-government," "soul-less machine," and "masses" clearly links the ideals of capitalism with the grotesque themes of machine-human hybridization already employed by Lewis in *The Apes of God*

(1930) and *The Wild Body* (1927). Lewis equates the "soul-less machine" of "money-government" with the "masses of half dead people," to suggest that society's fixation on money has reduced humans to machines. Individuals are mass-reproduceable, identical, disposable tools of profit: mere unthinking bodies driven by economic demands. The capitalist system evidently entails for Lewis a loss of the individual self, which ceases to have "value" because, unlike the body, it cannot be easily mass-produced. Communism, on the other hand, is theorized by Lewis in a manner that makes it almost indistinguishable from fascism. In *Time and Western Man* (1927, henceforth *TWM*), Lewis states: "

> My criticism of 'democracy', again, was of 'democracy' as it is understood today; and that it was based on the conviction that democracy is neither free, nor permits of freedom. If you must have it, however, it is better to organize unfreedom; so you get communism, another very elastic term, it appears" (1993, 117).

According to Lewis, communism is effectively Stalinism: "organized unfreedom." It is difficult to determine Lewis's "real" views on communism because his analysis stretches an already "very elastic term" by his own admission. This stretching of communism into an oppressive regime could be an ironic attack on its utopian revolutionary goals. However, his praise of the organized, mechanical and precise unfreedom of communism, compared with the façade of freedom provided by "democracy," could very well be sincere: his (brief) praise of Hitler and frequent attacks on the "mindless masses" throughout his work and criticism suggest an infatuation with authoritarianism, with himself as the *author*ity. Adding to this, Lewis states that "art is . . . one of the things that revolution is about, and cannot therefore itself be a revolution" (1993, 24).

This might explain Lewis's strange preoccupation with communism, and especially Marxism, in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926, henceforth *ABR*), a text obsessed with social organization and revolution. Lewis seems to imply that art is the forefront of culture, producing new ways of looking at and interpreting the world, which are then taken up by governments that try, and often fail, to implement that way of understanding via politics and revolutions (1989, 20, 22–23). Marx's opposition to Hegelianism, and his desire to see people have influence on the world instead of being abstracted from it, would have undoubtedly appealed to a discontented Lewis in its proposition of making politics and philosophy—and indeed art—instrumentalist.

This ambiguity—over the revolutionary potential of communism, its failure to implement its utopian ideals, and Lewis's use of bodily grotesquery—appears overtly in *RL* via Margot's encounter with the Spanish dwarf, a "terrible little figure of fun" who employs both horrible and humorous grotesques to simultaneously praise and blame communist

ideals (1991, 296; Gasiorek 2004, 94). Although dwarves have historically been associated with carnivals and comedy, Lewis likely first encountered imagery of dwarves in the grotesque paintings of Diego Velazquez, as well as those of Juan van der Hamen y León and Juan Carreño de Miranda Velasquez during his visit to the Prado in Spain in 1902 (Fletcher 1987, 147–48). As Wolfgang Kayser claims in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957), the ultimate illustration of the unsettling power of the grotesque "can be experienced during a visit to the Prado far more strikingly" (1963, 17). In the Prado's *Salón de Goya*, however, Lewis would have encountered visions of monsters, apocalyptic scenes, and deformed and mutilated beings: Goya depicts bodies with "distinctly ominous, nocturnal, and abysmal features that frighten and puzzle us" in Kayser's words, and these unnerving bodies had a major impact on Lewis's later art and literature, in his fascination with "the *shell*, the *pelt*, the physical behaviour of people."[3] Kayser argues that the "grotesque fusion of human and non-human"—"masks," "caricaturely distorted figures," and "automata"—produces an unsettling 'estranged world' in which "instruments . . . overpower their makers" (1963, 16, 39, 183–84). Indeed, Lewis uses the example of a Spanish dwarf not only in *RL* but also to illustrate his conception of satire and the word "grotesque" itself in *Men Without Art* (1934, 111–13).

This dwarf, in a moment of abject horror, picks on Margot "to be his dramatic mother" (*RL*, 265). By invoking imagery of "birth" (*RL*, 266) to suggest that Margot has "repudiated her own offspring—because of its unorthodox anatomy," the "comedy" of the dwarf's body becomes permeated with abjection, in the implication that the dwarf—an alien being—is derived from her own flesh. Julia Kristeva traces all acts of repulsion and disgust back to a moment of "primal abjection": the separation of the baby from the female body, which the baby rejects as not-self (1982, 12–13). Everything that provokes horror is thus a reminder of our assimilation back into the mother's body. The dwarf, however, reverses this process, undermining the boundaries of Margot's body by attempting to forcibly return to her womb, turning her into a "foreign girl" (*RL*, 266)—a "childless 'hermit girl' [who] had given birth to this joke"—in the process. The body of the dwarf is a category violation, for he is presented as simultaneously childlike and adult, unsettling identity and societal position as both superior or inferior, father or son, at once. The dwarf draws out Margot's bodily fluids in abject fashion—"*Tears!* . . . the dwarf had, as it were, drawn blood" (*RL*, 267)—and "to her horror, she found herself *responding*" (*RL*, 268) "out of mechanical sympathy." The grotesque multiplicity of the dwarf makes her body "mechanical," responding instinctually, at odds with her logic and reason.

Both Margot and the dwarf are compelled to perform a naturalist role that actually seems against their nature—an "organized unfreedom," in Lewis's words—which reveals nature itself to be nothing more than an act

or performance. Mother and child have no natural, biological existence; they are simply part of a system of call-and-response produced by socially determined behavioral roles. Margot must "belong to this system of roaring and spluttering bestial life of flesh and blood" that forces her body to "play her part" against her will: there can be "no escape," for her body does not actually belong to her, but belongs to the "system" she must necessarily dwell within if she wishes to continue existing. The dwarf's infiltration of Margot's body, and his modification of her bodily appearance, bodily functions, and bodily movements to adapt them to his roleplay serves to *translate* social pressures into a physical deformation of the individual's body, asking us to consider why we do not treat the loss of personal identity as equally absurd and horrible. Lewis marks on Margot and the dwarf's combined body the inevitable loss of individuality caused by the imposition of bodily roles upon the individual by their relationship with other bodies. Lewis metaphorizes Victor's conversion from artist to gunrunner, for the sham revolutionaries' profit, in an unsettlingly bodily manner, physically manifesting the consequences of rule-by-crowd in a grotesque and unfamiliar form.

In addition to this evidently grotesque tradition, Lewis had discovered a different sort of grotesque tradition during his numerous "expeditions" throughout the European continent after having left the Slade School of Art.[4] In 1906, during one such excursion, he arrived in Munich to discover that "the pre-Lenten festivities, or *Fasching*" had begun (O'Keeffe 2000, 64, 66–67). He later arrived in the French town of Le Pouldu "during the boozy aftermath of a *pardon*" in 1907; according to Lewis (1908), "these fetes are essentially *orgies*."[5] Lewis suggests that the peasant carnival combines both the religious and profane, inverting—and thus challenging—the established order. This "carnivalesque" style of grotesquery, first coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1984), is "filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying" (19). This laughter has "not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (11–12), undermining horror by turning it into a "gay monster" (151). Bakhtin links the grotesque with the use of the bodily "lower stratum" in medieval satire, which "digs a bodily grave for a new birth" (21). The grotesque body undermines reality, but also allows us "to bring forth something more and better" to replace it. Lewis and Bakhtin were not only near contemporaries; they were informed by similar contexts of Russian revolutionaries and a "Dostoevskian" tradition (Kaye 1999, 1; Meyers 1980, 16; Perrino 1995, 22, 17). Both consequently developed a philosophy of "*the laugh* that magnified Falstaff till he grew to be a giant like Pantagruel," as Lewis calls it. In 1932, Hugh Gordon Porteus claimed of Lewis's works that, like "Rabelais for example—not one person in ten thousand, possibly, is *capable* of responding" (184); Cyril Connolly, in his 1927 *New Statesman* review, claims the short story "*Sigismund* is a satire on race palmistry, in the best Pantagruelian manner,"

calling Lewis's theory of laughter a "religion of the grotesque" (1927, 358–59, 358).

Lewis was undoubtedly familiar with both the horrible and humorous traditions of the grotesque in literature and visual art, and actively participated in both. In contrast to Margot's horror, the dwarf appears to Victor and the Spaniards as a carnivalesque figure of fun, an "achondro-plastic monster . . . in full and flourishing health" (*RL*, 265) given "the freedom of Spain": a regenerative and all-encompassing body. Yet what they see in him is much the same as what terrifies Margot: his ability to change. The dwarf is "plastic" and thus easily changes shape, form, and role. For example, the dwarf's fooling and childlike behavior suggest a low status, but he is promoted above even "the Spanish officers" (*RL*, 267), whom he subjects to "a broadside of chaffing," "the obscene horseplay of medieval farce" (*RL*, 267) to which "none could object" (*RL*, 265). Once a child, he is now a general, "free to insult or to hector, having paid the price of extreme deformity."[6] The dwarf defamiliarizes "the normal world, which it took off and insulted" and the idea of the normal citizen, for "it was not only they who had legs." The dwarf reveals the common, animalistic body of all mankind, behind the poses and roles of class and status, and the "deformities" of body and mind that mark us out as individuals. However, although the dwarf moves freely within the system, changing role and shape, the responses his body provokes simply reinforce that system of power and organization, rather than liberate him from it, which constitutes Lewis's primary problem with revolutionary reform. The bodily plasticity of the dwarf reveals the body is unique but changeable, able to move between roles and forms, but therefore easily molded by external forces.

This molding of the body into more "useful" forms is a critical point to Lewis's ambivalence over revolution. The body of Jack Cruze, for example, is "full of an animal life" (*RL*, 93), a "joke cracked by mother nature, the old witch" (*RL*, 94) comparable to "Falstaff" (*RL*, 93), "so natural as to be strange," "a fawn in schoolboy's clothing" (*RL*, 94). As the narrator points out:

> "Every man's hand was against him in a sense: but . . . 'a little touch of nature makes the whole world kin'. The only trouble with old jack was that he was rather *more* than a touch. He was a proper handful" (*RL*, 94).

Lewis draws attention here to the dual power of the natural body: it "makes the whole world kin" in its reduction of all human categories to animal, instinctual ones, but in doing so it makes the body "so natural as to be strange" (*RL*, 94) in its collectivist impersonality, as with the "natural" mechanical imagery Lewis employs in *Apes*. The "fawn in schoolboy's clothing" is a comical image but also hints at an impersonation of humanity: that we—the masses—are all animals, tamed and trained by unseen masters to wear clothes and believe we

are individuals because of it. Social structures are revealed as artificial façades that conceal true animal mindlessness, but they are nevertheless very real and necessary to human communal life.

This is also Lewis's criticism of the London Communists: "big untidy gentlemen, of Public School type" (*RL*, 162), and their "imperfectly powdered ladies, their grinning, donnish highbrow Molls—oh, so much more snobbish than any duchess!" Victor and Margot "were not their sort in politics"; their "class of Communism" (*RL*, 162) is supported by "rich business fathers or foxy little doctors as dads," which "oppressed one like the helmet of a policeman." Revolution is sold as an amusement to the bourgeois citizens it attacks, perhaps echoing the themes found in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). The falseness of the "sham Communist[s]" (*RL*, 196) is not that they are *communists*, but that they are *shams*. Victor claims "do you suppose that these people are *real*?" while Margot senses that "these vivid likenesses of life only existed in her dreaming mind." The world of revolutionary politics appears "shadowy and floating," a fanciful idealization of revolution that has only a "phantom" (*RL*, 163) body: an "infection" as Lewis terms it in his letter. This communist revolution has no material reality, and thus no instantiation in the world. Victor's body is converted into an unsettling "ghost-person," a "shadow-person." This concern with the "unreal" body of the communists is in stark contrast to the visceral reality of the dwarf, a "horrible" visual "hallucination" (*RL*, 268) of the material effects of communism as implementation, and not utopian ideal. The word "hallucination" suggests something unreal yet perceivable, detectable with our senses but not there; a "brutal invasion of the external plane by the internal plane" (*RL*, 288). The idea of communism fails in its implementation, Lewis suggests, because it is an idea that has no reality, for it has been converted into a mass-produced amusement for the consumption of the bourgeoisie.

At this point, it is important to discuss Lewis's interest in "masses": mass production, mass democracy, mass opinion, mass culture. There were many contemporary concerns over the power of crowds and their leaders to dictate minds and governments on a dangerous scale. The Russian Revolution, and later the Spanish Civil War, sparked renewed interest in populist movements, while the First World War's enormous casualties provoked concerns about the power of mass production to convert the individual into something disposable (Pick 1989, 231). As Richard Cork suggests, after "Verdun and the Somme, artists began to develop an understandable obsession" with "mechanical weaponry's capacity for unlimited slaughter" (1994, 10). However, fears over the power of the crowd had permeated the turn of the twentieth century too, chief among them Gustave Le Bon's ironically popular work *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895). In it, he claims:

> "To-day the claims of the masses . . . amount to nothing less than a determination to utterly destroy society as it now exists, with a view to making it hark back to that primitive communism which was the normal condition of all human groups before the dawn of civilisation" (15).

His work is permeated with fears of regression and degeneration, claiming that "crowds display a singularly inferior mentality . . . they appear to be guided by those mysterious forces which the ancients denominated destiny, nature, or providence" (2012, 8). Lewis refers to Le Bon multiple times in *ABR* and, as such, we might employ him as a useful means of analyzing Lewis's anxieties surrounding the idea of crowds and popular culture (*ABR*, 192, 120). For example, Lewis's presentation of the dwarf as a "horrible hallucination" (*RL*, 268) resembles Le Bon's explanation of crowd behavior through "collective hallucinations," further stressing the connection between the dwarf's impersonal and changeable body, and the collective mass-body of revolutionary movements, in which the individual's body is made equally impersonal and changeable, deformed to suit the needs of the crowd's "leader" (Lewis 2012, 41).

Lewis expresses a similar sentiment in his midwar work "The Crowd Master" (1914), published in the second and final issue of *BLAST* and left uncompleted, which represented a turning point in Lewis's views of the individual's position within society. The narrator states: "The Married Man is the Symbol of the Crowd: his function is to set one going. At the altar he embraces Death" (94): to join the crowd is thus to lose oneself to literal pack mentality. He attacks popular culture's ability to manufacture and distribute ideas, manipulating the masses for warfare, which appears "like a great New Fashion" (98). Mass production, mass culture, and mass mobilization are all interchangeable means by which the individual is converted into a tool for other people's uses.

