WYNDHAM LEWIS: MODERNISM AND THE ANCIENT LIGHTS

by

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Abstract

The claim of this study is that Wyndham Lewis was both a 'revolutionary traditionalist' and a 'visionary modernist' and not, as he is commonly assumed to be, a 'reactionary modernist'. This study proposes that Lewis's work exhibits i) a Promethean drive to creation and freedom and a radical Modernist desire to realise an imaginative and ethical consciousness in the face of modern rationality, but that ii) this 'revolutionary' ambition is offset by a traditionalist resistance to grand teleological narratives, a classical insistence on humanity's limitations, and a preference for the 'ancient light' of eternity over Progress and time. The study relates this key tension in Lewis's oeuvre to an emergent metapolitical conflict between a resurgent, reactionary traditionalism on the one hand and a potentially diabolical techno-scientific futurism on the other (whose intellectual predecessors are Lewis's fellow Modernists like F.T. Marinetti and Ernst Jünger). The study concludes that Lewis's thought points to a 'third way' between these two metapolitical positions— one that ensures the inexorable march toward the singularity and a post-human future will be accomplished in tandem with nature and with the creative individual, rather than against him.

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'I will cease to be a revolutionary when this country is as mature as me'

- Vaslav Nijinsky

INTRODUCTION

In *The Vulgar Streak*, Wyndham Lewis describes what is 'vaguely discordant' about the face of the novel's protagonist, Vincent Penhale: 'its kind of beauty demanded… the accessories of a more picturesque epoch… he held it, his head, just a shade too much like a courtier out of a coloured plate in a history book' (1941b, p. 13). No matter how much April Mallow, the object of Vincent's desire, wishes to put his unorthodox views down to youth, she finds something 'fell short of the attractiveness of youthful rebellion in his remarks… something that made him seem- yes, *older'*.

The modern reader doubtless approaches Lewis with as much cautious beguilement as Ms. Mallow does Vincent. For even at the outset of Lewis's career, in *BLAST* (1914), that 'hugest and pinkest' of magazines (1984, p. 135), one senses something older manifest behind the infamous, bold majuscules. Such mystique is best captured by Fredric Jameson's remark that in Lewis we discover a 'modernism which is still extant and breathing, an archaic survival, like the antediluvian creatures of Conan Doyle's *Lost World'* (1979, p. 3). But much like the Hyperborean or Atlantis myths, Lewis's 'primordial status' (Rulo, 2012, p. 240) holds a futuristic as much as an historical allure, a fact perhaps accounting for the recent revival of Lewisian scholarship, given we live in a world increasingly poised between the alternate destinies of hypermodernity and Neo-feudalism (Faye, 2010; Jorjani, 2020). Lewis himself wrote that 'the artist goes back to the fish' with a memory to 'strike at the fundamental slime of creation (1986, p. 65) and in "The Physiognomy of Our Time" (1986, p. 77) Lewis describes this

Wyndham Lewis 'Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael' (1921). Lewis saw classicism as 'a progress backwards… to the great, central, and stable canons of artistic expression' (1989, p. 148).

condition as 'futuristic', as if the primordial were both a part of our deepest past and of our 'modernist future' (Foster, 2004, p. 143). T.S. Eliot, who himself refigured the Ancients and the Moderns in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", wrote in *The Egoist* that Lewis possessed 'the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man', the artist being 'more *primitive*, as well as more civilised, than his contemporaries' (1918, p. 106). In recent Lewisian criticism, such observations are most strongly reflected in David Lafferty's 2009 dissertation, *Wyndham Lewis's Kulturkampf*, which argues that Lewis's 'master-subject' was the 'sharp, politicised cultural division' between the 'Old and the New in the modern world' (2009, p. 1). Lafferty's positing of an oscillating dualism underpinning Lewis's thought builds upon the work of several scholars, principal among them being David Ayers, who postulated the core Lewisian dualism existed between an assumption of the self as 'almost nothing at all' and that the survival of Western Man is dependant upon the emboldening of this very self (1992, p. 3). Preceding Ayers was Hugh Kenner's 'Self / Not-Self' dichotomy (encapsulated by Arghol / Hanp), and Hugh Gordon Porteus's (1932) view that Lewis's 'twin combatants' who fight the same battle in different disguises were essentially 'Genius' and the 'Man of Action', and finally Geoffrey Wagner's (1957) delineation of a core Lewisian antagonism between intellectual authority and emotional anarchy. While Lafferty's work is the most compelling and evolved of these positions, this study will argue that the schism shaping Lewis's thought is in fact more radical, fundamental, and dare we say archetypal than even he allows.

The claim advanced, then, is that Lewis was, to use Vincent Sherry's term, a 'revolutionary traditionalist' (1983, p. 15). By means of unpacking this term at the outset, this study will argue that Lewis's work exhibits i) a Promethean drive to creation and freedom above all else ('there is no alternative to creation except the second-rate' (Lewis, 2010a, p. 204)), and a radical modernist desire to realise an imaginative and ethical consciousness in the face of modern rationality (Brighton, 1996, p. 144), but that ii) this

'revolutionary' ambition is offset by a traditionalist resistance to grand teleological narratives, a classical insistence upon humanity's necessary limitations, and a preference for the 'ancient light' of eternity over progress and time.[1]

The urgent significance of exploring this key tension in Lewis's thought stems from the fact it mirrors an emergent metapolitical conflict between a resurgent traditionalism on the one hand and a potentially diabolical techno-scientific futurism on the other (whose intellectual predecessors are Lewis's fellow Modernists like F.T. Marinetti and Ernst Jünger).[2] That intellectuals like Lewis have an impact upon this conflict is powerfully explored in Benjamin Teitelbaum's *War for Eternity* (2019) which describes how the traditionalism of political strategists like Steve Bannon (derived in his instance from Julius Evola and René Guénon) are influencing current world leaders to fight on behalf of eternity rather than to imagine a better future, to value 'stillness over progress' and bring our universe into alignment with 'what we were rather than what we dream we could become' (2019). Likewise, Gary Lachman's *The Return of Holy Russia* (2020) investigates Russia's return to an Orthodox culture, arguing that it neglects that nation's own "modernist" heritage as expressed through her Silver Age philosophers and Cosmist thinkers such as Nikolai Fedorov and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, both of whom attempted to 'convey a world… not yet ready for [us]' (Lachman, 2020, p. 393). This trend toward militating a return to traditionalism contrasts profoundly, however, with Jason Reza Jorjani's counter-declaration in *Prometheism* (2020, p. 1) of a 'revolutionary war against fatalism' and against this regression toward Olympian traditionalism. He calls instead for an active embrace of the Promethean archetype and a revival of its attendant modernist ambitions, grounding his

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[1] This schema owes a large debt to Paul Edwards' argument that Lewis's thought exhibits a tension between his modernist ambitions and his theological, metaphysical side as concerned with the relationship of a contingent humanity to a postulated transcendent Absolute (2000, pp. 4-5)

[2] Metapolitics being defined as as the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for the sake of long-term political gain.

research in the spirit of Futurists like Marinetti, Lewis's Italian counterpart, and indeed Ernst Jünger, both of whom will be revisited throughout this thesis.

This study maintains that Lewis is not only a unique reference point between these two burgeoning metapolitical positions, but that his 'revolutionary traditionalism' points to a third way between them. The Silver Age sage Nikolai Berdyaev could have been speaking of Lewis when he said the point of conservatism was not to prevent movement 'forward and upward,' but was instead a safeguard against a movement 'backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state.' (Berdyaev, quoted in Putin, 2013). One motive of this research, then, is to complicate the tired charge that Lewis was reactionary, a fascist or a conservative by emphasising the heavily caveated but nevertheless prophetic and revolutionary aspects of his work. Another incentive is that by articulating the 'third way' Lewis's work embodies between 'Modernism and the Ancient Lights', future Lewis scholars can better argue for his continued relevance and posit that he was, to use Fejió's term, no mere reactionary modernist but rather a 'visionary modernist' (Fejió, 1998, p. 7)

The remainder of this introduction will be dedicated to providing the contextualisation such bold claims demand. This is no easy task — as Marshall McLuhan said, not over-reverently, Lewis was the 'least provincial intelligence in England since St. Thomas More' (McLuhan, 1944). He embodied his own 'ideally free man', described in *Doom of Youth* (1932, p. 93) as the '*least* specialised… the *least* stereotyped… the least clamped into a system… in a word, the most individual'. Lewis was a novelist, a painter, a sculptor, a philosopher, a draughtsman, critic, politician, journalist, essayist, and pamphleteer, 'all rolled into one, like one of those portmanteau-men of the Italian Renaissance' (Lewis, 1967, p. 3). A man driven by force of mind (Yeats once commented in a letter to Sturge Moore on Lewis's intellectual passion, and the rarity of such passion), to read Lewis is to perform an act of 'mourning for high literature', yet without the solemnity such a line implies, for his work is also a 'manifesto of mind restoration and preparation, of

laughter and remembering' (Powe, 1987, p. 62), laughter being for Lewis the 'preserver' much more than 'the destroyer' (1964, p. 89). He produced well over a thousand paintings and drawings, wrote over forty books, and edited two magazines following *BLAST*. Like William Blake before him, however, Lewis's immunity to categorisation resulted in his talent being relatively neglected during his lifetime (Edwards, 2013). This is despite the fact that he was a harmonious polymath: the artist being balanced by the critic, and the philosopher being reinforced by the individual (Campbell, 1985).

Referring again to Lewis's 'revolutionary traditionalism', what most distinguished Lewis from his contemporaries was his unique view that the hellenic age held 'no monopoly of the qualities generally catalogued as "classical" (1929b, p. 255), and that this 'classical' could in fact be incorporated with the avant-garde. This insight vitalised Vorticism's contrast with the two defining contemporary views of humanity, namely the doctrine of the "Progressive Man" and the counter-reaction of the "Natural Man". H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw embodied the former, with Wells denying the Augustinian Christian view of man as born into original sin: man was perfectible, and with the aid of science, technology, rational education and a well-organised state, could realise a Utopia (a.k.a. Lewis's 'Human Age') (Burgess, 1967). Wells's fellow Fabian, Shaw, expressed this optimism quite differently, dreaming of a Superman (albeit one who dressed in 'Jaeger underclothing and ate nuts, instead of being a blond beast, its jaws dripping with human blood'. (Lewis, 1966, p. 64)), an artist-philosopher who would spearhead the Creative Evolution which he prophesied in *Back to Methuselah* as 'the religion of the twentieth century' (Shaw, 1921, p. xc). One of Lewis's greatest foes was this adulation of man-in-the-raw - 'Heaven preserve us from - your heaven!' (1956, p. 153) being his riposte to the utopians - but he did not reject their scientific, evolutionist doctrine from a regressive standpoint as, say, D.H. Lawrence, who pressed his hands on his solar plexus during a debate with Aldous Huxley and proclaimed 'I don't feel it *here*' (Lawrence, quoted in Huxley, 1936, p. 76). Lawrence

rejected modernisation and Progress because they were of the 'cerebral cortex'; Lewis rejected such things *because* of his cerebral cortex. He reserved his harshest satire for these wayward allies than for his more obvious adversaries; either because of their inability to recognise the dehumanising elements of their own belief systems (Lawrence's 'noble savage', for instance, can be seen as a mechanism of instinct) or because their retreat into the labyrinths of the self implied, at best, little intent in changing the external conditions of everyday life, as Lewis himself thought necessary (Schenker, 1992, p. 77).

It would have been more straightforward, perhaps, for Lewis to picturesquely offset from himself his peers, à la Joseph Conrad, 'hard and bright' as a fixed star (Burgess, 1967, p. 35).[3] But whereas Conrad's work appears as the final fruit of a bygone era, Lewis's work strives, in contradictory and often diabolical ways, to be a seed of the new. Besides a fleeting endorsement of Guénon's 'Classical Orient' (1927), Lewis, unlike the 'reactionary modernists' he is often grouped with, wastes little time on nostalgic traditionalism. We find no parallel in his work to Yeats' Celtic Ireland, Eliot's span of history prior to the "dissociation of sensibility", Pound's 'democratic aristocracy' of Twelfth Century Provence, or D. H. Lawrence's New Mexico (Ferrall, 2001, p. 137). Intriguingly, Lewis negatively identifies 'mass' culture with this very same 'primitive' and 'pre-modern', Horace Zagreus declaring in *The Apes of God* that 'jazz is the folk-music of the metropolitan mass - slum-peasant, machine-minder, - the heart-cry of the city-serf' (1981, p. 404). These factors, among others, led Rebecca Beasley to argue that Lewis represents an 'alternative' brand of modernism (Beasley, 2007); alternative both to the view that modernism is an outgrowth of modernity (Levin, 1966, Fokkema and Ibsch, 1988), and to the view that modernism is a

[3] This is not to overlook recent scholarship emphasising Conrad's modernist credentials, such as Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006, pp. 4-5) which depicts Conrad in terms of what she calls 'critical cosmopolitanism', arguing that his work critiques societal and cultural conditions in favour of advancing 'democratic individualism,' 'antifascism,' and 'anti-imperialism.'

reaction against modernity (Calinescu, 1987).[4] Kermode labels these two factions 'anti-traditionalist' and 'traditionalist modernisms', and while he himself classed Lewis as a 'traditionalist modernist' alongside Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Yeats (2000, p. 93-124), this thesis builds from Sherry's more radical and imaginative notion of 'revolutionary traditionalism' as the most fitting epitaph for Lewis. Sherry's definition is both more accurate than Kermode's and more precise than Beasley's, for although Lewis preferred the classical cultures of pre-modernity to liberal democracy he was compelled, in Pound's phrase, to 'make it new' (Pound, 1935). Lewis was, to quote Thomas Mann's reflections on revolutionary traditionalism, 'receptive toward the future, aristocratic and revolutionary at once' (Mann, 1942, pp. 90-91). Given Lewis's unique standing among the modernists, Eliot was justified to term his old friend the 'archetypal outsider', interestingly enough in a letter to Colin Wilson, author of *The Outsider* (1956), when Eliot queried Lewis's omission from that landmark exploration of the rebel as a genius (Eliot, quoted in Wilson, 1989, p. 83).[5]

This 'chronic oppositionalism' of Lewis's, to use Frederic Jameson's phrase (1979, p. 5), is a large part of why he became the first forgotten, and the last forgiven, of the Vorticist pioneers, England's only serious avant-garde movement of the early 20th century. That Lewis's reputation has been dormant for so long is of course unjust — as art critics like Brian Sewell argue, Pound contributed little but 'drivel and confusion', while Hulme in fact adopted much of his *Speculations* from Wilhelm Worringer's thesis *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), substituting 'geometric' for 'abstract' and, given that empathy only entered the English language in 1912, *einfühlung* for 'vital' (Sewell, 2011). Nevertheless, even if Vorticism as a movement was curtailed by the war, it had an enormous impact on what Roger Scruton termed the 'catholicity' of English intellectual life in the inter-war period,

[4] Beasley further substantiates her argument for Lewis as an 'alternative modernist' by showing how uneasily the arc of his career fits into the standard periodisation of modernism, and the extent to which he criticises other standard-bearers of modernism, including his fellow 'Men of 1914' (2007).

[5] Alongside Roy Campbell, Eliot was probably Lewis's most steadfast supporter throughout his career, and (despite some criticism) who Lewis also maintained the most respect for.

setting the stage for a post-war generation saturated in the Eliotic view of European culture; a generation who preferred Dante and Baudelaire to Tennyson and Browning, were steeped in the music of the Second Viennese School, enthralled to the Central European soul of Rilke, Kafka and Mahler, and educated by the existentialist translations of Walter Kaufmann (Scruton, 2018). Yet whereas Eliot became a symbol of this age, his *Four Quartets* (1941) blending the Anglican Christianity of England with a questioning search for a purified and modernist art, Vorticism remained a curious footnote, stranded as what Sewell termed a 'hapless rowing-boat between Cubism and Futurism, the Scylla and Charybdis of the day' (2011). While Sewell admits Lewis (and Edward Wadsworth) as the only accomplished exponents of Vorticism, his critique serves to remind us that to fixate on Lewis's early period would neglect the irony that his finest prose-writing actually came very late, when he was poor and blind. In assessing Lewis's 'revolutionary traditionalism', this thesis will thus pay particular attention to these works, for much like in Beethoven's final quartets, Lewis's late writing sees religious questions answered through a hard-won aesthetic discipline, and redemption achieved by the hard path of artistic truthfulness (Scruton, 2018). *The Human Age* (1955), a Boschian-triptych masterpiece, is particularly notable for achieving the extraordinary feat (especially for an English writer) of 'authentically and idiosyncratically' combining Swift and Milton (Kenner, 1958, p. 215).

Swift was incidentally one of the first to use the term 'modernism', in a 1737 letter to Alexander Pope, and by throwing his hat into the ring of his contemporary "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns", provided the groundwork for other satirists in his circle of the Scriblerians (Rulo, 2012, p. 12). E.W.F. Tomlin (1969, p. 20) brooks a further comparison between Lewis and Swift, arguing that Lewis's work will likewise endure long beyond his detractors for his satire acts as a 'great civilising force' (*Gulliver's Travels* being a satire of the new science of the Royal Society, as Lewis's is of twentieth-century utopianism). Satire is a defining element of Lewis's work, one which Lewis often treats as interchangeable

with art. Whereas contemporaries like James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson evoked the inner working of the minds of their central protagonists (Gąsiorek, 2015) - a reflection of professional psychologists making us aware of the layers of will under will under will - Lewis advocated the 'external method' of satire, thereby setting himself apart from the main line of Anglo-American modernist innovation and inviting comparison instead with the continental European, especially German, modernism (Beasley, 2007). Lewis was the 'personal-appearance writer' (1964, pp. 101-103), enjoying the surface of life, not merely for its own sake, but because it 'conceals the repulsive turbidness of the intestine' (1967, p. 9). This was something he could admittedly take to extremes, as Anthony Burgess noted: 'seeing a sardine on toast, [Lewis] acts as though commissioned to paint its portrait' (Burgess, 1967, p. 15). He could catch character just as well as Joyce, but with Lewis it was always the *outer* character.

Lewis's method represents a development from the classical satire of Swift in one regard, namely that his targets are more idiosyncratically chosen. Whereas Swift appealed to the eighteenth-century reader's faith in reason, Lewis's attacks are not in fact based on any common ground with the average reader. His painter's habit of looking at a human being as a mere *thing*, translated into the 'time' medium of fiction, produces a cold, cerebral humour at the expense of the stupid and clumsy human machine (Tomlin, 1969, p. 16); Lewis is not laughing *with* his readers, but *at* his creations (and, in places, at the readers too). The causticity stems from Lewis's lone recognition that, in spite of the tragic fact of war, modernity is really a *comic* thing, the seriousness we impute to it greatly intensifying the farce. It was left for Lewis to discover this, as it was left to Cervantes to discover that the consciousness of his time was comic. A world where the 'homicidal puppets' (Lewis, 1927, p. 88) of Hitler and Mussolini ('noisy ice-cream

Wyndham Lewis, Smiling Woman Ascending a Stair (1912)

agitator') are more perfect instruments of the *Zeitgeist* than Churchill or Roosevelt is indeed 'impossible' to deal with 'otherwise than satirically' (Campbell, 1985, p. 33). So whereas Lewis's avant-garde fellow, Marinetti, asks us to desire reification and worship at the altar of speed and Progress, Lewis instead 'invites us to laugh at it' (Foster, 2004, p. 148). Lewis writes 'Men are sometimes so palpably machines, their machination is so transparent, that they are *comic,* as we say' (1987, p. 95), in fact, 'all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things,* or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*' (1982, p. 158). Like the eponymous protagonist of his novel *Tarr* (2010a), then, Lewis exalts Life into a Comedy, on the principle that Art is the only thing worth the tragic impulse, and he argues in *A Soldier of Humour* that where 'Freud explains everything by *sex*, I explain everything by *laughter* (2004, p. 7). This can be said to render Lewis the last true Flaubertian, a man Lewis considered a 'Christian martyr' persecuted by the bourgeois (1964, p 86), and who saw great art as scientific and impersonal, a stylistic and grotesque realism. Lewis's effigies are galvanised by what Nietzsche's Zarathustra termed 'glittering scornful laughter' (Nietzsche, 1923, p. 282), eternal symbols who belong in the pantheon of Don Quixote, Tartuffe, Falstaff, Volpone or Gogol's walking nose. These 'essays in a new human mathematic' do not pander to the 'mighty vagueness of our hearts' (Lewis, 2003, p. 25; 2004, 149*),* but instead inhabit a world of ideas, a world flooded with 'brilliant intellectual daylight' (Campbell, 1985, p. 18). Despite Lewis's modernist ambition to remodel the world along new, zestful and creative lines, he balances this in "Theory of the External, the Classical, Approach in Art" (1989) by claiming there is a 'stiffening of Satire in everything good, of 'the grotesque,' which is the same thing', guarding against the tendency of his modernist fellows toward an unconscious and mechanistic romanticisation of the future's transformative potential.

It is interesting that in the early years of Lewis's "modernist ambitions", he was also the most satirical and cynical about man and and man's potential. From Vorticism and

BLAST up until 1937, this 'peculiar intellectuality' - as Eliot put it - made Lewis's work appear almost 'inhuman' (1918, p. 105). Dehumanised, however, may be a more precise word, Lewis being explicit that his chief desire was to engage with and depict the automatising tendencies of his time, rather than to valorise them. In "The New Egos" Lewis writes 'Dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World' (1914, p. 141) and the task of the modern artist was to make 'NEW BEINGS' (1914, p. 132) in order to demonstrate this. Lewis's satire must be understood as something more than a mere critique of cultural, spiritual, and social degeneration. It is not solely negative or excoriating, but rather a 'strategy for or technique to bring about regeneration in the midst of decadence' (Rulo, 2012, p. 8). Lewis writes 'the non-human outlook must be there . . . to correct our soft conceit' (Lewis, quoted in Foster, 2004 p. 146). This quote pinpoints the spirit of Lewis's anti-humanism, for it is not advocating a traditionalist-style subjection of man, or an insistence on a necessary separation of the human from the divine for the sake of the divine. Rather, Lewis seeks this separation to awaken man to his own intrinsic limitations, and to encourage him through art to transcend them - although, and this point is key, to not attempt transcendence by any 'inferior religions', subjective, or solipsistic means. As Ronald Paulson observed, what Lewis meant by "satire" was not too distinct therefore from T.E. Hulme's "classicism": its value is aesthetic and not moral, to be wielded as a 'critical, ironic, coolly surgical instrument' as contrasted to the Romantic poet's 'beautician-work on experience' (Paulson, 1971, p. xi). Lewis's Promethean injunction that the artist create 'NEW BEINGS' is often overlooked because of how robustly it is counterbalanced by what Toby Foshay and Paul Edwards justly describe as the postmodernity of Lewis's critique of modernism from within— his resistance to grand narratives, to false dreams of transcendence, and to the very idea of authenticity itself. As Beasley crisply put it, he was one of modernism's 'most innovative practitioners and simultaneously its most incisive critic' (Beasley, 2012, p. 135)

Those who view Lewis not just as reactionary but as a programmatic modernist with an authoritarian bent tend to view his inter-war polemics as a way of militating a culture which reinforces the above described separation. While such interpretations are often artificially imposed upon the original texts, it is nevertheless true that Lewis's inter-war writings do engage his ideas with the real life battlefield of politics more emphatically than his early modernist works or his later humanistic novels. Lewis's justification for this is described in *Time and Western Man* (1927): 'the world of ideas is the world that influences facts constantly… it is at least interesting to observe the politics of that abstract word, as it were - since what is its politics today will be ours tomorrow' (1993, p. 509). While Lewis expressed that he truly did 'believe in music, pictures, and books… that is a completely authentic obsession of mine', with the political meaning very little to him 'except in relation to those activities - which are the instruments of men, to make life bearable, and independent of systems just as much as science' (Lewis, 1963, p. 275), it is a regrettable fact that politics have come to weigh more heavily on Lewis's reputation than almost any other facet of his lifework. As with Vincent Penhale's features, Lewis's polemics demanded the understanding of a more 'picturesque epoch', one where writers were not approached with political labels and nobody was liable to approach Tolstoy as, say, a 'Christian Socialist' or Dostoevsky as a 'reactionary mystic' (1952, p. 38). But Lewis had the misfortunate to write in an era where politics were as inescapable as religion in Bunyan's day (1952, p. 147), and the writings which permanently scored his reputation were his 1930s tracts, especially *Hitler* (1931).[6] Lewis took to self-caveating 'in order to get at me, today, you have to get the politics off me first' (1937, p. 303); so 'be-politicked' had his name become. The unfortunate irony is that Lewis's politics were not his primary interest but an 'unlovely presence' (1984, p. 111) that grew out of the creative impulse, and was subordinate to it. Lewis's engagement

[6] Not to mention *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936), *Count Your Dead, They are Alive!* (1937), and the ill-titled tract *against* anti-semitism *The Jews: Are They Human?* (1939) - the latter title alludes to G. J. Renier's The English: Are They Human? (1931), intended by Lewis in the spirit of parody.

