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**Towards a Phenomenology of Literary Language: Wyndham Lewis and the Expressions of Being**

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# Towards a Phenomenology of Literary Language: Wyndham Lewis and the Expressions of Being

Francesca Bonafede

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# Abstract

The central aim of this study is to transcend the academic orthodoxies of literary scholarship to restore the reader to their rightful place as the subject of Wyndham Lewis's writing. As a case study for a phenomenological approach to literary theory rooted in an exploration of the phenomenological potentialities of literary language, this thesis contemplates Lewis as an *incarnated speaking subject* committed to the *coherent deformation* of linguistic structures as a method to formulate a phenomenology of ourselves. Lewis's literary practice, in fact, developed as a phenomenological method to neutralise humanity's gatekeepers and gatekeeping mechanisms and *express* the human encounter with the world. The chapters each deal with one of five key works (*BLAST* (1914)*, The Wild Body* (1927)*, The Apes of God* (1930)*, Snooty Baronet* (1932) and *The Childermass* (1928)), witnessing through close reading the development of Lewis's style in his lifelong search for the most appropriate form with which to craft the gesture that could be most effective at addressing fundamental ontological questions. What is it like to be human? What is the relation between consciousness and reality? Where, when, and most importantly, how can we perceive the coming into being of human consciousness? Is *Being* accessible to us? Lewis shares these philosophical concerns with Maurice Merleau-Ponty as both thinkers contemplate human expression as the pragmatic solution to the ontological crisis brought forward by modernity. A great awareness of the dialectical analogies between the structures of language, perception and consciousness prompted both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty to explore the coherently deformed linguistic structures of literary language as the blueprint for comprehending the human experience of reality.

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Lastly, I would like to thank Jo Cottrell, James Hirst and Dr Gareth Mills for their camaraderie and moral support.

# Contents

# Table of Figures

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| *ABR* | Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989). |
| *AG* | Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God* (London: Penguin Books, 1965). |
| *B1* | Wyndham Lewis (ed.), *BLAST* 1 (1914) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008). |
| *B2* | Wyndham Lewis (ed.), *BLAST 2* (1915) (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1993). |
| *CHC* | Wyndham Lewis, *Creatures of Habit & Creatures of Change: Essays on Art Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989). |
| *CM* | Wyndham Lewis, *The Human Age, Book One, The Childermass* (New York and London: John Calder Publisher and Riverrun Press, 2000). |
| *CPP* | Wyndham Lewis, *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. Alan Munton, (New York: Persea Books, 1979). |
| *E1* | Wyndham Lewis (ed.), *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature*, No. 1, (January 1927), Rpt., ed. David Peters Corbett (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994). |
| *E2* | Wyndham Lewis (ed.), *The Enemy*, No. 2 (September 1927), Rpt., ed. David Peters Corbett (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994). |
| *L* | Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. W. K. Rose (Bristol: Methuen & Co, 1962). |
| *MWA* | Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art*, ed. Seamus Cooney, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1987). |
| *RA* | Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment, an Intellectual Biography*, ed. Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984). |
| *SAL* | Wyndham Lewis, "Studies in the Art of Laughter," *The London Mercury*, No. 178, Vol. XXX, (August 1934): 509-515. |
| *SB* | Wyndham Lewis, *Snooty Baronet,* ed. Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984). |
| *SF* | Wyndham Lewis, *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1* (London: The Arthur Press, 1930). |
| *TWM* | Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927). |

*WA* Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen, 1952).

*WB* Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body, A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927).

# Introduction

> Our reason is not the pragmatical member among our faculties at all, but for us the ultimate truth-bearing vehicle. Yet it is only in league with our sensuous machinery of illusion that it is able to convey the "real", which machinery is pluralistic.
>
> *TWM* 378

> The best variety of intellectuals […] are by no means enamoured of the Ivory Tower. They do not want to speak to the stars, but to men.
>
> *RA* 15

> Language has to be destroyed before you transform ideas at all radically.
>
> *E1* 30

> There had been nothing violent about the birth of my mind. There was no dramatic and sudden enlightenment, but a long series of enlightening experiences—with the steady accretion of the technical means for the communication of the burden of experience.
>
> *RA* 156

This thesis explores Wyndham Lewis's literary aesthetics as they evolve alongside a distinctively phenomenological philosophy. The five chapters trace the development of Lewis's phenomenological enquiry through literary style, from the crucial intuitions of the Vorticist period to the mature aesthetics of the 1930s, working with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as the philosophical framework.

The study is not aimed at returning Lewis's aesthetics to an overarching theoretical framework but concerned with exposing the limitations of such an approach and showing how a deeply consistent and coherent achievement can be found away from the intellectual orthodoxies which have often dominated Lewisian scholarship and in the literary materials themselves. As a result, all chapters will be grounded in extensive close readings of the primary sources, featuring examinations of existing reader responses in an effort to draw critical attention to the concrete objects of Lewis's aesthetics.

Faced with an extremely extensive corpus of visual and written work by one of the most complex intellectual minds in Anglo-American Modernism, I will restrict my focus to a

selection of key literary works: *BLAST* (1914), *The Wild Body* (1927), *The Apes of God* (1930), *Snooty Baronet* (1932) and *The Childermass* (1928).

Notwithstanding the profound engagement with his age and his immense output as painter, portraitist, official war artist, novelist, poet, satirist, critical theorist and art critic, Lewis found himself in a permanent state of conflict with contemporary culture. Despite having been assessed by Walter Sickert as 'the greatest portraitist who ever lived'[1] and by T. S. Eliot as 'the greatest prose master of style of [his] generation'[2] Lewis fell out of the Modernist canon and became the forgotten figure of Anglo-American Modernism. The critical neglect to which Lewis's work has been subjected is for the most part due to the reputation he gained as an anti-establishment figure, actively opposing what he regarded as the strictly commercial interests of the literary and arts institutions that ostracised what he believed was genuine artistic expression. The difficulties in finding publishers willing to work with troublesome texts by an uncompromising author, together with libel cases, censorship, and several boycotts led by dominant London literary circles, simply meant that Lewis's books appeared in relatively small print runs and (with rare exceptions)[3] become quickly unavailable. Moreover, Lewis's notoriety had been greatly exacerbated by his sharp critique of democratic systems, crowd behaviour and above all, by the literary products of his short-lived critical engagement with fascist ideologies. In the last decade, Lewis's leading scholars re-engaged with these more controversial works contextualising them both historically and biographically and aiming to shed light on a series of dogmatic arguments put forward by critics based on 'seemingly offensive titles' and assumptions made about books that scholars have often 'not actually read'.[4]

Although we could not properly speak of Lewisian scholarship until the early 2000s, research on Lewis's literary output has developed considerably in the last fifteen years but there is still a great deal to be explored, as I will discuss in an overview of the scholarship produced to date.

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[1] Quoted in Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen,1954), xiii.
[2] T. S. Eliot, 'A Note on "Monstre Gai"', *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter, 1955): 522-526, 526.
[3] Exceptions before 1939 were the Phoenix edition of *Tarr* and the Nash and Grayson edition of *The Apes of God*.
[4] Nathan Waddell, 'Lewis and Fascism,' in Tyrus Miller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 87-99.
Waddell produced the most comprehensive, compact and dynamic reading of this topic exposing the crucial critical neglect to which some of Lewis's more controversial books have been subjected and faithfully reporting on the controversial texts in question offering a fresh and impartial critique. Waddell contextualised Lewis's response to fascism historically and biographically dividing its evolution into three stages and effectively summarising the relevance of his critiques of democratic systems, crowd behaviour, the role of the intellectual and the function of art in modern societies.

Hugh Kenner's idiosyncratic and concise account of Lewis's contribution to British art and literature (*Wyndham Lewis,* 1954) and Geoffrey Wagner's interpretation of the multiple positions assumed by Lewis as the 'Enemy' in his attacks on contemporary art, politics and philosophy (*Wyndham Lewis: Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy,* 1957), remained the dominant critical readings of Lewis until the more recent scholarship of the late 1960s.

Despite the publication of several critical essays on Lewis from 1968 to the early 1980s, partnered with two anthologies of his writings (the first in 1969, *Wyndham Lewis, an Anthology of his Prose* edited by E. W. F. Tomlin, and the second in 1971 *Wyndham Lewis on Art* edited by Walter Michael) and *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis* compiled in 1978 by Morrow, Bradford and Lafourcade, no critical work dealt with the totality of Lewis's literary, painterly and critical production until the year 2000.

In 1979, Fredric Jameson, then already a prominent scholar, brought controversial attention to Lewis's literary work with the publication of his study *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*. Despite the strategically sensationalist title and premise,[5] Jameson's attempt to engage with Lewis's literary style was thought-provoking for the time in which the monograph appeared and it inspired a generation of scholars to raise some of the key stylistic debates that still animate the field. In the same year, Alan Munton edited a collection of Lewis's *Complete Poems and Plays* that appeared as the first step toward the disinterment of Lewis's vast output accomplished by Paul Edwards twenty-one years later. The year 2000 was eventful for Lewisian scholarship and along with a rich biography by Paul O'Keeffe (*Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*), Paul Edwards's *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer* was at last published. Edwards's monumental book was an account of Lewis's entire career, 'from his earliest surviving drawings and paintings up to the final images he produced [...] in the late 1940s, in parallel with an account of the written work and development of his ideas from 1908 [...] to 1955.'[6] With remarkable reproductions of Lewis's drawings and paintings and an invaluable bibliography, Edwards's monograph explored the totality of Lewis's artistic contribution

[5] Jameson himself admits the provocative nature of his title in the prologue redefining Lewis almost immediately as a "protofascist". Furthermore, an equally provocatively titled appendix ('Hitler as Victim') appeared deliberately late in *Fables of Aggression*. The appendix, announced as a critical reading of newspaper articles on Fascism and Nazism by Lewis, actually develops as a heavy-handed attempt to obscure Lewis's sharp criticism of Fascism and Nazism which is neglected across *Fables of Aggression*. Jameson's quotations are highly decontextualized and reworked into the critical text for the purpose of further validating his theory of the "political unconscious".

[6] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.

'book by book, painting by painting', finally bringing its 'quantity and range' to the attention of the public.[7] While Lewis's image undeniably emerged from Edwards's study in its multifaceted richness, the ambition of making Lewis's work 'more manageable for criticism and more comprehensible for [...] the reader or the gallery goer'[8] was hardly achieved. In fact, Edwards left this task to future scholars as he concluded that the 'clearly defined central-core achievement' of Lewis's practice had been 'impossible to locate'.[9] Following *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer,* the publications of several essay collections, along with the yearly *Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies,* inaugurated the critical studies of Andrzej Gasiorek, Richard Humphreys, and David Wragg.

In 2004, Andrzej Gasiorek's *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* endeavoured to situate Lewis within a history of Modernism through a concise assessment of the critical writings not as mere background to the fictional work but as an integral part of Lewis's creative literary effort. In the same year, *Wyndham Lewis* by Richard Humphreys was significantly added to Tate's 'British Artists' series, making Lewis's complex figure accessible to the visual arts establishment. Despite its extreme brevity and the clear focus on visual arts, Lewis appeared in this illustrated survey as a painter *and* a writer; his theories on art, life, and politics efficiently distilled and his role appropriately discussed as the most influential, controversial, and inspiring figure of British Modernism.

In 2005, David Wragg's *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain, Creating a Political Aesthetic* departed from the archival and streamlining approaches of the preceding studies to isolate and engage in depth with one particular aspect of Lewis's practice. Operating on a selection of Lewis's production up to the 1930s, Wragg's study offered a reading of Lewis's politics, drawing from his conceptualisation of the avant-garde and his engagement with modernity and Modernism. Explaining Lewis's avant-gardism as an incessant articulation of the Kantian *aporia,*[10] Wragg assessed Lewis's avant-garde work as the perpetual alternation between two antithetic detachments and a repeated and unsuccessful attempt to resolve the irreconcilable dichotomies of Kant's third critique. Drawing on Nietzsche, Wragg identified these detachments as the

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Wragg declares: 'Lewis's work enacts the dilemma of disjunction between rational and aesthetic criteria' in David A. Wragg, *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain, Creating a Political Aesthetic* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 15.

mediation of Apollonian rationalism by way of Dionysian impulses, assessing Lewis's *wild body* as a utopian, transitory and intermittent (therefore unsuccessful) solution to the *aporia* and a mediating element in the third critique. Echoing Paul Edwards's irresolute conclusions to some degree, however, Wragg stated that Lewis's work should be seen as a 'symptomatic expression' of the impossibility of resolving the tensions raised by modernity and that it could therefore be taken into consideration as part of 'an ongoing debate' on modernity and Modernism. [11]

In 2015 and 2016, *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide* and *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* were published with the crucial aims of stimulating new scholarship and supporting a renewed interest in Lewis's work and legacy. *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*, in fact, provided a reader-friendly overview for readers with no prior knowledge of Lewis, just as *The Cambridge Companion* (also aimed at new readers of Lewis) appeared 'brief and accessibly written'[12] with the valuable institutional and academic status of a Cambridge Companion and constituting a more digestible descendant, both visually and structurally, of Edwards's monumental monograph.

Propelling Lewis's growing visibility further, a complete critical edition of the author's written works was commissioned by Oxford University Press in 2015, followed by the largest UK retrospective of Lewis's work in 2017 at the Imperial War Museum North, marking sixty years since Lewis's death.

With all this in mind, it is undeniable that the work of the last twenty years by leading scholars successfully achieved the primary aim of renewing interest in Lewis's work and legacy. It is, however, from our culturally degraded and technology dependent society that we are faced with an opportunity to reconnect with Lewis's output moving forward from the all-important archival, reputation-restoring and institutionalising work of existing scholarship and entering a much needed second era of Lewisian scholarship calling for an in-depth engagement with the materials of Lewis's art and literature. The ambition for this study is precisely to drive a new wave of research updating the work of a scholarship which has been repeatedly undermined by a failed ambition to identify an overarching core achievement from Lewis's multifaceted output. As a result, Lewis's aesthetics have

[11] Ibid.
[12] Tyrus Miller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis*, 15.

often been described as *difficult* for difficulty's sake, filled with *aporias*, contradictions and irresolvable dichotomies, and his critical works studied as a series of commentaries necessary to fill the many gaps left behind by the precarious complexity of Lewis's literary and visual work. In this study, I will suggest that such approaches have caused a progressive diversion from the troublesome materials of Lewis's art and thus from the core achievement that would integrate Lewis back into the Modernist canon. Furthermore, what this study aims to demonstrate through close reading is that an achievement can be witnessed consistently emerging from those very gaps and stylised traces; from these, meaning comes into existence in a constant state of becoming. These gaps, however, can be filled solely with the product of the reader's interaction with form, as I will be demonstrating.

The question of interaction with stylistically manipulated language is central to the choice of illuminating Lewis's aesthetic practice with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. While Merleau-Ponty advanced his phenomenological method by redirecting his ontological enquiry to stylistically manipulated form and the processes behind its production and reception, it was Lewis's double practice as visual artist and a writer that enabled him to attain a deeply phenomenological awareness of the central role that stylistically manipulated form plays in the life of human consciousness. This study, in fact, is not a comparative proposition grounded exclusively in shared philosophical concerns, but the uncovering of a deeper connection rooted in a method that led both thinkers to acutely similar and innovative solutions to unsolved philosophical questions of expression, embodiment, ontology and perception. What is it like to be human? What is the relation between consciousness and reality? Where, when, and most importantly, how can we perceive the coming into being of human consciousness? Is *Being* accessible to us? Is a conscious knowledge of ourselves achievable? Both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty hunted for a pragmatic solution to the ontological crisis brought forward by modernity.

Ian Patterson was the first to notice an affinity between Lewis and Merleau-Ponty's interest in the ontological relevance of our experience of the human body. Patterson's essay from 1996 stands as a stimulating insight into a linguistic medium which 'demands a physiological attention which can only make sense in terms of our experience of

ourselves as bodies'.[13] Moreover, Patterson identifies a 'triangular relationship between reader, meaning and text' which is sustained by 'the demands Lewis's prose makes on the phenomenology of our reading'.[14] In his analysis of *The Apes of God*, Patterson draws attention to Lewis's ability to simultaneously showcase and disrupt the inescapable series of relentless habits and fashions brought forward by modernity. To Patterson, while characters appear in a web of pre-established patterns of social norms, language brings forward 'a process by which the experience of reading […] influences us', as he perceives a language that 'makes the reader feel uncomfortable, and this discomfort is a mode of knowing'.[15]

While the core arguments in the present study are to a degree in agreement with these observations, Patterson identifies *The Apes of God* as *the* place for Lewis's phenomenological achievement as he in fact states that the 'performative utterances of *Blast* may be less effective agents of change'.[16] What Patterson considered as an isolated stylistic achievement is in fact one of the many proofs of concept for a phenomenological method which developed and evolved across Lewis's oeuvre, intuitively introduced with *BLAST* and theoretically grounded in *The Wild Body*. In addition, Patterson's Lewis-Merleau-Ponty comparative proposition remains fastened to the surface and overlooks the shared method, barely considering the rich phenomenology of expression that is central to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the living body and its keen focus on stylistically manipulated language.

This study, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate that Lewis's achievement, perceived by Patterson only as a reader of *The Apes of God,* is not merely an apparatus of stylistic devices, but a coherent and integrated philosophical system with a phenomenological method rooted in crucial observations of the fundamental role that expression plays in our experience of reality and of ourselves. Lewis's method shares with Merleau-Ponty's the fundamental discovery that the structures of expression and language mirror the subject/object dialectical structures of human consciousness exactly, as well as the ambition to find phenomenological means to overcome incomplete dialectics (in the

[13] Ian Patterson, 'Beneath the Surface: Apes, Bodies and Readers', *Volcanic Heaven: Essays on Wyndham Lewis,* ed. Paul Edwards (US: Black Sparrow Press, 1996), 123.
[14] Ibid., 132-133.
[15] Ibid., 127-128.
[16] Ibid., 126.

shape of sedimented meaning and patterns of behaviour) to bring the true essence of our humanity into being.

In addition to what Lewis shares with Merleau-Ponty methodically, his consistent search for a practical solution to the ontological crisis brought forward by the crisis of the natural sciences places him near the work of the phenomenologists more broadly. This chiefly modern crisis, derived from modernity's endorsement of objectivity and certainty and a focus on progress and technology, was joined to the promotion of a Cartesian model by which the world is internalised through a series of a priori structures and universals of knowledge. The rise of positivism cemented and validated these views, relegating mind and body to distinct spheres of being, with isolated modes and purposes, consigning humanity to a fractured and malfunctioning consciousness. While behaviourist psychology confined the body to a system of mere reaction to stimuli, intellectualist psychology contemplated the existence of a fully formed and independent world of the mind. As a result, consciousness was dominated by positivist certitude and given up to a pre-existing reality in which there is nothing more to say about the world. Phenomenological enquiry challenged the ambitions of positivism, by aiming to reawaken our dormant consciousnesses to a forgotten world of emerging meaning.

While these fundamental preoccupations at the core of the phenomenological undertaking were shared, different methods produced distinctive focuses and divergent conclusions. So, why the choice of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for this study? Linguistic structures play a pivotal role in the formulation of Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenology of ourselves, as his enquiry into language progressively turned into the blueprint for comprehending the human experience of reality. Merleau-Ponty's insights into language began with a recognition of the effects that *speech-acts* have on human perception, as he explored the way linguistic structures are entrenched with the structures of the human body in the act of perceiving. It is crucial to establish, however, that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological enquiry never exactly began with language but with a reassessment of the living body which developed from a refusal of the traditional irreconcilability between the *in-itself* and the *for-itself*, or rather: the inner world of intellectualism and the outer objective world of empiricism cannot possibly exist as separate domains. True consciousness, in fact, can only exist as an *incarnated consciousness* inhabiting a world which is a *world-as-meaning*. By admitting that there is an *in-itself* for us

and drawing attention to our embodied existence which we share with animals, plants and inanimate objects, Merleau-Ponty developed a phenomenology which aimed to reawaken consciousness to 'its own unreflective life in things'.[17]

Crucially, Merleau-Ponty believed the simplistic descriptive method of classical phenomenology ineffective for reality to be brought into being. He then formulated a method which consisted of exploring those instances in which consciousness ceases to take for granted its *natural attitude* towards the world and instead becomes present to itself and to its objects, by returning to a primordial type of experience which precedes all experience of the world. This compelling state belongs to a specific field of perception in which meaning is constituted, with the perceptive act developing as a creative act and determining a particular manner or *style* for consciousness of *being-in-the-world*. To Merleau-Ponty, the peculiar aspect of humanity resides not in our ability to create exceptionally complex structures of behaviour, or rather human institutions of meaning, but in the human capacity to identify ways to surpass those very institutions by bringing new meaning, thus reality, and truth, into being.[18]

With the aim of catching a glimpse of this primal experience of the world, Merleau-Ponty contemplated breaking with our familiarity with language. He proceeded by applying his ontological arguments to the structures of communication, directing his enquiry to the pre-linguistic field in which words are constituted as phonemic patterns, at that time when they only begin to be accepted by the speakers of a language. In doing so, Merleau-Ponty identified a type of meaning based solely on the phonemic power of the word, a meaning with an affective value that precedes both referential and conceptual levels of meaning and that he referred to in *Phenomenology of Perception* as *existential meaning*. The structures of this primordial meaning mirror the structure of the *body as expression*, as the linguistic sign stands for the physical actualisation of a meaning which is *incarnated*.[19] These observations led Merleau-Ponty to a wider consideration of how linguistic structures mirror the structures of perception, as he theorised the existence of a *gestural meaning* by which the body itself, expressive through pre-verbal communication, stands for the physical embodiment of our intentions and potentialities in our lived worlds.[20] Analogously, the *existential meaning* residing in the linguistic sign which is the embodied expression of

[17] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33.
[18] See 'The Human Order' in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A. L. Fisher (Boston: MA Beacon Press, 1963).
[19] See 'The Body as Expression, and Speech' in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.
[20] Ibid.

meaning (and yet inseparable from referential and conceptual meanings) survives the word's habitual usage within a linguistic community, remaining mysteriously attached to the word. For Merleau-Ponty, to fully comprehend the working of both these structures of meaning, we need to abandon the idea of meaning as conventional and focus our efforts on the survival of the *existential meaning,* exploring language in its alive status as 'there is only one language in a state of becoming'.[21] Merleau-Ponty, in fact, basing his argument on the structural analogies between language and perception rejected Husserl's notable attempt to formulate a theory of a universal *a priori* language. The mere shared comprehensibility of languages, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as *lateral universal*, does not allow us to say anything philosophical about language and we should therefore redirect our attention to *natural languages*, or rather, to the usage humanity makes of linguistic structures for the purpose of constituting our lived world.[22]

Aiming to observe linguistic structures in their alive status, Merleau-Ponty undertook an extensive study of what he believed the most complex yet readily available use of language in a state of becoming, literary language. Such language moves beyond institutionalised *second-order* language and documents the modulations introduced by speech-acts:

> Communication in literature is not the simple appeal on the part of the writer to meanings which would be part of an a priori of the mind; rather communication arouses those meanings in the mind through enticement and a kind of oblique action. The writer's thought does not control the language from without; the writer is himself a kind of new idiom, constructing itself, inventing ways of expression, and diversifying itself according to its own meaning. Perhaps poetry is only that part of literature where this autonomy is ostentatiously displayed.[23]

To Merleau-Ponty, the creators of genuine literary expression do not simply transmit a meaning by making use of language, but they themselves *become* language which like consciousness is neither an idea nor a thing. Thus, language is not simply an instrument to transmit thought, or an extension of the writer's body (as Jean-Paul Sartre put it)[24], but it is the body of thought and the bringing of a meaning into being. The meaning emerging from such language is thus autonomous and *exists* in the world of experience perceived by readers as a real entity. This type of meaning can only be the result of a *style*, or rather,

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[21] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 56.
[22] See 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in Maurice, Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
[23] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 8-9.
[24] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman and intro David Caute (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 12.

the manipulation of pre-existing *second-order* language with the aim of bringing *existential meaning* into being. Merleau-Ponty, in fact, distinguishes between what he refers to as 'great prose' and 'prosaic writing' as follows:

> All great prose is also a re-creation of the signifying instrument, henceforth manipulated according to a new syntax. Prosaic writing, on the other hand, limits itself to using, through accepted signs, the meanings already accepted in a given culture. Great prose is the art of objectifying a meaning which until then had never been objectified and of rendering it accessible to everyone who speaks the same language. When a writer is no longer capable of thus founding a new universality and of taking the risk of communicating, he has outlived his time. It seems to me that we can also say of other institutions that they have ceased to live when they show themselves incapable of carrying on a poetry of human relations.[25]

Meaningful communication can only be the endowment of a type of novel universality which is not embedded in historicity because it carries on a *poetry of human relations* which is based on our shared *incarnated* way of existing. The encounter with linguistic entities constructed in such a way is the complex experience of a new signifying system which allows *speaking subjects* to re-experience language in a field in which meaning is constituted during a process analogous to the one of true perception:

> Each word of a difficult text awakens in us thoughts which were ours beforehand, but these meanings sometimes combine to form new thought which recasts them all, and we are transported to the heart of the matter, we find the source.[26]

Merleau-Ponty believed that what is necessary for the work of literature and for any other type of genuine communication to truly achieve the status of a *speech-act* is an incarnated *speaking subject*, conscious of the phenomenon of language and in the act of expressing themselves through grasping the world of meaning in which we are immersed. Whether in the act of speaking (/writing) or listening (/reading), the *speaking subject* is taken for granted in both intellectualist and empirical analyses of language, causing most philosophical enquiries to miss crucial insights into human perception and into the way we constitute our lived world. To Merleau-Ponty, an effective phenomenology of humanity must direct its attention to the processes behind the creation, the use and reception of language.

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[25] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 8-9.
[26] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 178-179.

The present study contemplates Lewis as an incarnated *speaking subject* but principally as a thinker committed to the experience of manipulated linguistic structures as the most effective method to formulate a phenomenology of ourselves. Lewis's literary practice is driven by highly phenomenological concerns about the nature of human perception, seeking to identify a pragmatic method to restore dormant consciousness to a healthy dialectic and pursuing a primitivism which, rather than merely borrowing and appropriating pre-existing form (a quintessential aspect of Modernist aesthetics) focuses instead on mastering the primitive pre-linguistic and pre-experiential processes behind the creation of form.

The five chapters in this study witness the development of Lewis's literary aesthetics in his lifelong search for the most appropriate form with which to craft the gesture that could be most effective at assessing and experiencing humanity's most perplexing philosophical paradoxes. In what follows, I will proceed to uncover the main research questions in each chapter, elucidating the method selected for this study further.

Chapter one is an examination of *BLAST* as Lewis's first phenomenological investigation into the modern ontological crisis and into aesthetic blueprints for a new 'way of seeing' (*RA* 135) able to counteract the detrimental gatekeeping mechanisms responsible for the demise of the life of consciousness. In *BLAST,* time philosophy, politeness, academic orthodoxies and standardisation are accused of destroying humanity's perceptive instinct, which is primarily a creative instinct. *BLAST* seeks to rescue a modern individual passively enduring the 'appearance of the world' in an environment hostile to the human body 'which becomes of less importance everyday' (*B1* 141). Lewis sets for Vorticism the crucial task of retraining consciousness to perceive the epistemic power of the present ('The Present is Art'), which he defines as the world's 'crude energy', opposed to the *impure present* of appearances (*B1* 147).

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project begins with a call for a 'break with our familiar acceptance' of the world in order to achieve a 'direct and primitive contact' with reality. He contemplated a distinction between true perception, as knowledge of the present, and a *second-order perception* 'which we exercise at every moment' and which operates 'on the surface of being' concealing 'from us the former basic phenomenon'.[27]

[27] Ibid., 50.

The Vorticist *stillness* advocated for in *BLAST*, or rather the ability to contemplate essences, results from what Merleau-Ponty refers to as an *act of attention*. To achieve this contemplative status, the individual must identify the present and actively distinguish it from the *impure present*. This is precisely what *BLAST* seeks to negotiate for its audience.

In chapter two I propose *The Wild Body* as the place in which the raw observations for a new *way of seeing* of *BLAST* are grounded philosophically into the new 'system of feeling' (*WB* VI) that is elucidated in the compelling stylised essays 'Inferior Religions' and 'The Meaning of the Wild Body'. In *The Wild Body,* Lewis switches the focus phenomenologically onto the living body, restoring it to its proper place in the material world as a *thing* among things. While he achieves this effect stylistically in the short stories ideating a complex stylistic device by which an unfamiliar rendering of humanity is delivered through the eyes of a human character, he formulates a theory in the essays reversing Henri Bergson's theory of the comic precisely. Laughter then becomes the result of 'the observations of a thing behaving like a person' (rather than 'of a person behaving like a thing') (*WB*, 246). It is through this uncomfortable laughter that we acknowledge our own materiality and transiently resolve the incongruity between mind and body. Merleau-Ponty similarly rehabilitated the body positing that there is in fact an *in-itself* for us and believed literature to be a compelling medium to promote the 'sardonic form of humanism and […] particular kind of humour'[28] required to cast a crucial unfamiliar gaze on the ambivalence of our embodied existence. He described the process necessary to rehabilitating our incarnated dialectic as a way of 'looking at human beings from the outside.'[29]

Chapter three explores *The Apes of God* as a proof of concept for the externalist aesthetics ideated in *The Wild Body,* as well as a masterpiece of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as *coherent deformation*. By selecting fully recognisable characters, thus eliminating any possibility for abstraction and abolishing all distance between the *speaking subject*, the *speech act* and reality, Lewis enhances the efficacy of the human gaze on the human species, transporting ontological scrutiny into the lived world. A total phenomenological revaluation of truth and ethics emerges from interaction with the style of *The Apes of God* which maintains a gestural value because it exists in the world as incarnated meaning. The

[28] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Olivier Davis (London: Routledge, 2004), 60.
[29] Ibid., 23.

gesture delivered through *The Apes of God* triggers a process analogous to the one adopted by Merleau-Ponty for his phenomenological investigation into truth and ethics, commencing with a break from the *pensée survole* (high-altitude thinking) and a refusal of its tendency to situate knowledge in the abstract domain where standardisation and systematisation move incessantly away from reality, in the direction of incorporating the other to the same. *The Apes of God* is an encounter with what Merleau-Ponty defines as 'the truth in which we participate'[30] which is brought into being through a phenomenological ethical coherently deformed system based solely on humanity's most fundamental *intersubjective* and *intrasubjective* experiences.

Chapter four proposes the neglected *Snooty Baronet* as a crucial phenomenological work in which Lewis sets out to uncover the fundamental nature of human reality attempting to understand the relation between consciousness and nature. A metaphysical space emerges from within the interaction with the stylistic materials of *Snooty Baronet* from which unexpected ontological questions emerge explicitly. Lewis crucially sets out to contemplate these interrogatives with a book about books, writing, and crucially about language and which offers a total revaluation of human expression and a survey of the birth of meaning. It is through genuine participation in the speech act of *Snooty Baronet* that the heroic action is transferred to the reader who is admitted into the gradual demise of the malfunctioning consciousness of a traumatised protagonist, a modern antihero seduced by the viscous pseudo-dialectics of the interwar capitalist democratic project and condemned to an abstracted existence. The reader however is equipped with a way out through a renewed perception of human behaviour in its dialectical unity, its *intentionality* and its human meaning.