This helps explain Lewis's conflation of communism and fascism as the same sort of government: he sees both as requiring the subsuming of the individual to mass movements, in which there is no place for independent action. It is too simple to argue that Lewis is merely satirizing communism and revolution from a fascist perspective. Lewis, as "The Enemy" of everyone, presents himself as averse to populist movements in general for their ability to subsume the self to the demands of the "other," such that the individual's body is controlled externally and so reduced to savage, mechanical mindlessness as Le Bon feared. In Lewis's discussion of democracy, communism and revolution in *ABR*—which he terms his "criticism of 'democracy'" in *TWM*—he in fact (semi-ironically) advocates for communism, not fascism, as a counter for the chaotic "frenzied evolutionary war of the machines," in which "our lives are so attached to and involved with the evolution of our machines that we have grown to see and feel everything in revolutionary terms" (*ABR*, 23). Lewis here makes the connection between the capitalist mass-production of perpetually

new consumer goods, and the mass production of new and revolutionary ideologies, both for consumption by the masses. Revolution has thus become a popular commodity, a "great New Fashion." Lewis argues that we are sold new ways of looking at the world in the same way that we are sold any other commodity: each a necessary upgrade to an old, outdated, and insufficient model, but which is itself equally replaceable and disposable once a new and "better" product can be easily produced. Lewis suggests ideology, thought, and individual expression itself have become commodities to be mass-produced and sold, a process of commodification by which living people are organized and converted into a source of profit.

Therefore, rather than seeing a dichotomy between communism and fascism as Gasiorek argues, what emerges from *ABR* is instead a dichotomy between "rule by the masses" and "rule over the masses." For Lewis, capitalism is the ultimate example of "rule by the masses": because capitalism must maximize profit, and the most profit comes from appealing to the largest number of people, what the majority want thus determines all production, culture, and value. Capital thus organizes all bodies to produce for the lowest common denominator *and* to be as homogenous as possible, in order to maximize the "value" of a given individual. The artist must appeal to everyone if they are to make enough money to live, which consequently homogenizes art, eliminates individual expression, and renders artistic revolution, the new, and anything that deviates from the norm, unprofitable and thus inexpressible. Lewis argues this process does not occur under either communism or fascism because the masses are respectively "organized" or "ruled," rather than appealed to, by the state.

This is expressed very directly in *RL* when Victor, desperate for money and unable to find buyers for his paintings, is forced to become a forger of van Gogh paintings for Freddie Salmon and Abershaw, two of the London "communists" profiting from the violence in Spain via gunrunning. Notably, this scene functions as a satire not only of the falseness of revolutionaries but of the capitalist system as well:

> For a number of weeks now Stamp had been at work on these counterfeit pictures. He had formulas, by this time, for everything. . . . Why Stamp had a bandage over his ear was because, when they first talked the matter over, they had decided to do a bandaged portrait of the mad master. That would make identification easier. Half the likeness was there, ready-made, once you have the famous bandage over the famous ear. Everyone seeing the familiar square woodenness of these gauche likenesses, and then the famous bandage, would say "Van Gogh!" as soon as they clapped eyes on it. "Look," they would cry, "where he has cut off his ear!" (RL, 226–27)
>
> Salmon had several experts in his pocket who could be relied on, the moment the piece was completed, to cover it with their authority in the

> market. Indeed, it was destined for the collection of a specific American, who already had absorbed half a dozen spurious canvases signed "Vincent," which would almost certainly be joined by Tristy's little contraption. Three thousand bucks was as good as added to Salmon's bank balance, for what he planned he planned well. (*RL*, 228)

Forgery is configured as a microcosm of capitalism, which mass produces inferior copies of famous, individual works to appease crowds who look only for "identification": the "famous bandage over the famous ear." The brand-name of "half a dozen spurious canvases signed 'Vincent'" reduces the unique experience of a van Gogh painting to a signature and a severed ear, easily mass-producible symbols and formulas that fail to grasp either van Gogh's original work or his artistic self-expression, but which can poorly substitute both and turn a profit of "three thousand bucks" from a "specific American." The word "absorbed," signifying abject slime and sludge, draws attention to the alien mindlessness of capitalist systems. Individual art is "absorbed" into the system of mass media all too easily, in an entirely inhuman manner, recalling primitive single-celled organisms engulfing their prey. The "specific American" becomes paradoxically nonspecific: an amorphous, nameless, and faceless mass that stands in for the impersonality of art as a consumer industry.

The need for profit in art turns living humans into cheap, mass-(re) producible objects that obscure or destroy the uniqueness of the original. And in this mindless reproduction of other people's individuality, Victor and the other forgers are also denied their individual expression. Victor's fellow forger Isaac Whol "turned out with exemplary neatness forgery after forgery" (*RL*, 229), "human material" reduced to a "perfect, reliable machine." The forger-artists are converted into tools of mass reproduction in this "fake-masterpiece factory" (*RL*, 226). By reducing individuality to something physically reproducible, and thus profitable, commodification paradoxically destroys the human individuality it is selling. To Salmon, Victor is a "*crétin*" because he does not reproduce exact copies, expressing individuality rather than conformity. Salmon is identified only as a "businessman" (*RL*, 229–30), a "benefactor" who sees only "big money" in his "bank balance" for reducing artists to laborers in his "factory." Salmon is configured in the same manner as Lady Fredigonde is in *The Apes of God*, as one of the art patron "Apes" who reduce the artist to a mere popular culture reproduction machine, not someone capable of capturing and responding to the mechanical reality they are subjected to. Salmon even has "a really enormous false bottom to his face" (*RL*, 231). This "bogus jaw" renders him equally as mass-produced and fake as the forgeries he commissions, embodying both the false speech at the heart of revolution, and the oppressive mass-falsification of capitalism. Lewis's interest in "false bottoms" here—and elsewhere in *The Childermass* (1928) and "The Human Age" series—suggests

that revolution is not an end in itself, but merely a surface-level façade disguising a much deeper system of capitalist commodification and deception.

The horror at the heart of *RL* is that Victor's revolutionary spirit is itself commodified, converted from a human desire for freedom into a valuable slogan:

> "an animal amongst men. . . . For better or for worse these broad and hostile shoulders belonged to nature, with her big impulsive responses, with her violent freedom, with her animal directness: unconservative, illogical, and true to her elemental self. He subscribed therefore to the larger scheme" (*RL*, 236).

Victor is an "animal," like Cruz, who must express his individuality with "animal directness." Notably, Victor "belonged to nature." "Nature" is merged with capitalist systems, made "unconservative" and "illogical," with "impulsive response" that more closely describe the automatic, mindless absorption of art by the "American." The "her" pronouns of this passage present him as totally submissive to the control of external, mechanical forces. It is "*her* violent freedom" (emphasis mine), not Victor's, that is described here; he is a slave to his own ideals, which are themselves not his own, but systematic. He has "subscribed" to "the larger scheme," as if revolution were merely a magazine subscription—his revolutionary spirit is expressed only in transactional, consumerist language, incorporated as part of the system that controls his body to extract profit. Even as Victor takes his forgery and "put[s his] foot through it!" (*RL*, 239) in an assertion of individuality that "this is a lousy job, . . . and that just about expresses my feelings about it" (*RL*, 240), this act of self-expression is itself exploited by Abershaw, who thinks he "can find him a type of work that he will like even less" (*RL*, 245). Victor's desire for action allows him and Margot to be tricked into a fake gunrunning operation, and killed, to secure Salmon and Abershaw's profit. Forgery thus acts as a physical metaphor for the way in which capitalism eliminates individuals through commodifying them. In this factory, identities are physically and visually converted into mass-reproducible symbols that can be advertised and sold back to people, who consequently identify themselves in, and through, the products they buy. The "familiar square woodenness of these gauche likenesses" render identity inseparable from the commodities that must be bought to support and express it, reducing the individual to merely a source of profit, either by mass reproducing their own identity until it ceases to be "their own," or by laboring to mindlessly reproduce other people's identities, losing their own in the process.

In Jameson's words, in Lewis's earlier works "for a brief moment, indeed, the mechanical stands as the figure for the collective" (1979, 106–7). I argue that this is not a "brief moment": the mechanized body is a frequent metaphor used by Lewis to express his disgust at capitalist mass-production, connecting

the aforementioned “half-dead masses” with a “mass” production that strips people of individuality by endlessly reproducing them until they are crowds in themselves. When Victor and Margot attempt to flee to France in the car, this all-encompassing, mass-produced body is made literal and visually affronting:

> Above all she detested this charging beast, that muscular machine. Pounding beneath her, it carried her forward, she knew, by means of unceasing explosions. Very well. But in this act she must co-operate. To devour miles and to eat up minutes, in gulp after gulp, use must be made of *her* organs, so it seemed, as well as its own. Under her feet she had a time-eating and space-guzzling automaton, rather than a hackneyed means of transport, however horridly high-powered. . . . Victor and this brute were in collusion, he had deceived her for its sake! She disliked its psychological habits even more than its physiological habits, which was saying quite a lot, the latter being disagreeable enough in all conscience. (*RL*, 314)

The car becomes a “charging beast, that muscular machine,” “pounding beneath her” as it “devour[s] miles and eat[s] up minutes, gulp after gulp” using “*her* organs, so it seemed, as well as its own.” Not only does the car come alive, given a living body of “muscles” and “organs” as a “space-guzzling automaton,” it also begins to “devour” Margot, fusing her with the machine, which dehumanizes and overpowers her, the “instruments . . . overpower[ing] their makers” to use Kayser’s terms (1963, 39, 183–84). By converting the car into an all-consuming, falsifying monster, the text inverts the reader’s conventional relationship with machines to expose how machinery controls and limits our means of expression.

This phenomenon also “turned him [Stamp] back” (*RL*, 314) into “this stranger called Stamp,” the primal “original” yet “foreign Stamp.” The rush of scientific progress, hurtling into the future at automobile speeds, is in fact revealed as a regression. When Victor emerges, he is “not quite himself, of course, but a passable imitation.” The imposition of mechanical movements upon Victor has killed and replaced him with a primitive reproduction. He is a forgery of free will and personality, disguising an unthinking “automaton” replica, just as Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis* features an automaton stealing a living woman’s appearance, and killing her, to reproduce a dead woman. Incredible advances in technology are used in the service of violence and barbarism inflicted upon the human body, as they were during the First World War and soon would be again. Such commodification—exploiting revolutionary ideals to make individuals into reproducible (and disposable) parts of a social machine—causes the destruction of individuality, originality, and *difference*. These machines are capable of mass producing not only the human body but reality itself:

> Meanwhile trees, rocks, and telegraph-poles stood up dizzily before her and crashed down behind. They were held up stiffly in front of her astonished eyes, then snatched savagely out of the picture. Like a card-world, clacked cinematographically through its static permutations by the ill-bred fingers of a powerful conjurer, everything stood upon end and then fell flat. He showed you a tree—a cardboard tree. Fix your eye upon this! He said. Then with a crash it vanished. Similarly with a segment of cliff. Similarly with a telegraph-pole. (*RL*, 314)

From the perspective of the car, "trees, rocks, and telephone poles" are "held up stiffly . . . then snatched savagely out of the picture" "cinematographically." In *TWM*, Lewis claims "these democratic masses could be governed without a hitch by suggestion and hypnotism—Press, Wireless, Cinema"; for Lewis, mass media is an extension of commodification from the body to the mind, a way of profiting from thoughts and feelings by mass-producing symbols people can "identify" with. This intimately weds their identity with the capitalist system by turning it into nothing more than a set of reproducible objects. As Sara Danius argues, for figures like Maeterlinck, Marinetti, and Proust, the "inanimate becomes animate; the immobile becomes mobile" through the automobile's speed, allowing mankind to control the movement of space and time (2001, 110–14). In *RL*, however, mechanization produces "a card-world" of "static permutations" that "stood up on end and then fell flat." The repetition of "similarly" here reinforces the homogenization of reality through its conversion into a movie set: a "cardboard tree," "similarly with a segment of cliff," "similarly with a telegraph pole" turn the world into something that can be packed up, sold, and reassembled to meet the various ideological demands of the cinema's massive audiences.

Lewis thus suggests revolution is impossible because it is *profitable*: it can be printed on T-shirts, turned into movies, exploited by advertising to "fix your eyes upon" products, and thus normalized as part of everyday society, destroying its revolutionary potential. In *ABR*, Lewis even claims that "'revolutionary' dogma [is] daily manufactured in tons by the swarming staff specially trained for that work"; resistance is commodified and turned into a profitable symbol, perpetuating the commodification of individuality it supposedly attacks. To visualize this idea, we might also turn to Lewis's paintings, such as *The Crowd (Revolution)* (1915) (figure 1) and the later *The Surrender of Barcelona* (1934–37) (figure 2). Speaking of *The Crowd*, Paul Edwards notes the "circular treadmills . . . where their fellows toil in unchanging routine" (2000, 134). These were likely inspired by the "wheel at Carisbrooke [which] imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it" (*WB*, 149), which Lewis mentions in "Inferior Religions," equating the "imposition" of "a set of movements" on a mindless laboring animal with capitalism's control of the individual's body, as

we previously saw in the "fake masterpiece factory." Although the geometric figures of the painting carry red flags reminiscent of communist revolutionaries, the shape of this united mass takes on the appearance of girders or scaffolding, as if they are holding up, or blending into, the buildings that surround them and enslave their fellows. This is opposed to the imagery of Lewis's contemporary Luigi Russolo's futurist painting *The Revolt* (1911). According to Cork, Russolo demonstrates the futurist "unstoppable 'lines of force' carving through [the city's] nocturnal streets"; a wedge of people smashing the buildings with their wildly opposed shapes and colors (Cork 1994, 16). Lewis departs from such depictions of revolution overthrowing machines and buildings. Instead, his revolutionaries *become* them (Normand 1989, 10–18). Both the crowd and the observer are tricked into imposing the structures of control they overthrow on their own bodies.

Lewis's *Surrender of Barcelona* (1934–37), produced around the same time as *RL*, demonstrates that these images were still part of Lewis's consciousness at the time. In *Barcelona*, the helmets of the knights are faceless: the individuality of the conquerors is suppressed by their military uniform. Lewis's figures are dehumanized and rendered mechanical. The painting leads the eye downward with its long, vertical lines produced by spears, banners, and lances, and the buildings creating a seamless transitional movement between the towers at the top, and the armored and faceless knights who dominate the lower quarter. Between these two extremes, the victorious figures move upward into the city and slowly disappear from view, devoured by the geometry of the buildings just as the car "devours" Margot and incorporates her organs into its own. Like *The Crowd*, the banners proclaiming victory over the city merge with the forms of the buildings: they too are subsumed by its architecture, reproducing the forms they conquer. This is an expression of the complicated distinction Lewis draws between the material "surface" of things, "the shell, the pelt," and the visual façades that obscure it.

Lewis had already called for a degradation of sight in 1922, claiming "the eye, in itself, is a stupid organ, or shall we say a stolid one," and in his words, "we are all, in a sense even, so thoroughly hidden from each other because we see each other. It is more difficult to exercise our imagination when the eye is operating" (1922, 36–37). We accept unquestioningly what the eye sees as normal, and this is precisely why Lewis turned to the grotesque as a means to cut through and defamiliarize the visual world. Lewis uses this grotesque bodily imagery, both on canvas and in his literature, to translate the invisible and inexpressible commodification of identity into something visually affronting and strange, manifesting the "architecture" behind revolution—the structures that enable it and society to exist—by embodying it in unfamiliar flesh. Indeed, in the center of "Barcelona," brown and almost unrecognizable, is a hanged man, rendered invisible by the more vibrant shapes and colors surrounding him,

which engage with and draw the eye away far more readily. As with Victor and Margot, Lewis suggests that this is the fate of the individual within the crowd: lost among banners and slogans, obscured by visual propaganda and façades. Although its aims may be utopian, revolution is incorporated into the system it attacks, and the revolutionary individual is exploited, killed, and forgotten by the masses. Lewis is not anti-communist, but anti-revolutionary because, in his words, revolutionary ideology "disguises the squalor of the capitalist factory beneath the epileptic rhetoric of action" (*ABR*, 140). This façade of affirmative action can be manufactured and sold to revolutionaries, just as the image of van Gogh's "famous ear" is endlessly reproduced and sold to art collectors. Commodification turns revolution into merely another demographic.

