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Automata and Men :

the Shift towards a Human Ideal in the Fiction of

Wyndham Lewis

Par

Ahmed Amara

Département d'études anglaises
Faculté des arts et des sciences

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présenté par :

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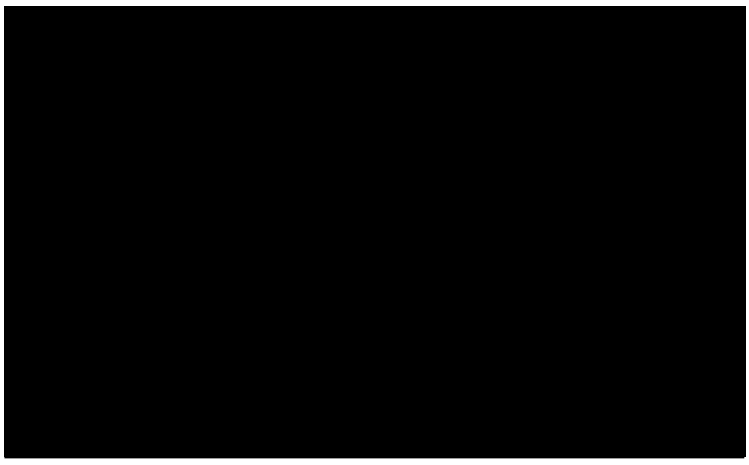

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to underscore the shift that occurred in Lewis's writing after WWI. The argument is that Lewis's pre-war fiction was characterized by an intransigent view that celebrated the autonomy of the intellectual, and deprecated the mediocrity of the layman. The books selected for the discussion of Lewis's early writings are the expression of the same rebellious mind that was behind Vorticist movement as well as the explosive journal *Blast*. After WWII, however, a new mood pervaded Lewis's novels. The early intransigence is gone, making way for a new awareness of the limitations intrinsic to the human condition. The new ideal celebrates healthy human relationships as the only means to come to terms with chaotic nature of modern life.

Awareness of this shift in Lewis's work will be shown to be useful in helping us avoid making generalizations about this idiosyncratic writer, as many critics did. Most of the criticism about Lewis has been preoccupied with analyzing what were seen as patterns in Lewis's fiction such as his detached stance, elitist mind, or fascist ideology. What was missing was the very important notion that Lewis's was a constantly developing mind, and that he kept reinventing himself both as a novelist and thinker.

Resumé de Synthèse

L'objectif de ce mémoire est de souligner le changement qui a eu lieu dans l'œuvre de l'écrivain britannique du 20 ème siècle Wyndham Lewis après la deuxième guerre mondiale. Mon argument est que les romans que Lewis a écrits avant la guerre sont caractérisés par une vision bornée qui met l'accent sur l'autonomie de l'intellectuel et dénonce le médiocrité du profane. Les romans choisis pour l'analyse du Lewis de l'avant-guerre sont ainsi l'expression du même esprit rebelle qui a déclanche le mouvement Vorticiste, ainsi que la revue explosive *Blast*. Cependant, après la guerre, une nouvelle disposition domina l'œuvre de Lewis. L'attitude obstinée donna lieu à une nouvelle conscience qui tient compte des diverses limitations de la condition humaine. Le nouveau principe souligne l'importance des liens humains pour l'expérience de survivre dans la vie moderne.

Etre conscient de ce changement dans l'œuvre de Lewis serait utile dans le sens ou il nous éviterait des généralisations concernant les idées de cet écrivain unique. La plupart des études qui on été faites sur Lewis ont tendance a analyser ce qui a été considère comme motifs dans ses romans, tel que son attitude indifférente, son esprit d'élite ou alors son idéologie fasciste. Ce qui manquait à ces études était la notion que Lewis avait l'esprit qui était en perpétuel état de changement, et qu'il a toujours essayé de se recréer en tant qu'écrivain et penseur.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Wyndham Lewis's standing in the literary scene continues to baffle many students of his work. This is a man whom T. S. Eliot declared to be the "greatest prose writer of [his] generation", and whose friendship and talent Ezra Pound has always endorsed. This is also a man who wrote prolifically, and whose abundant output ranged from novels and essays to literary criticism and political tracts. And this is by no means the complete picture. For, Lewis was a painter as well, and a most unusual one too, in the sense that he was never content with the passive role of reflecting, like scores of other contemporaneous painters, the art conventions of his age. Instead, Lewis developed a sharply iconoclastic attitude towards the dominant esthetic principles of the time, and the Vorticist movement, which he championed, was the articulation of this radically divergent view of art.

Yet, despite this activism, anyone studying Lewis's career will certainly be confused by the utter neglect that this writer/artist's work has from the start been subject to. Lewis's publication history is, in fact, one of rejection on the part of the public and extreme bitterness on the part of the author. Lewis was sometimes at pains to hide his envy and resentment as he saw many of his contemporaries (whom he almost invariably believed to be inferior to himself) climb their way up to public acclaim and approval, while he continued to writhe in neglect and obscurity. Lewis, however, was not the kind of person who would give up at the first daunting signs, and the more articulated his opponents' dismissal was, the more dogged and vigorous his creative energy became. He

continued to write prolifically and tirelessly until he reached that point where he actually started to thrive on the hostility which he encountered everywhere, and to "enjoy" the label of "The Enemy" which he had created for himself in his fiction out of sheer anger.

It is fairly easy to trace the reasons for the public's reluctance to grant Lewis the position that he otherwise deserves within the literary canon. For one thing, Lewis did his best to secure the greatest number of enemies and adversaries, and his ruthless satires and extreme caricatures of many of his contemporaries left them with no doubt whatsoever as to the aggressive nature of the emerging writer. Besides, Lewis's attacks were not restricted to his enemies, as some of his life-long friends had their share of his angry tirades, too. A clear example, here, would be Ezra Pound. Pound's favors and unflinching support had been extremely instrumental in effecting Lewis's entry into the arts scene, yet as though incapable of restraining his antagonistic instincts, Lewis unscrupulously dismissed him in *Time and Western Man* as a "revolutionary simpleton".

Another reason for Lewis's unpopularity was his 1913 split from Roger Fry's Omega Workshop, which had the disastrous effect of leaving him in an open confrontation with the entire Bloomsbury group. These formed, of course, the principal assembly of literati at the time and, to Lewis's greatest misfortune, *they* were the ones who shaped the public's taste and decided what was "good" art or literature and what was not. Lewis, naturally, counterattacked fiercely, and for a long time Bloomsbury was the major butt of his satires, but the showdown would nevertheless prove to have devastating effects on his career.

The *coups de grace*, however, happened in 1931 when Lewis, as if things were not bad enough for him, published his book *Hitler*, which was interpreted as an endorsement of the *Führer*'s ideals, and appeared to confirm what many had previously suspected to be signs of fascism. Lewis, obviously, could not have chosen a worse time for his book, and the public's disappointment and resentment were enormous: the idiosyncratic writer and eccentric artist was now also viewed as a fascist; and although Lewis was quick to renounce his authoritarian illusions, the damage cause by the Hitler book would prove fatal, if anything.

It is, therefore, not surprising, though certainly unfortunate, that Lewis's achievements both as a writer and painter have always been overshadowed by his personal animosities and political pronouncements. Lewis has long remained in total obscurity, a suspicious area, which most critics either tried to avoid or ignored completely; and even those critics who eventually decided to the shake the dust off this mysterious figure did so sometimes with the effect of further tarnishing his image. In fact, it was not until the 1950s that a genuine interest in Lewis started to be felt, and studies such as Hugh Kenner's *Wyndham Lewis* and Jeffrey Meyers' biography *Wyndham Lewis: A Portrait of the Artist* as *the Enemy* hinted at new ways of looking at Lewis's work and life. The focus was finally starting to shift from Lewis's controversial personality and writings to the quality of his work.

Today, the reception of Lewis is certainly different from that of his contemporaries, yet he is still not fully established as a great writer like many figures of his generation; and though his name is very likely to surface in any

discussion of the great modernists (Pound, Joyce and Eliot), his would still probably be a subordinate position. Again, the reason for this is less related to any intrinsic quality in Lewis's writings than it is to the prejudices that he was so successful in attracting.

Accordingly, the purpose of this dissertation is to show that to take Lewis's *oeuvre* as a homogeneous body of identical works controlled by the same idea is to fall into the same deceptive trap that led many of Lewis's opponents to make indiscriminate generalizations about the mind of the Enemy. Instead, the key to understanding Lewis's work lies, I think, in the awareness that his work clearly lends itself to a division into two phases: one that includes his early works and is dominated by the Enemy persona, and another that corresponds to his writings of the late 1930s and extends over the 1940s. In other words, a firm boundary should be drawn between pre-WWII Lewis and post-WWII, as it allows one to notice the change that occurred in Lewis's styles as well as in many of his ideas. For we have in the early Lewis an explosive and sometimes even reckless energy that lashed out at everything that came in its way, leaving in its wake a great deal of resentment and antagonism. The vision Lewis presents of the writer, or the artist, is essentially that of a hardened outcast, who wields his pen or his brush coldly and sometimes even inhumanly to assert his own superiority, and to express his contempt for the rest of the world. This is the Lewis of *Tarr* and *The Apes of God*, who considered himself the Enemy of everyone and behaved accordingly. Yet, though no less recalcitrant and antithetical, Lewis' later writings show a refining of his critical sensibility and, in this sense, a departure from the

super-human illusions that pervaded his early work. This is the other Lewis, the author of *The Revenge for Love* who, while deploring the many ills of the modern world, nevertheless acknowledges that the artist *is* part of this world and can only be a reflection of it.

By focusing on selected works from each period – namely *Tarr*, *The Apes of God*, *Hitler*, *The Revenge for Love*, and *Self Condemned* – this dissertation will point at the changes that occurred in Lewis's thought and style, and where possible establish a link between these changes and certain events in Lewis's life. It will also become clear how the various derogatory labels that have been attached to Lewis –such as "fascist", "idiosyncratic" etc. – reflect rather *one* stage or another of Lewis's constantly developing personality, and as such cannot be applied to the entirety of his work. By so doing, one will probably arrive at a better understanding of Lewis's mind, which will, in turn, lift the veil of notoriety off some of his best works.

Percy Wyndham Lewis was born on the eighteenth of November 1882 on his father's yacht off the coast of Nova Scotia. His father, Charles Edward Lewis was American, and his mother Anne Stuart Prickett was an English girl of Scottish Descent. Soon after his birth, Lewis's parents moved to England and lived there for five years before they finally separated in 1893. The young Lewis was thus early cut off from his American origins, and was left to the care of his mother, who lived precariously but was rather indulgent about her son's needs. Naturally, Lewis's relationship with his devoted mother was far more intimate and important to him than the scanty allowances and sporadic compliments he

used to get from his father. In 1897, Lewis attended Rugby, but his discontent with the school's conventional education and his own lack of motivation contributed to a very mediocre academic performance, and he finally ranked twenty-sixth in a class of twenty-six. Yet, as Jeffrey Meyers points out, Rugby's influence on Lewis was to provide him with a "set of values to rebel against: philistines, conformity, snobbery, academic ambition, and the conventional goals of Oxford and Cambridge" (Meyers 8). A year later, Lewis left Rugby and entered the Slade School of Art, where he found stimulation for his artistic talents and also started to write poetry. He left the Slade in 1901 and embarked on a journey that would take him throughout the European continent, and for seven years he led a bohemian life in Madrid, Munich and especially in Paris, which was then the cultural center of Europe. In Paris, he became friends with Augustus John, and the intellectual and artistic complicity between the two would prove a life-long influence on Lewis.

Lewis finally left the continent for England in 1909, and immediately started writing potboilers and working on his first story, *The Pole*, which would appear in Ford Madox Ford's *The English Review*. Through Ford, Lewis also became acquainted with Ezra Pound, and the two joined forces to revolutionize the arts and fight the philistines. It was this partnership with Pound that would partly induce Lewis to break his association with Roger Fry's Omega Workshop and to found his own Rebel Art Center, which also included Henri Caudier-Breszka and Richard Aldington. This was also the time when Lewis launched his Vorticist movement, which was inspired by Pound's Imagism, and which

advocated abstract and non-representational art as well as the energy of the individual mind. Though the word "vortex" itself was created by Pound, "the arch-Vorticist", as Hugh Kenner acknowledges in *The Pound Era*, was "Lewis unmistakably. Without him, the movement is unconceivable" (Kenner 240). Lewis's intellectual activity continued in 1914 with the publication of the first issue of the journal *Blast*, "Review of the Great English Vortex", which was, again, founded by Pound but mostly edited and written by Lewis. The journal advocated Vorticism and, as such, represented an early and important stage in the development of modernism in Britain. In the preface to his book *Wyndham Lewis: Fictions and Satires*, Robert T. Chapman calls *Blast* "one of the essential documents of modernism" (Chapman 9). The first issue contained poems by Pound, Lewis's Vorticist play *The Enemy of the Stars* and contributions by Ford Madox Ford and Rebecca West. In the same year, Lewis also completed *Tarr*, his first novel which would only be published after the war. In 1915, the second issue of *Blast* appeared, containing T. S. Eliot's "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night": the journal was increasingly attracting attention and Lewis's idiosyncratic personality started to be widely acknowledged. However, the war broke the momentum that was gathering pace, and Lewis was again plunged into obscurity as he entered the military service in March 1916 and trained as gunner and bombardier; in the meantime, *Tarr* began serial publication in *The Egoist*, and would finally be published as a book in 1918. After the War was over, Lewis returned to London and in 1919 published *The Caliph's Design*, a critique of the architectural conventions of his age, and a plea for an alternative, Vorticist

architecture. He then took a break from writing and for five years devoted himself to reading, produced many paintings, and contributed several essays to some literary journals such as Eliot's *The Criterion*, and to *The Calendar of Modern Letters*. The year 1926, however, marked the beginning of a very creative period both in terms of literature and criticism, which started with the writing of *The Apes of God*, a monumental satire in which Lewis attacked almost every aspect of the cultural life of his contemporaries. The effect of this book was so strong that Lewis started to be seen as a 'dangerous' person, and his tirades to be taken seriously. Lewis then wrote *Time and Western* Man, which many critics see as one of the most important works of literary criticism of the twentieth century. In it, Lewis criticized what he calls "the time school", which was predominant at the time, and linked the obsession with Time to be found in the work of many prominent writers such as Marcel Proust and James Joyce to Bergson's ideas of flux and fluidity. The book was full of interesting insights and brilliant analysis, but Lewis's notoriety, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the fact that the people he criticized were established literary figures, prevented what would otherwise have been an enthusiastic reception. Lewis made things even worse when, in 1931, he made a visit to Germany that culminated in the publication of a highly controversial book which he entitled *Hitler*. In this book, Lewis declared that Hitler was "a man of peace", and called on the western nations to leave Germany alone because that was the only way to avoid another world conflict. Obviously, Lewis could not have been more in the wrong, and though he repented later and insisted that what many people viewed as a fascist ideology was in fact

the expression of a sincere attempt to preserve a fragile peace in Europe, the public at large was infuriated by the book, and Lewis was left to writhe in total obscurity as a result. Yet, despite the ostracism, Lewis's creative powers never flagged, and during the following year, he published *Snooty Baronet*, *the Doom of Youth*, and his 1934 book of literary criticism *Men without Art*, a pun on Hemingway's *Men without Women*.

The Revenge for Love, an account of the Spanish Civil War written in 1937, signaled a shift in Lewis's thought and style. Characterization is no longer restricted to description from the outside, and as a result the characters become more substantial and alive. In 1939, just before the war broke out, Lewis and his wife left England for Canada and would stay there until 1945, an experience that would become the material for his last novel *Self Condemned*. After his return to England Lewis settled at Notting Hill Gate, published *Rude Assignment*, which he called "an intellectual biography", and became a critic for the art review *The Listener*. It was at this time that Lewis began experiencing a failure of eyesight, which ironically coincided with the emergence of the first signs of recognition for his literary and artistic achievements. The BBC started broadcasting a radio version of *The Childermass*, the first book of Lewis's trilogy *The Human Age*, and he was also granted a small allowance by the British government. He was then awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Leeds, before he went totally blind in 1953. A year before his death in 1957, an exhibition of Lewis's works was held under the title: "Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism."

Part One: "The Enemy of the Stars": Lewis's Early Fiction

"And controversy has been my lot".
Rude Assignment, 12

In 1926, Lewis complained in *the Art of Being Ruled* that "today… there is absolutely no intellectual Opposition in Europe" (Lewis 360). By "opposition", Lewis meant the intellectuals' role as the guardians of a given culture, the people who have both the understanding and power that would allow them to recognize the various deficiencies of their societies and fight them with all their might. It is this Opposition, this iconoclastic stance, together with the belief in the quasi-perfection of the intellectual, which would set the tone for Lewis's early fiction. It is clear that the Lewis who emerged out of the *Blast* days was a real blast, and armed with all the energy of the vortex, he set out to demolish what he viewed as the imperfections of his age. The task was obviously enormous, because Lewis was not just a Vorticist painter, an idiosyncratic writer, a philosopher, or a political theoretician; he was all these at one and the same time, which meant that he would have to attack his society from the various angles covered by his erudite knowledge. To accomplish this, Lewis thought that the intellectual, or the clerk, to use Julien Benda's term, should arm himself with all the detachment he can possibly master, and be impervious to anything that might compromise the accomplishment of the undertaking. In the process, human empathy and compassion are discarded as signs of romanticism and excessive sentimentalism, the arch-enemies of the creative, individual mind. Accordingly, the heroes of and themes of Lewis's pre-war fiction combine to express the author's oppositional disposition, as well as his faith in the matchless value of the intellectual.

1- The Ascetic Principe: the Artist as *Übermensh* in *Tarr*

Tarr is Lewis's first novel, begun in 1907 and serialized in the Egoist from April 1916 till November of the following year. The novel then appeared in book-form in 1918, before a thoroughly revised edition was published in 1928. All these composition and publication stages suggest a fastidious effort on the part of the author as well as the publisher, Harriet Shaw Weaver (and of course the dedicated Ezra Pound) to ensure that Lewis's entry into the publishing realm would have all the chances of success. And sure enough, the book had what it took to be an auspicious start to Lewis's literary career. As Lewis's himself recalls in his autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering*, *Tarr* was favorably reviewed by the most prominent critics of the time including Rebecca West and T. S. Eliot who, on reviewing it, declared that "in the work of Mr. Lewis we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man" (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 88).