The concluding chapter examines the pinnacle of Lewis's phenomenological investigations through language in *The Childermass*. It is the site of a paradigm-shifting discovery in relation to literature's ability to sustain a remarkably intense philosophical undertaking and permeate the elusive domain of metaphysics successfully. The gesture delivered through the vigorous and purposely undefinable aesthetic of *The Childermass* does not belong in the real world but in the realm of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'metaphysics in action',[31] or rather, phenomenological metaphysics. With *The Childermass*

[30] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 133.
[31] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 83.

Lewis finally presents his audience with a fully functional method to neutralise humanity's gatekeepers and replace our pseudo-dialectics with a *hyperdialectic*, bringing the metaphysical nature of our existence into being and restoring our knowledge of *what is* prior to knowledge, to philosophical and scientific reflections. This is humanity's most fundamental knowledge, a knowledge which escapes systematisation and linguistic communication and a knowledge that must remain tacit.

It is through *The Childermass* that Lewis is finally able to perfect and successfully deliver a phenomenological method able to validate his discovery that language *is* the domain in which the 'perpetual uneasiness in the state of being conscious'[32] can be given a *sense* because *Being* is accessible to us as long as we are committed to *expressing* it.

[32] Ibid., 29.

Before proceeding I should perhaps offer and apology. —Quotations are more attractive for the student than for the general reader, it is obvious. But if one gives only a digest of what the writer under discussion has said, uninterrupted by quotations, in order to effect its introduction into the system of the reader with the minimum demand upon his attention, much is lost in the process. There is a tone of voice, a manner of delivery, which only direct quotation can communicate, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated in such a case as the present. So I shall pursue the method of verbatim quotation throughout.

*WA* 102

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

# Chapter 1

# Stir up Civil War Among Peaceful Apes: Phenomenology of Attention in *BLAST*

> The human form still runs, like a wave, through the texture or body of existence, and therefore art.
>
> *B1* 141

> The Stars have been changed, but the play is the same.
>
> *RH* 278

Existing criticism remains fastened to a reading of Lewis's *Weltanschauung* as evidence of an alleged obsession with the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter and frequently understands *BLAST* as an early explicitation of this compulsion.[33] In this chapter, in contrast, I will propose *BLAST* as Lewis's first attempt to diagnose the damage that philosophical and scientific doctrines which evolved from the Cartesian model imposed on the life of consciousness, impairing pure perception and eliciting a chronic separation of the selves. In *BLAST,* Lewis establishes his lifelong interest and fascination with finding pragmatic ways to restore pure perception and the unity of the selves through aesthetic practice.

Thirty-six years after the publication of the 'hugest and pinkest of all magazines', Lewis reflected on his *BLAST* years:

> It was, after all, a new civilisation that I— and a few other people— was making the blueprints for […] A rough design for *a way of seeing* for men who as yet were not there. At the time I was unaware of the full implications of my work, but that was what I was doing. I […] felt it to be an important task. It was more than just picture-making: one was *manufacturing fresh eyes for people*, and fresh souls to go with the eyes. (my emphasis, *RA* 135)

[33] As an example of more recent critical attitudes Tyrus Miller declared: 'Lewis was philosophically and existentially obsessed with the Cartesian duality of mind and matter', see Tyrus Miller, "Introduction: Janus-Faced Lewis, Avant-Gardist and Satirist" in Tyrus Miller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. I.

This self-confessed partial awareness of the implications is precisely what makes *BLAST* so crucial to an understanding of a *Weltanschauung* rooted unconditionally in aesthetics. Despite its profound epistemological and ontological ramifications, *BLAST* is practical and sculptural, and its raw materials eventually turned into the models for Lewis's diversified literary and visual output which functioned as proofs of principle for a series of philosophical observations into the nature of humanity and our relationship with our physical environment. It is with *BLAST,* in fact, that Lewis's radical task of stimulating his audience to the formulation of a 'response to a fundamentally altered world' begins with the offering of an initial analysis of modernity's deceptive assimilating tendencies, defined by Lewis elsewhere as 'the technique of industry […] impos[ing] internationalism upon us […] by standardising life throughout the world'.[34] To Lewis, the Bergsonian trend of philosophical doctrines which dominated modern thought promoted an abstracted humanity impairing the exercise of true perception and propelling the decline of a dehumanised body (*B1* 141). Bearing an elemental insight into these challenges set by modernity to the life of consciousness, *BLAST* developed as the crude outline of an ambitious aesthetic practice conceived to reawaken a renewed type of sensibility. The practical aim of this practice was to deliver an 'improvement of life' grounded in the restored dialectic between humanity and its environment (*B1* 146).

In *BLAST,* Lewis scrutinised modern art's inability to formulate a meaningful response to modernity's mutated environment, coerced as it was by time philosophies to abandon reality as its primary purpose and relegating itself either to the futile domain of straightforward representation or to escapist and ineffective abstraction for abstraction's sake. Lewis criticised both techniques as unable to go beyond the surface and penetrate the essence of the real because both developed from a radical disengagement from the physical world. Contrarily, *BLAST* introduced the Vorticist as a new artistic figure, precursor of a new civilisation and unafraid to contemplate the external world and subsequently restore consciousness as a vital and active force within it. To Lewis, the modern artist had to redevelop a primitive kind of sensibility, getting 'deeply enough immersed in material life to experience the shaping power amongst its vibrations' (*B2* 40) and, in turn, use this same shaping power as the primal force of any aesthetic endeavour. The vigorous prelude 'Long Live the Vortex!' demanded a new ontological purpose for

[34] Wyndham Lewis, 'Super Natural Versus Super Real' in Walter Michael and C.J. Fox (eds.), *Wyndham Lewis on Art, Collected Writings 1913-1956* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 304-305.

this new art which sought its origin in a fundamental shift in subject from the 'appearance of the world' to its 'crude energy' (*B1* 7).

Designed by Lewis as 'an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way' (*B1* 7) and the only way 'to make the public *feel* that something was happening' (*RA* 135), *BLAST* aimed to restore art to its proper practical place in the lived world setting his new 'art of the individual' an onerous task: 'We want *to make* individuals, wherever found.' (my emphasis, *B1* 8) Acknowledging an incessant loss of individualism and calling for the dismissal of politeness, standardisation and academia, in favour of 'stupidity, animalism and dreams' (*B1* 7), Lewis invited *BLAST*'s audience to 'shed their education skin', destroyer of the 'creative instinct', and completed this dedication to the audience, declaring that 'intrinsic beauty is in the Interpreter and the Seer, not in the object or content' and that 'Blast [was] created for this timeless and fundamental Artist that exists in everybody.' (*B1* 7) As a curtain-raiser, 'Long Live the Vortex!' set the scene for a phenomenological milieu by which Lewis called for a break from *sensation*, the appearance of the world, and a return to the *essence*, the world's crude energy. What Lewis felt crucial to expose was the trap humanity was falling into, following the precepts of doctrines which, promoting the abandonment of pure perception in favour of time-bound *sensation,* were insidiously training people to succumb to a world of mass-rule. In *Time and Western Man,* Lewis analyses *sensation* as perpetual and purposeless action progressively supplanting contemplative perception and promoting a series of 'immediate sensational appearances unassociated with any component of memory' (*TWM* 409), taking reality away from the object and turning the world into an 'unknowable thing-in-itself' (*TWM* 413). What time philosophies advocated was reality as a picture, made of 'successive, flat, images or impressions' (*TWM* 409), seen rather than perceived, abstractedly depicted in *BLAST* as a 'cataclysm of premature decadence' and a 'furious mass of images left: no human' (*B1* 68). Lewis, on the other hand, believed humanity 'conscious of much more than we immediately see' insofar as 'every time we open our eyes we envelop the world before us, and give it body, or its quality of consisting of objects, with our memory' (*TWM* 408). While Bergsonism 'displaced the mind in favour of a movement group' (*TWM* 410) which was temporary and fragmentary, championing perpetual movement and action as the source of valuable knowing, Vorticism considered thought as independent from time-bound movement which is 'incompatible with reflection and impossible of contemplation' (*TWM* 414). *BLAST* emblematically

declared: 'the Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest' (*B1* 148). In 'Manifesto II', Lewis grounded Vorticism in this contemplative stillness, positioning it beyond the mere action and reaction of the *sensum:*

> 1) Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves.
> 2) We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes.
> 3) We discharge ourselves on both sides.
> 4) We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours.
> 5) Mercenaries were always the best troops.
> 6) We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World.
>
> (*B1* 30)

In this phenomenological set-up, the elemental opposite statements of mind and body cooperate in harmonious duality, eliciting a reality which is not passively *seen* as a series of flat successions of images, but perceived and contemplated, thus *chosen*. The Vorticist shows a *fight* on both sides exposing the audience to 'structures between two extremes' in favour of a peculiar cause. Lewis portrayed this new artist figure as a mercenary, profiting from switching sides between the two extremes at their convenience, and as a primitive, committed to hunting for the primordial relation that connects humanity to the world. Fundamentally divergent from the type of primitivism adopted by the continental avant-gardes, Lewis's idea of primitivism was not concerned with the mere borrowing of primitive forms and the straightforward replication of these, but with the phenomenological act of reawakening humanity's primordial relation to the world and with the understanding of reality's shaping powers. Emblematically, the artist figure contemplated in this phenomenological set up is described as the 'timeless fundamental Artist that exists in everybody' (*B1* 7) and it is this figure to whom *BLAST* is dedicated, or rather our *perceptive-self*, perception being a creative activity founded on a dialectic between opposite statements.

Crucially, Merleau-Ponty's seminal work on the phenomenology of human perception, through which he sought to understand the 'exceptional relation between the subject and its body and its world'[35] proposes consciousness as a chiefly *perceptive consciousness* and perception as a creative act which 'already stylizes'.[36] Dismissive of the classical prejudices

[35] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 4-5.
[36] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 54.

of established knowledge and calling for a return to phenomena, Merleau-Ponty described empiricism as an abstract and derivative sign language of the world that 'treated consciousness as a province of this world' and intellectualism as taking the world for granted, relegating the life of consciousness to a fictitious private field. [37] Both doctrines interrupted a fundamental dialectic, fracturing the self and condemning consciousness to either absolute objectivity, or absolute subjectivity, thus a dysfunctional *inactive subject* suspended between 'a world of impressions in itself, or a universe of determining thought'.[38] Merleau-Ponty advocated for a 'return to that world which precedes knowledge'[39] and a 'break with our familiar acceptance'[40] of reality in order to recover a 'direct and primitive contact with the world'.[41] Following an analogous process, 'Long Live the Vortex!' proposes a total abandonment of the burden of established knowledge, setting '*vision* as the task' (*B1* 7). With the aesthetics presented in *BLAST*, Lewis sought to stimulate his audience to restore true perception and achieve a specific type of *vision* which is 'the moment a man feels or realises himself as an Artist' (*B1* 7), or rather a *perceptive consciousness* which, trained to be paralysed, had to be disinterred and rehabilitated.

The design for 'Manifesto I' (Figure 1) departs from the list of numbered tenets of traditional manifestoes and takes the shape of eighteen visually captivating pages split into two sections with the first dedicated to 'blasts' and the second to 'blesses'. Despite the visual challenge posed by 'Manifesto I' to readers contemporary to the author of this study, the fragmented syntax, the layout and the use of typography would have been extremely familiar to 1914 audiences as the form typical of contemporary commercial advertisements. Furthermore, F. T. Marinetti had already championed extravagant use of typography in the futurist work *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914), while Guillaume Apollinaire's publication *L'Antitradizione Futurista* (1913) had already featured a proto-dadaist 'merde' and 'roses' structure reminiscent of *BLAST*'s 'blasts' and 'blesses'.

As the clear consequence of these considerations, criticism interpreted the aesthetics of the manifesto as a strategy for Lewis, then a young artist, to establish himself in the rising avant-garde through merely replicating the modes of the art movements on the continent. Although Lewis himself admitted that 'a necessary part of this work was of course

[37] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2003), 46.
[38] Ibid., 33.
[39] Ibid., X.
[40] Ibid., XV.
[41] Ibid., VII.

propaganda' (*RA* 135), there is a lot more to *BLAST* than meets the eye. With its 'portentous dimensions and […] violent tint' (*RA* 135), *BLAST*'s blocks of hefty sans serif typeface travelling in different directions 'printed on double royal sheets of paper—25 inches x 40 inches',[42] either guided, or harshly segregated by bold lines—had been craftily manipulated 'to make people *feel* that something was happening' (my emphasis, *RA* 135). The visual configuration of the manifestoes undoubtedly encouraged the reader to expect some sort of continuity with contemporary advertisements and the soaring production of the continental avant-garde, but to what aim? The page titled 'ADVERTISEMENT' (Figure 2) featured in *Enemy of the Stars* provides an important clue as to what is at play.

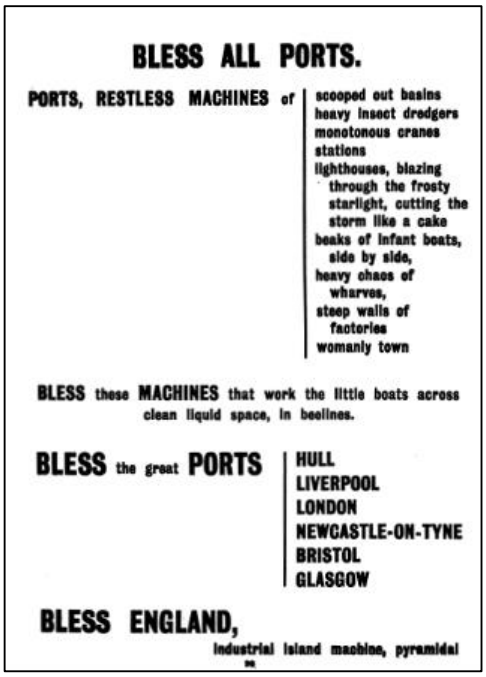


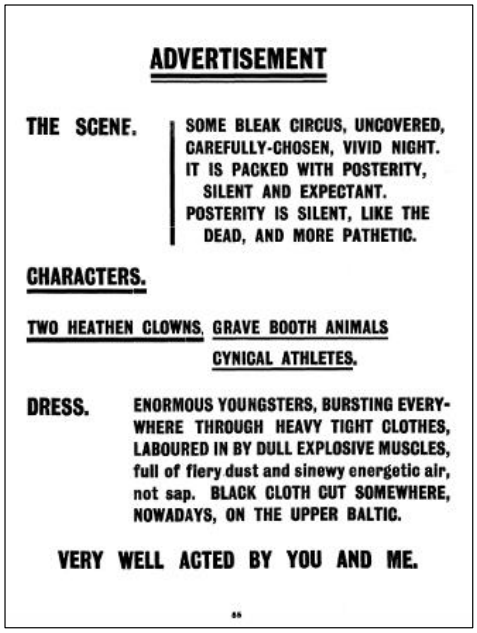

*Figure 1 From 'Manifesto', BLAST 1, 23.*

*Source:* Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. Used with permissions.

In 2011, Jodie Greenwood published the discovery of an advertisement featured in a 1914 issue of *The Manchester Guardian* reproducing the aesthetics in question exactly.[43] The font and the page layout of the advertisement were almost identical to *BLAST*'s own and furthermore 'the use of vertical lines to break the page, and the emphasis achieved

[42] Michael E. Leveridge, 'The Printing of *BLAST*,' *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, Vol. 7 (2000): 20-31, 21.
[43] Jodie Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System: Blast's reception' in Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, Nathan Waddell (eds.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 91.

through capitalising certain words' matched precisely.[44] The similarities did not stop at the visible features; in fact, the subject of the advertisement, a short sea route to Belgium, resonated deeply with some of the content of the 'blasts' and 'blesses'. Greenwood's observations revealed a much deeper connection between *BLAST* and advertising, which extended further than the mere visual appropriation and into the adoption of a semiotic system within the context of a specific discourse. While the visual experience of this format in the 'blasts' and 'blesses' is offered to the reader as a raw encounter with form, we witness the very same aesthetics reproduced in *BLAST* a second and final time in *Enemy of the Stars*.



**ADVERTISEMENT**

**THE SCENE.** SOME BLEAK CIRCUS, UNCOVERED, CAREFULLY-CHOSEN, VIVID NIGHT. IT IS PACKED WITH POSTERITY, SILENT AND EXPECTANT. POSTERITY IS SILENT, LIKE THE DEAD, AND MORE PATHETIC.

**CHARACTERS.**

TWO HEATHEN CLOWNS, GRAVE BOOTH ANIMALS CYNICAL ATHLETES.

**DRESS.** ENORMOUS YOUNGSTERS, BURSTING EVERYWHERE THROUGH HEAVY TIGHT CLOTHES, LABOURED IN BY DULL EXPLOSIVE MUSCLES, full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air, not sap. BLACK CLOTH CUT SOMEWHERE, NOWADAYS, ON THE UPPER BALTIC.

**VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME.**

*Figure 2 From 'Enemy of the Stars', BLAST 1, 55*

*Source:* Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. Used with permissions.

With the helpful title 'ADVERTISEMENT', establishing an explicit connection, this exclusive page is Lewis's advertisement for a newly conceived aesthetic practice by which the *new living abstraction* is translated into language in the Vorticist play. This observation will become clearer during my analysis of *Enemy of the Stars* in the second half of this chapter. Meanwhile, it is crucial to consider the possibility that 'ADVERTISEMENT' and the 'blasts' and 'blesses' of 'Manifesto I' are not camouflaged as advertisements as

[44] Ibid., 90.

hypothesised by Greenwood, but that they are in fact advertisements broadcast in the new reality emerging from the interaction with highly disrupted and misplaced institutionalised form, turning what is the dormant and passive attitude customarily associated with the consumption of advertisements into a dazzling experience.

The familiarity of the visual element, straightforwardly associated with advertisements, is swiftly disrupted by a warped version of the conventional advertising language constructed exclusively around the positive aspects of a product and delivered through pleasant and accessible language crafted to help consumers identify with the product and remember it. *BLAST*'s advertisements, on the other hand, provide the consumer/reader with positives and negatives, as concepts are unreliably firstly advertised, 'blessed', and suddenly libelled, 'blasted'. The language is demanding, belligerent and harshly abstracted in places and commercial products are substituted with the cardinal features of modern life, as travel, leisure, the concept of nationality, while industry, humour, sport, ports, the Victorian age and people's stylish outfits make their appearance in this distorted carousel. The 'blasts' and 'blesses' effectively sabotage the language of advertising, the emblem of modernity, turning what would ordinarily be the passive acceptance of a consumer into the effortful epiphany of an active subject.

In contrast with the visually dynamic and interactive tone of the manifestoes, 'Vortices and Notes' is presented as a series of disconnected epigrammatic pieces in which Lewis registered modernity's effects on the individual, announcing that 'the isolated human figure […] is [now] an anachronism' and 'THE ACTUAL HUMAN BODY BECOMES OF LESS IMPORTANCE EVERYDAY' as 'it […], literally, EXISTS much less.' (*B1* 141) Lewis identified a tendency to confuse life, intended as 'using your eyes, nose, ears and muscles', or 'good dinner, sleep and copulation' with 'ANOTHER Life', which is 'some stranger stuff' and 'something very abstruse and splendid' (*B1* 130). What Lewis held accountable for people's 'fall back on their stomachs and the meaner working of their senses' (*B1* 129) was the way their 'eyes sweep […] life horizontally.' (*B1* 141) This horizontal gaze described in 'Vortices and Notes' is a disembodied and time-bound passive registering of impressions, and what Merleau-Ponty referred to as:

> An empirical or second-order perception, the one which we exercise at every moment, and which conceals from us the former basic phenomenon, because

> it is loaded with earlier acquisitions and plays, so to speak, on the surface of being.[45]

Both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty considered this increasingly institutionalised and misleading perceptive practice as the cause for the steady rise of standardised perception and a consequent loss of individualism. As Merleau-Ponty observed, second-order perception 'scarcely can be said to grasp the world' as it is only false perception burdened with preconceived structures which merely provides us with the 'props and guides of a practical intention'[46] to keep us afloat in life (with a small 'l'). In 'Vortices and Notes', Lewis denounced this type of standardised perception which made of 'impersonality […] a disease', turning humanity into a multitude of sameness 'reminiscent of the insect world' in which 'individual demarcations are confused' as 'we all are in each other's vitals — overlap, intersect and are Siamese to any extent.' (*B1* 141) Following this dystopian picture, Lewis registered how modern art too had become entrenched in second-order perception and caught up in modernity's streamlining movement. In 'Vortices and Notes', imitation, representation and pure abstraction, as the techniques of modern art, are dismissed as giving rise to a false art whose internal workings mirror the 'machinery' of modernity, propagating a series of 'natures-mortes', or 'machines' which 'lack the one purpose or even necessity of a work of art, namely: Life' (*B1* 139-140). Lewis insisted that neither nature nor life of the type generated by second-order perception, or even what intellectualism and the continental avant-gardes endorsed as the juvenile asylums outside reality, could stand as the subjects of modern art any longer. To Lewis, what the avant-gardist experiments uncovered was a fundamental lack of purpose within a highly assimilated art which 'neither propel[led] nor ma[de] any known thing' (*B1* 140). To counteract such an anti-creational environment and finally guide humanity towards a return to a genuine contact with the world, Lewis introduced a new practical *raison d'être* for an art which demanded 'TO BE ALIVE' (*B1* 140) and he stated that:

> "Reality" is to the Artist what "Truth" is to the philosopher.
> (The Artists OBJECTIVE is Reality, as the Philosopher's is Truth.)
>
> (*B1* 139)

Lewis maintained that art should aim for an embodied reality based on pure perception, because although 'reality is in the artist', its image can only be found in life, and the artist

[45] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 50.
[46] Ibid.

'should only approach [life as] near as [it] is necessary for a good view'— the 'power' and 'quality' of his eyes determine the degree of 'focus' (*B1* 135). Divergently from the modern artist who is mindlessly 'caught in that machinery' of modernity and 'cut in a half—literally so', the artist figure championed in 'Vortices and Notes' is a fully perceiving embodied consciousness and a 'civilised savage' capable of 'strangeness, surprise and primitive detachment.' (*B1* 141)

Merleau-Ponty was fascinated by our typically human capacity for strangeness, surprise and primitive detachment which he referred to as a series of *acts of attention*, as 'to pay attention is not merely further to elucidate pre-existing data, [but] it is to bring about a new articulation of them.'[47] Like Lewis, however, he was concerned with exposing the ways in which human structures progressively impair our capacity to pay attention. Both empiricism and intellectualism, in fact, considered perception as independent from *acts of attention* and favoured *judgement* instead as the legitimate truth-knowing vehicle. This approach was contingent on an unshakable belief in the *constancy hypothesis,* by which reality is already there, fully constituted before and independently from the individual's own perceptive practice considered merely as a passive inputting activity. Merleau-Ponty defined *judgement* as the exact 'counterpart of pure sensation',[48] which rather than revealing the truth about phenomena conceals them behind pre-conceived assumptions developing as a passive exercise which 'belongs to the domain of the constituted [mind] and not to [the one of] the constituting mind'[49] from which true meaning emerges. Dismissing *judgement* and empirical or second-order perception as unfit for the purpose of grasping the truth about the world, Merleau-Ponty called for the contemplation of 'an object with the sole intention of watching it' allowing the object to 'exist and enfold its riches before [our] eyes'.[50] It is by way of contemplation that a subject becomes 'aware of each perception' in an act which does not only reveal the meaning that phenomena have, 'but moreover sees that they have meaning.'[51] To Merleau-Ponty, true perception is in fact knowledge of the present as 'the central phenomenon which makes possible the unity of

[47] Ibid, 35.
[48] Ibid., 37.
[49] Ibid., 43.
[50] Ibid., 50.
[51] Ibid., 42.

the ego',[52] reuniting the 'self which perceives' and 'the self which analyses perception',[53] hence assuring consciousness 'of his existence once and for all'.[54]

The framework for Lewis's new aesthetics presented in 'Vortices and Notes' analogously rejects second-order perception and *judgement* in favour of a contemplative attitude towards the present:

> Our Vortex does not deal in reactive Action only, nor identify the Present with numbing displays of vitality.
>
> The new vortex plunges to the heart of the Present.
>
> Life is in the Past and the Future.
>
> The Present is Art. […]
>
> The impure Present our Vortex despises and ignores. […]
>
> The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest. […]
>
> He lets Life know its place in a Vorticist Universe! (*B1* 147-148)

Contrary to what criticism has often interpreted as Lewis's effort to align himself with the avant-garde through merely replicating its aesthetics, *BLAST* positioned Vorticism in total opposition to the avant-gardist cults of modernity, time and progress which equated activity and dynamism with mindless and perpetual movement for movement's sake. Dismissing reactive action as an anti-creational passive rearrangement of pre-existing data, hence *judgement*, and refusing to recognise the numbing displays of vitality of second-order perception as adequate, the Vorticist despised the impure present which resulted from aimless movement and the mere registering of impressions of a horizontal time-bound gaze. The new artist figure described by Lewis is fully aware of the hypnotic and whirling temperament of modernity and accustomed to the ontological implications of abandoning oneself to its pace. Additionally, mindful of the importance of the material world for the purpose of grasping the truth, the Vorticist refuses to escape it in an avant-gardist fashion and instead conquers it by way of contemplation, positioning the Vorticist's 'maximum point of energy' in *stillness*.

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[52] Ibid., 51.
[53] Ibid., 49-50.
[54] Ibid., 51.

Vorticism set out to reinstate true perception or rather pure contemplation of the present for the purpose of mastering the operations whereby we constitute the world phenomena through our perceptive acts and use those same processes to inaugurate a new art capable of bringing present reality into being. For this purpose, Lewis envisaged a new artist with the 'functions and [the] intellectual equipment' of a geomancer. To Lewis, this new artist would possess:

> Sensitiveness to volume, to the life and passions of lines, meaning of water, hurried conversation of the sky, or silence, impossible propinquity of endless clay nothing will right, a mountain that is a genius (good or evil) or a bore, makes the artist; and the volume, quality, or luminosity of a star at birth of Astrologers is also a clairvoyance within the painters gift. (*B1* 138)

Analogously to the art of geomancy, the new art envisioned by Lewis is concerned with the form of our physical environment and rooted in the instinctive response which originates from the human interaction with our material surroundings. The new artist, like a geomancer, delivers a practical improvement of life for their audience, planning and shaping an environment which hinges on a renewed sensibility based on that original instinctive human response to the material world. Dismissing both representation and abstraction as inadequate methods for such complex delivery, Lewis conceived the *new living abstraction* as a technique capable of bringing reality into being, prompting the fundamental *act of attention* which plunges its audience 'to the heart of the Present' (*B1* 147). *BLAST* was crafted as the blueprint for this new aesthetics. Lewis in fact announced: 'the specific nature of the art destined to grow up in this country and models of whose flue decorate the pages of this magazine.' (*B1* 36)

Far from merely representing modernity, or replicating the modes of the avant-garde, *BLAST* stood as a solid phenomenological apparatus grounded in an *act of attention* triggered by the subversion of an only apparent familiarity. Merleau-Ponty, in fact, observed how *attention* is commonly associated with the mere recalling of data we already possess, when in fact it should be considered as 'a question of creation' as it is precisely 'by overthrowing data that the act of attention is related to previous acts'.[55] The simple image of the impure present in *BLAST,* in the shape of the modern metropolis, fashion, commercial advertisements and avant-garde aesthetics fails to meet the audience's

[55] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 35.

preconceived expectations causing consciousness to re-perceive pre-existing signifying systems anew as they carry new images forward:

> The miracle of consciousness consists in its bringing to light, through attention, phenomena which re-establish the unity of the object in a new dimension at the very moment when they destroy it. Thus attention is neither association of images, nor the return itself of thought already in control of its objects, but the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon.[56]

*BLAST*'s *new living abstraction* challenges its audience to suspend a commonplace unquestioned belief in reality to be reperceived as a new object through an *act of attention* which becomes a 'knowledge-bringing event'.[57] This challenging process however calls for a total revision of the conventional audience role, causing audiences reluctant to abandon common sense to become stranded, waiting in vain for something to be handed over. Such attitudes are rooted in a failure to join up in the movement of the abstraction and produced the contemporary dismissive reactions and visceral commentaries analysed by Greenwood who concluded that 'BLAST is hard to read'.[58]

A completely divergent category of reactions however emerges from Ford Madox Ford's contemplative response to *Enemy of the Stars*:

> A story that is to other stories what a piece of abstract music by Bach is to a piece of program-music […] *I don't just figure out what it means*, but I get ferociously odd sensations […] but then I do not understand what Bach meant by the Fourth Fugue, I don't want to.[59]

And Richard Aldington's:

> It doesn't seem to me necessary that one should 'understand' art in the sense that one understands a geometric problem or a legal document. The important thing is that one should realise the artist's personality and undergo the emotions he intended you to undergo in the contemplation of his work. I do perceive a strong, unique personality in Mr Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars*. I do receive all manner of peculiar and intense emotions from it.[60]

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System: Blast's reception', *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, 88. See 78-90 for Greenwood's analysis of contemporary and current responses to *BLAST*.
[59] Ford Madox Ford, 'Mr. Wyndham Lewis and 'BLAST'' in *The Ford Madox Ford Reader,* ed. Sondra J. Stang (New York: Eco, 1986), 176.
[60] Richard Aldington, 'Blast', *The Egotist*, 1 July 1914, 272.

The two authors account for taxing encounters with unstable materials, emphasising *BLAST*'s ambitious strategy grounded in Lewis's conception of a functional art able to rescue modern consciousness from a broken-up dialectic and restore it to its proper environment, or rather to the reality emerging from pure perception of the present. In what follows, I will delve into the materials of *Enemy of the Stars* to uncover the nature of Ford and Aldington's perplexing observations.

*Enemy of the Stars* is often considered as a merely provocative, stylistically anarchic, and experimental piece of avant-garde drama, not adhering to any specific aesthetic programme, and even contradicting the pronouncements of the *BLAST* manifestoes.[61] In contrast, I will argue that the play stands as the climax piece in the *BLAST* project, epitomising the manifestoes and providing the blueprint for translating the *new living abstraction* into language. Positioned in *BLAST* after the manifestoes and ingeniously juxtaposed with a series of poems by Ezra Pound, *Enemy of the Stars* makes its appearance as the founding text of Vorticism and Lewis's 'attempt to show them the way' (*RA* 139), to finally bridge the gap and elevate literature to the more daring achievements of the visual arts.

Although existing studies of *Enemy of the Stars* have contributed to the dissection of a rich mythical apparatus, they do not go very far in identifying the phenomenological value of language and the centrality of the reader's encounter with the materials. Moreover, in contrast with the recurrent labelling of the play as a proto-expressionist piece of self-analysis through which Lewis expresses an idiosyncratic sense of reality, *Enemy of the Stars* develops within a universal dimension, pragmatically exposing its audience to the dilemma concerning the status of the modern human as the victim of psychology and behaviourism, doomed to oscillate between pure subjectivity, as an interior without an exterior, and mere objectivity, as an exterior without an interior. To Lewis, nothing of value can be known by a split consciousness and it is through style that he proposed to resolve this suspension and rescue the individual from a chronic separation of the selves.

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[61] See Scott Klein, 'The Experiment of Vorticist Drama: Wyndham Lewis and 'Enemy of the Stars'', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1991): 225-239.
David Graver, 'Vorticist Performance and Aesthetic Turbulence in *Enemy of the Stars*', *Modern Language Association*, Vol. 107, No. 3, Special Topic: Performance (May 1992): 482-496.