Gasiorek argues that "*The Revenge for Love* is deeply hostile to socialist politics in general and to revolutionary politics in particular" (2004, 91). In contrast, however, Jameson argues "the doomed lovers of *The Revenge for Love* wish for nothing better than to be left alone" like "the aging Lewis himself, longing for a world stilled of the conflicts of the political" (1979, 37). But Lewis's approach to communism, and his very clear attacks on capitalist democracy, undermine these claims. Gasiorek states that "the natural was 'real', the revolutionary 'unreal'" in *RL*, but through the car, the fake masterpiece factory, and his art, Lewis suggests that "the natural" is itself merely a fabrication of capital, as all "social" ideas are (Gasiorek 2004, 91). Margot, toward the end of the novel, says "nature" (*RL*, 275) is a "sunny dream . . . *too* sunny altogether," "too artless," "too empty." Capital, in its quest for more, reveals reality itself as something unreal, like the "cinematographically" real trees, cliffs and telegraph poles, produced by social norms. New developments in art and industry return people to that primal, mindless and automatic world of nature, and the painful-satiric bodies Lewis employs reveal capitalism as a form of "grotesque time," in which past and future merge, social progress becomes stagnation and degeneration, and "New Fashions" return us to the savage and mindless past, "before the dawn of civilisation" in Le Bon's terms. Primal, "real" nature was always something artificial and mechanical for Lewis, from *The Wild Body* to *Apes*, and capitalist mass-productive society is merely a reproduction of this fact in a "new," or rather disguised, form. As Lewis complains, "it costs a lot to be an artist in Great Britain": to represent reality is to compete with films and novels that can reshape reality into a better, more interesting, and more profitable truth (1992, 7). His grotesque bodies show the need for revolution in the tragic image of Margot and Victor penniless, unable to express their individuality without losing it to mass appeal and mass reproduction, but they also show revolution's impossibility in fulfilling its goals, by turning Victor and Margot into a mere "decoy-duck" (*RL*, 330) for profit (Materer 1976, 122). Lewis's hostility is directed toward a capitalist system that constrains individuals by making them into reproducible, disposable objects.

*RL*'s grotesquery performs a conversion of idea into form in its use of the body. The machine-hybrids, false communists, and unsettlingly grotesque dwarves contained within the text physically and visually embody Lewis's more abstract criticisms of mass culture, revolution, and the mechanization of reality. The text itself draws attention to this fact in Victor's own transformation into a "symbol" (*RL*, 318). Victor is "*the symbolic man*," a "hunted symbol . . . and men were out with their shotguns to shoot it up" (*RL*, 318). Victor's bodily existence is commodified, a symbol like van Gogh's signature and ear. In being commodified, Victor loses all specific identity, becoming simply "*the symbolic man*," a conversion of idea into physical, bodily form that can be violently hunted down and killed. Yet, in becoming a symbol, Lewis allows Victor's body to metaphorically replace the abstract idea of capitalist commodification with a *real*, physical transformation of human into machine, product and profit that is unfamiliar and affronting to the eye. This is a productive means for analyzing the effect of the grotesque body as a way to "see symbols" in flesh, bypassing "stolid" vision, and remains all the more important today for decoding how corporations continue to exploit minority, queer, and other non-normative identities. Bodies in Lewis's work and art are both the site of oppression and revelation, for they force the reader to recognize the loss of individuality under capitalism by metaphorizing this as a grotesque conversion of human into machine, defamiliarizing our capitalist society that has normalized its transformation of people into products as a perfectly natural and everyday occurrence. Lewis's bodies, in both art and literature, embody the real but unseen violence capitalism visits upon individual identity.

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## Endnotes

1 For examples of analyses of Lewis that employ the grotesque, see Materer (1976, 39–40); Chapman (1973, 55); Orestano (2001, 170–71, 173); Anspaugh (1995, 129, 132).

2 For more discussion of the historical “splitting” of the tradition of the grotesque into “Bakhtinian” humour and “Kayserian” horror, see Chao (2010, 169); and Harpham (1982, xvi).

3 See Rose (1963, 191); Lewis (2004, 157); O’Keeffe (2000, 46). See O’Keeffe (2000); Meyers (1980), for more detailed descriptions of Lewis’s early life and career.

4 Wyndham Lewis, “AM autobiographical fragment,” August 17, 1908, Wyndham Lewis collection, #4612, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, box 3, folder 13; see also O’Keeffe (2000, 88).

5 See also the “Feast of Fools” tradition described by Bakhtin (1984, 426).

# ELEMENTS ARE VERY GLIB: CHALLENGING THE CONVENIENCE OF METAPHOR IN THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *BLAST*

*Nathan Waddell*

Picture yourself as a first-time reader of *BLAST*, the magazine edited by Wyndham Lewis that ran for just two issues between 1914 and 1915. That unmistakable pink cover lies in front of you. An aggressive project of some sort seems to be contained inside. What sort of "blast" are you dealing with?[1]

Earth, water, air, and fire all seem to be evoked in the open-ended abstruseness of the word "blast" itself. We speak of blasts as violent rushes of air, yet we also know blasts as a vegetable blight, as a curse, and even as a lightning bolt. "VEGETABLE HUMANITY" is a target of the *BLAST* manifesto, and there's a kind of coruscating zig-zag in the abstracted form of Lewis's drawing *The Enemy of the Stars* (1913), which appeared in the magazine's first issue. In the first volume of the magazine, at any rate, it's the possibilities of "blast" as an expletive ("CURSE / the lazy air that cannot stiffen the back of the SERPENTINE") or as a hurricane that seem to have authority (*B1*, 12, 15).[2] The two possibilities unite in the *BLAST* manifesto's desire to "CURSE / WITH EXPLETIVE OF WHIRLWIND / THE BRITANNIC AESTHETE" (*B1*, 15), a gesture Steven Connor sees as an effort "to dispel the mists of glamour and stupor" in an "anathematizing of the atmospheric" (Connor 2010, 180, 181). Lewis once described the "position" of the Vorticist, the figure whose ambitions are explained across both issues of the magazine, as being at "the heart of the whirlpool," the "great silent place where all the energy is concentrated" (Goldring 1943, 65). But in *BLAST* itself it's the airy metaphor that stands out, a point upheld by the cyclonic design that illustrates the "ERRATA" page at the start of the 1914 installment; in its manifesto's notion of an ideal art that partakes of tornado-like "insidious and volcanic chaos" (*B1*, 38); in the "gust" of wind that "blares up" (*B1*, 60) the voices of Argol and Hanp in Lewis's play *Enemy of the Stars* (1914); and, most unambiguously, in the image of the storm-cone that appears intermittently in the magazine's pages.

Given these atmospheric associations, it's little wonder that so many of *BLAST*'s commentators have used atmospheric idioms to explain the magazine's impact and significance. In a cartoon published in *The Egoist* in mid-July 1914, Horace Brodzky rendered Lewis and his allies Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Ezra Pound as a trio of Israelites blasting their "trumpets before the walls of Jericho,"

with a top-hatted *Times*-reader dwarfed by their combative, belligerent tooting (Brodzsky 1914, 272). Years later, in *A Poet's Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World* (1938), Harriet Monroe described the 1914 issue of *BLAST* as the "cyclonic" first number of a magazine designed "to blow away" everything with which Lewis and Pound disagreed (Monroe 1938, 355). Echoing Lewis's 1915 editorial remark about the magazine finding "itself surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts of all sizes and descriptions" (*B2*, 5–6)—surrounded, that is, by the political and physical explosions of war—Monroe pointed out that *BLAST* "had scarcely appeared when all its blasts and curses were smothered, swallowed up, reduced to ignominy, by the counterblast of Mars" (1938, 355). This image of a beleaguered *BLAST* surrounded by blasts it had little hope of overcoming has itself had an afterlife, persisting through memoirs written by those who were there at the time and through articles, essays, and monographs written by scholars who have inherited their terminology. Yet the image of *BLAST* as a whirlwind, or as the coalescing focal point for cyclonic energies, has been no less tenacious, a fact demonstrated by descriptions of the magazine in its entirety as an "explosive multi-media manifesto" and as a "rhetorical hurricane" (Carr 2015, 174; Gąsiorek 2017, 22).

At the risk of seeming po-faced, I'd like to caution here that too great a dependence on elemental metaphors risks reintroducing into our accounts of *BLAST* the very cohesiveness that so many critical analyses of the magazine have tried to avoid. Such metaphors are gratifying to use, but it's time to drop them: because they misrepresent the supposed "unity" of *BLAST*, and because they muddy the extent to which the magazine can or should be aligned with the ideas and attitudes of Lewis, its blaster in chief. No doubt their appeal lies in what Northrop Frye, in his "Preface" to Gaston Bachelard's *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1964), calls the "links of analogy," those mental processes—what Bachelard himself refers to as "modes of explanation"—by which the properties of one thing (e.g., the flickering of flames) seem inevitably present in the characteristics of some other phenomenon (e.g., the nature of vitality), and vice versa (Bachelard 1964, vi, 7). Critics tend to describe *BLAST* metaphorically as a blast precisely because the dynamism inherent in an idea of blasting seems already *there* in the ostensibly energized character of so much of its contents. But its contents don't cohere around any one kind of energy. If anything, they cohere around efforts to make miscellany have a purpose, to give multiplicity a workable shape.

All of this might seem like an ultra-pedantic way of putting things, not least because the title *BLAST* itself appears to invite the unity I'm claiming only a certain interpretation bestows on it. At first glance, the word "blast" seems to imply a literal explosion, or at the very least a discharge of metaphorical energy; in other words, it seems to function as an emblem of conceptual and possibly also stylistic integration. Yet the word "blast" also suggests, once we

re-encounter the magazine as already established readers, an overdetermined elemental imperative—that is, it seems to denote, or can be *seen* to denote, a collection of meanings with some aspect of the elemental as their baseline. In the magazine's pages, the "blast" of its title is most consistently aligned with the metaphorical blasting of mockery and dismissal. But the accumulated meanings assigned to that same word in later acts of commentary have tended to pull in competing directions. The "blast" offered by *BLAST* is now just as likely to be understood as the force of conceptual aggression, as the metaphorical explosion of satire, as a breath of fresh air, as the centripetal clarity of a whirlpool, or even, occasionally, as the explanatory charge of a thunderbolt.

Many commentators would say that the blast in question is, as Rachel Sykes puts it, the "explosion of noise and colour" implied by the magazine's gaudy, bombastic frontage (2018, 25). D. G. Bridson had something similar in mind when he claimed in *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis* (1972) that Lewis "could not be said to have made his impact upon the public as a writer until . . . he dropped his explosive review *BLAST* like a puce bomb on the Georgian parlour floor" (Bridson 1972, 1). In these terms, *BLAST* signifies an attempt to blow up an established scheme of artistic convention, just as D. H. Lawrence later insisted that something similar might be required to find a new novelistic form with which to explore the twentieth century's "really new feelings" (1998, 145). The possibility of such metaphorical representations derives not only from the magazine's title but also from its manifesto sections, whose signatories seemed to hope for an artistic tragedy that could "bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb" (*B1*, 31). Exactly this sort of analogizing temperament enabled A. R. Orage, writing in *The New Age* as "R. H. C.," to depict the countdown to the first issue of *BLAST* as a process of waiting for its "time-fuse" to run out (1914, 133).

According to such descriptions, *BLAST* was an intellectual incendiary designed to blow open a renewing space in culture. A key question to consider here is how these and other implications of the word "blast" have distorted the reception histories associated with *BLAST* and the movement, Vorticism, only certain aspects of the magazine can be said to explain. Fredric Jameson argues that the directed "vectoral movement" of Vorticist art, on whose behalf *BLAST* ambiguously propagandized, should be differentiated from the "lethal, expanding, and radiating haloes of energy" that emanate "like the waves of a bomb blast" from Futurist art (2013, 16, 24). Likewise, Alex Runchman points out that although the figurative language deployed across both issues of *BLAST* constitutes a peculiar kind of poetry, we should question that same language, not least because Vorticism "is more ambivalent about the potentiality of modern technology" than Futurism's mechanophilic dreaming (2017, 34). Runchman develops this idea in pursuing an account of *BLAST* as an "exploded collaborative poem," one that nevertheless shouldn't be allowed

to homogenize the "partly choreographed and partly accidental juxtapositions" that characterize its mix of polemics, inventories, reviews, notes, artworks, and death notices (31). Runchman treads a very fine line in prosecuting this case, but others have not always been so careful—and with the twin effect that *BLAST* can be made to seem more coherent than it really is, on the one hand; and that the complexity of an important moment in the history of the avant-garde is lessened in our retrospective accounts of it, due to the rhetorical charm of metaphorical elementality, on the other.

However attractive the strategy might be, depicting the "blast" of *BLAST* in elemental terms—as an explosion, as a gust of air, as a whirl of water—cuts against the magazine's resistances to uniformity. Part of the problem is that so many of its appreciators, myself included, remain partially or even fully wedded to the idea of trying to make it mean a singular something, a move David A. Wragg likens to a foolish attempt at silencing "boisterous guests at a party" (2005, 169). The resistances of *BLAST* emerge at a rhetorical level in its manifestoes—"We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours" (*B1*, 30)—and textually in the styles, forms, and experimental preoccupations that comprise its "multiplicity of voices" (Wragg 2005, 169). We've been told many times now that the first issue of *BLAST* in particular contains a surprising mixture of genres and media, and that its multifarious contents—from the confrontational abstractionism of Lewis, to the much less stroppy impressionism of Ford Madox Ford and Rebecca West—reflect the convoluted circumstances of its production. That awareness is attenuated, even if only in passing, by an insufficiently guarded attitude toward the elemental metaphors so often used to account for the magazine's place in early twentieth-century culture.

Elemental metaphors can take us backward to a sense of some singularity of purpose that publications like *BLAST* have sometimes been thought to embody, but which now seems increasingly unhelpful to historians of so-called little magazines and the avant-garde cultures to which they belong. David Macauley states that the elemental "tetrad" of earth, air, fire, and water "need not be construed solely as objective things-in-themselves, unmediated presences or first principles—in short, as simple, indivisible constituents of the material world by way of analogy with the chemist's periodic table." Instead, there is the option to seek a "renewed understanding of and critical encounter with" the "mediations that exist between us and the environment" as a way to appreciate how elementality is itself a construction of our human faculties (2010, 2). But many uses of elemental metaphor in accounts of modernist magazines enact precisely the essentializing "thing-in-itselfing" of which Macauley is rightly suspicious. This is not to say that metaphors don't have a place in modernist scholarship. Runchman's analysis of *BLAST*, for example, compels precisely because it sees the "seismic energy" of the magazine as a matter of traces rather

than unitary forms. But when we encounter such metaphors in the scholarship of others, or when we're tempted to deploy them in our own, we should ask questions about the functions they serve and the cultural-historical generalizations to which they can lead.