Yet, despite these propitious signs, *Tarr*'s reception was not as spectacular as its author had expected, and Lewis immediately found himself referred to as "the author of *Tarr*". Of course, there was apparently no harm in the label, and up until the late 1930s when he published his autobiography, Lewis seems to have interpreted it as a form of distinction and approval. Yet, one must not forget that before this, Lewis was referred to as "the editor of Blast" and everyone knew – including Lewis himself – the amount of suspicion and notoriety that Lewis had acquired during his Blast days. One might, therefore, conclude that it was not

without a measure of uneasiness that the public conferred this title on Lewis. This, in fact, should come as no surprise because *Tarr*, as Lewis himself admits in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, was a "bombshell", "an explosive novelty" both in terms of form and subject matter (Lewis 88). For one thing, the book was too short to be considered a novel in the conventional sense of the term, and its prose style was no less innovative and experimental. However, it was in subject matter that Lewis's first book shocked the public, and if I choose to discuss *Tarr* in this part of my thesis, it is to underscore its role in creating the first germs of a notoriety that would haunt Lewis throughout his entire career. In *Tarr*, Lewis advocated ideas that were radically innovative and perhaps too novel for his contemporary audience.

The central theme of *Tarr* is a redefinition of the artist and his relationship with the world. Frederick Tarr is the novel's protagonist and the artist-figure through whom Lewis's conveys his views concerning art and artists. The story starts when, after analyzing his "sentimental finances" (54), Tarr, an English painter who lives in Paris, decides to leave his German mistress Bertha Lunken. No explanation is offered by Tarr except that he wants to test a new mood of complete indifference. Bertha is shocked by this decision and, out of desperation rather than by choice, she becomes involved in a relationship with Otto Kreisler, an impoverished German artist. Tarr is attracted to Anastaya Vasek, a half-German, half-Russian girl whose "classical" beauty offers a complete contrast to Bertha's vulgar sensuality. The situation becomes more complicated when Kreisler meets Anastasya and is immediately infatuated by her. Unable to obtain

Anastasya's affection, and writhing under financial pressure, Kreisler becomes involved in an absurd duel, kills his opponent, and finally commits suicide, leaving Bertha pregnant with his child. To save her from shame, Tarr marries Bertha, assumes responsibility for the child, and makes an arrangement to see Bertha everyday from 4 p.m until seven, and devote the remainder of the day to Anastasya.

Tarr is certainly an idiosyncratic character, yet the one striking quality in his personality that the reader readily detects is his belief that, as an artist, he is superior to the rest of population. Early in the novel, Tarr makes no secret of his conviction that he is too good for his age, that as an artist he lives at a more elevated level of existence than the layman. The novel opens with Tarr having what looks like a conversation with Alan Hobson (Tarr is the one talking most of the time). From the beginning, Tarr thinks that "it was an effort to talk to Hobson" (4) and sure enough, the conversation that follows is anything but entertaining. Tarr starts at once by sarcastically calling Hobson Walt Whitman, and, when Hobson asks whether he is getting engaged, Tarr scornfully replies: "I never know at any given time whether I am engaged or not" (6). This will, in fact, be the starting point of an arrogant and ego-centric discourse that Tarr will hold throughout the novel, making of him an extremely disagreeable character even to those who are closest to him. Later on, he esoterically tells Hobson: "I am the panurgic-pessimist, drunken with the laughing-gas of the Abyss: I gaze upon squalor and idiocy" (8). Tarr thus claims ultra-human qualities because he is an artist, and, at the same time, expresses his contempt for the "idiocy" of the world.

In the second chapter, Tarr meets with Guy Butcher and starts a different type of conversation that proves to be no less conceited than the first. For, although Butcher is different from Hobson and apparently much closer to Tarr, the latter's attitude to him is no less condescending. Again, Tarr makes sure *he* is always the topic of the conversation, even if it is just to ask his partner whether he ought to marry his mistress or not. This otherwise strictly personal issue, when treated by Tarr, becomes of the greatest importance to everyone, and as such a great deal of deliberation and advice-seeking should take place. Yet, ironically enough, the act of seeking help only confirms Tarr's feelings of superiority and power because, even "when he solicited advice, as he was now doing of Butcher, it was transparently a matter of form. No serious reply was expected from anyone except *himself*" (21, my italics,)

In his article "*Tarr*: A Nietzschean Novel", Alistair Davies acknowledges the illusion of the "super human quality" in Tarr, which he links to the Nietzschean aspect of the book. Lewis, he argues, "was concerned with the creative and destructive social, cultural and psychological forces which weigh upon the artist in the modern world", (Davies 112). This was a theme that was being developed in Germany, especially by Thomas Mann and Rainer Maria, out of Nietzsche's analysis of the dialectic relationship between society and culture on the one hand, and the individual on the other. The "Nietzschean novella", as Davies points out, discusses "the nature and possibility of autonomous life, particularly for the artist, in a bourgeois environment" (108), and this appears to be Tarr's ultimate objective: to shut himself off from the bourgeois milieu he is

living in, and to lead the individual life of isolation. Just like the Nietzschean hero, the artist, according to Tarr, must disentangle himself from the herd consciousness, take pleasure in his individualism, and never be "afraid of isolation" (Lewis 110). This explains the root cause of Tarr's disagreement with what he views as Hobson's *esprit de corps*: "you are systemizing and vulgarizing the individual: you are the advance-copy of communism, a false millennial middle-class communism. You are not an individual" (17). This aversion to social life also reflects Lewis's own tendency to lead a quasi-solitary existence, and is the product of a complex belief in the superiority of the self and the mediocrity of the world. E. W. F. Tomlin traces this tendency in Lewis to his early encounter with the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Although Lewis was very much influenced by Nietzsche, and though this type of philosophy ran against "Nietzsche's nihilism and diabolism", Lewis was more attracted to "the serene pessimism of Schopenhauer" (Tomlin 30). In fact, this tendency is so present in *Tarr* that it sometimes verges on misanthropy, as Tarr makes no secret of his dislike for all the characters in the book; he even expresses his aversion to the people with whom he otherwise shares intimate relationships, and goes so far as to make a general comment which is strikingly misanthropic: "everybody, however, all personality is catching: we all are sickness for each other" (Lewis 64).

The artist, however, is *not* "everybody", and if he is raised above the rest of humanity, a further distinction should be made between real artists – what Davies calls "vital artists" – and pseudo-artists. In fact, throughout his art career Lewis always tried to draw attention to the presence in English artistic circles of

an insidious class of second-rate artists, whom he accused of doing more harm than good to art. This type of artist is epitomized in *Tarr* by Otto Kreisler, the son of a wealthy German businessman who rejected his father's job offers and chose to lead the life of a bohemian artist in Paris. It is obvious from the outset that Kreisler functions as a mere foil to the "real" artist, Tarr. Through Lewis's cruel lens, Kreisler is described as being everything that Tarr is not, and although he occupies the major part of the novel he has no share whatsoever in Lewis's sympathy. Instead, Kreisler is made to appear as the brutal, animalistic side of humanity – the odd-man-out in the refined Parisian art *milieu*. Consequently, whereas Tarr always meets with sympathy and affection, Kreisler's relations with the others are almost invariably characterized by scorn and contempt. "What, after all, does *Kreisler* mean? Satisfy my curiosity" (222), Tarr sarcastically asks Bertha, his former mistress, who is at this point in the novel developing a relationship with Kreisler. Tarr, who firmly believes that "some artists are less complete than others" (11), cannot absorb the fact that a sham artist might compete with him in art, and even less for a woman's affection.

Kreisler, however, is not the only example of the pseudo-artist in the novel. Alan Hobson is according to Tarr another art-charlatan who, like similar scores of fake artists, claims his Oxford background as his sole connection to art. By ridiculing Hobson, Lewis enters the first round of a life-long conflict with the Bloomsbury group, a conflict that would have catastrophic effects on his career. "The art-touch", he disgustedly remarks, "the Bloomsbury technique was noticeable" in Hobson's appearance. Jeffrey Meyers, Lewis's first biographer,

argues that the character of Hobson is based on Clive Bell, a member of Bloomsbury and an outspoken detractor of Lewis who, in a review of "Contemporary Art in England", tried to make light of Lewis's attempt to bring abstract art to England and accused him of being 'provincial'" (49). According to Meyers, Tarr's diatribe against Hobson is but retaliation for Bell's comments, and a criticism of all "the perverse fellow-travellers of art" (50).

Since he likes to think of himself as being special, Tarr believes that his artistic vocation entails a special treatment of women. Here, again, Tarr becomes a mouthpiece for Lewis to convey his idiosyncratic attitude to women, an attitude which is overtly sexist. The male artist, Tarr thinks, must steer clear of women; and if an encounter is inevitable, its terms should be exclusively dictated by him. According to these terms, the woman is expected to provide all the love and physical pleasure that she is capable of, and expect nothing in return except the Phallus – the symbol of male power and supremacy: "One thing is left facing any woman with whom [the artist] has commerce, that is his sex, a lonely phallus" (11). It is, therefore, clear that for Tarr, to be an artist means that he should extricate himself from all human bonds, particularly those which involve women, because "surrender to a woman was a sort of suicide for the artist" (205).

Equally central to his attitude to the feminine is Tarr's notion of humor. "Humor", he argues, "may be exactly described as the most feminine attribute of man" (59); and it is not at all difficult to perceive the amount of deprecation inherent in this statement, especially if one recalls Lewis's celebrated rejection of humor, which he denounced in Blast as the "quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity

and sleepiness" (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 40). Ever since that blasting, Lewis has always attacked humorists, and femininity has regularly formed the basis of the attack. "The humorist is not so masculine as he thinks himself" (27), Tarr disgustedly asserts. Likewise, Lewis attaches the label "feminine" to everything of which he disapproves, and another example here is the stream of consciousness technique, which was being particularly championed at the time by James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Marcel Proust. "The method of Ulysses", Lewis argued, "imposes a softness, flabbiness and vagueness everywhere in its Bergsonian fluidity" (Meyers 159). A strikingly similar criticism of feminine attributes is echoed in *Tarr*, when Tarr angrily lashes out at Hobson:

> You represent, my good Hobson, the dregs of anglo-saxon civilization: there is absolutely nothing *softer* upon the earth. Your *flabby* potion is a mixture of the lees of liberalism, the poor froth blown off the decadent Nineties, the wardrobe-leavings of a vulgar bohemianism with its headquarters in the suburb of Carlyle and Whistler. (Lewis 17, my italics)

Understandably, a person holding such opinions cannot be expected to have healthy relationships with women[1], no matter how "genuine" an artist he is. In the case of Tarr, this is illustrated by his affair with Bertha, a German "bourgeois-bohemian", as Tarr refers to her early in the novel. Bertha, we are made to understand, is helplessly in love with Tarr, whom she dearly calls Sorbert. Things, however, are not so joyful for Bertha, because her "Sorbert" has just come to her flat "to test a funny mood – a quite *new* mood as a matter of fact"

[1] Like his protagonist Tarr, Lewis had a problematic conception of women. In one of his letters, he declared that the woman is "the enemy of the absolute." In her article "Enemies of the Absolute: Lewis, art and Women", Valerie Parker argues that, while in the political books Lewis's enemy was mass society, and in his satires it was the bourgeois arty-frauds, "in *Tarr* the protagonist's enemy is woman, or rather the Nietzschean Woman, who represents the claims of ordinary sensual life." (211)

(53). Tarr then informs the helpless Bertha that he needs to reconsider his "sentimental finances" and tells her point-blank that the new mood he has come to test is a "feeling of complete indifference as regards [herself]" (53-4). Of course, from Bertha's calm reaction, we gather that her relationship with Tarr has always been anything but stable; she seems to be used to this kind of impulsive behavior, and her lack of response clearly offends Tarr: "you haven't kissed me yet", he reproachfully reminds her, and then he "drew her ungraciously and roughly into his arms, and started kissing her mouth with a machine action" (47).

In fact, this automaton-like side of Tarr is a recurrent motif in the novel. It denotes an absence of all human consideration, and stresses mechanical action, as illustrated by the fact that before confronting Bertha with his "new mood", Tarr "gave a hasty glance at his indifference to see whether it were O.K." (40). What we have here is someone who has taken an apparently preposterous decision which he knows will tremendously affect other people, and is now glancing at his new mood almost as casually as someone inspecting a new dress before going out. Another evidence of Tarr's machine-like mind is provided when Bertha, incapable of hiding her misery and disappointment, gives vent to her tears: "she disengaged her arms wildly and threw them round his neck, tears becoming torrential" (47). Oddly enough, Tarr's reaction to this outburst of emotion is to analyze the nature of her crying and, with scientific precision, he comes to the conclusion that her wail resembled "the buzzing on a comb covered with paper" (47). Yet, regardless of the nature of the resemblance, Bertha's passionate tears will have no effect whatsoever on the almost robotic Tarr. Nor is this attitude

restricted to Bertha. As Tarr himself explains, it is part of a general approach to what he calls "women's psychic discharges", which "affected him invariably like the sight of a person being sea-sick. It was the result of a weak spirit, as the other was the result of a weak stomach" (50). Again, we notice the juxtaposition in Tarr's mind of human experiences and scientific laws, a juxtaposition which makes him impervious to all human emotion and responses.

The other striking feature of the Tarr/Bertha relationship is that the former's rationality is only matched by the latter's sentimentality. For, whereas Tarr is mostly concerned with the "general energies of the mind" (12), Bertha's heart "had always been the most cherished ornament of her existence" (46); and whereas Bertha makes no secret of her fondness for Tarr and seems to take extreme pleasure in their love exchanges, Tarr's "intellect had conspired to the effect that his senses never should be awakened" (203). The contrast provided by the two characters hints at the larger dichotomy between Classicism and Romanticism, a theme that would continue to inform much of Lewis's later work. Lewis, following the other devoted classicists of his generation such as T. S. Eliot and T. E. Hume, launches an attack against what Davies calls the illusory "idealization [and] sentimentality" inherent in Romanticism (Davies 111). Inspired by Hulme, Lewis's attack centers on the notion that Romanticism represents a form of surrender to the animalistic side of humanity, whereas Classicism embodies the creative faculties of the mind. In *Tarr*, the protagonist eventually discards the passionate love offered by the voluptuous and sentimental Bertha, and opts instead for the classical and "artistic beauty" of Anastasya Vasek

(Lewis 203). Tarr claims that he can find in Anastasya, or any other "superior" woman for that matter, a source of inspiration for the creative powers of his artistic mind. Oddly enough, however, when Anastasya crosses her legs, and part of her thighs becomes visible, Tarr's "butcher-sensibility pressed his fancy into professional details, appraising this milky ox soon to be shambled in his slaughter-box, or upon his high divan" (297). It is interesting that at this stage, Tarr is no longer preoccupied by any notion of "artistic" beauty. Instead, the only thing that matters for him now is to release the animal in him, which is exactly what he claims to be resisting.

As one would expect, Tarr's adventure with Anastasya turns out to be a mere passing whim of his, and not the "immediate solution" that would allow him to protect "the artist in him" (203). Tarr eventually leaves her and resumes his quest for other women to satisfy his insatiable sexual needs, and his intentions and motives become less and less consistent as he probably realizes the amount of injustice with which he has treated Bertha. For the first time, the "superman" loses control: "unusually for him, Tarr felt alone, that was a nondescript, lowered and unreal state, for him" (196). Obviously, while he intended to endow his protagonist with the attributes of the Nietzschean hero-artist, Lewis ended up presenting us with an exceedingly unpleasant character who becomes a mere mouthpiece for his creator's radical and exclusive views concerning the privileges of the artist. It is interesting, here, that in a stroke of illumination the egoistic Tarr recognizes that he has always been "an arrogant, eccentric and unpleasant person

– *Homme egoiste*" (203), which is ironic because no other statement could possibly describe Tarr better.

With *Tarr*, Lewis made his debut in the art of writing fiction, and, through it, he made known his extreme disenchantment with the literary, artistic, and social conventions of his age. This was in fact the first germ of an unremitting struggle that would keep Lewis at odds with his contemporaries throughout most of his career, and would thus block the way for any public recognition of the value of his work. In *Tarr*, we also find early signs of a sharp satirical sensibility that would later develop into a full-fledged technique with *The Apes of God.*

2- Exploring the "Great Without": Satire and Visual ascendancy in *The Apes of God*

> "For Satire is never *nice*".
> – *Rude Assignment,* 55

> "Satire is *cold*, and that is good! ...there is a stiffening of Satire in everything good, of 'the grotesque', which is the same thing – the non-human outlook must be there...to correct our soft conceit. This cannot be gainsaid. Satire is good!"
> – *Men without Art*, 121

The period following the publication of *Tarr* can be described as one of "semi-retirement" for Lewis, to use William H. Pritchard's words. With the exception of *The Caliph's Design*, he produced no significant work, and returned instead to reading, painting, editing art reviews, and contributing articles to several literary journals, including Eliot's *The Criterion.* It was not until 1926, with the publication of *The Art of Being Ruled* that a new creative phase of his

career began, and with it a reviving of public interest in the so far notorious writer. Lewis next published *Time and Western Man*, a major work of literary criticism that earned him the admiration of W. B. Yeats, and in 1928 produced the first part of *The Childermass*, the first book of his trilogy *The Human Age*.

What most people probably did not know, though, was that during these years of intensive intellectual activity and image-embellishing attempts, Lewis was secretly preparing what would later be seen as a "time-bomb", a knock-out assault on all his enemies and *bêtes noires*. In 1930, the highly controversial satire *The Apes of God* was published, to the extreme horror and bitterness of Lewis's main satirical victims. Lewis, who had established his own printing house, The Arthur Press, decided to rely on his publishing experience to bring out *The Apes of God*. In an interview with the London *Star*, Lewis explains this choice: "previously, Chatto & Windus had always published for me...this new book however, was of the class that always does best when published by a private press instead of a large firm of publishers, so I decided to be the private press myself" (Meyers 158). This indicates that Lewis had an extremely high opinion of this particular work that took him seven years to finish, and he was certainly encouraged by some early praise from several prominent figures of the time. W. K. Rose' edition of *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* includes a letter by Prentice, predicting that *The Apes of God* "is certainly going to be a remarkable and astonishing book....I haven't read anything for months and months that has made such an impression on me" (167). Also, on reading *The Apes of God*, W. B. Yeats – whose interest in Lewis had started with his reading of *The Childermass* –

wrote to Olivia Shakespear asking her to "tell Mr Wyndham Lewis's...that I am in all essentials his most humble and admiring disciple" (Rose 181).

Praise, however, was not the only response to the book; and no matter how enthusiastically supportive some of the early reviewers of the book were, *The Apes of God* would turn out to be a complete disaster as far as Lewis's reputation was concerned. In fact, the book completed Lewis's estrangement from his contemporaries, an estrangement that had already been gathering momentum after the Vorticist project and the publication of *Tarr*. The problem with *The Apes of God* is that, despite being a *tour de force* of satirical energy as Hugh Kenner has observed (102), it created more enemies than Lewis could possibly handle. Besides, Lewis seems to have repeatedly fallen into the trap of dehumanizing his victims in ways that made them lifeless to the readers, and that made the book seem tedious as a result.