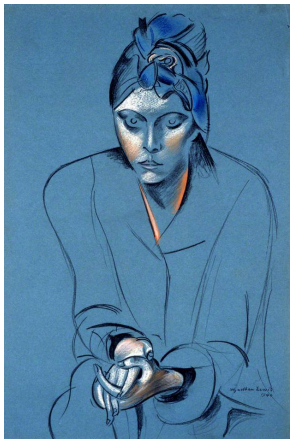
in politics sprang from a concern that a hyper-politicised world would be fatal to 'serious creative writing', leaving the author neither 'the will, the psychological incentive, the time, or *the peace'* to speculate in a manner conducive to the production of such works as Joyce's, *Ulysses* (1922), Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (1925), or James's *The Ambassadors* (1952, p. 198). George Orwell once claimed that Henry Miller's work demonstrated 'the impossibility of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape' (1957, pp. 187-88), but Lewis had proven himself up to the task, his debut novel *Tarr* (1918) being diagnosed by Rebecca West as a 'beautiful and serious work of art' (quoted in Lewis, 1937, p. 87), reminding one of Dostoevsky in how deeply it inquired about the soul.[7] But while *Tarr* (2010a) 'satirised the attempts of its titular protagonist' to avoid 'the kinds of relationality upon which Vorticism depended' (Waddell, 2012, p. 173), witnessing first-hand the atrocities of the Great War forced Lewis to confront directly with this frenzy of 'Party games and economic lunacies' (1984, p. 69). René Harding in *Self Condemned* (1954) painted the war as the historical 'mountain range' (Lewis, 1954, p. 89) that divided the world of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky from our present one; a 'mean, colourless and violent hubris' (1927, p. 19) that was 'not only absurd, but criminal' (1952, p. 148) and represented for Lewis the absolute antithesis of the culture his early art and polemics had fought for. To have remained aloof and merely to have 'cultivate[d] one's [artistic] garden' in the face of such a foe would be a betrayal of Lewis's modernist ambitions (Edwards, 2000, p. 6), even if he later criticised the Modernist movement for its failure to transform culture - a failure which the war was tragic evidence of (Gąsiorek, 2019, p. 19). He did not think that art was the place where revolutionary *action* itself should take place (unlike Marinetti, Lewis disavowed art as direct action (Edwards, 2013)), but his venture into politics exhibited a desire to embolden and to protect the aspects of contemporary civilisation that furthered the

[7] Rebecca Beasley notes how skilfully Lewis intertwines the tradition of the Künstlerroman (through Tarr's narrative) and the Romantic novel of disintegration (through Kreisler), but 'undermines' both (Beasley, 130)

Vorticist vision of 'renewed, zestful life' from those that led to 'atavistic fatalism and a repetition of mass slaughter' (Edwards, 2000, p. 6). Although oscillating and retrospectively naive in places, Lewis's polemics represent an intrepid effort to practically combine his revolutionary modernist ambitions with his classical view of a limited and contingent humanity.

With regard to the latter, Lewis took the Aristotelian view that 'man is a political animal' (Aristotle, 1998, 1253a1), writing 'man in society is an animal who is *governed',* or, put another way, that politics began 'the second we depart from the purely *animal* condition' (Lewis 1984, p. 63). He saw politics as something 'below morals… below reason… below even our normal impulses' (Lewis, 1951, p. 66). Yet Lewis concluded that 'without *something* there, where politicians are, there would be no great books, no Venus of Cyrene… no Raphaels or Titians, no great actors, no great philosophers or musicians or mathematicians. We do not owe all this to the politicians - we owe them nothing - but *without* them it could not exist' (1984, p. 64). Lewis's concern with politics lay not with politics-as-politics but with how to make the world conducive for the future Raphaels and Titians, his pamphleteering being a strategy of fortification to protect and to promote creative effort. More than the prophet or religious teacher, Lewis saw the artist-intellectual as representing the 'great unworldly element in the world', and it is he, not the political leader, who could provide the 'contrast of something remote and *different',* the very stuff of which 'all living (not mechanical) power is composed' (1926, p. 374). In both shaping yet transcending the political, Lewis's polemical thought again exhibits this intriguing tension between his quasi-utopian modernist ambitions, and a Platonic belief in an Absolute, something outside the physical world which has to be constantly referred to in order to make human life meaningful on the spiritual - 'not mechanical' - level (Edwards, 2000, pp. 4-5; Kozioł, 2002, p. 121).

1937 was mentioned earlier as the date when Lewis's writing ceased being 'inhuman,' recasting his modernist ambitions in the ancient lights and leaving the perilous field of politics behind (Edwards, 2013). The politics he did engage in from 1937 onwards reflected this shift, as he wrote pamphlets opposing anti-Semitism and Nazism, embraced cosmopolitanism in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) and launched a robust defence of democracy in *Anglosaxony: A League that Works* (1941a). Lewis claimed that he 'never varied' in what he considered *desirable,* only in what he 'regarded as feasible', his ambitions always being revolutionary and never 'reactionary' and with his adoption of conservatism throughout the inter-war period stemming from a belief that mass man could be incentivised by little else, let alone by the 'novel efforts' Lewis himself envisaged (1963, p. 274). This is true, but one particularly significant exception (and one we will revisit throughout this thesis) was Lewis's admittance of the 'natural' - notably the feminine - into his notion of the Absolute, as a ground for value rather than the negation against which positive values (the realm of 'genius') are thrown into relief (Edwards, 2000, p. 538).



Wyndham Lewis, The Artist's Wife, Froanna (1940)

This brief contextualising outline can only hint at how the extraordinary range of what Lewis 'laughingly' called his career (1963, p. 659). The depth and breadth of his work would perhaps have been better suited to the digital age, where one no longer expects the single defining work to be a writer's claim to posterity's regard— we now gauge the stature of a novelist by his ability to create an *oeuvre;* not to write a *Ulysses* or a *Waste Land,* but to construct, at least, a shelf (Burgess, 1967). Speaking on the B.B.C. just after World War Two, Geoffrey Grigson said: "If we could have a collected edition of Wyndham Lewis—a collecting of novels, stories, criticism, treatises, essays which have never been collected—we should understand, as perhaps we don't, his immense unity' (quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. IX). V. S. Pritchett counters that 'if one looks at the first and last sentences of any of his

paragraphs… the two will rarely be found to have any logical connection' (1964)— Pritchett overlooks that the mark of any good writer is his employment of dialectic, but more precisely, this dualism is central to the Vorticist aesthetic. This tension between an 'empathetic immersion in life' followed by an 'aesthetic abstraction from that experience…' helped maintain a certain rigour to Lewis's work, restraining it from 'submitting banally to life or withdrawing into a thin aesthetic spirituality' (Edwards, 2000, p. 201).

Like all great creative writers, then, to be understood Lewis needs to be read entire. His life's work may be summarised by the Greek word 'anabasis', which means 'to return by going back up' (Badiou, 2017). In a letter to Leonard Amster, his American publisher, at the end of his life, Lewis describes his ideological journey as such: 'I started out as what is called a "revolutionary"… I thought everything could be wiped out in a day, and rebuilt nearer to the hearts desire. I designed an entirely new London, for instance. I was not then acquainted with "ancient lights"' (1963, p. 274).

This acute self-summation will be reflected structurally and chronologically throughout this thesis, with Part One (Promethean Vorticism) investigating the former aspect in Lewis's early work through a discussion of his views on technology and the machine, and Part Two (Political Platonism) investigating the traditionalist aspect in his inter-war writings which detail the limitations of humanity from a classical perspective and negotiate their relation to a hypothesised transcendent Absolute. The conclusion will bring these two aspects neatly together with reference to Lewis's 1940/50's work, in particular his painting *Homage to Etty* (1942), where these dual (and duelling) essences of Lewis's thought reach a poetic yet open-ended conclusion.

A note on the thematic approach taken in This *Thesis*

The author believes that Lewis's value to the modern reader is not so much in a positively articulated vision, but rather that his contribution is as a critical discipline, a unique mode of perception. Often Lewis's meaning is elusive, mysterious as the communications penned by Mr. Zagreus of *The Apes Of God* — a good deal of work is left for the reader, 'but the result enables the reader to see (McLuhan, 1967, p. 64). It does not reduce Lewis' stature as a writer that he did not always provide answers, what is more important is that - like Norman Mailer after him - he was forever leaving us with 'higher and better questions' (Lennon, 2007). There can be no doubt as to the importance of Lewis's writings, but this is only half the story. As Eliot observed, Lewis is more like a 'magician' who 'compels our interest in himself… he is the most fascinating personality of our time rather than a novelist' (Eliot, 1918, p. 106).

The reference to Norman Mailer is not incidental. In a televised debate between Mailer and Lewis's friend Marshall McLuhan, McLuhan posited to Mailer that the present is only truly engaged with by the artist, whose purpose is to find new patterns within each emergent world, producing (as Lewis did) an avant-garde image that is terrifying to his contemporaries for he alone has the sensory awareness necessary to tell us what the world is really made of. But the artist *goes further*, Mailer contended, he must not merely state his observations, but make a decision as to whether this image is good or bad. It does not matter so much whether the artist finally is right or wrong in his judgement - what is essential is that his thought gives his audience a *subtler sense* of good and bad (Mailer, 1968). Mailer's point here is crucial for anyone seeking to understand the true value of Lewis's work. Whether his ideas were paradoxical, contradictory or politically Mephistophelian, his genius - his 'excess of individuality' - never failed to impart on the reader a *subtler* sense of hidden social and cultural logics (Waddell, 2015), especially those enabling the systematic oppression of the first-rate by the second-rate (Lewis, 1946).

By approaching Lewis from this perspective, this thesis seeks to build upon the firm ground established by excellent research into both Lewis's revolutionary and Utopian ambitions (Klein, 2010; Waddell, 2012), as well as his Platonism (Kozioł, 2002) and his theological concerns (Schenker, 1992). At an overarching level, this thesis is most indebted to Paul Edwards' *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000), both in terms of the tripartite structure that book maps onto Lewis's personal evolution (moving from the aesthetic rigour of his Vorticist years to a dawning realisation of the human), and for its turning the commonplace understanding of Lewis as an antagonist to the rest of Modernism into a serious dialectical movement (Park, 2001, p. 176). A final note, then, is that this thesis is one of exploration, consciously rejecting the temptation to try and reinsert Lewis's thought into conventional ideological binaries. Any faithful Lewis scholar is aware that behind his subject's dualisms and masks stands nothing but the intelligent authority of "The Enemy" himself (Chase, 1996, p. 144), stood - in text as in life - at the centre and on the outskirts of the "circus dirt-storm" that Osbert Sitwell said his presence 'invariably provoked' (1912, p. 33).

PART ONE

PROMETHEAN VORTICISM

In 1849, Wagner published a pamphlet entitled *The Artwork of the Future*, proposing that it was not enough for music to be merely contemporary or *zeitgenössisch,* it had to be ahead of itself, summoning from the future forms already lying there in embryo (Scruton, 2018). Lewis's early work can be appreciated in such a manner, particularly with the Vorticists, those 'first men of a Future that has not materialised', who 'moved too quickly for the world' (Lewis, 1937, p. 256). Apocalypse, in its original Greek sense (apokálypsis), means "revelation", and like Ernst Jünger - a German writer who also fought in World War One - Lewis experienced first-hand the apocalyptic dawn of a new era in which technology, functionality and work are the dominant categories (Blok, 2017; Jorjani, 2016). Yet while Lewis's peers present this change dramatically - take, for example, Jünger's *Storm Of Steel* (2004) - Lewis's own reflections on the war in *Blasting & Bombardiering* (1937) read instead like 'a gor-blimied police report' with a strange yoking of the 'Allo-allo-allo-what's-all-this-'ere to the intellectual and the exquisite painter' (Burgess, 1967). This is not to fault them; there is no inverse relation between his disarming style and the profundity of Lewis's ideas. As such, this chapter posits that Lewis's reflections upon the Promethean spirit of the technological age are as relevant today as they were when first recorded - be it those expressed through his early views on architecture, or his late-career mediations on the psychic mutations of mankind living in a 'magnetic city' of *The Human Age*. But this chapter will also demonstrate how, even during his most patently revolutionary period of thought, Lewis's grounding traditionalism enabled him to critique the reactionary excesses of Marinetti and Jünger and paint a road toward a nuanced and humanistic mediation of technology and his modernest revolutionary ambitions, as poignantly expressed in his late career paintings, particularly *Homage to Etty* (1942).

The understanding of technology in this chapter is taken from Heidegger (1977), who recognised modern technology in the broadest sense of unlimited technological 'enframing' and instrumentalisation; the apotheosis of a developmental teleology that arose out of Greek Philosophy and disintegrated into the diversified empirical sciences of modern Europe (Jorjani, 2013, p. 141), to be finally reintegrated by Cybernetics and the world of 'biological theatre', as William Burroughs termed it in *Nova Express* (2012). Lewis always had the sense that he worked 'at the beginning of a new epoch' (1921, p. 3), and the Vorticists did not only prefigure "biomorphic technologies" but were unique among their peers in contemplating a world 'complete without us' (Burstein, 2012, p. 258). This is relevant to Jorjani's assessment in *World State Of Emergency* (2017) that over the course of the next several decades, convergent advancements in technology will *reveal* something profound about human existence - biotechnology, robotics, virtual reality will all converge in mutually reinforcing ways that shatter the fundamental framework of our societies. McLuhan's PhD student, the novelist Sheila Watson, contended that a prime concern of Lewis's career was the role of the artist in a world being transformed by 'technological magic' (Watson, 1971, p. xvii), and throughout this chapter we will see how oracular this statement was — Lewis's work can only grow in meaningfulness as we approach the technological singularity's 'fiery forge', and an 'apocalyptic' transition into a post-human future, which (as per the central themes of this thesis) threatens either a return to traditionalism for the mass led by an Olympian 'elite', or a world-wide intensification of the techno-scientific 'Promethean' drive for 'creative innovation' and a 'visionary concern for the future' (Jorjani, 2020, pp. 11-21), as foreshadowed by the likes of Marinetti and Jünger. Lewis's work on technology and the machine has a unique relevance at this juncture, for while it is would be easy to read a purely Promethean impulse into the Vorticist desire for a new civilisation providing 'fresh eyes for people, and fresh souls to go with the eyes' (Lewis, 1950, p. 135), of a breaking free of origin so one can "invent [one]self properly" (1915 p. 91), one must also balance this

with Lewis's theories for the necessity for human imperfection which dialectically acted upon his modernist and utopian ambitions.

Such nuances in Lewis's approach to technology and automation are sadly overlooked and/or underplayed by critics. Most prominent among them is James Fox, who stated in his 2011 BBC documentary - while distastefully (by his own admission) presenting Lewis's bisected brain to camera replete with eerie music and sinister lighting - that Lewis ('not a nice man') envisioned a 'new society, governed by machines' and dreamt of a 'mechanical world order' (2011). It is true that Lewis saw technology as opposed to the 'functionalism of nature' (Edwards, 2000, p. 490), and thus had the potential to redefine human culture positively and creatively, but he actively distrusted any impulse which turned 'the honest pessimism of Schopenhauer into the insincere optimism of Bergson' (1927, p. 434). Lewis's defensive concern was that modernisation did not beget a mechanical dystopia; his early work's utilisation of metallic hues and abrupt angularities to depict the cold and indifferent universe of the early twentieth century, a world from which the edifices of tradition had been torn (see *Timon of Athens*), was not therefore an endorsement. Rather, his work strove to imagine a new ego that could withstand the shocks of the 'military-industrial, the modern-urban, and the mass-political' (Foster, 2004, p. 115), and forge these stimuli into a protective shield, convert them into a new hardened subject able to thrive on such shocks - the painting *Wyndham Lewis as Tyro* (1921) being a case in point. As we will see, this pre-empts by some decades Jünger's formulation of the individual figure 'the Anarch' and his maturing away from of the titanic figure of The Worker and toward favouring a return of the Gods (Benoist, 2008). If 'Promethean/titan' versus 'god' are a recapitulation of our central dialectic 'modernist

Wyndham Lewis as Tyro (1921).

ambitions' and 'ancient lights', then the ballast of Lewis's writings on technology is *Tarr's* tacit argument is that although the gods have 'abdicated' this world, men cannot and should not attempt to fill their place. Lewis writes: 'Deadness... is the first condition of art. The second is absence of soul, in the sentimental human sense' (2010a, p. 265). This qualifying phrase, as Schenker (1992) points out, is significant - Lewis is not against 'soul' per se, just man's vulgarisation of it.

The response to critics like Fox is that although Lewis did not yearn for a return to an imagined pre-technological idyll, like the 'natural men' did, this does not therefore 'mark [him] down for robothood', nor render him, *de facto,* an exponent of 'the philosophy of a full-blown automaton' (Lewis, 2003, p. 85). In *The Mysterious Mr. Bull* (1938) Lewis declared himself to have been a 'revolutionary' at the time of *The Caliph's Design* (1919), and to have been 'born, if ever a man was, for utopias, built upon a dazzlingly white and abstract ground' (1938, p. 229), but this was no totalitarian or programmatic plan for a 'new society', rather a benevolent impulse to get art 'out of the studio' and to instead improve the daily lives of the Everyman stuck within an oppressive, unimaginative and rationalistic society. But as to his fellow *artists*, Lewis warned them to not 'dangerously identify [themselves] with vulgarity as Picasso, for instance, inclines to identify himself with the appearance of Nature…. The world may, at any moment, take a turn and become less vulgar and stupid. The great artist must not miss this opportunity' (1914, p. 145). Lewis was thus an arch-defender of art's radicalism, but rejected its subjection to any trend: cultural, political or technological. He was in this respect in accord with Frankfurt School theorists such as Marcuse, who insisted that if a utopian society ever came into being, art would *still be* the site of opposition and resistance because it was above all committed to 'a beauty and truth antagonistic to those of reality' (Marcuse, quoted in Gąsiorek, Reeve-Tucker, Waddell, 2011, p. 221). It is precisely *this* distinction - and not a theocratic divide - which Lewis's polemics and his postulated Absolute, discussed in Part Two, sought to argue for — to

protect Art's separation from the amalgamating or 'enframing' power of the machine, of Progress, and ultimately from Heidegger's 'they-self' or *Das Man* (Heidegger, 1967).

The 'enframing' power of technology is a prevalent concept in this chapter, one defined by the German sociologist Hans Freyer in *Der Staat* as a 'secular and planetary process that turns humankind into a unified race (Freyer, 1926, p. 172). But it is Freyer's subsequent argument, that such technological progress and its unifying effects must be resisted by 'employing technology to national and conservative ends' (Pankakoski, 2019, p. 11) - and not, as Lewis envisioned, converted into 'a *will to invention,* to beauty, significance and so forth' (1997, p. 173) - which defines 'reactionary modernism', and helps explain this chapter's intent to wrest Lewis from it.

1.1 A tale of two modernisms

In Jeffrey Herf's landmark *Reactionary Modernism* (1984), Lewis is featured as England's own reactionary modernist alongside Germany's Ernst Jünger and Gottfried Benn, France's Malraux and Gide, and of course the *Duce* of Futurism himself, Marinetti. What unites these reactionaries in their modernism, according to Herf, is that each saw themselves as 'liberators of technology's slumbering power' and desired their nations to be *more* rather than less industrialised, associating technology with a new 'antibourgeois vitalism, masculine violence and eros, the will to power, and creativity rather than commercial parasitism' (Herf, 1981, pp. 12, 47). This may be defined as a *futural* relationship to the past, a rejection of the conservative ambivalence toward technology without succumbing to 'cowardice or materialism' (Herf, 1984, p. 68). Lewis also rejected 'commercial parasitism', and heralded creativity over bourgeois rationalism, but he did so in the name of Art and individualism rather than a sentimentalisation of the machine and the titanic. In this sense, he is both 'revolutionary' and 'traditionalist'.

To fully grasp the relevance of Herf's nevertheless provocative ideas, it is worth briefly outlining the context of 'reactionary modernism', particularly its antagonism to the worldview of the bourgeoisie as cultivated in the nineteenth century. The rise of the bourgeoisie followed the destruction of traditional values which began with the birth of Cartesian subjectivity and culminated finally in the French Revolution. The Revolution, however, did not lead to the rational "Enlightenment" that was envisioned. Enlightenment thinkers, especially the intellectuals of the atheistic *Culte de la Raison,* were naive in assuming that by 'dynamiting the edifices of centuries of tradition' they would reach a 'solid bedrock of rationality' - the Laws of Nature, Human Nature, etcetera - upon which to build a new order (Jorjani, 2017). Without such a foundation, the anti-traditional character of the Modern embrace of technology became indicative of a merely passive nihilism, attached to values that were no longer sustainable. Modernist forefathers of postmodernity, such as Nietzsche, instead demanded an 'active nihilism', a 'violent force of *destruction*' directed against these unsustainable values, a 'destruction that purifies humanity' (Gillespie 1995, p. 179). Whereas passive nihilism is viewed as a distorted will to power which cannot go 'beyond good and evil' and is, Nietzsche argues, 'full of morality that is not overcome' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 7) active nihilism instead aims at *overcoming* Enlightenment values (Weller, 2011, p. 44) and writing 'a new mythic history' (Jorjani, 2017). Nietzsche's modernism thus recognised nihilism as a path to aesthetics, and as such is the the genesis of modernism proper, for it not only uproots old values but regards the world as a totality and a work of art (Ohana, 1989, p. 752). This corroborates Edwards's observation that avant-garde modernists were pioneering not just the art, but also the life of the future (Edwards, 2000). This 'aestheticising of politics' conflated the previously autonomous spheres of art, morality and science, unravelling what Max Weber and Jurgen Habermas regarded as the defining characteristic of the Enlightenment (Ferrall, 2001).

Herf's ideas are expanded upon by Roger Griffin in his magnum opus *Modernism and Fascism* (2007). He writes: 'fascism, despite the connotations of regression, reaction and flight from modernity it retains for some academics, is to be regarded as an outstanding form of political modernism,' one that encapsulates a 'deadly serious attempt to realise an alternative logic, an alternative modernity and an alternative morality to those pursued by liberalism, socialism, or conservatism' (Griffin, 2007, p. 175). Building on the work of numerous scholars, Griffin arrives at a "maximalist" definition of modernism as 'a reaction (but a non-reactionary, revolutionary reaction) to Western "modernity"' (Griffin, 2008, p. 10). Modernism's 'common denominator' thus lies in the bid to achieve a sense of transcendent value and a meaning of purpose despite Western culture's progressive loss of a homogeneous value system and overarching cosmology (nomos) caused by the 'secularising and disembodying forces of modernisation' (Griffin, 2008, p. 15). This 'radical effort of regeneration', to reconquer transcendence amidst the ruins of cultural uniformity, can be divided into what Clarke (2013) terms *introvert* and *extrovert* modernist reactions. The introvert reaction is generally individualistic, in Griffin's expression an "epiphanic modernism" (the path of the artist) while the extrovert, socially transformative, epoch-inaugurating reaction is defined as "programmatic modernism" (Clarke, 2013; Griffin, 2008). It is arguably but a short step from "programmatic modernism" to fascism, the transcendent politics proposed by Arthur Moeller van den Bruck at the beginning of the Twentieth Century being not so different from Guillaume Faye's "Archaic Futurism" at its end (Clarke, 2013). Both are, in the phrase of Guy Debord, 'technically equipped archaism' (Debord, 2012). If the mission of the programmatic modernist is to start time anew, *Neuzeit* (Jorjani, 2017), then the epiphanic modernist's own 'rejection of modernity' occurs instead in the cultivation of moments in which there is *Aufbruch* (departure) of a purely inner, spiritual kind, with no recourse to revolutionary, epoch-making designs on 'creating a new world' (Griffin, 2008, pp. 14-5).

This programmatic/epiphanic division relates to Kermode's aforementioned delineation between traditionalist and anti-traditionalist modernisms, and is a useful tool to further explore the dialectic central to this thesis. *BLAST* is an important case in point; its style is outwardly programmatic, heralding England's transformation into an 'industrial island machine, pyramidal workshop' (1914, pp. 23-24), yet it is equally reverential to the timeless and the eternal, blessing the 'vast planetary abstract of the OCEAN', the 'wild MOUNTAIN RAILWAY from IDEA to IDEA, in the ancient Fair of LIFE' and upholding Shakespeare as 'the most catholic and subtle Englishman', prefiguring Lewis's late sympathy with Thomism as a bulwark against the 'second-rate' people who are 'thorough revolutionaries' (1914, pp. 26-41). Such overlooked nuances demonstrate why it is necessary to challenge the prevailing consensus that Lewis was purely a reactionary and programmatic modernist during his early career (Levenson, 1984; Rulo, 2012), and instead demonstrate that Lewis's work always incorporated characteristics of epiphanic modernism, paving the way for his clearer harmonising of these elements in the latter stages of his life.