Differing from the rest of the literary contributions to *BLAST* by other signatories, *Enemy of the Stars* is in direct conversation with the manifestoes and the philosophy of 'Vortices and Notes' functioning as the formal expression of Lewis's new aesthetics. Apropos of this consideration, and keeping in mind Lewis's considerable efforts in *BLAST* to distance Vorticism from the continental avant-garde by overthrowing avant-gardist trends and formulating a philosophy of art which opposed F. T. Marinetti's Futurism completely (present vs future, stillness vs movement, space vs time, as well as formally building a serious signifying system for the merely sensationalist use of extravagant typography), it is compelling to entertain the possibility that *Enemy of the Stars* could have been in fact conceived to directly oppose Marinetti's literary debut titled *L'Amant Des Étoiles* (*Lover of the Stars*). The work first appeared in 1901 as a collection of poems in 'La Revue Blanche' and was then republished in 1902 as an epic poem in 19 cantos under the title *La Conquête Des Étoiles* (*The Conquest of the Stars*). Developing in the rather conservative form of the epic poem, Marinetti's writing is dominated by aesthetic nostalgia, featuring neoclassicist and symbolist formalism and explicitly Dantesque oneiric atmospherics. The epic poem narrates the vicissitudes of a war between the Sea and the Stars, a crude allegory for the poet's ambition to raise literature to new metaphysical heights; an ambition which however remains trapped in the merely allegorical, practically contradicted by the lack of aesthetic innovation in the poem itself.

Despite *Enemy of the Stars* sharing with *L'Amant Des Étoiles* a palpable oneiric element and the war-like struggle between two opposite forces, Lewis overthrows pre-existing data once again, dismissing Marinetti's humanless and gawkily anthropomorphized set up in favour of the hyperhuman domain of consciousness, as well as trading Marinetti's formalist pastiche for the *new living abstraction*. In complete opposition to Marinetti's belief in the aesthetic superiority of an unhuman and unearthly literary form (hence the non-human characters and the allegorical ploy to reach and subjugate the celestial 'citadel of the Infinite' through climbing a mountain of human cadavers), Lewis brings the mind-body struggle into being in *Enemy of the Stars* by way of two human characters summoned in an unprecedented abstractive dimension. The ostentatious and aimless formalism for formalism's sake of *L'Amant Des Étoiles* is rejected in favour of purposeful aesthetics able to reawaken the reader's embodied attention towards an unprecedented resolution to humanity's primal struggle, emerging from interaction with manipulated form.

In *BLAST*, Lewis engaged more explicitly with Futurist aesthetics, rejecting its decorative sensationalism and lack of practical value and illustrating the need for a new aesthetic approach which allowed the arts to play a significant role in the modern world. Dismissing a 'purely abstract' practice as 'picturesque and superficial abstraction for abstraction's sake', Lewis criticised the chief Futurist painter Giacomo Balla's work for becoming 'less representative and more abstract every day' with 'naturalistic fragment of noses and ears' completely absent from his latest work (*B1* 144). Abstraction was however still relevant to Lewis, as he dismissed its rival techniques (imitation and pure representation) by stating that 'the significance of an object in nature (that is its spiritual weight) cannot be given by stating its avoirdupois', insofar as 'what a thing spiritually *means* to you can never be rendered in the terms of practical vision, or scientific imitation'.[62] Formulating the prerequisites for a more purposeful abstractive technique, Lewis stated that the artist should never lose sight of the fact that 'everything is representation, in one sense', even in abstraction, and that art should never aim for the representation of the natural form, but of 'the *essence* of the object' (my emphasis, *B2* 45). In *Enemy of the Stars* the phenomenological ambition of finding ways of accessing essences is sought in the lived experience of the literary form (both in the writer's experience of producing it and the audience's witnessing its production).

As the conflict between the characters, effortlessly recognisable as humanoid totems of the self, functions as those bits of noses and ears missing in Balla's paintings, an oneiric plot enfolds as the primal struggle between the two tendencies of the modern self, Arghol and Hanp, absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity, while the reader is engaged in a secondary but crucial struggle with form. Far from what previous criticism has identified as a mere exercise in elision and juxtaposition, or merely as a shifting of attributes of things anarchically, the style of *Enemy of the Stars* is the conscious and programmatic rejection of 'signs and meanings already accepted in a given culture' in favour of what Merleau-Ponty described as the recreation of 'the signifying instrument henceforth manipulated according to a new syntax'.[63] Contrary to what has been described as volatile and agitated, the style of *Enemy of the Stars* stands as a solidly crafted *new living abstraction* with an essential quality recognised by Lewis in his study on German sculptures described as 'disciplined, blunt, thick and brutal with a black simple skeleton of organic emotion'

[62] My emphasis, 'Vorticist Exhibition' in Wyndham Lewis, *Wyndham Lewis on Art, Collected Writings 1913-1956*, 96.
[63] Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 9.

(*B1* 136). Through a signifying system which originates by replacing what Lewis identified as the second-order perceptive mode of 'unselective registering of impressions' with 'the weight of the object […] which is its spiritual weight' (*B2* 45), Lewis practiced in *Enemy of the Stars* what Merleau-Ponty referred to as 'the art of capturing a meaning, which until then had never been objectified'.[64]

As part of his quest to account for the phenomenon of expression in *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty explored literary language, deducing that modernity denied language's own past and origins, understanding it solely as a conventional system of signs. In fact, while behaviourism viewed language as a mere response to stimuli, intellectualism designated it as the mere envelope of thought, both only allowing for one type of 'institutionalised speech' which distanced signs from their true signification.[65] Such views on language damaged perception as they both implied that once an 'object is sufficiently determined we are no longer free to say anything whatsoever about it' and, furthermore, what we do say about the object remains forever a cultural and linguistic constant.[66] Separating *spoken language*, as a series of conventionalised meanings, and *speaking language*, as a gesture that engenders language, Merleau-Ponty detected a fundamental prominence of the former and a consequent breakdown in expression which has been 'lost through the very use of language […] because communication seems to us unproblematic'.[67] Turning his attention to genuine literary works as instances in which communication escaped this sedimentation and retained its intrinsically problematic nature, and redefining language as the body of thought which does not merely transmit thought, but rather accomplishes it, Merleau-Ponty called for the need to reconquer genuine expression, which is not the mere transmission of pre-existing meaning but the unceasing emergence of new meaning.[68] As part of a wider effort to reinstate a healthy dialectic within the fractured modern consciousness, humanity had to find ways to not just *use* language but to 'restore what is paradoxical and even mysterious about language'[69] with the aim of making it once again a vehicle for true knowledge, which is the 'effort to recapture, to internalise, [and] truly to possess a meaning that escapes perception at the very moment that it takes shape there'.[70]

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[64] Ibid
[65] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 141.
[66] Ibid., 122.
[67] Ibid., 117.
[68] Ibid., see 'The Indirect Language'.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 124.

In the essay 'What is "Difficult" Poetry', Lewis engaged with the problem of meaning, wishing for contemporary discourse to abandon the mere practice of 'taking sides for and against' (*CHC* 195) it and to focus instead on how meaning is experienced. Declaring himself firmly against the notion of a univocal and straightforwardly accessible meaning and promoting 'the recognition of more orders of "meaning"', Lewis called into question whether it is in fact desirable for the reader of a literary work to possess 'a full understanding of what the writer meant' (*CHC* 195-196). Lewis also clarified that this type of multiplicitous meaning should not be understood as a layered hierarchical system by which one meaning is more valuable than the other, nor as a comparative system, by which different meanings are simply juxtaposed with one another. The several orders of meaning should in fact 'exist side by side upon equal terms' (*CHC* 195-196) in a parallel system of multifunctional connotations each charged with their own ultimate purpose.

Like Merleau-Ponty, Lewis believed that the power and purpose of artistic compositions could be assessed according to whether they referred to pre-existing meaning or forged new meaning. He placed in a first category all compositions which could be described as the work of a poet 'who hands you out an Appendix, which is the nature of the programme in programme music', turning the piece into a cipher for a meaning that needs to be sought elsewhere and subsequently 'imported into' the work. (*CHC* 197-198) Controversially taking T. S. Eliot's poetry as an illustration, Lewis stated:

> You will be told that you have not understood the poem — that in order to understand it you should have read such and such a fourteenth-century treatise, that you should be conversant with this or that or the other theory of creative anthropology, taken somewhat at random. (*CHC* 198)

To Lewis, any meaning that exists externally and refers away from the composition 'belittles the value of the object', pushing such literary works away from 'the field of art where things are made' and into 'that field of art where literary and extraneous "meaning" holds sway' (*CHC* 198). In a second category Lewis included all works which are presented 'in front of us with the comment that there is no "meaning" in it except what resides in the irrational suggestive potency, the direct impact of the words' (*CHC* 197). Citing Mallarmé's poetry as an example, he remarked: 'its meaning is itself!' (*CHC* 199) Lewis depicted such creations poetically in 'One Way Song', as a 'hybrid beyond language [that] only words can reach' and 'word-storms' releasing sentences that 'forsake their

syntax and ambit' and hit the brain allowing it to 'mint its imagery at best' (*CPP* 31). The power of these 'genuinely difficult poetical creations' is entrenched in the emergence of a meaning that is a 'rebellious shadow […] which cannot be caught and condensed into a dialect of common sense, or indeed properly articulated at all' (*CHC* 196). Lewis explored his understanding of genuine meaning further by shifting the focus completely from a view of meaning as a thing that can be crafted, handed over and possessed:

> Certain literary compositions are not, and have not been intended to be, susceptible of any logical analysis. These are the "difficult" compositions. Their success depends upon their remaining unresolved and floating: a half thought: two disparate notions cunningly compromised in an equivocal, an impossible, association: an existent and a non-existent paradoxically wedded. The sort of shapes we meet in such literary field are similar to those encountered in the fields of the more abstruse mathematical intelligence, or that we hear about as being domiciled there. (*CHC* 196)

Lewis assigns a crucial ontological value to the challenging and paradoxical experience of a purposedly ephemeral and ungraspable meaning that is not the uncomplicated projection of a self into another self, nor the plain rediscovery of one's thoughts in the other's words, but what Merleau-Ponty describes as our involvement in 'a movement of thought of which [we] would have been incapable alone and [that] finally opens [us] to unfamiliar significations'.[71] Both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty are captivated by the way this type of 'prodigious meaning'[72] can emerge from something as pragmatic as linguistic structures. Exploring structures from the mathematical field, Merleau-Ponty delved deeper into this phenomenon to illustrate how language and all anthropogenic systems are not limited to a sedimented world of conventional meaning but are in fact 'pregnant with a meaning'.[73] Using integers as an extreme instance of conventional signs, by which one would think that truth is 'an immovable sphere of relations', Merleau-Ponty considered how all the discoveries and observations made about integers through an algorithm could erroneously be thought either as already contained in the algorithm before the observations took place, or taken externally and imported into the algorithmic structure by the observer.[74] These assessments are both inaccurate. All observations,

[71] Ibid., 118.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

> emerge only when I address a certain question to the *structure* of the series of numbers, or rather when the structure poses a question to me insofar as it is an open and incomplete situation, as it offers itself as something to be *known*.[75]

The intelligible world of numbers is there before our observations, as equally reality is there before our perception; however, this does not imply that our observations are 'immanent in the hypothesis' or that 'they are prefigured in the structure', as it is only when the structure is varied by a subject that the results are 'caught in the development of [our] thought'.[76] Merleau-Ponty referred to this process as 'a veritable *development of meaning*' by which we lose the ties of the structure to convention and reconquer the perceived world 'in the moment where a structure is decentred, opens up to questioning, and reorganises itself according to a new meaning'.[77] Far from being a spontaneous event, this

> restructuring [is] announced in the vectors of the initial structure by its style, so that each effective change is the fulfilment of an intention, and each anticipation receives from the structure the completion it needed.[78]

Both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty rejected the idea of transparent communication and understood genuine meaning as a process of emergence from a specific type of structure which offers an open situation allowing a subject to reshape readily available meanings and express something that has never been expressed before. Meaning is therefore not a thing, nor an idea, but an experience with an active subject at its core, whether *speaker* or *hearer,* in the act of creating reality. Such experience never leaves the subject with 'a store of recipes but [with] a radiant image',[79] nor does it provide the subject with 'a set of ideas but rather the emblem and the monogram of those ideas.'[80] Modern art and literature, however, increasingly endorsed a view of the subject of art as a merely passive witness at the mercy of sensationalist formalism. Lewis denounced this attitude as a 'system of intellectual fraud' as he quoted Henri Bergson directly:

> [The object of art] is to send to sleep the active or rather the recalcitrant forces of our personality, and thereby to induce in us a condition of perfect docility, in which we realise the idea suggested to us, in which we sympathise with the sentiment expressed. In the methods employed by the artist you will discover,

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[75] Emphasis in original, Ibid., 126.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 127.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Olivier Davis (London: Routledge, 2004), 74.
[80] Ibid., 76.

> in an attenuated form, refined and in some ways spiritualised, the methods by which in a general way the hypnotic trance is induced. (*TWM* 191)[81]

Extremely suspicious of everything that claimed 'to 'send to sleep' the resistance of active personality' (*TWM* 192), Lewis rejected Bergson's hypnotic take on art as an attack on individuality. Literature was particularly impaired by such a view as it encouraged the complete abandonment of meaning in favour of a 'verbal music' (*TWM* 197), praising linguistic rhythm in isolation with the aim of promoting a desirable hypnotic quality. Lewis firmly believed that language could not be abstracted as effortlessly as either music or visual art because the musical and rhythmic qualities of language can never be experienced in complete isolation from and beyond meaning. He identified a certain insurmountable definiteness and stability within language, as language's chief function is to describe objects, and it is inevitably linked to the physical world that we perceive and 'that we all share in common [and] in which we all meet and communicate' (*TWM* 191). In *Enemy of the Stars* Lewis developed a series of techniques to abstract language effectively and to allow his audience to overtake the passive, somnambulist and superficial knower promoted by time philosophies and to re-emerge as an active consciousness. In what follows, I examine the workings of such techniques through close reading with the aim of uncovering Lewis's practical solution to restoring the role of the artist as a supplier of stimuli and actively rejecting the kind of art that aimed to liberate consciousness from the implications of a physical world.

The reader of *Enemy of the Stars* is encapsulated within the piece from the very first pages due to the immediate disorientation caused by a double title page. While the first page displays the play's title printed in all capitals followed by a full stop, the second title page features the title once again, this time with the stage play script convention of an underscore line running the exact space length of the title, but also, with a rather unconventional subtitle emblematically announcing 'SYNOPSIS IN PROGRAMME' (*B1* 53) and substituting what would traditionally appear as a description line (such as 'A Play in Four Acts'). The omission of the underscore line could indicate that this may not in fact be a subtitle, but possibly that description line missing from the conventions of a title page. Could 'SYNOPSIS IN PROGRAMME' therefore be a description of *Enemy of the Stars* as the synopsis of the programme outlined in the manifestoes?

[81] Lewis's own translation of Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1910), 132.

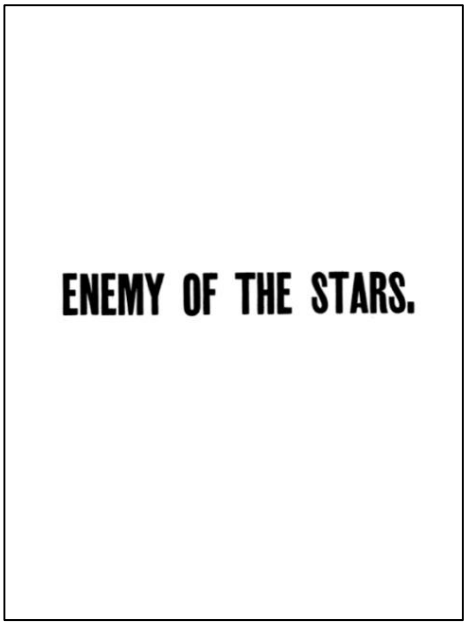


*Figure 3 From 'Enemy of the Stars', BLAST 1, 51*

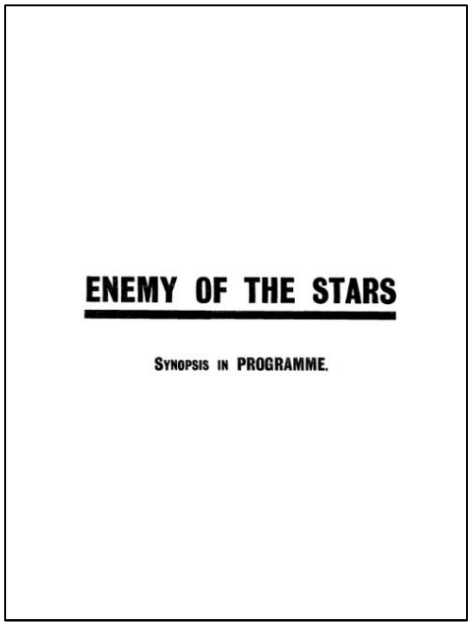


*Figure 4 From 'Enemy of the Stars', BLAST 1, 53*

*Source:* Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. Used with permissions.

Following the two title pages, the 'ADVERTISEMENT' (*B1* 55, see Figure 2, page 31) substitutes what would customarily appear in a standard stage playscript as the 'Dramatis Personae'. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the page provides the reader with a compelling clue to decode the signifying system of the manifestoes, but it also plays

a vital role in inaugurating the play. The 'ADVERTISEMENT', in fact, situates *Enemy of the Stars* precisely by replicating the typography, format and layout of the manifestoes exactly, thus simultaneously establishing a direct connection with the manifestoes and breaking off from Ezra Pound's preceding typographically and aesthetically more traditional poetry. The 'ADVERTISEMENT' is constructed as the linguistic equivalent of cross-track adverts for upcoming films with the visual element of the poster replaced by a powerful linguistic image radiating through the play in all its different dimensions of signification. The 'SCENE' is a 'bleak circus' which has been 'carefully-chosen' and populated with a dystopian image of 'posterity', which is 'silent', 'expectant', 'dead' and 'pathetic' (*B1* 55). Character names and roles are absent from the 'CHARACTERS' section, which appears as a forceful abstraction of a layered structure of conjured characters. A description of 'two heathen clowns' emerging from unorthodox syntax is in fact followed by a direct address summoning both reader and author to the stage: 'VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME.' (*B1* 55) The sibylline address discloses the abrupt and unwilling engagement which destabilises the reader, now officially designated victim and partner in crime.

The compelling 'ADVERTISEMENT' is then followed by six pages of artworks by Lewis with blank pages interposed between the visuals (*Plan of War*, *Timon of Athens*, *Slow Attack*, *Decoration for the Countess of Drogheda's House*, *Portrait of an English Woman*, *The Enemy of the Stars*). The images interfere with the reading act carrying the destabilisation forward as the reader is now compelled to exercise a purely perceptual faculty, perhaps as an initiation to the unconventional approach necessary for what is to follow. In fact, following this unexpected exhibition of visual works a third title page appears, this time featuring what could have been the description line missing from the previous two title pages, with the text 'THE PLAY' (*B1* 57) printed in all caps with the traditional underscore line running the exact spacing length of the text. When taking into consideration the sequence of the artworks, however, the description line could plausibly belong with the artwork which precedes it titled 'The Enemy of the Stars' as the perceptual version of a title page emerging from the physical movement of the reader advancing through the hefty pages.

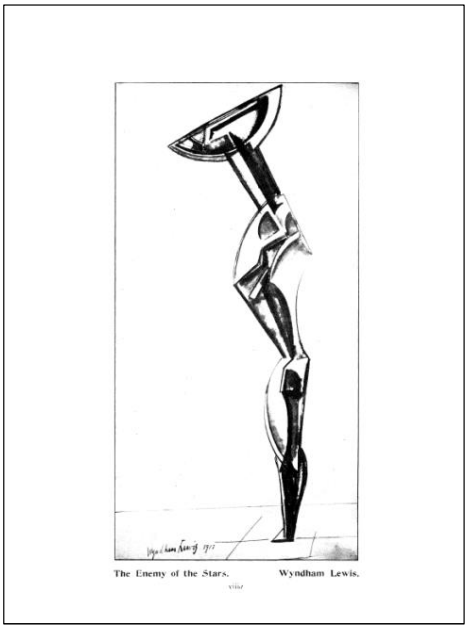


*Figure 5 From 'Enemy of the Stars', BLAST 1, viiia*


*Figure 6 From 'Enemy of the Stars', BLAST 1, 57*

*Source:* Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. Used with permissions.

Three title pages down the line, the reader's expectation of a curtain finally raising on the stage remains unfulfilled with another unorthodox version of a 'Dramatis Personae' materialising, and yet another title, 'ENEMY OF THE STARS' (*B1* 59), this time, both underscored and punctuated. Providing the reader with an additional and crucial element to set the scene as 'ONE IS IN IMMENSE COLLAPSE OF CHRONIC

PHILOSOPHY', or rather time philosophy, from the Latin *chronicus* via the Greek *khronikos,* of time, or concerning time, Lewis proceeds to account gradually for the complete cast of characters and descriptions for the Scene and Time, as we are finally introduced to a first character:

> YET HE BULGES ALL OVER, COMPLEX FRUIT, WITH SIMPLE FIRE OF LIFE. GREAT MASK, VENUSTIC AND VERIDIC, TYPE OF FEMININE BEAUTY CALLED "MANISH". (*B1* 59)

This cumbersome male character endowed with the feminine attributes of 'Manish', the Indian god of the mind, is introduced by this passage with references to a Gnostic Venustic initiation according to which a mystical character would be supposedly re-living the entire cosmic drama, sacrificing themselves for humanity. Further in this section, the same character is referred to as 'the protagonist' to whom Humanity (the King) is violently averse. A 'second character' or rather a 'human bull' appears on stage rushing off 'into the earth' to join the protagonist:

> SECOND CHARACTER, APPALLING "GAMIN," BLACK BOURGEOIS ASPIRATIONS UNDERMINGING BLATANT VIRTUOSITY OF SELF. His criminal instinct of intemperate bilious heart, put at service of unknown Humanity, our King, to express its violent royal aversion to Protagonist, statue mirage of Liberty in the great desert. (*B1* 59)

This antagonistic figure appears as a much earthier and more solid presence, associated with sinister attributes and allied with the King/Humanity in a fight against the protagonist who is instead associated with Liberty. The reader soon learns that the two characters (the protagonist and the second character) are not the same pair already encountered in the 'ADVERTISEMENT' and described as the two 'heathen clowns'. The discovery is endorsed by this passage:

> THEN AGAIN THE PROTAGONIST REMAINS NEGLECTED, AS THOUGH HIS TWO FELLOW ACTORS HAD FORGOTTEN HIM, CAROUSING IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL CAVERN. (*B1* 59)

The duo of muscular actors from the 'ADVERTISEMENT' dressed in 'black cloth' and coming into sight onto 'some bleak circus' is otherwise engaged and seemingly unaware of the protagonist (consequently of the antagonist too?) (*B1* 55). With this further

clarification a cast of four characters is belatedly revealed when an enigmatic voice immediately disrupts the arrangement:

> "Yet you and me: why not from the English metropolis?" — Listen: it is our honeymoon. We go abroad for the first scene of our drama. Such a strange thing as our coming together requires a strange place for initial stages of our intimate ceremonious acquaintance. (*B1* 59)

Another direct 'you and me' address, duplicating and reinforcing the effect of the first direct address ('VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME'), announces the reader's involvement in what it is referred to as 'our drama'. The reference to the temporary departure from London to join the performance increases the eeriness of the direct address invading the physical reality of the first rounds of *BLAST*'s audiences almost certainly reading from the English capital. The nature of the reader's acquaintance with this unfamiliar voice is described as a 'honeymoon', 'intimate' and 'ceremonious' to anticipate a degree of physical and emotional involvement taking place.

The challenge to the reader is relentless. Another enigmatic message enclosed in a bold rectangular frame opens the subsequent page: 'THERE ARE TWO SCENES' (*B1* 60). The reader however soon realises that the stage direction does not reflect the structure of the play and that there are in fact no scene designations at all, but only a perplexing numerical sequence (I to VII) which could be interpreted as act designations (based on the conventional Roman numerals) however, their positioning (three pages after 'THE ACTION OPENS' (*B1* 61)) suggests otherwise. Could the two scenes perhaps relate to the two character pairs, with a first version of *Enemy of the Stars* being 'very well acted by you and me' and a second version performed by the characters Arghol and Hanp?

Additional stage directions are provided with 'RED OF STAINED COPPER' as the dominant direction for a first stage of the same open flesh colour featured in the 'RED UNIVERSE' in which the characters are then described as 'shut in with the condemned protagonist' (*B1* 61). This second stage is characterised by a hut in a bizarre position as it is in fact 'rolled half on its back, door upwards' (*B1* 60). Creating the impression of a body on an operating table awaiting a surgical procedure, the 'audience looks down into the scene' which takes place inside the rolled back hut with the 'CHARACTERS GIDDILY MOUNTING IN ITS OPENING' (*B1* 60).

Arghol is introduced once again with a page bearing his name as its title and in which 'posterity' is impatient to see him on stage as a 'gladiator who has come to fight a ghost, Humanity' (*B1* 61). In order to set the 'necessary scene', in what seems to be a prophecy of the action that is about to enfold, posterity 'sinks into the hypnotic trance of art' until 'the execution is over' (*B1* 61). In fact, while the hypnotised posterity in the play has abandoned itself to the trance of art, allowing humanity to execute the individual (the bodily Hanp stabs the mind-principle Arghol to death subsequently turning into an 'empty shadow'), the reader is awakened from a dormant approach to conventional language through a fight with the materials of *Enemy of the Stars* so preventing the tragic murder which ends the play from replicating itself. Furthermore, we are informed of the success of the staging of such drama—'THE BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS HAVE BEEN ENORMOUS'—when another centred text message in all capitals opens the action, officially and once again, with the reader having been repeatedly and unwillingly admitted backstage and left questioning whether they will ever get to sit in the auditorium (*B1* 61).

The action is set in motion by Arghol becoming unconscious as a result of having been assaulted by his uncle. The cryptic figure of the uncle who runs the wheelwright's yard to which Arghol voluntarily exiled himself transposes the concepts of the second-order *life* discussed by Lewis in 'Vortices and Notes' in opposition to the higher *Life*. The uncle is in fact superstitious, as 'habit curbs him mathematically' and he 'loads [Arghol]'s plate' solely because he has a 'palpable reason' to keep him alive (*B1* 69). Furthermore, Arghol gets 'used to him' because of the 'routine' provided by the humdrum of life in the wheelwright's yard (*B1* 66). As a result of the uncle's second assault, Arghol loses consciousness again and wakes up in a page titled 'THE NIGHT' where he finds himself imprisoned in a 'messed socket of existence' (*B1* 64). It is during the awakening that we learn of Arghol's voluntary withdrawal from the city, which is described as:

> Cataclysm of premature decadence. Extermination of the resounding, sombre, summer tents in a decade, furious mass of images: no human.
>
> Immense production of barren muscular girl idols, wood Verdigris, copper, dull paints, flowers.
>
> Hundred idols to a man, and a race swamped in hurricane of art, falling on big narrow souls of its artists. (*B1* 68)

In search of a more authentic life, Arghol escaped the decadent world of the city where humanity has been replaced by images and objects turned idols; however, rather than the authenticity he sought, the wheelwright's yard subjects Arghol to numbing structures with incessant rhythms transporting him to a lethargic state:

> Accumulate in myself, day after day, dense concentration of pig life. Nothing spent, stored rather in strong stagnation, till rid at last of evaporation and lightness characteristic of men. (*B1* 68)

Arghol shares the self-imposed confinement with his 'half disciple' (*B1* 65) Hanp, a bodily character driven exclusively by primitive needs and trapped into a series of action-reaction systems of behaviour. Described for the most part as eating, smoking, coughing and spitting, Hanp is the uncultured victim of his reverential fear for his intellectual counterpart Arghol, who in such close quarters is forced to come to terms with Hanp's intense physicality. Despite the well-defined opposite natures of the two characters, the style creates a unique effect by which the two opposites constantly blur into each other and are perceived by the reader not as a synthesis, but as an unorthodox dialectic dominated by ambiguity and lacking any sort of linear progression. The effect is achieved through the omission of conventional playscript cue lines identifying the character who is speaking combined with highly abstracted language, rhetorical questioning and dialogues irregularly and unexpectedly blurring into monologues and revolving back into dialogues with sporadic appearances of a narratorial voice mixed with more general stage directions. There are no steady grounds on which to rest for a reader who is explicitly addressed, called to action and compelled to experience a set of subverted playscript conventions paired with an explosive word order by which syntactic constituents land in unfamiliar positions, radiating a whole new set of information. The challenging style of *Enemy of the Stars* triggers a fundamental effort performed at different levels of signification. The reader's own struggle with the abstracted language is in fact iterated synchronically across two further dimensions, with the troublesome conflict between Arghol and Hanp mirrored in the battle overarching the play between Humanity(/Mankind) and the individual(/personality/self):

> When Mankind cannot overcome a personality, it has an immemorial way out of the difficulty. It becomes it. It imitates and assimilates that Ego until it is no longer one… This is success.
> Between Personality and Mankind it is always a question of dog and cat; they are diametrically opposed species. Self is the ancient race, the rest are the new

> one. Self is the race that lost. But Mankind still suspects egotistic plots and hunts Pretenders. (*B1* 66)

In this suggestive passage, Arghol paints a powerful picture of Mankind as a paranoid despot obsessed with ensuring every self is hunted down and assimilated by appropriating thoughts and spreading them 'in a million brains' to neutralise their weight (*B1* 70). This dystopian rendering of standardisation promoting the movement which cripples human consciousness by turning the other into the same, is carried across the play with personified versions of Humanity and the individual joining the reader and the text (the author), and Arghol and Hanp, as a third character pair. This picture suddenly weaves itself into the action of the play with Arghol melancholically confessing that he had 'a sort of conscience previous to the kicks', with thoughts 'heavy as a meteorite', reinforcing the identification of the uncle (who administered the kicks) with a tyrannical streamlining principle (*B1* 70).

Although Arghol initially appears as the sole victim of the violent and mind numbing status quo in the wheelwright's yard, the ambiguity of the style promotes a perpetual intertwining of Hanp's voice and thoughts with Arghol's, until Hanp sees Arghol reflected in a 'sunken mirror' as he understands that 'the price of this sharp vision of mastery was contamination' (*B1* 71). In various unsuccessful attempts to free each other from their desperate sedated state, Arghol and Hanp, the mental and the bodily, talk to each other uncomprehendingly of each other's opposite states of existence. The conflictual relationship renders both characters incapable of shaking off the rhythmic routine of the wheelwright's yard.

An analogous situation is forced on the embodied reader who is subjected to a highly demanding reading act, effortfully leafing through 25 by 40 inches double royal sheets of heavy paper crowded with linguistic and typographical materials which are troublesome, rich, sculptural, relentless in rhythm and abstracted in an unprecedented way. Furthermore, direct addresses and eerie references invade the reader's own physical reality with multiple calls to action. The reader's own struggle to come to terms with a demolition of linguistic conventions brings the characters' struggle with the soothing but deadening routine of the wheelwright's yard into being in a superior way. The reader is called to abandon the steadiness of conventional expression and instinctual perception in favour of new otherworldly forms emerging energetically from the debris of accepted language.