In *The Apes of God* almost no action takes place; the narrative centers on Daniel Boleyn, a "young genius" whom the reader is invited to follow as he makes a tour of London's artistic circles. In the course of this journey, Dan meets with most of Lewis's worst enemies: pseudo-artists, poseurs, literary coteries, homosexuals, and the list goes on. It seems that Lewis made sure that nobody is spared in the course of this massive attack and, to be sure, his satire achieved great success in many parts of the book. Complete success, however, was handicapped by what was viewed by many critics as weak characterization and a tedious plot. The novel opens with a lengthy, italicized prologue entitled "Death – the Draummer" and, sure enough, the first lines of the book smell of death, if

anything. The first character we meet with is Lady Fredigonde Follet, a grey-haired ghost of woman who is having her hair done by her maid, yet who only inspires decay and degeneration: "the lips of parchment whinned 'hennessey', and shaken at the same time by the vicious plucks of the comb, the large false-teeth rattled in the horse-like skull, while she panted at this person...with hissing politeness" (Lewis 12). A more detailed description of the Lady's anatomy will ensue, with the effect, again, of creating an image of animal decomposition:

> The neck had survived, that was still elastic, but it dwelt upon a plaster bust. Her arms were of plaster – the moved, but upon either hand of the lay-torso. Too stately to maltreat – as she had been used with her person, in her hey-day, like a naughty horse – she still would exercise her headpiece sharply, upon the ruined clockwork of her trunk. (14)

This is a woman who exudes disintegration and whose very presence creates a whiff of death that permeates her environment. Later on, we learn that this repulsive Lady is based upon Gertrude Stein, one of Lewis's biggest enemies, and one whose writings and style Lewis made it his life-long goal to criticize. Like Stein, Lady Fredigonde was "cut off from the optic or tactile connections", and as a result, she

> passed most of her time in her mental closet, a hermit in her own head. Sometimes she would stein away night and morning to herself, making patterns of conversations, with odds and ends from dead disputes, and cat's-cradles of this thing and that – a veritable peasant industry, of personal chatterboxing and shortsighted nonsense. (18)

What Lewis is criticizing most here is Stein's stream of consciousness technique, which ran against Lewis's principle of favoring the intellectual over the emotional. Yet, the fact that Lady Fredigonde stands for Stein does not make her an interesting character; in fact her physical decay is more than matched by

her aging mental capabilities. She seems to be utterly unaware of her deteriorating condition, and makes judgments that show her lack of understanding: "Horace Zagreus is a great dear she huskily purred – she did not care what they said – much that he says is undeniably most sensible and true" (18). The Lady remains an idiotic character throughout the novel, and it is towards the end of the book that Lewis deals the death blow to the already dying ghost. Lewis has his ridiculous character wedded to the cunning Zagreus, when suddenly her romantic illusions come to an abrupt end: the Lady pathetically dies in the arms of her prince charming. If the book's characters have to be lifeless, than Lady Fredigonde is certainly the most lifeless among them. She is an example of Lewis' inability to escape from the limitations imposed by her utter contempt for his characters.

The lady, however, is not the only example of what were seen as "flat characters". The other characters moving in the Lady's orbit are not particularly interesting, either. Such is, for instance, that case of Dick Wittingdon, who seems to exemplify Lewis's tantalizing technique of surprising the reader by presenting what seems to be an extremely influential character who, in the end, turns out to be a mere joke. Accordingly, Dick's appearance in the book is made to appear most impressive:

> Then the door rocked, there was a sound of blows, and then one loud distinct rap cut them short. Bridget stopped standing her face towards it. For a moment there was a cessation of these sounds of a disquieting irregularity. But the door slowly came ajar, it seemed to hesitate: a further fumbling occurred outside: next it flew briskly open and an enormous bronzed and flannelled figure burst in. (33)

This theatrical entry makes us wonder if, indeed, Dick is the one character who is going to give life to the otherwise tedious plot. Yet, despite his "six-foot-two of brown seasoned manhood" (34), Dick will reveal himself to be "a mere fool" (148); together with his aunt Lady Fredigonde, he reflects the hypocrisy and superficiality of the upper classes, which Lewis is always at pains to deprecate. Dick's encounter with, and subsequent treatment of, his aunt is meant to be emblematic of the falsehood that underlies relations within the aristocratic classes. Upon meeting the aging Lady, Dick heartily exclaims: "you look most awfully well – you astonish me more everytime I see you!" Yet, when he actually hugs her, he can hardly hide his aversion and disgust:

> He had seen the lipstick's trail at close quarters, he had smelt the breath blowing straight out of the no man's land of death at the hollow heart of the decrepit body. His eyes rested upon her for a moment, in the process of straightening himself to his fullest height, with a spasm of disgust, in self-defence, at having been let in for a disagreeable experience. (35)

Like so many of the Apes in the book – and he is a "the world's prize Ape" – Dick has his own artistic pretensions. He has used his considerable wealth to transform himself into an "Oxford-voice *fairy-prince*" (148), but has been too dull to succeed, and his conception of letters is limited to pornographic literature. He is also "a noted amateur *flagellant*" who keeps a wide collection of whips, which Materer sees as an attempt to "make him seem romantically sinister" (86).

In the chapter entitled "The Split-man", Dan meets Julius Ratner, a second-rate writer who keeps a bookshop and "whose ambition led him to burgle all the books of Western romance to steal their heroes' expensive outfits for his musty shop" (154); and despite being an Ape like the others, Ratner is unique because his "apishness …knows no frontiers" (160); but that is just about his only

"merit". For Ratner's literary pretensions are a sham if anything, and Lewis does particularly well in exploding all these pretensions with the power of his sharp satire. Ratner's creativity, we are told, works like a "literary engine", which he can start only by working himself into a frenzy. Also, with him it was "a settled habit to treat his muse as a bad joke", and perhaps rightly so, because she kept turning up "every time more pretentiously not-of-this-earth, but of some spurious, borrowed, gimcrack millennium, staged on the Rummelplatz of *that* polish market or in *that* swabian dorf" (160). Lewis goes so far as to include a sample of Ratner's prose style (for he is writing a novel), and this is probably what allowed many critics to see an allusion to James Joyce through what looks like a stream of consciousness technique as well as the *Epiphany* style. Yet, whomever readers will think that Ratner stands for, it is clear that for Lewis he represents that class of second-rate writers who lack both talent and inspiration, yet who rely on their personal connections to get their books published and their merits exaggerated. Through Ratner, Lewis attacks what he views as the repulsive principles and practices that dominated the publishing industry at the time, preventing poor but talented writers from having their chance, while making way for the sham ones, as long as they have money. Ratner, we are told, is a writer, publisher, and distributor all in one, and to top it all, he owns "a small high-brow review called simply "*Man X*", which helps "puff and fan that wan perishable flame of [his] occasional works" (161). The fact remains, however, that he is not an interesting character, and as such his only merit is to have confirmed Zagreus's earlier statement that "one Ape is not unlike another" (160).

The other characters in the book or Apes– and there are so many of them – are even less interesting than the drab ones that have so far been mentioned: Dan goes to Pamela Farham's tea party, where he meets with Clemmie Richmond and witnesses an extremely dull debate; he then poses for a lesbian Ape, meets the Proustian Lionel Kein, and finally attends a party at Lord Osmund's. The one character who manages to distinguish himself from the rest of the Apes is Horace Zagreus, Dan's mentor and apparently a specialist in discovering "genius". Zagreus's knowledge of, and commitment to, the principles of the omniscient Pierpoint suggest a different level of awareness from that of the Apes, an idea that is further emphasized by Dan's reverence for him. Yet, Zagreus can by no means be said to correspond to Lewis's favorite type of man, and as such there is a satirical touch to the way he is presented to the reader. His very name, for instance, as Hugh Kenner points out, is one of Dionysus's names, "which suggests a reference to the Dionysian praise of the emotions that Lewis deplored" (Materer 86). As for his project of initiating Dan into the world of arts, Zagreus's intentions are brought to question in the episode in which he, accompanied by Dan, meets Francis – obviously one of his former protégés. Significantly, Zagreus seems to be scandalized by the encounter, and Francis's comment: – "still as interested as ever in the young" (Lewis 59) – casts a dubious light on the "artistic" motivation behind Zagreus interest in Dan's "genius". Later on, Dan will have another chance of getting a better glimpse into Zagreus's personality, when one of his female acquaintances, Melanie Blackwell, expresses both her surprise and disappointment at the knowledge that Dan has been seeing Zagreus:

"I did not know you had been seeing Horace", Melanie says "with offended slowness"; then she adds: "but if you had been seeing Horace – that is a pity....Horace is all right, but as regards young men Horace is really impossible that is the trouble, he cannot help that of course" (105). This seems to confirm Francis's earlier comment that as far as Zagreus is concerned, Dan is merely his "latest suffix" (60). Seen in this light, Zagreus becomes like the rest a bogus person, a lifeless character, and a mere imitator, or ape, of the real Pierpoint whose principles he pretends to uphold. Unlike Zagreus, however, Pierpoint has the distinction of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time; he observes the other characters from an apparently superior position and, by means of his Encyclicals, is able to pronounce judgments that are strikingly similar to Lewis's; and although Hugh Kenner argues that, in the end, like Zagreus's, Pierpoint's superiority to the Apes is fake, he acknowledges all the same that "we are not meant to notice that" (101) because Pierpoint is obviously the only character who is spared Lewis's satire.

It is true that Lewis's utter contempt for his characters has prevented him from making any of them interesting for the book. Materer argues that casting the principal character in the novel, Dan, in the role of a naïf was itself a risky undertaking on Lewis's part, as this is a very demanding technique; it is true that this technique had already been successfully used by writers like Voltaire and Eveleyn Waugh who faced the challenge of "mak[ing] the actions of knaves and fools amusing to the reader even while exposing their triviality" (Materer 87). Lewis, however, was probably too carried away by his strong dislike for the

targets of his satire to even grant them the credit of being amusing. The result was that, while acknowledging Lewis's attempt to revive the tradition of satire, many critics have expressed their disappointment at what Meyers calls "the overwhelming negativity and anger" of the book's satire. What prevented Lewis's satire from reaching the level of that of Pope or Smollett, for example, was the fact that he "was not really interested in his victims and never brought them to life" (160).

The question that arises here, though, is whether it should necessarily be considered a blunder on Lewis's part to have created "flat", uninteresting characters. For this is a writer who had a radically different view of human subjectivity, and for whom the conventional notions of surface and depth were part of an orthodox mode of writing that he had set himself to overthrow. In his book *Late Modernism*, Tyrus Miller has recently questioned the cogency of many critics' tendency to compare Lewis's characters to those of writers like D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce (whom he calls high modernists) as a means of evaluating them. He argues that even those critics who were generally sympathetic to Lewis like Kenner and Materer still "find his work falling short of greatness when measured against high-modernist writing". One example of this, according to Miller, is Materer's tendency to judge "Lewis's late modernist works on evaluative criteria that, in their appeal to vitality, roundness, and human depth, might have come straight out of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*" (Miller 87). What these critics apparently failed to consider was the fact that if Lewis did not manage to create "rounded" characters like those of Lawrence or Joyce, it was

because he never intended to. Nor should he, in my opinion, be expected to do so; certainly not in a satirical book like *The Apes of God*, where the main objective is to reveal the inconsequence and superficiality of the victims, as well as "satirically debunk…modernist prose" (88).

The other main characteristic of Lewis's satire, and one that was seen to be equally responsible for the "defective" characterization is the fact that it is theory-based. Lewis once wrote: "I am for the *Great Without*, for the method of *external* approach, for the wisdom of the eye, rather than that of the ear" (Meyers 159). Lewis's adherence to the principles of visual immediacy froms the nucleus of a peculiar theory of satire. The method consists in describing the characters from the *outside* rather than from the inside; probing the inner beings of characters is for Lewis a sign of sentimentality and a form of surrender to the cult of the emotion. The "internal method", as Lewis prefers to call the stream of consciousness technique, was according to him responsible for devaluing many otherwise great works, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*. He wrote in *Men without Art*:

> As developed in Ulysses, it [the internal method] robbed Mr. Joyce's work as a whole of all linear properties whatsoever, considered as a plastic thing – of all contour and definition in fact. In contrast to the jelly-fish that floats in the centre of the subterranean stream of the 'dark' Unconscious, I much prefer, for my part, the shield of the tortoise, or the rigid stylistic articulation of the grasshopper. (120)

Instead, Lewis chose to discard the deep and concentrate on the "shell": "in writing, the only thing that interests me is the shell. It's the actions and the appearance of people that I am concerned with, not the 'stream of consciousness' of any 'mysterious', invisible mind" (159). The result, however, was that in *The Apes of God* Lewis ended up presenting the reader with what appeared to be

"shells" of characters, and the book's otherwise brilliant style was, in Meyers' words, frequently spoiled by "excessive elaboration and by the granite landslides of prose that suffocated rather than stabbed the victims" (160).

In a 1930 letter to Richard Aldington, Lewis wrote:

> *The Apes* has caused here in London a great deal of disturbance. My life has been threatened by an airman, even! Then James Joyce has come to see me, to play Odysseus to my Cyclops – quite forgetting that it is *he* who has half-sight. The agony-column of the Times has echoed the rage of the people who considered themselves attacked in the Apes. (*Letters* 190)

This beautifully sums up the tremendous effect *The Apes of God* had on Lewis's life and career. For, apart from the various formal weaknesses of the book which have been discussed earlier, and which disappointed many of Lewis's otherwise supportive critics, *The Apes* created for Lewis enemies of an altogether different type, and by this I mean personal enemies. Unfortunately for Lewis, most of the people satirized in the *Apes* were members of the major literary coteries of the time, and by alienating them, Lewis put his very career on extremely precarious ground. The main butt of *The Apes*' satire are Bloomsbury, Lewis's life-long enemies. Bloomsbury, however, is not one person but a group of the most influential literary and artistic figures of the time including, among others, Roger Fry, Virginia Wolf and her husband Leonard, Clive Bell, Herbert Read, Desmond MacCarthy, and Lytton Stratchey.

Lewis hated Bloomsbury for many reasons. He thought that the group was prejudiced against him, and was extremely hurt when they took sides with Roger Fry during the controversy that led to Lewis's break with the Omega Workshop. He also disliked their snobbish behavior and thought that they were using their Cambridge background to promote their mediocre art and writings. As for their

esthetic principles, Lewis believed that Bloomsbury esthetics were essentially Victorian in that they were decorative and old fashioned. Further deepening the gap between Lewis and Bloomsbury was the latter's pacifism. Lewis probably felt that it was unjust that he should have suffered tremendous loss in the war, while his opponents took the cowardly position of claiming that they were pacifists. The war had in fact wreaked havoc on Lewis's entire career by disrupting his Vorticist project and killing two of his best friends, and, if he was now criticizing Bloomsbury's pacifism, it was more as a result of his bitterness than out of any desire to promote the cause of war. Finally, Lewis's antagonism to Bloomsbury could be seen as being partly homophobic, as he was particularly repulsed by the group's "homosexual ethos" (Meyers 162). Lewis had already expressed his aversion to homosexuality in *The Art of Being Ruled.* In the "Man and Shaman" section of the book, Lewis argued that

> The male sex-inversion can be regarded...as the prognostication of a deep revolution in the European character. The bold, adventurous, "independent", but uncreative European of the past, dies with this fashion, perhaps; and may, it is to be hoped, be reborn after it as another creature: in short, more what the Asiatic is. (240)

That homosexuality is treated as a form of "revolution" should not strike one as being indicative of a positive attitude; not one who is familiar with Lewis's mind, anyway. In fact, Lewis viewed the homosexuals' rebellion against the predominant mainstream heterosexuality as the expression of a sentimental desire to be "the underdog", and linked it to the emergence of the cult of youth, symbolized in *The Apes of God* by Zagreus's weakness for, and idealization of, "young geniuses". Just like women and the layman, the homosexual, or "turn-sex"

as Lewis prefers to say, is the enemy of the intellect; in fact, "there is no bitterer enemy" (244). This is why Lewis attacked Proust as

> [a]n arch sex-mixer, a great democrat, a great enemy of the intellect. For he desires in the deepest way to see everything converted into terms of sex, to have everything and everybody on that violent, scented, cloying, and unreal plane, where there is nothing that cannot be handled, the very substance of illusion sniffed at and tasted by everybody, and put to the uses of sensation. In that world most of the values of the intellect are reversed. (244)

Again, we notice the uncompromising stance that sometimes verges on dogmatism when it comes to dealing with ideas that were not part of Lewis's fixed principles. This rigid conception of the intellectual also recalls the Nietzschean exultation of the role of the artist earlier seen in *Tarr*.

Yet, by attacking people like Proust, Viginia Woolf, and Stratchey[1], Lewis's huge "bloomsburial" project had little chances of success from the beginning; and although many critics admit that Lewis did score some points in the course of this life-long battle, and that many a Bloomsburian writhed under the painful whip of his satire, it was obvious that during this conflict Lewis "had suffered more harm than he had been able to inflict" (Meyers 166).

As he conducted his dogged warfare with Bloomsbury, Lewis clearly felt the need to align himself with a group whose power and influence could match that of his rivals. Here the Sitwells, a prominent literary family, presented themselves as a first choice. They had already expressed their admiration for the young writer's talent, and had done their best to help initiate him into the world of

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[1] In the introduction to C. J. Fox's edition of Lewis's criticism entitled *Enemy Salvoes*, C. H. Sission argues that what he calls "Lewis's slapping down of the great" writers was not intended to "diminish what is of value". He adds that Lewis's satire is usually "directed against what he sees as the weak or frivolous aspects of their performance."(8)

art and letters. This explains why, when Lewis unleashed *The Apes of God*, the Sitwells were literally shocked by what they saw as the sheer wantonness of the attack. Meyers' biography of Lewis includes comments made by Sir Sacheverell Sitwell, which show the amount of bitterness *The Apes* had provoked among the Sitwells:

> In the early 1920s I was a friend and a great admirer of Wyndham Lewis's. But in [1930] he launched, without warning, *The Apes of God*, a huge time-bomb meant to destroy my brother, my sister and myself. Since then, though still an admirer of this genius *manqué*, I want to hear no more of him. He was a malicious, thwarted and dangerous man...we had the impression that he was a friend until he tried to deliver this death blow. (168)

These comments illustrate how characteristically miscalculated and impulsive Lewis's moves could be, and how, instead of winning people over, he would typically seek to antagonize them. They also show the extent to which Lewis fell out of the Sitwell's favor and anticipates their subsequent attacks on the Enemy. In fact, the Sitwells did not lose much time before they launched their counterattack. Edith Sitwell, whom Lewis sarcastically called a "most hoary, tried and reliable" enemy, retaliated by ridiculing Lewis in her autobiography *Taken Care of* and in her only novel *I Live under a Black Sun*, by calling him "an involuntary recluse" (Meyers 169). Osbert Sitwell, for his part, attacked Lewis in *Those Were the Days* through the character of Stanley Esor, an obscure Jew who "attempts to be a poet, musician, painter, philosopher, sculptor, and architect...but lacks genuine talent" (173).