1.2 Prometheist blueprints, transcendent ideals

Before the First World War, there was a growing dissatisfaction with contemporary culture and social structure among artists and intellectuals. Artists who wanted to create a new art were determined to effect a *tabula rasa,* their competitive enthusiasm characterised by Lewis as a 'big bloodless brawl, prior to the great [actual] bloodletting' (1937, p. 35). Foremost among these warring movements were the Futurists, led by F.T. Marinetti. The notebooks of the philosopher Anthony Ludovici provide a valuable insight into the contemporary intellectual reception of this burgeoning avant-garde, Ludovici describing the Futurists as having 'courage' and a 'healthy contempt of age an experience', diagnosing this as an 'aristocratic, not a democratic attitude' (1912, p. 119). He saw the Futurists as undermining the 'cult of experience' which 'took its origin in the unimaginative and

mechanical soul of the proletarian democrat who believed that men *who knew* could be *born'* (1912, p. 120). It is significant that Ludovici viewed the Futurist's ambitions as 'aristocratic' as contrasted to the 'democratic', un-Promethean, un-Faustian subservience of the proletariat toward their superiors, toward their 'gods' — significant in that this challenges the schema of traditionalists like Guénon (and today Aleksander Dugin) who likewise oppose liberal democracy, but view the Wests's Faustian ambitions as a revolt against the Gods that precipitates a descent into 'matter, sensuality, corporeality and mechanicalness' (Dugin, 2019, p. 39)— a 'degradation of Tradition' whose opposite is not a Promethean *ascendancy* but a monarchical *transcendency*. Lewis - and this is a prime example of the value this thesis ascribes to his work - forms a bridge between these two interlinked, opposing but increasingly relevant world-views. In *BLAST,* Lewis concurrently heralds the 'End of the Christian era' (quoted in Meyers, 1980, p. 64) and the dawn of man as *homo faber* (man the maker), but tempers this enthusiasm with an ambivalence toward this transition on a mass scale, as the diminutive abstractions of his early paintings such as *Labour Deputation: Marine* (1917) reveal. Lewis's eye is drawn to the flawed nature of this new man — we can see that Lewis's use of abstraction marked not just the distance between God and man, but the flaws in man's nature that might well have occasioned God's abandonment of him (Schenker, 1988, p. 60). While Lewis expresses a definite animus towards the 'mechanical men', he does not, à la Kermode's traditionalist modernists, advocate a return to the cultural conditions of pre-industrial societies. Lewis's chief adversary is revealed not to be materialism, but rather the 'time-philosophies' which grotesquely animate this mechanised

Wyndham Lewis "Labour Deputation: Marine" (1917)

mass by ‘pumping it full of time’ (Lewis, 1927, p. 170), artificially handing back to this technologised body the ‘stolen, aristocratical monopoly of personality which we call the “mind”’, dethroning the ego and replacing it with ‘democratic passions’ (1927, p. 318). As Ferrall pithily put it, for Lewis ‘mass culture is fine so long as it is for others’ (Ferall, 2004, p. 137)

The Futurist Manifesto appeared in *Le Figaro* in 1909, the same year Lewis published his first story *The “Pole”* in Ford Madox Ford’s *The English Review*. Futurism was inspired by the aesthetic insights of Picasso and Georges Braque, and as we have alluded to, their movement was defined by an enthusiasm for speed and a general celebration of the power of the machine. It was with ‘Caruso tenor-instincts of inflation’ (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1973, p. 240) that Marinetti trumpeted technology and the future - as he did for anything that was ‘anti-past’. In his anthology *British Art Since 1900* (1962), Sir John Rothenstein observes that Lewis was both attracted to and repelled by the Futurists. Like Ludovici, Lewis applauded in principle the ‘vivacity and high spirits’ of the Futurists (1915b, p. 41), their ‘challenge to the stars’ and their war on Time (albeit waged in the name of Speed, not eternity). Yet Lewis condemned their glorification of war as ‘the only hygiene of the world…’ (Marinetti, quoted in Rainey et al., 2009, p. 53), and their uncritical valorisation of teleological Progress, having the wit to see that the future Marinitti eulogised was, being distant, as sentimental as the Past - just as, in a later essay on architecture, "Plain Home-Builder: Where Is Your Vorticist?” (1989, p. 245), he referred to modernists as having a ‘sentimental passion’ for metal as opposed to wood. Moreover, by excluding the Past, one made the Present sentimental— the Past having acted as a ‘sponge’ to ‘absorb our melancholy’ (1914, p. 17). The Vortex, *BLAST* declared, was not afraid of the Past - it had merely forgotten its existence. Although the older Lewis declared himself a self-confessed ‘brave-new worldite’ (1989, p. 236), in 1913 he was at pains to reject the emphatic abstraction of Futurism (and, by implication, the early stages of Italian fascism), on the

grounds that its interpretation of the 'new' was neo-romantic and Bergsonian, leading to a religion of *force and "action"* at all costs. This came to be one of Lewis's most important lessons from the war, and he wrote the epithet 'Truth has no place in action' in his "Guns" catalogue (1969, p. 105). Faced with the 'flaccid feminine modernity', Marinetti sought a resolution in speed, in explosion, with nerves that 'demand war' and 'lust for danger' (Marinetti, 1972, pp. 67-46), whereas Lewis combined this revolutionary energy with a classical preference for eternity over velocity, declaring the vortex a 'great silent place' at the 'heart of the whirlpool' where 'all energy is concentrated' (Lewis, quoted in Goldring, 1943, p. 65)

Vorticism thus defined itself by eschewing the romantic tendencies of the Futurists, as it also broke with the Cubists' confinement of their art to traditional studio-bound subject matter, and the 'wandering' and 'slack' expressionism of Kandinsky (1915, p. 40). Pound's contention that The Futurists were merely 'an accelerated sort of impressionism' (Pound, quoted in Lewis, 1914, p. 154), mirrored Ludovici's eventual conclusion that their work exhibited a 'mere love of form and of technique' - the latter satirically asking whether the Futurists actually *did* love their station at Milan or tramcars as much as 'women and absinthe', in which case they really were 'no better than the 'vulgar realists of the past', exhibiting nothing but a 'vague love of the modern age of chaos… of the subjection of man, not by a single grandeur, but by a complex and multiplied littleness' (Ludovici, 1912, pp. 110-111). In his essay "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature", Marinetti refers to Art as 'the need to destroy and scatter oneself' (1972, p. 89) which is diametrically opposed to Lewis's proclamation 'I resist the process of melting… it's myself I want to conserve' (Lewis, 1937, p. 16). To clarify this distinction at the most fundamental philosophical level, Lewis's classicism aligns with the famous first thesis of Plato's *Parmenides* and its affirmation of the One, whereas Marinetti's romanticism veers closer to the second thesis and its affirmation of the Many, preferring plurality, atomism and the play of fragments not over unity, a thesis

regarded by Plato as a 'political heresy' (Dugin, 2019, p. 18; Meinwald, 1991). While Lewis does not oppose Marinetti's exploding of the old bourgeois idea of a non-technological subject (Foster, 2004, p. 115), at this fundamental level, the Platonist in Lewis then demands the subsequent reforging a new ego, a 'NEW BEING' (Lewis, 1914, p. 132). The Futurist's lack of such vision led Ludovici to warn that their manifesto sought to replace 'man with the machine, and society with the anarchist' (Ludovici, 1912, p. 120).[8]

In *Blasting & Bombardiering,* Lewis recalls a conversation with Marinetti: 'You Wops insist too much on the Machine. You're always on about these driving-belts, you are always exploding about internal combustion. We've had machines here in England for donkeys' years' (1937, p. 34). This critique originated in *BLAST's* "Melodrama of Modernity", where Lewis takes aim at Marinetti's 'Automobilism and Nietzsche stunt… he hammers away in the blatant mechanism of his Manifestos, at his *idee fixe* of Modernity' (1915, p. 143)… and in *The Caliph's Design:* 'their paean to machinery is really a worship of a Panhard racing-car' (1986, p. 57). Lewis perceives that such worship of the machine for machine's sake, like art for art's sake, takes 'all the useful Gods & Goddesses away', leaving the true artist with 'no role in the social machine, except that of an entertainer, or a businessman' (1986, p. 58). None of this is to say Lewis favoured a return to traditionalism; both he and Ezra Pound shared Guillaume Appollonaire's motto that "On ne peut pas porter partout avec soi le cadavre de son pere' (you cannot carry your father's corpse everywhere), but Futurism was, as Pound argued, a descendant of impressionism, a sort of 'accelerated impressionism' (Pound, 1914).

Marinetti's worship of the motor car is but the inverse of Lewis's *bête noire,* Bergson's steam-engine *Time God* (which we will revisit more comprehensively in Part Two). Marinetti saw the machine as a tool to free humanity from determinism, writing

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[8] Such anarchism was not at all at odds with Futurists' political affiliations - as Pier Paolo Pasolini observed, 'nothing is more anarchic than power. Power does what it wants'. (Pasolini, no date)

'velocity destroys the laws of gravity, renders the values of time and space subjective' (Marinetti, quoted in Rainey, Poggi & Wittman, 2009, pp. 224-29) — this is the same determinism Bergson identified with the Newtonian rationality and which his philosophy sought to transcend (Edwards, 2000, p. 104). Lewis's modernist ambitions were equally Promethean and revolutionary in desiring to free man from the historical determinism of Hegel and Spengler, free will being a prerequisite of meaningful action, but his belief in a Platonic Absolute led him to identify the naïveté in Bergson and Marinetti's approach, namely that they had fallen prey to Romanticism in their desire to make time a *subjective* duration and bundle of intensities (Dyal, 2014). Lewis - who resisted solipstic, psychologically-minded modernisms (Gąsiorek, 2004, p. 121) and instead based his creative work on a knowledge that was radically pragmatic - had the strength to grasp that *truth is what works,* and resultantly, where Futurist art was explosive, vorticist art was fixed. His external aesthetic drew on classicist claims about the need for limits, relied on metaphors that emphasised structure and building. (Gąsiorek, 2004, p. 121) 'I hate the movement that blurs lines' Lewis remarked to Marinetti (1937, p. 35), an aesthetic opinion that is philosophically traceable to Lewis's Platonic opposition to the Many, his antagonism toward the crowd, the unconscious, initially to the feminine, and above all to Bergsonian *durée*.

Whereas this thesis maintains Lewis was both a revolutionary and a traditionalist, those who read him as a mere conservative or reactionary could argue that Lewis's criticism of Futurism reveals his ideology to be uncomfortably close to Marinetti's countryman, Guiseppe Prezzolini, who recommended that the Fascist party 'consider Futurism as having already been absorbed for what it could provide as a stimulus' and to now 'repress it for whatever it may still possess that is revolutionary, anti-classical, and unruly' (Prezzolini, quoted in Rainey, Poggi & Wittman, 2009, p. 278). Hal Foster launches a similar critique, arguing that where Marxism sought to *overcome* technological self-alienation dialectically, the 'potentially fascist' impulse of Lewis's 'NEW BEINGS' sought instead to *elevate* this self-

alienation into an absolute value of its own (Foster, 2004, p. 114). This reading overlooks the alternative elements of Lewis's Modernism, particular as revealed through his architectural visions in *The Caliph's Design,* which were 'zestful, pluralistic and open' (Edwards, 1966, p. 75). In this work Lewis sought a 'formal beauty', one that aimed at life, 'full life' (1966, p. 16), stimulating and not depressing the imagination. As such, his architectural visions are an expression of an evolutionary force, inspiring man to personal genius — not a fascistic elevation of self-alienation, but an overcoming of alienation *without the loss of individuality*. Jorjani defines this precise ambition as a characteristic of 'Prometheist aesthetics' (2020, p. 8), a novel concept which befits Lewis's architectural visions much more clearly and profoundly than the ill-fitting 'reactionary modernist' interpretation. This distinction underlines that Lewis wanted to maximise creativity on the individual level, while simultaneously resisting the kind of atomised individualism of liberalism and progress as depicted in his painting *The Crowd* (1915). He understands that the only purpose of protecting the individual is to promote creativity, not atomisation. In this sense, Lewis is both anti-traditionalist, and anti-progressive.

The difference between reactionary modernism and this alternative modernism which harnesses the imagination and spirit toward a 'multiplication' rather than 'a reduction of forms' (Edwards, 1966, p. 74) can be seen most clearly by comparing *The Caliphs Design* to the Futurist's 'temple to Machinery', as realised at Lingotto in Turin. Based on Chiatonne's drawings and Sant'Elia's plans for La Citta Nuova, the Lingotto factory - which Lewis no doubt wished had remained in abstract (1986, p. 58) - finds structural precedent in the doctrines of Taylorism and Fordism, only transplanted to anti-democratic countries, where workers had only frail rights. It stood for, or was at least 'ntellectually linked to the machine, to man as a machine cog, to the suppression of the individual, to collectivity, discipline, submission to the state (Meades, 2016). Foster (2004) argues that Taylorist and Fordist doctrines marked the beginning of the integration of the human body and the

industrial machine, but while still at this point the two were still demarcated, the machine could only be a 'magnificent' extension of the body or a 'troubled' constriction of it, as Freud argued in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930). Giovanni Agnelli, the founder of Fiat (whose Futurism was hardly ideological but technophiliac), built at Lingotto a factory which could be said to be aesthetically 'magnificent', yet was certainly constrictive of human potentiality — functional to the point of frugality, its modernist ambitions were not to inspire creativity among its workers, rather to subject them to reductionist ends. Manufacture proceeded from street level and spiralled upwards, with the final stages of assembly being carried out on the fifth floor— the famous banked test track on its roof was practical as well as unique. It is not hard to join the dots when Lewis later described Mussolini as a politician whose only concern is 'the *usefulness* of things' (1927, p. 21*)*

The Lingotto Factory in Via Nizza, Turin. 'For everything that is rubbishy puerile in the Latin temperament machinery has come as an immense toy' (Lewis, 1989, p. 33)

Lewis always likened such enthusiasm for machinery in the arts with political enthusiasm for the industrialisation of the Soviet Union and its accompanying feats of social engineering—enthusiasm in which he did not share (Edwards, 2000). He saw the

functionality of such architecture as taking its cue from the insect world which 'carried [its] structure outside, as it were, and thrusts it upon the eye' (1929b, p. 251) and wrote: 'the danger, as it would appear at present […] is evidently that we should become overpowered by our creation, and become as mechanical as a tremendous *insect world*, all our awakened reason entirely disappeared' (1919, pp. 74-76).[9] In *The Caliphs' Design*, Lewis further argues: 'Supposing that we destroyed every vestige of animal and insect life on this planet, and substituted machines of our invention, under immediate human control, for this mass of mechanisms we had wiped out… what would be the guiding principle of these new masses?' - we would merely have substituted 'in fancy, an approximate human invention for every form of animate life' (1986, p. 77). Lewis accuses Marinetti's trumpeting of the machine as really, at bottom, an adulation for the universe of *beings* - the world of insects. This is why, although Lewis preferred the external to 'that which is fluid… 'dark', vague, 'mysterious' and stormy' (1929b, p. 255), Lingotto should not be confused with Lewis's own modernist ambitions. His blueprints for transforming the urban environment as laid out in *The Caliph's Design* envisaged a 'vibrant, zestful culture' (Edwards, 2000, p. 491) to replace the 'impure Present' (1915, p. 148) — they were not functional designs. In fact, by the 1930s, Lewis came to criticise the domestic actualisations of modernist ambitions - namely the 'approved chromium-plated', ultra-puritan interiors furnished with 'severe bookcases… steel chairs… aluminium beds' (1989, p. 245) - as something which disconnected the individual from any substantive sense of what purpose his home was to serve (Moore, 2016). Lewis opposed such 'robotic tastes' as 'super-Victorian' in their conviction that 'cleanliness is next to godliness' (1989, pp. 254-55), further evidence that Lewis was more authentically anti-conservative than even the most radical modernists. In opposing both this technocratic modernism and the reactionary, folksy traditionalism of Nazi architecture, Lewis envisioned

[9] Not that kinder comparisons exist in the Kingdom Animalia; as Lewis wrote to Pound, 'man with an aeroplane is still merely a bad bird' (1985, p. 31)

a third way, a naturalised and humanised modernism such as that expressed by Wells Coates. Lewis was complimentary towards Coates, whose constructions (such as the Lawn Road Flats) were designed to be responsive to the needs of the average man and woman. In mediating and modifying modernist principles for the common man, Coates' designs were much nearer both to the spirit of *The Caliph's Design*, and Lewis's later admittance of the feminine and the natural into his notion of the Absolute, as most potently expressed in his 1940s paintings and discussed at the end of Part Two.

We can substantiate this understanding further by turning to Gąsiorek's argument that Lewis saw that people escape 'entrapment in animality or mechanism through the *techne* of civilisation' (Gąsiorek 2007, p. 139). As Heidegger (1977) reminds us, the Greeks used the word *techne* for both art and technology, it being a form of *poiesis* or creative cultivation. Gąsiorek argues that abstract art, for Lewis, depended on a *poiesis* that produced new 'synthetic valuations… its designs were transfigurative, acting as visual analogies of the significant and intentionality that architecture was supposed to impose on the world' (Gąsiorek, 2007, p. 139). It is useful here to remember Heidegger's further differentiation between equipment and art, that equipment is so designed that its *createdness* - its work on an undefined material - disappears in its usefulness, whereas the work of art somehow preserves its createdness within itself. Great works of fine art tend not to have any practical use, so when we are confronted with them, *that they are created is thrust to the fore*. If the utilitarian architecture Futurism begot may be called equipment, than the architecture Lewis espoused was art - one that aimed endowing social existence with form and purpose, to work 'for formal beauty, significance and so forth, in the arrangement and aspect of life (Lewis 1919, p. 25). As he writes in a deleted chapter from *Time and Western Man* 'for a thing to have "meaning"… it must be alienated from its function: if it lapses into function, again, at once its meaning evaporates… before the work of art you must forget, as the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* was described as doing' (1993, p. 527). Yet, without the

obvious practical use, Lewis understands that he is painting 'pictures of a world that will never be seen anywhere but pictures' (1986, p. 160), and pondered that if they ever *were* constructed in the authoritarian fantasy of the *caliph,* it would still require 'at least a generation between these forms could mix with any but forms of their own kind, and assume the functions and duties of normal existence' (Lewis 1969, p. 119).[10] Again we find Lewis's modernist ambitions to be formulated in the least programmatic terms imaginable.

Yet Lewis's insistence on the limitations of man, that later expressed themselves in a political divide between 'puppets' and 'natures', are nevertheless present in even his most humanistic expressions of his modernist ambitions. Indeed, the Lewis of the 1930s declares that the average man should 'put himself humbly in the hands of a competent modernist designer' who '*ration[s]* him, very strictly indeed' in anything other than strict necessities, lest he get artistic ideas beyond himself (1989, p. 255). This relates to Lewis's earlier argument was that it was not for *his* sake that he sought these aesthetic improvements in the external world— a Rembrandt, he says, would make a new thing out of anything, 'windmills in Holland or industrial England… the best half-dozen artists of any country… do not depend on the objective world for their success or stimulus' (1986, p. 35). So, while it might seem programmatic when Lewis calls for a completely transfigured world, a city 'rebuilt on a more conscious pattern', a 'bright, new, enchanting capital' that would have been white like the 'sets for a movie about Babylon (designed, perhaps, by Le Corbusier)… [with] blueprints for hanging gardens between Blackfriars Bridge & Westminster' (1950, p. 155), we must remember his claim that it is not 'because I want to look at it. It is *you* who would look at it. It would be your spirit that would benefit by this exhilarating spectacle' (1986, p. 39). Lewis's ideal 'gay intellectual shell' is not functional but purely external in quality because 'the life of the Crowd, of the Plain Man, is external. He can live only through others and

[10] This might help explain why there no Vorticist 'Lingotto', but there is instead the legacy of Vorticist inspiration upon the work of David Bowie, Bryan Ferry and Captain Beefheart.

outside himself. Then he, in a sense, *is* the houses, the railings, the public statues, churches and roadhouses. His beauty and justification is in the superficial life of all that he *sees…'* (1919, p. 138). Lewis's artist would 'merely benefit' from the creation of such a shell because they would 'no longer [be] finding [themselves] in the position of a freak' (1986, p. 39). More pertinently, in *The Enemy of the Stars* Arghol views 'the Self' as a 'loathsome deformity' contracted from others like a disease; the artist, however, must live, so he 'must strike some sort of truce with this self; he must live among Hanps… he must come to a working arrangement with them' (Kenner, 1950, p. 27). If Lewis envisages a symbiotic relationship between the people and the artist - wherein the energy 'pent up' in the studio is released into the general life of the community, and from which this 'life outside' returns to 'enrich and invigorate the studio (1919, p. 11) - then improving the external world and hence the external man was a fundamental part of this virtuous cycle. Lewis's blueprints are hence devised 'from the standpoint of genius' (1932, p. 132), his principal concern being to prevent the transformation of the outside world into a 'vast Nursery' which would leave the artist with no place to take leave of 'the most oppressive and stuffy features of the traditional Family Circle' (1932, p. xxviii). The salient point here is that Lewis's classicism, his insistence on man's limits, is not for a conservative or reactionary purpose: it is in fact because he foresees that, if left unchecked, the unconscious romanticisation of the machine and 'abstract' modern man in Futurist and other modernist architecture leads straight back to the same tyranny and rigidity of the hierarchical societies of the past. It is only by adopting a humanistic and mediated modernism that the mass can be uplifted *and* the artist be kept free from them to fulfil his true creative function.

These themes were echoed in Lewis's exhibition of a portfolio of drawings that had been intended to illustrate an edition of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, in which Timon is depicted as a snapping puppet (1914). This portrays Lewis's view that man can rise above the animal by classical detachment and control, but that the majority of men will always

remain as puppets or automata (Bolton, 2011). This was why Tarr bemoaned the 'democracy of vitality' in Latin countries. If the best things of the earth are in everybody's 'mouths and nerves', then the artist has to go and find them in the crowd (Lewis, 2010a, p. 202). Tarr's ultimate conclusion is that he prefers the *artist* to be free, than for the crowd to be artists. Lewis's intuition that art (and hence the divine) should be distinct from the mass only reaches full fruition in *The Human Age* (1955), but we find seeds of its germination here in his earlier comments on technology and architecture's relationship to society. Lewis can appreciate the efficiency of a city built by a despot, but acknowledges in "The Machine" that 'this would be a city of *Ifs and Ans* [*sic*], for a rather vulgar streak somewhere in the mind of the despot would be enough to spoil the city' (Lewis, 1997, p. 172). And should this despot be a dilettante to boot (as is typically the case), then Lewis's vision in *The Caliph's Design* would be the opposite of his intention to make the world safe for modernist art, rather, it would be like France, where 'you never find a severe artist anywhere, because everyone is "artistic"' (2010a, p. 203). This is further elaborated upon in *The Mysterious Mr Bull* (1938), where although Lewis observes himself as 'intolerant of social compromise as it is possible to be… a man of the tabula rasa in both art and politics', and that he would gladly 'shatter it to bits' much of the old, bad tradition, he nevertheless questions *who* would then proceed to rebuild our society "nearer to the heart's desire"? Whose "heart's desire" would it be that would raise the New Jerusalem?' (1938, p. 230). By the time of *Anglosaxony* (1941a) - concurrent, by no coincidence, with his reconsideration of democracy - Lewis acknowledges that however much one may desire it, a tabula rasa is impossible: 'one cannot build from the base, all we can do is alter as we go along (much like architecture)…' (1941a, p. 72). Experience has taught Lewis that 'a community, tribe, or nation, grows like a tree' (a naturalism he returns to in paintings like *Homage to Etty*), with 'its past… as real as its present' and upon which 'radical changes' should not be imposed 'arbitrarily' (1941a, p. 72) — or, indeed, mechanistically.

Lewis's thinking on this matter reaches a fitting terminus in *Malign Fiesta* (1955) where the Fallen Angels live with Sammael (Lewis's Satan) in a suburb of Hell designed in a manner that the Caliph of his parables might have designed. Edwards writes 'only in league with a power semi-divine can the artist's designs be made real, but that (God not being interested in power) the power the artist allies himself to is likely to be that of the devil' (1986, p. 159). And so, at the end of his life, Lewis came to see Art as the inevitable victim of revolution and the machine, coerced by them into daring extremes which end in an 'insane zero', a 'clownish suicide' or a 'nihilistic nothingness' (1954, p. 33). If a humanistic and mediated modernism for the mass - but with the artist ultimately separated from it - was Lewis's ultimate solution to this problem, then this is an answer he forged in the fires of his 1915 painting, *The Crowd*— Lewis's most accomplished visual expression of the clash between his modernist ambitions and a classical insistence upon humanity's limits.

1.3 The Crowd revisited

Left: Wyndham Lewis, 'The Crowd' (1919). Top Right: Luigi Russolo, 'The Revolt' (1911). Bottom Left: Umberto Boccioni, 'The City Rises' (1910)

According to Normand, Lewis's *The Crowd* (1919) signalled the end of his artistic apprenticeship and the beginning of his life's work proper (Normand, 1992, p. 78). Of Lewis's early work, it is certainly the most profound encapsulation of the dialectic this thesis examines: Lewis effectively critiques the excesses of his avant-garde counterparts while in the same brush stroke declaring his own genuinely revolutionary and visionary modernism.

In this painting, Lewis takes the fragmented and frantic moving imagery of Futurist work and pointedly locked these forms into a static composition. It is static *but* dynamic, and hence a double-edged critique not only of Futurism but of the passivity of the left-wing Cubism. 'The Vorticist', *BLAST* proclaims, 'is at his maximum point of energy when stillest… The Vorticist is not the Slave of Commotion, but its Master' (1914, p. 153). Contrast this to Marinetti's 'we will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot' (1972, p. 33), and one sees how, through technique alone, Lewis demonstrates that Futurism is but 'the disgorging spray of a vortex with no drive behind it' (1915, p. 153). It was perhaps presumptuous of the Futurists to attempt to trap movement in painting (although Cezanne succeeded, in *The Murder* (1868)) — painting being a static medium, like architecture, but unlike cinema and unlike prose. This was not a trap Lewis fell into: his response to self-alienation was a rigorous 'self-preservation' against the oncoming forces of non-differentiation, a striving to keep intact the body ego which Marinetti instead desired 'an ecstatic release of' (Foster, 2004, p. 131).

The Crowd works on a deeper level than a departing riposte to Futurism, however. It also interweaves a commentary on contemporary culture itself, and a prophecy of its future direction. There are two elements to the painting we must therefore analyse: i) Lewis's conflicted views on revolution at the start of the twentieth century and ii) a prophetic insight into modern Urban society with its alienation, regulation and atomisation. As to the first element, we see how Lewis's work intentionally contrasts with Russolo's *The Revolt* (1911), which embodies Marinetti's positive view of the rioting crowd as purging the ossified

bourgeois class, the city being penetrated by the triumphant red wedge of 'eternal and omnipresent velocity' (Marinetti, quoted in Rainey, Poggi & Wittman, 2009: 51). Lewis comments on the almost carnal element of this in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) when he condemns such modernist art as 'a thirst to sexually invade everything—to violate any intimity' (1969, p. 210). The 'Revolutionary Simpletons' in Lewis's painting are generally seen as a satirical commentary upon such a crowd, the figures trapped within their respective blocks, unaware of the larger mechanism, in this case the city, which 'enframes' their utopian aspirations. This foreshadows Lewis's argument in *The Art of Being Ruled* that our lives have become 'attached to and involved with the revolution of our machines that we have grown to see and feel everything in evolutionary terms…' (1926, p. 11). This is followed by the Heidegger-esque critique that 'science is often described as the religion of industrialism… it is said to have provided man with a 'new world soul'… in its 'impersonality' and 'scientific attachment' it is an ideal cloak for human will' (1926, p. 34) . The politicisation of science into dogma, in tandem with industrialised Darwinism, has thus corrupted the masses, and led to the mythical conception of the 'Progressive Man' who views progress as an end in itself. A result of this loss of a 'unifying spiritual centre' (Lossky, 1951, p. 235) is the same "possession" that Dostoyevsky made graphic in *The Devils* (1916) - an alternative title of of which is indeed *The Possessed* - the same possession that Lewis depicts in the painting. The revolutionaries are shown to be puppets in the hands of atavistic forces, like those Andrei Bely depicts in *The Silver Dove* (2000), 'mediums of formless elements', swept along the tides of a Dionysian chaos wherein, ironically, they are not racing to the future but are 'slaves of the past', chained to it by 'malice, envy and revenge' - the very sentiments Lenin strove to evoke in Russia (Lachman, 2020, p. 310).