This passage paints an efficient picture of this process as it begins to weave itself into the action:

> To break vows and spoil continuity of instinctive behaviour, lose a prize that would only be a trophy tankard never drunk from, is always fine. Arghol would have flung away his hoarding and scraping of thought. But his calm, long instrument of thought, was too heavy. It weighted him down, resisted his swift anarchist effort, and made him giddy. […] words coming out of caverns of belief […]. (*B1* 74)

Simulating the reader's disposition, Arghol (the mind principle) is held back by a network of structures fixed to conventional language ('the calm, long instrument of thought') as vows, instinctive behaviour, sedimented thoughts and beliefs resist his best intentions ('his swift anarchist effort'). As is the Vorticist in the manifestoes and the characters in the play, the reader is engaged in a fight on multiple and ever switching sides to access a 'sharp vision' through authentic 'contamination' of mind and body. As the fundamental factor eliciting this process, the text gradually enters the dimension of the play physically, with references to its own materiality and reproductions of the mental states of the reader through startling imagery:

> Hot word drummed on his ear […] Groping hands strummed toppling Byzantine organ of his mind, producing monotonous black fugue […] His mind unlocked, free to this violent hand. (*B1* 65)

> Weak now, it handled words numbly, like a tired compositor. His body quite strong again and vivacious. Words acted on it as rain on a plant. (*B1* 66)

> A strong flood of thought passed up to his fatigued head, and at once dazed him. Not his body only, but being was out of training for action: puffed and exhilarated. Thoughts fell on it like punches. (*B1* 76)

This intricate approach to breaching the reader's own reality through mirroring their experience of the text in real time, paired with the bringing into being of the workings of human consciousness through the elemental pair and their interactions, leads to a total disruption of the reading act. In the role of Arghol, the reader is a 'bell beaten by words' (*B1* 73), besieged by 'messages reaching [the] brain by telegraph' (*B1* 75), while those same 'words act on him as rain on a plant' (*B1* 66). In the role of Hanp, the reader is faced by Arghol metamorphosed into an organic rendition of *BLAST* described as 'a large open book full of truths and insults' (*B1* 71). The otherworldly materials of which *Enemy of the*

*Stars* is made no longer behave like conventional languages, as they compel the reader to swiftly develop an entirely new set of perceptive skills to plunge into what is a brand-new object brought into being through the reading act, but by no means limited to the reading act itself, which is merely the necessary perceptive stage on the way to a vigorous and revelatory vision.

In addition to the simultaneous mirroring of the reader's experience in the interaction between the characters, what initially appear as mere narrative descriptions outline the workings of the text and its desired effects on the reader:

> Arghol shows Hanp picture postcards. He described the character of each scene. Then he had begun describing more closely. At length, systematically he lived again there for his questioner, exhausted the capital, put it completely in his hands. The young man had got there without going there. But instead of satisfying him, this developed a wild desire to start off at once.
>
> "Wait a moment."
>
> He whispered something in his ear.
>
> "Is that true?"
>
> "Aye and more." (*B1* 72)

And again:

> Suddenly, through confused struggles and vague successions of scenes, a new state of mind asserted itself.
> A riddle had been solved.
> What could this be?
> […]
> Was that a key to something? (*B1* 80)

Both scenes stand as performative versions of the play's engagement strategy. The first pages of *Enemy of the Stars,* in fact, exhibited a series of artworks formatted as 'picture postcards', followed by a description of each character and each scene (in 'vague succession') and culminated in the reader's unconditional and unwilling involvement. Through struggle and confusion, the reader attained 'a new state of mind', even if the aims of this process are still unclear ('was that a key to something?').

In the final scene, the text assumes the emblematic features of a fastidious snore as insufferable as to trigger the murderous act that concludes the play. Arghol is now asleep when a snore rises 'quietly in the air', a quiet snore insofar as it is a text being read silently (*B1* 83). The snore causes a 'first organ […] to abate […] [while] a second one at once [is] set up: stronger, startling, full of loathsome unconsciousness' (*B1* 83). With the alertness of preconceived reason (the 'first organ') decreased due to the reader's need to reconfigure their perceptive modes, the body (the second organ) is restored to attention by the snoring(/text) as:

> It rose and fell up centre of listener's body, and along swollen nerves, peachy clotted tide, gurgling back in slimy swallows. Snoring of a malodorous, bloody, sink, emptying its water. (*B1* 83)

In this revolting picture, bodily parts throb and secrete in discomfort reacting to the snore(/text) which originates from a second body (Arghol's, or rather a mind principle in the reader's dimension, but also a character attempting to purge himself from preconceived reason in the plot) emblematically depicted as a 'malodorous, bloody, sink' in the process of emptying itself. The substitution of the subject (Hanp) with the ambiguous 'the listener' summons the distressed reader whose 'whole being [now] [lays] bare battened by this noise' when at last, the riddle is solved, and the purpose of this nauseating struggle clarified:

> The snore crowed with increased loudness, glad, seemingly, with him; laughing that it should have at last learnt to appreciate it. A rare proper world if you understand it! (*B1* 83)

Hanp, the body principle, irreparably tangled in preconceived, mind-numbing but soothing structures, murders the mind principle Arghol (who paradoxically wishes to self-destroy, entrapping himself in the routine of the wheelwright's yard) and then commits suicide. The inefficient coexistence and self-destructive tendencies of the two characters/principles in the wheelwright's yard is the abstraction of a broken-up dialectic which causes both characters' deaths and the death of consciousness by which mind and body cannot exist in separate domains. What is proposed to the reader, however, is a resolution to this dilemma in the shape of the 'rare proper world' of *Enemy of the Stars,* which is the world of contemplative stillness advocated for in the manifestoes and endorsed by the reader's inability to approach language comfortably and instinctively.

This meticulously crafted struggle, in fact, prompts the reader to the exercise of a pure and renewed perspective on language and consequently on reality, language being the principal human structure through which and *in* which we perceive and make sense of the world. At the centre of *Enemy of the Stars* is a radical meditation that involves an embodied readership dealing with a work which far from a ponderous allegory or a perturbed attempt to preach aesthetic doctrines, establishes language at the root of perception and perception as the foundation of human consciousness.

With *BLAST* Lewis began to uncover the potentialities of stylistically manipulated form for the purpose of endorsing a renewed sensibility and delivering a practical improvement of modern life through the restoration of a healthy dialectic between humanity and our environment. *Enemy of the Stars* is the first proof of concept for Lewis's new radical aesthetics transposed into a literary style designed to surpass representation and pure abstraction to introduce the more functional and emerging *new living abstraction*. The use of language as the principal medium of the *BLAST* project allowed Lewis to develop a series of valuable intuitions which functioned as the blueprint for a literary practice which evolved thereafter into a phenomenological method for enquiries into the nature of being through linguistic structures.

In his examinations of linguistic structures, Merleau-Ponty differentiated between language which develops from 'elements of creation' and language belonging to 'elements of representation'.[82] Linguistic structures of the latter category are subordinate to the erroneous belief that to achieve successful communication it is necessary to impose the evidence of things on the reader's senses, promoting an approach which resides in an illusory realm of a world which can be rationalised and fully known by a 'complete man'[83] who sees meaning as something that can be simply *passed on*. To Merleau-Ponty, such illusion invalidated the dynamism and richness of perceptive experience, by viewing language as 'destined to a state of perfection in which complete expression is achieved'.[84]

Committed to operating in the domain of creation, Lewis aimed to forge what Merleau-Ponty referred to as an 'expressive organ'[85] by programmatically overthrowing structures

[82] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 51.
[83] Ibid., 50.
[84] Ibid., 49.
[85] Ibid., 56.

which no longer compromise us and subsequently by negotiating the prerequisites for new structures to call upon us as they emerge in a perpetual process which has a lot in common with pure perceptual experience:

> The [artist] rearranges the prosaic world, and so to speak, makes a holocaust of objects, just as poetry melts ordinary language. But in the case of works that one likes to see or read again, the disorder is always another order. It is a new system of equivalences which demands *this* upheaval and not just anyone, and it is in the name of a *truer* relation among things that their ordinary ties are broken.[86]

Any artist committed to the creation of such complex emergence must return to a nonsignifying world and renounce all existing signification to truly comprehend the origin of signification.[87] It is at that incipient stage that style reveals itself as a decisive element:

> Style is what makes all signification possible. Before signs or emblems become for everyone, even for the artist, the simple index of already given significations, there must be that fruitful moment when signs have *given form* to experience or when an operant and latent meaning finds the emblems which should liberate it, making it manageable for the artist and accessible to others.[88]

Style is not the mere idiosyncratic rendering of the world 'according to the values of the man who discovers it' but it is intrinsic to our experience of the world because perception already stylises and it is through perception that we alter our behaviour and our way of being in the world (which is a kind of style) by continuously outdoing familiar perceptions and substituting them with new unfamiliar ones.[89] Style is therefore not an object that can be located in the work of art, or simply applied to it as an embellishment; neither does it live within the artist, or in their gestures previous to the composition of the work. Style is 'nothing' until it 'emerges' from the work:

> When style is at work, the [artist] knows nothing of the antithesis of man and the world, of signification and the absurd, since man and signification are sketching themselves against the background of the world through the very operation of style.[90]

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[86] Ibid., 63.
[87] Ibid., 58.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 58-59.
[90] Ibid., 59.

The crucial phase of any purposeful work thus is not its completion, but the moment in which the reader approaches it 'and mysteriously resumes in his own way the meaning of the gesture through which it was made.'[91] Genuine style is a mysterious distortion paradigm by which the reader does not merely access concepts but comes into contact with a way of *being-in-the-world* as the artist 'concentrates the still scattered meaning of his perception and makes it exist expressly'.[92]

As evidenced by the contemporary reactions to *BLAST* in Greenwood's analysis, encounters with works crafted this way can be troublesome processes whereby a soothing familiarity is shattered to allow 'the particular arrangements' to envelop us in the particular 'haze of signification'[93] perceived by Ford and Aldington. To Merleau-Ponty, analogously to when we experience the world around us with our bodies, the artist must throw us in 'without transitions or preparations' and this struggle is an essential phase that allows our prejudices to be destroyed, initiating us to a 'conquering language' which 'teaches us to see and makes us think'.[94]

As 'the blueprints for […] a way of seeing' *BLAST*'s practical aesthetics aimed at showing the potentialities of our existence, by assigning to genuine art the phenomenological task of 'manufacturing fresh eyes for people, and fresh souls to go with the eyes' (*RA* 135). It provided a legitimate alternative to the production of the hypnotist of the modern world or the Bergsonian artist, who trained audiences to shut off consciousness and withdraw from reality. In the next chapter, I will trace the evolution of Lewis's aesthetics from the exploratory *new living abstraction* of *Enemy of the Stars* to the fully formed literary style of *The Wild Body* in which Lewis begins to implicate his readership in crucial ontological and epistemological cogitations on the ambiguous and relational nature of humanity.

[91] Ibid., 55.
[92] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 54-55.
[93] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 90.
[94] Ibid.

# Chapter 2

# The Tragedy of Seeing, Hearing, and Smelling Self-Consciously: The World of Perception and *The Wild Body*

> If another man has ideas of any kind (not borrowed clichés) that irritate you enough to make you think or take out your own ideas and look at 'em, that is all one can expect.
>
> Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*[95]

> Laughter is that arch complexity that is really as simple as bread.
>
> *WB* 239

T. S. Eliot appraised the essays at the centre of *The Wild Body* as 'genius' and Ezra Pound as 'the most important single document that Lewis has written'.[96] 'Inferior Religions' and 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' recorded a fundamental shift in Lewis's ontological thinking, from the 'militant vitalism' of his early years to a lifelong search for a 'philosopher's stone' that is a 'primitive unity' (*WB* 232-250) beginning in the fundamental recognition of a need to reassess the way we relate to ourselves and to the world. The aesthetics Lewis trialled in *BLAST* are grounded philosophically in the two essays and transposed in the short stories into a fully formed externalist style presented as a new way for consciousness to be present to itself and its objects.

My analysis of *The Wild Body* will begin with a survey of three reader responses to witness the sophisticated workings of Lewis's style as a point of departure for my enquiry and to direct my critical focus on the controversial impact of what Merleau-Ponty believed the 'sardonic form of humanism and […] particular kind of humour'[97] indispensable to the development of a phenomenology of ourselves. The three readings have been selected for the shared presence of a visceral response to the style of *The Wild Body*, followed by a

[95] Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), 222.
[96] Geoffrey Wagner, *Wyndham Lewis, A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1957), 220.
[97] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Olivier Davis (London: Routledge, 2004), 60.

failed attempt, but nevertheless a very determined one, to find a common ground to engage with the work.

Hugh Kenner's reading of *The Wild Body,* with the suggestive painterly analogy equating the short stories to a 'verbal impasto',[98] is one of the earliest and most influential readings of Lewis's seminal work. Despite an acknowledgement of the solidity of a style that is impossible to bypass, like thick texturized layers of paint, Kenner used his analogy inconsistently, focusing solely on the thickness of the medium and leaving behind compelling features of the impasto technique which could truly account for the workings of Lewis's style. In fact, whenever paint is laid on using this technique, the colours are often mixed directly onto the canvas and the painter's brush and knife strokes remain visible, drawing attention to the physical properties of the paint and creating an appearance of the picture spilling over and reaching towards the tactile sensibility of the viewer. Kenner, on the other hand, perhaps overwhelmed by the textural hurdles of the style, failed to engage with those painter's strokes so perceptibly there, assessing Lewis's medium as a 'rush of imagery' and an 'arresting artistic disaster'.[99] Kenner's unilateral relationship with the medium caused him to dismiss a series of crucial aesthetic elements:

> We begin to suspect that Kerr-Orr's own narrative frenzy covers "cramped and meagre" adventures inadequate to the importance the prose bestows on them […] throughout *The Wild Body* […] we may fairly deduce that he [Lewis] himself found it easy to confuse the Vorticist's still point of maximum energy with a hectic random fusillade of images to aggrandise the trivial or nonexistent. Kerr-Orr's prose exists, in its tumbled way; but the man Bestre need never have existed.[100]

Missing an opportunity to properly account for the impact of specific aspects of the medium, which he nevertheless detected as 'the bewildering energy of the prose',[101] Kenner anchored his criticism in more familiar grounds, by turning his attention to the presence/absence of a plot. The analysis concludes with a dismissal of *The Wild Body* as a series of 'spectacular harlequinades'[102] based on the excessively tenuous plot and characters which are worthless because they do not exist outside Lewis's prose—which is then rejected as an idiosyncratic and performative exercise in style for style's sake.

[98] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen,1954), 92.
[99] Ibid., 88-90.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 91.
[102] Ibid., 89.

Increasingly disgruntled objections push Kenner away from the work; in a further attempt to overcome his disorientation, he turns his attention to a passage of *The Apes of God* in which he detected a replica of the style of *The Wild Body*:

> The images fight for predominance. The syntax is rudimentary, subordinating nothing. And though the images are visual, they are gummed onto a subject itself visible in such a way as to conceal its shape completely. The effectiveness of the paragraph is kinaesthetic; the words don't matter so much as the abrupt gestures of their consonants and phrasal intervals. This passage is static in the same way as the story "Bestre" is static; the details fall in a steady rain, and any of them may alight in any spot. Mistaking the image for the thing, Lewis tends also to mistake the characters for the novel; like *The Wild Body*, the *Apes* breaks apart in the memory into lengthy character sketches, loosely united by the author's prickly vigour.
> There is no necessary connection between doctrinaire concern with the *outside* of people and the absence of plot.[103]

The first half of the passage is rich with intuition, with Kenner's unmediated registering of the power of a style crafted to deliver highly unorthodox impressions of an emblematic shape (crucially, as I will discuss, a human shape). In the remaining half of the passage, Kenner suspends his interaction with the materials and resumes traditional criticism, failing to elaborate further on those raw impressions. Contradicting his original judgements, and reassessing what earlier in the passage he described as a 'rush' where 'images fight for predominance' as 'static', Kenner failed to identify a missing connection between Lewis's style, his concern with the *outside* of people and the tenuousness of the plot. Kenner's dismissal of *The Wild Body* is in fact based on this fundamental irreconcilability, which then becomes the source of the almost unbearable fastidiousness recorded in his incisive evaluations. The underestimation of such discomfort and the reluctance to look for a resolution in the materials themselves led Kenner to a shift in focus towards less troublesome aspects of the short stories.

Only temporarily leaving aside the dense style of *The Wild Body,* its allegedly tenuous plot and Lewis's focus on the *outside* of people (all extensively explored in this chapter), I will briefly take into consideration Geoffrey Wagner's renowned reading of *The Wild Body*. Wagner's assessment is driven by an understanding of Lewis's theory of laughter as identical to Henri Bergson's theory of the comic except for a 'superficial reversal'

[103] Ibid., 103-104.

translating only to 'surface variations and vagaries'.[104] While philosopher and media theoretician Marshall McLuhan felt it crucial in his own work to draw attention to the fact that Lewis's 'theory of the comic as stated in *The Wild Body* is the exact reverse of the Bergsonian theory of laughter', Wagner assertively responded: 'I cannot agree with this'.[105] Wagner, in fact, isolated Lewis's theory from its stylistic applications, reducing it to a Dadaist version of Bergson's, merely intended as a playful perpetuation of the arguments for the dichotomy of mind and body laid out in *Matter and Memory*. In agreement with McLuhan's remarks, further discussions in this chapter will demonstrate that Lewis's reversal of Bergson's theory is programmatic, intimately connected to the style of the short stories and aimed at switching our attention back to our experience of the human body. Furthermore, the theory is not only central to the phenomenological approach to consciousness inaugurated in *The Wild Body,* but also crucial to an understanding of Lewis's stylistic practice, which gradually evolved into the foundation of a *Weltanschauung* rooted in phenomenological aesthetics.

Both Kenner and Wagner operated at the same detached level, neglecting to consider *The Wild Body* as a whole and disregarding the epistemological value of form. As a result, both assessments are delivered not from the position of a reader, but from the point of view of an absolute observer declining to partake in the revelatory processes of self-observation and self-identification underpinning this unique reading act. Partially noticing this fundamental oversight, Maria Jesús Hernaéz Lerena pledged a commitment to the reader of *The Wild Body,* setting off to explore 'the impact that the reading of Wyndham Lewis's stories usually has on a contemporary reader of short stories'.[106] The troublesome nature of the style, however, undermines Lerena's initial pursuit almost immediately, with prompt accounts of the materials as 'difficult to swallow' and a 'threat to our taste'.[107] The use of the plural possessive determiner is indicative of Lerena's rapid move away from the articulation of the reader's experience towards a more generalised judgement. The remainder of the study, in fact, develops as a total recalibration of the scholar's original ambition and settles for an alternative 'ultimate intention' as 'an invitation to read Lewis's stories for their fiction, […] regarded as acts of storytelling *per se*.'[108] The shift in focus

[104] Wagner, *Wyndham Lewis, A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*, 216.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Maria Jesus Hernaez Lerena, 'Are Lewis's Short Stories Pathological?' in Carmelo Cunchillos Jaime (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis the Radical: Essays on Literature and Modernity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 39.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 41.

away from the singularity of the medium and towards a search for narrative structures is a clear signal of the critic's capitulation to and conscious departure from the linguistic materials. Lerena's further assessments, in fact, emerge from various attempts to compress *The Wild Body* into the shapes of a general category of literary composition. Contradicting Kenner's assessment of an insubstantial plot, Lerena evaluates the short stories as problematic, declaring that with *The Wild Body* 'Lewis introduced plot back into the story' and thus betrayed the genre, because 'what the short story is supposed to do is develop a mood or a feeling, not a story.'[109] Furthermore, borrowing Wagner's unsuitable method for reviewing 'Inferior Religions' and 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' which are detached from considerations of the style of *The Wild Body,* Lerena hastily summarises the crucial essays as a 'well-articulated theory of pattern and primitivism' for which the short stories are 'an apparently unfit mould'.[110] Despite the recalibration of Lerena's initial premises for the study, the neglect of the aesthetic experience of the materials becomes increasingly problematic in this reading:

> No wonder that when reading Lewis's stories we are tempted to consider them as pathological, unaccountable perversions of the story itself, because they feel more like *tableaux vivants*, frozen spectacles, than processes. They deny depth and *movement* to the self. We can even consider them to be perversions of the genre of the short story, because they hold up as ideal a figure (the narrator) apparently affected by some kind of normopathology: with a penchant for considering the external world the only necessary index of reality, he is also incapable of believing that there is intelligence in a brain other than his. No epiphany is bound to happen within this environment.[111]

The invitation to consider *The Wild Body* stories exclusively for their fiction and storytelling (as a substitute anchoring purpose replacing the initial premise) is contradicted here by the critic's registering of an absence of depth, movement and processes. Furthermore, Lerena interprets the narrator's interest in the external world as pathological and unreasonable, ultimately dismissing *The Wild Body* as a purposeless environment hostile to its readership.

Differing from the detached dismissals of the first two readings, Lerena's study documents an intricate process by which the specifics of the reader's encounter with troublesome form are consciously and programmatically put aside and replaced by

[109] Ibid., 42.
[110] Ibid., 43.
[111] Ibid., 51.

attempts to mitigate the destabilising experience. The conclusion that the materials of *The Wild Body* should be defined as 'pathological' short stories, in fact, hardly provides a comprehensive account of the working of style and its impact on the reader, merely recording the critic's attempt to rationalise a perceived anomaly by ascribing it to a diseased source, as a form of resolution.

All three readings of *The Wild Body* feature unprocessed struggles with the style, dismissed as tasteless and unnecessary formalism, paired with a fundamental inability to reconcile a series of elements such as the unmet expectations linked to the genre, the striking externality and the philosophy outlined in the two essays. All three readings perceive *The Wild Body* as an unsympathetic setup devoid of purpose because they all look in unsuitable places for a traditional type of static resolution which never materialises. The perceived hostility is in fact triggered by the challenge to the conventional model of interpretation by which the theories outlined in the two essays should appear elucidated and expounded somewhere *in* the stories. The absence of such equivalence demands a unique approach to a type of meaning that is not handed out or situated anywhere and that initiates the reader to new structures of understanding. In what follows, I argue that *The Wild Body* challenges our very idea of literature as in it, Lewis explores new possibilities for literary language, giving to fiction and style a new existential purpose through phenomenology and developing a type of meaning which *is* access to states of consciousness, reality and truth through interaction with form.

In his last autobiography, Lewis stated that both his 'literary career' and his 'interest in philosophy' (*RA* 125) began with the sojourn in France which inspired *The Wild Body*. Having attended Henri Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France and having been introduced 'to a more primitive society' in Brittany, Lewis described the time spent composing his notes for *The Wild Body,* as well as the period shortly after that, as 'responsible for much' (*RA* 124). Although it represented 'a blank in regard to painting', he recalled:

> Long vague periods of an indolence now charged with some creative purpose were spent in digesting what I saw, smelt and heard. For indolent I remained. The Atlantic air, the raw rich visual food of the barbaric environment, the squealing of the pipes, the crashing of the ocean induced a creative torpor. Mine was now a drowsy sun-baked ferment, watching with delight the great comic effigies which erupted beneath my rather saturnine but astonished gaze […]. (*RA* 125)

This is an invaluable record of revelations which emerged from Lewis's experience of being disconnected from the distractions of city life and becoming fully aware of his own perception and overwhelmed by the working of his senses, as he emblematically ingested and digested the physical world. Lewis's gaze is ambivalent ('astonished' and 'saturnine') due to his encounter with the Breton peasants which represents both a disappointment and a significant epiphany. In *Rude Assignment,* Lewis evoked his time absorbed in the primitive setting and his early attraction to a 'militantly vitalist philosophy' which he recognised 'took the form of reaction against civilised values' (*RA* 125). At the time, in fact, inspired by Bergson's lectures, Lewis firmly believed in the primacy of the body over the mind for the purpose of experiencing authentic life and considered the civilised mind as corrupting that very authenticity. Retrospectively, Lewis defined this brand of philosophy as 'not a very good one', recognising in it the fundamental 'error' of believing 'the crudest life' as being authentic life alone and mistaking 'for "the civilised", the tweed draped barbaric clown of the golf-links' (*RA* 126). Lewis later came to realise that the two lives he had been comparing had much more in common than he had anticipated, hence his saturnine gaze, caused by the disappointment at a missed encounter with authentic life coinciding with a 'sun-baked drowsy ferment' at the discovery he could only partially grasp during his residence in the French countryside.

After France, Lewis continued his travels further in Spain and Holland, determined to experience what at the time he trusted as a more attractive way of life. As Paul Edwards points out, Lewis was then a young artist beginning to make crucial observations about human existence, inspired by the people he came into contact with. However, he was only able to fully process these observations and develop them into a coherent philosophical framework fifteen years later.[112] During this protracted time of incubation such notes of impressions collected through the eye of a young painter remained rather unusually in rough format until Lewis's multiple interventions in more mature phases of his thinking allowed for subsequent insights which were inspired by these raw observations and thus retained a fundamental phenomenological rawness which characterises Lewis's entire production. From his return to London in 1909 to the publication of the short stories in the version known to us today, the materials composing *The Wild Body* had been partially

[112] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 14.

published and edited time and time again. Three of the short stories had already been published in 1909 in *The English Review,* and further fragments in *The Tramp*. Despite a 1911 letter to Sturge Moore mentioning an imminent autumn publication of the 'Breton things' by John Lane, under the title *A Soldier of Humour*, a publishing contract was not issued until the summer of 1914 under the different title *Our Wild Body,* and with the essay 'Inferior Religions' as the introduction. The publishers however did not survive the war and this contract was never fulfilled. In a 1917 letter to Ezra Pound, Lewis mentioned the re-editing of the essay 'Inferior Religions', which then appeared in *The Little Review* in September of the same year (*L* 96). Two years later, in a letter to John Quinn, Lewis stated: 'I have just re-written several of my early stories and essays, and am looking for a publisher for that book under the title of "Inferior Religions" or "A Soldier of Humour"' (*L* 112). The essays and stories were not published until 1927 under the title *The Wild Body, A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories*. By the time this final version appeared, Lewis had been editing and building on those sketchy travel notes for nearly two decades. As Paul Edwards remarks, these were crucial years for Lewis, extremely prolific for his career as a writer, but also abundant with life experience. In fact, from 1909 to 1927, Lewis had published in rapid order five of his major works, *Tarr, The Caliph's Design, The Art of Being Ruled, The Lion and the Fox* and *Time and Western Man*, as well as having experienced the First World War as a soldier both in training and at the front.[113]

In the foreword to the final 1927 version, Lewis outlined that while preparing the collection of stories for publication, he came to the decision to use 'the original matter rather as a theme for a new story', because 'the material' deserved 'the hand of a better artist than [he] was when […] [he] made those few hasty notes of very early travels' (*WB* V). While the 'original matter' turned into the theme of *The Wild Body,* the 'new story', as Lewis himself declared, is commented upon and elucidated in 'new material' (*WB* V) composed of the two essays, 'Inferior Religions' and 'The Meaning of the Wild Body'. The essays, in Lewis's own words, functioned as 'a commentary on the *system of feeling* developed in these tales' (my emphasis, *WB* VI).

The Breton encounters stylised in *The Wild Body* represented a philosophical and existential turning point for Lewis, propelling the externalist satiric style which originated

[113] For a full discussion, see chapter 'A Primitive Soul Trying to Get Back to its Element' in Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 9-34.

from a fundamental need to find a new medium to deal with a new *system of feeling*. As I will show, this same style subsequently turned into the blueprint for Lewis's entire body of literary work and functioned as the starting point for the development of a phenomenological method grounded in literary aesthetics.

In 'Inferior Religions', Lewis contemplated his Breton experience, accounting for the Bretons as 'puppets', 'intricately moving bobbins' and mere 'cyphers' who appeared to be solely driven by what Lewis referred to as their 'wild body' (*WB* 232-242). As 'incomplete machine-men' and 'shadows of energy', the Bretons were fundamentally opposite to a preferable 'synthetic and various ego' but also far from what Lewis had initially seen as an encounter with the purest way of life (*WB* 232-242). The lethargic apathy of the 'habit world' (*WB* 236), which Lewis had hoped to forsake in his escapist exercise away from city life, followed him to the French countryside as he became increasingly aware of the fundamental condition of existence shared by both civilised and 'primitive' people. The lives of the Bretons were nothing more than elemental versions of what Lewis ordinarily witnessed in the city as 'generalised myriads' of standardised selves increasingly replacing 'violent individualities' (*WB* 235). Astonished at the unforeseen interaction between the Bretons and their surrounding environment, Lewis became fascinated with the way the Breton man became 'drunk with his boat or restaurant as [one] is with a merry-go-round', just as all Bretons appeared to be 'subject to a set of objects or to one in particular' (*WB* 232). Furthermore, Lewis identified a pattern at work underpinning the daily existence of the Bretons which developed from within the 'monotonous rhythm' of labour causing them to be intoxicated by the 'everyday drunkenness of the normal real' through keeping 'their limbs involved from morning till night' (*WB* 232-233). On occasion, this pattern assumed the distinctive characteristics of a religious fascination, complete with its totems, idols, and fetishes. Lewis recorded observing the innkeeper as he 'rolled between his tables ten million times' in a dance-like ritual, turning his 'damp napkins [into] the altar cloth of his rough illusion' while the bruises on a fisherman's wife were worshipped as 'the marking upon an idol' (*WB* 233). This 'realistic, intense and superstitious' rhythm, with the mesmerising features of both a dance and a 'savage worship' (*WB* 234) became increasingly insidious and difficult to detect:

> The complexity of the rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open untrammelled life. This subtle and wider mechanism merges, for the spectator,

> in the general variety of nature. Yet we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid. (*WB*, 233)

As a spectator, Lewis initially misjudged the 'primitive' setting as an instance of authentic life and only fully grasped the extent of his own intoxication with the Breton patterns and the implications of this deceptive scheme after his return to London, when his failed pursuit of authenticity caused his vitalist philosophy to collapse in favour of crucial discoveries. The version of *The Wild Body* that we know today is thus the record of a process of retrospective handling of the Bretons' bodily existences, with their intricate patterns and mysterious relationships to the physical environment, through a new externalist satiric style. The resulting discoveries, which are led by deeply phenomenological concerns, emerged from the very choice of reworking the materials through literary language and represented a starting point for Lewis's lifelong commitment to aesthetic expression for the purpose of gaining ontological insights.

In *The World of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty illustrated how classical authors approached 'primitive' people either as 'a model of more attractive form of civilisation', or as 'no more than a blind mechanism' and 'a series of inexplicable absurdities'.[114] Such approaches developed from the Cartesian belief in the existence of a 'fully-formed man' and 'master of nature' capable of absolute knowledge and adopted as the blueprint for an ideal humanity endorsed by both modern science and philosophy.[115] The point of view of this absolute observer, severely limited to the mere comparison of the 'primitives' to the deceptive idea of a 'normal' man, resulted in a list of faults which dismissed 'primitive' people as lacking human attributes, equating them with machines or animals due to the perceived incoherence which underpinned their existence. To Merleau-Ponty, humanity can only access the true knowledge of itself and of the world by recognising wholeness and coherence as illusory as, even if 'the healthy, civilised, adult human being strives for […] coherence […] the crucial point […] is that he does not attain this coherence: it remains an idea, or limit, which he never actually manages to reach.'[116] The essence of humanity resides in fact in our incongruities and irresoluteness which can only be explored through 'a philosophy of a more mature kind' which starts off from a radical reversal of the traditional point of view of philosophy:

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[114] Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 55.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 56.