However, here again, one can find justification for the utter ruthlessness of Lewis's attacks in *The Apes of God* in the fact that the book was never intended to be a conventional satire. In fact Lewis preferred to think of *The Apes of God* as an

original exercise in what he calls 'non-ethical' satire, which is to be distinguished from 'ethical' or conventional satire. He further elaborates on this distinction in *Men without Art*:

> There is of course no question that satire of the highest order has been achieved in the name of ethical will. Most satire, indeed, has got through upon the understanding that the satirist first and foremost was a moralist. And some of the best satirists have been that as well. But not all. So one of the things it is proposed to do in these pages is consider the character, and the function of, non-ethical satire; and if possible to provide it with a standing, alongside the other and sciences, as a recognized philosophic and artistic activity, not contingent upon judgments which are not those specifically of the artistic of philosophic mind. (107)

Lewis cites Dryden as a precursor in the writing of non-ethical satire, and as someone who "dispensed with the protective moralistic machinery of the classical satire" (107). This explains, for Lewis, the "frantic rage" of Dryden's opponents, and in turn the fury of the people who were satirized in *The Apes of God*. For Lewis, however, it is much more tolerable to meet with rage and resentment than to have to write the kind of satire that would paradoxically serve as publicity for his victims. Whereas, "if you remove from satire its moralism, then it has no advertisement whatever for the victim – then it is doubly deadly, and then also the satirist is doubly hated by those picked out for attack" (108). Again, what many critics have dismissed as weakness resulting from Lewis's inability to separate his writings from his personal animosities turns out to be the product of an elaborate theory of satire.

On the whole, if the overall impact of *The Apes of God* is to be described in one word, then this would be "distastrous". Yet, in typically Lewisian fashion, the various ensuing attacks on its author merely provoked his latent antagonistic

instincts, and when his attackers thought that he was demolished, Lewis launched another most unexpected new offensive: his 1931 book simply entitled *Hitler*. The "Lewis gun" had yet to make another charge.

3- Politics and Fascism in *Hitler*

> "It is somewhat depressing to consider how as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it".
> – *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 4

Lewis wrote in *Rude Assignment:*

> Politics is for the Twentieth Century what religion was for the Sixteenth and Seventeenth. In a time so exclusively political, to stand outside politics was to invite difficulties: or not to identify yourself, in passionate involvement, with one or other of the contending parties. (75)

And involved he was; perhaps even too involved to *avoid* difficulties. Lewis's politics have always been characterized by his dislike for Western democracy, and the key to this aversion lies in his belief that democracy, as practiced in the West, tends to turn people into a large, unthinking mass. This is a position Lewis adopted with particular vigor after he read Julien Benda's important book *La Trahison des Clercs*. As Geoffrey Wagner points out, Benda's main argument revolved around the pressures that the State exercises on the clercs, or intellectuals, in order to subdue them and force them to become part of the masses. For Benda this is treachery; for Lewis it is the death of the intellectual. Lewis's conception of human society is based on the distinction he makes between "the changeable few" or the elite, and "the changeless many" or the masses; and his belief has always been that "the main body of humanity is

composed of "things", idiotic units who have no desire to feel deeply or think clearly, 'hallucinated automata'" (Wagner 34). Thus, like Tarr, his Nietzschean individualistic artist hero, Lewis refused the conformity principle imposed on him by the democratic system, and looked for alternative systems that would reward the elite artists and grant them the prestige and privileges they well deserve.

In the 1930s, the Western democracies were already showing signs of imminent decline, while both Communism in Russia and Fascism in Italy and Germany were increasingly attracting more sympathizers. The tides, however, were more in favor of the Communists, but Lewis, faithful to the end to his antithetical nature, chose to swim against the tide and his ideas dramatically started to drift towards the right. He believed that Communism held as little future for the artist as democracy did. He was extremely fascinated by the authority and dynamism that fascist leaders inspired, and he longed to witness the euphoria they managed to create among their supporters. This dream miraculously came true when, in November 1930, Lewis was given a commission by the editor of *Time and Tide* to write some reports on Hitler. This meant that Lewis would be able to travel to Germany and see with his own eyes what he had only been able to see in his imagination. It was during this "fateful November", as Meyers calls it, that Lewis's gathered the material for his controversial *Hitler*.

In the opening of *Hitler* Lewis asserts his belief in the importance of the role that Germany was to play in shaping the future of Europe. "Germany", he says, "holds the key of the New Europe" (3). This he explains by the new, dynamic political forces that were actively competing for power and were

attracting a great number of voters. Among these, the *Hitler Bewegung* (Hitler Movement) and the communists stand conspicuous. Yet Lewis declares from the beginning that he is neither a "critic, nor as yet [an] advocate of German National Socialism or Hitlerism", and that the aim of his book is to present "the intelligent Anglo-Saxon [with an] unprejudiced and fairly detailed account of this novel movement" (4). Accordingly, the next few pages look like a typical journalistic coverage of the National Socialists' campaign to win voters; Lewis backs his account with statistics that show both the increasing popularity of the movement as well as his own objective and neutral approach to the whole matter. This, however, does not prevent him from saying that he was tremendously fascinated by the sheer dedication and enthusiasm of the early supporters: "it was impossible to be present and not be amazed at the passion engendered in all these men and women, and the million of others of whom these were only a fraction" (11).

Germany, however, was certainly no paradise on earth, and in the chapter entitled '*Berlin im Licht*', Lewis expresses his disgust with what he saw as the atmosphere of disorder, sexual perversity, crime, and violence that reigned in the capital city, and made of it a worse place than the infamous Chicago. The main cause of this large-scale violence was the constant skirmishes and street fights between the Nazis and the Communists, which the German authorities were unable to suppress. What is remarkable about these fights, though – and here Lewis's position becomes less neutral – was the fact they were not even. For, while the Communist is invariably armed, the Nazi "has only his fists and sticks to defend himself with, owing to the discrimination of the Police Authorities –

from the start the Nazis have been incessantly denounced, harassed and disarmed" (19). This allows Lewis to conclude that "most of the killing and wounding is done by the other side", meaning the communists (19). The Nazi leaders for their part, and notwithstanding the unjust nature of the situation, continued to urge their followers not to arm themselves, to keep calm and avoid violence. Here, Lewis's partiality starts to take shape as he praises the Nazi leaders not only for their "pacifism" but also for their sense of focus and their aversion to issues of morality and sentimentality. They seem to have learned that some issues are far more important than others, and "the young Nationalsocialist has firmly grasped this fundamental truth, in a manner that no average political Anglo-Saxon would". It is for this reason that Lewis's sneers at "the great Western democracies" for repeatedly dragging their peoples into "moralist cul-de-sacs" (22-3).

It is perhaps in the second part of the book, entitled "Adolf Hitler – the Man and the Party", that Lewis states his most controversial opinions. Hitler, he asserts, "is a man of peace" (32), and he bases his argument on the impression he had that the Nazis abhorred violence and warfare and were always in favor of peaceful means: "the present Hitlerite attitude is adamantly pacific. The orders that have gone out to confine themselves to legal measures only, of propaganda and self-defence, are very strictly enforced, within the party-ranks" (55). This policy was obviously dictated by the *Führer* (the leader) who himself "was not a gratuitously warlike individual at all" (54); he was rather "an armed prophet", one whose ammunition did not consist of ordinary weapons but of an army of "a hundred thousand fists – mere knuckles" that were ready to fight and die for him.

The other aspect of Hitler's Germany and one that Lewis seems eager to emphasize (and which in hindsight appears terribly wrong) is the fact that the power and the threat posed by the Nazis were deliberately blown out of proportion by the Allied propaganda machine. Lewis thought that the Hitlerites were too much engrossed in their internal problems to even *think* of attacking their neighbors.

Pro-Hitlerism, however, was not Lewis's only mistake in *Hitler*; he further alienated himself from the others by expressing anti-Semitic views. Lewis, who had undertaken the task of bringing the principles of the German fascist movement closer to his compatriots, knew perfectly well that, to do so, he has to account for the notorious *Judenfrage* or Jewish question. Here, too, Lewis believed that the Western media played an important role in spreading prejudiced ideas about the emerging movement on account of its allegedly blatant anti-Semitism. Lewis's explanation for this anti-Semitism is that the Jewish people, being "an independent and powerful, and very exclusive, religious community", can only attract speculation and suspicion wherever they go, just as they did in America. His argument is that the anti-Semitism that exists today has its root causes in "the extremely bad manners and barbaric aggressiveness of the Eastern slum-Jew immigrants dumped into America yearly in such great numbers" (36). On the European continent, however, anti-Semitism is used as an effective "instrument of political agitation" not only by the Hitlerites but by most nationalist movements throughout Europe, the idea being that the Jew epitomized all the destructive forces that threatened European culture. This, Lewis argues, is

illustrated by the establishment all over Europe of anti-Semitic institutions, the biggest being in Paris. It is, therefore, preposterous to say that the Jewish question is peculiar to Germany or any other single country, and it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that it is a European – if actually not a universal – issue, the only distinction being that the Hitlerite probably "takes the Jew too seriously" (41). Lewis, then, concludes by emphasizing the historical, racial, and cultural kinship between the English and their Teutonic neighbors, and urges his countrymen not to "allow a mere bagatelle of a *Judenfrage* to stand in the way" of preserving this kinship (42).

It is quite hard to exaggerate the damage that the *Hitler* book caused to Lewis's already suffering image. Immediately after its appearance, the book drew a large amount of criticism and resentment, and out of the only four reviews that it received three were negative. People were repelled by what they viewed as blatantly pro-fascist ideas and shameless anti-Semitism, and Lewis was shrewd enough this time to realize that, in order to put an end to the controversy, he had to publicly retract his *Hitler* statements. And retract he did, by writing two books: *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human*? Both books were attempts to dispel the fascist stigma that was starting to cast its dark shadows upon his person and career, a task that he will undertake again in 1950 when he claims that far from advocating fascism,

> My general aim…in Hitler was to break the European ostracism of Germany, call in question the wisdom of the Versailles Treaty and get it revised, end the bad behaviour of the French chauvinists, attempt to establish healthy relations in Western Europe. This was undertaken in the interest of Western civilization (the private interest of Germany had no

> weight with me at all: my spiritual home always has been, if anything, France. (*Rude Assignment*, 224)

In other words, Lewis's intention was to protect peace across a Europe which was in a situation that threatened to degenerate at any moment into a mass conflict. Nor is this claim totally untrue, especially if one considers Lewis's life-long aversion to warfare and his uncountable personal losses to this monster. The war had in fact destroyed his Vorticist ambitions, disrupted his writing career, plunged him into obscurity after he had gained some fame, killed two of his closest friends – T. E. Hulme and Gaudier – and would later condemn him to exile. Also, if we add to this the fact that *Hitler* was written in 1930, that is, at a time when Europe was inexorably moving in the direction of a second mass war, we could well understand the reasons for Lewis's anxiety. He was ready to do anything to stop the specter of war from casting its gloomy shadows over England and Europe once again, and was perhaps too carried away by his zeal to realize that fascist Germany could actually be the biggest trigger to any potential conflict. He also failed to understand the personality of Hitler and the nature of his intentions, and mistakenly though that he would bring peace to Europe if he were given a chance.

Lewis's flirtation with fascism and anti-Semitism will become clearer, I think, if we compare it to the pro-fascism and anti-Semitism of his close friend Ezra Pound. I use the term "flirtation" because, in Lewis's case, fascism was more of a short-lived adventure than a life-long cause as it was for Pound. As has been mentioned earlier, Lewis was the staunchest opponent among his contemporaries of what would later be known as "mass culture". He often expressed his contempt

for the "demotic" and the "lowbrow" as they represented by-products of monopoly capitalism and mass-production. This elitism would lead him to embrace fascism with its claimed promise of reward for the intellectual. He thought that artists were better off in fascist Italy and had even more to aspire to in Germany, whereas there was little future for those artists who were unfortunate enough to be living in the capitalist west. Thus, Lewis's fascism was basically future-oriented, and as Charles Ferrall explains in his book *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics*, was devoid of any "nostalgia for any pre-modern culture" (135). Unlike the other modernist reactionaries, Ferrall argues, "there is no equivalent in [Lewis's] writing of Yeats's Celtic Island, Eliot's period after the 'dissociation of sensibility', Pound's 'democratic aristocracy' of Twelfth Century Provence, or Lawrence's New Mexico" (135). As for the anti-Semitism expressed in *Hitler*, it is, I think, more related to Lewis's eagerness to appear wholly pro-fascist, than it is based on any elaborate theory about the Jews. It is clear in *Hitler* that Lewis was ready to go to any lengths to defend the Nazi movement in Germany even if this implied accepting many extreme Nazi principles such as their anti-Semitism. All these factors make of Lewis's fascism a transient whim in the history of his ever changing personality, and the fact that he later retracted from his earlier pro-fascist and anti-Semitic views, in *The Hitler Cult* and in *The Jews: Are They Human?*, proves the lack of any real commitment on Lewis's part.

In the case of Ezra Pound, however, things are not as straightforward. For, while Lewis's only contribution to the support of the emerging fascist regimes was through his writings, Pound took a more engaged position. While in Italy, he

delivered series of radio broadcasts[1] to promote the cause of Italy's Mussolini and Germany's Hitler. Pound believed that fascism combined left-wing egalitarianism with right-wing conservatism, and fused these contradictory ideologies in the image of the Nation. He was therefore impressed by the authority inspired by Mussolini, which promised to redress the economic, social, and cultural ills of Europe. His reactionary stance was also reflected in his belief that Mussolini's fascist regime would bring back the glorious Roman past. In his edition of *The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis*, Timothy Materer quotes Pound as writing in July 1936:

> Now that the empire exists, it needs a Center in which the intelligence and the strength of the race are concentrated, but from which in turn the light of its civilization spreads across and penetrates the lesser nuclei…the New Order will speak from Rome in ways neither understood nor dreamed of, in ways forseen only by a few people who have an 'ardent imagination' (*Letters* 182).

Even Pound's anti-Semitism was based on a comprehensive theory of economics. He believed that usury was the root cause of all the financial problems in Europe, and held the Jews responsible for the suffering of millions of deprived people through the practice of this evil system. This is why *The Cantos* are full of deprecating references to Jewish bankers, whom Pound viewed as monsters looking only for material profit. Even after the Axis was defeated in the war and he was incarcerated and then confined to St Elizabeth's Hospital, Pound never retracted his pro-fascism, and instead "maintained or established new relationships with various racist and anti-Semitic organizations and individuals"

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[1] According to C. David Heymann, Pound was not even content with his own Radio Rome speeches. Instead, "he performed various [other] functions. He wrote press releases for other broadcasters to read, edited manuscripts, created slogans, helped organize the network's propaganda campaign." (110-111)

(Ferrall 66). Ferrall recounts how on his arrival back from Italy in 1958, Pound "gave the fascist salute to assembled reporters... [and] three years later he was photographed at the head of a neo-Fascist parade" (66). This absolute commitment to fascism had the effect of alienating Lewis, who quickly realized the fallacy of the fascist regimes and was willing to erase this infamous chapter of his career from his memory altogether. As a result, the correspondence between the two friends during and after the war shows Lewis to be growing increasingly impatient with Pound's constant references to Mussolini and fascism. In a letter dated December 26, for example, Lewis tells Pound: "Governments a lot of warts, and Mussolini he makes rings round them as a politician. But I'm tired of all politicians" (*Letters* 199); and in July 1946 his tone becomes sharper as he sarcastically writes: "my dear old Ezra...I am told that you believe yourself to be Napoleon – or is it Mussolini? What a pity you did not choose Buddha while you were about it, instead of a politician!" (230).

It is therefore ironic that Pound's life-long commitment to fascism and his infamous trial and subsequent confinement did not prevent people from recognizing his genius and the key role he played in the modernization of poetry, whereas Lewis was never forgiven, even though he publicly renounced his short-lived pro-fascism. Even the notorious *Hitler*, as anyone can see, was the expression of a naïve and absurdly wrong assessment of the political situation of the time, and it was only in hindsight, after the conflict was over, that Lewis could see how terribly in the wrong he was, and how, after a long battle against the foreign policies of England and the Allied nations, he was proved to be a naïf. He

was also able to see the amount of damage he had done himself by aligning himself with the fascists in the hope of saving a peace that was doomed anyway. In *Rude Assignment*, he bitterly admits: "I did myself so much damage at the time it diminished the value of my other work" (Lewis 224). This statement was written in 1950, and it clearly signaled a change in Lewis's mind in so far as he became able to see through his own mistakes and – totally unlike the earlier Lewis – admit that he, too, could be in the wrong. Looking back at a career plagued by innumerable blunders, Lewis seems to have developed a new consciousness characterized mainly by maturity, humanness and subjectivity, and sure enough the books that he wrote afterwards testify to this change.

PART Two: "Idealism Recognized": The Triumph of the Human in the Post-war Books

Anyone studying Lewis's career as a writer will become aware of a shift in style as well as in themes that distinguishes his early writings from those of the late 30s and 40s. Fredric Jameson often refers to this shift as a "break" to invoke its abrupt nature, and in *Rude Assignment*, Lewis himself speaks about "a change of outlook" that allowed him to revisit his early style and thought and reinvent himself both as a writer and thinker. By focusing on two samples of Lewis's late work, namely *The Revenge for Love* (which many, including Hugh Kenner, consider his masterpiece) and his last novel *Self Condemned*, this part of my thesis will point to the departures from, and where applicable the intersections with, Lewis's novels of the early and mid-twenties. *The Revenge for Love* will be of interest in so far as it represents a dramatic development in Lewis's conception of the condition of art and artists in the modern world from those early views expressed in, say, books like *Tarr*. This development, in turn, marks an attempt to come to terms with the human reality, with its tribulations and limitations. The book also involves a revisiting of long-held views concerning politics, Romanticism, and idealism in the age of modernity. In *Self Condemned* the process of reconciliation with the human reaches its limits, and the result is the rediscovery of limitations and weakness as intrinsic to the human condition.