The flag bearers (carrying the red flag of socialism, centre, and the tricolour of French anarchism, bottom left) can be said to contrast therefore with the Vorticist's classical beliefs, an interpretation supported by Lewis's charge that Russolo's painting, with its 'sheer

unadulterated Belgian romance', was an 'identification with the crowd' and therefore a 'huge hypocrisy' (Lewis, 1915, p. 42). Lewis understands the mass as the 'enemy' of the artist, who instead 'favours solitude, conditions where silence and purity are possible' just as other men 'favour gregariousness where they shine and exist' (1915, p. 134). In *Time and Western Man* he states: 'the intellect works alone. But it is precisely this solitariness of thought, this prime condition for intellectual success, that is threatened by mystical mass-doctrine' (1927, p. 21). This is not to take Lewis as a condescending 'highbrow', or a 'Mister Ivory Tower' as he explains in *BLAST No. 2*: 'We are against the glorification of "the People," as we are against snobbery' (1915, p. 8). The retort to this, made by Ferrall, is that this irony is typical of reactionary modernists: they are 'elitist' in despising the emerging 'mass culture' but 'populist' in that they themselves dream of influencing a popular audience in the future—there is a certain romanticism in this, as Yeats would have it they were writing a 'cold and passionate' poem for a fisherman 'who does not exist' (1979, p. 385). Lewis's key insight, however, is that this 'purist revolutionary matter' was contaminated by the 'impure over-political matter with which it is carried along (1926, p. 351). Such 'matter' is bound up with revolution in Russolo's painting, uncritically depicting the moment 'a new phase of history devours an old one' (1926, p. 151) - Russolo take sides with the new, whether it is good or evil, true or false. The only important thing is what its form is, its *Gestalt,* which here is the Progress of radical objectification and materialisation swarming over the bourgeois aesthetic and intellectual stagnation of the nineteenth century ('active nihilism'). The drive of the crowd depicts this *Gestalt,* an inexorable process that Ernst Jünger says we can only accelerate the momentum of (2017). As Lewis noted a decade later, the notion of *revolution* is intimately associated with the notion of *progress* (1926, p. 27); a submission to Hegel's advancing logic of the dialectic and to its counterpart, the historical determinism and biological fatalism of Spengler's 'world-as history' - which, according to Lewis, 'so excellently fits in' with the fatalist and evolutionist requirements of orthodox 'revolutionary'

thought (1927b, p. xxxiv). Viewed as a critique of Russolo's work, *The Crowd* thus intimates a further Lewisian interpretation - one expressed in *The Old Gang and the New Gang* (1933) - that the 'Old' bourgeois class unwittingly moulds itself around the 'New', and in the process Progressivism becomes the new conservatism (this has diluted, by the time of *Doom of Youth* (1932), to Lewis's prescient predictions of dieting and 'slimming' fads to mimic youth). Lewis suggests, therefore, that adherence to the *Weltanschauung* of Progress has become the default attitude of the Mr. Everyman (Lafferty, 2009, p. 108).

Edwards (2000), however, argues that the dynamic colours of the painting (re-emboldened due to a recent cleaning) do not render it as anti-revolutionary as some critics, notably Normand (1992), suggest, and that Lewis in principle approves this swift anarchist effort. While the painting's colour scheme could equally be said to evoke the same vivid reds and yellows that one mentally pictures in *The Childermass* (1928), it is true that the city and figures here are rigid, which contrasts positively with Lewis's accusations elsewhere that mechanism has imposed the fashion of primitivism, not 'stiffened but melted life', and rendered the conditions of experience 'fluid and frothy' (McLuhan, 1967, p 192). The anarchist effort Lewis could be in principle approving is one that exchanges new and valuable values for outmoded ones, and it prefigures the delineation between the creative and destructive aspects of revolutionary ambitions he sought to separate in *The Art of Being Ruled,* to make 'certain things that have flown a grey and neutral flag… declare themselves as Ozman or Ahriman, the dark or the light' (1926, pp. 25-6).[11] While *The Crowd* is conventionally viewed as purely dystopian because of its dehumanised angularity, this can be seen as a positive (even Utopian) quality if contrasted with the folksy traditionalism that was to come to define Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and mark the true failure of Modernism to achieve the radial social transformation it intended. A similar reading would be to

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[11] This harks back to Zoroastrianism, and given Sammael's origins has important implications in *The Human Age,* as we shall later see.

interpret the *The Crowd* as a forerunner of H.R. Giger's 'darkly Promethean art', which depicts the overcoming of alienation both from machinery and from fellow humans - or humanoids - through an orgiastic communion of the new beings (Jorjani, 2020, p. 54). On a broader level, the ambivalence of *The Crowd* reflects Jean Ladriere's question as to whether the increasing inextricability of technological science from culture (seen here by the revolutionaries and the modern landscape blending) will mean 'an elaboration of new cultural forms', or a 'progressive disintegration' of culture by technicality (Ladriere, 1977, p. 18). That Lewis had the foresight to pose such a question at the beginning of the century when his contemporaries were either heralding the destruction of the machine or seeking a retreat from it is evidence indeed of his 'visionary modernism', and his genuinely Promethean nature. This is based on a more foundational understanding of the 'Promethean' as something broader than empowering man via technology, referring instead to the term's genesis in the Greek words for 'forethought and prevision' (Jorjani, 2020). As Stiegler writes, *Promethia* is the anticipation of the future, that is, of danger, foresight, prudence and and an essential disquiet: somebody who is *promethés* is someone who is worried in advance (1998, p. 202). 'Essential disquiet' is a perfect way to describe *The Crowd,* and it is also a fitting an epithet for much Lewis's work.

This leads into the second relevance of *The Crowd* to our argument, namely its prophetic commentary on the nature of modern Urban society. The power of the work is such that Fox, whose criticism of Lewis we previously noted, acknowledged that the painting was 'truly prophetic' (2011), just as Will Self (2017) commented that Lewis's work foreshadowed the problematic nature of filter bubbles and echo chambers long before the internet or social media. Returning to Normand's interpretation of the painting, we see how it reflects Heidegger's 'central but entirely tacit concern' in his techno-scientific writings that the enframing potential of technology endangers 'all historical peoples and the whole international world order' (Jorjani, 2013, p. 140). Lewis's modernist peers saw how the

creation of the 'Individual' signified the decomposition of the community, but Lewis is already thinking beyond this (or 'worrying in advance'), toward the point where the machine causes the decomposition of the Individual. *The Crowd* portrays the modern tragicomedy of separation: the more people are isolated, the more they resemble each other. The figures are not individuals being reduced to 'abstract beings' as Marx predicted In *The German Ideology* (1932), they are instead wholly *external*, hollowed out. They are not, then, individuals removed from their traditional exterior bonds, as liberalism intended, but entities whose social bonds have been reconstructed *precisely by* their being deprived of all substance (Tiqqun, 2000). This theme is addressed in *The Art of Being Ruled,* when Lewis discusses how modern society creates what Sorel terms 'artificial' bonds to cement people to each other, and this bond 'has to be of an exclusive nature… they have to cease to be conscious of all the other things they are, outside that particular category…. i.e. the 'Proletarian' should forget he is also a Catholic, or vice versa - a Catholic that he is a member of the working class' (1926, p. 151). This foreshadow's Dugin's argument that the idea behind liberalism was to "liberate" the individual from everything that was external to him - faith, tradition and authority (Dugin, 2012). Yet while these abstracting and alienating forces have made the figures in *The Crowd* more similar, it also makes them grow '*ideologically* more separatist, and conscious of the external quality of "nationality'" (Lewis, 1927, p. 78).[12] This is perhaps the primary curse of modernity for Lewis, one that fulfils Jünger's prediction that patriotism will too become 'subjected to the same processes of secularisation which affected the faith we envy today in the lives of martyrs' (Jünger, quoted in Hafkesbrink, 1951, p. 282). Dugin further states that when you get rid of the transcendent, you end up with a world that is entirely rational and material, leading to productivism and economism (which, when the individual is paramount, demands capitalism). The ultimate effect of eliminating the transcendent, however, is that you also

[12] *Doom of Youth* (1932) further supplements the further categorisations of sex, age, and race.

eliminate hierarchy. It is notable that while there are skyscraper heights in Lewis's painting, there is indeed no *hierarchy*.

To more tightly relate this point to our central argument, we can compare this analysis with Günther Anders' concept of 'Promethean Shame' which he defines, in an essay of the same name, as the 'shame when confronted by the humiliatingly high quality of fabricated things (*selbst-gemachen Dinge)*' (Anders, 2016, p. 30). Whereas "Promethean' typically refers to an attitude of defiance and of a wresting of autonomy from higher powers, the shame Anders invokes encompasses a dialectical reversal wherein the 'Prometheus of today' is indignant not at owing his existence to the gods, but rather at his being 'not made at all' and consequent inferiority to everything fabricated and technologically designed (Jorjani, 2020, p. 40). Today's "Promethean man", embryonically portrayed by the Revolutionaries of *The Crowd,* refuse to accept human inferiority but only by seeking to 'live as one with the gods' and attaining 'co-substantiality with technological instruments' (Anders, 2016, p. 40)— we recall here the domesticated modernist interior whose 'cleanliness' Lewis mocked as being 'next to godliness' (1989, pp. 254-55). This perversion of the Promethean impulse is reflected uncritically in Russolo's and Boccioni's paintings, but Lewis criticises such a phenomena: the figures blend with the purposiveness and designed-ness of the city around them, and it is *this* that is the fundamental quality (even motive) of their existence, rather than their respective exterior political or revolutionary causes. The fundamental point here, however, is that Lewis does not satirise such 'Promethean Shame' from a traditionalist standpoint but rather from one of 'Promethean Pride', from a valorisation of the 'self-made man' or artist-intellectual who stands apart from 'the crowd', as Arghol does from Hanp, or Tarr from his mechanistic opposite Kreisler. Such analysis leads critics such as Ishay Landa to claim that Lewis has nothing but 'disdain and aloofness' for the mass (Landa, 2018, p. 323). This is a fair point, but Landa's subsequent conclusion - that the intervention of programmatic modernism into mass culture was not to

glorify the mass in and of itself, rather its aim was to weaken the massified element and enhance the national one - must be questioned with relation to Lewis. This *is* an insightful comment by Landa, but one which he should have limited to the Futurists and other reactionary modernists. Emilio Gentile likewise traced the paternity of early Fascism to the Futurist campaign for a 'modernist nationalism' (Gentile, 1994), but this incentive *The Crowd* clearly condemns as 'romantic', war being for Lewis the ideal context for generating uncontrolled emotion and 'sententious elevation' (1915, p. 132). The crowd in Russolo and Boccioni's works are not therefore a uniting of Arghols, but a swarm of jumped-up Hanps.

In this significant way Lewis diverges from 'programmatic modernists' of the era, most revealingly Jünger, who saw the First World War as 'the *father* of all things… it hammered, chiseled and hardened us into what we are' (1922, p. 13), with the first generation who fought in the trenches being described as those for whom 'machines are not dead iron but rather an organ of power, which it dominates with cold reason and blood' (1925, p. 19). To clarify this analysis on an archetypal level, Jünger's identification of 'the Father' with war contrasts diametrically with Lewis's own Platonic schema (Koziol, 2002; Wilson, 1989). In his *Timaeus,* Plato describes a metaphysical system that resembles a 'platonic holy family' consisting of the father (the eternal forms) who begets the son (the model or 'offspring' of the father), and the mother (the receptacle) — in the context of this thesis, the father is Lewis's 'ancient lights', the son is his modernist or Promethean ambitions, and the mother is the undifferentiated, Bergsonian flux, the feminised, the Romantic and the primitive. This triadic mythology is termed an encylopedic logos by Jacques Derrida (quoted in Gudmarsdottir, 2016, p. 114), and radically reinterpreted by Dugin (2019) as The Light Logos (Apollo) The Dark Logos (Dionysus) and The Black Logos (Cybele) - with Plato, Aristotle and Democritus representative of each respectively. What is important at this juncture is to note how, in works like *The Crowd,* Lewis depicts the 'degraded' and 'falsified' revolution (1927, p. 5) as the *opposite* of the classical, a sign we

are living under the rule of the Black Logos, typified by a 'reign of temporality and materialism… the reign of quantity over quality, earthly over heavenly, mechanical over the organic… [and] the preponderance of individualist fragmentation, including the aesthetic norms of contemporary art' (Dugin, 2019, p. 8). These are all, as we have seen, symptoms which Lewis finds latent in the work of his avant-garde fellows. These revolutionaries in art 'sell themselves to Nature' and become a 'satisfied slave of Nature, as their fathers were of Formula… It never occurs to them that Nature is just as sterile a Tyrant' (1915, p. 129). It runs contrary to conventional scholarship for the programmatic modernists to be linked with 'the mother', the mysterious *Khôra* (χώρα) or the mythological 'chaos' (χάος) which Plato likened to a 'wet nurse' (Plato, 1943, 69) and Dugin sees as symbolic of a 'feminine, maternal regime' (Dugin, 2019, p. 2). But this is precisely the view Lewis takes of mass revolution, of merging with technology and of the 'world-as-history': it is sententious, retrogressive where it thinks it is progressive, and falling back on the 'meaner working of [the] senses' (1915, p. 129).

To once more presage our overall argument, toward the end of his life Lewis complicates this schema by admitting the feminine into his concept of the Absolute, by no coincidence during the same period in which he reconsiders democracy and redresses the balance of his modernist ambitions with the 'ancient lights'. But to understand this transition comprehensively, and the profound message it advances, we must first turn to Lewis's interpretation of nature and the machine as it was forged during his service in World War One.

1.4 Cantleman's Spring-Mate

Lewis's attitude toward nature and the machine is perhaps the most revealing iteration of the dialectic at the heart of this thesis, and what most distinguishes him both from the reactionary modernists and from the 'natural men' such as D.H. Lawrence and today's

Wyndham Lewis, Combat No. 2 & Combat No. 3 (1919)

traditionalists. Edwards (2000, p. 133) describes the grimy textures and mechanical figures in Lewis's war paintings, such as *Combat No. 2 & Combat No. 3 (1919)* as giving metaphorical force to the world of elemental passions they represent, the machine merely rendering more terrible and accessible to our dehumanised species the 'implacable violence of the insect world'. Unlike the Romantic view that man perverts Nature, Lewis's initial view holds more in common with Jünger's argument in *The Worker* (2017) that modern machinery has merely uncovered (and unleashed) Nature's latent and hostile elementary forces. Jünger speaks of war in the same sense we talk about nature: artillery barrages are a "storm of iron" *(Eisenhagel),* exploding shells a 'hurricane of fire' *(Feuerorkan),* airplanes drop bombs like a 'vulture' *(Aasvogel)* while circling over enemy troops who represent a 'swarm of bees'*(Bienenschwarm)* (Jünger, quoted in Herf, 1984, p.72).

Cantleman's Spring-Mate (1917), the best of Lewis's early stories, portrays nature in this same Darwinian-mechanistic fashion: 'The miraculous camouflage of Nature did not deceive this observer. He saw everywhere the gun-pits and the 'nests of death'. Each puff of green leaves he knows was in some way as harmful as the burst of a shell'. The story recounts the casual and brutal seduction of a country girl named Stella by an infantry officer on leave, and develops the theme of his sketch *A Young Soldier* (1916), which equates the 'profound and sinister business' of the soldier with the 'functional existence' of woman

(Ashford, 2013), and concludes that our vigorous world would 'certainly maul the Constellation of Hercules if that misguided organisation should come in our direction' (Lewis, 1916, p. 46). Lewis wrote *Cantleman* while training as a gunner, so critics are prone to colour their analysis in an autobiographical hue, but less spuriously we can read Cantleman himself as an amalgam of Tarr and Kreisler, the two central characters of *Tarr*. He possesses the ironic detachment of the former and the melodramatic nihilism of the latter (a nihilism inherited from nineteenth century pessimism, which Lewis elsewhere links with National Socialism). Cantleman is thus half conscious, half sensual/mechanical (Kenner, 1950).

> Cantleman put his arm around Stella's waist, and immediately experienced all the sensations that he had been divining in the creatures around him: the horse, the bird and the pig. The way in which Stella's hips stood out, the solid, blood-heated expanse on which his hand lay, had the amplitude and flatness of a mare… (Lewis, 1917, p.12).

The story describes how the creatures of nature in spring are busily copulating about the newly-enlisted Cantleman, and neither copulation nor death is for the bird or insect anything but a mechanically violent matter of course. Stella herself is 'contaminated with Nature's hostile power', which recalls the short story 'Bestre', where Lewis remarkably describes the colour of a woman's cheeks as having 'the feminine colouring of battle' (2004, p. 75), and the description in *Joint* of the female as an 'absurd magnet' (Joint, no date, p. 200). Cantleman is drugged by Stella's 'delicious appetites' (1917), and since an animal occupation is exacted of him as a soldier, he decides he may as well play the part fully.

Is Lewis hereby depicting the essential alienation of the artist from Darwinistic nature? If the metaphysical point of the story is this, then it seems odd that, at the age of

thirty-three, Lewis would not have been aware that this could come across as somewhat immature. Colin Wilson (1989) argues this very case, stating that *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* demonstrates the difference between Shaw's misanthropy and Lewis's misogyny, for while Shaw may make his Undershaft tell Cusins 'like most young men, you greatly overestimate the difference between one young woman and another' (1907), Shaw's work has a kind of jovial kindliness that *Cantleman* lacks. One response is that *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* exhibits a form of black humour similar to that of Louis-Ferdinand Céline in his first novel *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932). The semi-autobiographical Ferdinand walks through the Bois de Boulogne with Lola, and reflects 'nature is a frightening thing, even when it's solidly domesticated as in the Bois…. the trees are as vast and gentle and strong as dreams…. but Ferdinand distrusted them, as he distrusted Lola' (Céline, 1983, p. 45). The war has, for Ferdinand as for Cantleman, imparted a caustically cynical attitude toward women and nature: 'war went straight to their ovaries… they demanded heroes, if you weren't a hero, you had to pretend to be one'. This leads to the memorable remark 'horses are lucky, they're stuck with the war game but nobody expects them to be in favour of it. Enthusiasm, the bastard, was reserved for us!' (1983, p. 75). Ferdinand, however, was still enamoured by women's beauty: 'her body was a joy without end. I never wearied of exploring that foreign body' (1983, p. 44), yet there is scant evidence of this in Cantleman's psychology. Perhaps the root of this difference is, as Philip Head (1980) argues, that Céline wishes to leave 'nothing on the surface' and to 'die in music, not in reason', which is quite the opposite of Lewis's obsession with the ostensible dedication to the intellect (Head, 1980, p. 14). But even more blatant is Lewis's statement in *A Soldier of Humour* that his sense of humour is his 'philosopher's stone' and was 'perhaps the natural enemy of sex… "Sex" makes me yawn my head off… I boldly pit my major interest against the sex-appeal' (Lewis, 2004, p. 7)

Critics frequently point out that Cantleman's actions are self-defeating, that he remains convinced that by his contemptuous possession of Stella he is outwitting or avenging himself on nature. Yet by impregnating his 'Spring-Mate' he has of course contributed to the perpetuation of the race — either way, nature has achieved her end. Wilson argues that the story is emblematic of Lewis's character limitations: '[Lewis] is so obsessed by this notion that Nature is a confidence trick that he seems totally unaware of the lack of logic in punishing the girl for serving as an instrument of its duplicity. If there is irony in Lewis's view of Cantleman, it is not apparent' (1989, p. 93). The more charitable assessment, offered by Kenner, is that Lewis is showing how 'one's willed assessment of the emotional texture of things does not in fact liberate one from their logic' (1950, p. 52) - twice Cantleman creates his own poetic world under the impression of objectivity, twice he unawares plays his own ant-like role in nature's plans. As Kenner admits, this is a sympathetic interpretation, even if it is not too distinct from the theme Lewis shoehorns the reader into taking from the closing paragraph.

> And when he beat a German's brains out, it was with the same impartial malignity that he had displayed in the English night with his spring-mate. Only he considered there, too, that he was in some way outwitting Nature; he had no adequate realisation of the extent to which, evidently, the death of a Hun was to the advantage of the animal world. (Lewis, 1917)

Lewis is damning Cantleman, not for the morality of his actions (Wilson's critique stands in this sense), but for his lack of insight into their inherent futility. Edwards (2000) duly notes how this passage equivocates between vulgar John Bull type patriotism ('death of a hun…') and scientific Darwinism ('advantage of the animal world').

What is significant about *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* in terms of this thesis's argument is that many of Lewis's fellow 'reactionary modernists', most significantly Ernst Jünger, viewed the machine as capable of an assault upon the very biological fatalism Lewis opposes here, even emphasising the spiritual aspects of modern warfare to this end. In *Feuer und Blut* (1926, p. 81) Jünger states 'the machine… must be beautiful for him who loves life in all life's fullness and power', for it has the potential to be 'incorporated into what Nietzsche meant… when he attacked Darwinism' that 'life is not only a merciless struggle for survival but also possesses a will to higher and deeper goals'. It was owing to such comments that Jünger earned the moniker of the "anti-Remarque".[13] Lewis, meanwhile, spied the flaw in Jünger's reactionary attitude toward the machine and it's evolutionary power, as per *Cantleman's* underlying message that the more 'savage' one is, the more primitive or the more feminine, then the more mechanical one is. This is echoed in Lewis's later theoretical works such as *Paleface* (1929b, p. 250), which maintains that 'every age has been a machine age' and that an 'alaskan totem-pole, a Solomon Island canoe, a siamese or Indian temple, is *a machine*'. This is similar to Bernard Stiegler's innovative argument in *Technics and Time* (1998) that the 'Promethean Condition' is synonymous with the 'human condition' (1998, p. 199), that humans would not be humans without the technology that threatens to dehumanise them *and* give them the power to become superhuman. He claims that the prosthetic is fundamentally and existentially constitutive of being human, that the 'being of humankind is to be outside itself' (1998, p. 193). The machine cannot therefore be valorised by reactionary modernism as some new means to undermine materialism — it is a circular argument, in the same sense that Nietzsche's assault on the materialism of Darwin's 'struggle for existence' merely substitutes the struggle for power in its place. As Lewis writes: 'Darwin was just the generalizing research-student, Nietzsche was the philosopher of

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[13] Erich Marie Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front,* which depicted the horrors of war in pacifist terms, and was banned by the Nazis.

Darwinism' (1941a, p. 48). In Nietzsche, and by implication early Jünger, the surplus (or "creative") energy freed by the machine is not invested in art, which is where, according to Lewis, it should be invested. Rather, this surplus energy is reinvested in the very struggle that it exceeds (Lewis, 1926, p. 125). This is a prime example of Lewis's 'epiphanic' modernism, underlining the critical point that the modernist ambitions he held in his early period were never programmatic, but always geared toward a final commensuration with the 'ancient lights' of art and the transcendental.

Lewis's view of the relationship between the natural and the technological bears a further significant comparison with Marinetti. The Futurist manifesto depicts the baptism of a car crash that follows a joy ride, in quite graphic terms which appear to allude to a cloacal rebirth: the 'maternal ditch… full of muddy water' gulps down the vehicle the Futurists have capsized in, from which they are reborn in the 'very first dawn' as modern 'centaurs', half men, half machines (Marinetti, 1973, pp. 19-24). Marinetti goes on to envisage 'iron bridges that chain the hills together' and 'surgical trains that pierce the blue belly of the mountains' (quoted in Rainey et al., 2009, p. 94) — the most complete technologization of nature thus appears as a re-naturalisation, as a 'progress back to nature' (Huyssen, 1986:, p. 71). By contrast, *Cantleman's* cynicism underscores Lewis's later statement in *Blasting and Bombardiering* that he resists this very 'process of melting' (1937, p. 15) and consequently Vorticist art aims to conserve the self. The Futurist desire to technologise nature and to naturalise technology is one which instead sees art as synonymous with the 'need to destroy and scatter oneself' (Marinetti, 1972, p. 89). Lewis's thought is valuable for being revolutionary whilst simultaneously rejecting the anti-individualistic and inversely romantic radicalness of Marinetti and Jünger.

The young Lewis's suspicion of this impulse is the same as his suspicion of the feminine; namely, it threatens him with what he is not (Tickner, 1992). This implication interestingly bears even closer resemblance to the 'esoteric Futurism' of the Russian Cosmist

Nikolai Fedorov than to Marinetti's Italian version— Fedorov was, as George M. Young describes, uncharacteristically critical for a Russian of "feminine" values and "Damp Mother Earth", extolling the "masculine" virtues of 'rigor, duty, the task' over the 'eternal temptress, the desire for trivial consumer goods… worldly pleasure and comfort' (Young, quoted in Lachman, 2020, p. 297). In *The Return of Holy Russia* (2020) Gary Lachman argues that Fedorov's vision was 'little short of Promethean' in its desire to achieve mastery of nature by man, and is distinct from Marinetti's blending of the two. Lewis's vision is similar, except that importantly it is art - and not 'man' - which he opposes to nature.