Lewis himself got the ball rolling, in this respect. In an interview published in *The Daily News and Leader* on April 7, 1914, three months before *BLAST* appeared, Lewis stated that the title "signifies something destructive and constructive. It means the blowing away of dead ideas and worn-out notions. It means (according to the Anglo-Saxon interpretation) a fire or flame" (14). The blast of *BLAST*, then, at least for Lewis at this point in time, was the blast of critique, the blast of forceful contradiction of cliché, orthodoxy, and habit. Like *The Blast*, the San Francisco–based anarchist magazine edited by Alexander Berkman from 1916 to 1917, *BLAST* sought to destroy certain tendencies in order to replace them with new, better alternatives. *The Blast* aimed at sociopolitical revolution, but its rhetoric was very similar to the idioms favored by Lewis. Just as *BLAST*, in Lewis's eyes, sought a "destructive and constructive" process, so too did *The Blast* mean "to destroy *and* to build" on the principle that, "socially speaking, Destruction is the beginning of Construction" ("Why the Blast?" 10). Lewis's additional remark about "the blowing away of dead ideas and worn-out notions" being "a fire or flame" suggests that, for him, "blasting" was a mobile language that could absorb different kinds of conceptual contrast. The "blast" of *BLAST* could be a whirling cyclone as much as it could be a searing blaze.

The terminology of *BLAST*, when the magazine finally appeared in July 1914, upheld the mobility of Lewis's articulations. The "blasting" in question is simultaneously enunciated in words and metaphor as a curse, as a whirlwind, as explosions, and in the magazine's visuals, principally in the storm-cone design, as a cyclonic impetus. In all cases the emphasis falls on the clearing away of some prior, undesirable phenomenon, be it the aesthetics of Italian Futurism, bourgeois taste, English weather, artistic amateurism, or thoughtless, unknowing laughter. And to this extent, given the influence he exerted over its contents, *BLAST* expresses what we might call Lewis's "tabula rasa temperament," his desire always to get back to some clear ground upon which innovations in thought and deed might be erected—an attitude running from *BLAST* through *The Caliph's Design* (1919) and onward to *The Mysterious Mr Bull* (1938), in which Lewis reasserts his credentials as a man "born, if ever a man was, for utopias" (1938, 229). Yet the fact remains that although *BLAST* bears Lewis's imprint more than that of any other contributor, it nevertheless is not and was not *his* in any simple sense of the word.

Lewis' later came to regret this. In *Rude Assignment* (1950), he turned to metallurgical imagery to characterize much of what was included in *BLAST*—mainly the poetic material "by Pound etc.," and by implication a good deal else—as "soft and highly impure." As Lewis put it: "I wanted a battering ram that was all of one metal" (1984, 229). He didn't get what he was after, it seems—and neither will

we, rhetorically speaking, if we stick with elemental metaphors in portraying *BLAST* as a bomb, as a whirlwind, and even, yes, as a vortex. What we'll end up with is a less accurate image of a magazine whose contents—particularly the contributions from Ford, West, Jessica Dismorr, and Helen Saunders—are not necessarily best categorized in line with the metaphorical aggressivity of explosions, storms, and coils. Despite the unpredictable circumstances of production that generated it, we can see the conspicuous lack of synthesis that *BLAST* presents as a *celebration* of disunity, of something even bound up with an anti-totalitarian spirit (see Brown 2003, 101). And if we do still want to use metaphors to account for that spirit, perhaps a better candidate would be an idiom of play. After all, so much of what ended up in *BLAST* arrived there in a mood of mischief. Maybe a better way to think about who and what featured in the magazine is to imagine that its contributors were there more or less just to have a good, satirical time—to have a blast, in fact.

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## Endnotes

1 My thanks to Michael Shallcross for suggesting the immensely satisfying pun in my article's title.
2 Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the main body of the text as *B1*.

# *Wyndham Lewis's Cultural Criticism and the infrastructures of Patronage* by Nathan O'Donnell

*Reviewed by Leon Betsworth, London College of Contemporary Art*

What is the value and status of an artist and their his work in a changing world? It is a question whose answer Wyndham Lewis pursued in various ways throughout much of his life. It was an impassioned preoccupation, interrogating the professional and economic environment of the artist, culminating in a corpus of critical work that both inspired and provoked contemporaries. Undertaken over a period of more than forty years, Lewis's steadfast inquiry produced some of the most astute, incisive, far-reaching, sometimes confounding and exasperating but always interesting critical investigations into the nature and status of art and the artist in the twentieth century. The sheer scale of Lewis's critical output is a daunting testament that only a handful of Lewis scholars can claim to have come to grips with completely.

Ably picking through the trail of Lewis's dogged pursuit in his book *Wyndham Lewis's Cultural Criticism and the Infrastructures of Patronage* (2020),[1] Nathan O'Donnell (Research Fellow at the Irish Museum of Modern Art) pieces together and elucidates the complex contemporary contexts through which Lewis established and defended his respective critical positions. Assessing the work chronologically—from Lewis's earliest avant-garde salvos in *Blast* (1914–1915) and his two other editorial projects, *The Tyro* (1921–1922) and *The Enemy* (1927–1929), through *The Caliph's Design* (1919) and *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), to his work for the BBC and *The Listener* (1946–1951) as well as an array of other writings in papers, periodicals, and broadcasts—O'Donnell assembles a picture of the recalcitrant, adversarial firebrand, proffering up for us a diachronic image of the "critical Lewis," as it were: a dynamic, shifting "portrait of the artist" revealed through his prodigious art and cultural criticism.

The first chapter, "Professionals and Amateurs: Bloomsbury, *Blast*, and *The Caliph's Design*," establishes the crux around which Lewis's critical faculties were so often exercised. Revisiting the infamous split with Roger Fry, O'Donnell contextualizes Lewis's early art criticism through the rise of the ideology of professionalism and the new vilification of the amateur. Understanding the schism between the two men not as rooted in a frivolous squabble between

two irreconcilable personalities, as familiar accounts would have it, but rather as more significantly representing "two opposing accounts of the role of the professional" in English artistic society, O'Donnell suggests that the rift constituted a fundamental "contest for mastery of the professional terrain, and for control of the professional *market*" (22). It is here that O'Donnell introduces what he describes as "a wider chasm in English cultural life between a model of the professions predicated upon a traditional liberal-humanist ideal and one influenced by the more transparent, rationalized, and openly capitalist concepts of professionalism being imported at this time from the United States" (19). This antithetical chasm is a central contextualizing force throughout the book, and it is from within his early wrestling with it, and his concomitant assessments of Fry, Bell, and the "Chelso-Bloomsberries" as "irredeemable amateurs," that O'Donnell traces Lewis's subsequent philosophical and political development as well as his inimitable rebarbative style (22).

In chapter 2, "Art and Criticism in the Machine Age: *The Tyro*," O'Donnell explores Lewis's second editorial venture, *The Tyro* (1921–22), alongside what is the first extended critical examination of Lewis's unfinished novel *The Life of a Tyro* (or "Hoodopip," as the sixty typescript pages are titled), which Lewis intended to be a much larger satirical science fiction project. O'Donnell provides a fascinating and compelling reading of this extraordinary work in which Lewis postulates a future society of "Tyros" living in caste formation on a distant planet called "O" and whose lives are regimented by a nefarious militant elite.

Much ground is covered in this wide-ranging analysis, beginning with influences on Lewisian thought from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Georges Sorel, Syndicalism, and Henry Ford to the effects of postwar industrial reforms, particularly those advocated in F. W. Taylor's 1911 publication *The Principles of Scientific Management*, and the devastating material effects of "Taylorism" on industrial workers. O'Donnell suggests that with his Tyros "Lewis was reflecting at a critical and satirical level upon the processes of industrial rationalization and the corporatization of state and business interests which had gathered pace in England during the war" (12). What O'Donnell astutely draws out here is the uneasy ambivalence of Lewis's depiction of this rationalized world of the Tyro where "on the one hand Lewis seemed to celebrate their brutality" and, on the other, gives "an unmistakably menacing, nightmarish quality to their representation" (75). Indeed, as he points out, the prototype of a brutalized future found in the unfinished *The Life of a Tyro* anticipates the argument more thoroughly realized in Lewis's later work *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), which postulates an authoritarian future society divided along occupational lines and ruled and regulated through a sophisticated propaganda machine.

In the next chapter, "'I Am Planning a Small Review': *The Enemy and the General Strike*," O'Donnell chronicles Lewis's developing critical-political

position as it was borne out and consolidated in his third editorial venture, *The Enemy* (1927–29), and the associated publication project, the Arthur Press. O'Donnell identifies a distinct political reorientation in Lewis's polemic after 1926. Picking up on Lewis's disavowal of the previous years to 1918 as "waste," O'Donnell cites the 1926 General Strike as marking both the end of an era (Lewis's postwar "sickness") and the completion of his "political education" (106). What O'Donnell does well by this marker is thoroughly examine Lewis's retractions and revisions of previously held critical positions as presented in *The Art of Being Ruled*; he highlights in stark relief the extent of Lewis's political and philosophical journey to this point. Documented herein also are the shifting parameters of what Lewis considered "revolutionary" in art and society as his suspicions about the fashionable avant-garde emerged. Reading the "Appendix" to Lewis's long critical essay "The Revolutionary Simpleton" (1927), O'Donnell argues that the protofascistic elements of *The Art of Being Ruled* ought not to be conflated with Lewis's later engagements with Hitlerite fascism but rather understood as marking "the end of a particular variant of Lewis's utopianism" and his previous indifference to the economic and material realities of the "mass- or herd-animal man" (136–37).

The final two chapters look at Lewis's shifting engagement with art institutions and other professional groupings responsible for promoting art and supporting artists in England. The economic realities of the post-slump 1930s and what O'Donnell calls Lewis's "more pragmatic approach to art criticism" is the subject of the fourth chapter, "'Public Money Is Private Money': Paying for the Arts in the 1930s." In a period of declining opportunities for artists (not least for himself), O'Donnell finds Lewis focusing his attention more keenly on the limited and limiting infrastructures of patronage and the role they play in determining the kinds of art produced in society. Through a series of essays, published outside of specialized art publications, on architecture and design, as well as several radio and television appearances, O'Donnell contends that as Lewis continued his political reorientation, he began to "cautiously cultivate" a new interest in the "human scale in art." O'Donnell identifies a burgeoning liberalism in Lewis's criticism, quite contrary to his earlier championing of the aesthetics of the machine and, indeed, the currents of the time.

Despite the politically charged fervor of the 1930s and the appearance of clusters of engagé artists, poets, and writers, O'Donnell finds that Lewis's "faith in the 'individualism' of the artist and the autonomy of the artwork were irreconcilable with such collectivized activities" (143). Lewis was now, O'Donnell says, "focused on the personalized and imprecise, what he called 'the scribble' as opposed to the streamlined aesthetic of a mechanized late capitalist society. The work of the individual artist—the brushstroke and the sketch—came to seem to him far more valuable than the hard linear precision that had been the object of Vorticism" (145). Throughout the chapter, O'Donnell

demonstrates the value of his approach in accounting for and explicating Lewis's shifting politics via his criticism rather than, say, through his reactionary pamphleteering of the period. O'Donnell argues persuasively, for instance, that Lewis's political reorientation ought to be understood as more complex than a "left-right-left" progression and that, further, "elements of Lewis's humanism are in fact inextricable from his growing interest in Hitlerite fascism" (164).

The fifth and final chapter, "'The Best in the Worst of All Possible Worlds': Lewis and the Institutions," looks at Lewis's long-standing and constructive relationship with the BBC and his art criticism in *The Listener*. It is here that O'Donnell finds Lewis at his most exacting and penetrating—interrogating the postwar economic and professional environment for the working artist, as well as mounting enthusiastic encomiums for a talented crop of new painters in postwar London. The Lewis portrayed here is a vital and necessary voice. In a particularly fascinating piece of analysis on Lewis's criticism of the newly created Arts Council, O'Donnell not only draws out unexpected (and unacknowledged) parallels and sympathies that Lewis shared with certain Bloomsbury acolytes (John Maynard Keynes in particular); he also shows that Lewis's reservations about such state-led schemes were prophetic, incisive, pertinent, and still relevant to the operations of the council today. Ultimately, O'Donnell boldly argues that this later criticism "provides a key for reading the whole body of Lewis's work, and portrays, as against the popular figure of the malicious reactionary, a very different Wyndham Lewis" (186).

For scholars new to Wyndham Lewis, O'Donnell's book provides a useful critical Baedeker to the scope, complexity, and cultural contexts of Lewisian thought while adding nuance and forging new pathways of understanding by bringing unpublished archival material to light and providing new readings for those scholars more familiar with the artist. This is a valuable and highly recommended resource that lays the ground for future assessments of Wyndham Lewis's complex body of critical work.

## Endnotes

1 Nathan O'Donnell, *Wyndham Lewis's Cultural Criticism and the Infrastructures of Patronage* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 264 pages.

# *The Modernist exoskeleton: Insects, War, Literary Form* by Rachel Murray

*Reviewed by Alan Munton, University of Exeter*

This book establishes a new concept for modernism: the presence of insects.[1] It is an unexpected argument persuasively made by Rachel Murray's intense and significantly theorized discussion. Four authors are discussed: Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), and Samuel Beckett. Simply to name this diverse group shows how pervasive insectification has been, and a mass of new words is involved (though "insectification" is not yet one of them). The term "exoskeleton" refers to what holds an insect together from outside: unlike us, they have no internal structure. The exoskeleton is made of chitin, which is related to glucose, and in many insects it falls off and has to be regrown again and again. (The painting *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro* shows, we shall be told, its subject's features "beneath a chitinous facial armour" [33].) In literature, the obvious example is Gregor Samsa, who in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) wakes up as a large but unspecified insect. An early quotation is from this source, and Murray uses the date of the story's publication, 1915, to move to the theme of war. She does this through a quotation from Lewis's account of his war experience in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), where he saw men "become stuck like houseflies upon a section of flypaper, in a marshy patch" (*BB* 1967, 161). (The quotation neglects to mention that these men were sitting on a pole "with their pants down"!) Murray then makes a significant legitimating statement: "Insects, it seems, played a surprisingly prominent role in Western society's self-understanding during this period, helping scientists and artists alike to think through some of the central concerns of the modern age" (8).

If this large claim can be justified, we shall have to think about modernism in new ways. Which "central concerns" did D. H. Lawrence engage with? It isn't immediately apparent that there are many insects in his best-known works: *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920) get a mention, but the main discussion is of *The Ladybird* (1923), *Kangaroo* (1923), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). The first two are problematic in various ways: *Kangaroo*, set in Australia, "allows itself to be contaminated by the rhetoric of fascism" but encourages the reader to fight back (84). The primary term here is "swarm," which means human swarms, or crowds in a democracy, and where the main character, former soldier Richard Somers, "is caught like a fly on flypaper," in

the novel's words (77). Unlike the character nicknamed Kangaroo—a political reactionary—Somers represents the individual accepting collective life "in all its sticky discomfort" (78). Citing Arthur Rimbaud in a rather complex allusion, Murray argues that a "'swarm poesis'" allows Lawrence to "harness [the] turbulent energy" of the swarm (78). It will be apparent from this that the insect argument becomes complex and allusive, but at the same time asserts the significance of positive energy in interwar society. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the hardness of the insect's shell is lifted so that the selves of Connie and Mellors may emerge "tenderly" (90, quoting the novel) and develop into identities that can survive in the new collectivity, or swarm. The title of this chapter is "Formication," but *Lady Chatterley*, needless to say perhaps, allows a discussion of fornication around a minor character's mention of "th' insex." This witty transition from insects to sex helps renew "the boundaries of the self" (89) against the threat of dissolution, though this is a wider concept that some readers may have difficulties with.