> the 'normal' person must remain open to these abnormalities […]; he must take the trouble to understand them. He is invited to look at himself without indulgence, to rediscover within himself the whole host of fantasies, dreams, patterns of magical behaviour and obscure phenomena which remain all-powerful in shaping both his private and public life […]. These leave his knowledge of the natural world filled with gaps, which is how poetry creeps in.[117]

To Merleau-Ponty, the total rejection of the misleading view of the absolute observer is crucial to any endeavour truly aimed at understanding the position we occupy in a world that we share with 'primitive' people, animals and inanimate objects. Furthermore, it is compelling to consider that we share our physical environment and the same embodied condition of existence with 'primitive' people, animals and objects, and in the light of this relationship of 'vertiginous proximity', a fundamental reassessment of our way of relating to the world is required.[118] To Merleau-Ponty, this paradigm-shifting reassessment can only be initiated through our bodies, forgetting 'what we find natural about things because they have been familiar to us for too long' and relearning 'to look at space and the things which inhabit it, both animate and inanimate through the eyes of perception' and 'do the same with respect to human beings'.[119] Merleau-Ponty believed that 'this rehabilitation of the animal [and primitive] world required a *sardonic form of humanism* and a *particular kind of humour*',[120] referring to this process as a way 'to look at human beings from the outside' reinstating a healthy unfamiliar gaze that 'makes the mind self-critical and keeps it sane'.[121] Considering artistic and literary expression as essential to the facilitation of those instances in which we can achieve genuine experiences of ourselves, Merleau-Ponty saw Voltaire's *Micromégas* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as well-executed efforts to cast an unfamiliar gaze on our species by making use of fantastic creatures and animals as literary devices. While Merleau-Ponty stated that philosophy 'should measure itself more honestly, against the darkness and difficulty of human life […] without losing sight of the irrational roots of this life',[122] Lewis similarly remarked that the 'sense of the absurdity, or, if you like, the madness of our life, is at the root of every true philosophy' (*WB* 244). In *The Wild Body*, Lewis takes this same phenomenological venture further as he appoints a human character as his 'soldier of humour', forcing an unfamiliar gaze on the human species from the point of view of a human character with the ambition to find ways to deliver an effective

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 51.
[119] Ibid., 61.
[120] My emphasis, Ibid., 60.
[121] Ibid., 68.
[122] Ibid., 56-57.

unfamiliar *human* gaze on humanity.

Kerr-Orr, possibly the most phenomenologically oriented of Lewis's character creations, makes his stage debut as the 'soldier of humour' and narrator of *The Wild Body*. Proudly displaying the attributes of the better artist Lewis had become after his experience in Brittany, Kerr-Orr is 'astonished at everything at bottom' and possesses a 'settled naïveté' as he inhabits a 'joke-life' dominated by the distinctively phenomenological principle of 'denial of the accepted actual' (*WB* 4). Furthermore, very early in the text Kerr-Orr introduces the reader to the cryptic functionality of his comedic gaze:

> And what I would insist upon is that at the bottom of the chemistry of my sense of humour is some philosopher's stone. A primitive unity is there, to which, with my laughter I am appealing. Freud explains everything by sex: I explain everything by laughter. (*WB* 5-6)

The laughter originating from Kerr-Orr's peculiar comedy is presented both as an explanatory principle and an emblematic portal into a desirable but elusive primitive unity equated to the philosopher's stone, or rather the quintessential alchemical transmutation for achieving the highest level of human enlightenment. Kerr-Orr's mystifying introductions proceed with a perplexing but crucial account of his sense of humour in action:

> My sense of humour in its mature phase has risen in this very acute consciousness of what is me. In playing that off against another hostile me, that does not like the smell of mine, probably finds my large teeth, height and so forth abominable, I am in a sense working off my alarm at myself. So I move on a more primitive level than most men, I expose my essential me quite coyly, and all men shy a little. (*WB* 5)

Confronting his dual existence, Kerr-Orr releases his sense of humour against his other hostile self in the shape of a grotesque and malodorous body. Referring to this unusual process as the practice of exercising '[his] alarm at [him]self', Kerr-Orr gains an emblematic and profound self-knowledge which, he remarks, is avoided by most humans as a consciousness of our own embodied existence. Practising what Merleau-Ponty referred to as looking at human beings (and in this instance, at oneself) from the outside, Kerr-Orr declares that 'things must stand out in their true colours, and men too' (*WB* 23). Addressing the reader directly and involving them in his considerations, Kerr-Orr assesses his grotesque realism as the result of a unique ability to 'catch sight of some stylistic

anomaly' (*WB* 6) which cannot be rendered through abstraction, as he further elucidates:

> Most men do not detach the principle from the living thing in that manner, and so when handed the abstraction alone do not know what to do with it, or they apply it wrongly. I exist with an equal ease in the abstract world of principle and in the concrete world of fact. As I can express myself equally well in either, I will stick to the latter here, as then I am more likely to be understood. So I will show you myself in action, manoeuvring in the heart of reality. (*WB* 7)

Boasting about his exceptional ability to express himself and exist efficiently in both the abstract domain of 'principle' and the concreteness of 'the living thing', Kerr-Orr warns the reader of the uncommon and challenging nature of such plasticity announcing his strategic choice to remain in the 'concrete world of fact' for the reader's benefit. The obscurity of Kerr-Orr's announcements decreases when the intricate design for his characterisation and the solidity of the style collide with the further elucidation of a 'primitive unity', which appears in the essay 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', as an 'absolute revelation' and as a process of 'fundamental self-observation' (*WB* 245). Further clarifications then emerge from Lewis's deliberate inversion of Bergson's theory of the comic.

Bergson identified laughter as a corrective social construct and a response to absentmindedness aimed at counteracting and minimising the effects of any rigidity and inelasticity of the body which would be considered eccentric and suspicious behaviour. In Bergson's view, 'the comic is the result of a man behaving like a machine' and of the 'illusion of a machine working in the inside of a person'.[123] Laughter therefore pursues the 'utilitarian aim of general improvement' as it 'softens down whatever the surface of the social body may retain of mechanical inelasticity'.[124] Bergson identifies our distinctive automatisms as the manifestation of an illusory incongruity between the materiality of the body and the mind, and laughter as a socially accepted muffling device for all those instances in which this discrepancy becomes apparent. This view implies the existence of an absolute observer, a Cartesian fully formed human making use of laughter as a standardising device for brushing off the inelasticities intrinsic to humanity on the grounds that they reveal a 'grave inadaptability to social life'[125] and fuel the separatist fears which threaten the social machine.

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[123] Henri Bergson, *Laughter, An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Paris: Temple of Earth Publishing), p.12a.
[124] Ibid., 9a.
[125] Ibid., 8b.

In 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', announced as a 'few notes [that] may help to make the angle from which [the stories] are written' (*WB* 250), Lewis reverses Bergson's theory, precisely declaring that 'the root of the comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person' (*WB* 246). By upending the core of Bergson's mind-centred theory, Lewis switches the focus phenomenologically towards what he refers to as 'a thing', or rather, 'the wild body'. As a mere vessel, the 'wild body' is a thing (or an animal) that by way of a fundamental 'physical anomaly' is caused to behave like a person (*WB* 243-244). The incongruity between mind and body is no longer an illusion, but a fundamental feature of reality which humanity has grown accustomed to ignoring, causing us to become detached from the workings of our own consciousnesses. To Lewis, we should feel as equally surprised and amused coming upon 'an orchid or a cabbage reading Flaubert's *Salammbo*' (*WB* 247) as we do with a man occupied in the same way. In both instances we are witnesses to 'autonomously and intelligently moving matter' (effectively a thing/body behaving like a person), although because we operate in the same fashion and we are too familiar with what in fact is a 'strange sight', we grant priority to the mind, turning the body (a thing behaving like a person) into an idea (*WB* 247). It is the fundamental suspension of our blind acceptance of this phenomenon which is in fact the baffling event which provokes 'the brain-body's snort of exultation' or rather a 'fundamentally un-gregarious, sculptural, isolated and essentially simple' (*WB* 238) type of laughter, in total opposition to Bergson's social laughter. As Lewis proceeds to explain, laughter is an 'absolute revelation' as it can throw bridges 'impossible for any logic to throw' between our separate domains of mind and body allowing us to contemplate our own fundamental ambiguity (*WB* 244). As a result of this renewed ability for awareness, a conscious person is composed of 'two creatures': the wild body, and the laughing observer (*WB* 243). While the first creature is immersed in life, the second 'never enters into life, but […] travels about in a vessel to whose destiny it is momentarily attached' (*WB* 243-244).

Lewis crucially admitted that whether it is relatively easy to look at other people or 'any opponent who is only different enough' as things behaving like persons, it is much harder to look at oneself in this 'hard and exquisite light', as 'it is far more difficult to appreciate with any constancy […] that whatever his relative social advantages or particular national virtues may be, every man is profoundly open to the same criticism' (*WB* 245). Once this

process is completed, however, we reach a level of 'fundamental self observation' that crucially 'must be of the nature of the thunderbolt' and therefore only temporary as 'we are not constructed to be absolute observers' (*WB* 245-246). Nevertheless, where this self-recognition 'does not exist at all', the self too ceases to *exist* and 'men sink to the level of insects' (*WB* 246).

While Bergson's social laughter conceals the incongruous workings of human reality conducing to passive normalisation, Lewis's individualist laughter calls attention to our embodied existence, prompting an active practice of self-observation and transient awareness of our peculiar ambiguity. Lewis's premise in *The Wild Body* is not merely a theory of the comic, but a cogitation on a functional type of primal satire based on distinctively phenomenological preoccupations. In *The Wild Body,* Lewis aims to find ways to restore the human body to the centre of our life of consciousness for the purpose of renewing our awareness of our paradoxical condition of existence. In fact, it is by losing sight of the body and its situation in the physical world, that consciousness ceases to be dialectical, allowing standardised perception to prevail and to entrap humanity into abstract systems of 'inferior religions' or intense patterns of behaviour. As a result of falling into this spiral of inattention, by which true perception is replaced with preconceived structures, humanity's encounter with its environment ceases to be a place where knowledge is constituted. Through the stories in *The Wild Body* Lewis handed over to the reader a survey of this malevolent course and its detrimental outcomes, deploying the externalist style to incite a phenomenological laughter functioning as an *act of attention* upon ourselves.

In Merleau-Ponty's words, an *act of attention* is a 'transformation of the mental field' and 'a new way for consciousness to be present to its objects' and to itself.[126] In fact, witnessing the workings of crippled consciousnesses, while simultaneously set to re-perceive the human body anew through Kerr-Orr's gaze, the reader of *The Wild Body* is prompted to awareness of their own peculiar condition of existence, as I will demonstrate in what follows. Sharing Lewis's preoccupations, Merleau-Ponty remarked that humanity dangerously abandoned the concept of the 'body as an object, *partes extra partes'* repressing a 'consciousness of the body, and the soul' and turning the body into 'the highly polished

[126] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2003), 31.

machine which the ambiguous notion of behaviour nearly made us forget'.[127] To counteract this tendency and restore a true consciousness of ourselves, Merleau-Ponty believed it 'necessary to translate the functioning of the body into the language of the in-itself'.[128] Merleau-Ponty, however, also admitted that the human tendency to abandon all views of the body as an object is inevitable due to the exteroceptive nature of our perception which consists of the brain giving shape to external stimuli through obscure processes 'traced out in the nervous system' which we are unable to see, understand or take into consideration as part of our immediate experience. [129] This impending predicament makes a strategy for translating the body into its proper language, which is the language of the *in-itself*, difficult to achieve, as Merleau-Ponty observed:

> In so far as I inhabit the 'physical world', in which consistent 'stimuli' and typical situations recur […] my life is made up of rhythms which have not their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but their condition in the humdrum setting which is mine. Thus there appears round our personal existence a margin of almost impersonal existence, which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on to keep me alive; round the human world which each of us has made for himself is a world in general terms to which one must first of all belong in order to be able to enclose oneself in the particular context of a love or an ambition.[130]

To Merleau-Ponty, the solution to our 'dilemma of having to fail to understand either the subject or the object'[131] resides in finding functional ways to renew our awareness of these invisible series of biological mechanisms which we habitually neglect as an impersonal and therefore irrelevant type of existence. It is only by deliberately crafting opportunities to turn our attention away from the human world and towards the mechanics which allow us to exist as inhabitants of a physical world that we can regain true awareness of our bodies and access consciousness of our immediate experience. This can only be achieved through counteracting our habitual and instinctual impulses:

> The whole life of consciousness is characterised by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object [the body] is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.[132]

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[127] Ibid., 87.
[128] Ibid., 84.
[129] Ibid., 87.
[130] Ibid., 96.
[131] Ibid., 82.
[132] Ibid.

True knowledge of ourselves is unattainable outside a radical contemplation of our double existence as subjects/objects and therefore 'we must discover the origin of the object at the very centre of our experience', which is our body, and 'we must [also] understand how, paradoxically there is *for us* an *in-itself*' in order to gain an insight into the life of human consciousness.[133] The fundamental error of conceptualising the body and turning it into an idea is in fact the origin of all objective thought which causes us to be 'no longer concerned with [our] body, nor with time, nor with the world [because we] experience them in antepredicative knowledge' which is the 'death of consciousness'.[134] This shift, in fact, leads humanity 'to lose contact with perceptual existence' and induces a deceptive reliance on patterns of behaviour for our representation of the world. [135]

Lewis examined these deceitful patterns, referring to them as 'inferior religions', bringing this tendency of humanity into being in *The Wild Body* as a symptom of our 'habit-world' (*WB* 236) which is an 'objective play-world, corresponding to our social consciousness' (*WB* 240). For this purpose, the characters of *The Wild Body* are presented as 'puppets' and 'not creations', far from what Lewis considered as a preferable 'synthetic and various ego' (*WB* 236) and displaying 'a failure of a considerable energy, [and] an imitation and standardizing of self, suggesting the existence of a uniform humanity,—creating, that is, a little host as like as ninepins' (*WB* 235-236). The broken-up dialectics of the Bretons are at the centre of the action of the short stories as they are shown turning their own bodies, as well as the objects and the physical world around them, into the dead totems and fetishes from which relentless webs of preconceived patterns of behaviour (or inferior religions) iterate substituting genuine perception.

In *The Structure of Behavior,* Merleau-Ponty referred to 'inferior dialectics' which developed from psychological and social determinism as the emergence of 'imperfect dialectics' and 'impartial structures' fracturing the human embodied dialectic. [136] These inferior dialectics originate in objective stimuli which 'have been clothed with a meaning from which we do not extricate them', giving rise to 'rigid and stable structures' displaying a problematic 'inertia' and 'adhesiveness'.[137] These standardised structures are the direct result of our

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 82-83.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A. L. Fisher (Boston: MA Beacon Press, 1963), 220.
[137] Ibid., 178.

social organisation which draws us into coexistence, where the self is no longer 'the unique constituent'.[138] As a result, our rich perceptual experience streamlines itself, as we accept things' and peoples' manner of existing while we increasingly distance ourselves from the domain in which structures are conceived:

> Consciousness can live in existing things without reflection, can abandon itself to their concrete structure, which has not yet been converted into expressible signification; certain episodes of its life, before having been reduced to the condition of available memories and inoffensive objects, can imprison its liberty by their proper inertia, shrink its perception of the world, and impose stereotypes on behaviour; likewise, before having conceptualized our class or our milieu, we are that class or that milieu.[139]

This socially driven tendency corrupts what Merleau-Ponty described as the *human order* of behaviour by which perceptual behaviour turns back upon itself to express a meaning which 'manifests an interior being externally' bringing about 'the emergence of new cycles of behaviour'.[140] When this process is corrupted, perceptual experience projects consciousness outwards unidirectionally on the threads of preconceived structures, disrupting the typically human 'progressive and discontinuous structuration of behaviour' and replacing it with 'the fixation of a given force on outside objects'.[141] Existence in such incomplete and broken down dialectics, causes human behaviour to regress to lower orders as we lose the 'power of choosing and varying points of view' and of creating structures that are 'not under the pressures of a de facto situation' and 'beyond the present milieu'.[142] The uniqueness of the *human order* in fact resides in our ability to reflect on existing structures and surpass them in a progressive structuration of behaviour 'verified only by the active integration of isolated dialectics—body and soul—between which [the self] is initially broken up.'[143]

Lewis utilised manipulated language to set the reader of *The Wild Body* towards a recognition of our human tendency to succumb to inferior dialectics and thus supplied a method to revive the *human order* through restoring the dialectic within our split consciousnesses. In the first short story, 'The Soldier of Humour', Lewis addresses the role of language in *The Wild Body* with an epic exchange between the narrator/protagonist

[138] Ibid., 222.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 162.
[141] Ibid., 177.
[142] Ibid., 175.
[143] Ibid., 223.

Kerr-Orr and Monsieur De Valmore which takes place at the Fonda del Mundo (which emblematically translates to World Inn) in the French city of Bayonne. In the dining room of the hotel, Monsieur De Valmore, a Frenchman overly fond of all things American, falls victim to a language-war against Kerr-Orr, who introduces the premises of this episode as follows:

> A language has its habits and idiosyncrasies just like a species of insect, as my first professor comfortably explained; its little world of symbols and parts of speech have to be most carefully studied and manipulated. But above all it is important to observe their habits and idiosyncrasies, and the pitch and accent that naturally accompanies them. (*WB* 47)

Kerr-Orr's functional preamble draws attention to the fundamental ambiguity which takes centre stage in *The Wild Body* stories. An awareness that language can be rebuilt, dissected and manipulated, in fact, is just as crucial as the contemplation of the worn-out aspects of language with all its accepted associations, familiar significations, conventional phonemes and gestures. Language itself then makes an appearance on the scene in a very peculiar light during Kerr-Orr's encounter with the hostess:

> She […] poured out a few guttural remarks (it was a Spanish staff), all having some bearing on my fate, some connected with my supper, the others with my sleeping accommodations or luggage. They fell on the crowd of leisurely workers without ruffling the surface. Gradually they reached their destination, however. (*WB* 21)

The phonemes uttered by the hostess are unfamiliar because pertaining to an unknown linguistic system, and this unfamiliarity accentuates the material quality of the spoken words portrayed, like entities falling onto the workers, albeit with little physical consequence. Furthermore, these acoustic phenomena are mysteriously linked to objects (supper, sleeping accommodation, luggage) and Kerr-Orr only becomes aware of this relationship, and of the fact that the phonemes have reached their destination, thanks to the sight of the workers acting upon their instructions. In this passage, the reader witnesses language receding to a lower physical order in which words, as merely acoustic phenomena, are divorced from deeper structures of meaning and act upon organisms to induce action in a primal system of response to stimuli. Experienced through Kerr-Orr's gaze and deprived of any antepredicative knowledge of linguistic apparatuses, the reader witnesses a linguistic exchange at a primal level as an initiation to what is to follow.

In direct opposition to this first linguistic encounter, in fact, the reader is immediately faced with language at its most conventional, with the first meeting between Kerr-Orr and Monsieur De Valmore developing as ritualistic small talk about the weather between guests in a hotel dining room. Refusing to abide by the socio-pragmatic rules of phatic expression, Kerr-Orr disobeys polite conventions, contradicting his fellow diner and triggering the unexpected disruption which leads to a linguistic duel. Furthermore, Kerr-Orr, who had until then camouflaged himself as a Frenchman, reveals his identity causing the conversation which started off in French to abruptly switch to English and so escalating the disruption further. As a result of this sudden shift, the behavioural apparatuses erected between the two interlocutors with all the conventional attributes of stereotypical Frenchness disintegrate and begin to rebuild anew with the same conversation taking place again in English:

> Subject after subject was chosen. His volte-face, his change of attitude in the argument, became less and less leisurely. But my skill in reversing remained more than a match for his methods. At length, whatever I said he said the opposite, brutally and at once. (*WB* 26)

A second identical conversation takes place from Kerr-Orr's vantage point of knowing 'already what shade of expression would cause suspicion, what hatred, and what snorting disdain' (*WB* 21). Monsieur De Valmore's increasing familiarity with Kerr-Orr's method, however, gradually turns the exchange into a full-scale dialectical battle between two opposites: an Englishman impersonating a French native speaker and a Frenchmen impersonating an English native speaker. Dissecting his opponent's use of English, Kerr-Orr swiftly detects that 'he had not inherited [the language], but acquired it with the sweat of his brow' (*WB* 21-22). Furthermore, he records a profound change in his interlocutor as a result of this new medium:

> Speaking the tongue of New York evidently injected him with a personal emotion that would not have been suspected, even, in the Frenchman. The strange blankness and impersonality had gone, or rather it had *woken up*, if one may so describe this phenomenon. He now looked at me with awakened eyes, coldly, judicially, fixedly. (*WB* 19)

Monsieur De Valmore's whole structure of behaviour is altered by the use of American English, perceived as an 'obscure and whirling idiom', causing his speaker to slide into an 'anglo-saxon American state of mind' (*WB* 22). Kerr-Orr concludes that while Monsieur De Valmore's 'legal nationality [had been] imposed on him', his 'elemental' exclusively

'manifested itself in his American accent, the capital vessel of his vitality' (*WB* 25). Monsieur De Valmore's posture, the way he carried himself, his attitude towards his clothes, his personal opinions and his cultural outlook shift and readjust remarkably swiftly in response to the use of a different language. Having identified his interlocutor's tendency to slip into webs of preconceived structures, Kerr-Orr deliberately challenges Monsieur De Valmore's choice of English as default language, by reverting the conversation back into French in multiple attempts to unmask and disarm his opponent. Kerr-Orr is captivated by the type of power language exercises on Monsieur De Valmore, as he admits:

> I was curious to see the change that would occur in my companion if I could trap him into using again his native speech. The sensation of the humbler tongue upon his lips would have, I was sure, an immediate effect. (*WB* 23)

Despite Kerr-Orr's initial superiority, both interlocutors draw increasingly refined inferences from the linguistic duel, which gradually assumes the characteristics of a sequential game in which players choose their moves over time, formulating a plan of action for each stage. This arrangement, however, gradually shifts into a more ritualistic and coordinated exchange, as when a choreographed dance which requires non-verbal connections between the dancers to facilitate synchronicity, improves over time, making the most proficient couples look as if they are one and the same person:

> We changed about alternately for a while. It was a most diverting game. At one time in taking my new stand, and asserting something, either I had changed too quickly, or he had not done so quite quickly enough. At all events, when he began speaking he found himself *agreeing* with me. (*WB* 23)

This unexpected development orchestrated by Kerr-Orr leaves Monsieur de Valmore distraught as he is hit by Kerr-Orr's words: 'the word "bum" lay like a load of dough upon his spirit. My last word had been american!' (*WB* 28). The unsettled Monsieur de Valmore 'was not the same man' anymore and now 'la[id] paralysed in the centre of the picture' as 'sounds came from him, words too—hybrid syllables lost on the borderland between French and English, which appeared to signify protest, pure astonishment, alarmed question' (*WB* 28). Deprived of his ability to hide behind preconceived cultural and linguistic structures, Monsieur De Valmore is no longer a Frenchman or an American, but merely a body 'robbed […] of the power of speech' (*WB* 27).

The reader of 'The Soldier of Humour' becomes wholly involved in language, as their encounter with the solidity of Lewis's medium gradually merges with performed thoughts experiments aimed at restoring to their original strangeness those aspects of linguistic exchanges we take for granted. From witness to the bewitching quality of the hostess's acoustic waves mysteriously eliciting action as they propagate, to being party to the sophisticated emergence of intricate structures during the linguistic collision between Kerr-Orr and Monsieur De Valmore, the reader is unwillingly drawn to reassess their own participation in linguistic exchanges (including their immediate reading act) and to reconsidering the implications of humanity's involvement in language.

Merleau-Ponty described speech as a baffling experience which 'summon[s] [us,] grips [us], […] envelops [us] and inhabits [us] to the point that [we] cannot tell what comes from [us] and from it'.[144] This bewildering effect travels across interlocutors during what Merleau-Ponty defines as the 'phenomenon of the mirror', by which, through linguistic encounters we contemporaneously distinguish ourselves from and identify with the other by means of our shared embodied condition of existence of which language is a manifestation:

> Whether speaking or listening, I project myself into the other person, I introduce him to my own self. Our conversation resembles a struggle between two athletes in a tug-of-war. The speaking 'I' abides in its body. Rather than imprisoning it, language is like a magic machine for transporting the 'I' into the other person's perspective. […] Language continuously reminds me that the "incomparable monster" which I am when silent can, through speech, be brought into the presence of *another myself*, who re-created every word I say and sustains me in reality as well. [145]

By bringing into being the troublesome nature of the exchange which leaves Monsieur De Valmore crushed by his efforts to resist Kerr-Orr's disruptive agenda, Lewis exposes the rarity of genuine communication which becomes increasingly alien to us as it is constantly undermined by the detrimental familiarity which emerges from the sedimentation of linguistic conventions. To Merleau-Ponty, conventional language is comparable to the absence of language as we only truly communicate when '[we] refuse to content [ourselves] with the established language' and open ourselves to the 'capacity

[144] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 19.
[145] Emphasis in original, Ibid.

to allow [ourselves] to be pulled down and rebuilt again by the other person before [us].'[146] Language only thrives when it ceases to be mere apperception and emerges from 'its live and creative state'.[147]

Restoring linguistic exchanges to their original strangeness is the necessary initiation to the taxing and unsettling linguistic encounter with the innkeeper Bestre, archetype of *The Wild Body* characters and embodiment of the 'wild body', who is not simply encountered by the narrator. Kerr-Orr in fact recalls '[becoming] aware of Bestre' in this peculiar episode:

> At work in my untidy hive, I was alone: the atmosphere of the workshop dammed me in. That I moved forward was no more strange than if a carpenter's shop or a chemist's laboratory, installed in a boat, should move forward on the tide of a stream. […] as I bent over my work, an odiously grinning face peered in at my window. […] I did not even realise at first that it was I who was the intruder. That the window was not my window, and that the face was not peering in but out […] this was hidden from me in the first moment of consciousness about the odious brown person of Bestre. (*WB* 114)

In this challenging passage, Kerr-Orr's workshop is oddly referred to as mobile and compared to a shop, or a laboratory installed on a boat flowing through a river. The scene is initially assumed to be indoors, featuring Kerr-Orr becoming startled by the sudden appearance of a grotesque face peering through the window. The unambiguous scene is disrupted dramatically by Kerr-Orr's realisation that he is not indoors at all, but outdoors peering in through somebody else's window and this abrupt reversal produces a disorienting effect which demands a resolution through a highly phenomenological total reconfiguration of traditional viewpoints in favour of crucial discoveries.

Lewis's depiction of the human body in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' as 'an antediluvian vessel' (*WB* 237), offers a way into this strenuous thought experiment. From the bizarre account of the workshop ('a carpenter's shop or a chemist's laboratory, installed in a boat, should move forward on the tide of a stream'), in fact, we can deduce that Kerr-Orr's workshop is in fact Kerr-Orr's own embodied self, hence its being mobile, installed in a boat-body both immersed in the material world and flowing through it. Keeping this in mind, the only plausible explanation for Kerr-Orr's conviction that he

[146] Ibid., 20.
[147] Ibid.

had been looking out, when he was really peering in, is that the material world is phenomenologically one with Kerr-Orr's body, with the inside of his workshop as his world-body and the inside of Bestre's house thus perceived by Kerr-Orr as the outside. The implications of this intense phenomenological thought experiment can be better grasped with an examination of what is both the most well-recognised and most misunderstood painting by Lewis. The encounter between Kerr-Orr and Bestre, and *Workshop* (Figure 7), in fact, share the aim to disrupt perceptive faculties calling their audiences to an analogous phenomenological task.

Through Kerr-Orr, the reader experiences the competent artist's gaze as the character not only comprehends that his perceptive self is a creator and that the material world is its workshop, but also realises that his own body is integral part of that material world and, by extension, that his embodied self is his workshop too. In the painting *Workshop*, on the other hand, the viewer is invited to use their own eyes to experience the competent artist's gaze as they are cast towards a different but analogous window, a patch of blue in the centre of the canvas.

*Figure 7 Wyndham Lewis, 'Workshop', Oil paint on canvas, 765 x 610 mm*

*Source:* Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. Used with permissions.

Eyes fixed on the centre of the composition, driven there by the whirling perspective, the sky and the top of a tree (a vegetable green patch) finally reveal themselves to the viewer while architectural elements gradually emerge, gyrating around that central gaze encasing the viewer's body. The previously threatening, foreign, inorganic materials and shapes of

the architecture framing the composition metamorphose into more organic fleshy shades as they come into increasingly closer proximity with the viewer's body, highlighting our commonality with the material world and our shared embodied existence. Just as experienced by Kerr-Orr, the viewer is outside, looking in, with the feeling of being inside, looking out.

*Figure 8* Dorason, *Skyscrapers in Commercial Area, Hong Kong*

*Source:* Shutterstock, June 9, 2022, 295195619, https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/skyscrapers-commercial-area-hongkong-295195619. Used with permissions.

It is through this crucial scene in *The Wild Body* that multiple phenomenological revelations about Kerr-Orr's relationship with the physical world and his embodied position within it emerge. This scene is the location for an archetypical encounter with *the other* during which Kerr Orr, equipped with his revelations and proficient at exercising his new viewpoint, faces his own embodied condition, further approaching Bestre *from the outside*. His perception of the 'hard meaty gust' (*WB* 117) is laid out fully in all its primordial strength:

> His very large eyeballs, the small saffron ocellation in their centre, the tiny spot through which light entered the obese wilderness of his body; his bronzed bovine arms, swollen handles for a variety of little ingenuities; his inflated digestive case, lent their combined expressiveness to say these things; with every tart and biting condiment that eye-fluid, flaunting of fatness (the well-filled), the insult of the comic, implications of indecency, could provide. Every variety of bottomtapping resounded from his dumb bulk. His tongue stuck out,

> his lips eructated with the incredible indecorum that appear to be monopoly of liquids, his brown arms were for the moment genitals, snakes in one massive twist beneath his mamillary slabs, gently riding on a pancreatic swell, each hair on his oil-bearing skin contributing its message of porcine affront.
>
> (*WB* 116-117)

The character of Bestre is turned into a thing 'laid out before an impersonal consciousness'[148] with the ability to perceive the human body as it actually is or rather an otherworldly series of absurd objects mysteriously connected. Possibly one of the best examples of Lewis's phenomenological experiments in style, this passage disrupts the reader's perceptive modes dramatically, suspending our naïve acceptance of humanity and imposing on us the unique (and complex to achieve) unfamiliar human gaze on the human species. As observed by Merleau-Ponty, 'the contrast between what is called mental life and what are called bodily phenomena is evident when one has in view the body considered part by part and moment by moment',[149] and it is only when we find ways to construct opportunities to adequately take this fundamental ambiguity into consideration that the mental becomes finally visible and accessible to us from the outside structure, revealing a transitory unity of consciousness. Summarising his learnings during his travels, Kerr-Orr provides the reader with a series of pragmatic pointers to achieve similar results:

> There was no intention in these stoppages in my zigzag course across Western France of taking a human species, as an entomologist would take a Distoma or a Narbonne Lycosa, to study. Later, at the time of my Spanish adventure (which was separated two years from Bestre), I had grown more professional. Also, I had become more conscious of myself and of my power of personally provoking a series of typhoons in tea-cups. (*WB* 119)

Kerr-Orr describes his technique as the play act of a field scientist collecting specimens at which he has become increasingly proficient after his encounter with Bestre, a crucial occurrence which fine-tuned his perceptive methods and allowed him to discover efficient ways to enhance his 'power' of creating opportunities to improve his own consciousness of himself. Kerr-Orr then tries to persuade the reader to close in on Bestre:

> I learnt a great deal from Bestre. He is one of my masters. When the moment came for me to discover myself – a thing I believe few people have done so thoroughly, so early in life and so quickly—I realised more and more the beauty of Bestre. (*WB* 128)

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[148] Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, 222.
[149] Ibid., 181.