This is an essential point to grasp, both in terms of defining Lewis's attitude toward nature and in the context of the wider study. Lewis views the gender of aesthetics as essentially masculine, Tarr proclaiming that 'God was man, the woman was a lower form of life. Everything started female and most so continued: a jellyfish diffuseness spread itself and gaped upon all the beds and bas-founds of everything: above a certain level sex disappeared, just as in highly-organised sensualism sex vanishes… everything beneath that line was female' (1990, pp. 313-314). Commenting on this passage, Fredric Jameson observes that while women, the organic, and sex itself are here all identified within a mythic, implicitly negative term, there is significantly no correlative celebration of the male principle. The peculiarity of Lewis's sexual ideology is that, while metaphysically misogynistic in numerous places, 'it is not for all that phallocentric' (1979, p. 97). Jameson continues: 'the positive term which logically corresponds to the negative one of the female principle is not the male, as in D H Lawrence, but rather art, which is not the place of a subject, masculine or otherwise, but rather impersonal and inhuman, or, as Lewis likes to say, "dead", spatial rather than temporal and existential' (1979, p. 97). So, whereas Marinetti's aim to 'technologise nature' relates to William James' view of Nature as 'essentially incomplete' and 'open to a growth that incorporates the effects of human intentions and creative acts' (Jorjani, 2013, p. xxxi), and whereas Fedorov seeks to impose the masculine upon

nature, Lewis's schema leaves no room for the masculine in and of itself for Art has subsumed it. Positing Art thus as the true opposite of the mechanical, primordial and the feminine allows Lewis to criticise both Nature and the 'masculine' attempts to master it from a still revolutionary and non-conservative standpoint.

This intriguing mix of a Promethean rejection of the natural order combined with a deep concern for the transcendental is nowhere more profoundly encapsulated than in Lewis's war paintings, particularly *A Battery Shelled* (1919), to which we will now turn.

1.5 A Battery Shelled

Lewis partook in two of the major battles in 1917, the Battle of Messines Ridge in June and the Third Battle of Ypres (aka Battle of Passchendaele) from September. Passchendaele was one of the most gruesome - and mechanised - battles ever to have taken place. As second lieutenant, Lewis the soldier spent much of his active time like Lewis the painter - a supremely detached observer - and it is infinitely to Lewis's credit (and our benefit) that he retained his critical and artistic eye in such extreme circumstance. As Durman and Munton note, 'even death could look like bad art' (1996) to Lewis, as we discover in his letter to Ezra Pound: 'I stumbled into one (of two) with his head blown off so that his neck[,] level with the collar of his tunic, reminded you of sheep in butchers' shops, or a French salon painting of a Moroccan headsman' (Materer, 1985, p. 105). While Lewis hated the sight of 'all these bodies', of the trenches lined with fresh corpses', he was capable of objectively storing such impressions 'to be pondered at a later time' (1967, p. 139).

Paul Ham (2013) provides one of the most objective accounts of the atrocities that took place at Passchendaele, describing soldiers drowning in shell-holes filled with liquid mud, and stretcher-parties wading through the morass and taking countless hours to bring in casualties. Paul Nash captured this 'evilly yellow' mud with the same artistic precision as Georges Rodenbach's pen had earlier captured the greys of nearby Bruges in *Bruges-La-Morte* (1892). Lewis - to whom the very name of this 'first-class quagmire', *Passchendaele*,

was appropriate to its 'splashiness and passion at once' (1937, p. 151) - was faced with the unique challenge of depicting this 'great bog' in the machine-derived, diagonal technique of Vorticism. Lewis's answer is to present the marshes as a muddy geometry, the diagonals and angularity of the early paintings recirculated in a liquified form, as the ground that has been opened up threatens to swallow the whole scene up. In Anders' essay *On Promethean Shame*, this 'ground' that opens to swallow one has a deeper significance as the ontological structure of the self and the world, and in relation to the Promethean, Jorjani argues this recalls not only the Titan's fall from heaven but also their imprisonment underground (Anders, 2016, p. 67; Jorjani, 2020). Lewis's depiction of the eruption of the ground into a primordial Vorticism could thus show that the soldiers on both sides of the fighting are mutually conspiring to literally 'unearth' the titanic spirt imprisoned beneath the veneer of the natural.

The most renowned of Lewis's war paintings is indeed *A Battery Shelled*, and it presents a culmination of the themes of nature and the machine in Lewis's early work. As Samuel Hynes wrote in *A War Imagined* (2011), the violence and the mechanism of pre-war experimental art had been validated by the manner of atrocities in the Great War. Not only validated, then, but made necessary, for 'if war was a nightmare in reality, then only a distorting, defamiliarizing technique could render it truthfully—art would have to become untrue but actual' (Hynes, 2011, p. 164). *The Times'* Clutton Brock (1920) noted that any such pictures are not just representations but *protests* - a point echoed by Wilfred Owen, who in his letters argued that the new art of war must offer new allegories for a new hell

Top: Ogata Korin's Waves around Matushima (no date); Bottom: Wyndham Lewis, A Battery Shelled (1919)

(1967). In *Rude Assignment,* Lewis echoes these sentiments, writing that although 'decidedly angular', the paintings in his 'Guns' collection 'were naturalistic' (1950, p. 137). This incorporation of conventional forms (as opposed to the pure abstraction of his pre-war paintings) did not indicate a reconciliation with the humanist ideals denounced by Hulme, a denouncement which Lewis of course shared. Rather, Lewis sees that the modern abstractionists have in a sense taken the role of the naturalists of the 19th century - promoting a romantic belief in the power of man to reshape the world or himself according

to his selfish preconceptions (Schenker 1988, p. 61) - a naivety the war exposed. That the abstract avant-garde style so easily ingratiated itself to the pre-war world no doubt heightened Lewis's suspicion of it as a means for genuine revolution. His stylistic adaptation of naturalism thus becomes, in itself, a rebuff and a corrective.

The principal reference point for *A Battery Shelled* was Ogata Korin's *Waves around Matushima* - a fact consistent with Vorticism's favouring of the East's classicism, that 'steady power of fundamental vision and impeccable taste' (Lewis, 1963, p. 86). Edwards refers to *A Battery Shelled* as enacting a 'savage-irony'… inverting the 'nature-mysticism' of Korin's screen into depicting the 'mechanical destructive energies with which the West has replaced nature' (2015, p. 29) - the same inversion that *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* made of Hardy's Wessex into one of anti-nature. In *The Caliph's Design,* Lewis directly parallels Korin's painting with the heavy artillery of the First World War, describing the latter as being 'of exactly the same importance, and in exactly the same category, as a wave on a screen by Korin…' (1919, p. 57).

The deeper into the painting we look, the more the characters come to resemble the insect figures of *The Crowd*: simplified fragments of anatomy, indistinguishable as personalities, their attempts to escape the bombardment forcing them into a twisted, mechanical ceremony. Normand (1992, p. 103) describes this effect as 'combining the grotesqueness of the "wild body" with the absurdity of the machine world… the essentially comic notions of ritualised acting, the repetitive dance of the primitive, instinctual self, and the collapsing of that self into the unthinking unanimity of the mass.' Normand likely refers to the essay "The Meaning of the Wild Body", where Lewis explains 'the root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person' and also explains that 'there is nothing that is animal (and we as bodies are animals) that is not absurd' (2004, p. 157). But like Lewis's pre-war paintings (e.g. *Two Mechanics* or *Two Figures*), *A Battery Shelled* does not provoke the 'genial laughter' that is

the subject of Bergson's treatise (Edwards, 2000: 75). The salient point is that Lewis's "comedy" at this time suggests a more 'troubled questioning of the conditions of life', one foreshadowing that late twentieth-century condition: the absurd. The figures in *A Battery Shelled* can be seen to anticipate Mailer's commentary on the urban life of the 1960's, with 'faces and bodies like gorged maggots on the dance floor, on the highway, in the city, in the stadium.. a host of chemical machines who swallow the product of chemical factories, aspirin, preservatives, stimulant, relaxant, and breathe out their chemical wastes into a polluted air' (2013, p. 427). What Mailer describes is a latter domestication of the processes Lewis depicts originating in *A Battery Shelled,* and the insidious sublimation of the merging of man and machine into biological and civilian forums - Heidegger's anticipation of biotechnology to assimilate all that is seemingly natural - and it unsettlingly echoes Lewis's description of the ghostly peons in *The Childermass* as 'the multitudes of personalities which God, having created, is unable to destroy' (1928, p. 37). None of this is to impose anti-technological themes onto Lewis's work. Lewis may not be an uncritical Futurist, but this does not therefore render him a reactionary. His nuanced position is that if we do not consciously embrace the Promethean archetype driving the technologisation of life - and redirect it toward positive and creative ends - then this inexorable process will lead to the kind of absurd and grotesque scenes which *A Battery Shelled* depicts.

Lewis was a war-insider, so it is all the more remarkable that - unlike say Paul Nash or Otto Dix - he eschews the final narrative closure of death in his wartime work. In *A Battery Shelled,* but also throughout Lewis's 'Guns' catalogue, he documents soldiers engaged in routine daily, mechanical, but essential activities. This has a deeper significance, one which we can grasp through reference to Ernst Jünger's figure of *Der Arbeiter* a.k.a. *The Worker* (2017).[14] In his series of seminars on Jünger, Heidegger argued that Jünger's

[14] In Jünger's writings, four great Figures appear successively, corresponding to the chronology of his life: they are the Soldier, the Worker, the Rebel, and the Anarch (Benoist, 2008)

'worker' is to be understood primarily as a metaphysical prototype which emerged from early twentieth century modernism (quoted in Palmier, 1969). This prototype is influenced by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and is a manifestation of the metaphysics which prepared the way for the new man, in just the same way as Lewis's vorticist or Marinetti's futurist. The moniker 'The Worker' is open to misinterpretation, for unlike Max Weber, Jünger did not regard work as an expression of the Protestant desire for acceptance by God, and unlike Marx, he did not consider it an expression of freedom or alienation (Ohana, 1989, p. 756). The task Jünger's 'worker' sets himself is the creation of the myth of the modern world, and is the ultimate embodiment of what we earlier referred to as 'active nihilism'. As with Lewis's figures in *A Battery Shelled*, Jünger presents *Der Arbeiter* as an active impersonality, a child of technology in service of 'total mobilisation', whose aim is to transform life into energy (Hafkesbrink, 1951) - what Spengler referred to as the 'working earth' (1928, p. 505). Jünger describes, and Lewis depicts, how this figure 'worked hard nihilistically for a few years with dynamite, and, dispensing with the most inconspicuous fig leaf, blew the nineteenth century — and ourselves — to smithereens' (Jünger, 1929). Jünger hereby echoes Marinetti's praise of the alchemical power of mechanised warfare to remodel "Homo Faber" as a Superman in the 'forge of Vulcan' (Jünger, 2004)

Like Lewis's stylistic blending of naturalism and abstraction, Jünger presents The Worker as abolishing the traditional opposition of nature/culture. Indeed, as Spengler writes 'nature becomes exhausted, the globe sacrificed to Faustian thinking in energies… the supreme transfiguration of enterprising work' (Spengler, 1928, p. 505). At the onset of war, the Soldier, though crouched in shell crates, 'still believed… that man was stronger than material. That proved to be an error' (Jünger, quoted in Benoist, 2008). What Lewis presents in *A Battery Shelled* is not only how technology transformed war into monotonous "work", but how the Soldier's chivalrous spirit died in Nash's 'evilly yellow' Flanders mud - a point Lewis emphasises in *Time and Western Man* by recalling more 'primitive combats' when

'individual intelligence, valour and endurance played a more conspicuous part in the result' (1927 p. 255). Jünger later reminisced that only fighter pilots, who combined soldierly virtue with technical skill, remain distinct from this process and he deemed them the 'knighthood of [the] war' (quoted in Loose, 1974, p. 25). For the most part, however, the war transformed the world into a vast workshop. Technology 'enframed' it, to give a rough English translation of Heidegger's "Gestell"— Gestell being the "essence" of technology, the very worldview that makes modern technological civilisation viable. Dugin interprets this as the end of a process that stretches back to the dawn of philosophical thought, from Heraclitus splitting phusis ('nature', or 'that which exists') from logos ('idea', the logos which orders the universe), but specifically from Plato placing ideas between man and existence and defining truth as that which corresponds between them (Dugin, 2017). This gave birth to alienation, to Heidegger's calculative thinking (1975), and finally to the development of technology. In losing sight of pure being, man pursued the path of nihilism, a tendency which reaches its zenith in the modern era, where technical development displaces Being and crowns 'nothingness'.

A Battery Shelled describes (but does not endorse) the view that to unite with work, to become an automaton, is perhaps *the only way* to physically survive this scenario of pure nothingness. This metaphor is suggested by the figures in the painting becoming more ant-like and less human in direct proportion to their proximity to the battlefield, as compared to the humanised figures, taking a brief respite from the arena. Closer inspection, however, reveals that some of the scurrying automata are carrying a wounded comrade into a dugout under the direction of an officer. One therefore questions whether these figures are fully *mechanical* as the popular analysis suggests, or whether they are being shown, more subtly, as humans in the process of being *mechanised*. Mechanised, in Jünger's terminology, from the Soldier to the Worker.

Stepping backwards through this interpretation reveals that Lewis is imparting a positive message through this mini-scene. Heidegger (1977) believed that at the moment of greatest risk - the moment of most 'nothingness' - *this* will be the moment which most reminds mankind of its existence, of its Being. Heidegger quotes the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin to great effect: 'where the danger lies, there also grows that which saves (1977, p. 42). While this concept is only embryonic in *A Battery Shelled,* it becomes a central - and final - one in Lewis's last major work, *Malign Fiesta* (1955). In that text, Sammael - the hypostasis of the Time Cult, and would-be creator of a Human Age projecting Lewis's core antipathies (the dissolution of the Subject; the fetishising of revolution; vulgarisation; populism; deceptive forms of democracy and the cult of the child)(Nath, 1996, p.164) - is defeated by God, Lewis's representation of the Absolute and the 'ancient lights'. This could be taken as proof that Lewis rejected his modernist ambitions in favour of the 'ancient lights', a notion which initially appears to align with Heidegger's famous posthumously published statement that 'only a god can save us now' (1993). Yet, as Jorjani argues (2013), the god (note: lower case g) which Heidegger may in fact be referring to is the very one driving the technological-scientific evolution itself: Prometheus. What Heidegger is saying, Jorjani claims, is that only by cultivating a Promethean ethos can we endure the impending technological singularity and successfully emerge on the other side of the 'end of history', into a post-historical, if not post-human, future. This strongly recalls Lewis's concluding words to *The Art of Being Ruled,* urging us toward 'higher human classifications, which, owing to scientific method, men could now attempt' (Lewis, 1926, p. 375). This further relates to Lewis's cultivation of a hardened subject able to thrive on the type of shocks Heidegger describes, reflecting what Foster describes as Lewis's effort to 'transvalue reification and regression alike'. One could therefore posit that the figures in *A Battery Shelled* are being 'saved' by introduction to this condition of a "new ego" or a "cold consciousness" (Foster, 2004, p. 172).

Such an interpretation, although complex, is supported by the intended narrative offered by *A Battery Shelled*. It challenges the traditional assumption that the foreground figures are Officers, representing the elite, aloof from the carnage (some critics even take the moustached figure for Lewis, detached, ruefully reflecting on his Vorticist 'enthusiasm' for mechanisation, as its real life manifestation is realised behind him). Edwards (2000, p. 213) points to how the proletarian 'old Bill' moustache of one of these figures precludes them from being officers - they are not superior to the shelling behind them, their detachment is due merely to their physical remove from it. It is more fitting to suggest that these three naturalistic figures (be they ex-miners, farmers or fisherman etcetera), represent the Soldier who only becomes 'one with technology' - becomes 'The Worker' - upon entering the battlefield. In *Cold Modernism,* Burstein is less convincing in arguing that Lewis's characters represent a fascist body that is 'wholly constructed… stand[ing] in for a previous incarnation, the völkish body, that of the people' (2012, p. 65). We have already discussed Stiegler's convincing claim that the prosthetic is actually a constitutive part of being human, as allied with Lewis's argument that the technical is primitive, but moreover Lewis's work resists as much as it documents the process Burstein describes, and *A Battery Shelled* is certainly no vindication of the 'destroy to create' ethos of reactionary modernism (Hafkesbrink, 1951), — the positively destructive force of technology which had been 'revealed' to Jünger and other German visionaries amidst the mechanized slaughter of the First World War (Evola, 2009). If Lewis's automata symbolised, for Jünger, the "day labourers of a better future…. [who] shattered the stiffened shell of a world so that spirit might revive" (Jünger, 1936, p. 49), then we should compare this to Lewis's passage in *Filibusters in Barbary:* 'some relief is necessary from the daily spectacle of those expiring Lions and Eagles, who obviously will never recover from the death-blows they dealt each other (foolish beasts and birds) from 1914-1918, and all the money they owe our dreary old chums the Bankers for that expensive encounter' (2013, p. 24).

It was on the point of spiritual revival that Heidegger wrote a letter to Jünger saying 'your essay *The Worker*… belongs in the phase of "active nihilism"' (quoted in Loose, 1974). Jünger's Worker - like Lewis's revolutionaries in *The Crowd* - are concerned with how to *form* the new world, not of knowing how to master it. The Soldier and the Worker have a common enemy: the bourgeois liberal, Nietzsche's 'last man', a representative of the empty yet ceaseless movement of the modern subject toward itself as a source of ultimate historical sense (Hemming, 2017). And just like the revolutionaries in *The Crowd,* the Worker aims to abolish the differences between the classes, between peace and war, between civilian and military, and establish Work (or Progress, in the revolutionaries' case) as the general law of a world that devotes itself entirely to efficiency and productivity, even in leisure and rest. The borderline between battlefield and civilisation narrows - as Jünger writes 'there is no longer any movement whatsoever—be it that of the homeworker at her sewing machine—without at least indirect use for the battlefield' (1993, p. 562). Here we see the embryo of the 'political modernism' Peter Fritzsche defined as part of the 'Nazi Modern' (1996), and Lutz Koepnik's argument that the aesthetics of fascism reflected its aspiration 'to subsume everything under the logic of a modern culture industry, hoping to crush the emancipatory substance of modern life through modern technologies themselves' (1999, p. 62). Like the revolutionaries of *The Crowd,* the Worker would not be fazed if ending bourgeois liberalism meant 'dividing the earth's surface into hexagons (like honeycombs) or covering it with termite hills' (1932, p. 252). This reminds us very specifically of the 'insect world' Lewis feared that the process of social rationalisation would bring about: it is a world that inverts Clausewitz's aphorism, making politics the continuation of war by other means. Or, as Henry Miller wrote, a world in which the new warfare has necessitated a new kind of peace: one within which the highest treason would 'not to be of service' (1959, p. 231). This dystopian scenario is one which runs contrary to the modernist ambitions of both Lewis and the programmatic modernists such as the early

Jünger and Marinetti, and in the case of both Lewis and Jünger, caused them to refocus their efforts away from the mass and toward the protection of the individual in the face of the 'enframing' of society by technology.

1.6 Beyond action and reactionaryism

We have seen then that the world depicted in Lewis's war painting is one of active nihilism's unlimited marshalling of potential energies. This transformation of the warring industrial 'into volcanic forges' - as identified by Jünger as the 'most striking sign of the dawn of the age of labor (1999, p. 126) - is a movement that is neither economic nor political, but quasi-mythological and Promethean. It saw Jünger conclude 'the age of gods is over, and we are entering the age of the titans' (Jünger, quoted in Hervier, 1995, p. 69). The figures in *A Battery Shelled* are the labourers of the Titans, having exerted "such a degree of pressure… that it blasted to dust an old order, a petrified form of life" (1938, p. 140). In the aftermath of the war, the historical manifestation of the collectivist revolution Jünger himself prophesied made him reconsider the errors of his philosophical speculations, bringing him closer to Lewis's 'revolutionary traditionalism'. Jünger realised the machine is not necessarily antagonistic to bourgeois values, rather it transforms the world only by globalising the desert (Benoist, 2008). This is the same recognition which Jünger's sibling, Friedrich George Jünger, came to when he observed in *The Failure of Technology* (1949) that capitalist mechanization and Marxist mechanization were brothers, and corresponds to the novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), where two rural brothers are threatened by the encroachment of the 'Chief Ranger', generally taken to symbolise Göring or Stalin. Like Lewis's criticism of Russolo's *The Revolt,* Jünger saw that salvation cannot be attained from an acceleration of the Zeitgeist but only through a rediscovery of inherited values. Jünger is no longer encouraged by nihilist destruction, and instead he calls to the fore anchors of stabilisation in

the chaos: 'stabilisers and new theologians who are keenly aware of the essential evils of the time in their deepest roots' (Jünger , 1939, p. 106).

Lewis likewise diagnosed that in postmodern times 'the problem of problems is to find anything of value intact and undiluted . . . to discover any foothold (however small) in the phenomenal chaos', to discover an 'unchanging criterion of continuous validity . . . some steadying principle' (Lewis 1954, p. 351, 1952, p. 149). This is why Jünger eventually dismissed Prometheus and the Titanic reign of the elemental as one leading straight to nihilism; it was, above all else, a revolt against the gods, and in World War Two, he made it his personal duty to counteract the effects of war's titanic destruction through acts of salvage and preservation, helping the French population and taking museums and cathedrals under his care.

If it is Marinetti's work which bears the most interesting parallels to Lewis's thought in the Vorticist period, then it is Jünger's trajectory which entails the most revealing parallels with Lewis's later writings. For during the inter-war period, with books such as *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis's own time-defying ethos also developed away from socially transformative ambitions, away from the imaginistic and energetic potential of technology, into one characterised by 'Apollonian control, stability and permanence' (Gąsiorek, 2007, p. 136), although underpinned by a consistent concern for the freedom of the individual, the artist-intellectual. This is a significant and lasting transition in Lewis's thought, but more immediately it was reflected by a wider modernist trend in the aftermath of the war that demanded a break with the now compromised pre-1914 experimental avant-garde. This was spearheaded by the Purists, who sought to restore regularity in a war-torn France post World War I (Ball, 1981). Lewis's *Nude I* represents - 'almost

Wyndham Lewis. Nude I (no date)

embarrassingly' (Edwards, 2000, p. 225) - the classical return to renewal and order.

The Purist movement was led by Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, who sought to create a permanent art out of the 'tropisms' derived from life's universal 'constants' (Ozenfant 1931, p. xii). This is in a sense a *mechanical* Platonism, emphasising an integration of 'machine-made products into a life whose order has been finally determined' (Edwards 2000, p. 228-229). Lewis scorned this typical modernist home as a 'doll's house for a sports-girl robot', and he exhorted its prospective residents to not also 'be made into a sedate athletic doll… into an exhibit, like a show-piece for a lecturer (1989, p. 255). Michel de Certeau's definitions of 'strategy' and 'tactics' - the former referring to different modes of institutional power, the latter to ways of outwitting the dominative exercise of this power - aptly describe, for Gąsiorek, Lewis's new mobilisation of the individual to resist this controlling vision (Certeau, quoted in Gąsiorek, 2007 p. 145). There is 'no better way', he argues, to show the transition in Lewis's thought from the 'strategy' of *The Caliph's Design* to the 'tactic' of "Plain Homebuilder: Where Is Your Vorticist?" (1989). The notion of d*esigned* space (namely urban life as a matter of planning and design), gives way to Lewis's favouring of *experienced* (dynamically unfolding) space which envisages the creation of autonomous human agents and the 'remaking of urban space as a cooperative venture' (Gąsiorek, 2007, p. 145).

This represents a far-reaching shift in Lewis's thought toward the role of *techne* and modernism in society. Lewis now finds creative potential in the disruption and unsettling of ordered space, and it is this - more than the 'city-by-fiat' dreams of *The Caliph's Design* - which grants the individual autonomy (always Lewis's goal). Lewis exemplifies this point with an interesting comparison of two quite different cities: 'Venice is built upon the most disadvantageous basis imaginable… Manhattan on the other hand depends for its existence upon the rock-mass beneath it… you may cite Venice as an example of man imposing his will upon the waters, but in fact the charm of Venice is the waters… With Manhattan the

rock underneath is of no importance except as a socket and platform' (1997, p. 172). Lewis reasons that Venice is 'a specimen of human art (typifying a human submission to the natural beauty of the waters)', whereas Manhattan is 'a specimen of the non-human', and by weighing up the two, he concludes 'Venice could be the better place, as the Venetian is the better man' (1997, p. 172).

Contrary, then, to his wartime depictions in *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* and *A Battery Shelled* of a hostile nature (certainly hostile to the individual) - a nature synonymous with mechanisation - Lewis now sees man's greatest achievements as those that accommodate modernist ambitions *with* nature. Lewis even praises Anglo-Saxon Democracy as a 'natural phenomenon', as compared to Fascism which is an 'artificial intellectualist contraption', Hitler's famous soil-doctrine being condemned as 'literature... and not the spontaneous flowering of the peasant-mind…' (1941a, p. 36).[15] Lewis's new reasoning stems not just from a revaluation of nature but a sharpened recognition of the limits of man, for whenever man has dominated nature - 'chopped through it or crawled over it, in the manner of Lilliput' - he has 'not been able to supply the appropriate *mind* for the super-body' (1997, p. 172). Here, then, the twin themes of this thesis intertwine. Critiquing the solipsistic excesses of Marinetti and Jünger, Lewis recognises the need for man's limitations, but proposes that Promethean and revolutionary ambitions can be better achieved *in tandem* with nature. This dovetails with Edwards' (2000, p. 544) conclusion that Lewis always 'regarded multiplicity as a condition of value: a monstrous Unity simply swallowed everything up into its nothingness'. Lewis summarises: 'projecting his tortuous, not yet oppressive, geometry, out upon the chaotic superstructures, being methodic where he can, in the teeth of natural disorder, man is seen at his best. He then produces something of intellectual as well as

[15] As Nietzsche reportedly said, 'extreme positions are not exchanged for moderate positions, but for contrary positions (Nietzsche, no date).

emotional value, which the unadulterated stark geometry of the Machine-Age precludes' (1997, p. 172).