The discussion of H.D.'s novels—but not her poetry—is very different. She was in a disturbed marriage to Richard Aldington, was a friend of Lawrence, a lover of Ezra Pound and of Bryher and other women, and an analysand of Sigmund Freud. Internalization is crucial to her fiction. That often deals with the world wars and their associated traumas. These include the loss of a child at birth, as is developed in *Asphodel* (1921–22, published 1992), in which the Aldington figure is "like a great moth" (110), and the main character Hermione endures a "cocoon state," which gives this chapter its title. In *Nights* (1935) a character based on Pound resembles a giant mosquito (111). In *Bid Me to Live: A Madrigal* (1949, published 1960) Julia undergoes war while "'a frail-spider-web of a silver cord' . . . weaves its way through her psyche" (122); here the character Rico, based on Lawrence, draws Julia into a relationship in which she finds herself "drawn inexorably to his 'spider feelers'" (123). Whereas Lawrence conceives identity as a "vital potential self," Murray understands H.D. as exploring identity as "a state of radical indeterminacy" (124). Insects make persistent appearances in H.D.'s fiction, and help generate a genuine sense that outside shells can be active generators of subjective modernist experience.

Samuel Beckett is far more clearly committed to insect forms. In 1948 he wrote a letter proposing that it was "in the eternally larval" (129) that being and non-being should be sought. His work is predominantly a critique of the exoskeleton, "the psyche as an armoured structure" (135), leading him to invoke Charles Darwin's interest in the developmental potential of the caterpillar. In *Murphy* (1938) the title character represents the larval, while Endon, his opposite, has a consciousness "encased within a solipsistic shell" (139), in Murray's words. Beckett even invented the word "vermigrade," which is recognized by the *Oxford English Dictionary* and means "proceeding in a worm-like manner" (140). In *Malone meurt* (1951) Macmann is described as

"nu comme un ver," or "naked as a worm" (142). In *The Unnamable* (1953) there is, next to the unnamed figure, a character (if that is not too definite a word) named Worm. A complex argument ensues. The main figure, though without a name, is real; Worm scarcely exists, yet performs an essential function in the structure of Beckett's thinking, which derives directly from Henri Bergson, specifically from his *Creative Evolution* (1907). This argument places instinct above the word—that is, animal instinct, which is the development from larvae to insects, means that the successful arrival of a completed butterfly or moth allows Beckett to practice a language of instinct that takes precedence over words that attempt to define the world precisely. The outcome is the writing in *The Unnamable*, and elsewhere, which Beckett—writing about Proust—sets out as a desire for "instinctive perception" over phenomena that have been "distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect" (143). Murray's summary is that Beckett is attempting "to transport subject and text alike back towards a more elementary stage of existence, a process that entails resisting, often unsuccessfully, the pull of 'the great life torrent' of narrative" (144). I was grateful for the description "often unsuccessfully," because—as much as I enjoy Beckett's writing—I did not want to submit wholly to a conceptual world dominated by the "instinctive" activities of insects. Murray has more of value to say, but this summary will have to suffice.

What, then, of Wyndham Lewis? He turns up in asides and supportive comments throughout this book, and seems to have something relevant for all the authors discussed here. Rachel Murray herself won the 2015 Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust Essay Prize with an outstanding essay entitled "'Diabolical Indigestion': Forms of Distaste in Wyndham Lewis's Body of Work," which ranged perceptively across much of what he wrote (see *JWLS* 6, 2015); Murray has a grasp of both generality and detail, and that emerges significantly here. The most important source for the study of insects is the work of Jean-Henri Fabre, and Murray finds plenty of evidence that Lewis read Fabre (1823–1915), whose series *Souvenirs entomologiques* established him as an entertaining and widely read expert observer of the behavior of insects of all kinds. Murray establishes that Lewis would have read Fabre in translation in *The English Review* before the war, and that he held in his library J. Arthur Thompson's *Outlines of Zoology* from 1895, and the 1915 edition of John Lubbock's *Ants, Bees and Wasps*, while also referring to work by Maurice Maeterlinck and to the myrmecologist Auguste Forel's *The Senses of Insects* (1908). This is a remarkable discovery, all the more so in that it has scarcely been noticed by mainstream Lewis criticism.

Insects are there in "Cantleman's Spring Mate," in *The Caliph's Design*, and above all in the 1922 version of the short story "Bestre," which is here discussed across five pages. Insects show up three times, but Murray makes a skillful analysis of much more, with a particular discussion of Bestre's intense

gaze through the window, which "explod[es] the distinction between inside and outside, subject and object, self and surroundings" (36). Madame Riviere, the put-upon woman, has an appearance that resembles a large Coleoptera, or beetle, with her "feline battle mask" that puts her into relation with Fabre's researches. When Bestre cannot break her using his hostile gaze, he exposes himself to her, thereby protecting himself against her stare. Murray goes on to quote from a Lewis essay in *The Tyro* itself, where he reflects that "We are all, in a sense even, so thoroughly hidden from each other because we *see* each other," and she invokes Freud's "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915) to suggest that when Bestre's self-exposure makes him "the object of the gaze," Lewis is proposing that "Bestre achieves a degree of mastery over the conditions of his [self] exposure" (37–38). This argument, the invocation of Freud, and the reimagining of what would normally be considered Bestre's oppressive gesture, is fascinating and persuasive.

The discussion of *The Childermass* (1928) begins by drawing attention to the many "exuviae" found on the Time-flats that Pulley and Satters negotiate; this is a term for the exoskeletal remains of the selves that they encounter. The novel has such words as "anopheles," "ephemerids," and "epeira," all of which occur in Fabre and the other books Lewis owned. (Mosquitoes, mayflies, and spiders, should you not know.) The theme of war is present here, given Pullman's experience, and this fulfills another aspect of Murray's argument. The author further argues that this novel is a critique of the way in which modernism, in Lewis's view, was no longer strikingly original, so that mimicry (conceived as positive) becomes a way of remaining creative. For Fabre, mimicry embodies "the sheer variety of adaptive behaviours in the insect world" (40) rather than a Darwinian struggle for survival. The arrival of Alectryon near the end leads to Murray's proposition that there are "signs of fascism" in the novel that are "most troubling in that they resemble little more than a superficial colouring" (49). That surely suggests that the signs are trivial. Why mention fascism and then ("superficial") withdraw from it? In my view the reader is not expected to sympathize with Alectryon; he talks mostly about sexuality in a peculiar way that is satirical and not to be taken seriously. His cloak has "a bangkok swastika temple design" (*C*, 294) on it, which probably means that it is not the sloped Nazi version, but instead the perpendicular Thai religious version, meaning good luck and prosperity. This is therefore not what Murray calls "a troubling development" (48) in *The Childermass*. These are difficult matters, I agree, but more caution should be exercised in linking Lewis with extremist politics on such slight and contestable evidence.

The positive reading of insect life here stands alongside a different concept, with which I had some difficulty. *The Childermass*, Murray says, gives insight "into the surface modifications that Lewis made to his body of work in the late 1920s" so that he could resist the "destructive forces in his cultural

surroundings" (40). This looks like Lewis's critique of culture and society—in other words, his central concern: satire. Yet the word "satire" is not used here, and these "surface modifications" are mentioned again but never defined, though they become "increasingly frenzied" and indeed show "the versatility of his outward shell" (43). Perhaps Lewis has become a functioning insect?

*Snooty Baronet* (1932) mentions Fabre in its first chapter, and Murray argues that the entomologist inspires Snooty's attempts to present "my human specimens" on "the same footing as ape or insect" (52–53). The problem is that the author has decided that Snooty is a version of Lewis himself, and that he "submits an extreme, unrepentant version of himself to intense scrutiny" (52) in the novel. Snooty is as he is because he holds behaviorist theories about human identity, and the novel is a critique of the self that develops from that pseudoscientific theory. Lewis's own identity is not at issue in any case; but since Murray nowhere mentions behaviorism, this suggests that her discussion contains a significant misreading. To argue further that Lewis's writing "slips between the role of victimiser and victim, predator and prey" and that Snooty also "resembles a grotesque caricature of his author" (who is nevertheless "fascinated by insects" [52]) is perhaps incautious in drawing too direct a parallel between author and text, and accordingly risks misrepresenting Lewis himself.

A similar assumption about Lewis's fictional presence occurs in the discussion of *The Revenge for Love* (1937), where Percy Hardcaster is said to resemble Lewis (he's called Percy, after all). According to Murray, this is "a work of political satire set during the Spanish Civil War" (56), which it is not—it was carefully set before fighting began. There is plenty of satire around Hardcaster, but this phrase ignores the account of the love affair between Margot and Victor, which is crucial to the novel. For me this is an unpersuasive reading of the moving moment in the last lines of the novel when Percy at last shows some human feeling when he learns that the couple have died and "a sudden tear" rolls down his face. Fredric Jameson's well-regarded remark that "there hangs and gleams the realest tear in all literature" is dismissed because Stella Benson, sitting for a portrait, had noticed Lewis's *teeth* were gleaming! For Murray to describe *Revenge* as "more sentimental" than his earlier fiction is, I feel, inaccurate. Surely it is not sentimental at all, but is rather the first of Lewis's novels to strive purposefully after a humane outlook, which is a quite different matter.

This discussion of Lewis is uneven, therefore. At its best it is excellent—there are fascinating pages on Lewis's appearance in Joyce's "The Ondt and the Gracehoper," (1928) which I haven't space to discuss, for example. In its weaker moments it succumbs to the temptation to give Lewis himself a hard time, as though his personal behavior were an aspect of his writing. Altogether, this book is complex and often difficult, as it moves rapidly from text to theory and back again. Nevertheless, the perceptive reading of the texts of all four authors, and the extraordinary range of Rachel Murray's reading, together with her remarkable ability to find valid points

of reference in a multitude of places, will remain valuable for us all. We shall live with modernist insects.

## Endnotes

1 Rachel Murray, *The Modernist Exoskeleton: Insects, War, Literary Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020, 2022), 210 pages.

# A Review of *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque* by Kate Armond

***Reviewed by Gabriela Minden, University of Oxford***

Kate Armond's *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque* (2018)[1] is less a study of influence than an exploration of the critical possibilities that arise in conjuring the specter of the baroque and using it as a lens through which to reassess various artistic phenomena of Anglo-American modernism. This choice of methodological framework is a wise one, as it allows Armond to shed the burden of proving causation and move on to the more sophisticated work of recovering what she aptly calls a "dialogue" between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries that is at once nuanced and compelling (7). As Armond acknowledges, this particular dialogue that modernism held with the past is not exactly unknown. Yet it represents an area in which scholars have continued to discover previously untrodden critical territory, evidenced not only by Armond's study but also by recent works such as Jane Stevenson's *Baroque Between the Wars: Alternative Style in the Arts, 1918–1939* (2018) and Joseph Cermatori's *Baroque Modernity: An Aesthetics of Theatre* (2021). *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque* constitutes a thought-provoking contribution to this facet of modernist studies. By reexamining a variety of early twentieth-century artistic phenomena in view of their affinity with theatrical and philosophical advances of the historical baroque, Armond illuminates what she describes as a "baroque aesthetic that runs counter to the dominant modernist values" promoted by central figures such as T. S. Eliot and James Joyce (7).

The range of materials on which Armond draws to build this argument is broad and commendably interdisciplinary, encompassing modernist literature; epistolary correspondence; theories of dance, acting, and stagecraft; performance practices; and evidence of philosophical, historical, and social developments. This interdisciplinary approach enables Armond to interrogate how three different baroque "sources"—the German *Trauerspiel* (play of mourning), the monism of Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and the Italian commedia dell'arte—were "recreat[ed]" and harnessed to new aesthetic and political ends in a diverse selection of early twentieth-century arts (2018, 8). Over the course of six chapters, Armond unfolds how aspects of these seventeenth-century philosophical concepts and theatrical forms emerged, and were sometimes fundamentally recast, in the novels of Djuna Barnes and

Wyndham Lewis, the writings and choreography of the American dancer Isadora Duncan, and the theater theories of Edward Gordon Craig. Through perceptive and detailed comparisons, Armond makes a powerful case for her assertion that the modernist figures featured in her study were not simply "passive recipients of tradition," but were rather extraordinarily "innovative, playful, and even irreverent in their reworking" of baroque sources (7).

The book's chapters are arranged around key modernist figures, as well as forms and definitions that "allow the baroque to be used as a framework for analysing modernist achievements" (7). Following a brief introduction, the first chapter provides an overview of the main baroque sources on which Armond concentrates. The three ensuing chapters are all dedicated to Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), lending the novel a centrality for which Armond makes no apologies, justifying her decision by contending that *Nightwood* offers "the most detailed baroque vision captured by any modernist writer" (2018, 8). While at first glance this sustained engagement with *Nightwood* may seem to indicate a somewhat narrow focus, to hold this view would be to overlook the true scope and ambition of Armond's study. Negotiating between detailed analysis and remarkably broad contextualization, Armond draws out the subtle connections between *Nightwood* and Walter Benjamin's theories of seventeenth-century allegory, "creaturely" vocal utterances that evoke baroque perceptions of humankind's affinity with the animalistic, Sitwellian interpretations of the cultural and political achievements of baroque sovereignty, and more (90).

These early chapters thus reveal the value of Armond's complex methodology. Often, we find that the baroque sources on which Armond focuses did not have a direct bearing on their twentieth-century counterpart, but were rather mediated through a modern conduit. Barnes's engagement with *Trauerspiel*, for instance, is understood through her exposure to the aesthetic developments of German expressionist theater, themselves consonant with aspects of *Trauerspiel*; similarly, Duncan is associated with Spinoza's monism through her interest in Ernst Haeckel's fin de siècle evolutionary science, itself indebted to Spinozan thought. Building up layers of contextual evidence that suggest some level of modern exposure to notions and forms that can be traced to the historical baroque, Armond skillfully weaves a web between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries that opens up her study to a wide range of rewarding explorations.