The shift will also be proved to confirm Lewis's status as one of the prominent practitioners of modernism (or anti-modernism), and will help explain the neglect he has long been subject to, as well as the current attempts at rediscovering this "sort of genius" (O'Keefe).

1- Breaking the "Shell": *The Revenge for Love*

In the preface to his book *Wyndham Lewis*, Hugh Kenner describes *The Revenge for Love* as "a twentieth-century classic"; and he is by no means the only critic to express admiration for the book. In fact, many scholars and readers alike were impressed by the book's brilliant prose style, as well as the fresh treatment of issues like subjectivity and realism. Lewis wrote *The Revenge for Love* during the years that saw the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and that were characterized by an overwhelming sympathy for Communism. Lewis, however, was always suspicious of Communism and, like George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*, he chose to be on the opposite side, and this not by endorsing the fascists, but by questioning the authenticity of Communist ideology.

Set in Spain, the story opens with a conversation between Percy Harcaster, a British Communist activist imprisoned in Spain, and Don Alvaro, the prison ward. Hardcaster has been caught carrying a load of dynamite while crossing the Spanish border. With the help of a few Spanish reds, he plans to escape from his prison but is shot by the prison warder, and subsequently has to have his leg amputated. Back in England, Hardcater is received as a hero by his fellow reds, among exaggerated tales about his suffering at the hands of the fascists. Harcaster, however, is not very happy with the atrocity propaganda that has surrounded his accident in Spain, and tells Gillian Phipps, a doctrinaire Communist woman, about the true circumstances of his injury, as well as the falsifications of the

Communist propaganda machine. She reacts by unleashing her aggressive lover Jack Cruze, who brutally beats the handicapped Harcaster, and concludes with a kick in the stump of his amputated leg that sends him to hospital. While recovering from the assault, Hardcaster is asked by a group of capitalists and Communists to conduct a new mission – that of smuggling arms into Spain. He is to be helped by Victor Stamp, an Australian painter, and his devoted wife, the romantic Margot. Later on, Victor and Margot learn that the load they had been risking their lives to smuggle consisted not of arms but of bricks. Trapped in the unfamiliar Spanish surroundings, the couple will meet their death in a mountain storm. Hardcaster, too, is caught, and he ends where he began: in a Spanish prison. However, the tragic death of Victor and Margot, with whom he started to develop a friendship, acts as a catalyst for a change that happens inside Hardacster, and that allows him to realize the "false bottom" that underlies human existence.

In *The Revenge for Love*, as in most of Lewis's novels, art becomes a central theme. Yet, while Lewis's other works are almost invariably governed by a pattern that alternately celebrates the "real" artists and deprecates the pseudo-artists, the *Revenge for Love* seems to have a pattern of its own. For the artist-figure in the book, Victor Stamp, is an avowedly second-rate artist, yet he is at the same time one of the very few characters in the book who shows some integrity. Lewis tells us from the beginning that Stamp, an Australian painter who lives in England, "was no good as an artist. He had never been able to draw properly" (Lewis 86); and, as if anxious to leave no doubt whatsoever as to the utter failure

of Victor Stamp to make his mark as an artist, Lewis has his pathetic character awkwardly stare at the product of his minimal artistic qualities. The painting that confronted him, however, does little to improve his lot: "the thing literally shouted *second-rate*! at him. *Art-student* yes! but *Artist* not! it kept up its offensive heckling, and it cowed him everytime" (85). Out of this repulsive portrait, however, Lewis does not seem to derive anything like the contempt he expressed earlier on for Kreisler, the pseuo-artist in *Tarr*. In fact, the reader cannot help but feel some measure of sympathy for this "art-student" who deplores his own lack of talent and obsessive artistic blunders: "why should such a fellow possess this taste for the silly sweet, where the color question was concerned?" (86), the pathetic Victor bitterly wonders. Yet Victor ironically finds consolation in the otherwise disheartening awareness that "most Australian and English artists are little, if any, better than he was himself" (87).

However, to see Victor as a mere example of the numerous "arty-frauds" in the way that, say, Kreisler was, is to do him a great amount of injustice. It would, I think, be more appropriate to compare him to Tarr, the real artist, with whom he shares some traits, yet of whom he paradoxically appears to be the opposite. In fact, despite his lack of talent, Victor does share Tarr's primarily artistic concerns; the mere fact that he continues to draw and think art despite not only his personal lack of inspiration but also the restrictive nature of his material condition testifies to Victor's genuine belief in art and in himself as an artist. Unlike the dilettantism of Kreisler or the pretensions of the characters of *The Apes of God*, Victor's artistic interests are genuinely sincere. The comparison with Tarr

is also useful in that it outlines the "new" art-philosophy that Lewis's mature mind has come to develop.

It has already been shown that Victor's self-criticism and his humble recognition of his own limitations as an artist are a key element in his conception of himself and his art. This, when set against the absolutism of Tarr's views concerning the value of the artist, constitutes a significant development. The early Nietzschean artist-hero who rejects the banality of everyday life and the mediocrity of the layman, and choses to lead the life of hermitage is now plunged neck-depth in the hub and vortex of a drab and tumultuous reality. It would be interesting at this stage to compare Tarr's esoteric art conversations with his friends and women, with an exchange between Victor and his wife Margot which takes place early in the novel:

> - "What, darling? She asked.
> - Griffiths wants 'my cheque' by return of post! He said. 'My cheque' is good!
> - I'm afraid Griffiths will have to wait, she said, pushing away the bill with a finger, quietly but firmly.
> - I'm saying Griffiths will!" (74)

It is remarkable that with Tarr the details of everyday life as well as his material conditions are almost totally absent; even with Kreisler, we are only given a brief account of how he manages to survive. In *The Revenge for Love*, however, the idea of survival in a wholly unsympathetic environment, and the strife to make ends meet become a top priority for the artist. Nor is this totally unjustifiable, considering the "very hell of a lousy situation" which the artist in the modern world is very likely to find himself in. Thus, to Tarr's preoccupation with his mainly "sentimental finances" are juxtaposed a set of very different finances:

> Margret's last day of work had come round. The twopenny Lending Library where she had been employed had gone phut and this was the day of the final winding up and they would be lucky if she got her money. Both were now unemployed, instead of one, and on all sides they had debts. (82)

Yet, here again, Victor finds relief and consolation in the same idea – that his problems are not unique; they are in fact the very function of the modern age: "everyone Stamp knew was in much the same case" (82).

Nor is Victor completely wrong here, as the exchange with his artist friend Tristram Phipps will later confirm. "Tristy", as he is called, has nothing in common with Victor: he is a devoted Communist and so is his wife Gillian; and unlike Victor, he lets revolutionary politics play an important role in his life. Art is just about the only thing he shares with Victor, and it is this professional complicity that seems to keep their relationship going. One would expect, therefore, that when these two meet, art will be the first topic to come to mind. This, however, is far from being the case simply because, just like Victor, Tristy is yet another example of the artist trapped in a dauntingly dismal reality, a world that cares nothing for his art, and is only ready to accept it when he manages to produce commercially marketable paintings. These are, indeed, difficult times for starting artists because "no one would give anything for a picture of any sort today, unless it had a Name attached to it … and not much then" (89). It is no surprise, then, that both Victor and Tristy will eventually resort to forging as their only means to earn a living and survive in this commercial world. "If Victor Stamp's pictures don't sell quite so quickly as they should, why not do a few Van Goghs, for the time being?" was Abershaw's wise advice. Victor, in this sense,

and Tristy too for that matter, can be seen as standing for their creator's long struggle and ultimate failure to achieve success as an artist. Lewis suffered not only because of his precarious funds, but because he broke with conventional esthetic traditions and sought to bring a novel abstract art to an unwilling public. Just as Victor is obliged to fake Van Gogh in order to keep the wolf from the door, so was Lewis forced to depart from his ground-breaking art and resort to portrait-drawing to make ends meet. It is therefore obvious that by the time he wrote *The Revenge for Love*, Lewis has finally come to a better and more realistic understanding of his position as an artist from the one articulated in *Tarr*. The early intransigent stance and uncompromising attitude concerning the autonomy of art and the privileges of the artist have given way to a bitter awareness of the essentially philistine nature of the modern age, and this in turn has given rise to a resignation totally alien to Lewis:

> They did everything to depress and discourage you to work and pay your way. They would rather get you lent money (and put you in their power by debt), than get you a sale of pictures, so that you could honourably own money of your own, as Victor had said to her more times than once, in his bitterness against them…they disseminated the belief that because society was rotten, work was out of the question. (182)

These words uttered by Margot strikingly recall the kind of society depicted in *The Apes of God* or *Rotting Hill*, had it not been for this novel "acceptance" of the various hardships that plague the artist as part of the wider ills of the human condition.

Lewis's views concerning the position of the arts in the modern world can also be seen as indicative of his attitude toward the broader phenomenon of modernism. It is clear from the desolate landscape presented to us that Lewis's

shared many of his contemporary modernists' view of the modern age as a wasteland for culture and the arts, and also their call for new ways of seeing the world and for equally novel modes of expression. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, more than other modernist writer, Lewis was for quite a long time at the very center of the modernist vortex. Through his friendship with renowned modernists like Pound and Eliot, as well as the leading role he played as the founder of the avant-garde Vorticist movement and his influence on Imagism, Lewis was at the frontline of the clash between the late nineteenth-century traditions and the emergent modernist voices. Also, though he never thought of himself as being part of any literary movement and repeatedly expressed hatred for all kinds of collective movements, Lewis's writings nevertheless do unmistakably show modernist qualities, and his prose style has often been described as unique and innovative. Yet, like everything about him, Lewis's relationship to modernism is remarkably ambivalent[1]. In *Men without Art*, Lewis launched a devastating attack on most modernist writers of the time including D. H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway; and the list grew bigger with *Time and Western Man* to include James Joyce and his friend Pound. In the latter book, Lewis criticized what he viewed as the modernists' obsession with the "time cult", and herded them together in what he called the "time school", the origins of which he traced to Bergson's notion of flux. Together with the notion of the fluidity of time, Lewis

[1] In his study *Modernism(s)*, Peter Nicholls observes that it was a tendency among Anglo-American modernists to express their aversion to collective movements. As result, though at one point "London became a metropolitan 'Vortex' for Pound, Lewis and Eliot their sense of belonging to a shared avant-garde was considerably more ambivalent than that of comparable groupings on the continent" (166).

attacked the modernists' vogue for inwardness and the stream of consciousness technique which, again, with its flabbiness and fluidity, conflicted with Lewis's esthetically-inspired clear-cut vision of the world.

This tendency in Lewis pushed many critics to presume that he was an anti-modernist, and that what really defined him more than anything else was his opposition to modernism. In his study of *Modernist Fiction*, Randall Stevenson echoes this position when he takes Lewis as an example of the forces that were working against the advent of modernism. He compares the prose style of *Tarr* to that of *Ulysses* and concludes that

> the prose of *Tarr* offers a complete contrast to the stream of Molly's soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses*. The opening paragraphs from Tarr and the closing chapter of *Ulysses* stand at opposite ends of the spectrum of new prose styles that modernism developed in its reflections of different conclusions about the divisibility of the stream-like continuity of time. (Stevenson 132)

Stevenson, however, admits that though diametrically opposed to mainstream modernist techniques, *Tarr*'s prose style can nonetheless not be described as conventional, thus exemplifying many critics' difficulty in placing Lewis within the wide scope of modernism. As I have already noted, one recent attempt to solve this dichotomy is Tyrus Miller's statement that Lewis – along with writers like Djuna Barnes and Samuel Beckett – are part of what he calls "late modernism", as distinct from "high modernism". According to Miller, late modernism emerged both as a result of, and response to, the crisis that engulfed early modernism. The key factor to this crisis was the modernists' emphasis on form to the exclusion of all social and historical contexts. After World War One, however, modernism's insistence on the autonomy of art and its preoccupation

with form were brought into question with the emergence of heavily politicized avant-gardes and socially-oriented forms of culture. It was within this context that the late modernists faced the "predicament" of having to choose between isolationism – preserving heir "creative island" – and opening up to the socio-political forces that were working around them. As Miller argues, they chose to follow their modernist precursors but with a difference. For, though

> [t]he detached stance and stylistic rigor of late modernist writing continued to put the crowd at a distance…the heroism of this gesture, common to modernist writers from Baudelaire to Joyce, had become grimly farcical, as it revealed a social automatism controlling the artist presumably its master. (Miller 31)

And one might ask: is not this exactly poor Victor's plight? Desirous as he is to keep the rest of the world at bay and devote himself to art, he is nevertheless overwhelmed by the social and political tide that will relentlessly carry him to his own doom. Thus, as Miller points out, any form of escape in art is doomed to failure in a world where the context is becoming more important than the text itself.

Yet, despite this divergence, Miller continues to see late modernism as an extension, or perhaps a revision, of high modernism rather than as a break from it, thus rejecting the idea that the late modernists showed a regressive tendency in relation to nineteenth-century realism. Citing *The Revenge for Love*, Miller argues that, though on a surface level this novel seems to adhere to traditions of realism and naturalism, it can by no means be described as realist in the conventional meaning, because

> this "realism", this return to certain "naturalist" conventions, is not as straightforward as it might first appear. For the world it "realistically" depicts is a universally de-realized one, one permeated by mimicry, counterfeit, diversion, imposture, and spectacle: the condition of generalized mimetism. The apparent transparency of these works is an unsettling, uncanny *fiction* of reference…more than "realist", these works are "hyperrealist"; if in a certain sense "naturalist", they nevertheless reflect a simulacral nature, a denatured reality of spectacles, codes and models. (83)

In fact, the theme of reality as apposed to falsehood lies at the very center of the novel's concerns. The original title that Lewis intended for his book was "*False Bottoms*", and it was only at the request of the publisher that the author accepted to change it. This shows, however, that from Lewis's vantage point, *falsehood* and not reality was the prevailing currency of the time. Accordingly, the world depicted in *The Revenge for Love* offers nothing like the clear-cut certainties of *Tarr*, or the highly-defined, geometrical shapes of Lewis's early Vorticist paintings; this is a world where "real" people would have to grope their way blindly in an extremely deceptive environment, just as Margot has to find her way among the unreal crowd at Shean O'Hara's party. The party, a gathering of Communists and capitalists alike, could be seen as a microcosm of modern society at large. With its artificial limits and unreal walls, O'Hara's luxurious mansion strikes Margot as being "like a box that had false sides to it and possibly a false bottom" (Lewis 164); and in walking amid these unreal surroundings, Margot has to make sure that "she was not treading upon trapdoors, and the masked heads of shafts, as well as leaning against a hollow wall, in a deceptive security" (164).

Nor are the buildings the only "unreal" aspect of this world; the inhabitants too are no less elusive, as Victor appears to have inferred. Accordingly, he takes the liberty of shouting obscenities at O'Hara's party, mindless of the crowd, and when Margot entreats him to show more restraint he angrily replies: "do you suppose that these people are *real*? do you think they exist?" This comes as a shock to Margot who, being real herself, starts to feel threatened and prefers to avoid this subject: "of all the conversations Victor was apt to hold with such young men as Pete, she perhaps disliked more than any others those that bore upon this topic, namely that of the appearance and the reality" (176). Yet, no matter how hard she tries to ignore the matter, she becomes increasingly convinced of the fact that what she perceives as her own reality (hers and that of Victor) is completely different from *their* reality, and regardless of whose reality is more valid, Margot resolves to keep these two disparate worlds or realities from clashing; and it is precisely to avoid this clash that she decides not to let Victor "venture outside herself among the unreals" (177), and does her best to coax him into declining their job offers and avoid their society. However, by accepting to work for them, Victor has crossed the line that separated the two realities, or the "reality" and the "unreality"; and even though he is given a second chance to save himself and Margot when he decides to quit his "lousy job" and put an end to his "career as a faker" (276), he will still allow himself to be duped once again, and this time into a far more dangerous business than forging pictures. The new mission apparently consists in smuggling arms to war-torn Spain, with Victor acting as a driver of the bootleg vehicle. Later on, Victor and Margot will

find out that the cases they were risking their lives to smuggle contained no arms, and were instead filled with packing-paper and bricks. Like everything else around them, the operation was false, a mere cover-up for the "real" smuggling that was taking place somewhere else. This time around, however, Victor cannot simply retract with impunity like he did earlier; he is now trapped in the mountainous Spanish borders after having killed a Spaniard, in totally unfamiliar surroundings, and with Margot as an extra burden. In the end, the couple's tragic death in a mountain storm underscores the cruelty of the inhuman forces that have sent them to their peril, and reveals the hypocrisy and falsehood of communists and capitalists alike as well as the deceptive aspect of their politics.

Politics is of course a central theme in *The Revenge for Love*, and the fact that Lewis chose Spain as the setting for his book is revealing. For while he was working on the novel between 1934 and 1935, the political situation in Spain was inexorably moving towards an explosion. By the time the book was published in 1937, the Spanish Civil War was at its peak, and everybody's attention was drawn to the conflict that opposed the Republicans to the fascist-backed militia of General Franco. The prevailing mood across Europe, and in England in particular, at the time was one of sympathy for the Republicans, who were continually losing ground. In England, Lewis must have had a first-hand experience of the wide-spread enthusiasm for what was increasingly seen as the Spanish "cause". Yet both his antithetical nature as well as his well-known aversion to Communism led him, along with a few other intellectuals, including Eliot, Pound, and Yeats, to take a different path and to support the Right-wing Nationalists.

Besides, despite its preoccupation with the Spanish situation, *The Revenge for Love* is predominantly informed by the wider international conflict that was gathering momentum at the time between communism and fascism, a conflict of which Lewis had seen glimpses during his stay in German, and which eventually provided him with the material for *Hitler*. Yet, unlike *Hitler*, with its blatant anti-Communism and pro-fascism, *The Revenge for Love* provides a more subtle approach to this question. For one thing, the book has a communist as its hero. Percy Hardcaster, "a British navvy turned Marxist school-master" (25) is there both at the opening and conclusion of the novel, thus underscoring his key role in the narrative. Hardcaster, however, is not a conventional communist, and this is, I think, what makes him an interesting character for Lewis in a way that the other communists in the book are not. Unlike Tristy the communist artist, his wife "Gillian communist", or Virgilio his Spanish roommate at the hospital where he was recovering, Hardcaster's commitment to the idea of the revolution does not blind him to the various ambiguities and contradictions inherent in communism. Early in the novel, he literally shocks Virgilio by asserting that "the vertical classes of capitalism are better than the horizontal classes of fascism" (56); and when the Spaniard reminds him that "*No* classes are better still", Hardcaster boldly and sententiously replies: "class of *some* sort there always *must* be" (56); and he shows even more intelligence and perception when he goes on to argue that one "cannot in practice abolish class. Stalin and his great commissars after all constitute a class. An administrative caste…we know that" (56).