The beauty of which Kerr-Orr speaks emerges from the style's ability to suspend sedimented perceptive structures by which 'the human signification is given before the alleged sensible signs'.[150] Bestre, totem of the human body, is revealed in its material essence and shown as it would 'appear in the primitive life of consciousness', returning the body to its proper dialectic which *it* shares with other objects in the material world.[151] The act of removing the body from the realm of ideas, however, 'demands a reformulation of the notion of consciousness'[152] by which the two separate dialectics of body and mind become integrated and replaced by an embodied dialectic. To truly achieve such a shift, self-observation and identification are necessary and stylistically endorsed, for the benefit of the reader, in an eerie passage breaking up the narrative to allow for Bestre's direct address to the reader:

> 'Am I not rather smart? Not just a little bit smart? Don't you think? A little, you will concede? You did not expect that, did you? That was a nasty jar for you, was it not? Ha! My lapin, that was unexpected, that is plain! Did you think you would find Bestre asleep? He is always awake! He watched you being born and he watched you ever since. […] He will be in at your finish too. […] Meanwhile he laughs at you. He finds you a little funny. That's right! Yes! I am still looking!' (*WB* 166)

The reader is accused of having been actively ignoring Bestre's existence, adding the sinister revelation that Bestre has always been omnipresent throughout the reader's life, and furthermore, that he will continue to be so until their death. Through the direct address, Lewis achieves a temporary invasion of the reader's immediate reality and forces us into a conversation with the character of Bestre metamorphosised as the epitome of the wild body by means of his revelations. At this point, the reader is no longer a witness to the scene, but a participant, personally involved in Kerr-Orr's illuminating encounter and set to unravel a series of primordial discoveries rooted in Bestre's distinctive gaze. Kerr-Orr, in fact, notices the space between Bestre and the subject of Bestre's observations 'miles to his right' as a 'short tunnel' gradually filling 'with clever parabolas and vortices, little neat stutterings of triumph, googled-eyed hypnotisms, in retrospect, for his hearers' (*WB* 118). As a spatial manifestation of Bestre's perception this tunnel-like projection affects his target physically:

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[150] Ibid., 167.
[151] Ibid., 166.
[152] Ibid., 169.

> The eye was really Bestre's weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded it was drawn from all the most skunk-like provender, the most ugly mucins, fungoid glands, of his physique. Excrement as well as sputum would be shot from this luminous hole. (*WB* 125)

In this visceral picture, Bestre's eye as a weaponised 'luminous hole' perceives through projecting the body outwards. This perceptive practice reveals Bestre's mastery over the most repugnant organic manifestations of our embodied condition which, actively eschewed by humanity, are instead effectively internalised by Bestre and subsequently discharged by him into the physical world. Scrupulously brought into being for the reader, who is wholly involved in this scene thanks to the direct address, Bestre's distinctive act of perception culminates with Kerr-Orr, surprised at finding himself 'shaking with the most innocent laughter' as a result of his 'staring eye […] suddenly [taking] on the flesh' (*WB* 120). In 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', a list of numbered tenets in the style of a manifesto addresses 'the attributes of laughter' of which the first two are:

> 1. Laughter is the Wild Body's song of triumph.
> 2. Laughter is the climax in the tragedy of seeing, hearing, and smelling self–consciously.
>
> (*WB* 236)

Kerr-Orr describes this laughter as a revelation in the shape of 'a realistic firework' which 'hoists the primitive with its own explosive' but also 'keep[s] the primitive at bay' in a civilised environment (*WB* 158). As the stylistic emblem of ultimate self-recognition and the material trace of an *act of attention* emerging from an active acknowledgement of the body's legitimate role in the world of perception, the laughter contemplated by Lewis is a recalibration of consciousness towards true embodied existence which is passed on to the reader via the incisiveness of the externalist style reinforced by the direct address and the first-person narration. The role of Kerr-Orr as the stylistic prism through which Lewis's externalist satire is conveyed is crucial to the functionality of a style aimed at resurrecting all human bodies, including the reader's, from the domestication of civilised life. In 'The Cornac and his Wife', the stylisation of complex dynamics between circus performers and their public displays how the strategy behind Kerr-Orr's characterisation is rooted in a meticulously crafted relationship with the reader:

> His [the Showman's] cheerless voice […] conjured them to occupy the seats. […] Each time he retired to the position he had selected to watch them from, far enough off for them to be able to say that he had withdrawn his influence, and had no further wish to interfere. Then again he stalked forward. This time the exhortation was pitched in as formal and matter-of-fact a key as his anatomy would permit, as though this were the first appeal of the evening. Now he seemed merely waiting, without discreetly withdrawing—without even troubling to glance in their direction anymore, until the audience should have had the time to sit themselves […].
> […]
> These tactics did not alter things in the least. Finally, he was compelled to take note of his failure.
> […]
> Then unexpectedly, from outside the periphery of the potential audience, elbowing his way familiarly through the wall of people, burst in the clown.
> (*WB* 144-145)

The Showman, supposedly proprietor, producer and presenter of the circus, employs multiple strategic gambits in a struggle to reel in his public, alternating announcements and withdrawals of his presence and adjusting his influence until he realises that his 'tactics did not *alter* things in the least'. Admitting defeat, the Showman vacates the stage to welcome a more effective entertainer elbowing his way in:

> [the clown] conducted everything—acting as interpreter of his own jokes, tumbling over and getting up, and leading the laugh, and explaining with real conscientiousness and science the proprietor's more recondite conundrums. […] Had it not been for his comments, I am persuaded that the performance would have passed off in a profound, though not unappreciative, silence.
> (*WB* 151)

Stylising the dynamics between author, narrator and the reader (the Showman, the clown and the public), Lewis performs his strategy for *The Wild Body* drawing attention to the relevance of Kerr-Orr's creation and his stylised gaze for the purpose of extracting a series of crucial realisations from the reader. As remarked by the Showman: 'the public paid for an idea, something it drew out of itself' (*WB* 141). The Showman's matter-of-fact approach, however, is incompatible with a necessary reassessment of the peculiarities of our existence that can only be achieved through a suspension of our practical and utilitarian attitudes. This process calls for the prismatic stylistic addition of the clown, Kerr Orr, allowing the reader to perceive,

> not […] a succession of ideas and theses but […] the same kind of existence as an object of the senses, or a thing in motion, which must be perceived in its temporal

> progression by embracing its particular rhythm and which leaves in the memory not a set of ideas but rather the emblem and the monogram of those ideas.[153]

The frustrations with *The Wild Body* recorded by Kenner, Wagner and Lerena are caused precisely by a stagnation of the reading act which crystallises in the hunt for a series of ideas and theses which are never provided. The reader of *The Wild Body* is required to live through the forcefulness of the style to re-experience themselves, humanity and the world of perception in a productive light, reawakening consciousness to the human embodied condition and preventing it from regressing to lower orders of behaviour abiding by imperfect dialectics.

The meaning of *The Wild Body* is its style which represents the initial aesthetic development in an evolving search for the most suitable form to address highly phenomenological concerns:

> What I started to do in Brittany I have been developing ever since. Out of Bestre and Brotcotnaz grew, in that sense — if in no other — the aged 'Gossip Star' at her toilet, and Percy Hardcaster. Classifiable I suppose as 'satire', fruits of much visceral and intellectual travail and indolent brooding, a number of pieces were eventually collected under the title of 'The Wild Body'. (*RA* 125)

In the next chapter, I turn to consider the style of *The Apes of God* as a further development of the externalist satire of *The Wild Body,* featuring an iteration of the unfamiliar human gaze on humanity for the purpose of bringing ontological scrutiny into the real world.

[153] Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 76.

# Chapter 3

# A Moonstruck Music of Hallucinated Machines: Phenomenological Ethics in *The Apes of God*

> Art will die, perhaps. It can, however, before doing so, paint us a picture of what life looks like without art. That will be, of course, a satirical picture.
>
> *MWA* 225

> The conclusion that in some form or another the original 'ape' was man!
>
> *MWA* 101

*The Apes of God* has received many critical treatments influenced by its eventful contemporary reception, yet those same criticisms have overlooked the phenomenological value of such events which developed in response to a gesture delivered by Lewis into the real world. In this chapter, I approach *The Apes of God* as a further step towards an integrated understanding of Lewis's *Weltanschauung* through the evolution of the satirical externalist prose theoretically grounded and experimented with in *The Wild Body*. The atypical short stories functioned as the stylistic blueprints for the fully formed style of *The Apes of God,* which I propose is a masterpiece in what Merleau-Ponty defined as *coherent deformation*, through which Lewis exploited satire's full ontological potential.

As a necessary introduction to the close reading of Lewis's dictionary-sized book, it is crucial to offer a compact review of Lewis's prolific philosophical thinking and writing at the time of composition. I will also digress into the events that preceded, accompanied, and followed the appearance of the work as a valuable insight into the gestural value of a style which *exists* in the world as incarnated meaning. I will argue that it is by eliminating any possibility for abstraction still latent in his choices for characterisation in *The Wild Body* that Lewis develops the rhetorical device of the human gaze on the human species further. In so doing, Lewis abolishes any distance between the speaking subject, the speech act and reality, bringing ontological scrutiny into the lived world.

The first references to a manuscript for *The Apes of God* can be found in the 1923-1924 correspondence between Lewis and T. S. Eliot as they discussed details of respective ongoing projects, as well as a potential contribution by Lewis to Eliot's new literary magazine venture *The Criterion*. In a September 1923 letter, Lewis referred to the contribution as 'a fragment' titled 'Mr. Zagreus and the Split-Man', later described as 'the Zagreus Mss' whose content was then published in February 1924 in *The Criterion* (*L* 139). In the same letter, we learn that the delay in submitting this fragment was partly due to Lewis's immersion in the composition of a 'batch of short essays' which he was hoping to publish 'as a small book' (*L* 139). Lewis, in fact, had been working on a 'small treatise' (*L* 139) of his philosophical reflection provisionally titled 'The Man of the World'. In further correspondence, Lewis shared with Eliot the philosophical concerns at the core of 'The Man of the World':

> I need not tell you that it is still rough. For instance, to establish the *full relationship of the monad to God* (in the Leibnizian sense) I shall require at least three or four pages. And I wish to give a small chart of the *vicissitudes of the ego*, through Kant down to the 'Critical Realists'. (*L* 140)

And even more strikingly:

> …(The blank pages represent a piece about Kant which I have not given you, as it is only a recapitulation of some of his theories.
> …I aim at a more or less popular audience of course.)
> B. of Part I. deals with *evolution*, the usual theology of the biologist, (*his interpretation of Form*) and the *evolution of "forms" over into civilised life*…
> After part II comes (with all the resources of inductive vividness at my command) a part burrowing, on more personal lines, into *"the problem of knowledge"* and so forth. (*L* 140)

With these remarks in mind, it is crucial to consider that during the first years of composition, *The Apes of God* merely consisted of a series of fragments for publication in a literary magazine and was therefore a secondary project, when most of Lewis's time was dedicated to ontological and epistemological concerns explored at great length for 'The Man of the World'. These overarching philosophical issues, however, grew too extensive and were integrated in *Time and Western Man,* a work Lewis later defined as the place where he provided 'a very detailed answer to that disintegrating metaphysics.' (*RA* 58) These very same concerns, however, such as the vicissitudes of the ego, the evolution of form into civilised life and the problem of knowledge, are also the concerns at the centre of *The*

*Apes of God* project. In a 1929 letter to Richard Aldington, Lewis clearly outlined the situation that urged him to provide a 'detailed answer' to the metaphysical crisis he exposed in *Time and Western Man,* and that same answer subsequently developed into the style of *The Apes of God*:

> You are no doubt aware of the "Victorian" fashions that for some years have been gaining grounds—taste for waxed flowers it began with and has become thorough as a fashion since.
> […]
> Since the war […] no fresh effort has been anywhere encouraged: the world has slowly been encouraged to return trips to its 19th Century weaknesses and philistinism. (That produced one fair-size War—who knows, it might produce another one?!) (*L* 189)

In April 1924, a second fragment titled 'The Apes of God' (which then became 'An Encyclical' in the final version of the work) appeared in *The Criterion*, with plans for a third and fourth fragment provisionally titled 'Lord Osmund's Party' and 'Mrs Farnham's tea-party' to follow. Despite Eliot's assessments of Zagreus as 'a masterpiece', and 'The Apes of God' fragment as 'immense' (*L* 140), *The Criterion* never published the further two fragments. From the correspondence between Lewis, Eliot and the publisher, the decision not to publish can be easily discerned as the result of several unaddressed reservations about 'the hosts' surname' being too recognisable, 'Bloomsbury' being explicitly cited, and swearwords (*L* 138-141). As Eliot remarked in an attempt to justify the hesitancy of the publisher: the editor of a periodical 'is not justified in risking offending harmless and otherwise desirable readers' (*L* 138-141). Amid definitive recognitions of the ingenious originality of the project and the keen sense of uneasiness stood the realisation that Lewis's was explosive material and the unpleasant consequences of its appearance onto the London literary scene could be foreseen. Thus, at very early stages of composition, the controversial history of *The Apes of God*'s rejection began.

After submission of a sample manuscript to C. H. Prentice of Chatto and Windus, Lewis was forced to face further reservations and appeals to acknowledge the problematic nature of the recognisability of the characters (C. H. Prentice, in fact, had no trouble recognising Lionel and Isabel Klein as the satirical renderings of the novelist and translator Stephen Hudson and his wife) and Lewis was urged to consider the potential implications. Responding to C. H. Prentice's editorial comments and his depiction of the characters as mere 'obstacles' which he hoped they could overcome through compromise,

Lewis rather assertively outlined: 'the cases you choose are not the ones I could, I am afraid, remove from my picture' (*L* 167). Despite Prentice's sound assessment of the manuscript as 'remarkable and astonishing', as he admitted that he had not read 'anything for months and months that has made such an impression' on him, Lewis remained unwilling to make concessions (*L* 167).

Lewis's inflexibility and the prospect of potential libel cases pushed Chatto and Windus to make an inadequately low offer for the work, exacerbating the relationship with Lewis which then ended in 1932. Following this open hostility from a publisher which had always championed his work, Lewis began to suspect a boycott and, keen for the state of affair exposed in the manuscript to reach the public, he self-published a limited edition of *The Apes of God,* which appeared in June 1930 published by The Arthur Press (the same small press founded by Lewis to facilitate the publication of *The Enemy*).
In a letter to Chatto and Windus written soon after the self-publication, Lewis outlined his regret at the missed opportunity to collaborate with the publisher, reiterating the incongruity between the financial offer and the editor's opinion of the work, but also stressing the capital importance of this book:

> so greatly was it out of proportion (1) with your opinion of the book (2) with its dimensions (not its *area* in the private edition, but the quantity of effort that it contained—its quarter of a million of carefully-written and often-corrected words), (3) with the place such work must occupy in my life, (4) with the six years or more devoted to it, off and on […] (*L* 195)

Despite Lewis's last effort to revive discussions, building on the success of the self-published limited edition, Chatto and Windus made no further offers and Lewis ended up selling the manuscript to Nash and Grayson, who published a second edition in 1931. Lewis had rightly foreseen the prominent place that *The Apes of God* would occupy in his career and with the higher print run of a second economical edition circulating among the London literary establishment, the distant echoes of *BLAST*'s reception could undeniably be heard. Reviews began flooding in, as reported by Lewis in this letter to Richard Aldington:

> The *Apes* has caused here in London a good deal of disturbance. My life has been threatened by an airman, even! Then James Joyce came to see me, to play Odysseus to my Cyclops—quite forgetting that it is *he* not myself who has half-sight. […] The agony-column of the Times has echoed the rage of people who

> considered themselves attacked in the Apes—many peculiar things have happened. […] the letter I enclose will indicate that a counter attack is about to begin. (*L* 190-191)

Lewis's counterattack was meticulously planned as a series of actions, the first of which was a circular letter issued by The Arthur Press accompanied by a copy of the limited edition which was delivered to supporters who were likely to review *The Apes of God* favourably. The letter called attention to historical attempts to suppress important satirical works and solicited favourable reviews for the purpose of rescuing the book from the boycott that would damage the possibility of further editions appearing. In addition to this preventive solicitation, Lewis planned to make public his July 1930 correspondence with poet Roy Campbell, together with a letter by editor of *The New Statesman*, Ellis Roberts, to Roy Campbell, as conclusive proofs of a boycott in the works. In the correspondence, Campbell shared with Lewis the news that his own review of *The Apes of God* had been rejected by *The New Statesman* on the grounds of it being 'favourable to Mr Wyndham Lewis' (*SF* 13). Lewis shared the information publishing *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1*, in which he provided an account of the rejection with reproductions of the original correspondence. The pamphlet also included reviews submitted in response to The Arthur Press circular letter, extracts from newspapers and literary magazines and an essay addressing the role of fiction and the value of satire in contemporary culture.

In *Rude Assignment* Lewis identified satire as one of the 'three fatalities' that shaped his 'pattern of thinking' as a writer, with the other two fatalities being his role as an intellectual and his politics (see *RA* 11-107). Lewis considered satire as a genre he unwittingly slipped into as the necessary outcome of a series of philosophical reflections into ontology, truth and ethics. In fact, considering classical satire as 'a kind of poetry invented for the purging of our minds' (see *RA* 11-107)[154], Lewis firmly believed that a crucial and necessary distinction should be made between classical and modern satirical modes. Examining the satire of contemporary cartoonists Victor Weisz and David Low as a starting point for his analysis, Lewis identified two satirical models, with their main difference residing in the impact they have on their audiences.

[154] Lewis quotes from W. P. Ker (ed.), *Essays on John Dryden* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1926), Vol. II, 100.

While the first model, as a purely aesthetic and impersonal satire, appeals to the intellect and 'does not think of the subject as a creature of this world', the second model, or personal satire, appeals to passions, and its 'figures are much more like people' (*RA* 48). Providing the mere 'incarnation of a vice or a folly', the former is a gentler and ineffective type of satire, developing mainly as a form of entertainment, in fact:

> the characters as embodied ideas, are rendered incapable of breathing the same atmosphere with us, so that we know that they are not people such as ourselves, but a symbolic company.
>
> (*RA* 50)

In impersonal satire, characters are abstracted manikins existing 'upon a different plane to that of life' (*RA* 49) as they are not conceived to resemble people in the real world. Personal satire, on the other hand, is constructed on characters' *lifelikeness* and the construction of a 'scene so vividly conceived that one felt it had happened' (*RA* 49). Lewis admitted that such analysis could tempt us to either conflate personal satire with realism and impersonal satire with comedy, or to contemplate satire and realism on the same plane, or to even ask ourselves 'where Satire ends and Comedy begins' (*RA* 50). For a clear understanding, Lewis concluded that we should abstain categorically from mere 'questions of terminology' simply because this type of enquiry requires '*an interpretation of life*' (my emphasis, *RA* 50). It is precisely while pursuing his own *interpretation* that Lewis formulated a set of phenomenological observations that led him to an evolution of the externalist model of *The Wild Body* into the distinctive style of *The Apes of God*, finally exploiting satire's full ontological power.

It is compelling that Lewis arrived at these crucial observations through insights he gained as a portrait painter as, in his own words, the 'experiences gained in that capacity […] furnish one with an insight into the mind of a generation obtainable perhaps in no other way' (*RA* 52). Lewis's first crucial observation, in fact, was built on modernity's peculiar approach to realism, taking Francisco Goya's portrait of the queen of Spain as an illustration. Lewis hypothesised that presented to a modern aristocrat, such a depiction would be viewed as a caricature of the sitter and returned 'to the artist who had been so foolhardy as to perpetrate it' (*SAL* 510). Furthermore, Lewis added that this same logic was responsible for the custom of publishing 'no straight photographs' in contemporary newspapers, because:

> What average persons, in our time, think of as the truth about themselves pictorially (and what goes for the face goes for the spirit) is, as a minimum, something with all their weak points omitted. (*RA* 52)

As a precious insight into modernity's attitude towards truth and reality, Lewis observed that 'what is "truth" for one period is slander for the next', with the modern world surprisingly classing realism as satire (*SAL* 510). Since reality is not to be portrayed as the eye sees it, but as 'an inflated, conventional "improved" substitute', objective reality is viewed as the caricature of a truth which 'must always be emotional', and furthermore 'favourable to the object' (*RA* 52). Lewis saw this shift as an 'extraordinary change' and the cause of 'modern standards being lifted abnormally high above reality', leaving us with 'far less of the real' (*RA* 52).

Reality in the modern world is thus systematically replaced by a pleasing alternative which aligns with preconceived expectations and emerges as the insistent manifestation of a series of iterating abstracted structures concocted to preserve our societal arrangements. To Lewis, this is the result of humanity becoming at once 'less sensitive [and] more touchy' (*SAL* 510), with the decrease in *sensitiveness* induced by our state of perpetual dazzlement with this improved alternative. With the substitute structures so finely embedded into collective life to pass as unbridled reality, humanity becomes increasingly unaware of their emergence and unable to identify the necessity to re-establish a genuine contact with reality. As a result of this tendency, our conventional abstract idea of *what it is like to be human* does not coincide with the reality that we are refusing to perceive, as we inevitably become 'more touchy' about the true nature of our own condition of existence. Moreover, it is precisely by failing to exercise such refusal that we alienate ourselves from the physical world, causing the dialectic of our consciousnesses to stagnate and furthermore betraying our typically human way of existing through progressive and discontinuous structurations of behaviour.

In such circumstances, the only socially acceptable satire must be aligned to morality in a way to ensure that 'the species' is not let down; and therefore, all satire which does not comply with such shifts is considered as unethical and inhuman (*SAL* 513). Satire is then a further structure imposed upon the real to provide us with the illusion of a revolution that is really merely a reiteration and preservation of preconceived structures adhering to

absolute constructs of truth and ethics, which are meaningless in a world of emerging meaning.

Calling for satire to be redefined, Lewis rejected this model as an ineffective form of entertainment for the corrupted consciousness and the mere perpetuation of modernity's herd mentality, tending to assimilate the other to the same. Lewis believed satire to be of value only 'where [it] begins *to do something* to the person who is the occasion of the mirth' (my emphasis, *RA* 50). Genuine satire should in fact possess comedy's 'fresh appetite for the absurd and the foolish' (*RA* 50) whilst operating in 'fields which are commonly regarded as the preserve of more "serious" forms of reactions' (*SAL* 514). Effective satire, in fact, stands 'half-way between Tragedy and Comedy' (*SAL* 515) as it showcases the truth about our human condition of existence, which is a tragicomic truth. To Lewis, satire can be defined as 'the truth about any person' and the reconciliation of the absolute opposites of '*seeing-of-ourselves-as-others-see-us*' and the '*self-picture*' (my emphasis, *SF* 49). This is however a disagreeable reconciliation as it forces humanity to look beyond the many layers of the improved fictitious reality and perceive the truth about our perplexing state. For this reason, satire must establish itself in the domain that 'belongs to the "classical" manner of apprehending' (*SF* 52), one which existed before the layers of improved reality reshaped the real world into a human world. This highly phenomenological approach relies on 'the evidence of the eye rather than of the more emotional organs of sense' (*SF* 52) and translates to an externalist artistic idiom:

> It is easier to achieve those polished and resistant surfaces of a great externalist art in Satire. […] the non-human outlook must be there (beneath the fluff and pulp which is all that is seen by the majority) to correct our soft conceit. (*SF* 48)

To Lewis, the satirist should be interested in revealing 'what is behind the façade' (*SF* 52), adopting a 'non-human outlook' (*SF* 48) which is disentangled from preconceived reality and thus liberated from morality 'because no mind of the first order has ever itself been taken in, nor consented to take in others, by the crude injunctions of any purely moral code' (*SF* 43). With this in mind, Lewis asked how satire could then be effective and justify 'its cruelty and destructive values, its headsman's role' without the moral sanction' (*SAL* 512), and he answered by repositioning the border between comedy and satire. While comedy and satire share freedom from ethical impulses, comedy 'implies complete

satisfaction with the world as it is' (*RA* 50) whereas satire strives for a degree of change which can be delivered remarkably through style. Lewis, in fact stated:

> The reply to this, of course, is to be sought, first and foremost, in that neglected factor, style (and, further, in the fact that the artist is compelled to some extent to supply his own police). (*SAL* 512)

It is in fact from the 'resistant and finely sculptured surface of sheer words' (*SF* 46) which makes up the style of *The Apes of God* that something is accomplished in the real world and a non-thetic gesture is delivered remarkably from within the dynamics of reading. The compelling observations obtained by Lewis as a portrait-painter are the very ontological insights on human intersubjective experience that lead Merleau-Ponty to shift his enquiry from standard philosophy and traditional descriptive phenomenology to a pioneering phenomenological method rooted in the experience of aesthetic form. With a shared belief in the importance of restoring our impaired dialectics through finding innovative ways to exercise a credible non-human outlook on humanity, both Lewis and Merleau-Ponty considered style as the most effective means to counteract the damages inflicted on the life of consciousness by an intellectualism, which distanced humanity from reality and replaced the world of perception with an abstracted and conventional idea of *what it is like to be human*.

With what he regarded as the most radical philosophical act, Merleau-Ponty rejected what he referred to as *pensée de survol* (high-altitude-thinking) or rather the illusion of what philosopher Claude Leforte skilfully summarised in his preface of *The Visible and the Invisible* as 'a total explicitation of the world, of a complete adequation between thought and being, which nowise takes into account our insertion in the being of which we speak'.[155] Aiming for 'a complete reconstruction of philosophy',[156] Merleau-Ponty programmatically released the dualistic tensions of classical philosophy, overthrowing conventional viewpoints and setting a new practical field of philosophical enquiry. To Merleau-Ponty, in fact, philosophical enquiry had abandoned our lived and ambiguous experience of the physical world in favour of the fabricated point of view of a detached, fully formed and rational consciousness. This classical vantage point, with its apparatus of abstract imperatives, promoted the illusion of universality and *a priori* knowledge,

[155] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), xxv.
[156] Ibid., 193.

replacing perception with *judgement* and gradually separating consciousness from its paradoxical situation. The thought of a rational, abstract and generalised subjectivity is in fact merely a deception, as the embodied configuration of humanity makes our experience of *being-in-the-world* inevitably situated, thus absolutely unique. As we are implicated in space and time, Merleau-Ponty believed abstract categories are unable to account for the specificity of human experience. As a result of these considerations, the possibility of an absolute truth, which is a truth of 'transparency, recovery and recollection',[157] must be discarded if we are to account for the uniqueness of human experience:

> We say that true has always been true, but…the foundation of truth is not outside time; it is the opening of each moment of knowledge to those who will resume it and change its sense.[158]

Absolute truth is merely an abstract construct which cuts humanity off from the situatedness of our experience and creates the illusion of universality. Consequently, sedimented layers of non-situated truth set between us and the world, impeding our perception of a truth which emerges continually from our unrepeatable experiences of reality. Truth thus can only be a truth 'in which we participate, not insofar as we think the same thing but as we are, each in his own way, moved and touched by it'.[159] Merleau-Ponty in fact rejected the classical model of Kantian ethics as detached from concrete experience and as reporting to the abstract imperatives of the moral law, in favour of a new model of phenomenological ethics intrinsic to our *intersubjectivity* and rooted in our shared incarnated existence. It is through our experience of the other, in fact, that we are truly able to grasp the true nature of our own self, as *intersubjectivity* constitutes *intrasubjectivity* (as equally Lewis's 'the truth about any person' lies in the reconciliation of the absolute opposites of '*seeing-of-ourselves-as-others-see-us*' and the '*self-picture*' (my emphasis, *SF* 49)), as Merleau-Ponty pointed out:

> that which makes me unique, my fundamental capacity for self-feeling, tends paradoxically to diffuse itself. It is because I am a totality that I am capable of giving birth to another and of seeing myself limited by him.[160]

It is, in fact, the shared experience of our existential structures through our bodies that determines what Merleau-Ponty referred to as *universal singularity*. In other words, although

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[157] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 133.
[158] Ibid., 143-144.
[159] Ibid., 133.
[160] Ibid., 135.

our *being-in-the-world* is unique and unrepeatable, the fact that we share our embodied state with other humans is humanity's only true ethical imperative. It is only through our *intersubjective* experience that we gain consciousness of our ambiguity, as we explore the world through our bodies, but our bodies are also *of* the world. We can gain further insights into our ambiguous state by paying attention to our *intrasubjective* capacity for r*eversibility* which is the 'ultimate truth' by which our bodies can be simultaneously touching/touched, seeing/seen.[161] This process, however, is possible in principle but never fully realised, for we are unable to grasp the precise revelatory moment in which our two domains coincide. The crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological practice, however, is that it maintains that humanity must actively look for moments in which we are able to revive our grasp on our *reversibility* and pursue our natural propensity for self-modification through turning our attention to our *intersubjective* experiences. It is as a result of an artificial universality, which caused us to lose our ability to perceive ourselves outside a generalised idea of subjectivity, that we overlook our natural capacity for self-modification and fail to remain open to true perception, replacing our experience of ourselves and the world with preconceived structures which shield us from reality.

In his search for the most suitable field in which human ambiguity could be experienced, Merleau-Ponty became engrossed in language, set 'to follow[ing] [the] transition from the mute world to the speaking world'[162], hunting for insights into our *intersubjective* and *intrasubjective* experiences in linguistic structures as 'the others' words make me speak and think because they create within me another than myself'.[163] Merleau-Ponty guided his enquiry into language through a fundamental distinction between *spoken speech* as the sedimentation of previous acts of expression or constituted language, and *speaking speech*, in which the expression is inseparable from the expressed. In the latter, he unorthodoxly singled out literary expression as the linguistic domain in which the coming into being of language could be witnessed in its alive status:

> The living relation between speaking subjects is masked because one always adopts, as the model of speech, the statement of the indicative. One does so because he believes that, apart from statements, there remains only stammering and foolishness. Thus one overlooks how the tacit, unformulated and nonthematised enters into science, contributing to the determination of science's meaning […]. One overlooks the whole of literary expression, where we must

[161] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 155.
[162] Ibid., 154.
[163] Ibid., 224.

> precisely mark out what may be called 'oversignification' and distinguish it from non-sense. [164]

Merleau-Ponty identified literary language as the place in which *oversignification,* or rather what is left unsaid, unformulated and unthematised in language could be efficiently observed, mysteriously 'reorganising things said, affecting them with a new index of curvature' and bending them 'to a certain enhancement of meaning'.[165] Referring to this phenomenon as *coherent deformation*, Merleau-Ponty set to witness the workings of our *intersubjective* experience in this 'almost imperceptible inflection of ordinary usage'[166] and introduction of 'a consistency of a certain eccentricity'[167] in literary language:

> When I speak to another person and listen to him, what I understand begins to insert itself in the intervals between my saying things, my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me. Here it is the same thing to speak to and to be spoken to. This is the irreducible fact that all militant speech harbors and which literary expression brings before us, if ever we were tempted to forget it.[168]

These paradoxical workings which are concealed in most linguistic uses and overlooked in favour of efficiency, are laid bare in literary language through which we can experience our own *reversibility*. With genuine literary expression, in fact, there are no definite roles for speaking subjects, simultaneously speakers and hearers by cause of the embodied nature of an exchange which mirrors the structures of human consciousness. The author thus does not speak directly from their mind to the reader's mind in a unidirectional exchange, but they manifest an interior being externally by means of expressive traces left behind to solicit the totality of the reader's self, who is in turn required to embody this process of manifestation within their own self. Encounters with such type of coherently deformed linguistic systems elicit a synchronicity between the reader and the author's total selves which coincide as their situations merge. For Merleau-Ponty, however, not all literary expression originates from *coherent deformation,* as he stood opposed to the flawed achievements of formalism and thematic literature:

> It is certainly correct to condemn formalism, but it is usually forgotten that formalism's error is not that it overestimates form but that it esteems form so little that it abstracts it from meaning. In this regard formalism does not differ from a 'thematic' literature which also separates the meaning and the structure in

[164] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 144.
[165] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 19.
[166] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 132.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., 142.