The later part of the fifth chapter and the sixth chapter of the book extend this intricate approach to recovering historical resonances. While these sections turn to Gordon Craig and Wyndham Lewis, two figures whose engagement with their seventeenth-century source—the commedia dell'arte—is more easily discernible, Armond nevertheless uses their familiarity with the genre to draw somewhat unexpected and generative parallels. This allows her to read Gordon Craig's theory of the *Übermarionette* as a modern resurgence

of the dynamic and extemporaneous qualities of the commedia dell'arte, and to offer an illuminating reconsideration of the physicality of Lewisian satire, particularly as developed in *The Apes of God* (1930). Casting the novel's central figures as stock characters of the commedia dell'arte—Zagreus emerges as the clear Arlecchino, and the naive Dan Boleyn becomes Pierrot—Armond styles a "Commedia of the Apes" that underscores how Lewis's prose can be seen to offer a distinctive sense of embodiment and theatricality (2018, 140). As Armond eloquently phrases it, "While in the commedia performance, physical action was often swift, incisive and even athletic, Lewis displaces that energy, and it is not human bodies but the words on the written page that surprise and impress, performing feats of skill, changes of pace, unexpected flights, tumbles and tricks" (148). It is not only the characters but also inanimate objects and more that are shown to have physical impulses: in Armond's construal, even a clap of laughter seems to dance across the table (146). There is a renewed focus on satire's rendering of physicality, materiality, and exteriority that Armond sets against modernism's more familiar preoccupation with interiority and consciousness, gesturing to writers such as Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust (144). Armond's reading of *The Apes of God* thus lends weight to one of her study's most stimulating conclusions: that baroque modernism emerges as "an aesthetic of human embodiment" (161). At the same time, this commedia dell'arte parallel allows Armond to highlight the similarities between Lewis's treatment of the 1926 General Strike and the plight of the dispossessed in seventeenth-century Italy, augmenting the novel's cultural critique as well as its satiric effect.

Given the significance of Armond's innovative methodological framework—a major contribution of her study—it is perhaps inevitable that weaker parts of the book come when Armond strays from this framework and strives to establish influence for cases in which correspondence seems more probable. Some suggestions that modernist figures deliberately drew on baroque sources were less convincing, and indeed unnecessary for Armond's valuable analyses. Despite the breadth of the study, there are also a few areas that would have benefited from greater consideration of notable interconnections. For instance, while Armond is in many ways carving out space for a version of modernism counter to that which was animated by an interest in the classical world—evoking the late nineteenth-century distinction that Heinrich Wölfflin drew between classical and baroque art—it was nevertheless surprising to have chapter 5's discussion of Duncan, Gordon Craig, and Lewis vis-à-vis Hellenism, the physicality of modernist performance, the ritualistic dithyramb, and Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) without a gesture to the extraordinary significance of Nietzschean thought. Finally, I would have welcomed more critical engagement with Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), particularly in light of the central role that it plays in Armond's argument.

These points are minor, however, and do not diminish Armond's study, which will provide its readers with a more nuanced and profound understanding of Anglo-American modernism while broadening their knowledge of the work of Barnes, Lewis, Duncan, and Gordon Craig. In Armond's hands, theatrical and philosophical advances of the seventeenth century emerge as forces of artistic renewal for a selection of the early twentieth-century's literary, theatrical, and choreographic developments. Most significantly, *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque* offers an expansive paradigm for considering the implications of artistic heritage, historical forms, and intermedial translation for modernist innovation. When set in the context of modernism, Armond suggests at the close of a pithy conclusion, the baroque "represents a way of mediating between past and present" (166). We might say the same about her study as well.

## Endnotes

1 Kate Armond, *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 192 pages.

## References

Armond, Kate. 2018. *Modernism and the Theatre of the Baroque*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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# *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* by Lise Jaillant

*Reviewed by Adrian Osbourne, Swansea University*

With its pleasingly direct title, *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*[1] provides an engaging and informative entry into the burgeoning field of studies into the publishing history of modernist literature. The importance of little magazines to modernism's dissemination has been well documented, with, for example, Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible's *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (2007) and Eric Bulson's *Little Magazine, World Form* (2019) offering in-depth and contemporary assessments of journals such as *Criterion*, *The Dial*, and *The Little Review*. In *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*, Lise Jaillant brings together twelve chapters that look at how publishers large and small brought modernism to book.

The publishers and their author lists discussed in this collection provide a veritable who's who of anglophone modernism: Faber & Faber and Eliot; Shakespeare and Company and Joyce; Grove and Beckett; the Hogarth Press and the Woolfs' "friends"; and so on (Jaillant 2019, 76). Wyndham Lewis, as befits his energetic contributions to modernism, makes brief appearances in several chapters, so it is somewhat ironic that the most sustained engagement with his publishing history—in Adam Guy's chapter "Calder and Boyars"—examines the posthumous new editions of *The Human Age* trilogy (in separate volumes; 1965–66), *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1967), and *Tarr* (1968) by Calder and Boyars. As Guy argues, these publications "index the fact that Lewis's legacy and reputation were still being negotiated in the decades following his death" (Jaillant 2019, 220). In fact, the underlying point here—that the publishing industry's interest in such writers, both during modernism's heyday and the later attempts to determine its legacy, brought the not readily alignable worlds of avant-garde literature and commerce into conflict—is a thread that runs throughout the book. Almost without fail, each chapter relates how the press in question—with Faber & Faber and New Directions as notable exceptions—either folded or was swallowed up by one of the conglomerates that rule the oligopolical publishing industry today. While this is not the book's main focus, it nonetheless provides a sobering assessment of the arts' ability to withstand the forces of capitalism that is as relevant now as ever.

To return to *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*, and passing over the unpaid intellectual labor that constitutes the contemporary academic publishing model, Jaillant's introduction cogently outlines the project this book works toward, surveying the territory while issuing a call to academic arms: "It is time for modernist scholars to pay more attention to the book publishers that 'made it new' in the first part of the twentieth century" (2019, 2). Staking its claim to be the first edited collection to investigate the publishers that sold modernist titles in the US and the UK (with Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company and Nancy Cunard's Hours Press providing a French connection, even though the work they published was entirely or predominantly, respectively, in English), the book is divided into three parts: "Pioneers," "Fine Books," and "Publishing Modernism after the Second World War." These sections offer a chronological journey through modernist publishing from B. W. Huebsch's publication of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) to J. H. Prynne's *Kitchen Poems* (1968) by Cape Goliard.

## Pioneers

In "Pioneers," Catherine Turner opens the collection with "Modernism, Reform and the Traditional Business of Books," which explores how B. W. Huebsch's imprint, mainly between 1906 and 1926, sought to publish barrier-breaking modernist writers while operating within the parameters of the established, and predominantly conservative, American publishing industry. While Huebsch ranked commercial value below his belief in literature's capacity to bring about change, Turner argues that he "opened the door only to a particular type of modernism, a modernism that focused on social problems" (Jaillant 2019, 17). The combination of his role as literary gatekeeper and his commitment to traditional publishing values meant that, for example, *Winesburg, Ohio* was in, while Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925) was out, as Huebsch's conception of modernism required a social critique and not experimentation for its own sake. Turner uses this to defend Huebsch from Sherwood Anderson's accusation that he passed on publishing *Ulysses* (1922) due to a lack of literary taste, suggesting instead that it was due to a perceived lack of a political engagement in Joyce's novel, however legally and financially prudent it may have been to avoid the ineluctable court action. Another strand that Turner's clear writing illustrates is how Huebsch's traditional publishing methods, which meshed with his desire to provide challenging texts to as wide an audience as possible, constituted an attempt to give integrity and respectability to modernist work, with one eye already on posterity.

"Young Americans" by Amy Root Clements discusses the firm of Alfred A. Knopf, including how it handled the American publication of *Tarr* (1918), "a particularly distinctive artefact of modernism" (Jaillant 2019, 36). Despite

an initially cool reception in the US, Lewis's first novel remained in print with Knopf some eight years later, when it was advertised as a privileged glimpse into a bohemian Paris where at any given moment, according to Knopf's advertising copy, an artist may set "the Seine on fire with a masterpiece" (2019, 37). However, at this time, Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) was about to make its American debut through Harper, and Clement indicates this formed part of a pattern of Knopf failing to retain their modernists. The reader is informed that Eliot was lost to Horace Liveright for want of an advance on *The Waste Land* (1922), but the reasons for Lewis's change of publisher are sadly absent. How *Tarr* stayed in print with Knopf for almost ten years would also merit some further investigation, when, as Clement highlights, in 1918 the *New York Times* derided "the writer's lack of skill" and suggested the novel would only please "the pretentious and the half-baked" (Jaillant 2019, 37). While the chapter opens with the questionable claim that the US of 1915 "had not yet established norms for determining which of its authors should be deemed meritorious"—which would presumably have been news to publishers, audiences, and reviewers of Hawthorne, Melville, Beecher Stowe, and Twain, to name but a few—and some of the asides feel unnecessary (do we need to know that Dorothy Bussy, whose translation of Gide was used by Knopf, had developed an unrequited passion for the French author even as he began a relationship with Marc Allégret?), its strengths are the overview of this important modernist publisher and particularly the foregrounding of Blanche Knopf's equally important contributions as cofounder and director of the company that bore only her husband's name.

Jennifer Sorensen's chapter provides a timeline of Boni & Liveright, followed by illuminating case studies of the company's promotion of modernist texts in relation to race and gender. Sorensen shows how Boni & Liveright's marketing copy for Djuna Barnes and Frances Newman oscillates bizarrely between a metaphor on the physical penetration of the female body—Barnes has been "shot once too often. But what a gallant wound!"—to an unreal intellectual merging between author and her fictional creation—"Katherine Faraday's [the protagonist of Newman's *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (1926)] ideas and actions are refracted in their transition through Miss Newman's mind" (Jaillant 2019, 62). Sorensen applies an equally keen and analytical eye to the publisher's editions of Jessie Redmon Fauset's *There Is Confusion* (1924) and Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death* (1926), exposing the problematic racial tensions and textual conflicts of marketing these Harlem Renaissance novels for a predominantly white audience.

The first section is completed with a chapter each on perhaps the most famous names of high modernist publishing: the Hogarth Press, by Claire Battershill, and Faber & Faber, by John Xiros Cooper. Both chapters offer an informative and rewarding read, with Battershill cutting through the mythos

to examine the commercial realities that made Hogarth a success, such as sales orders to Boots and W.H. Smith, while Cooper outlines the difference between the avant-garde and modernism to argue persuasively that modernism and the "fully deployed market society" are "in fact one and the same," and that in Eliot, Faber & Faber had just the right person to not only show the age of modernity its own face for the first time, but also to sell it the mirrors (Jaillant 2019, 91).

## Fine Books

This section of the volume examines the smaller presses that provided a link between the artisanal methods of the little magazines and the mass-market aspirations of the previously discussed companies.

In "Shakespeare and Company," Joshua Kotin describes how Sylvia Beach acted as, inter alia, publisher, agent, banker, and lawyer for Joyce, all the while enabling the published version of *Ulysses* to approach Joyce's vision by accepting constant revisions of the manuscript, even as it was at the printers. For Kotin, Beach accommodated her sole author in a way few other publishers would have managed, being equal parts "indulgent," "idealistic," and "visionary," and without her, *Ulysses* "would not have been the book we know today" (Jaillant 2019, 120). The predatory nature of international publishing is also touched upon, as the editor of the American journal *Two Worlds Monthly*, Samuel Roth, took it upon himself in 1925–26 to publish, without permission, excerpts of *Ulysses*. Beach's legal position was uncertain, and her financial resources stretched, so she organized a letter of protest against this copyright infringement, which attracted signatures from a stunningly diverse range of writers and intellectuals, including Albert Einstein, D. H. Lawrence, Mina Loy, Luigi Pirandello, and Wyndham Lewis.

Mercedes Aguirre's chapter, "Publishing the Avant-Garde," provides a detailed account of how Nancy Cunard's Hours Press was no vanity project of a dilettante, managing in just four years to publish Beckett's first book, *Whoroscope* (1930), and Pound's *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930), with covers from artists such as Man Ray and Yves Tanguy. Aguirre makes a strong case for the importance of Hours Press in disseminating surrealist ideas and bridging French- and English-speaking avant-gardism.

Lise Jaillant looks at another short-lived press that focused on deluxe limited editions of modernist texts; her chapter "'Flowers for the Living'" examines the Gaige imprint, which ran from 1927 to 1929 and, among other texts, published *Orlando* (1928) and *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (1928) in the US. Jaillant effectively conveys Crosby Gaige's efforts to produce fine editions of contemporary writing, as he attempted to bring into being the type of books he wished himself to collect. While the economic realities of the project led, perhaps inevitably, to the end of the Gaige press, Jaillant sees it as a turning point

in the history of modernism. Not only did Gaige promote Woolf as a collectible author in a male-dominated market, Jaillant also argues that Gaige's creation of fine editions of modernist texts for American bibliophiles constituted the necessary complement to the larger runs of cheap books emanating from other publishers; this formed a two-pronged approach that gave American readers access to the widest range of modernist editions yet.

## Publishing Modernism after the Second World War

The final section of *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* focuses on the period of 1945–71, and it is interesting to see how the cultural and academic institutionalization of modernism, with the concomitant historicization, revisionism, and claims for legitimacy, affected, and was affected by, the publishing industry. Greg Barnhisel discusses the influential American publisher James Laughlin in "New Directions Books," whose company is a rare instance of an ongoing concern today. Much of this is due to Laughlin's enduring vision for New Directions, which Barnhisel eloquently summarizes as a "conviction that experimental literature would renew a corrupted world" (Jaillant 2019, 176). This core ethos was combined with professional business practices that included market diversification; New Directions' "The New Classics" series reprinted "important predecessors or exemplars of modernism," such as *The Great Gatsby* (1945), *Exiles* (1946), and *A Season in Hell* (1945), at the cheap price of $1.50. At the same time, Laughlin produced small-run fine printings for a more exclusive, subscription-based readership. Barnhisel also rightly highlights how New Directions' "Makers of Modern Literature" series made a significant contribution to the growing field of critical modernist studies, which included Hugh Kenner's pioneering and influential study of Wyndham Lewis in 1954.

This is followed by Loren Glass's illuminating chapter on Beckett's lifelong relationship with Grove Press. Supported by images of the Roy Kuhlman book covers, Glass makes a compelling argument that these distinctive and iconic designs provide a complement to the formal and typographic innovation of a work such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954), in ways that "encourage the critical analogy between Beckett's writing and abstract painting" (Jaillant 2019, 206).

The final chapter, Matthew Sperling's "Cape Goliard," underlines the harsh realities of incorporating a little press within a major publishing house. Sperling's account of Nathaniel Tarn's efforts to maintain Goliard's editorial independence and foster literary avant-gardism, when the executive board of Jonathan Cape held the power and purse strings, call to mind Cnut. And Goliard's cofounder Tom Raworth used the same combination of letters in a slightly different order to express his contempt for Cape's director, Tom Maschler. Sperling outlines the importance of Cape Goliard in publishing poets such as Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne, while persuasively arguing that

the press's swift demise in 1971 (four years into a legally nonbinding ten-year agreement) contributed to the effective effacement of modernism in the UK from the end of the 1960s onward. Following the closure of Cape Goliard, poets like Prynne and Raworth returned to the small presses and informal distribution networks, while American modernist poets such as Olson and Robert Duncan were barely in print on this side of the Atlantic as, in Britain, traditional poetry and the movement "structured the shape of the poetic field for the decades leading up to the end of the twentieth century" (Jaillant 2019, 248).

With its necessarily wide range of subjects, *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* may not, beyond Adam Guy's "Calder and Boyars" chapter, constitute an essential purchase for the Wyndham Lewis scholar, but the book provides an invaluable introduction, overview, and series of case studies of many of the most important publishers of modernism.