Yet, despite his perceptive mind, Hardcaster will be proved wrong in his belief that other fellow communists share this knowledge. It appears that, for the clever Hardcaster, anyone with a minimal intelligence would be able to see the discrepancy between the apparent coherence of communism's theoretical foundations and their limitations when put into practice. This "error of judgment" will result in a series of attacks, the first of which is delivered by Virgilio: "I sometimes believe, Don Percy, that you are really a fasict" (57). This verbal attack anticipates the violent scene at Gillian's flat in the second part of the book, when Percy, no longer able to stand the Communist propaganda machine, confronts Gillian with the falsehood of the atrocities to which was allegedly subjected. "That's a stock story", he informs the stunned Gillian, "we always tell that story on the Spanish front. I thought you understood" (205); but she does *not* understand, and the ensuing exchange makes Percy quickly realize that for the second time he has made the same mistake:

- "I took you for a hero! She said, with a laugh
- A hero? *A hero*!
- Yes; a notion I had. I see I was mistaken. You have explained the true position with commendable clearness, I'll say that for you. I didn't know you were an intellectual!
- In your sense I must be a bad communist…
- You make communism seem very dull." (209)

Yet, the realization that talking as he has been doing to this dogmatic Communist was "an error of judgment on my part" will not save Percy's skin; and now that he has been confronted with Gillian's complete ignorance of the true nature of the values for which he is fighting, he thinks that he might just as well let her know what he thinks of *her* version of Communism as opposed to his

working-class Communism. He accordingly reveals his utter contempt for the "fancy salon-revolutionaries" and "old-school-tie pinks" who have no compunction in exploiting the working class for their own benefit, and this in the name of the Revolution:

> For us of the working-classes this is an ugly and hazardous business – we know if we go in with you that it's not *our* revolution but *yours* that we're working for. That is self-evident. We have no illusion about that. We know that it is not for our beautiful eyes that you run about with little red flags and play at Bastilles and Jacobin Clubs, or put your hands in your pockets to finance strikes and insurrections. We know that only too well. We know that as much money is being spent is fomenting revolution as is being spent in resisting it, and we know that those fabulous sums of money do not come from the working-class – on whose behalf *all* revolution is *supposed* to be set in motion. (213)

One can only imagine the horror and disappointment of someone like Gillian, who is so thoroughly responsive to communist propaganda, upon hearing these ugly facts; and although her initial reaction recalls Virgilio's confused disappointment ("I think you'd be more at home in a fascist organization than in ours", she accuses Percy), her displeasure will prove of far greater consequence, as she will arrange for the smug, working-class communist to be physically abused by her brutal lover Jack Cruze. The scene that follows is one of excessive violence, where Jack delivers a series of blows to the invalid Percy and then concludes by kicking him on the stump of his amputated leg in what is, in my opinion, one of the most moving and significant scenes in the book. For the sheer bloody violence of the scene stands in striking contrast to the methodically graphic, and even humorously detached, prose that is used to describe it:

> Before he could open [the door], Jack was upon him, his fists springing out from his sides, returning, ad darting forward again, like deadly hammers of gum-elastic. And each time they trapped their target, with a wet smack, Percy's head crashed against the door. (217)

And it is not over yet:

> He sprang back as Percy rolled on the floor, and he delivered a pile-driving kick at his fallen rival's weak spot, the mutilated stump. As the boot struck him, where the Spanish surgeon's knife had cut in, Percy Hardcaster turned over, with a bellowing groan, against the wall, and Jack sent in another one, with surgical precision in the violent application of his shoe leather. And then he followed it with a third, for luck. (218)

It is this detachment which, in my opinion, paradoxically reveals Lewis's sympathy for his abused character, a sympathy which the author has worked hard to hide. After all, the lesson that Percy Hardcaster has just learned, namely that of "how important not to tell the truth – except to a very few people" (212), is one that Lewis had learned only too well, and in just as hard a way, too.

This involvement with the characters is unusual for Lewis's, a significant departure from the early detached narrator who was only interested in the "shells" of his characters as in *Tarr*, or was deliberately distancing himself from them to show his contempt for them as in *The Apes of God*. It is obvious then that with *The Revenge for Love*, a new human touch is felt and allows for what Jameson calls an "emotional resonance" in the book. Through this new approach, the human bond is emphasized as the strongest and most enduring aspect of the modern age; in a world where everything is either false or ambiguous, the love and friendship among the trio Margot, Victor and Percy Hardcaster prove to be both genuine and resilient. It is rare for a Nietzschean artist-writer like Lewis's to be concerned with love, much less when he is writing a book about politics. Yet,

in *The Revenge for Love*, the "author of *Tarr*" chose a love relationship as the focal point of the narrative. Right from the outset, Margot's extraordinary love for Victor in emphasized, and the significance of this love lies in the fact that it is heroic, because to love in Margot's age is almost like acting against the Gods: "love was in vain, love could do nothing…the gods had a hatred for love" (70); and this, Margot knows only too well, yet she has absolutely no choice, as she is already in love with Victor and nothing can be done to remedy the situation. Nor is she completely desperate, though, and this because as soon as she starts thinking about Victor she is invaded by a new hope and a belief in the resilience of love: "love was too strong. There was Victor! She could hold back no more. And she touched him with a little nervous hand" (71).

Margot is a very interesting character, if actually not the most interesting one in the book, and although some critics like Jameson think that she is as lifeless and degraded as the puppets satirized in *The Apes of God*, they still agree that her "portrait is a kind of tour de force for Lewis" (Jameson 146). In fact, I would go even further to say that she is one of the very few characters in Lewis's fiction with whom the latter seemed to fully identify. Margot's distinction arises in part from her being Lewis's first female heroine ever, and her genuine love and resilience anticipate Lewis's sympathy for Hester in *Self Condemned*. In addition, it is with Margot that Lewis's eventually abandoned his early famous technique of describing his characters from the "outside": it is mostly Margot's inner life and not her outside shell that we are invited to follow, and it is often through her eyes that we see the world; so much so that the objects of this world are distorted by

the subjectivity of her perception as illustrated by the following passage where Margot tries to describe – in her own way – a Blackshirt:

> She said to herself more than once that this blackshirt bore a *distant* resemblance to Victor. There was the same jaw. Then the shoulders were in both cases atlantean. There was *something*, too, she could not define. There was enough at all events, to endear him to her, in a reflection from her cult. (76)

Obviously, we cannot totally rely on the vision conveyed to us by the extremely impressionistic Margot, whose perception of the world is contingent upon her own love for Victor, so that everything she sees or experiences is evaluated on the basis of its relatedness to the object of her love. Hers is a burning, unconditional, and unselfish love; it is the driving force of her very existence, and everything else is relegated to second place; so much so that she suspects this uncanny love of being at the origin of Victor's misfortunes, and she feels helpless because, even if "he did not return [her love], fate would never forget. Victor would always be *the man who had been loved*, in the way she had done (it was the *way* that she had loved that was at the bottom of the matter)" (70).

The other distinctive feature about Margot, and one that sets her apart from Lewis's early characters is the fact that she is a developing character. In this respect, Robert T. Chapman sees a movement in Margot's world-view (and that of Gillian) from "the naïve, sentimental acceptance of life", as shaped by her early response to Virginia Woolf's "high-brow feminist fairyland", towards "a view that takes into account the unromantic, the cruel and the absurd" (129). However, one might argue that although this can be valid for Gillian whose illusions about Communism made her live in a different layer of reality, it is not necessarily so for Margot. In fact, and as has been demonstrated earlier, Margot's initial world-

view has been extremely cynical, to say the least, and this reflects her awareness of what Chapman sees as the Sartrean absurdity of existence. What has probably changed in Margot , though, is the nature of the strategy she uses to deal with this absurdity. Here, we notice a movement from an early passive resignation and acceptance of her fate, through what can be called the Ophelia-stage (where she considers the implications of her passivity), to a final resolve to *act* in order to impose her own will in the making of her fate. An illustration of this stage would be the episode where Margot becomes aware that something was going wrong with their mission and tries to convey her doubts to Victor but ultimately fails:

> But where was the use of insisting upon this with Victor? He would not listen to her, he would only laugh. She must joke too, that was all about it. She must enter into the joke that was not there. She hadn't got the heart, it was no use, to put the wind up her beautiful private Apollo – or rather to try to, for she could scarcely succeed. (295)

Later on, by analyzing the character of Ophelia, she manages to diagnose her own problem: weakness only had made Ophelia fail Hamlet at the critical moment, and her lack of guidance when that was most wanted led to her loss and that of her prince; it is up to her, Margot, now to face up to her own predicament and choose her path. Here, it is interesting that Margot takes refuge in nature as the perfect setting to deliberate the matter, a typical gesture from the woman who had brought herself up on Wordsworth and *The Excursion*. With a Ruskin book in her hand and "nature in the flesh" all around her, Margot seeks comfort and guidance in the beauty and serenity of the natural world. Nature, however, in typically Lewisian fashion, can offer anything but serenity, and is rather described

in terms of movement and power that recall D. H. Lawrence's mystic belief in the presence in nature of a living force so deep yet so instructive:

> Margot lay upon the bank of a mountain stream, and gazed with a look of an uneasy surprise at the playfulness of its waters. *Power*, *elasticity*, brightness: she could not have believed that the *high spirits* of these liquids and the *grandeur* of these stones could disturb a casual visitor...she observed the incessant sport of the waters, as they poured in and out of rocks, in their delicious obstacle race, with a mild aversion. At this placid health of sunlit nature she peered with a puzzled attention. (307-308)

It is in fact this tumultuous nature that opens Margot's eyes to the essentially "chaotic reality, against which heroism (book heroism) could be of little avail" (311); and almost immediately, the seriousness of the situation as well as the negativity of her reaction dawn on her with perfect clarity:

> She ought not to have allowed Victor to undertake that excursion: she scolded herself. She had been criminally weak. Indeed, they ought not to be here in France at all; and that was that. What was she doing lying by the side of this pretty stream, too, while Rome was burning. (313)

Finally, the disillusioned woman decides to break the spell of nature, and, with a new determination, she heads back to the real life that was waiting for her with all its problems and complications: "in her haste she let the book lying on the grass. Without looking left or right she started back, at a rapid walk, in the direction of the village" (313). This denouement of Margot's crisis echoes, again, the Lawrencian triumph of life over the forces of the abyss, and one has only to consider the unfolding of Paul Morel's battle with death at the very end of *Sons and Lovers* to see the striking similarity between his experience and Margot's:

> But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly (Lawrence).

It appears that in both experiences, the return to the city symbolizes a recognition of, and a reconciliation with, the turbulent nature of human existence which is reflected in the "humming" and "glowing" city-life.. Having had a momentous glimpse of the abyss, both Margot and Paul realize that salvation lies not in giving in it to the tranquility of death. Rather, it is to be found – paradoxically – in going through what John Osbourne would later call 'the pain of being alive'.

Margot, however, is not the only character in the book who looks into the abyss, nor is she the only one to undergo a change following this experience. Parallel to Margot's experience is Hardcaster's own movement from the rigid, professional attitude he shows early in the book to an attitude that takes into consideration the subjective and the human. Again, this is a case of unprecedented development in Lewis's fiction, where the inner life of the character is probed and his vulnerability and empathy are revealed. We have seen that Hardcaster's main attribute is his ability to discern in his adopted ideology – namely Communism – what other Communists are totally blind to. This sharp critical perspective, annoying though it might be to his superiors, apparently does not prevent him from climbing all the way up to the highest ranks of the Communist Party. He is an agitator who wields the pen to promote the cause of the Revolution, and is "looked up to as an organizer of parts, a man of good party-brains" (26). The reason for this distinction, Lewis's tells us, is Hardcaster's professionalism as

well as his frank, outspoken nature: "there was no bourgeois shame of civilized modesty about old Percy – he betrayed a robust disregard for civilized decorum while yet far short of the place for which he was making" (26). In other words, this is a man whose only loyalty is to the idea of the Revolution, whereas for everything else he maintains an attitude of complete detachment. As a matter of fact his attitude is quite similar to Tarr's except that, with Hardcaster, the Revolution has substituted art as the root cause of this detachment. Also, like Tarr, Hardcaster's detachment is basically a mood, which means that it can fail him at any time. This is what happens for instance when Hardcaster is puzzled by the strange behavior of the Spanish peasant woman who brings him provisions daily. Lewis's tells us that following this incident, "Hardcaster was offended in spite of his hard-boiled 'outcast' shell" (28).

Like Margot, too, Hardcaster goes through an important experience with nature, an experience which significantly precedes his taking the crucial decision to escape from prison. The significance of this experience lies in the fact that it highlights a different aspect of Hardcaster's personality, one that he has apparently worked so hard to hide. By this I mean Percy's remarkably artistic response to nature, a response that has constantly been repressed by his commitment to the Revolution. Nature (capitalized by Lewis), Hardcaster thinks, is "blind to the intellectual beauties of the Social Revolution, and deaf to the Voice of conscience" (46). This is why he has done his best to resist his artistic predilections, and with success too, since for the time being his "party-mind" seems to have the upper hand of the artist in him. Thus, Hardcaster comes out of

this experience perhaps shaken but not altogether changed. In fact, his "hard-boiled shell" becomes even harder after the traumatic incident of his escape has left him with only one leg. This is illustrated among other things by his irritable response to the Spanish nuns who were overlooking his convalescence. It is curious to see that the more dedicated and humane the nuns become, the more Hardcaster's behavior degenerates, to the point where Sister Teresa ("the most aggravating lunatic of all her detestable lot" in Hardcaster's view, but in reality a most sympathetic nurse), is moved to tears. It is interesting at this point to compare Hardcaster's reaction to this show of emotion with Tarr's detached response to Bertha's crying: "when Percy observed one afternoon that she was crying at something he had said, he flung himself in the opposite direction in an outraged sulk" (54). Another example of this almost inhuman attitude is provided during the party that is held back in England to celebrate Hardcaster's "triumphant" homecoming. Hardcaster is, of course, the star of the show and he makes no secret of his joy with the almost idolatrous admiration offered to him by "the Red men and Red women" (148) who were present at the party. Lewis makes sure that the minutest details of Hardcaster's pose as well as that of his admirers are depicted, and from this picture we learn that Percy's affections seem to have undergone a dramatic change:

> In the place of honour Gillian Phipps [was] pressed up against his sick leg…In place of the lesser honour, because leg to leg with his more ordinary and less dramatic limb, was Ellen Mulliner. It further very marked indeed, the manner in which Percy Hardcaster displayed his preference for his new acquaintance, and was at no pains to conceal his desire to confirm his more recent success – rather than to advertise this triumph of long standing, which was already dating. It would have been

> impossible to find a more flagrant case of omission to be off with the old before being on with the new. (148-149)

The sarcastic tone of this passage clearly conveys Lewis's disapproval of Hardcaster's inhuman attitude and callous behavior, and mocks his assumption that, because he has been injured while serving the Revolution he is now entitled to treat people as if they were mere objects made to reward his sacrifice. Hardcaster, however, seems to revel in his new image as a martyr, and proceeds to give a totally inaccurate account of the way he has been treated by the sisters at the Spanish hospital:

> they refused to give me bed-pans all the time I was there except once in the morning…my mosquito curtain was taken away and I was left at the mercy of a colony of malarial mosquitoes, which sent my temperature up once or twice round a hundred and seven – so much that I heard later that they were expecting me to die and that a priest was standing by to offer me the sacrament! (152)

Yet, if the aim of these "atrocity propaganda" is to win people's respect and compassion, Hardcaster's hardened feelings will not allow any humane exchange with others to take place. This is what happens, for instance, when Ellen Mulliner reacts compassionately to the atrocity of the tales that she has just heard "by whispering to [the martyr] some caution…not to overtax his strength…by reviving these painful memories in too great detains". Harcaster's response to this empathetic show of concern is reminiscent of his earlier conduct with the Spanish nuns: "Percy ducked and with a touch of crossness reassured her shortly; then silenced the officious young woman with a roguish push" (152).

Towards the beginning of the sixth part of the book, however, Lewis tells us that "Percy Hardcaster was considerably altered", and that although he changed physically, it was "inside" that the dramatic alteration took place (275). Lewis, however, is not particular as to the causes of this change, which are apparently left for the reader to guess. Significantly, Hardcaster's last appearance in the book before this dramatic alteration is in the scene where he is jointly beaten up by Gillian and her lover Jack Cruze. It is therefore obvious that this incident played an important role in – if it was actually not the key reason for –the change that he has undergone. Nor is this surprising, especially if we take into account the fact that, during the exchange that has led to the violence, Harcaster has had to confront not only Gillian's fancy communism but also his own inclination to join in the game and be part of the illusory herd. Finally, by attacking Gillian's version of communism, he has also symbolically cut the umbilical cord that tied him as a communist to the same body politic, and the violence that ensues can be seen as symbolizing Herdcaster's dramatic rebirth: a new Percy is born, one who is remarkably unlike the other. Once again, the idea of looking into the abyss presents itself as a fundamental prerequisite for the change; a rite of passage as it were:

> Serafin himself could not have said nothing with more feeling for the false bottom underlying the spectacle of this universe, and making a derision of the top – for the nothingness at the hear of the most plausible and pretentious of affirmatives, either as man or as thing. And [...] his 'nothing' meant nothing, just that, not more and not less, but a calm and considered negation. (276)

Coincidentally, this encounter with the abyss reveals to Harcaster the sham nature of his own politics, and he accordingly starts to distance himself from his ideology amid rumors that he "might leave the Party. He and communism might part company" (280). Hardcaster, however, will continue to serve the Communist "cause", and this time not as a "part organizer" but as a "man of action". The new task consists in smuggling arms to Spain, and Hardcaster does it for money rather than for any superior cause. A changed individual, Harcaster leaves England for Spain, accompanied by the pivotal couple of the book, Victor and Margot, and it is in the course of this mission that he will come into contact for the first time with a new and apparently stronger ideology – that of love. In a passionate outburst of emotions, the otherwise quiet and reticent Margot reveals to Hardcaster what Victor means to her, and asks him to protect them; and when the exasperated Percy tells her that theirs is a doomed love because Victor is "as good as dead", Margot ardently replies: "he's as good as dead to you, perhaps. But not to me. He is life itself to me. I cannot imagine the world without him. You would not be there if he were not there. For me" (329). To a man like Harcaster, who has always believed that loyalty to Communism is of the highest order, this comes as a surprise. He is even tempted to think that Margot is an abnormal girl, and as such should not be taken seriously. Margot's overpowering love, however, will prove authentic and her determination substantial as she learns of Victor's excursion into the Spanish territory, and without betraying any sign of hesitation decides to follow and try to save him. Hardcaster, again, finds himself clueless as he watches the reckless Margot run after her husband heedless of his admonitions

as well as the dangers inherent in the enterprise. It is at this moment that he realizes that Margot's love is in fact more genuine and overriding than his own "love" for the Social Revolution; and out of this realization a novel feeling of sympathy and friendship towards the couple is born: the hardened shell finally starts to yield under the pressure of a new empathy. Consequently, it is the well-being of Victor and Margot rather than the success of the mission that is now Hardcaster's first concern, as he makes it clear to Mateu, his Spanish assistant:

- I shouldn't like old Vic to get in a jam! I'm not so hard-boiled as to stand by and allow that. I'm telling you – I'm staying off any funny business that might turn out [badly] for Vic. Whatever he is, he's my friend. You get that?
- Your *friend*? What is that?
- Never mind what that is. We won't argue about the word friend. But I'm telling you, Mat! (345-346)

Yet Harcaster's forebodings will later prove to be not altogether unfounded, as he will later learn in his Spanish cell where he ends just as he began. But the English prisoner is hardly a shadow of the hard core militant, full of zeal for his political cause and careless about everything else; the man we see now is a broken, disillusioned *human* being, as his grief over his friends' tragic death shows:

> But meanwhile a strained and hollow voice, part of the sham culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed at the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful sing-song. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the passionate, the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating, voice, and crying to him now to give back, she implored him, the young man, Absolom, whose life he had had in his keeping, and who had somehow, unaccountably, been lost, out of the world and out of time! He saw a precipice. And the eyes in the mask of

> THE INJURED PARTY dilated a spasm of astonished self-pity. And down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison. (380)

Thus, the shell is finally broken; Hardcaster's change is complete, and this rules out the implication of futility that otherwise results from the circular structure of the plot.