> a work. The true opposite of formalism is a good theory of speech which distinguishes speech from any technique or device. Speech is not a means in the service of an external end. It contains its own ebbing, its own rule of usage and vision of the world, the way a gesture reveals the whole truth about a man.[169]

In *The Apes of God,* literary formalism is laid out phenomenologically as the most extreme symptom of *pensée de survol* which iterates across human domains, separating humanity from our embodied and situated experience. Lewis in fact spotlights formalism and its shortcomings by injecting fashionable literary styles into a coherently deformed system that hinges on a 'good theory of style, or speech'.[170]

As I will demonstrate through close reading, it is through a committed interaction with the coherently deformed language of *The Apes of God* that the reader can take part in the fundamental philosophical act of rejecting the *pensée de survol* through a reassessment of truth and ethics based on a renewed awareness of our *intersubjective* and *intrasubjective* experiences. Notwithstanding traditional assessments, this makes *The Apes of God* a profoundly humane work, even though its radical aims can be missed altogether when style is neglected.

Although a unified theory accounting for Lewis's intentions and achievements in *The Apes of God* never appeared, most readings of the novel, perhaps distracted by the rich history of the publication and the outrage which surrounded it, feature irreconcilable dualisms and assessments of the work as an idiosyncratic and fatalistic depiction of a state of affairs within contemporary society. While Hugh Kenner, overwhelmed by Lewis's style, dismissed the novel as a mere formalist exercise with a 'pointless obsession with the external',[171] Geoffrey Wagner overlooked style altogether, singling out an 'intelligent laughter' with 'a heightened sense of separation' emerging from Lewis's satirical modes.[172] In Paul Edwards's account, on the other hand, *The Apes of God* is a dramatisation of *The Art of Being Ruled* carried by a prose that in places is not 'electrified' or vital enough 'to sustain the ton of rubbish it is called on to transport into the reader's head'.[173] Furthermore, Edwards assessed Lewis's basing of his characters on recognisable people

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[169] Ibid., 89.
[170] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 77.
[171] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen,1954), 95-105.
[172] Geoffrey Wagner, *Wyndham Lewis, A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1957), 214-215.
[173] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 342-343.

as a 'danger' obscuring a 'larger satirical purpose'.[174] Lastly, in Andrzej Gasiorek's reading the novel is seen as 'a bleaker, harsher update on the satire of the pre-war bourgeois-bohemians earlier cauterised in *Tarr*'[175] and a fictional manifestation of the author's professional and personal frustrations in which Gasiorek detects 'a general sense of life's meaninglessness'[176], as Lewis's depictions seem to stand as 'pale simulacra of a truth that cannot be grasped by human beings'.[177] Gasiorek's final crucial assessment is that Lewis's apes were created to suggest that humanity is ultimately and inextricably trapped in the physicality of the body and that after all 'there may be no cartesian ghost in the machine at all'.[178]

As I hope to demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, far from an idiosyncratic outlet for nihilism, vengeance and antihumanist irreconcilabilities, *The Apes of God*'s aim is to provide a radical literary style which enables a reader to release the societal adhesive structures which impede true perception of ourselves and of the world, to bring the truth about our embodied existence into being and expose the potentialities of our incarnated life. Crucially, Lewis's achievements are delivered by means of a *coherently deformed* linguistic system and it is exclusively from within the reading act that Lewis's achievements can be perceived in action. The reader's perception of a series of stylistic phenomenological devices, such as the externalist method and the use of recognisable characters, gives us an opportunity to engage with a satirical purpose which is an expressive gesture and a force of change delivered to reach into the real world. This idea was elaborated by Lewis himself as, although he admitted that the subject of *The Apes of God* was the 'moronic inferno' and the 'utopia-gone-wrong' society which emerged between the two world wars (which had been already at the centre of his critical works *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled*), he clarified:

> *The Apes of God* […] produced a great deal of disturbance […]. The social decay of the insanitary trough between the two great wars is its subject, and it is accurate. However it is magnified and stylised. It is not portraiture. *A new world is created* out of the shoddy materials of everyday, and nothing does, or could, go over into that as it appeared in nature. (my emphasis, *RA* 214)

[174] Ibid.
[175] Andrzej Gasiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), 65.
[176] Ibid., 62.
[177] Ibid.74.
[178] Ibid 63.

Lewis's emphasis on the centrality of the style for a rendering of his subject which is not a mere portrait but 'a new world' is paramount. Referring to *The Apes of God* as a 'book of action', Lewis stated that an 'immense and critical' revaluation of all values occurred in modernity by which 'there is no present' as people live in the 'comfortable fog' of a past which suppresses reality (*SF* 50-51). The action claimed for *The Apes of God* is precisely to disperse the fog of the 'period-taste' and bring reality into being through making people 'understand the changes inside themselves' (*SF* 50-51). Lewis crucially stated that the satire of *The Apes of God* was 'concerned with man [and] not with manners' (*SF* 50-51).

Witness to the parasitic apparatus of modernity surviving in crippled consciousnesses caught in the comforting fog of the past, Lewis rejected the positing of reality and crafted a calculated disturbance aimed at bringing consciousness back to itself. Lewis identified distinctively ontological issues which he planned to address phenomenologically, through a style which evolved from the experiments on externalism, satire and abstraction in *BLAST* and *The Wild Body*. While the reader of *BLAST* is faced with a phantasmagoria of everyday modernity in a version that anchors consciousness and demands a rehabilitation of perceptual consciousness, *The Wild Body* invites us to a thought experiment joining Kerr-Orr as the embodiment of the evasive non-human gaze on the human species from a human character. In the short stories, the level of linguistic abstraction Lewis had already experimented with in *Enemy of the Stars* decreases while a straightforward referential aspect, solidly present in *BLAST* as London and modernity, is omitted with the action transported to a faraway land populated by archetypal characters. In *The Apes of God*, on the other hand, Lewis reintroduced a referential aspect paired with the intensity of the style he perfected and grounded theoretically in *The Wild Body*. The compelling contemporary reception of *The Apes of God* echoes the reception of *BLAST* both in intensity and difference in range not coincidentally, but precisely because of the shared phenomenological implications of the referential aspect.

In *The Apes of God,* this stylistic intervention intensifies as the abstracted modern individual which appeared in *BLAST* and the archetypal totems of the human species of *The Wild Body* are actualised and brought into the lived world of the reader. The recognisability of the characters, locations, societal rules, rituals, social events and modes of modernist formalism abolish the distance between the reader, the work, and the familiar everyday world as a new dimension steadily shifting across all three domains emerges from the

reader's interaction with style. This approach demands a first-person involvement, as the reader is forcefully and inevitably immersed in a stylised version of their everyday real, with style working to exterminate any opportunity for the reader to posit what they are exposed to as they are compelled to live it instead. I refer to this stylistic device as *hyper-recognition* and I propose the style of *The Apes of God* as a means for Lewis to bring ontological scrutiny into the real world.

Rejecting formalism, both Merleau-Ponty and Lewis favour the type of composition that conveys an upheaval managing 'to throw our image of the world out of focus, to distend the dimensions of our experience and pull them toward a new meaning'.[179] Genuine literature, in fact, reaches its full potential when it is capable of fracturing the 'ordinary ties' of pre-conceived reality displaying a new set of equivalences revealing 'a truer relation between things'.[180] While the stylistic experiments of *BLAST* and *The Wild Body* developed as Lewis's attempts to find ways to set in motion an *act of attention* in the reader, the satirical externalist prose of *The Apes of God* appears as a fully formed style and a masterpiece in *coherent deformation* belonging to the domain of constituting language and establishing meanings in a lived context of expression, through a style which actualises a typically human manner of *being-in-the-world*.

The close reading in the final section of this chapter explores the workings of Lewis's style as it promotes a fundamental awareness of *reversibility* within human consciousness and between human dimensions steering the reader towards a complete revaluation of truth and ethics.

Before 'the formal raising of the curtain on the stage', an emblematic prelude opens the novel with the reader shown into the Follet mansion, residence of the 'oldest veteran gossip-star', Lady Fredigonde:

> A CAT like a beadle goose-stepped with eerie convulsions out of the night cast by a cluster of statuary, from the recesses of the entrance hall. A maid with matchless decorum left a door silently, she removed a massive copper candlestick. She reintegrated the gloom that the cat had left.
>
> The cat returned, with the state of a sacred dependant, into the gloom. Discreet sounds continually rose from the nether stair-head, a dark whisper of infernal

[179] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 91.
[180] Ibid., 56.

> presences. The antlers of the hall suggested that full-busted stags were embedded in its substance. A mighty canvas contained in its bronze shadows an equestrian ghost, who otherwise might have ruffled the empty majesty of the house with confusing posthumous activity. (*AG* 11)

Stylistically reminiscent of the 'ADVERTISEMENT' which introduces *Enemy of the Stars,* the scene is set in a Victorian mansion haunted by the past in the form of objects besieging the monumental architecture of the building. A cat and a maid, seemingly interchangeable as sharing the same dignified attitude to movement in the darkness, stand for the only representatives of life in an otherwise comatose building.

When Lady Fredigonde's 'savage head' awakens, 'the oldest spoilt-baby in Britain by seven summers', described as architecturally 'trapezoid in profile—an indoor model of the Maya pyramid', opens the action on a complex ritual: 'The Toilette of a Veteran Gossip Star'. Promptly assisted by the 'body-servant' maid Bridget, the ritual begins with 'human basket-making', or rather, the making of the bun, and proceeds with the contemplation of potential beauty treatments: the selection of the cap, the ribbon with the clan tartan, the lozenge, the locket and the brooch, all instruments of a liturgy and paraphernalia of the 'decent emperor' awaiting to be crowned for the day (*AG* 11-12). Establishing *The Apes of God* in the great satirical tradition, the prologue evokes the mock-heroic mode of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock,* as something of the triviality of a woman's boudoir is given an epic treatment. The apparatus of sylphs and gnomes devised by Pope to help direct the fate of the heroine, however, is replaced in the Follett mansion by infernal presences and ghosts guiding the decrepit Lady Fredigonde to the inexorable event that closes the novel. In Lewis's own words, Fredigonde is 'herself the prelude'. Embodying the complex layered system of meaning that introduces and summarises the different realms of reality accessed by the reader through the novel, this character acquires additional layers of meaning in each chapter.

Hardly physically present in the action and only properly appearing in the opening and closing sections of the novel, the decrepit Fredigonde is gradually associated with embodiments of England's political situation, reality, art, satire, modernity, the mind, and the crippled consciousness of the modern individual. In this early example of Fredigonde's characterisation, the solid style of the prelude reaches a new level of intensity:

> Aside from that self-expression there was nothing left in her body. The neck had survived, that was still elastic, but it dwelt upon a plaster-bust. Her arms were of plaster—they moved, but upon either hand of a 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 clock-work of her trunk. In dumb-show or stationary make-believe she would sweep out and roll with it, as if it were still carried hither and thither, from apartment to apartment, or swept through the air above her hunter, strapped to a black billy-cock, as it galloped after foxes, or else, tossed in the sports of Venus in preposterous four posters of the epoch of the middleclass Elisabeth, Victoria. Ex Gossip-column-belle, she behaved like an independent elf that had crept into this roughly carved knap. She directed her eyes this way and that, propelled the tongue and lips with appropriate phrases, peering now and then down the dark shafts, godspeeding the offerings of milk, fruit and eggs. In this manner she had composed her differences with matter. (*AG*, 14)

As an ex-gossip-column-belle, Lady Fredigonde is an ex-expert in factual reality who now lives outside reality, stuck in a mentally rehearsed past and merely situated in the real world through material occupancy, trapped in a dysfunctional body. Fredigonde is only distinguishable from matter thanks to her linguistic ability, although her speech, made up of conventional compositions, is hardly a sign of her presence in the world. Fredigonde is the embodiment of a malfunctioning consciousness, as we learn in this passage:

> Cut off from the optic or tactile connections, Fredigonde 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, or personal chatterboxing and shortsighted non-sense. It had been at the allotted span that the great reversal had been completed, of outside into in—so all that is external was become nothing but a burst of dreaming, railed through and fought out foot to foot upon the spot. (*AG* 18)

Fredigonde's mental idiom is the stream of consciousness of the fashionable interior monologue, presented as a combination of 'Stein-stutter' (*SF* 47), non-sense and a mental re-enactment of past conversations. As a crippled modern consciousness, Fredigonde is cut off from everything external which is only 'a burst of dreaming' and turned inwards towards the unconscious, in a process referred to as 'the great reversal'. In *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1* Lewis justified his dismissal of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence in *The Apes of God*, because as authors they championed the illusive unconscious, or rather the 'romantic abdominal Within', as they 'abandoned the sunlit, pagan surface of the earth' and so gave rise to literary work which was a 'jelly-fish that floats in the centre of the subterranean stream of the "dark" unconscious' (*SF* 47-48).

The reader is exposed to pages of professionally crafted stream of consciousness, in the style of Stein's writing, as Fredigonde re-enacts a past conversation with another character described as an attractive curly haired albino by the name of Horace Zagreus. Emblematically, we learn that 'all that [Zagreus] says is most sensible and true and something that's worth listening to at all events' (*AG* 19). Fredigonde then relives a conversation with Zagreus on the worthlessness of names as 'tags', and 'descriptive whatnots', followed by an oratory piece by Zagreus on language:

> But we survive by words he says—things perish. He got that most likely from those Smart Alicks he goes about with. In some respects he is a master of paradox. By words, this is it seems the idea, we are handed over to the tender mercies of the Past. That is that parasitic no-longer-with-us class of have-beens, he cleverly calls it. In other words the dead. (*AG* 20)

So early in the novel, Horace Zagreus, 'master of paradox', denies the importance of names but draws attention to the endurance of words, and their ability to give us access to the past. The past, however, is death and as Zagreus remarks:

> The dead get us, as he puts it, caught at the extremity of a sentence, baited with a sweet rhyme—that is excellent. Then in lexicons we succumb at every turn, they are ambushed. 'All language whatever is a dead tongue'. How true that is! But that is how they catch us live-ones dash it, the old devils—those life coveting dead'uns, to live upon us All-alive-ohs—as second rate succubuses. (*AG* 20)

The effects of these fragments, supposedly by Zagreus, juxtaposed with the constant intrusion of Fredigonde's idiotic stream of consciousness, constitute a metacommentary on the deadness of the medium which aligns with the reader's own immediate experience of the satirised internal monologue. The piece, in fact, reproduces the reader's own feeling of being unwillingly narcotised by a style which is lifeless, as it demands nothing of a reader besides complete surrender. Amplifying this effect further, the overall feeling of apathy and lifelessness takes the shape of a 'disembodied odour that was not there' (*AG* 20). The odour appears in Fredigonde's mind as soon as she detaches herself from her body as 'the eyes ceased to function' while she 'sniffed without nostrils' (*AG* 21). The mouldering stench, described as 'an inner wind blown against the inside of the senses, filling the brain' mirrors the workings of a style that numbs the senses and hypnotises consciousness (*AG* 21).

Further stream of consciousness follows with sections of conversations about the all-important lace cap intricately woven in the monologues. The sacred object infiltrated by Pope into Belinda's boudoir is a Bible, turning the heroine's toilette into a self-referential parodic mass. Here it is substituted with Fredigonde's lace cap. Worn to adorn the head, which is the physical manifestation of Fredigonde's only reality, the lace-cap turns into a sacred object with Fredigonde gradually drifting off under it:

> Far calmer at last, Fredigonde again withdrew. She closed her eye-lids to relax herself. The day and night cinema that exists immediately within was encouraged to operate. The brain on its own initiative from its projections was flashing lace-caps upon the screen. All her collection was idly called forth […]. (*AG* 23)

The cinematic brain, working in isolation from the eyes flashes false images as Fredigonde loses herself in the most peculiar dream. Her collection of lace-caps ends up in a museum, complete with captioned tags, vitrines filled with busts and visitors to this acclaimed exhibition. The visitors' gaze on the lace-caps is emblematically felt by Fredigonde as a gaze upon herself:

> they were bending over the cases, she felt cool in their tremendous shadows—these were TIME-SHADOWS of spatial beings—they cooled her shoulders like the shadows from precipices. (*AG* 24)

And:

> Her name was constantly spelt out, in foreign accents, very halting, from the typed etiquettes, by sluggish baedekered visitors, frequenting the cap-cases—it was natural, it was there to commemorate a head. (*AG* 24)

Although Lady Fredigonde's head is the subject of the exhibition and her name is uttered by all visitors, what is on show is merely a collection of fashionable paraphernalia positioning the owner socially. The visitors' comments, in fact, are just empty gossip by cold or rather lifeless 'TIME-SHADOWS' as the temporary figments of an inward mind unable to perceive the world outside itself. Once again, the medium references itself as the lace-caps mirror the dead words of the fashionable style in question, the empty signifiers of a mind filled with deadness as it perpetuates an inward life outside reality. After her death, Lady Fredigonde's physical head will be no more and the lace-caps left behind in the physical world will be the only remaining signifiers for her mind, the source

of Fredigonde's fictitious internal life, thus merely signified by a fashion item belonging to a dead past and worn to indicate social status.

The Prologue's final scene features Lady Fredigonde's abandonment of the chair, or rather 'her cyclopean cradle', in an epic operation described as 'two masses [coming] apart', with the chair yawning as a 'shell that had been, according to some natural law, suddenly vacated by its animal' (*AG* 28). With her eyes finally open and beginning 'to strike more firmly and to register', Lady Fredigonde gradually gets her personality back 'fragment by fragment' as 'her head was lived in once again' (*AG* 29). A further passage then establishes the significance of her character:

> When they were near the rear of the chair […] They entered the spotlight shot in a shaft computed to be ninety million miles from the solar projector—so stupendously aloft, in its narrow theatre, for this human performance. She lowered her body into its appointed cavity, in the theatrical illumination, ounce by ounce—back first, grappled to Bridget, bull-dog grit all-out—at last riveted as though by suction within its elastic crater, corseted by its mattresses of silk from waist to bottom, one large feeble arm riding the stiff billows of its substantial fluted brim. (*AG* 29)

Protagonist in the 'human performance' that is about to enfold, Lady Fredigonde's infirm body is appearing gradually on stage 'ounce by ounce'. Prophesising that there will be a time in which she 'shall not be able to move about like that', Lady Fredigonde becomes hypnotised by modernity's omnibuses, the super-traffic and the new skyscraping flats in a rush of interior monologue—an incessant paragraph-long list beyond punctuation stands as a phantasmagoria of all things modern with the reader only able to anchor themselves visually to the following capitalisations: VANITY FAIR, DROPPING THE PILOT, GREAT WAR. (*AG* 30)

Haunting the mind of the reader, the three phrases work as an evocative tripartite system, a riddle from a peculiar sphinx for safe passage into the novel. The capitalisation joins up the three phrases visually and simultaneously isolates them from the rest of the lowercased paragraph. Although seemingly unrelated, they emerge from the satirised stream of consciousness as a floating open system with the reader called to fill in the gaps of signification.

The prologue only accounts for the first thirty pages of a monumental six-hundred-and-fifty-page novel. The action has not opened yet, but the reader is already aware of the strong mental energy required to engage with a style that is sculptural. The action then opens officially at the Follett mansion with an introduction to several socially well-defined characters at ease in the grandiose interiors. A young Jewish East Londoner by the name of Archie Margolin, protégé/assistant of Lady Fredigonde's nephew Dick Whittington, however, delivers the view of the outsider, setting the scene more precisely:

> So gold-curled flat-buttocked East-end cupid, he sveltly stood, in the day-dream of his scornful vulgar elegance, surrounded by such upholstered shells of vanished cyclop beef-eaters (and their dead belles, whose strapping ham-pink limbs in fancy he decorated with bulging period furdelows, window dressed, baldly spread-eagled, for his distant appetites). Watched by substances of an alien life he was nevertheless oppressed and contemptuous: this culture was dead as mutton but its great carcass offended him—it would take a hundred years to melt. He grinned and yawned.
> […]
> 'The space-mad, the English! –from their spacious days of their great Elisabeth to the Imperial Victoria. But—now that space, itself, has shrunk under their feet, by time contracted—what a race of Pygmies!'. So the great furniture shouted to his senses the message of its empty scale. (*AG* 49)

The spectral remains of this 'alien life' which so offend the outsider are showcased through the decrepitude of Lady Fredigonde's body permeating the architecture and paraphernalia which make up the Follett mansion. Cadaverous presences of a 'dead culture' appear in the flamboyantly decorated interiors, as we learn that the all-important space has been shrunk by time. The reader is then initiated to three exercises in perspective:

> For a moment they grinned in each other's eyes—the animal, which has suddenly caught sight of its own person in a glass, and for a moment, before it thinks it has happened on another dog, perceives itself. (*AG* 45)

> He [Margolin] returned into the centre of the room. He approached another mirror and observed his face, inclined to burst out laughing as it watched him slyly in the polished surface. (*AG* 50)

> Dick flung his body into as sofa (which gasped in its wheezy bowels) and then slightly eructated, with a heavy zigzag movement up his body, the back of his flat occiput becoming for a moment as stiff as a poker—from hair en brosse,

> flourishing straight up into the air in the same plane as his neck, and so in a sheer undeviating drop to his coccyx, against the high-backed squatting apparatus to which he had brutally committed his person. Once more a ball of wind made its way irresistibly up his neck. His trunk shook, contracted and relaxed, to assist the slight explosion. (*AG* 40)

In the first passage, the initial scene with two characters gazing at each other suddenly turns into an animal gazing at its own image in a mirror, overturning the reader's perspective on the scene completely in a rendering of the phenomenon of *reversibility* and its inscrutable quality. The juxtaposition of the words 'its own person', together with the oscillatory effect endorsed by the calculated sequence of words 'animal', 'person' and 'dog', draw the reader's attention to transiently perceive human bodies and animal bodies on the same plane. Moreover, not only do the two characters temporarily merge into one image to account stylistically for the nature of their *intersubjective* experience, but the precise moment in which they recognise themselves as embodied through perception of their own body through the other's body is traced meticulously as a flash in their minds, before they regress to their original unaware state.

In the second passage, Margolin is described as approaching '*another* mirror' although the reader is witnessing Margolin gazing into an actual mirror for the first time. In fact, before this scene what Margolin gazed into was not a conventional mirror but a rendition of the world around him (including other humans in his field of perception) as he perceived the deadness of the structures which surrounded him, rejecting them in favour of his own situated truth. Even though Margolin is supposedly watching his own reflection in the mirror, *reversibility* and *intrasubjectivity* are stylistically rendered through an effect expressed by the phrase 'as it watched him'. This time, the body, 'it', watches Margolin, 'him', as he temporarily grasps his ambiguity. This process culminates in a fit of laughter.

In the final passage an entire paragraph is dedicated to Dick Whittington's approaching the sofa with the seemingly straightforward intention of simply sitting down. The human body and its movements are magnified, dissected, and dislocated, as well as accounted for on the same plane as the induced movements of an inert object, the sofa. The reader encounters a solid medium by which the gaze on the human body is non-human, as we forcefully unperceive the body and reperceive it through its movements which are mysteriously joined to the sofa's own. Through the reading act, we are granted access to

stylised renditions of those very rare moments in which we can be fully aware of our embodied existence.

The reader's involvement increases in intensity with the appearance of three further characters on the scene, the first of which already partially introduced in Lady Fredigonde's mental digressions as Horace Zagreus, who makes an official entrance with an impromptu visit to the Follett mansion. The character's name has strong Dionysian connotations, evoking both the Roman Epicurean poet Horace, and the Orphic god Zagreus (son of Zeus king of gods and Persephone queen of the underworld). Horace Zagreus's characterisation, however, is based on the Irish poet Horace de Vere Cole, an eccentric prankster connected to the Bloomsbury group. Furthermore, Zagreus's physical appearance as a curly haired moustachioed albino is reminiscent of another character with a similar prominent role in Lewis's fictional creations: Kerr-Orr, 'soldier of humour' and narrator of *The Wild Body* stories. The reader potentially engages with the character before the action officially opens, with the characterisation radiating a multi-layered system of connotations to the classical world, the reader's everyday reality and Lewis's previous yarn spinner creation. With the action developing further, we learn that Zagreus is a partially (or conveniently) deaf highbrow and a closeted gay man who studied at Oxford. Because of his difficult financial situation as an unemployed ex-surveyor, he visits the Follett mansion in the first chapter intending to sway the family lawyer to secure the Follett fortune before his cousin, Dick Whittington.

Zagreus is always accompanied by Daniel Boleyn 'Mister Only-Nineteen' or 'Dan', 'Dante-young', an extremely handsome *tabula rasa* young man, supposedly a poet and future genius, according to Zagreus, even though Dan has to his account only 'one most lovely poem' in free verse. Dan is a moronic and 'incredibly helpless boy-in-distress', with aching feet, who is incapacitated by 'direct references to the dimensions of his body', as he moves 'everywhere with the silence of a spirit' because, apart from an occasional Stein-stutter, he has very little to say (*AG* 107-108). Zagreus persuades Dan to pursue artistic greatness, forcefully acting as his mentor with the promise of a free studio and an all-important and necessary initiation to the complex world of 'The Apes of God'. In the first two chapters, the pair Zagreus/Dan develops as a distorted version of *The Divine Comedy*'s pilgrim-guide system, as they prepare to descend into the sinful world of the apes, moving in a pair at an 'unusual speed for human beings' (*AG* 46). Transiently

coinciding with the author, Zagreus announces the descent, emblematically stretching 'out his arm to indicate their path, carpeted with his dreams' (*AG* 49). The pilgrim-guide structure then iterates with Zagreus in the role of the pilgrim and the elusive character of Pierpoint in the role of the guide:

> You have not heard of Pierpoint? No one ever sees him now—he has shut himself up for some reason. Pierpoint is a painter turned philosopher. He says he wants a studio, but as he never paints I can't see what he wants one for. He models himself upon Whistler. (*AG* 138)

Another radiating characterisation reveals itself to the reader gradually starting with the name Pierpoint modelled on the English hangman executioner Albert Pierrepoint. The 'painter turned philosopher', however, takes inspiration, we are told, from the renowned anti-art-establishment American painter James Abbott McNeal Whistler who abandoned the mainstream Realist movement with the intention to create his own painterly style and founded the Aesthetic movement with a group of dissident artists. The correspondences with Lewis's own career do not stop here. Whistler, in fact, shifted in protest at the contemporary debate on art's subject matter, developing his own philosophy of art, as he focused on the study of form, Japanese aesthetics and the relationship between music and colour. Furthermore, through restricting his palette, altering the tonal contrast and rejecting the linear perspective, Whistler painted with the aim of drawing the viewer to form itself, rather than to the subject of the work. Finally, Whistler was the protagonist of the notorious *Whistler vs Ruskin* trial, in which he sued art critic John Ruskin for libel, because of his critical review of the painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*. Despite the trial ending in Whistler's favour, he received little in damages and ended up bankrupted by the legal costs. Attempting to rekindle his damaged career and reputation, Whistler published a pamphlet titled *Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics,* which contained his account of the trial and 'The Gentle Art of Making Enemies'*,* conveying Whistler's vicious counterattack and advocating for a renewal of aesthetic principles. Whistler's writing is satirical and belligerent as he singles out and attacks critics, artists and patrons, calling for a new aesthetics to replace the dominant academicism so damaging to the future of arts.

The connections to Lewis's own career and the composition and foreseen reception of *The Apes of God*, including a prophecy of the publication of *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1*, are rather explicit here. What is most compelling, however, is that despite the clear

projection of Lewis's own personal reality through Pierpoint's characterisation, the character is physically absent from the action of the novel. Pierpoint's indirect presence manifests itself incisively through a long-written document called 'The Encyclical' addressed to his disciple Zagreus, who in turn will re-addresses it to Dan as a necessary brief for his initiation. Pierpoint's presence is also channelled through Zagreus himself, as the reader soon becomes acquainted with 'the broadcast', or rather with Zagreus's only official medium which develops as a series of faithful repetitions of Pierpoint's own past interventions in society. Furthermore, the perplexing dual Pierpoint/Zagreus voice, together with the iterating pilgrim-guide system, develops further through the reader's engagement with the style of 'The Encyclical', as I shall discuss.

As an epistle in the form of a memorandum, the title 'The Encyclical' is suggestive of a high-ranking official document with doctrinal content and appearing copied and pasted to Zagreus's first letter to Dan, functioning as inauguration to his initiation into the world of the apes. In the letter, the already fragile boundaries between fiction and reality disintegrate further with a description too familiar to the contemporary reader of *The Apes of God*. The 'societification of art', in fact, is the subject of the letter with the explicit reference to old moribund Bloomsbury ('the bloom is gone') presented as the guilty party and described as 'a select and snobbish club' with its 'foundation-members consist[ing] of monied middleclass descendants of Victorian literary splendour' (*AG* 131-132). The letter goes on to describe a 'a novel type' of bohemian by choice, or an 'economist-utopian' organised in hordes of wealthy pseudo-artists pricing real artists out of studio space, as 'Parnassus becomes a recreation ground of unlimited extent and the humblest citizen is an amateur of some or all the arts' (*AG* 126). The letter goes on to outline that in such a 'little artificial world of carefully fostered self-esteem', the cults of the 'amateur' and the 'child artist' emerged while art schools began to promote a 'universal cultured amateurism upon the Western super-democratic pattern'. (*AG* 126-132) These pseudo writers, painters, sculptors and composers are what Pierpoint refers to as 'Apes of God', or rather, 'prosperous mountebanks who alternatively imitate and mock at and traduce those figures they at once admire and hate' (*AG* 131). Described as efficiently organised to occupy all positions of influence within the art world, they programmatically endorse each other's work and live in 'organised hatred of living 'genius'' (*AG* 132). Furthermore, the apes are considered as a dangerous anti-creational force to be reckoned with as they influence taste and the means of art production with their wealth. Pierpoint concludes

that the apes are 'more damaging' than the general public would perhaps imagine 'for the very reason that they are identified, in the mind of the public, with art and intelligence' (*AG* 129).