We can conclude, then, that Lewis's most overarching insight on technology is that machines have nothing to do with one's state of civilisation or barbarism. One may put the soul of a god in the body of a man, but the reverse can never be achieved— nor should it be attempted, as Lewis argues in *Time and Western Man:* 'we do not need to 'magnify' a human body, but only to intensify that consciousness of a separated and transcendent life' (1927, p. 434) - intensify being the key word, and the purpose of art and architecture. This recognition of an essential gap between human and divine that can never (and should never) be scaled means that the best the machine can ever do is *enlarge* man 'as you enlarge a small photograph… [but] will it ever be allowed to enlarge, or to multiply, anything *good?'* (1997: 173). Lewis argues that *even if* the machine reproduced the Mona Lisa, or Van Gogh's *Postman* ten thousand times over, then it still is doubtful as to whether this would be an improvement. One may recall a similar theme being explored in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), when the bone an ape has used as a bludgeon is tossed high in the air and metaphorically transforms, four million years later, into an orbital satellite. McLuhan terms this as Lewis's neoplatonism: art is of the spirit, the divine spark in man and art *alone* can impregnate the world with some quality of reality (2011). The destiny of the Machine, meanwhile, is synonymous only with the 'destiny of the Mass' (1972, p. 173) — a view quite literally borne out by recent developments, where technology has the power to genetically engineer high IQ individuals but not to create, ex nihilo, a great artist or creative force (Jorjani, 2020).

In *Self Condemned,* René Harding condemns the 'vortex of slush and nonsense… [the] pillage and carnage we have glorified as "history"'- a 'ten-millenia-long' conspiracy - and proposes the principal figures in the history book should not be the 'plumed and beribboned directors of homicide' but instead the heroic creators, composers of the 'story of

ideas, theory of the state, evolution of law, scientific discoveries, literature, art, philosophy, the theatre, and so on…these are the proper subjects of history' (1954, p. 351, pp. 84-5). It was to protect and enhance this 'creative minority' from the mass that Lewis relinquished his revolutionary ambitions of *The Caliph's Design* and instead sought to become the 'mythographer of the age' (Watson, 1971, p. xix). But his transformative ambitions did not entirely dissipate, merely transmuted, and the blueprints of *The Caliph's Design* are replaced by a desire to structure a 'politics of the intellect' to answer a question 'more important' than that of the Machine— 'the *natural* fashion in which all human societies grow and flower and perish… can a conscious or mechanical canon be imposed upon them?' (1997, p. 173). This is the question Lewis's inter-war polemics sought to resolve, and which we will now turn to in Part Two.

Before doing so, it is worth delving just a little further into this point, for it is an appropriate one upon which to summarise this chapter's findings. Lewis claimed he had 'always held that ideally it would be more satisfactory if this limitation of natural growth—the waxing and flourishing plant-status—could give place with us to something more' - yes, the machine grants society power, but with the machine comes barbarity, and so Lewis argues (significantly) that there has to be a way to design 'a *will to invention,* to beauty, significance and so forth' (1997, p. 173). In his rejection of the barbarity of the machine (whose destructive potential Marinetti and Jünger hailed), whilst simultaneously embracing this will to invention, Lewis restates his credentials as a 'revolutionary' or 'Promethean' traditionalist, rather than a reactionary modernist. When Heidegger (1977) observed that we are being 'enframed' or 'set up' (*Gestell*), by the increasingly autonomous nature of technology, and the subsequent annihilation posed to humanity by "devices" such as those Lewis depicts in *A Battery Shelled*, what he meant was that we are at the mercy of the spectre of the Promethean (Jorjani, 2020). This led to the aforementioned *Der Spiegel* quote 'only a god can save us now' (1966). We discussed how reactionary modernists such as

Jünger eventually turned against Prometheus and the titans, going on to theorise a passive resistance on an individualistic basis (the Anarch), Jünger himself becoming a literal-esoteric rather than a political thinker (Pankakoski, 2019). But Lewis, whose commitment to modernism ran deeper *because* of, and not despite, his criticism of it, remained faithful throughout his life to the Promethean creative drive that inspired his modernist ambitions. It is only that, as expressed via his comments on Venice, on Wells Coates, and on creating 'NEW BEINGS' - he suggests that we *change our relationship* to the Promethean/Faustian archetype so that we are consciously, rather than unconsciously, embracing this force that animates Western culture. By repurposing technology away from the destruction of World War One, and toward a more amenable, mediated usage in aiding our 'will to invention… significance… [and] beauty' (1997, p. 173), we can craft a super-human(e) and creative future — one which simultaneously avoids the 'barbarity' of the reactionary modernists and the 'society of robots', and the anti-creative devolution to a pre-industrial primitive 'tabula rasa' society, which Lewis later scorned as the 'desideratum of the marxist' (1936, p. 31). As a 'revolutionary traditionalist', we can thus conclude that Lewis's writing on technology argues not for an exorcism of Prometheist or modernist ambitions, but a conscious redirection of them toward a more 'constructive and empowering possession' (Jorjani, 2020b, p. 20).

PART TWO

POLITICAL PLATONISM

Lewis's famous oppositions have been the origin for many critical forays into his oeuvre, Hugh Gordon Porteus being the first to observe that 'in all of Mr. Lewis' work it is possible to trace the presence of a conflict between two opposing principles' (Porteus, 1932, p. 19). Moving on from the focus in Part One on Lewis's Modernist and Promethean ambitions, as revealed through his discussions on technology and the modern world, we must now turn to inter-war writings which detail the limitations of humanity from a classical perspective and negotiate their relation to a hypothesised transcendent Absolute. These vexing, vexed and often philosophically revelatory polemics were labelled by Josephine Park as the 'greatest impediment' to constructing a coherent Lewisian vision (2001, p. 175). Nevertheless, it is in an impediment we will seek to overcome before bringing the two halves of this thesis together in our conclusion.

To first establish some brief context: the notoriety Lewis had established in 1914 as leader of the Vorticists and as editor of *BLAST* had dissipated by the time the war ended, and it was time for him to rebuild from scratch. This was a task he approached with idealism and modesty, Meyers writing that Lewis felt 'his early success had perhaps been achieved too easily' and that there was still a great deal for him to learn (1980, p. 102). Lewis spent the first half of the 1920's living in near-isolation, reevaluating his ideas from the comfort of the British Museum Reading Room. He intended to do justice to his recognition that for art to be authentic in the modern age, it had to first be grounded in the most rigorous analysis of all the ideologies that now 'almost unnoticed' saturated the mind (Lafferty, 1992, Edwards, 2015). By 1925 the fruits of his labour were complete: a 'megalomastodonic masterwork' entitled *The Man of The World* (Meyers, 1980, p. 105). This tome exhaustively cleared the ground of contemporary culture to prepare at last for the possibility of authentic art, and formed a bridge between Lewis's early celebration of the

divided self - 'contradict yourself… in order to live, you must remain broken up' (1917, p. 6) - and his increasingly robust resistance to that 'swift obliteration of the person which is going on' (McLuhan, 1946, pp. 201-202), predicated on an idea of the self as our only "terra firma" in a 'boiling and shifting world' (Lewis, 1927, p. 5). The work ran to over 800 pages (O'Keeffe, 2000), 'longer than War & Peace, Ulysses & so on' (Lewis, quoted in Materer, 1985, p. 144). Alas it was deemed 'too expensive to print, too heavy to lift and too large to store' by Lewis's publisher (Meyers, 1980, p. 105). The book was consequently hammered into fragments, a process which produced three of Lewis's major works: *The Lion and the Fox, The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man.* These writings, particularly the latter two works, are the philosophical cornerstones of Lewis's 'revolutionary traditionalism'.

The Lion and the Fox examines the Shakespearian heroes - Antony, Timon, Coriolanus, Othello, Lear - in relation to the famous 'apologuic figure of Machiavelli's' (Lewis, 1966, p. 83). It presents the Shakespearian hero as the distant, heroic 'lion' whose soul exists in a world of ideals, but is destroyed by his clash with the fox or 'ideal *little man* with the sling and the stone' (1966, p. 189). A typical Lion would be Othello with 'all the magnificent helplessness of the animal, or all the beauty and ultimate resignation of the god' (1966, p. 191), destroyed by an Iago figure who stands for any 'solicitor, stockbroker, politician or man-about-town in England to-day, or in Shakespeare's day' (1966, p. 193). He is not single, but many (Watson, 1971, p. 157), and in the role of Everyman he is representative of the 'crowds around the crucifix, or of the ferocious crowds at the corrida, or of the still more abject crowds at the mortuary games' (Lewis, 1966, p. 191). Shakespeare and Machiavelli have taken over the archetypes of Arghol and Hanp from *The Enemy of The Stars,* but whereas Lewis was once unequivocally on the side of the heroic (misunderstood) artist, he now appreciates how Shakespeare transcended such dichotomies, being limited neither to Othellos *or* Machiavellis.

The Lion and the Fox is important for this thesis's argument in that it establishes a model of Lewis's ideal artist-intellectual: a detached or 'transcendent' observer of the cultural conflicts of his time, yet who nevertheless engages altruistically with metapolitical dialogue from his privileged viewpoint (Lafferty, 2009, p. 31). Lewis's study shows how Shakespeare - without 'producing paradigms of vice or virtue, designed to influence opinion' - was able to create 'a picture of conflict between ... two abstractions, in an intermediate zone, of objective reality' (1966, p. 284). This natural matching of opposites' Lewis wrote 'saves a person… from dogmatism and conceit… if I may so, it places him at the centre of balance' (1927, p. 133). It recalls Heraclitus's view of conflict as the 'father of everything' and his Pythagorean-inspired maxim: 'that which opposes, fits; different elements make the finest harmony ever' (quoted in Jaeger, 1939, p. 182). It is this element in Lewis's thought which sets precedent for the 'third way' his work carved between 'Modernism and the Ancient Lights'.

2.1 Dualism at the End of History

Lewis jocularly described his own politics as 'partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order' (1929a, p. 70). It is evidence of Lewis's Promethean fore-thinking that his closest comparison here is Dugin's *The Fourth Political Theory* (2009), which likewise seeks to shift the choice of paradigm from the three 'horizontal' theories of modernity (liberalism, communism and fascism) toward a vertical decision between the political philosophies of the order and the Father (Platonism), the Son (Aristotelianism) and the chaos of the Mother (materialism). We earlier referred to Lewis's work as one of *anabasis,* to return by going back up, and similarly Dugin advocates that we need to go *up*, back to order, where the machine of modernity 'cannot go' (Dugin, 2017). Lewis's political approach - not treating politics as an answer, but reformulating it at as a question - is critical to our notion of him

as a 'revolutionary traditionalist'. Despite his 'healthy passion for order' (the political philosophy of the Father), Lewis resists a vertical dash toward the transcendent as undertaken by other modernists, such as T.S. Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism, or Jünger's development of his reactionary modernist position into an apolitical stance of aristocratic anarchism. According to Dugin, such a process removes the tension of battle and makes philosophy a game (Dugin, 2019, p. 82).[16] Rather than take such an approach, the Lewis of the inter-war years grounds his journey toward a harmonisation of his modernist ambitions with the 'ancient light' of the Absolute via a radical, creative and existential interaction with the troubling ideologies of his time.

A further interesting parallel here is with the American-Iranian author and self-declared Futurist, Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (better known as FM-2030), who proposed the notion of *UpWingers* (1973), a socio-political commitment to ideological and technical innovation in ways that defy and supersede the Left-Right dichotomy (Jorjani, 2020). Going right or left is indeed only a choice on a horizontal plane, and Lewis's polemics look skyward (recall again the pointed lack of hierarchy in *The Crowd)*. Esfandiary's book was subtitled "A Futurist Manifesto", a reflection of his confidence that Transhumanism was the successor to Futurism. Similar to his grapples with Marinetti, however, Lewis would doubtless have agreed with the desire to replace the Left/Right dialectic, but not necessarily for the sake of a transhumanistic future, as he likewise rejected the Italian Futurist's obsession with the chaotic elements of the machine which disintegrated the individual - the individual which *The Lion and the Fox* and *The Art of Being Ruled* seeks to fortify and protect.

Lewis's method of political analysis can be said to echo Schlegel's notion that paradox is the supreme form of irony - the ironist being committed both to the need for, and to the impossibility of, communication about the unconditional. Reflecting back on his

[16] Such a movement is also undertaken, for example, by the Neo-Platonists.

career, Lewis wrote that 'from the start I have behaved as if I were free' (1951, p. 105), and his critical method during the inter-war years sought to impart the same emancipation upon the reader, to enable him to pass that true test of 'first-rate intelligence' prescribed by F Scott Fitzgerald, namely 'the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function' (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 69). Lewis reflects on this purpose in *Rude Assignment*: 'it was my idea [in The Art of Being Ruled]… to state, here and there, both sides of the question to be debated, and allow these opposites to struggle in the reader's mind for the ascendancy and there to find their synthesis' (1984, p. 183). In order to remain "unpolluted" by the "groupish order" of cultural, political and intellectual dialectics, Lewis encourages us not just to think, but to make us think "more freely" (Nicholl, 1995, p. iii). As such, the promise of *The Art of Being Ruled* is to 'save people from being 'ruled' too much—from being 'ruled' off the face of the earth, as a matter of fact' (1937, p. 339). In this sense, it shares the same concern for the values of the community at large as does *The Caliph's Design,* geared specifically to guaranteeing 'freedom from interference' for the 'intellectual workman' (1926, p. 374).

Although delivered in a typical 'truth-in-jest' manner (Jameson, 1979, p. 164), Lewis's political dualism does not betray that maxim from *The Code of a Herdsman* to never 'play with political notions… a compromise with the herd' (Lewis, 1977, p. 4). Lewis's fascination with shells and simulacra, puppets and masks should not be taken as proof that he did *nothing but* play with politics, approaching the arena only with an ironic reserve (see Dwan, 2015). Rather, 1927's *The Art of Being Ruled* puts into practice this 'ancient and valuable Iranian principle of duality' (Lewis, 1927, p. 25) - indeed Lewis's Satan, Sammael, interestingly claims 'Iranian dualism is at the bottom of God's mind' (1955, p. 129) - and we see how Lewis chooses such a method not to obfuscate, but because this was *the clearest way he could communicate his ideas*. Lewis's dualism therefore has much in common with Proudhon's belief that 'as the two poles of an electric cell do not destroy each other, so the

two terms of the antinomy do not become resolved. Not only are they indestructible, but they are the very motive force of all action, life and progress. The problem is *not to bring about their fusion*, for this would be death, but to establish an equilibrium between them - an *unstable* equilibrium, that changes as society develops' (Proudhon, 1858, p. 229). Lewis's dualism is consequently opposed to the Hegelian view that man's ideas progress toward a perfectible wisdom that makes unavoidable the end of history and a 'universal (i.e. nonexpandible) and homogenous (i.e. nontransformable) state' (Kojève, 1980, p. 95). This also recalls Carl Schmitt's theories of open history and his introduction of the *katechon* to resist the world-ending *eschaton* moment. Schmitt initially saw duality as the answer (needing at least one counter-power to resist the Antichrist (Pankakoski, 2019, p. 264)), but he eventually reasoned that theories such as Nietzsche's eternal return, politically manifest as Jünger's East/West division, were equally unsatisfactory. Dualism, Schmitt argued, led to an interplay of impulses and counter-impulses which only reiterate in endless new variants — he sought, instead, a truly historical uniqueness (Pankakoski, 2019). Schmitt's rejection of the 'eternal return' theory in favour of a belief that everything was true only once (2015) led him to dismiss not only the unilinear idea of world unity but also the traditionalist cyclical conceptions of time. Such a position is in sympathy with Lewis's own 'third way' stance between these two world-views.

Lewis's approach thus marks a telling divide from the modernist ambitions of his contemporaries as discussed in Part One. His tentative postulation in *The Art of Being Ruled* of a world-state and a shared political community as a response to the 'recent growth of war' (1926, p. 367) contrasts with the Conservative Revolutionary Hans Freyer, who in his book of the same year, *Der Staat* (1926), suggested 'turbulent world history' itself as the ultimate teleological goal, rather than the rational unity of a 'supra-state' (Freyer, 1926, p 197), or Hegel's notion of a peaceful 'supra political' world (Peperzak, 1994, pp. 256-62). Yet, typically, Lewis's views also diverge from the more purely radical thinkers such as

Nikolai Fedorov and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. Fedorov's Cosmist futurism was inspired by the teachings of Zarathustra including, significantly, the idea that history is progressive and teleological and not eternal as in pre-modern cultures. Fedorov believed that the ancient Iranians embodied an 'optimistic activism' as opposed to the 'passive pessimism' and 'submission to the turning of the great wheel' present in ancient Indian culture (Young, 2012, p. 83). The Soviet rocket scientist and pioneer of the astronautic theory, Tsiolkovsky, took this teleological belief to the extreme in arguing man was on an inevitable course to 'outgrow our material envelopes' and 'join the rays of cosmic energy', constituting in the final analysis something akin to the pleroma of the Gnostics (Young, 2012, p. 151).[17] In *Time and Western Man,* Lewis takes up a position between Plato and Aquinas to oppose such 'surging ecstatic featureless chaos' (1927, pp. 109-10), and Lewis's resultant insistence upon a separation of the divine and the human can thus be traced back to his Platonic and vertical view of history. This contrast is most potently encapsulated by comparing the grandiosely catholic finale of Lewis's *Malign Fiesta* (where God literally descends from heaven to sustain this separation) with the apocalyptic event in Zoroastrian eschatology that inspired Fedorov and the Russian Cosmists, namely the Frashokereti. The Frashokereti is envisioned as a bathing of the earth in molten metal which 'turns the planet into an alchemical forge… such that the perfection of the realm of forms can be perfectly instantiated on the earthly plane and embodied by human beings' (Jorjani, 2020, p. 59). This echoes the foreboding words of CIA Chief William Harvey, a character in Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (2007), that: 'Lava is entropy. It reduces all systems. Communism is the entropy of Christ, the degeneration of higher spiritual forms into lower ones' (Mailer, 2007, p. 682). Such melting of the realm of forms, of the higher into the lower is, as we shall see, a direct inversion of Lewis's metaphysics as articulated in these inter-war years, and makes for the

[17] Gnosticism is indeed something Lewis links with Bergson and the Time philosophy, tracing the latter's origins to 'the mongrel westernised-orientalist of alexandrian mystical doctrine (1927, p. 134).

strongest enunciation of the 'traditionalist' aspect of his 'revolutionary traditionalism'. For it is to protect against such 'monstrous unity', and the resultant entropy and solipsism, that Lewis seeks to separate God from his creation in *Malign Fiesta* and *Time and Western Man*.

The first section of *The Art of Being Ruled* develops precisely out of Lewis's earlier intuitions regarding Technology, with Lewis dismissing the delusion of 'impersonality' and 'objectivity' of science, deducing that such a fallacy leads to the politics of fatalism and urges the person to merge his personality into *things*. Lewis finds Science, with its deceptive mask of anonymity and impersonality, to be busily dismantling, by means of 'behaviourist doctrines', the concept of the Person (Kenner, 1950, p. 74). This was a position Lewis maintained throughout his life, arguing that science, especially when in the hands of Einstein, is on the side of the "thing"… merging us all into a 'mutually devouring mass' (quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. 42). Aside from further demonstrating Lewis's platonic opposition to chaos (*Khôra),* his attack upon the imposturous 'impersonality' of science is remarkably similar to Heidegger's coeval argument in *Being & Time* (1967) that the cosmos is anything but ahistorical, and his corresponding challenge to the faux-Platonism of scientific principles and Bergson's 'dream of a universal mathematic' (Bergson 1903, pp. 82-84). Heidegger argues that only by getting underneath the historical trends and finding principles even more basic than history could one begin to act authentically and, in Lewis's terminology, become something other than a puppet or a 'Hanp'. This is why Lewis strove to mark *his* revolutionary ambitions off from the conditioned, temporal and hence inauthentic 'typical conventional *modernist,* false-revolutionary' tendencies of his fellows. Lewis scorned such contemporaries as wanting to 'plunge into the stream of life' by 'smashing the watchtowers' and 'Baudelaire's "light-houses"' in a fervent desire to submit 'the intelligence' to the 'mobile reality' (Lewis, 1926, p. 337). What Lewis objects to ultimately is the philosophy of New Time, which dismantles eternity as a 'dubious hypothesis', as a 'myth', as a remnant of the 'not-yet-scientific', and substitutes it with the

ontology of time - history, process, development and evolution (Dugin, 2018). Lewis's subsequent critiques of democracy are inextricable from these metaphysical concerns, and thus a limited reactionary or conservative intention cannot be so easily grafted upon them.

2.2 'The rule of the demos'

Lewis' often pushed his arguments in *The Art of Being Ruled* to an extreme out of a desire to shatter the liberal illusions of reformist socialism and parliamentary democracy (Gąsiorek, 2011, p. 207), with the unfortunate side-effect of garnering himself a reputation as a conservative (and worse) - unfortunate because, as we have argued, Lewis never endorsed a 'static' conservatism that saw mankind as unable to better itself, with much of his satirical energy being spent on trying to correct (but not condemn) modernism's Promethean ambitions (Waddell, 2012). Conservatism is, after all, merely the desire to move in the same direction but at a reduced speed (Dugin, 2017): something which Lewis's work demonstrates no sympathy with.

Perhaps the most misunderstood element of *The Art of Being Ruled,* then, is Lewis's motives for the comparison he undertook between the two great rival ideologies in Europe at the time: liberal democracy and authoritarianism ('Leninism' and fascism). He burrowed like a medieval sapper under the fortifications of liberal democracy, not because he was a proto-fascist thinker, but because democracy was a system he held responsible for the atrocities of the First World War, and because he could reveal that a battle between these three theories was essentially a fight over which was most consistent with the paradigm of modernity (Dugin, 2017). In a brilliantly provocative critique, Lewis contrasts the 'obliqueness' and 'indirectness' of liberal-democratic rule (with its 'what the public wants' philosophy- a Bergsonian, commercial version of the Schopenhauerian will) to the 'frankness' and 'directness' of authoritarians. The authoritarians, he argues, 'make no disguise of their forcible intentions, whose power is not wrapped in parliamentary humbug… who does not

say at each move of the game that he makes it for somebody else's good' and do not camouflage their iron rule as 'christian charity' (1926, p. 75). As René Harding, the central and semi-autobiographical character in one of Lewis's last novels, *Self Condemned,* reflects: 'guests are no longer poisoned by their hosts, as was the case in the Italy of the Borgias. That is too crude. Hypocrisy has, in our society, put a thick patina over everything: there are a number of forms of violence which must not be indulged in… But whereas in the Italy of the Borgias massacre was confined to quite modest numbers, today a man (a politician) may destroy ten million people without it ever being remarked that he has behaved rather badly' (2010b, p. 84). Although Lewis demonstrates a qualified sympathy for the abstract democratic ideal ('there is nothing wrong with democracy except the people who compose it' (1926, p. 324), in *Time and Western Man* he distinguishes between this "pure" democracy of political theory and 'the present so-called democratic masses, hypnotised into a sort of hysterical imbecility by the mesmeric methods of Advertisement' (1927, p. 42). Democracy, whatever can be said in its favour, is 'invariably at the mercy of the hypnotist'. A vicious cycle thus ensues: because of the techniques of the hypnotist, the Public confirm the cynicism he takes toward them, and learns to 'live up to, or down to, its detractor' (1926, p. 74).

Lewis's target throughout much of *The Art of Being Ruled* is precisely this 'machinery of the democratic flattery of democracy', the vulgarisation of the average man into the abstraction "Mankind", and the self-justifying abuse by an elite of 'enlightened' intellectuals of said abstraction — Shaw, Swift, Robert Burton and Charles Richet all being singled out for criticism. The notion that Lewis was a reactionary is usually derived from his claim that the Greek 'slave' was better kept than today's 'penniless "freeman"' (1926, p. 323). What this quote reflects, however, is Lewis's belief that, for the average man (but not the individual), this 'top-down' paradigm is preferable for his own protection - be it war with Napoleon or revolution with Sorel - the penalty is 'too heavy now' for the 'use of that

word, *man*… why not waive the little word and accept the status of a dog, or of a slave?' (1926, p. 324).

When Lewis reflects upon Aristotle's ideal city, where *Freedom* was but the name of a square, exclusive to ruling elders and which 'no low mechanic or husbandman…. Should be permitted to enter' (Politics, XII.), he was not doing so out of a nostalgia for a bygone era, but because of his concern with the fallacy of Progress (capital 'P'), and the dangers it brought. He contrasts Aristotle's ideal city (once a reality in Thessaly) to the contemporary era where there is no place that the slave (now 'Mr. Everyman') cannot enter, and where his rulers will even try to sell him a 'toothbrush or a bassinette' as he walks by. But the concealed price tag of such levelling is that when Mr Everyman is inevitably 'compelled to kill other mechanics of neighbouring states' he will be 'described as a volunteer' (1926, p. 323). Lewis caricatures the Democrat Profiteer (the merchants of death for whom Lewis says the 'bloodbath was a Lucky Dip' (1984, pp. 184-85) thus:

> So now you've been and gone and killed fifteen million of yourself, have you?… well, you are a silly fellow! still, you would do it, you bloodthirsty, homicidal devil! I can't stop you! There's no holding you in when you see red, is there? Ah, well! you rule yourself, thank goodness for that — or you might start blaming me for it! But suppose after all a bit of a scrap does you no harm occasionally! Boys will be boys! (1926, p. 82)

And poor "Mankind", Lewis sees — mutilated, bankrupt, and brutalized — looks at that 'genial, "kindly" face, with its merry pickwickian twinkle and plausible tongue (not a bit proud! a self-made fellow, evidently! good luck to him!)', with a "grim" smile, and thinks to himself, "Yes, I am a bit of a devil!" (1926, pp. 82-83). Democracy is thus doubly insidious in Lewis's eyes: first, it pretends to give its citizens freedom but actually hides its

power of coercion, which, secondly, makes it possible to present political events such as the First World War as willed by the populace (Frisch, 2019). Lewis, despite his classical insistence on man's limitations, believes that man is not naturally a 'fighting machine', arguing it is 'only as a machine… that he can fight' (1926, p. 367)— a remark that tragically recalls the contrasting foreground and background figures of *A Battery Shelled* (1919), with their message that to be a machine was the only way to survive that dehumanising conflict. Lewis argues that it is only democratic rulers and their 'competitive careers' who effect this 'paradoxical transformation' in their otherwise extremely soft subjects. As Julius Pokorny's *Indo-European Etymological Dictionary* (1959) substantiates, the very origin of the word democracy' lies in the dā (*də-) meaning 'to divide' and 'to separate', and this dovetails with Lewis's opposition to fragmentation and atomisation as evidenced by his critiques of Bergonsian flux, of Marinetti's romantic desire to 'scatter oneself' (1972, p. 89), and his lampooning of the ideological separatism of the identical automatons in *The Crowd*.