## Endnotes

1 Lise Jaillant (ed.), *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 280 pages.

## References

Bulson, Eric. 2019. *Little Magazine, World Form*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Churchill, Suzanne W., and Adam McKible, eds. 2007. *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jaillant, Lise, ed. 2019. *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

# *Filthy Material: Modernism and the Media of Obscenity* by Chris Forster

*Reviewed by Matthew Pilkington, University of Tennessee*

On the surface, Chris Forster's *Filthy Material* (2019)[1] enters the well-trod landscape of literary obscenity and retreads familiar arguments found in the pioneering works of scholars from Celia Marshik and Adam Parkes to Rachel Potter and Paul K. Saint-Amour. However, *Filthy Material* differentiates itself from its forebears by viewing the evolution of literary modernism through the intersection of obscenity censorship and the study of media ecology featured prominently in the works of Friedrich Kittler and Marshall McLuhan.

Forster is deeply invested in how the pervasive culture of obscenity censorship shaped literary modernism, and his work covers the staple texts of this discourse: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Forster also brings fresh discussion to works by Wyndham Lewis, Walter Sickert, Norah James, and T. S. Eliot. He argues that properly understanding the complicated history of modernist obscenity means acknowledging the prominent role of "the media-technological landscape" on the development of literary modernism since "obscenity is foremost a media crime" (3–4). The scope of *Filthy Material* is extensive, with each chapter providing valuable insights on the shifting media ecology of twentieth-century literary modernism.

Chapter I—"Modernism and the Media History of Obscenity"—is a valuable survey of the field of media ecology and the evolution of how "literature was read, valued, or judged obscene" (15). Forster argues that new technological developments in printing and distribution create the conditions by which "the *publicity* of reading itself" (17, emphasis in original) shift and force a reevaluation of the public's relationship to literature and obscenity. These examples are illustrative of a larger cultural shift in literary modernism in which our understanding of modernist obscenity is inextricably tied to changes in media (38).

Chapter Two—"The Pornometric Gospel: Wyndham Lewis, Walter Sickert, and the Collapse of the Ideology of the Nude"—charts a different evolution of artistic obscenity by looking at the shifting perspective of the academic nude as seen in Walter Sickert's Camden Town nudes and Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*

(1918). By tracing the history of the female nude through to the beginning of the twentieth century, Forster highlights the role of mass reproduction on diminishing the "ideology of the nude" (43) and suggests that as access to the female nude became more commonplace, artists like Sickert and Lewis—who would have had extensive education in the study of the female nude—began to reevaluate its status as a privileged art object.

For Sickert, this demystification is achieved by removing the female nude from its mythological and allegorical context by encouraging voyeuristic engagement with the nude placed in "a modern, realistic setting" (46). Whereas Lewis's rejection of the academic nude is mediated through his novel *Tarr* and the aesthetic values of the character Kriesler and his rape of Bertha. In the end, Forster argues that Lewis's "rejection of the nude is a rejection of an entire ideology of aesthetic value that locates the value of art in the idealization of life and the sublimation of sexuality" (52). Forster posits that Sickert and Lewis's devaluations of the academic nude were a direct result of pornographic representation made commonplace in a shifting media-technological landscape that necessitated their intervention.

Chapter Three—"Skirmishing with Jolly Roger: D.H. Lawrence, Obscenity, and Book Piracy"—offers a refreshing look at the publication history of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, not through the obscenity of the work itself, but through Lawrence's own critiques of pornography and his fraught relationship with piracy and the art of copying. Forster highlights the contrast between Lawrence's response to the piracy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Joyce's condemnation of pirated editions of *Ulysses*. Whereas Joyce's stance against piracy came largely from questions of authorship and property, the emphasis on Lawrence is more concerned with "trying to perfect a condemnation of obscenity" (72) that would emphasize questions of "circulation and production" (79). Forster argues that as print culture became more accessible, the emergence of low-quality, mass-produced pirate editions created the conditions for Lawrence's anger at the piracy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. His displeasure was less a concern over the rights to his intellectual property than a response to the degradation of the novel's artistic legitimacy.

Chapter Four—"Very Serious Books: The Circulation and Censorship of *The Well of Loneliness* and *Sleeveless Errand*"—charts the suppression of Norah James's *Sleeveless Errand* (1929) by drawing a direct connection to action taken against Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) several years earlier. In the case of *The Well*, Forster illuminates the conceived correlation between price and the perception of obscenity. Selling Hall's novel at a higher price—one typically reserved for academic texts—led to "pretensions to seriousness and social importance" that amplified the threat already presented by its female authorship and subject matter (116). In highlighting how the suppression of *The Well* served as a test case for the corrupting influence of

these kinds of text, Forster makes it clear that Norah James faced opposition for the "imagined effect that publishing a novel about a class of women who use . . . verbal obscenities would have on the biopolitical health of postwar England" (105).

Chapter Five—"Obscenity and the Voice: Eliot's Bawdry"—contrasts starkly with the previous chapter by examining how private circulation was used to bypass traditional checks against modernist obscenity and by exploring the connection between modernist obscenity and homosocial networks. Forster's inclusion of Eliot is a unique addition in works on obscene modernism, as Eliot largely avoided suppression of his work. The subject of Forster's discussion—Eliot's unpublished poem "King Bolo and His Great Black Queen"—circulated "outside circuits of print and acceptable discourse" (127) and instead occurred through word of mouth and private letters passed within an exclusively male circle of readers. Forster suggests that the private circulation of Eliot's obscene "King Bolo" poem harkens back to a lost era of homosocial unity and this private circulation—contrasted with the publicity of the music hall or bawdy folk song—makes the reader keenly aware that "modern disintegration is at the center of [Eliot's] work" (143).

Chapter Six—"Materializing *Ulysses*: Obscenity and the Work of Print in the Age of Film"—swerves slightly from the preceding studies, which largely emphasize an outside-in approach to how media technologies influence and shape literary modernism, by focusing on *Ulysses*'s "foregrounding of its own printedness" (154) in a move that emphasizes the role of form and style on the creation of obscene art. Forster argues that the presence of material censorship—from asterisks or ellipses in print to pixelization or bleeps in audiovisual media—emphasizes a work's own materiality while serving as valuable protest against censorship.

This deliberate emphasis on preserving these obfuscating errors associated with typesetting and literature's materiality—contrasted with the bald approach to obscene content—meant that "*Ulysses* posed such a challenge that reviewers often struggled to find some framework by which to understand the 'novel'" (173), as it eschewed the expectation of how the obscene novel conceals or exposes. Forster then shifts his focus to the 1967 film adaptation of *Ulysses* to emphasize the role of transmission on the perception of obscenity. By 1967, *Ulysses* had long been deemed "not obscene" and was widely circulated, but the film faced significant censorship for the use of language that appeared nearly verbatim in the original novel. Forster's argument here is that as the age of obscenity in print was coming to an end, the remediation of print to film meant that obscenity would be reassessed as changes in medium led to new modes of circulation.

Forster closes with a look at the waning years of print censorship through the shifting focus of two small publishers of obscene literature: The Obelisk

and Olympia Presses. Operating out of Paris, these presses were instrumental in the publication of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) because they could serve as "a way station between utter suppression and complete liberalization" (191), but Forster makes clear that these presses were anomalies whose service came during a period of major upheaval in the way that books were policed. In the same year that *Lolita* was published in England, the Obscene Publications Act would see significant reform, and what deemed a book worthy of suppression was much harder to quantify. Forster argues that these changes were illustrative of a larger shift in media ecology that is still visible today in how we think about everything from film and TV to violence in video games (192).

Where *Filthy Material* triumphs is in the timelessness of its messaging. Artists creating at the turn of the twentieth century faced very different challenges from their modern counterparts. However, by examining the struggles of literary modernism and the evolutions of art that were driven by rapid reinventions of media technology, we can learn a great deal about how to prepare for the arrival of unforeseen yet inevitable changes to the media ecological landscape.

## Endnotes

1 Chris Forster, *Filthy Material: Modernism and the Media of Obscenity* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 216 pages.

# *Rethinking G.K. Chesterton and Literary Modernism: Parody, Performance, and Popular Culture* by Michael Shallcross

*Reviewed by Naomi Milthorpe, University of Tasmania*

Michael Shallcross's *Rethinking G.K. Chesterton and Literary Modernism: Parody, Performance, and Popular Culture* (2018), the eighth volume to be published in Routledge's Literary Texts and the Popular Marketplace series, comes as a welcome addition to the critical literature that interrogates the supposed great divide of the early twentieth century. Chesterton's popularity and association with mass culture means that he has remained a marginal figure—a footnote or punchline—in scholarship on literary modernism. As Shallcross notes, this study might at first appear a "wild goose chase": "After all, the majority of critics who have given the matter any consideration have concluded that no meaningful correspondence existed" between Chesterton and modernism (1). Shallcross's often surprising study carefully and wittily—much like Chesterton's detective hero Father Brown—tracks down those correspondences. Comprising six chapters and an introduction detailing Chesterton's "confrontation [with modernism] across almost half a century of British culture" (16), the volume shows that Chesterton was a person of immense significance in the development and self-definition of literary modernism.

The book opens with an account of Chesterton's early friendship with Edmund Clerihew Bentley, which at first seems an unlikely subject given that Bentley is also not known as a modernist. But as Shallcross argues, drawing on comprehensive archival and biographical research, their friendship set the template for "the vacillation between opposition and identification, antipathy and affinity, that consistently characterised Chesterton's later responses to the dominant thought of the age" (19). Critically tracking this vacillation, Shallcross imagines a portmanteau creature, the Chesterbentley (riffing on the Chesterbelloc, George Bernard Shaw's original). Onto the back of this pantomime-horse figure, Shallcross packs a detailed argument about Chesterton's intellectual, literary, and personal development through the 1890s and early 1900s. This is then followed, in chapter 2, by a reading of Chesterton's use of travesty and burlesque, especially of his own person and dress, to negotiate Edwardian literary culture. These chapters, though

perhaps more modernist-adjacent than modernist, effectively set up the book's later arguments (and jokes) about the playfulness, duality, and identification inherent to Chesterton's confrontation with modernism.

Readers of this journal might be most interested in chapters 3–6, which cover Chesterton's direct engagement with literary modernism and the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, focusing in particular on the central players in Shallcross's carnivalesque drama of high-low cross-pollination: Lewis, Pound, and Eliot. We see Chesterton parodying, pillorying, and satirizing these figures, both reading and writing in modernist (or modernish) modes. Shallcross also shows the ways in which modernist writers dialogically reflected and refracted Chesterton in print (a major framework here is Bakhtin). Though as Shallcross admits, Chesterton's most direct influence in the 1910s might have been to inspire "reconstructing the very walls of exclusivity that he had sought to demolish," the avant-gardes of this period also often performed in his signature modes and genres: "whether in the buffooneries of Bloomsbury, the practical jokes of Italian Futurism, or the range of textual comedians conceived by the young Eliot and Lewis" (104). Lewis and Eliot emerge in particular as pseudo-Chestertons, "both modernists *and* Thursdayites" (104), through close readings of Eliot's poems "Humoresque," "Suite Clownesque," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Lewis's unpublished detective novel *Mrs. Dukes' Million* ("a burlesque shadow text to the high-modernist totem; an abject repository for Lewis's verbal waste products" [139]). It is in this way that Shallcross contributes to the complex picture of early twentieth-century literary culture, which no longer resembles a great divide so much as a crowded theater. The early "histrionic contest for cultural authority" between Lewis/Pound/Eliot and Chesterton, which raged in printed essays, short stories, and poems, as well as unpublished works and private letters, emerges through the 1930s into an "unlikely salvaging of mutual understanding, subsequently lost to a critical audience more invested in underlining the opposition than in negotiating the complication" (16).

The book's subtitle is "Parody, Performance, and Popular Culture," and through his readings in these later chapters, Shallcross offers an energizing intervention into critical scholarship on satire and parody as productive, rather than destructive or merely imitative, modes. Shallcross draws on Julia Kristeva's thinking about abjection to frame his discussion of Chesterton's relations with modernism as contamination/boundary-crossing. The abject joins the anti-modern, the carnivalesque, and the parodic as "another productive context through which to navigate the boundaries both erected and traversed by the factions under discussion" (167). In cataloging the ways in which parody and satire circulated as major discursive modes during this period—and the ways in which Chesterton provided direct influence and impetus for modernists'

uptake of them—what we see finally is a modernist culture more textually diverse, and far sillier, than it is generally given credit for.

Shallcross focuses, by and large, on the Men of 1914 (and, briefly, Virginia Woolf) as most fully representative of the strawmen Chesterton was seeking to expose. While it is perhaps beyond the purview of Shallcross's book, it might be a fruitful line for future scholars to pursue Chesterton's engagements with women modernists and the ways that his work contests and/or confirms the middlebrow (a term that does not feature prominently in the book). If I were to venture a downside to the book, it is that the chapters are quite long. In making his arguments, Shallcross assembles such an array of allusions, sources, jokes, and double entendres, drawn from archival sources and from very close analysis of his subjects' oeuvres, that the central thread of an individual chapter can momentarily be eclipsed by the dazzle of its local readings. But the book's pointed title remains instructive if readers ever get dizzy. Throughout, the book encourages its readers to reconsider—and to really think about—Chesterton as a writer who, through the affordances of parody and his investment in the popular, was by necessity interested in and engaged with what later came to be defined as literary modernism.

## Endnotes

1 Michael Shallcross, *Rethinking G.K. Chesterton and Literary Modernism: Parody, Performance, and Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 308 pages.

# *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922* by Rebecca Beasley

*Reviewed by Francesca Mancino*

Published by Oxford University Press in 2020, Rebecca Beasley's *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922*[1] is a necessary, definitive study of Russian literature's permeation into British literary culture. *Russomania* is a sustained balance of cultural biography, criticism, and literary genealogy that does not overwhelm the reader in spite of its breadth. Beasley weaves British high modernists—namely Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and Dorothy Richardson—with figures who straddle the Edwardian and modernist periods, like Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford, and D. H. Lawrence. Others such as H. D., Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis remain mostly peripheral to the text, as Beasley's principal aspiration is to highlight the several Russophile strands of modernism. For H. D., Pound, and Lewis, the strand of the "simple life" tended to remain on the outliers of their writings as opposed to the forefront (93–94).

We can better understand "the simple life" if we turn to fin de siècle print culture, where "aspects of a simple life literary culture" serve as just one aspect of the Russophile strand of modernism (111). Beasley is adamant in maintaining caution, here, since she does not propone that Russian literature entirely or directly influenced "simple life literature" (112). Instead, she underlines how the "simple life" manifested in modernist literature in several ways, including in an "explicit Tolstoyism to a socialism that criticizes Russian autocracy," a tempered fascination with "rural life and folk art" that may be traced to "British sources" echoing Tolstoyism, and "Northern European peasant arts, fables, and folklore" (112). Lewis's early travel narratives are one example that Beasley cites. While it is unclear whether those writings are suggested as depicting "an emphatically English narrator confronted by a Dostoevskian world" or "a Chekhovian narrator confronted by a Dostoevskian world," the possibility of this influence in Lewis's work is nonetheless captivating (425). Indeed, the ramifications of modernist Dostoevskian worlds highlight a "distance between the narrator and the world they encounter [that] results in authorial comment on an early modernist worldview, a comment that can be tragic or, more often, satiric" (425). Given the highly satirical nature of many of Lewis's works (i.e. as

he stated overtly in *Satire and Fiction* [1930]), Beasley misses a key opportunity to sharpen her argument in regard to the linkage between Lewisian satire and Russophile literature.