The other significant aspect about *The Revenge for Love*, and one that is connected to the human theme, is the concern with automata; and although one can argue that this is a typically Lewisian theme (what are Tarr or the puppets of *The Apes of God* if not automata?), the way it is treated in *The Revenge for Love* signals a departure from the early celebration of the machine, to what looks like a deep anxiety over the fate of *men* in the machine age. Lewis's interest in machines has started with his early and brief flirtation with Italian Futurism. His first contact with Futurism occurred in 1910 when F. T. Marinetti, the school's founder, visited England to deliver a series of lectures designed to arouse the English public's interest in the new school. Lewis was at first thrilled by the publicity and enthusiasm that the Futurists generated, but was soon repelled by their emphasis on speed and violence, which was at odds with the Vorticist concern with stillness and immobility. Later on, Lewis would eventually attack Futurism in *Time and Western Man* as part of the infamous "time school" because of its adherence to the concept of Bergsonian flux. The brief adventure with Futurism, however, has left its imprints on Lewis's Vorticist paintings as well as on his fiction, and a key manifestation of this are the almost machine-like men

that dominated his early fiction. In *The Revenge for Love*, too, the automata are there, but they are treated in a different way.

One example of a 'mechanical' character in the book is the former Spanish Civil Guard and present turnkey Don Alvaro. Unlike the other prison wards, Don Alvaro we are told, constantly wears a "mask of authority" (9), and his mechanical nature is emphasized: "he had belonged to a great kid-gloved military elite, with the power to shoot all suspect citizens at sight, after a former challenge" (13). It is such mechanical responses that now define the chief wards' behavior and conduct with others, in this case the inmates of the prison, or the people who come to visit them. An example of this is Don Alvaro's treatment of the peasant woman who brings Percy Hardcaster provisions. Almost upon seeing the woman, Alvaro's conspiratorial instincts detect a certain abnormality in her behavior, and in order to verify his doubts, he starts acting if he were an automaton: "[He] was not the man to conduct himself as if a woman were a boxer in petticoats, or to depart from the strict male canon. And, right foot advanced, the angle of the instep at ninety degrees, his pose was a model for just such a dumb show" (17). This attitude is strikingly reminiscent of Tarr's pose when he stops to inspect his new mood of detachment and see it is "O.K." Alvaro also shares Tarr's lack of feeling when it comes to dealing with women. We have seen the extent to which Tarr judges women solely on the basis of their *usefulness* to his art, so that Bertha's sentimentality is viewed as a threat to his artistic detachment, whereas a woman like Anastasya – with her physical charms – is accepted. Similarly, Alvaro's opinions about women are not particularly flattering to women. He

views women as "bulls", which for him are the arch-symbols of primitive instinct, and this conjures up the threat to the male expressed earlier in Tarr: "with women as with the bull, atavism steps in – the repertoire of attitudes, for the male waits upon prescriptive technicalities, more especially in these lands that have been touched by the sloth of Asia" (16-7). It should come as no surprise, then, that when the woman is intimidated by Alvaro's machismo and starts crying as a result, the latter's reaction to her crying recalls Tarr's famous indifference. "To weep is excellent" the insensitive Alvaro ominously tells the scared woman, "but it is better still not to lend oneself to things that result in tears – and worse! Far worse! To weep is nothing" (21).

Yet, despite this menacing disposition and his seemingly awe-inspiring physical presence, Alvaro is paradoxically made to appear as a fool – a mere toy in the hands of the fascists. This can be seen in the way Lewis juxtaposes the rough machismo of the mustached chief ward to the utter vulnerability of the peasant woman. The effect of this is ironically summed up by – of all people – Alvaro himself, when he sententiously says: "to impose on a woman's weakness [is] the action of a cochino!" (35). On another level, Alvaro's awareness and understanding of the political situation in Spain is shown to be extremely superficial, and this despite his efforts to convey the opposite impression. This is evident from the way he keeps referring to Spain as if it were a united and perfectly cohesive nation (All Spain), at a time when the various factions fighting for control of the country cannot even be numbered. It is this naive belief that provokes the incarcerated syndicalists' derisory rejoinder: "All Spain – all Spain!

What is *all* Spain?...what is "all Spain", *por dios*?" (36). This reaction is perhaps humiliating enough for Alvaro, yet it is during the tumultuous scene that follows Hardcaster's encounter with the woman that Alvaro's final mortification is effected. In a powerful passage, Lewis describes how the prisoners, united in their rage against the turnkey, manage to express their scorn for the disreputable Alvaro:

> They all came into action at once. Don Augustin pointed his forefinger at the common enemy, as if to take aim, his finger trained upon his man. Then with all his force *he spat* – as if a slingstone had parted from its sling: but I it was a *word* he spat – a big percussive back-block epithet – his skull flung forward at the end of his long neck. (37)

The other character in the book who projects the same adherence to the machine and lack of humanity is Jack Cruze, a man "full of animal life that you get from contact with animals only. Men don't induce it. It grows to its full stature in the sink of a stable" (95). In fact, although Jack's main driving force is more animalistic than mechanical, his behavior is most of the time conditioned by certain rules, which reveal his robotic mind. One of these rules, which Jack learned as a child, consisted in physically assaulting any person criticizing his odd behavior, so that whenever somebody alludes to his indiscrete conduct with women, Jack's "young fist would jump out and draw blood" (96). Jack's main obsession and one which goes all the way back to his early adolescence is his extreme hankering for women; even when he grows up and becomes a prosperous accountant, he still goes about machine-like, driven mainly by his sexual drives. In fact, his obsession is such that, even at work, he makes sure he is conveniently surrounded by hordes of pretty young women to satisfy his insatiable instincts, or

at least this is Tristy's impression upon visiting Jack's office: "he began at last to see that the four walls of this office were by way of being a conventional framework only" (102). Nor is this any stretch of the imagination on Tristy's part, who on seeing Jack in his headquarters for the first time "recognized a force of nature that had burst its way into this city office and had consented to assist at the assessment of his income-tax" (102). It should be noted here that the association of Jack with nature is not meant to be flattering to the former, in so far as it underscores both his lack of feeling and sophistication. Like Alvaro's, Jack's knowledge of the world is very limited, as it is almost invariably related to his sexuality. This is why, for instance, when he is invited to Tristy's flat and is shown the studio, he can hardly hide his disappointment because all he is able to think about while forming his mental picture of an artist's studio is a "bunch of young ladies posing in pink underclothes, upon leopard-skinned ottomans" (106). Lewis's final demolition of Jack occurs in a scene that recalls Alvaro's humiliation at the hands of his prisoners; like Alvaro, Jack will allow himself to be made a fool of when he tries to show off his knowledge of politics in order to impress a Communist crowd at Gillian's house. Seeing that the bulk off the conversation is concentrated on the atrocities of the fascists in Spain, and in his eagerness to join in the discussion, Jack awkwardly mentions that a friend of his was imprisoned and tortured in Petrograd, Russia. Of course, Jack has no idea that he is talking to people for whom Russia is a Mecca of sorts, and whose reaction to this one can imagine only too well; and Jack makes things even worse for himself by quickly expressing his uncertainty as to the veracity of his friend's account.

The damage, however, has been done, and Jack's mediocre personality and hollow mind have been revealed to all, as Gillian, his "protectress" publicly scolds him: "who told you that stuff, Jack? You are an old nitwit to be sure" (113).

Lewis's aversion to people who act like machines, or automata as he prefers to call them, has its origins in his lack of faith in machines. In the final section of *The Revenge for Love*, and precisely in the description of the events that will lead to the death of Victor and Margret, the emphasis is laid on the vehicle – the machine that will lead the couple almost against their will to their doom. During their excursion inside the Spanish territory, and despite the risks related to this adventure, both Victor and Margot are acutely aware – albeit in different ways – of the machine that is taking them at a breathless speed. For Margot, it was hard to hide her extreme aversion to the car because it makes her feel that as a human being she is quite useless:

> Above all she detested the charging beast, that muscular machine. Pounding beneath her, it carried her forward, she knew, by means of unceasing explosions. Very well. But in this act she must cooperate. To devour miles and to eat up minutes, in gulp after gulp, use must be made of *her* organs, so it seemed, as well as its own. Under her feet she had a time-eating and space-guzzling automaton, rather than a hackneyed means of transport, however horridly high-powered. (354)

For Victor, however, the car is an object of wonder that allows him to push himself to his limits, and explore the various possibilities of speed and danger. It is with dismay that Margot suddenly recalls Victor's childhood fascination with cars, and she subsequently comes to the appalling conclusion that

"this is why [he] had run away, just to be able to drive [the car]! Silly boy! He had *tromped* her with a machine!" (364). It is remarkable that Margot keeps viewing the machine as a rival to herself, which in turn reflects Lewis's own anxiety over the threat to humanity posed by machines. This anxiety becomes even more articulate when the machine is described as a form of obsession that has insidiously worked its way into people's minds: the machine is no longer a mere means but an end in itself, or this is what Margot at least thinks as she examines Victor's obsessive behavior with the car:

> On several occasion Margot flew up from her seat like a cork, and was almost lost out of the car. But to this Victor paid no attention whatever: if he had lost her out of the car he would not have noticed it, she felt quite sure. Indeed, almost always when this happened his foot was seen to crush down more cruelly upon the accelerator; and Margot was obliged to cling to the safety straps and other available finger-holds, she was so volatile, to prevent a repetition of this contretemps. (353)

It is precisely this ability to work men out of their minds that seems to bother both Margot and Lewis; the bleak possibility that human beings will eventually be subordinated to the objects of their own creation – the machines – is inconceivable. Unfortunately, though, this is exactly what happens in the book, as the machine continues to run inexorably, while its occupants seem to have lost all control over it:

> The car was proceeding now at a great speed and she was tossed and flung about more like a shopper's parcel than *a human being*. Her soft sobbing even was made to sound like violent hiccups or short protesting cries, as it jerked out of her breathless body, by the incessant battery she underwent, accompanying the savage onrush of the machine. (368)

Margot's sobbing can be seen as a protest against the ruthlessness of this Frankensteinian monster that has turned against its master to avenge its very creation. This, in turn, alludes to the Sartrean concept of the *practico-inert*, which Jameson defines as: "that malignant destiny or anti-freedom which human beings create over against themselves by the investment and alienation of their labor in objects which return upon them unrecognizably, in the hostile form of a mechanical necessity" (82).

A Hero "*Malgré moi*": *Self Condemned*

If *The Revenge for Love* was considered by many critics to be Lewis's masterpiece, his last novel entitled *Self Condemned* has its admirers, too. In fact, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this book that concluded Lewis's career as a novelist, and this for many reasons. To start with, many critics see in *Self Condemned* a *roman a clef* which describes Lewis's experiences in Toronto, Canada during the war years. The book is also important in that it follows up on the change that took place in Lewis's writing and that had started with *The Revenge for Love*. In it, Lewis makes both a final repudiation of the uncompromising absolutism that has characterized his early fiction, and a reconciliation with human contingencies.

The novel tells the story of René Harding, a forty-seven-year-old Professor of history who decides to resign his Chair because he has become extremely "displeased" with the history he is teaching, and thinks that he has "no authority to teach the truth" (Lewis 137). Instead, he chooses to immigrate to

Canada, to the utter bewilderment of his mother and sisters, who cannot comprehend why a respectable university Professor and promising writer (René has just published a controversial but highly successful book) would give up his entire academic career and embark on an uncertain future in North America. René's motives are even less understood by his wife Hester, who is also upset because she has been left in the dark and is the last one to hear the news. Arriving in Canada, the Hardings settle in a twenty-five by twelve room in Momaco's Blundell Hotel. This room is to remain a refuge for the couple away from the freezing temperatures of the Canadian winter as well as the equally cold reception they have among the locals, until fire destroys the hotel, thus abruptly closing this chapter of the Hardings' life. The fire paradoxically liberates René from his self-confinement and his intellectual stupor, and he starts to be accepted by the people of Momaco. Hester, however, becomes more dejected, as she sees René's troubles beginning to vanish, and with them her dream of going back home. René's prospects continue to improve and he finally gets his breakthrough when he is offered the Chair of Modern History at the University of Momaco. Regaining his intellectual activity, René becomes oblivious to his wife's happiness, and the solidarity that has grown between the couple during the years of adversity starts to give way to a situation where each one is leading his and her own , separate life. The climax of the novel occurs when René is called to the Police Headquarters while attending an academic dinner; he learns that Hester has committed suicide by throwing herself under a truck. René is devastated by the news and retreats to

the isolation of a Catholic seminary from which he will emerge later "a half-crazed replica of his former self" (402).

In a letter to Mrs. Webb, the director of Hutchinson, dated May 29, 1947, Lewis described the central theme of the novel as follows:

> As now planned it will be dominated by the 'everything or nothing principle'. This means a character who is what today is colloquially known as a perfectionist. Woman has been called 'the eternal enemy of the absolute', so our perfectionist must encounter immediate difficulties when he comes in contact with woman. (Rose 410).

Obviously, the man Lewis is talking about is a kind of throwback to the Nietzschean artist-hero that we have seen in *Tarr*, with his absolutism and chauvinism. Nor is René Harding's concern for the integrity of his intellectual mind totally different from Tarr's anxiety over the fate of the artist in him. What distinguishes the two characters, however, is René's perfectionism. This is a man who, despite the comfort of his financial situation, feels that everything around him is going the wrong way, including his own profession. "I am no longer able to teach a story of the world which they find acceptable", he tells his mother, explaining the reasons behind his decision to resign his Chair. "They would not let me teach my students things which I now know, so I have had to tell them that there is no longer anything that I can teach" (Lewis 16). What is more, as a historian, René is able to take a more general outlook and realize that the problems that are plaguing the academic establishment are only a fraction of the wider falling apart of modern European societies. Politics, for instance, is one other aspect of this disintegration, with politicians representing the worst of

humanity. In an interesting conversation with his Marxist brother-in-law, Percy Lamport, René launches a tirade against modern day policy-makers and cites a particular event in the history of the United States which he thinks is emblematic of the degree of depravity which politicians can reach. The event is the sinking in Havana Harbor of the American battleship *Maine*, which René thinks was carried out by the Americans in order to inflame public opinion at home and justify an attack on Spain, despite the American President's commitment to peace:

> But the President was determined to have no war if he could possibly help it. So would it be the war-part of which Theodore Roosevelt was a prominent member? Would they murder hundreds of their countrymen, gallant seamen, in order to precipitate a war? The answer is, to my mind, that they would. Indeed, they would blow up half the world to have their way. And this goes for all politicians in all places...today a man (a politician) may destroy ten million people without it ever being remarked that he has behaved rather badly. (56-7).

Reading this passage, one can hardly resist the temptation of thinking of *Gulliver's Travels* and Swift's extreme disenchantment with the politics of his age. A century later, René is found echoing the same Swiftian disenchantment with almost every aspect of modern life. Here, for example, is what he has to say about the institution of family:

> He had done, in the past, a good deal of serious field-work on the Family. In England, he had concluded, there was little more than animal attraction left: and when we get down to the animal level we only have to think of the pigeons on our window-sill. There would be no maternal recognition of a young pigeon who flew down upon our window-sill and reminded the old hen-bird, sunning herself there, that he was a one-time egg of hers. He would be roughly repulsed. (143-144)

And about the war that was being fought against fascism:

> A war is going somewhere no doubt – our lovely boys are dying somewhere up in the ether waves, piloting their ships, hounded by Zeros in unequal fight, because some fool or knave prevented them from having anything but 'too little and too late'. But the children are not supposed to be disturbed on Sunday. We are the children – so all the news becomes emptily rosy. (183)

This acute awareness in René of the defects of his age is coupled with a belief in his own divergence from the norm. In fact, René believes that his unorthodoxy makes him both an outsider and a prophet of sorts, who has been singled out to redress the ailments of his society. "I think in a manner in which one is not allowed to think", he tells his mother, "so I became an outsider, almost a pariah" (18); and if Shelly believed that poets are 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world', René's position seems to revolve around the idea that it is the intellectual's role to define the values of society and intervene whenever these are transgressed. This position, again, recalls Tarr's Nietzschean exultation of his role as an artist, as well as the responsibilities and prerogatives attached to that. Nor does René fail to show the influence of this elitist philosophy on him as he distances himself from the widely abhorred Nietzschean concept of the herd mentality, and emphasizes instead his individualism: "most people think collectively…but they do not usually think very clearly. They have no pretensions to being individuals. They are a collective individual, a group of some sorts" (22); and when his sister asks whether he himself was not a group, he replies: "I was a group, a university. But when I wished, or when I felt compelled to cease to be that, I had to isolate myself, of course, and think the matter out by myself" (22-3).

His reply echoes the same principle of isolationism which has been expressed in *Tarr*.