Lewis's anxiety about these flaws in the democratic model are enhanced by his greater disquietude regarding their potentially disastrous interaction with the inexorable technological march toward an unconscious, anti-creative and totally instrumentalised mankind as discussed in Part One. He cites Einstein to summarise his concern: 'the characteristic danger to human society is that the outstripping intellect will destroy the backward mass of men by imposing a civilisation on it for which it is not ready' (Einstein, quoted in Lewis, 1926, p. 366). Lewis proceeds to argue, in a quote which directly reflects this thesis's central themes, that: 'to withhold knowledge from people, or to place unassimilable knowledge in their hands, are both equally effective, if you wish to render them helpless' (1926, p. 366). This aligns with Jorjani's present-day argument that a 'breakaway' elite, comprised of up-to-date versions of the 'enlightened' intellectuals Lewis attacks, have decided that only they can bear the Singularity-level technological breakthroughs, and seek to leave mass man behind to a feudal, pre-industrial level of culture

(Jorjani, 2020). The classicist in Lewis would agree that men, *as a whole*, will never be ready for such knowledge, this does not mean we should abuse them. To militate against such an eventuality in the present day, Jorjani advocates a re-activation of the Promethean spirit, inspired in part by the Futurists and the Russian Cosmists, to 'forthrightly face' the technological Singularity. Jorjani, however, takes the ultra-Nietzschean conclusion that the Prometheist would 'prefer to risk' the extinction of *homo sapiens* rather than suffer the humiliation of a deliberate regression engineered by today's 'enlightened intellectuals'. Should the human race become extinct, let it be because we have evolved *beyond* it, toward a future 'synonymous with an evolutionary revolution inaugurating Promethean post-humanity' (2020b, p. 11-17). Despite the disturbingly programmatic ring to this declaration, it dovetails with the prophetic nature of Lewis's concluding paragraph to *The Art of Being Ruled,* where Lewis calls for the extinction of 'Abstract Man, that enlightened abstraction of a common humanity… that phantom of democratic "enlightenment"' which must be 'disposed of for good in order to make way for higher human classifications, which, owing to scientific method, men could now attempt' (Lewis, 1926, p. 375). This is where Lewis's classical political criticism of modernity most distinctly interacts with his modernist ambitions, providing evidence for his 'visionary modernism', and subverting claims he was a mere 'reactionary modernist'.

2.3 'Fascism as an alternative'

Before leaving *The Art of Being Ruled* behind, it remains only to tackle the details of Lewis's apparent 'recommendation' of fascism for the mass, stemming as it did from the above critique of democracy. In *Modernist Nowheres* (2012, p. 182), Waddell astutely notes that Lewis's account of personhood became 'notoriously slippery' during the inter-war period, with *The Art of Being Ruled* making all too 'disturbingly clear' the tension between his ridicule of an unconscious herd life (i.e. Lewis's 'traditionalism') and a utopian desire to

release potential or already-existent individuals from such a life to fully develop their capacities (i.e. Lewis's 'Prometheism'). This is a reiteration of Lewis's persistently complex relationship to Individualism — *Tarr,* for example, satirised the optimistic bildungsroman of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* presenting a picture of persons as overdetermined beings incapable of truly independent action (Peppis, 1994), whereas *BLAST* exhorted the English to become self-determined 'individuals'.

In "The Crisis of Managerial Conceit" (1984), Lewis states: 'the Public has deteriorated, they have neither the will nor the common sense of a peasant or guildsman, but are more easily fooled…. this can only be a source of concern and regret, *to all except 'the leaders of men'*. But instead of valorising this process - as Nietzsche does, demanding a 'declaration of war on the masses by higher men' (Nietzsche, 1884) - Lewis looks to a modern example of non-liberal society, concluding that the Russian people have not been through such a 'cheapening process', and so en masse they respond to art stimuli of a 'more severe and serious order - plays, ballets, books' (1984, p. 23). It is no surprise, then, that in the section on Proudhon and Rousseau in *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis states that 'in the abstract' he 'believes the Sovietic system to be the best. It has spectacularly broken with all the past of Europe: it looks to the East, which is spiritually so much greater and intellectually so much finer than Europe, for inspiration. It springs ostensibly from a desire to alleviate the lot of the poor and outcast, and not merely to set up a cast-iron, militarist-looking state' (1926, p. 320). Instead of using this as evidence of Lewis's authoritarian streak, his argument is in fact closer to Leonard P. Wessell's argument in *Prometheus Bound* (1984) that Prometheus was Karl Marx's sacred ideal, one which liberated the individual to pursue creative projects that gave his life meaning, and to no longer be a tool of alienating industrial productive forces[18]. It might appear confusing, then, when Lewis states that 'for

[18] It is worth recalling here the differing intents behind the Futurist's 'Lingotto' factory and Lewis's imagined city in *The Caliph's Design.*

anglo-saxon countries… some modified form of Fascism would probably be best', but it is essential to point out that Lewis interpreted Fascism as a variety of Marxian socialism, a faction of the 'extreme and militant Left who have burst round and through to the Right, as it were — circumnavigated, boxed the compass' (1926, p. 70). His 'advocation' of fascism, and Sovietism, are hence much less authoritarian in nature, and much more emancipatory (if naive), than they initially appear. Indeed, even in the later *Anglosaxony* (1941a) Lewis recommended an 'antiseptic, sweet-smelling, blue-eyed version of international socialism' as a means to meritocracy, arguing that this 'mild form' of communism may react with the Anglo-Saxon soul to create 'an intelligent, orderly, shake-up of the social structure, so that the best brains have a chance of functioning freely instead of being stifled and paralysed by mediocrity, as at present happens in the vulgar and purposeless luxuriance of the middle-class businessman's millennium' (1941a, p. 31). Even in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926, p. 79) Lewis always favoured the *idealised* meritocracy of democracy, which rules in the 'name of intelligence', as opposed to the 'fascist and soviet governments' who rule by 'economic intelligence and political economic power' (1927, p. 79). The reason he still thinks 'vertically', and is a 'revolutionary traditionalist', is that a genuine meritocracy and a *true* aristocracy (note: not monarchy) of the kind Plato and Pythagoras advocate against the Athenian democracy are, in fact, synonymous (Jorjani, 2017).

These are all effective rebuttals to accusations of Lewis's 'reactionary modernism', but it may still be said that Campbell was mistaken in painting Lewis's logic as having 'swiftly and triumphantly organised' the 'inevitable chaos' that resulted from 'years of mystical and liberal drifting'. Campbell notably praised Lewis's advocation of 'the dictatorial rule of a vigorous and intelligent minority' as 'the only possible ultimate answer to the ever-growing chaos consequent upon liberal democratic reform' (1985, p. 24). Even if one took the highly questionable view that a country, as a whole, is likely to work more efficiently under a political dictatorship than under the 'will of the greatest number' (Lewis,

1926, p. 73), it is surprising that Campbell did not realise that men of genius, like himself and Lewis, are rarely included in 'the country as a whole.' By definition, they do not fit easily into the strait-jackets that dictatorships demand. And any regime that cramps its highest type of individuals of creative ambitions cannot survive long, as Toynbee shows in his *A Study of History* (1987), a much less fatalistic (and ultimately more convincing) tome than Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918). If this formula is true, then no political totalitarianism can provide a lasting social discipline, as Colin Wilson writes in *Religion and the Rebel* (1957), 'it is only when a society is half-dead that people are stupid enough to think that it can' (Wilson, 1957, p. 117). Shortly after publication of the unfortunate *Hitler* (1931), Lewis focussed on this 'semi-religious drive' of the political philosophies of modernity to 'deprive the individual of anything he possesses in excess', arguing that 'genius is down for extinction' because, after all, 'what is genius but an excess of individuality?' (1932).

In response to this threat of extinction, Lewis speculates as to the more concrete possibility of a political system which upholds anarchism (for the natures) and fascism (for the puppets) (Lafferty, 2009). This is informed by Goethe's jargon 'puppets and Natures' (1950), for Lewis spies that that there is an 'absurd war between the two… mechanical men being the natural allies of technology, of machinery, and owing to the great development of machinery, the pressure on the "natures" increases. The 'mechanical' type of men do not aspire to be agents, they are happiest when weighed down with a minimum of responsibility' (1984, p. 204). We see here again the philosophy of the Fox, the 'Man of the World' being the 'arch exponent of the philosophy of defeat.' For his survival he has built himself a "labyrinth" which he calls civilisation, within which he buries himself 'deeper away from nature every day… a man who is himself small and weak, but who has acquired, who lives in the midst of, a powerful defensive machinery. He is in this sense 'the champion of the mechanical, and the constant adversary of the individual' (1927. p. 187). This division

of natures and puppets is not because Lewis envisages himself a 'Philosopher King' or wishes to form a 'Superman party', but because, like René Harding, he merely wishes to see the 'upper plane substituted for the under plane', exchanging the 'criminals or morons' currently in power for 'first-rate, honourable, intelligent men' (2010b, p. 115). Lewis's notorious consideration of fascism as an alternative must - as Lafferty points out - be seen in light of his simultaneous call for an anarcho-syndicalist union of artist-intellectuals, or those who exist outside of society, 'in a republic, [where] a committee of Sages would perhaps be the rulers' (2010b, p. 115). In *Left Wings Over Europe* Lewis writes that:

> The sort of society for which one set of men are heading, whether they know it or not, is a mechanical, standardized society of robots conveniently mesmerized by slogans — worn down, all over the earth, into a monotonous consistency …. And' the sort of society for which another set of men are heading is the opposite — one in which there is diversity and individual initiative. The former is the outcome of an almost mad predilection for the abstract and the theoretic. The latter is the outcome of a sane and rational appetite for the concrete and the real (1936, pp. 22).

This brings us neatly back to the comparison of *A Battery Shelled* with Jünger's *Der Arbeiter,* and on this point we can finally critique one of the most convincing claims that Lewis is a reactionary modernist: Fredric Jameson's argument which, crudely summarised, posits that Lewis' style and thought are inherently fascistic because of his detestation of levelling "proletarianisation" (1979, p. 113). The way we can now counter this is to propose that Lewis's opposition to 'proletarianisation' is *not* to be understood in Jameson's Marxian class sense, but as a resistance to the mechanical levelling process enacted by 'The Worker' or 'operator', the new type of man whose assimilation with technology commenced in the forge of the First World War. The Worker is quite distinct from the Marxist proletarian in

that his revolution does not target private property but a bourgeois culture founded on the enlightenment ideals of reason, morals and individualism in favour of a 'heroic sense of reality and impersonality' (Evola, 2009, p. 218). There is a significant connection here with Spengler's prognostication that 'the engineer' (Jünger's 'Worker') would become the aristocrat of the Future in the final chapters of *The Decline of The West Volume II* (1928). This further problematises Jameson's reading, for Spengler argued that Marx *also* viewed the machine as one of the creations (in fact, the proudest creation) of the bourgeoisie (1926, p. 504). Jünger himself departed from 'the worker' when he realised technology was not ultimately antagonistic to bourgeois values, but rather transformed the world only by 'globalizing the desert' (Benoist, 2008). This process was foreseen by Spengler, who wrote that the machine would become more pervasive in its forms, 'less and ever less human, more ascetic, mystic, esoteric', causing matter to 'withdraw itself into the interior' (Spengler, 1928, p.504). This process is reflected in Lewis's work, from which robots gradually disappear, and the metaphors become no longer machine-like, but bodiless and sexless, ghosts speak to ghosts (such as in *The Human Age*) — even Pierpoint in *The Apes of God* (1981) is a disembodied voice, life is automated by programmers no one sees, rulers disappear, and only hollow frontmen are left (Powe, 1987). This echoes Spengler's endmost insight that Faustian man ultimately becomes the slave of his creation:

> The *engineer*, the priest of the machine, the man who knows it… The quiet engineer it is who is the machine's master and destiny... Nothing is so utterly antipodal to the motionless satiate being of the Classical Empire. It is the engineer who is remotest from the Classical law-thought, and he will see to it that his economy has its own law, wherein forces and efficiencies will take the place of Person and Thing… (Spengler, 1928: pp. 505-506).

Nothing is more antipodal to Lewis's thought, either, and *Time and Western Man* is dedicated to opposing this 'reduction of men to mechanical, manipulable producers in an industrial dystopia' (Ayers, 1992, pp. 71-98)— *not* to opposing 'proletarianisation' in a reactionary or fascistic sense.[19] The closing paragraphs of *The Decline of The West Volume II* (1928) convey how high the stakes are:

> The Waking-Being submerges itself into the silent service of Being, as the Chinese and Roman Empires tell us… Time triumphs over Space… For us, however, whom a Destiny has placed in this Culture and at this moment of its development— the moment when money is celebrating its last victories, and the Caeserism that is to succeed approaches with quiet, firm step — our direction, willed and obligatory at once, is set for us within narrow limits… we have not the freedom to to this or that, but the freedom to do the necessary or to do nothing. And a task that historic necessity has set *will* be accomplished with the individual or against him (1928, p. 507).

If, in hindsight, Spengler's words appear prophetic as related to the events of he 1930s, we should consider how they are potentially *even more* relevant to the future decisions which face humanity today with regard to the singularity. The 'time-philosophers' are contributing to the dawning of an age of the machine in which all are 'enslaved and manipulated' on 'Pavlovian principles' (Ayers, 1992, pp. 71-98), whereas the authentic revolution which Lewis argues for instead 'cultivates intelligence as a reflection upon the world and not a

[19] It is important to add the caveat that, unlike say Norman Lindsay, Lewis did not therefore argue that the 'artist, poet, musician, and thinker' should in place of the engineer be 'the aristocrats of the Future' (Bolton, 2018); his work implies that the artist-intellectual should be distinct, like Jünger's final figure that supersedes the Worker and the Rebel, namely the Anarch. It is a 'separation of functions' Lewis seeks: 'a plumber while I write is working in my bathroom… What I am doing is more ambitious than repair work, I am as it were proposing a new bath - a new house. But *not* a new mankind…. just a stricter separation of functions' (1984, p. 203).

mechanical function of matter' (Ayers, 1997, p. 71). Lewis strives thus to redefine our attitude toward the Prometheist and Faustian spirit which is driving our technological 'evolutionary revolution' (Jorjani, 2020b, p. xxv), to consciously own and empower it toward conscious and creative ends, rather than unconsciously letting it oppress us into destructive and totalitarian ones. The choice - as Spengler forebodingly presages - is ours. Given the inexorable march of technology toward the singularity, the post-human future will indeed be accomplished 'with the individual or against him' (Spengler, 1928, p. 507).

2.4 Elective Infinities: Time and Western Man

We have seen how *The Lion and The Fox* studied the relationship between Lewis's ideal artist and society via Shakespeare, and how *The Art of Being Ruled* scrutinised the politics of this relationship within the modern consumer society and the role of the individual within this. Sensing an alliance between Commerce and the Romantic spirit, *Time and Western Man* finds Lewis turning back to the arts, and dissecting how modern culture - riddled with a 'chronological philosophy' (1927, p. 3) - undermined the necessary objectivity of the artist-intellectual. Such is the uniqueness and importance of Lewis's vision that Yeats deemed *Time and Western Man* one of the volumes that the poet 'defied the doctors' by reading (Yeats, quoted in Caracciolo & Edwards, 1998, p. 110). At this crucial juncture in the inter-war period, Lewis decided the moment had come for a 'rigorous restatement… of the whole "revolutionary" position' (1927, p. 38).

Lewis presciently saw that the revolution Vorticism heralded was being perverted into an 'evolutionary, mechanical *Change',* writing 'we are *the changed* too much: we are not enough *the changers*' (1994, p. xxxiii). This is a precise encapsulation of Lewis's 'revolutionary traditionalism' — it rejects Progress and conservative stasis equally, favouring only an individual and creative revolution. In all the 'radical' rhetoric about 'manifest destiny,' about 'modernity' or 'the spirit of the age', Lewis uncovered a 'time-mind'

orthodoxy that limited revolution to one type only, namely a fatalist revolution issuing from the same mint as the Marxist economics or the 'history' of Spengler. The 'eternity' Lewis opposes to Time is therefore not retrogressive, but always new; akin to the eternity (l'éternité) that Rimbaud 'found again': *c'est la mer allée avec le soleil* (Dugin, 2019; Rimbaud, 2013).

For the first book of *Time and Western Man*, Lewis treats this 'eel-like' issue of the 'time-cult' as an abstract phenomenon, pervasive enough to contain all his chronic enemies (vitalism, romance, sensualism and the interlinked amateurism and denial of intellect). Fascinating and infamous as his critiques of Joyce et al., now are, the reader takes Lewis on trust somewhat that he will deliver on this provisional concept of the 'time-cult'. In Book Two, the patient reader is rewarded with Lewis grounding his analysis in Bernard Bosanquet's definition of time-philosophy as 'the acceptance of time and change as ultimate characteristics of (not 'within') the universe… faith in the progress and, in some sense, the perfectibility, of the human species… and the identification of morality and religion with the faith in this law' (Bosanquet, quoted in Lewis, 1927, p. 224). Lewis is not ultimately concerned with whether this great time-philosophy that overshadows all contemporary thought is viable as a system of abstract truth, but whether 'in its application it helps or destroys our human arts' (1927, p. 179). Lewis shows how modern science, art, and politics have all conspired mutually to create an unreal state of mind where the sentimental 'religion of Fate' dominates all else: 'Spengler's violent power-doctrine applied to History is still Nietzsche, and Alexander and Whitehead are still Bergson' (1927, p. 286). Lewis would prefer for these 'different worlds of physics, philosophy, politics and art… [to be] rigidly separated', for he intuits that the creative artist is particularly apt to 'receive blindly, or at the best confusedly, from regions outside his own, all kinds of notions and formulae' (1927, p. 10), and hence unwittingly embody political or scientific notions (in this case time, modernity, destiny etcetera) into the central body of his work.

Although Lewis expertly demonstrates *how* the time-mind pervades the work of his contemporaries, it is only really in the latter stages of the treatise where Lewis expounds on 'the concrete appearances of this compelling concept', that one then fully grasps *why* Lewis sees it as so pernicious (1927, p. 38). Here, Lewis again quotes Bosanquet to great effect: 'the distinction at stake is that between time in the Absolute and the Absolute in time' (Bosanquet, quoted in Lewis, 1927, p. 239). If this sums up the crux of Lewis's battle with Time, then it leads to a rather significant parallel with Marinetti who declared 'we already live in the Absolute, for we have already created velocity which is eternity and omnipresent' (quoted in Rainey et al., 2009, p. 53). Maurice Blanchot and later Bernard Stiegler likewise argue - consciously playing upon Ernst Jünger's *An der Zeitmauer* (1959) or 'At the Time Wall' - that our age is one of breaking the 'time barrier', with technology such as supersonic devices revealing that speed is ontologically prior to time, and is in fact more primordial than it (quoted in Jorjani, 2020, p. 90; Lukacher, 1982)). This emphasises the profundity in Marinetti's quote 'time and space died yesterday' (Marinetti, 1973, p. 20), and threads together our earlier discussion of machinery to reveal both a revolutionary and a traditionalist aspect in this modernist desire to overpower *Chronos*, the god of time. Jorjani (2020b) raises the fascinating speculation that a civilisation based on speed, not time, would require a political stability far exceeding any society known to history so far - a 'revolutionary traditionalist' or archeo-futuristic society would thus be technologically advanced in the ways the Futurists could only dream of, yet based on the kind of anti-mechanistic, anti-teleological view of history Lewis proposes. This radical postulation synchronises Lewis's argument for 'time in the Absolute' with his later political endorsement of a stable internationalism, and substantiates his argument in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) that such an international order of 'cosmic men' would be required to prevent 'Armageddon III' (Lewis, quoted in Caracciolo, 2010, p. 82).

Bosanquet identifies the 'time-philosophy' as the 'hidden cable' connecting philosophic speculation with politics, and although Lewis agrees, he did not himself stress the latter element (1927, p. 226). Lewis argues that the political is only the most important factor where the second-rate is concerned, and the second-rate is in any period vitiated by what is *beyond* it: the psychological. It is the psychological which Lewis sees as more worthy of analysis here. Although genetically the parent book, we are reminded of why *The Art of Being Ruled* is best considered a discursive appendix to the philosophical speculation put forth in this book about Time (Kenner, 1954, p. 76)— if the Zeitgeist is the force that rules the powers that rule us (McLuhan, 2016) then dissecting the machinations of this force is more urgent than assessing the politicians who are mere puppets of it. Through this shift in focus, Lewis is able to discern the true issue - be it Einstein or Bergson, Alexander or Proust, the leading thinkers exhibit not a *physical* mind, but a 'psychologic… mental' one (1927, p. 128). Lewis perceives that we have thus come to live 'mentally and historically' so much more than did the Hellene or the ancient Indian, and that we refer to what we have as 'a time, tout court, with the minimum of place the present age' (1927, p. 256). This is a great mystery and a paradox to Lewis, for our period is less 'a time' than any other, in one sense, but 'so much more acutely so in another sense' (Lewis, 1927: 256). Yet *why now,* of all times, do we rebel against the mythological thinking of the Greeks, or the 'ahistorical soul' of the Brahman Nirvana? For 'not since the Dark Ages', Lewis scorns, 'has there been a time about which the time-jingo has as little right to boast as the present…. it is difficult to see how any man could believe in these irrational and pompous vaunts.' (Lewis, 1927, p. 234). We find it is not on behalf of the 'Brahman Nirvana' or the 'ahistorical soul' in themselves that Lewis argues (à la Evola or Guénon), rather, he uses these elements to criticise Modernism from within, in particular its subconscious deference to grand narratives that reduce to a 'temporal collectivity' (1927, p. 181). As Lafferty (2009, p. 85) argues, Lewis's purpose here is to show that there is an 'effective, if flawed' intellectual alternative to

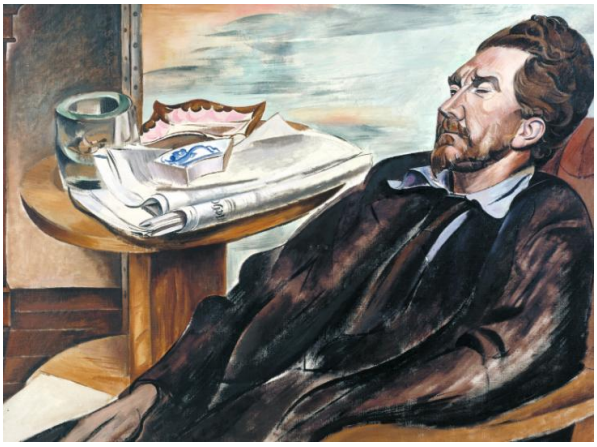
revolutionary orthodoxy - more effective and sophisticated than the 'stereotypical Tory' - and thus by this process stem the tide of a conditioned, inauthentic, mechanised revolution.

Lewis's premise, then, is that the less reality one attaches to time as a unity, and the less one is able instinctively to abstract it, the more important concrete, individual, or *personal* time becomes. Bergson's durée, or *psychological time,* is essentially the 'time' of the Romantic. So Lewis returns, at a metaphysical level, to a clash between the classical as 'rational, aloof and aristocratical' and the romantic as 'popular, sensational and "cosmically" confused' (1927, p. 26). The stakes could not be higher, for Lewis, when considering the pernicious effects of combining this romantic 'time-philosophy' with the growing instrumentalisation of man as led by technology. He argues in "An Extremist View" that 'the subjective temper of the present age tends to solipsistic valuations and, of course, to the blackened corpse at Gild-sur-Yvette… to the Gas-ovens at Belsen' (1984, p. 73).

Normand (1992) perceives that Lewis's confrontation of the classical and romantic is encapsulated, in embryo, in his painting *Edith Sitwell* (1935). The paraphernalia of the painting all have their individual meanings (the books and globe represent Sitwell's literary aspirations, the clothes her self-conscious bohemianism), but the central concern, superseding these elements, is the 'curious type of immortality' which Lewis saw as the objective of a classical system. "Classical", for Lewis, is anything which is 'nobly defined and exact', as opposed to that which is fluid and of 'the Flux' (1929b, p. 255). In "Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in our Time" (1922), Lewis approves of how 'immortality descends' upon the 'olive-tree'

Wyndham Lewis, Edith Sitwell (1935)

that Van Gogh saw, or a burgher of Rembrandt, an immortality which, in the case of the painting, they 'pay for with death or at least with its coldness and immobility' (1922, p. 30). He quotes Schopenhauer's maxim that art 'plucks the object of its contemplation out of the stream of the world's course' (1922, p. 31). This 'immobility' Lewis contrasts with Bergsonian impressionism which 'would urge you to leave the object in its vital milieu' (1922, p. 31). A second portrait, this time of Ezra Pound (1939) painted over a decade after *Time and Western Man,* clarifies that Lewis's central duality is very much present in his critique of the 'time-cult'. It is emphatically not an opposition to the 'new', but only to the Romantic, be that old or new. Lewis writes that Pound 'has really walked with Sophocles beside the Aegean; he has seen the Florence of Cavalcanti; there is almost no-where in the Past that he has not visited' (1927, p. 87), and in 1934's *Men Without Art* he writes that Pound has a 'tendency to regard a scuffle in fourteenth-century Sienna as fundamentally more interesting than a similar scuffle in Wigan or Detroit today.' (1934, p. 61).



Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound (1939)

This links to the aforementioned infamous section of Book One, the 'Analysis of The Mind of James Joyce'.[20] Lewis's contention is that the 'all-life-in-a-day' scheme of *Ulysses* buries beneath its scale the 'classical unities of time and place' (1927, p. 100), rendering it another 'time-book', exemplifies the peculiar paradox that 'an intense preoccupation with

[20] Colin Wilson (1989) writes that with 'deadly precision' Lewis put his finger on the basic weakness of Ulysses, namely the attempt to build Stephen up into a kind of intellectual superman, without offering to show the reader his intellectual credentials (Stephen goes around looking superior, saying obscure, elliptical things in a dry tone of voice, but never actually proving that he has the ability to think). Yet Wilson also accuses Lewis of missing what makes Ulysses a great book: the attempt to create new intensities of experience through language.

time or 'duration' (the psychological aspect of time…) is wedded to the theory of "timelessness"' (1927, p. 128). This is a discernment of great importance for Lewis's theory. It allows him to postulate an 'innate confusion in the heart of [modern] reality… that so long as time is the capital truth of your world it matters very little if you deny time's existence, like the Einsteinian, or say there is nothing else at all, like Bergson; or whether space-time (with the accent on the time) is your god, like Alexander. For all practical purposes you are committed to *the same world-view*' (1927, p. 105). Even if one is vital and the other is static, Bergson is thus the same as Proust — time is merely abstract in the former, extremely concrete in the latter. Pound's interest in 'the classical', and in the traditionalist interest in 'eternity', is a romantic one, a time one. As it is a reality in *time,* not in space, Lewis argues that the Past is thus being used as a 'compensating principle' (1927, p. 99), and if if you have an appetite for the beautiful, then 'to create new beauty, and to supply a new material' (1927, p. 116) is the only available course of action. This is a major restatement of Lewis's modernist, fore-thinking Promethean ambitions and a commitment to genuinely revolutionary avant-garde art. Judged by this 'human, aristocratic' standard (1926, p. 116), the art of Lewis's contemporaries betrays revolution by passively reproducing the contemporary ideologies and facilitating the oncoming mechanistic universe. This clearly proceeds from our conclusion regarding *The Art of Being Ruled,* namely that Lewis sought to redefine and make conscious the technological and social phenomena inexorably transforming society, rather than allowing us to 'sleepwalk mechanically into the future' (Edwards, 2013, p. 6)— the future that Spengler argued would happen 'with the individual or against him' (Spengler, 1928, p. 507).

An earlier painting that enlivens this understanding is *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros)* (1921), which illuminatingly captures Lewis's evolving attitude to the 'romanticism-classicism' dichotomy. The brief context of this painting is the return to classicism throughout Europe during this period (as we discussed in Part One, in relation to Le

Wyndham Lewis, A Reading of Ovid (Tyros) (1921)

Corbusier), and its adoption by artists such as Picasso who subsequently melded classicism with modernism. On the surface level, we can interpret the *Tyros* as symbolising Lewis's contempt of contemporary nationalistic claims to the classical, as described in *The Caliph's Design:* 'the hysterical second-rate Frenchman, with his morbid hankering after his mother-tradition, the eternal Graeco-Roman, should be discouraged' (1919, p. 139). It is also worth remarking that Ovid's poetry is best known as satirical, and hence there could be a homage here by Lewis, a mirror-in-mirror effect of which the *Tyros* are on the receiving end. Looking more deeply, we see that the figures are located in the contemporary world by means of their modern civilian apparel, and associated with the classical merely by the reference to Ovid in the title. If the term 'classicism' in Lewis represents the rational, detached, intellectual, then the figures of the Tyros, by contrast, represent a base physicality, a purely emotional response to this very same classical. Their identical appearance is suggestive of group-mind, and likely a Marxian-based class identity owing to their red colouring. Their furtive schoolboy glances suggest a plundering of history, and of the classical, by the vulture-like time-mind to justify their politicised, change-driven revolution or 'Progress'. Hudson's (2013) reading supports this case, in particular her claim that Lewis is highlighting the idiocy of the *Tyros* by choosing Ovid, a satirical classical writer almost completely irrelevant to their cause, when they could have selected, for instance, Plato's *Republic*.

A Reading of Ovid (Tyros) is a prime example of why this study has placed such emphasis on a definition of Lewis as a 'revolutionary traditionalist'. It explains why Lewis both opposes the 'sensation' of Spengler, yet does not wholly embrace the catholic critiques of modernity, his nearest ally in *Time and Western Man*. Lewis's reasoning is that

Catholicism's Neo-scholastic elements are incurably "conservative", forever the "old" against the "new"' (1927, pp. 385-6), something he has already identified as a Romantic affliction. As the inverse of the 'evolutionist' position, Lewis finds the catholic position 'too rigid in its opposition', for 'everything is, "modern"' and 'therefore to be attacked' (1927, pp. 361-2). It is ultimately also a 'time-doctrine' in that it attaches the same disproportionate importance to *one* time (antiquity), as its opponents do to *all* time (Lafferty, 2009, p. 83). This said, Lewis claims that between 'Time' and its enemies, the line of argument he adopts has more in common with St. Thomas than with the priests of evolution and 'Destiny' (1927, p. 387). He admires the catholic plan for 'divine exclusiveness', as opposed to William James' view of the religious impulse as 'biological' and 'belonging to all the orders' (Sheen, quoted in Lewis, 1927, p. 392). Lewis goes so far as to state: 'we should support the catholic church perhaps more than any other visible institution: but we should make a new world of Reason for ourselves, more elastic than the roman cult is in a position to supply, and employing all the resources of the new world to build with' (1927, p. 391).

This is one of the clearest statements in Lewis's work of 'the third way' his work posits, for it promotes a creative and genuinely revolutionary position whilst simultaneously guarding against the solipsistic fetishisation of time and Progress inherent in the techno-scientific philosophies of the future, and the danger this lack of objective reasoning could pose to the free agency of the individual and ultimately to the stability of the self. This study is in agreement with Lafferty in that Lewis's goal is to fuse the best of the 'Old' and the 'New', or the Traditionalist and the Promethean, to build in a 'creatively revolutionary' manner a "new world of Reason"' (Lafferty, 2009, p. 86). Lafferty argues that this might provide a moral and intellectual framework for a new Europe, even a new international society— this is correct, but Lafferty's thought can be pushed even further. Such a process, this 'third way' that Lewis's work posits, would help correct the 'mad contradiction' at the heart of the Western psyche (1927, p. 312), namely the obligation to 'unify the gods of the

barbarous Old Testament, and the humane New' (Nath, 1996, p. 154). It would combine the emancipatory Gnostic vision of Christ as a humane liberator, whilst protecting against the resultant techno-scientific hubris, which (according to Mailer) began in the embryonic hours when Christ forgave the sins of the father, encouraging men to ignore taboo and experiment with nature (Mailer, 1985, p. 186). This reflects Edwards' own conclusion that Lewis's work strives to establish a world that fulfils his artists' imagination of a zestful modernity, yet is simultaneously the most comprehensive critique we have of this modernist urge to overcome our dereliction by 'violently breaking through to a realm of authenticity, a reality transcending our divided condition'. As a 'revolutionary traditionalist', the 'third-way' message Lewis's work holds for our future society, torn as it is between the metapolitics of traditionalism and techno-scientific futurism, is that we should strive to be 'Apes of God, rather than gods ourselves' (Edwards, 2000: pp. 5, 549).

2.5 Coda

While this would be a fitting point on which to conclude this section, and our study, it is necessary to tie up some of the loose ends with regard to the 'time-philosophers' who Lewis attacks in *Time and Western Man,* as his reasons for doing so help substantiate our conclusions regarding Lewis's positioning of the 'ancient light' of eternity as a corrective to the teleological, transcendent urges of Progress, time and revolution.

Lewis quotes Fulton J. Sheen to clarify the ground on which his position and the Thomist doctrine meet, even if they quit it at different points, for different destinations: 'As men lost faith in the intelligence, they acquired faith in the God of becoming. The modern God was born the day the 'beast of intellectualism "was killed"… the day the intelligence is reborn, the modern God will die. They cannot exist together: for one is the annihilation of the other' (Sheen, quoted in Lewis, 1927, p. 388). Sheen's passage reflects what Whitehead termed the 'bifurcation of nature', the split between instinct and intellect. On this point,

Lewis approvingly quotes from Bertrand Russell's pamphlet "The Philosophy of Bergson" (1912): 'among animals, at a later stage of evolution, a new bifurcation appeared: *instinct* and *intellect* became more or less separated. They are never wholly without each other, but in the main intellect is the misfortune of man, while instinct is seen at its best in ants, bees and Bergson. . . . Much of Bergson's philosophy is a kind of Sandford and Merton, with instinct as the good boy and intellect as the bad boy' (Russell, quoted in Lewis, 1927, p. 238). Lewis quips: 'And we know what would happen to the 'bad boys ' of the Past if Bergson had his way, especially the hellenic monsters, headed by Plato…' (1927, pp. 238-9).

Due to this 'bifurcation', Sheen postulates that the modern mind places itself not in the external world but in self, the world of internal experience, and approaches God not through the world, but through the ego. This mirrors the Lewisian opposition of the 'Self' and the 'Not-Self', a recurrent theme in *The Enemy of The Stars* (1914) and *Tarr* (2010a), with the 'Not-Self' described in *Time and Western Man* as the 'patent' of Western genius (1927, p. 263). From the Greeks to the early Celts, Lewis finds the 'natural magic' of Western poetry at its zenith in the intense relation between this objective Western mind and the *alien* world of 'nature'; the loss of this separation is what he bemoans in *Ulysses,* which for all its 'scientific "impersonality"' gravitated everywhere 'to the ego of the author' (1927, p. 262). Bergson likewise connects the intellect and deterministic (Kantian) common-sense with space, and the creative freedom of the vital force (élan vital) with time.

In *Religion and the Rebel (*1957) Colin Wilson makes the interesting argument that the distinction between intellect and intuition is a false one, evidenced by the fact that in the sages of ancient India and China, great intellect and great religious urges co-existed in the same men—Lao-tse, Chuang Tzu, Manu, Vyasa. Wilson sees this bifurcation of nature (originating in the Newtonian victory for scientific enterprise, and the resultant determinism of nature) at the root of the decline of the west. Shaw thought he had found a way out of this quandary by replacing Darwin with Lamarck - where Darwin tried to reduce life to a

mere biological, deterministic mechanism, Lamarck advanced the theory that species evolve because they *want* to evolve. Shaw states: '... I had always known that civilisation needs a religion as a matter of life or death' (Shaw, quoted in Wilson, 1957, p. 74), and this provides a formulation of the religious attitude which Wilson outlined in *The Outsider* (1956), namely Vitalism. It is precisely this Vitalist evolution which Marinetti's Futurists sought to accelerate, via prosthetics, for only then might man 'be endowed with surprising organs: organic adapted to the needs of a world of ceaseless shocks' (quoted in Foster, 2014).

Lewis, of course, rebukes this solution - as Edwards argues, one of his most overarching objections is to this Vitalist attempt to locate a humanly sfatisfying value system in nature itself (Edwards, 2000). Lewis reasons that we cannot merely exchange the doctrine of a mechanism for one of 'organic mechanism', presaging Foster's (2014) critique that the Futurists sought to 'on the one hand extrapolate the human towards the inorganic-technological' and on the other 'make the inorganic-technological the epitome of the human… to be already dead… [yet] stake the future of life on technology'. All this tells you, Lewis scorns, is that the machine is alive— 'which is not such an agreeable belief, constituted as we are, as to believe that it is partially inert', and he lambasts this 'subtle darwinism' that calls itself 'life' merely in order to 'advertise death' (1993, p. 512). To protect the authentic individual, and the authentic creative revolution, from this hypocrisy, Lewis's metaphysics seek to isolate nature from our real values: 'for any view of the world such as we are arguing for here to be successful… *deadness* [of nature] is essential' (1927, p. 200). This is diametrically opposed to Spengler's claim that Goethe's 'Living Nature' was exactly that which he called 'World history' (Spengler, 1918, p. 56). Lewis justly says that it is 'at least strange' (1927, p. 230) that Goethe - upon whose Faustian archetype Spengler rests his theory - was himself, as Spengler underhandedly admits, 'lost in admiration' of 'the 'pure Present'.

As for Whitehead himself, his ultimate position, sourced from an essay called "Immortality" (1941), delivered at the Harvard Divinity School, forms a significant caveat to the arguments Lewis presents in *Time and Western Man*. Whitehead states that the world in which we live is a world of chaos, purposelessness, mortality, and it is the *World of Value* which is the timeless world. 'Creation aims at Value, whereas Value is saved from the futility of abstraction by its impact upon the process of Creation. But in this fusion, Value preserves its Immortality' (Whitehead, quoted in Wilson, 1957, p. 314). Whitehead asks 'In what sense does creative action derive Immortality from Value?" (1941, p. 83) He comes to argue that 'personal identity' is the fusion of the World of Value with the World of Activity; in fact, as Wilson writes, 'the human being is a manifestation of the world of value in the world of activity; and the greater the man, the more "value" he manifests' (Wilson, 1957, p. 315). The salient point here is that Whitehead shows why the difference between the Vitalists and the Neo-religionists like Eliot are not as great as first appears. Religion, the need for an Absolute or a 'World of Value', is essentially a recognition of a distinction between 'two worlds', spirit and matter, and that they really are two differing worlds, not one.

This helps us identify more clearly that the *true* issue for Lewis is the method by which these two worlds commune, and for Lewis the only approach is 'the intellectual road' (1927, p. 390), via art and aesthetics, the Absolute being something to be thought, *not* experienced. This relates acutely to his Promethean ambition in *The Caliph's Design* to improve the aesthetic daily experience of the everyday man. Significantly, all the great instances of art cited by Lewis as materials for the construction of this 'bridge' to the divine all derive from the past: 'we can assert that a God that swam in such an atmosphere as is produced by the music of a Bach fugue, or the stormy grandeur of the genii in the Sistine Ceiling, or the scene of the Judgment of Signorelli at Orvieto, who moved with the grace of Mozart… such a God would be the highest we could imagine' (1927, p. 395). Edwards (2000, p. 315) thus concludes that, as a positive prescription for revolutionary Modernism,

Time And Western Man scarcely delivers. This is not to say that Lewis is nostalgically classical; his inferred argument is that modern art has not yet reached these heights, but - by ridding itself of sublimated ideologies, and overcoming its fatalistic, passive, romantic tendencies - it can strive, as Vorticism did, to stand alongside the giants of the past.

As a means of advocating this strenuous approach, Lewis approves of the paradox that the catholic position, insisting as it does on a distinction between the Divine and man, is therefore a 'less religious' position than the complacent 'God-hungry mysticism' of William James, where God can be supposedly reached directly through personal 'religious experience' (1927, p. 389). Lewis views this misappropriation of the divine for personal ends as something grotesque, similar to his depiction of the *Tyros* plundering Ovid. Worse, if it is not our 'Self' we encounter in this scenario, it is like to be some replication of ideology. Here, we see how Lewis's protection of the individual in *The Art of Being Ruled* and his opposition to unconscious mechanisation (as discussed in Part One) coincide most strongly with his metaphysics. He writes: 'Everything analogically indicates God as a great Unity. We, when most individual (least automatic, and least religiously or otherwise entranced), possess most a similar unity to that we must attribute to God. When we… reach out towards Deity and melt ourselves in a "cosmic" organic of feeling— we are least *ourselves* and posses least centre and organic unity' (1927, p. 397). Lewis consequently opposes the religionist to the artist - the great artist exercises his 'supernatural' power 'personally', whereas the priest, minister and mystic all collectivise spiritual experience to varying degrees (Edwards, 2000; Schenker, 1992). This helps explain why, in one of his letters to Ezra Pound, written during service in World War One, Lewis notes that he had self-identified as a Roman Catholic to 'eliminate one of the chief nuisances of life in the army, those dreadful English churches' (Meyers, 1980, p. 278). The religionists mediate and blur the distinction between human and the divine, Lewis's metaphorical target in *The Human Age* (1955).

One final insight of note is that whereas Berkeley - Lewis's ally in *Time and Western Man* - formulated his Idealism with the intent of subjecting us to an admittedly benign Deity, Lewis's deity has instead, more democratically, renounced his authority over us (Edwards, 2013, p. 15). Lewis described our minds as an 'Aladdin's Cave', a 'paradise', a 'magnificent private picture-gallery' about which our deity allowed us to wander 'in any direction, and to any private ends we pleased'; this the ultimate 'gift of a God, a highly democratic proceeding on His part'— such that 'He became aristocratic again, as it were, for the sake of others'. Lewis concludes that, in this, sense 'God abdicated… He apparently no longer wished to be 'the Absolute'… So he introduced us to, and made us free of, His Heavenly pictures. (1927:, pp. 401-402).

This notion of becoming aristocratic for the sake of others harks back, consciously or otherwise, to Lewis's disclaimer of *The Caliph's Design*; 'it is *you* who would look at it. It would be your spirit that would benefit by this exhilarating spectacle' (1986, p. 39). Just as that imagined city preserved the integrity of both the artist and the crowd, so God's radical transcendence is enacted to protect, in Hulme's words 'the gap between the regions of vital and that of the *absolute* values of ethics and religion' (1924, p. 32). And just as the life of the 'crowd' in *The Caliph's Design* is external, so Lewis depicts mankind as: 'surface-creatures only… It is among the flowers and leaves that our lot is cast… on a still day consider the trees in a forest or in a park, or an immobile castle reflected in a glassy river: they are perfect illustrations of our static dream; and what in a sense could be more 'unreal' than they? That is the external, objective, physical, material world… *our* world of 'matter', which we place against the Einsteinian, Bergsonian, or Alexandrian world of Time and 'restless' interpenetration' (1993, pp. 425).

Wyndham Lewis, Creation Myth (1927)

Lewis's paintings during the period of writing *Time and Western Man* (such as 'Creation Myth') reflect this alliance between Vorticism's static but creative revolution and nature's 'pure present' against the 'temporal collectivity' (1927, p. 181) of Bergson and the Futurists on the one hand, and the wistful romanticisation of nature and the primitive as undertaken by the likes of D.H. Lawrence on the other hand. In his letters, Lewis terms this stylistic shift as the 'mixed-idiom of pure-abstraction-and-stylised nature' (1963, p. 505): an effective visual summation of his 'revolutionary traditionalism.'

We must turn finally to a deleted passage from *Time and Western Man,* where Lewis opposes these aforementioned characteristics of Modernity in new and startling terms:

> It is the brutal mindlessness of the capitalist industrial world, with its deadly array of gigantic machines to destroy us, with its ideologies marshalled to infect us with its soulless will… The Moloch of Modern Ideas and its hierophants are a far greater destructive force for *us* than the peaceful courses of the stars and the occasional disquietude of volcanoes or hurricanes. It is not Nature, but they that is our enemy. Nature is indeed our friend. . . We worship, if we worship, still the virgin-goddess, the stars on the ocean, the break-of-day: the natural magic that inspired our earliest beliefs. (1993, p. 527).

This is a quite remarkable passage, especially to conclude with, as in many senses it threatens to upend the schema for argued for throughout this thesis so far. What it reveals, however, is that Lewis's Classicism was always that of a "soured" Romanticism, he was a 'cynical post-Romantic' as Bowden (2014) put it. By the 1940s, however, Lewis began to allow a more direct Romantic tradition (expressed initially by his admiration for Korin's *Waves at Matushima)* to shine through almost unalloyed. This is nowhere more evident than in the 1942 painting, *A Homage to Etty.*

Wyndham Lewis, Homage to Etty (1942)

As Robert Stacey remarks, William Etty and Lewis were both 'externalists', and emphasised 'sheen and reflectivity', the difference being that Etty's take on this subject was 'hot' whereas Lewis's was 'cold' - although both were obsessed by the 'oceanic' (Stacey, 1992, p. 114). Rowland Smith (1994) enhances the perceptiveness of Stacey's comments by noting that in the originals of *Homage to Etty*, Lewis's nude figures were still mechanistic in origin. Despite the soft outlines in the reproduction 'there [was] still a hint of the human puppet underneath Lewis's newly-flowing lines' (Smith, 1994, p. 541). This arguably shows that Lewis - despite abandoning his "classical" pessimism and replacing it with a concerned humanism - was therefore no more optimistic about human development than when he was painting automatons. His intellectual framework retained a kind of tragic romantic sentiment, only shorn of the rigorous aspects of his satirical invective, the authority of his

linear technique, and even the 'negative politics of his idealistic fascism' (Normand, 1989, p. 333).

But is there, in fact, a more positive interpretation here? As in *Cantleman's Spring-Mate,* nature in *Homage to Etty* is also presented as a combustible force, but the 'puff of green leaves' now holds a more benign connotation (Edwards, 2015, p. 35). *A*s the art critic Walter Michel notes, the 'vortex of abstract *organic* forms' in these late paintings appear to deny mechanism (Michel, 1972, p. 140). There is a clear 'biomorphic' quality to these works, as though they portray an inner vision offering a physiology of the creative process itself, whilst also being abstracted enough to propose an 'astronomic metaphor for creation' (Normand, 1989, p. 338).

Lewis's maturing attitude toward nature, the feminine and the absolute as evidenced in *Homage to Etty* is comparable to Shelley's poem *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), where Prometheus's mother, Earth, is liberated from Heavenly oppression, and an earthly Utopia is wrought by the human race through the Promethean gift of crafts employing Wisdom and Knowledge including 'arts, though unimagined, yet to be'. Shelley describes the building of 'a new earth and sea / And a heaven where yet heaven could never be" (2007, p. 79). Initially, a reading of this theme into *Homage to Etty* seems to contradict Lewis's insistence on the division between the human the the divine, as most profoundly expressed in his late masterpiece *Malign Fiesta* (1955).[21] But there is a key passage in the (often overlooked) novel *The Red Priest* (1956) which suggests a way for these two positions to co-exist in Lewis's schema. In that work, Father Augustine Card sees how England is metamorphosing into something like Sammael's (Satan's) domain: "England is not on the way to being a second Sweden, with the beautiful houses of working men, whose rooms glow with the inside of forest trees - not that, but a sort of Methodist's model of Russia' (1956, p. 42). One

[21] In this novel, God descends in the final pages to halt the fusion of the divine and the human as planned by Sammael, the Devil, who seeks to dissolve 'immortality… into mortality' and create a 'swarming of ephemeral units in place of a world of large and more stable things' (1955. p. 479)

could argue this vision of Sweden is a textual translation of *Homage to Etty's* vision of late-Lewisian truce between nature and the feminine and the absolute. It speaks of a 'natural' realisation of the zestful, vibrant external 'shell' that Lewis hoped would enliven the life of average man in *The Caliph's Design,* and thus represents a humanistic embrace by Lewis's early modernist ambitions of eternity, nature and the feminine. In a sense, then, approaching the end of his life, Lewis recovers the theme which was 'fundamental to his entire being' (Normand 1989, p, 338), namely that artists should in their work 'submit to no idea of the good but the one implicit in creation itself' (Edwards, 2000, p. 542)— not to a fetishising of revolution, of the machine, or even of the primitive. In a sense, these late-life paintings embody that most Lewisian (and Promethean) pronouncement by Tarr: 'there is no alternative to creation except the second-rate' (2010a, p. 204).

CONCLUSION

Wyndham Lewis died on the 7th March 1957, four months after his seventy-fourth birthday. Too young? An absurd question, though perhaps not as absurd as it initially sounds. Some words by the English musicologist, Ernest Newman, are worth considering in this regard. In his Sunday Times column (1927), he acknowledged his obvious regret at the early deaths of composers like Schubert, Mozart and Purcel, but proposed the 'paradoxical proposition' that the composers who died too young were actually the likes of Wagner (seventy), Beethoven (fifty-seven), Puccini (sixty-six), Brahms (sixty-four), and Verdi (eighty-eight) (Newman, quoted in Burgress, 1985, p. 259). These composers were still developing, he argued, while those struck down in their youth had, to his mind, developed to the limit of their capacity. The untimeliness was all human; as artists, they died on time.

There are many writers whose greatest career move was to die young - Arthur Rimbaud, Sylvia Plath, Alain-Fournier, Thomas Chatterton… D. H. Lawrence? No (although Mailer had the uneasy feeling he may have ended up the literary advisor to Oswald Mosley, had he survived into the late 1930's (Mailer, 2014). Lawrence's progression from the domination of women by men in *The Woman Who Rode Away* (1924) to the equality of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) was just as complete as the 102-year-old Ernst Jünger's journey from totalitarian principles of *The Worker* (2017) to the emancipation of The Anarch as shown in *Eumeswil* (1977). Lewis, naturally, cannot be classified at either extreme. The development in Lewis's work from his modernist ambitions toward his 'ancient lights' was cohesive, provocative and fulfilling, but also tantalisingly open-ended. The unpublished and unfinished fourth book of *The Human Age* saga - entitled *The Trial Of Man* - planned, for example, to describe Pullman's assimilation to the divine element, making him 'the first character in any Wyndham Lewis work to achieve a meaningful destiny' (Kenner, quoted in Schenker, 1992, p. 183). It promised to be the most engaging communion yet of Lewis's modernist ambitions with his 'ancient lights': a reconciliation

which this study has shown to be but poetically hinted at in his late-life paintings such as *Homage to Etty*.

This outcome is perhaps a fitting one— Lewis's "Song of the Militant Romance" after all contains the romantic refrain 'never completion', reflecting a preference for life to remain an absolute possibility or infinite 'promise' (Dwan, 2015; Lewis, 2003, p. 33). This study has proposed that this 'promise' Lewis's work holds for the future society is a 'third way' between the best of the 'Old' and the 'New', between the Traditionalist and the Promethean; an encouragement to build in a 'creatively revolutionary manner' a "new world of Reason"' (Lafferty, 2009, p. 86), one that proceeds beyond 'Abstract Man' and seeks to make way for 'higher human classifications' (Lewis, 1926, p. 375)— not in any programmatic sense, but by way of inspiring a community of creative individuals who can ensure that the inexorable march of technology toward the singularity and the post-human future will be accomplished both in tandem with nature and 'with the individual' rather than 'against him' (Spengler, 1928, p. 507).

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