The majority of Lewisian discussion in *Russomania* concerns Lewis's relationship to Ford and *The English Review*. His and Pound's writings in *The English Review* left Ford hopeful that his periodical would sustain cultural significance. Their presence in the review was a shift away from the "'Edwardian' conception of English national identity" (181). Beasley asserts that instead of viewing *The English Review* in terms of "canonical modernism," or the emergence of the "younger future modernists," we should assess Lawrence, Pound, and Lewis's involvement in terms of their writing styles (183). Ford then categorized writers into two categories: artists and propagandists (36). Where Pound falls within the former, Lewis embodies the latter. Beasley argues how "Lewis's work should be seen as belonging to what Ford described as the school of 'factual literature,' written by 'propagandists,' which I suggested were also represented by Bennett, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Lawrence, Tolstoy, and Wells, and placed in the *Review* against the school Ford favoured, that of 'imaginative literature' written by 'artists,' represented by Conrad, Ford, France, Hudson, Hunt, James, and Lee" (430). Further, "the canon Pound presents in the *Little Review* in 1917, eight years later, is more recognizably the canon of high modernism and, at this time, Lewis appears to be central to the favoured group" (430). Notably, Beasley advises that *Russomania* is not primarily a study of influence in spite of Turgenev, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy's reception among the aforementioned writers. Additionally, though she maintains that Russian modernism precedes British modernism, her study does not provide a Russian response to Russian modernism, as the British reception is focalized. Because her study instead addresses the Britain's synthesis of Russophile literature, *Russomania* leaves room for how Russian authors who wrote at the same time as Lewis and Pound—such as Andrey Bely and Marina Tsvetaeva—received and/or responded to the same works.

While we may associate Lewis in terms of Vorticism, *The English Review* held his travel stories, presenting an "avant-garde project to reform English culture and literature" in the May, June, and August 1909 issues of the periodical (181). Considered by Ford to be a propagandist, Lewis appeared as a sort of savior to him when they met for the first time. This meeting is chronicled as having occurred after Ford prayed to St. Anthony for "'a good contribution'" to appear for publication in his review (182). Upon this prayer, Lewis appeared. Yet, Ford mistakenly viewed Lewis as Russian. Because of this, Ford initially said to Lewis, "'I don't want any Tsar's diaries. I don't want any Russian revelations. I don't want to hear or smell any Slavs'" (182). Subsequently,

Beasley describes Lewis as having "'save[d]'" Ford by "providing good writing for the *Review*, rather than a new (avant-garde or modernist) kind of writing that will 'put English culture and Britain at the forefront of Europe'" (183). This point remains arguable given that Beasley refers to Lewis as a young modernist as if to distinguish him from Ford's generation in terms of literary style. Thus, a discussion, albeit brief, on Lewis's authorial maturation would be apt here in order to illustrate this quasi-contradiction in *Russomania*, if Beasley suggests that Lewis's writings in *The English Review* reveal few qualities we now consider to be characteristically "modernist."

Ford, however, did not view Lewis as a grand tour de force: "though [he] respected the quality of Lewis's writing, he did not see it as 'imaginative literature,' the type of writing that he thought would improve British culture, like James's" (183). Rather, Lewis's own thoughts of his writing reinforce Ford's categorization of him as a propagandist rather than an imaginative writer. Lewis voiced, "'What people want is me, not you. They want to see me. A Vortex. To liven them up. You and Conrad had the idea of concealing yourself when you wrote. I display myself all over the page. In every word'" (183). We see Vorticism again when Beasley makes an astute observation that dovetails with Tyrus Miller's assessment of "pure corporeal automatism" in modernist literature (426). Such "'obsessive depictions'" include Lewis's "'puppets,'" Djuna Barnes's "'performers,'" and Samuel Beckett's "'mirthless laughter'" (426). This concerns a recurring metaphor of "life as theatrical performance" in late modernism, which is seen through the vision of "depersonalization and [the] deauthentication of life in society" (426). Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) is used as an example to support her argument, as "his sources include Mikhail Farbman's *After Lenin* and Huntly Carter's *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*" (427). In tracing how Lewis exercises this metaphor throughout his corpus, Beasley notes that he had

> first used that metaphor to describe Russia nine years earlier. . . . Lewis never visited Russia, but between May 1917 and May 1918, while in France with the 330th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery, he and Pound collaborated on a series of what Lewis entitled "Letters from Petrograd," published as "Imaginary Letters" in the New York-based *Little Review*, where Pound was foreign editor. Lewis took on the persona of a British soldier and Russophile, William Bland Burn, stationed in Petrograd during the first months of 1917.

Further, we can first see how Lewis "introduced the characterization of Russia as a stage" in a late draft of Burn's first letter (427). Here, he writes, "Much occurs here of the strangest. The Russian factor is quite curious in this game. It

is really, much more than other countries, a theatre to itself, carrying on a play of quite a different description" (427).

Beasley then briefly details Lewis's much-discussed political history before reinforcing the notion that "Lewis valued Russian literature highly, particularly the work of Dostoyevsky, and in the first issue of *Blast* (1914) Russia had been presented to British artists as an example of a great 'Northern Art,' whose climate and landscape produced 'extraordinary acuity of feeling and intelligence'" (429). Burn (i.e., Lewis) writes of how "living in Russia 'is not like living among their books. Nor are the people around you as prepossessing as the fictitious nation. But where would art be if they were? . . . it is only the books that matter'" (429). In turn, Beasley leaves room to delve further into the Russophile influences in Lewis's work—since other writings aside from "Imaginary Letters" are fruitful in Russian references. In his fictional piece *Self Condemned* (1954), the words "Russia" and "Russian" appear almost fifty times, but this title—that mentions Tolstoy and holds a character referred to as "the Russian"—is not mentioned in *Russomania*.

Since Beasley's study is not about Lewis—or Ford or Pound, for that matter—it would be unfair to say any unexplored Lewisian paths are weaknesses of *Russomania*. Rather, the aforementioned places in *Russomania* that could be expanded in terms of Lewis's writing supports how there is space in Lewisian studies to further explore his portrayal of Russia throughout his corpus.

## Endnotes

1 Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 560 pages.

# *Automatic:* *Literary Modernism and the Politics of Reflex* by Timothy Wientzen

***Reviewed by Matthew Purvis, Independent Researcher***

Developed from his dissertation, *Automatic: Literary Modernism and the Politics of Reflex*[1] was authored by Timothy Wientzen, an associate professor of English Literature at Skidmore University. Wientzen's text is divided into five chapters bookended by an introduction and afterword. Opening with a genealogical account, the book offers a highly condensed history of the development of reflex and automaticity as a 'cognitive phenomenon' from Descartes until the twentieth century (19). It was in the late nineteenth century that reflex became something approaching a scientific paradigm. Stimulus could be comprehended as not merely physical but cultural, and the environment could be conceptualized as a form of engineering (20). Environment and milieu became privileged concepts for recognizing how individuals were formed and, Wientzen asserts, this found quick artistic translation.

Each subsequent chapter focuses on the work of a specific modernist author (D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Rebecca West, and Samuel Beckett), situating them within a range of their contemporaneous sociological and biological discourses. The book is staked around two basic claims. The first, that 'reflex plays a decisive role in configuring the political dimensions of literary modernism' (4); the second, that 'modernist literature mediated and responded to a twentieth-century public sphere understood to be increasingly geared toward automatic behaviors' (8).

Wientzen's general narrative tries to sort out how 'categories of automaticity' could function as part of a shared language across disciplines and fields, from avant-garde literature to the work of Pavlov and public relations theory, to the sociology of Marcel Mauss and Norbert Elias, among others (4). This concentration, he contends, allows his work to operate as something of a counter to bids to understand modernism in terms of the mind, particularly under the influence of psychoanalytic modeling. Instead, what he concentrates on is notions of the unconscious foreign to the Freudian.

According to Wientzen, some modernists treated habit as the baggage to be jettisoned for a proper understanding of modernity to emerge (34). Their attempts to think this through often 'founder' but in ways that can be 'generative' (40).

Modernist literature was often tied to the disruption of habit and rote perception by defamiliarization and other strategies (35). Such formal strategies are loosely contextualized in light of extended enfranchisement and the acceleration of technology which was met by intensified interest in human machinery. For artists and theorists alike, part of this interest included the re-evaluation of the limits and plausibility of concepts about liberal democracy and rationality.

In the paradox of a society that outwardly celebrated individualism while concentrating on uniformity, a stress on the environment meant that modern social life was conceived of as necessarily automatic, with environmental conditioning triumphing over rationalism. Everyday life could no longer be regarded as politically neutral because it was constantly being conditioned. Mass modernity and automaticity were identified (33). As a result, people appeared as automata in the grooves of culture. The appeal of the notion of reflex often had less to do with its value as science *per se*, than its political implications (27). For thinkers like Carl Schmitt, politics were being re-conceptualized not as battles between subjects but as the battle over the tools to construct them (27). This demanded new models, as ideology ceased to be a matter of consciousness and culture was promoted as a way of creating new models for being (29-30). With Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony and Edward Bernays' on propaganda, a stress on reflex and the control of unpredictable social factors and actors became pivotal to conceptualizations of the political.

By the turn of the twentieth-century, a materialist understanding of human beings as automatons had reached something approaching an orthodoxy, both in scientific and, to a lesser degree, in artistic circles (41). Vitalist philosophy emerged as a reaction against this dogmatism. It was Henri Bergson in philosophy and Georges Sorel in political thought who constructed a diagnostic vocabulary that would be called upon and adapted, by everyone from T.E. Hulme, to Lawrence, to Lewis. Bergson appealed to those who looked for 'diagnoses of the spiritual consequences on materialist thought' (47). Memory, time, intuition, and consciousness would be put forward as models intended to battle the 'spatialization' associated with scientific or rational intellection and concepts. Intuition in particular could be regarded as a form of thinking that inverts habit (49). From the vitalist matrix would come the idea that the authentic self is the one that does not think (55). In artistic terms, this meant the creation of characters in allotropic terms, the central concern of Wientzen's chapter on Lawrence and his relationship with the vitalist politics in light of the thought of Sorel. All of this sets the stage for Lewis.

Wientzen contends that it was the rejection of vitalism that ultimately proved more important for literary culture than its embrace (72). If, for Hulme, Bergson would be rejected for failing to come to terms with the distinction between the divine and life, for Lewis, vitalism remained only another humanism, and so only another mode of enslaving 'the intelligent to the affective nature'

(73). It is in part for this reason that Lewis holds a central place in *Automatic*. Lewis opens the first chapter, frames the final, and has one of his own. It is in his engagement with Lewis that Wientzen discovers the most direct address to his central concerns. Given his criticisms of some of the other writers discussed, Lewis also appears in discussions of their work.

Wientzen's discussion of Lewis is constructed primarily through readings of *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) and *The Childermass* (1928). Refusing to write him off as 'paranoid' (84), Wientzen commends Lewis's 'acute diagnosis of the problems that the politics of reflex posed' (75). He interprets him as regarding behaviorism as 'pernicious' but basically correct (82). Similarly, he sees his work as mirroring that of public relations theorists on the manipulation of the populace by invisible forces. Like them, Lewis's work is taken as part of a critique of liberal political thought when the advent of mass media seemed to reveal how fundamentally misguided it was (89). Mass media is conceptualized as a form of education and capitalism as an 'educationalist' state (83-84). Creatively, Wientzen contextualizes Lewis within the educationalist tendencies of the British state, such as the British Documentary Film Movement, John Grierson, and the advocacy for propaganda in order to keep democracy functional.

For Lewis, however, the democratizing tendencies of the mass media tended to collapse into their opposite (87). With the 'will' conditioned by media manipulation, democracy functioned merely as a system of habit and voting was degraded into a 'farce' with individual autonomy 'poisoned' by invisible forces (90). An illusory individualism, Lewis recognized, would be central to much of modernist art practice and would be exemplary in 'fashion', providing a faux uniqueness to what was only a flux of conditioning. This applied not only to style, but to opinion (92).

Hidden manipulators would be a central concern of Lewis. If there was no evident will at work in the mass culture, he would seek the 'hidden cables' that tied modernist art to the system of manipulation (87). But it would not be the exposure of interests behind the scenes of mass suggestion but their symptoms that would be his focus, as the emphasis on reflex becomes the problem itself (92, 97). This was fitting given that it was with aesthetics rather than cultural critique that the solution to the problem was seen to reside (93). With Lewis there is a great stress on surface, to the point of promoting uncertainty regarding the difference between humans and machines (98-99). Wientzen treats *The Childermass* as exemplary of Lewis' attempt to probe this problem. He reads the novel as a study of characters who are determined by a pseudo-environment and the contingent identities they adopt to suit the needs of relationships, leaving them to appear as clichés and poseurs. Without the depth of realist characters, they appear as the environment (97). Superficiality provided the best way to show the constitution of modernity.

Wientzen's text is engaging, focused, and straightforwardly written. Each chapter is structured around a conceptual précis derived from the authors' work, which is then applied to their literary works. It does not rely on extensive foreknowledge of the texts discussed, and the chapters flow and build logically from one to the next. The book also suggests some different avenues that could be fruitfully taken up in future studies. A study more rooted in the material culture of the artists than in the conceptual frameworks that they were reacting to and deploying could add many fascinating layers. It is one thing to discuss automaticity, but it would be quite another to document it in practice and flesh out a discursive form that would adequately describe literary historical development in accord with such a model.

The book also has a significant shortcoming in its reading of Lewis. While the author frequently alludes to the central importance of form, discussions of a formal variety are limited. In regard to Lewis, it is his lack of traditional realism and complex, often alienating way of dealing with stimulus that is highlighted (101). As Wientzen interprets it, modernist art may then serve as a sign that people can escape their conditioning (104). However, his analysis is primarily conceptual and thematic, with the aesthetic assumptions and experiments of the authors receiving short shrift. This is nowhere more evident than in the discussions of Lewis, for whom automaticity had consequences that were profoundly formal. Partially this is due to Wientzen not engaging with the polemics of *Men Without Art* or *Time and Western Man*, which complicated the artistic implications and possibilities of the automaton. It also bears mention that given Wientzen's concentration on affect, Lewis' adamant contention that the behaviorist model was almost perfectly comedic is curiously ignored.[2] In fact, the overwhelmingly comic aspect of automaticity is ignored. Lewis' concept of non-moral satire is particularly important for understanding this, both for his own approach to writing and interpretation of modernism broadly.[3]

This lack of comedic sensibility is even more pressing in terms of Wientzen's afterword on the 'predictable irrationalism' (173) of contemporary 'surveillance capitalism' as a 'realization of the behaviorist social agenda' (180), which calls to Lewis once again as it tries to apply its cumulative argument to an analysis of the last decade of electioneering in America, an account curiously devoid of the hilarity that it would have undoubtedly held for Lewis.

## Endnotes

1 Timothy Wientzen, *Automatic: Literary Modernism and the Politics of Reflex* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2021); 272 pages.

2 Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 351.

3 Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), 85-93.

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