René's affinities with the hero of *Tarr* are also evident in the ambivalent views he holds towards revolutionary change. For while both Tarr and René share the same dissatisfaction with the status quo, they are nevertheless antagonistic to any romanticization of the idea of change. If a change is to take place, it has to be done individually, without the heroic aura of collective action. That is why it is with "overwhelming difficulty that [René makes] use of the term hero" when addressing his sister Mary. Like Tarr (and echoing Lewis himself), René makes sure his motives are totally divested of sentimentalism: "I was not using the word 'heroic' with any sentimental accent" (23). However, one might argue that it is precisely sentimentalism which is behind René's tacit conception of himself as a hero of sorts – a man who stands out thanks to his 'superior' intellectual consciousness. René's discourse is replete with imagery that reflects his difference from the rest, so that at times he is the only man "awake, while all these others slept", and at others he becomes the 'Invisible Man' (author's capitals) picking "his way among people who could not see"; or he is someone "brutally concrete in an unsubstantial universe" (29). These images are obviously the product of a highly egotistical mind that has failed to reconcile itself to reality and has chosen instead the comfort and complacency of the heroic plane.

In his study of Lewis's fiction, Robert Chapman quotes Lewis's discussion in *The Lion and the Fox* of A. C. Bradley's definition of the "fundamental tragic trait" of Shakespeare's heroes. Chapman's argument is that

René represents the characteristics of an archetypal tragic hero, "his fatal flaw being that very absolutism of will which raised him above group thinking mankind" (Chapman 156). In fact, it is what Lewis calls towards the end of the novel "the will-to success" that seems to control René's mind almost to the exclusion of anything else, and keeps pushing him towards the edge. It should be noted here that René's decision to resign his Chair and start a new, uncertain future in Canada was taken individually, without taking account of the opinions of the people who are related to him and whose fate is inextricably linked to his; and even when he informs his mother and sister about his resolve, it is after he has already made up his mind to carry out his plan no matter what, so he is absolutely not seeking genuine advice. "I have shut the door behind me", he tells his mother; "there is no going back upon what I have said" (Lewis 16).

Yet, despite her own resentment at having been kept in the dark till the last minute, his mother is wise enough to acknowledge the fact that, if anyone should have been informed first, it is the wife, Hester. René, however, has a different opinion and, as a result, his indifferent statement: – "I have told her nothing. She knows nothing so far" (19) – comes as a surprise both to his mother and sister; and perhaps rightly so, for you would not expect a man to keep his wife in ignorance of a decision that will change the entire course of their lives, in this case towards an uncertain direction. By this time, however, René appears to have been transformed into an automaton who, like the automata encountered in *The Revenge for Love*, is motivated by one single urge and will not allow anyone to interfere with the fulfillment of this obsessive urge, not even his life's companion.

It is for this reason that René's compulsive mind refuses to consider anything apart from the execution of his plan, although he knows perfectly well that Hester will not necessarily see things as he does: "I have no doubt that she will reproach me. But nothing that Essie says will change my plans. In a case like that there is only one thing to do" (19); and put his words to action he does, when he finally confronts his wife with the news, and bluntly tells her that her opinion does not matter in his scheme of things:

- "It did not occur to you to consult me?
- No. Nothing would have been gained. What was involved could only be settled by myself, not in discussion with others. Talking would only have blurred the issue…
- All this is settled, then? She demanded.
- Absolutely. He lay back and scratched his head." (36)

This exchange is clearly emblematic of the degraded state communication between the couple has reached, a situation brought about not only by René's reticence about sharing his thoughts with wife but also by his broader conception of how intellectual people should treat their spouses.

By acting as if Hester did not exist at all, René reveals the extent to which his new worldview is divested of any human considerations. The prominent professor of history and promising writer has so far enjoyed a position of unequal power and prestige, and now, by renouncing this prestige, he is in fact exercising more power, and he relishes his own feeling of importance as he observes the strong effect his decision has on the people around him. Like Percy Harcaster, who basks in the attention and reverence offered him by the other minor Party members, and who becomes a hardened shell as a result, René gives up the human side in him in the pursuit of what is essentially a super-human goal. René's own

"shell" is especially clear in his treatment of his wife, whose "mediocre intellect" he holds in contempt. Not only does René think that Hester has no right to be consulted in matters that bear on the couple's future, but he also treats her as an inferior partner whose brain cannot possibly grapple with issues of great magnitude. This is certainly the impression one gets from René's ultimate discussion with Hester of his decision to emigrate to Canada, and especially his remark that he is now arriving "at something which involves a great deal of explanation of a technical order" (37). In view of Hester's limited powers of understanding, he decides that such an explanation would be futile. Of course, the way Hester is portrayed in the book by Lewis clearly refutes such an assumption and, indeed, she appears to be a remarkably perceptive person; and it is precisely this perceptiveness that allows her to control her initial disappointment at having been left in ignorance of René's plans, and then enlightens her as to her husband's not entirely flattering view of her mental capabilities. "This is entirely over my head. Bird-brain could not grapple…I see", she bitterly but sarcastically tells her husband, making one last appeal to his intellect. René, however, refuses to see the human being in his wife, and only feels exasperated each time he has to come in contact with her 'inferior' intellect; he obviously cannot get over the fact that, intellectually, she is no peer of his, and "though smart enough, she had not a fraction of Mary's or his mother's judgment" (31). Miraculously, however, the highbrow professor of history has so far managed to live with a woman intellectually his inferior, but how this happened we are only left to guess; the important thing, though, is that now, with René's new outlook, Hester's

intellectual deficiencies have become uncomfortably obvious, so much so that René starts to question the very validity of this unequal union: "their marriage had been a bus-accident. No off-spring had resulted. A good thing. The male off-spring would have resembled Essie more or less" (31). It is interesting to see René at this stage refer to his marriage as a "bus-accident", and talk about "off-spring" instead of child, as this is indicative of a new objectivity that – like Tarr's detachment – seeks to evade human contingency.

However, like Hardcaster in *The Revenge for Love*, René is offered a chance to reconsider his views, and he changes as he goes through the intense experience of giving up everything and starting from scratch in an unfamiliar environment. The first instance of this change happens as the Hardings prepare to set off for North America. Hester, who has so far managed to handle René's whims and reticence with outstanding success, is suddenly overwhelmed by the prospect of parting with "family and friends, upon a journey which René [himself] had never pretended could have a happy ending, nor that her absence could be anything but long" (146). Unable to control her emotions, Hester starts sobbing like a little girl, a reaction that catches the indifferent René off guard and leaves him utterly confused. Yet, when Hester reveals to him the reasons for her crying, and then apologizes for her excessive show of emotion, René is suddenly moved, and "the realization of what this would be for poor Hester struck him for the first time. He always *forgot* that Hester was a human being" (my italics, 147). Still, even if this realization recalls Hardcaster's gradual but steady coming into contact with the human reality, in René's case it is by no means as irreversible; in

fact it only lasts for a moment, and as soon as he sees Hester's tearful eyes, René, like Tarr, reverts to his usual indifference:

> As he got down on the bed beside her, he muttered, 'Poor old Ess!' tenderly for him, and Hester pushed aside her grief and turned towards him her big – her too big – eyes, clouded with tears. But then, alas, the usual thing occurred: alas, because grief is a more serious thing than pleasure, and it had been too unceremoniously pushed aside. The effect of that, too, on René was devastating, mocking, as it did, his momentary glimpse of a human reality. (147)

It is clear, then, that at this stage, Rene is still unable to see the qualities inherent in Hester as a human being and not just an intellectual partner, and this is partly due to the fact that he is still possessed by that same arrogance which he derives from his social position and academic standing. Thus, while the wife does her best to hide her distress at having to part with everything that is familiar to her life, the Professor can only feel morose as he watches a woman darting "hither and thither, as if pretending, it seemed to him, to find something: and assuming a series of display poses as though she had been modeling for *Esquire*'s most risqué draughtsman" (147); and René's exasperation grows as he meditates upon the loss of his position and the prospect of spending his remaining days of his life with this "mediocre" person: "Hester's obscene person must henceforth be his Muse, in succession to history. He was going to Canada in order to fornicate with Hester. What else!", and "what a terrible nightmare is that going to be!", the Professor also seems to be saying.

Obviously, therefore, René has recovered his former self with its indifference to everything that is human, and its pursuit of unrealistic dreams; the change, of which we have seen several signs, does not take place after all. In fact, it seems that for a real change in person and perspective to take place, one has to

go through an intense experience as it were, and preferably one that has a tragic dimension to it, such as what happened to Hardcaster; and just as the hero of *The Revenge for Love* reappears as a changed person after the loss of his leg, so does René finally realize the necessity of adjusting to the extremity of his new living conditions on the North American continent. These harsh conditions are brilliantly summed up by Lewis in a powerful passage:

> They [the Hardings] were as isolated as are the men of the police-posts on Coronation Gulf or Buffin Bay. They were surrounded by a coldness as great as that of the ice-pack; but this was a human pack upon the edge of which they lived. They had practically no social contacts whatever. They were hermits in this horrid place. They were pioneers in this kind of cold, in this new sort of human refrigeration; and no equivalent of a central heat system had, of course, as yet been developed for the human nature in question. They just took it, year after year, like backwoodsmen (however unwilling) they had become hardened to the icy atmosphere. They had grown used to communicating only with themselves; to being friendless, in an inhuman void. (170)

Thus, just like Hardcaster's cell in the Spanish prison, the Hardings' hotel becomes a sort of microcosm for the world at large, one that provides them with shelter from the physical and emotional cold that engulfs them on their new land. Dispossessed of that superciliousness that used to blur his vision of everything back in England, René has finally "learned his lesson of final and absolute exile. He beg[ins] immediately to forge for himself a more disciplined personality" (162); and out of this sheer solitude and isolation that become the couple's everyday life, a new bond develops that brings them closer as never before. It is only now that René is able to see the human being in his wife, and he stands amazed as he observes her stoicism and complete devotion to him, a vivid contrast to his past condescending view of her person. That is why, though not a very communicative person by nature, René can no longer hide an overwhelming

feeling of gratitude towards his devoted wife and, in deeply emotional language, he pours out his heart to her for the first time:

> Honestly, being imprisoned, as we have been, here, has its compensations. This barren life has dried out of me a great deal that should not have been there. And you have become integrated in me. This tête-à-tête of ours over three years has made us one person. And this has made me understand you – for most people I should hate to be integrated with. It is only when three years of misery have caused you to grow into another person in this way that you can really know them…in the other world, Hester, I treated you as you did not at all deserve. I cut a poor figure as I look back at myself. (239)

Hence, by recognizing his own past blunders, the man "who has repudiated the compromise of a normal living", and who has decided "never to use compromise or haf-compromise, under whatever circumstances", has eventually come to the realization that compromise is a function of the human condition (163). Nor is this experience unfamiliar to Lewis the man, whose uncompromising views played a major part in his neglect as a writer and artist, and prevented him from getting the recognition that he otherwise well deserves. It is, therefore, no surprise to see many of the heroes of Lewis's late books looking back in anger at their past career; Harcaster does it in *The Revenge for Love*, and so does René in this book. In Hardcaster's case, the discovery of love at the very tragic moment of death is so painful that it breaks the mask into pieces and draws tears from the otherwise dry eyes; in *Self Condemned*, the unmoved René is finally shaken as he comes into contact with his wife's humanness and unconditional affection for him, and recognized, by contrast, his own cruelty and inhumanity. The purgatorial tears are again there to celebrate the moment of truth: "René was so moved that tears flooded his eyes, as he held her [Hester] as well as he could" (239).

René, however, is not Hardcaster, or else *Self Condemned* would only be a mere replica of *The Revenge for Love*, and would thus lose its value as an important development in Lewis's work. Also, whereas the central theme of *The Revenge for Love* is the change towards the recognition of human values, in *Self Condemned* the irrevocability of the change is brought into question. We have seen that René's repudiation of his former egocentric principles and his rediscovery of himself as a human being have basically been a function of the change in his circumstances. Yet, the question that lingers in the mind of the reader is whether another change of fortune would engender an equally dramatic change of perspective, and this time in the opposite direction. To answer this question, Lewis arranges that his main character regain some of his past glamour, as he gradually integrates into Momaco life. The turning point, here, is the fire that destroys the hotel where the Hardings live, and with it the solidarity that has grown out of their years of adversity. Immediately after the fire incident, the Hardings are obliged to find another place to live, and as they leave their old room, they start to develop divergent views. For, while Hester sees the fire as another reason to go back to England, René prefers to think of it as sign that this chapter of hardship in their lives is finally coming to an end, and that better times lie ahead. Nor is René totally wrong, as he – "through the agency of M. Furber" – starts to form several relationships and thus integrate into Momaco life. The most important of these new acquaintances is Professor McKenzie, "a Scottish Sophist of about forty-five" (313) with a slight Glasgow accent. With McKenzie, René indulges for the first time since his arrival in Momaco in a long, intellectual

conversation that leaves the Scotsman very impressed. At the end of this meeting, McKenzie asks René to bring his wife along and have dinner with him, and René realizes at once that "this was a turning point in the epic of Momaco; the social void was to be filled with friendly faces, and the first was that of this agreeable Scot" (323); and a turning point it is indeed to prove: René first gets a job as a newspaper columnist for the Momaco Gazette-Herald, begins giving lectures, and then, with newly acquired financial security, starts working on a new book. The real breakthrough, however, occurs when he is offered the post of Professor of Modern History at the University of Momaco. This means a return to the initial point of departure, a throwback to the old days when René was completely absorbed by his own sense of importance and careless about everything else. Hester, in the meantime, realizes that this new development confirms the gloomy prospect of a lengthy stay at Momaco, and sees her dream of going back to England fade away. Consequently, in a last-ditch effort she confronts her husband with her distressing thoughts, only to be coldly reprimanded for being so fussy; so she ominously responds:

> All right...you deceive yourself. You have an uncommon capacity for self-deception, my dear René. I am sick of talking to you about this business. Accept, full of joy and self congratulation, your dirty little job, and you will see, someday, that I was not wrong as you think. (364)

It is at a moment like this that René is called on to validate the change that has taken place inside of him; he is now confronted with the same person who has asked him in the past, under similar circumstances, to consider her opinion and feelings, and whom he squarely cast off as an inferior being. To Hester's extreme disappointment, however, René does exactly the same thing that he did back in

England, and seems to be too blinded by his success to see the suffering that she has been going through. It is now obvious that she has obstinately deceived herself into believing that, by being resilient and patient, she will set an example for her impetuous husband and will eventually transform him into a considerate person; and for a moment, during their ordeal, she had thought that she had succeeded, as she saw her René become more humble and humane. The change, however, was a mere illusion – an impulsive reaction due to the years of adversity and the wife's loyalty. Now that he has recovered his former glory and success, René is again impervious to everything and everyone except the voice of his egoistic self. Mindless of his wife's suffering, René continues to go through the routine of his own life as mechanically as if he were in a trance, until one day he is called from a professional dinner by the Police, and is told that his wife has thrown herself under a truck. The effect of the news is to tear the professor violently from his prolonged trance, and leave him brutally exposed to the horror of the suicide as well as his responsibility in it. Later on, in the hospital room where he is recovering from the physical as well as the emotional scars of the shock, René looks back at his life and, in his inner-most soul he sees Hester, but this time she is not the dull, submissive wife:

> The Hester he saw at present was a living and moving one, one that he had loved, a witty, at time malicious one; but one who had become part of his physical being as if they had been born twins, physically fused – or better, one might say, for physical amalgamation would be unpleasant, identical twins. It had been a fearful estrangement between them when she made a return to England a supreme issue, a life or death issue. She still, in death, spoke of England. But all he spoke to her about was forgiveness. Could he ever be forgiven? No, forgiveness was of course impossible. (376)

Forgiveness is, of course, out of the question, if only because René has had his second chance and missed it again; and it is only now that the enormity of his mistake dawns on him with all its pretension and inflexible dogma, so that for the first time he comes to terms with his limitations as a human being who has stood in defiance to the odds:

> The fact was that [he] had stood up to the Gods, when he resigned his professorship in England. The Gods had struck him down. They had humiliated him, made him a laughing stock, cut him off from all recovery; they had driven into the wilderness. The hotel fire gave him a chance of a second lease of life. He seized it with mad alacrity; he was not, he had not been, killed...though already he was being shaken by the unceasing psychological pressure of the obsessed Hester...When the Gods stuck down the second time there was, from the moment of the blow, and the days spent in the white silence of the hospital, no chance that he could survive, at all intact. You cannot kill a man twice, the Gods cannot strike *twice* and the man survive. (406)

In the end, René learns the same lesson that Hardcaster has learned, that human empathy and love are the most important and transcending aspects of the human condition, that all else comes after, and that when "the personality is emptied of mother-love, emptied of wife-love, emptied of the illusions upon which sex-in-society depends, then the personality becomes a shell" (400). It is here, I think, that the peculiarity of *Self Condemned* within Lewis's work is to be found: we have here an ultimate and unambiguous celebration of love as the most fundamental value to the personality; and if in *The Revenge for Love* Lewis underscores the importance of love, in *Self Condemned* he explores the unthinkable situation where we have to live *without* love. This is why I continue to see the two novels as being complementary to each other, and as representing the climax of Lewis's 'fiction of humanity'.

Conclusion

In the prologue to his book *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Fredric Jameson observes that

> The neglect of Lewis is...a happy accident for us, who can then, as from out of a time capsule, once more sense that freshness and virulence of modernizing stylization less and less accessible in the faded texts of his contemporaries. (3)

Freshness *is*, indeed, the one quality that distinguishes Lewis's work from that of the other modernists, and makes it a hazardous enterprise to attempt to place his work with any fixed type of categories, like many of his early detractors did. This freshness and diversity are, in my opinion, a function of Lewis's constantly developing mind, and his relentlessly inquisitive disposition. And it is probably this continuous movement that confused many critics and induced some of them to take the easier course of dismissing Lewis's work as the product of a volatile and impulsive mind. Others preferred to approach Lewis from narrow perspectives and, as a result, managed to see only one side or another of his voluminous work. One of these restrictive approaches was to concentrate on what many viewed as Lewis's icy detachment and the absence of human reality in his work. It has been shown in the course of this thesis, however, that this represented only one stage of Lewis's developing writing, and that Lewis was never impervious to the formative experiences that he underwent, and that ultimately transformed his entire outlook. The experiences and characters of *The Revenge for Love* and *Self Condemned* are, in this respect, totally removed from those depicted in Lewis's early fiction, and as such testify to the idea that Lewis kept reinventing himself both as thinker and writer. It is certainly this constant reinvention of

himself and revisiting of his ideas and principles that made T. S. Eliot declare that Lewis was 'the most fascinating personality of my time'.

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