Whether the contemporary reader's response to this apocalyptic vision of the cultural world was indignation, animosity, or amusement, the specific references disintegrate the screen of fiction, allowing for a peculiar space to emerge which sets the grounds for multiple and direct appeals to the reader:

> In my review of this society, especially with regard to its reaction upon art, I rather insist upon than seek to slur over the fact that I am a party. But it is amongst the parties that the acting judge is ultimately chosen. Where else should you get him from? The supreme judge is constantly absent. (*AG* 126)

In the fictional world of the novel the letter was originally composed by Pierpoint and re-endorsed through Zagreus's forwarding of the document to Dan, although the vocal presence of the author is felt rather strongly and this effect is amplified by the specific references to the studio rental crisis and to Bloomsbury in particular. The sudden shift from the fiction of the Follett mansion to the reality of the reader's everyday life is paired with an intense overlapping of voices, as Pierpoint, Zagreus and Lewis himself speak through the medium of the letter. In the passage above, the cryptic voice declares that they too are 'a party' in the state of the society described, as well as the 'acting judge' replacing 'the supreme judge' who is 'constantly absent'. The passage seems to indirectly reference Pierpoint's own absence at the fictional level, as the character functions as a non-situated judging voice communicating through broadcasts, a form of *spoken speech,* or sedimentation of previous acts of expression. Another layer of meaning is then added to this system as the passage continues:

> It is on account of the superior percentage of truth in composition of your glosses that your statement is erected into a standard. And 'of an opinion which is no longer doubted, the evidence ceases to be examined'. The finding of the supreme judge would automatically dissolve us all into limbo. (*AG* 126)

In this second clarification, the letter refers to the medium of the novel and to the ineffectiveness of Pierpoint's disembodied broadcasts for the purpose of uncovering a meaningful truth, which is a truth emerging from examination and not from statements which have already been spoken. Furthermore, a supreme judge should not be sought as

an opinion transformed into standard 'ceases to be examined', driving us towards sedimented absolute truths. The quotation in this passage is a direct unreferenced quote from Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. The phrase belongs to Johnson's examination of Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* which continues as follows:

> A writer who obtained his full purpose loses himself in his own lustre. Of an opinion which is no longer doubted, the evidence ceases to be examined. Of an art universally practiced, the first teacher is forgotten. Learning once made popular is no longer learning; it has the appearance of something which we have bestowed upon ourselves, as the dew appears to rise from the field which it refreshes.
>
> To judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them. That which is easy at one time is difficult at another […].[181]

This reference opens up yet another dimension of intertwined reality and fiction, with the passage acquiring a dual critical function. While at the fictional level Pierpoint invites Zagreus to judge for himself the truth of what is outlined in the letter, the explicit reference transports the reader to Johnson's renowned discussion of the importance of shedding pre-conceptions derived from detrimental standardised aesthetics and of situating the work when judging an author's creation. The three voices (Pierpoint/Zagreus/Lewis) thus branch out of the novel and while Zagreus is called to judge Pierpoint's evaluation, with Dan called to the same by Zagreus, the reader is called to judge both the veridicality and the aesthetic value of Lewis's work.

Furthermore, at the centre of Johnson's consideration lies Dryden's paramount contribution to English criticism with a reminder of the importance of Dryden's active intervention to counteract the fact that 'critical principles were then in the hands of a few, who had gathered them partly from the ancients and partly from the Italians and French'.[182] With this direct reference to Dryden's work through Johnson, Lewis sets off an unspoken discussion with his readership around the stylistic choices of *The Apes of God* and the aims of the work. A parallel is created between Lewis's stylistic interventions in the novel and Dryden's disregard for aesthetic standards as he created and imported new formal structures into poetry, but the parallel is also extended to the satirical subjects. In fact, in *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1* Lewis admires Dryden's criteria for the

[181] William Hazlitt, *Johnson's Lives of the British Poets* (London: Nathaniel Cooke, Milford House, Strand, 1854), 182.
[182] Ibid.

selection of his subjects which were chosen not 'because they were naughty' but most importantly 'because they were dull [and] they had sinned against the Reason' (*SF* 43). Another emblematic intervention further elucidates the role of the author/s of 'The Encyclical':

> Some—who are upon the outside limit of the gaussian law of error—we instinctively admire most, not least. We feel I think that they are most alive. But you cannot 'be alive' and adjudicate. –There is no universal consent upon the subjects of which I am treating. […] Things however that I have put forward as facts—not as fair comment—will be verified by you in due course. Fortunately there no one can balk the truth of my evidence. (*AG* 126)

Attempting to justify his position as the author of 'The Encyclical', Pierpont declares that humanity is governed by the gaussian law of errors which favours the general facts that make up the social body, cancelling out individual peculiarities considered as mere noise which obscures an ideal value. Both naturally attracted to and threatened by individuals who, like Pierpoint stand outside this law, humanity silences their opinions on the grounds that it is only through preserving ideal values and average standards that society can be rationalised and kept in its homogeneous existence. The reader, however, is made aware of the fact that they will be able to 'verify' what is presented to them as facts rather than the author's opinions through multiple opportunities to contemplate both the author's role and their own role in the handling and evaluation of these facts. The rationale of *The Apes of God* is then explicitly referred to:

> Without going further into this, I have laid bare for you the present predicament of art. I have given an outline of the present dispositions of its natural audience—showing how the decline in their wealth, culture and sense of responsibility has brought down with it those intellectual activities that depended upon it. […]
> My information upon these subjects is quite first-hand. You may think the picture I draw is unfair (if you like 'ferocious') or that my sources of information are interested and unfriendly. (*AG* 133)

And previously,

> I will make them parade before you in their borrowed plumes like mannequins, spouting their trite tags, and you shall judge if my account is true. (*AG* 131)

The metareferences to the novel's own aims and strategy fuse fiction and reality further, with the reader now officially joining the action as a secondary pilgrim preparing for the

descent into the world of the apes. The Lewis/Pierpoint/Zagreus system is then elucidated further as the conclusion to the letter confirms:

> There can only be one judge, and I am not he.
> I am not a judge but a party. […]
> The flourishing and bombastic role that you may sometimes see me in, that is an effect of chance. Or it is a caricature of some constant figure in the audience, rather than what I am (in any sense) myself. Or, to make myself clearer, it is my opposite. (*AG* 133-134)

The crafting of the Pierpoint/Zagreus dynamic is not the mere introduction of an external authorial intelligence but a realisation of Lewis's firm belief in satire's ontological power as '*everyone* should be laughed at or else *no one* should be laughed at' (*MWA* 89). Both Pierpoint and Zagreus are in fact satirical renderings of the author delivered through the 'flourishing and bombastic role' Lewis carved for himself. In the passage in question, amplified by the use of the word 'audience', the three voices are intertwined as we are once again reminded that the voice is a party to the facts and therefore unable to act as the ultimate judge of what is presented. While Pierpoint is the satire of the gesture initiated by Lewis through the composition of *The Apes of God* and of Lewis's unlikely metaphorical exit from the society he is satirizing, hence the character's physical absence, Zagreus is the satire of the author of *The Apes of God*, created to remind us that anyone with such an arsenal of fastidiously detailed gossip at his disposal cannot but be not only a party in the state of affair described, but an active participator. Moreover, 'the broadcast' appears as a satire of Lewis's own critical modes, as a series of Pierpoint's sedimented interventions in society faithfully replicated and recycled by Zagreus. Merely repeated by the imitator-ape Zagreus, the lengthy broadcast sections are laughed at by the apes as the tedious monologues of an imaginary power principle performed by a madman. Furthermore, strategically inserted between the action, the broadcasts provoke boredom in the reader, identifying such modes as incapable of accomplishing anything in the real world and thus justifying the need for the style of *The Apes of God* to make up for that ineffectiveness. The interminable tirades are strategically juxtaposed with the style of *The Apes of God,* standing as a reminder of the ineffectual nature of a truth that is handed out as an absolute judgement. Hence, the frequent reminder that Pierpoint/Zagreus/Lewis cannot act as the judge because 'there can only be one judge' and it is the reader, creator of their own truth which gradually emerges from their interaction with the style of *The Apes of God*. This satirical system is reinforced further in the very last chapter of the novel, as a bankrupt

Zagreus, who has spent a considerable amount of money supporting Pierpoint's intellectual enterprise, is desperate to inherit the Follett fortune and accepts a marriage proposal from the decrepit Lady Fredigonde, emblem of the societal adhesiveness Zagreus is ultimately unable to escape.

'The Encyclical' inaugurates Dan's many encounters through each chapter in the world of the apes with 'The split-man', or rather a second-hand book dealer and aspiring novelist crippled with fabricated complexes, whose writing style is very much based on James Joyce's; a group of dilettante artists channelling idiotic art-talk in pretentiously decorated artless studios; the London intelligentsia engaged in the art of gossiping at a liqueur chocolates party, and finally, a couple of lesbian painters who mistake Dan for a model compelling him to come to terms with his naked body.

Daily instructions in the form of further letters from Zagreus guide Dan through this 'field-work' until chapter nine, when the two finally reconvene on the way to a dinner party at Lionel and Isabel Kein's. The protagonists of this chapter, suggestively titled 'Chez Lionel Kein, Esq.', are based on real life Marcel Proust translator and Lewis's patron, Stephen Hudson and his wife. The chapter opens with this scene:

> Mr Zagreus stared at his imposing shadow moving slightly upon Kein's door. He steadied himself against this exenterated paper-maché self, dodging parallax as it moved with the precision of its contingent nature—registering the slightest breath of life disturbing the higher dimensional shape it weighted upon. *On ne mesure pas le hommes à la toise!* Dan's shadow, as well, waited upon him, not upon its original. Dan was there like a shadow too, on and before the door. Were they inside the door as well, in further projections of still less substance—their stationary presences multiplied till they stretched out like a theatre queue? Was there anything after the shadow (as was there anything behind the man)? The queue of four might be multiplied to any power within, from where still no sound issued. (*AG* 249)

Zagreus gazes at his own shadow as another one-dimensional puppet version of his self faithfully following the movements of its original, whereas Dan's shadow is akin to its original as he himself is merely a shadow of his own self. Zagreus then visualises a line taking shape of further projections of his own self on the inside of Kein's door when he is interrupted by the striking vision of a horse 'black and primitive' (*AG* 249). Drawing on Plato's allegory of the chariot as the human soul, and the charioteer as the human mind in constant struggle to bring the black horse of irrational and bodily driven emotions

under control, Zagreus's vision is of a 'mortuary chariot' from which 'Proust peeped' (*AG* 249). The reader is introduced to the Proustian residence haunted by shadowy unsubstantial time-bound self-projections, with the soul turned into a mortuary chamber, merely a storage space for deceased bodies which are kept looking as much alive as possible for the purpose of ritualistic viewings and ceremonies. This cryptic passage sets the necessary scene for what is to come, as a conversation about the value of Proust's work reveals itself as a series of crucial philosophical discoveries elucidating the vision of the theatre queue further.

Entering the building described as 'a parallelepiped with all required by the human worm for its need', Dan and Zagreus finally meet the host, a 'beardless but military moustachioed Dr Freud' and 'perfect *Proust-character*' (*AG* 249). Kein's obsession with Proust takes him to great lengths, with fantasies about his appearance in *À La Recherche du temps perdu* as a 'blessed martyr transfixed with the arrows of Truth' (*AG* 261). Amusing Zagreus greatly, this confession triggers a broadcast that forces Kein, or rather '*A Li in search of an author*' (*AG* 259), into justifying his bizarre desires. In the broadcast chapter titled 'the peroration' the work of Proust, the high priest of gossip, is scrutinised in a satire of satire. Challenging 'the devotee of Truth' Kein to expand on the aspirations he shares with his wife Isabel, Zagreus announces that their Proustian admiration is fuelled by a voracious appetite for gossip and the fact that Proust's satire is only critical in a way that 'makes people uncritical and comfortable' (*AG* 266-267). Zagreus then interprets Kein's passion for Proust's work as a power complex, as their "'self-feeling" grows fat upon the people [they] can intellectually devour or dominate—in Fiction' (*AG* 267). Isabel acknowledges that she had 'never analysed the effect of reading that way', with this statement affecting the reader, now inevitably alerted to the effects of their own immediate reading. Zagreus proceeds:

> How is it that no one ever sees *himself* in the public mirror—in official Fiction? That is the essential point of my argument with Li. Everybody gazes into the public mirror. No one sees himself! What is the use of a mirror then if it reflects a World, always, without the principal person—the Me? Let us put it in this way. You would not like to look into such a mirror and suddenly find *yourself* there. […]flesh and blood will not stand *that*!' (*AG* 267-268)

And again:

> People feel themselves under the special protection of the author when they read a satire on their circle—am I right!
> […]
> it is always the *other fellows* (never them) that their accredited romancer is depicting, for their sport. (*AG* 268)

The reader is compelled to contemplate the ontological value of the recognisable characters of *The Apes of God* through Zagreus's criticism of 'official Fiction'. The italicised words '*himself*', '*Me*' and '*yourself*' amplify the effect, while Zagreus brings into question 'the use' of Proust's work if in it 'the principal person—the Me' is absent. The reading act itself is then invaded as Zagreus concludes that any reader approaching a 'satire on their circle' would naturally assume a defensive stance and refuse to recognise themselves among the satirised. The reader's perspective and the Keins', now in the position of scrutinised readers, inevitably and transitorily overlap as Zagreus challenges Isabel to picture her own satirical portrait, emphasising the impossibility of anyone being able to straightforwardly endure such vision. He then clarifies:

> What I really am trying to say is that none of us are able in fact, in the matter of quite naked truth to support that magnifying glass, focused upon us, any more than the best complexion could support such examination. Were we mercilessly transposed into Fiction, by the eye of a Swift, for instance, the picture would be intolerable, both for Fiction and for us. […] *Every* individual without exception is in that sense objectively unbearable. (*AG* 270)

What the Keins naïvely misread as the truth is merely the truth of 'official fiction' and a 'canalized and conventionalized truth' to which we are all 'immune' (*AG* 281). Isabel nevertheless continues to maintain her admiration for satirical works and her mature relationship with satire when Zagreus draws his last revelatory weapon:

> Then why—how shall I put it—are you not *different*? Please excuse me—it is very important. Why do you never *change*, in spite of that revelation? You or anybody I mean of course. (AG 268)

The direct question to Isabel is opened up to the reader as Zagreus readdresses the question to 'you or anybody', disclosing that the truth of satire is 'a revelation' which provokes a fundamental change. Official satire, on the other hand, which is merely a dramatised form of gossip, demands no such change because it operates outside the domain of truth as 'what is called fiction is in large part the private publicity machinery of the ruling society' (*AG* 277). The truth evoked by Zagreus cannot emerge from 'polite

Fiction' because it belongs to a different 'order of reality' which is the truth about ourselves and the only 'order of reality that matters' (*AG* 281).

The dialectical structure of this chapter intensifies the reader's involvement, with the allusions to hypothetical reading acts of satirical fiction calling for an examination of the reader's own immediate interaction with the satirical materials of *The Apes of God*. The discussion with the Keins pertains directly to the reader's immediate encounter with the type of revelatory satire which features 'the Me', catapulting the reader into a different order of reality with access to a taxing truth. The effect of this discussion on the reader is rendered through style with this evolution of the theatre queue:

> The theatre queue had come to life, now: here, all about him, in solid ranks, it chattered and ate. […] An Ape-herd, all projections of himself, or he of them, or another—gathered from everywhere, swarming in after him, or collected to await him. […] When their eyes met his it was always himself, in some form, at some time. The intensity of this truth, like a piercing light often compelled him to turn his head away from people, as he might from an image in the mirror. He lifted up his head—he would look at these apparitions in the mirror-like depths of their eyes! A life-time of these machines—he knew them by their factory marks: it was not a task beyond his powers to take their 'movements' out of their cases—it was a human task—that great mechanic Pierpoint had been his master. (*AG* 310)

The self-projections become an 'Ape-herd' suddenly infused with the life of the dinner party guests, as iterations of bodily (and no longer merely time-bound) projections of the self, through which Zagreus is able to experience 'the intensity of this truth'. The eyes of these projections, in fact, are 'mirror-like', enabling Zagreus to execute the 'human task' of perceiving the truth about himself through the embodied existence of other humans with whom he shares the same 'factory marks'. This truth, however, is just as equally powerful and unbearable as he is urged at times to 'turn his head away'.

The culmination of Dan's initiation is the Lenten party thrown by the Finnian Shaw family based on real life siblings Osbert, Sacheverell and Edith Sitwell, depicted as an extremely wealthy and pompous family of pretend poets making of 'Apehood a true business' (*AG* 338). In the lengthy chapter which makes up over a third of the novel, the highly recognisable trio is viciously parodied in what is presented as a case study for 'how Apehood can affect an entire family' (*AG* 338-339). At Lord Osmund's special request, Dan, Zagreus and Julius Ratner (the split-man) are in attendance as performers.

Abruptly carried away from the satire of Dan's 'field-work' in the London artist studios, the reader witnesses an intense stylistic shift through the appearance of a play within a play, within a novel. The Lenten party, structured in twenty-three individually titled scenes, opens as 'a sort of ill-acted Commedia dell'Arte', as the un-masked hosts indulge in 'their Theatre' having specifically requested that all guests attend in costume as '*Characters in Fiction*' (*AG* 371-372). A satirical rendering of Edith Sitwell's poetic performance *The "entertainment" Façade*, staged in 1922 at the Sitwells' family home, can be retraced both in the action and in the structure of the chapter, beginning with the titles of the scenes as satirical renderings of Sitwell's own titles in *Façade*. Moreover, Lady Harriett, parodying Sitwell's iconic megaphone performance, appears performing in her 'operette' (*AG* 506) roaring with her pouting mouth in the shape of a trumpet. The narrative description of this stylised version of a real happening is irregularly fractured by bursts of declamatory poetry by a Finnish poet named Kanoot, 'Kenute or Knut', described as 'a strange painted shamanised northern wanderer—who possessed no home, but who passed from pub to pub, studio to studio, party to party' (*AG* 372-373). Kanoot is responsible for delivering an empty poetic form of entertainment:

> The entire table was rocked with the detonation of haphazard strophes—fragments of poetry, metrical thunderclaps, bisected couplets, heads or extremities, of rhymed invective—they struck it with the full force of the age of King-Sun. (*AG* 373)

Court jester at the mercy of Lord Osmund's will, Kanoot is not a poet but a human jukebox reciting existing poems upon request and highly preoccupied with maintaining the attention of the wealthy patrons upon himself. The bizarre entertainment, in fact, only acts as a mere background to the café-chatter and gossip that goes on relentlessly, as the principal aim of the happening is to get Finnan Shaws devotees to come forward with gossip on Lord Osmund's enemies:

> There were the small antagonists of osmundian literary intrigue—people who had hurt his lordship's vanity by ignoring or by castigating his literary enterprises. There were those who had resented the dilatoriness of payments for a picture or a book, or for an object of furniture […] someone who had made him a butt in an entertainment like the present one. (*AG* 371)

This reference to the skirmishes of the literary business strengthened by the allusion to *The Apes of God* is merely an illustration of the countless instances in this chapter in which

the reader is pulled back and forward from the fictional realm to everyday reality. All such references however make an appearance stylised in disorienting scenes, as in the case of three uninvited masked characters suddenly joining the party. Dressed in black and sitting in the dark away from the party, the mysterious trio can only be perceived through the unidentifiable sound they produce. The 'diabolical noise', firstly attributed to an '*english* storm' and subsequently to the loudspeaker, makes it impossible for the distracted guests to converse (*AG* 273-376). Lord Osmund finally confirms that the noise is in fact caused by the three 'whispering bandits' (*AG* 381) when the guests (and the reader too) inevitably begin wondering if the unidentifiable 'trio of scandal' (*AG* 380) could in fact be Zagreus with his troupe of conjurors dressed for performance. The hypothesis is then discarded when Zagreus makes an entrance with a mysterious 'distant, hollow and violent banging', together with Dan and Ratner in full costume, and Margolin who as a secondary and more effective jester is in charge of hassling the guests by throwing lightened matchsticks at them (*AG* 391-394). Distancing himself from the three intruders Zagreus turns investigator and solves the enigma of 'the three knaves' (*AG* 382) as he faithfully reports to Lord Osmund that they are in fact conspirators 'engaged in the doubtful pastime of exchanging their private thoughts' which 'in a public gathering it is a breach of all privacy' (*AG* 413). The three uninvited unrecognisable figures in the dark, whose speech is an unbearable noise, stand for uncontrolled, independent and non-standardised speech, perhaps the speech of *The Apes of God*, that so much infuriates Lord Osmund and his real-life counterpart.

To counteract the anarchic atmosphere instigated by the speech of the conspirators, a series of pantomimic established routines or 'scandal-lazzi' (the pun based on the repertoire of typical scenarios in the Commedia Dell'Arte commonly referred to as *lazzi*) channelled by preapproved and well-rehearsed characters follow one another. The 'unassimilable three' with their unbearable 'anti-social mutter-à-trois' (*AG* 373) remain unidentified, but Mrs Bosun, the housekeeper, perseveres with her investigation to please her masters until she drops to the ground with an acute attack barely noticed by a blasé Phoebus (the younger of the Finnian Shaw siblings) as he continues nonchalantly to savour an asparagus (*AG* 398). Zagreus intervenes to reassure Dan, and the disoriented reader:

> 'You will see they will continue shouting at each other, they are wound up' Horace Zagreus pointed out to Dan: 'and they have this play to do—it's called BOSUN.

> But look—you cannot benefit by all that you are hearing in that position […] Make yourself into a vessel a retort that will trap that thunder of pure folly, this thunder of pure folly that is going on. Those equidistant claps from Phoebus, counterclaps from Olympus, which is Osmund—what a moonstruck music of hallucinated machines that is—they chose *Bosun* to suggest a nautical print these predestined period fanciers I expect, to make you hitch up your slops and spit black plug—there is no Bosun, and there is no fit!' (*AG* 399-340)

The nature of the pantomimic routine ultimately aimed at the 'heaven of small hate constructed of small-talk' which follows the 'delicious crisis', is in fact nothing more than a ritual which 'must be seen to be believed' (*AG* 400). Zagreus, however, follows this interpretation with a series of bizarre instructions, guiding Dan to perform a squinting crouch, a fake yoga pose, paired with oracular advice: 'here is different—you have to turn this inside-out I should say outside-in' and 'imagine good Osmund is an intestine. Yes, an intestine' (*AG* 399-400).

As a result of this less than transparent commentary, the reader is forced into the crudest possible externalist gaze on Osmund, the theatre director of all routines taking place, while the discomfort caused by this bizarre reading act is embodied by Dan and his distressed attempt to maintain the outlandish yoga pose in the midst of a dazzling, relentless linguistic medium, with poetry and prose alternating, and the multiplicity of juxtaposed satirised and original styles and incongruous scenes making up this colossal invention. The descriptions of Dan's physical uneasiness induced by the odd artificial position Zagreus forcefully put him in, paired with his lack of understanding of the ultimate reason for his efforts, induce the reader to sympathise with the situation they share with Dan. Similarly, Lewis deforms the subsequent scenes to mirror the effects of style on the reader, crafting a prose which constantly refers to its workings and embodies itself in the action:

> The struggle raged under the words, the words became beastly. Both used beastly words to each other until he became frightened. Partly it was what they said, partly the way they said—speaking in cipher, or was it a tone-code, of another tongue. (*AG* 435)

And again,

> Archie was delighted with the pomp of this big foolish newspaper word he had found inside his little head, brusquely he swelled out to utter it—all words were potential toys, big mouthfuls especially, to be battered over when talking, by his

> little tingling tongue, at such as Horace—talking a great indoor sport, batting the winged word captured in a newspaper over the net. (*AG* 450)

Words are embodied creatures or mysterious objects which act on the characters, conducting the direction of each scene. In addition to the many such references to the workings of the style, a more explicit meta-stylistic lengthy discussion on satire is offered through Zagreus and Ratner's speculations on 'the laws of satire' (*AG* 468) which build on the previous discussion at the Keins' dinner party and on the inadequacies of polite satire. Zagreus invades the reader's own reality, establishing the 'vicious', 'unfair and single-minded' style experienced in the reader's immediate reading act as an instance of good satire:

> To be a true satirist Ratner you must remain upon the surface of existence.
> […]
> Well, to regard people as "good," or as "bad," you will concede, one must remain very much upon the surface to do that.
> […]
> In other words morality is superficial.
> […]
> Morality is on the surface. But also the values that decide whether a person is ridiculous or free from absurdity are pure conventions of society, they exist only in a surface-world of two dimensions.
> […]
> Underneath, if one pricks far enough, in the eyes of a Shakespeare we are all ridiculous—we all play those tricks that make the angels weep.
> […]
> So satirists have to be half-blind, there is no other way.
> […]
> To the satirist a thing must present itself as more simple, it must possess a stupid finality, it must be more rigidly contained by its genera, than in fact anything is.
> […]
> What about the Public. The Public.
> Yes the Public—that is most important of all—the Public.
> […]
> Yes. But the audience of the satirist is composed of strictly two-dimensional beings—such creatures can respond alone to a quite simple, a superficial image. It has to be a something cut out of their prejudices and conventions.
> (*AG* 470-471)

The universe conjured by *The Apes of God* is fully unravelled in this passage as intrinsic to the 'surface-world', or rather a type of aesthetics by which 'morality is superficial'. The satirist's domain is in fact established in the 'stupid finality' and the 'genera' of things which inevitably makes us 'all ridiculous' as they bring our attention back to our paradoxical states. Furthermore, Zagreus elevates the role of the reader of *The Apes of God*

who is 'most important of all', predicting that they will be liberated from the 'conventions of society' and 'their prejudices' in order to re-perceive the 'surface' and 'respond alone to a quite simple and superficial image', which is the troublesome image of our physical actuality through the gaze of the other, key to experiencing ourselves as incarnated consciousnesses.

The style of *The Apes of God* is premised on a non-systematic conception of phenomenological ethics based upon our *universal singularity*. While our individual experience is situated in time and space, and thus unique and unrepeatable, the simple fact that we all share the same embodied paradoxical condition of existence works as the only possible ethical imperative which emerges from our *intersubjective* experience, on which *intrasubjectivity* is based. It is therefore through the style of *The Apes of God* that the reader experiences simultaneously the uniqueness of our individual experience in the revaluation of truth as 'the truth in which we participate'[183] and the commonality of our embodied situation through perception of a reality which is brought into being as incarnated. Furthermore, the recognisability of the characters adds a heightened layer of self-recognition by which Lewis brings ontological scrutiny into the real world, targeting the systematised and illusory essence of the societal structures *in which* and *by which* we exist and inducing specific individuals (and himself) to face a true perception of themselves, or rather a reconciliation of the absolute opposites of '*seeing-of-ourselves-as-others-see-us*' and the '*self-picture*' (my emphasis, *SF* 49).

Through the hyper-recognisable stylised world of *The Apes of God* Lewis delivers a gesture into the real world which does not require interpretation or inward reflection, but rather a specific type of understanding which happens through the body as it 'merges with the structure of the world that the gesture sketches out and I take it up for myself'.[184] As Merleau-Ponty states a 'gesture does not make me think of anger, it is the anger itself';[185] similarly *The Apes of God* does not make the reader think of truth, it is itself truth:

> [the artist] speaks to his audience according to the way that its members have of abiding in the world [he gets at] their fundamental ties to the world and thus transforms their deepest partiality into a means of truth…We shall completely understand this trespass of things upon their meaning, this discontinuity of

[183] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 133.
[184] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2003), 191-192.
[185] Ibid., 190.

> knowledge which is at its highest point in speech, only when we understand it as the trespass of oneself upon the other and of the other upon me.[186]

Far from bleak prophecies for life's meaninglessness and a truth that cannot be grasped and the promulgation of a fundamental sense of separation caused by the absence of a ghost in the machine, *The Apes of God* hands over a profound sense of unity to the reader who is willing to effortfully put meaning back into life through the contemplation of a superior truth which is not composed of predetermined absolute ethical principles but lived by a dialectical consciousness as an incarnated truth.

In chapter four, I will observe how Lewis's enquiry into the relation between consciousness and reality culminates in *Snooty Baronet* in a total revaluation of human expression, through a survey into the birth of meaning and an exploration of the processes behind the sedimentation of meaning and its further active rejection, crucial to the preservation of a healthy dialectic within the fractured modern self.

[186] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 133.

# Chapter 4

# A Sensorium Cut Out of the Surface of a Star where Two Universes Met: Phenomenological Ontology in *Snooty Baronet*

> It is not a thing to boast about that you *talk*, and that the elephant does not. It depends what you say.
>
> *TWM* 323

> Men naturally gather and exclaim to watch the final extinction of such a redoubtable human myth as the 'mind'.
>
> *TWM* 347

> For if you deny the existence of everything except knee-jumps there is not much to say about life.
>
> *TWM* 342

> The book critic is always far too busy keeping his end up socially ever to have time to read a book. He is particularly grateful therefore when some formula is discovered, the use of which will give him all the appearance of having penetrated to its heart without in fact even having opened its pages.
>
> *SB* 66

In a handwritten inscription on a copy of *Snooty Baronet* Lewis stoically admitted: 'this is the bad hat of my family of books'.[187] As one of the most misread of Lewis's books, *Snooty Baronet* is often assessed as an inferior work, highly idiosyncratic and lacking aesthetic and philosophical value. In this chapter, in contrast, I approach *Snooty Baronet* as a fundamental phenomenological intervention aimed at uncovering the fundamental nature of our human expressive reality through attempting to understand the relation between consciousness and reality.

[187] Timothy Materer, *Wyndham Lewis the Novelist* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), 100-101.

As reported by Bernard Lafourcade in his notes to the 1984 Black Sparrow Press edition, the 1932 Cassell edition of *Snooty Baronet* remained the first and only edition of the novel for fifty years (*SB* 5) and despite Lewis's efforts to reach out to American publishers, the book remained the first of his fictional works without an American edition. Lewis suspected an attempt at boycotting the work and soon detected a new 'more insidious form of banning' in the shape of a 'virtual suppression' (*CHC* 184-185). Three weeks after *Snooty Baronet*'s publication, Lewis reported that the novel had 'been banned by the two largest lending-libraries in England' which programmatically purchased 'a dozen copies' keeping the book off the public shelves, supposedly due to its overtly sexual passages (*CHC* 184-185). This coordinated action resulted in what Lewis denounced as a 'book assassination' by which public access to the book had been considerably restricted, without the benefits of traditional censorship which would have generated sensationalist publicity and consequently 'brisk sale in the shops' (*CHC* 184-185).

The novel was never granted a renaissance through scholarship either, being dismissed as 'peppy and pointless'[188] by Hugh Kenner and by William Pritchard as a 'novelist's last gesture in a blind alley'.[189] Furthermore, *Snooty Baronet*'s crucial satirical achievements are missing from monographic scholarly assessments, with the novel hardly making an appearance in larger studies such as Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression*, David Ayers' *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* and Paul Edwards' monumental *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*. Geoffrey Wagner only assigned three pages of what he defined as 'brief comments' to a semi-biographical 'minor satire' and merely the 'skittish and erratic progeny' of *The Apes of God*.[190] In agreement with Wagner regarding the centrality of the biographical element, Bernard Lafourcade highlighted a 'dualistic inventiveness' at work in *Snooty Baronet* as he concluded without elaborating further that the protagonist's 'unique contradictory nature is due to his being so much modelled on the author himself, though half the time expressing views totally opposed to his' (Afterword, *SB* 265). In Toby A. Foshay's interpretation, *Snooty Baronet* was a way for 'Lewis [to] merely employ […] fiction as a means to explore the violent implications of current social theories'.[191]

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[188] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen,1954), 109.
[189] William Pritchard, *Wyndham Lewis "Profiles in Literature"* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 114.
[190] Geoffrey Wagner, *Wyndham Lewis, A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1957), 255-157.
[191] Toby Avard Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 108.

As with previous dismissive readings of Lewis's fictional work considered in this study, there is again a lack of discussion around style paired with arguments about uncomplicated and aimless antagonisms and trivial contradictions for contradiction's sake. Lafourcade's editing style in the 1984 edition of *Snooty Baronet* is patently revelatory of this tendency. In his 'Note on the Text and Organisation of this Book' he in fact included a subtle admission that some of the many corrections applied directly to the text could perhaps work against a novel in which a 'strategy of distortions and approximations when dealing with quotations, proverbs and other stereotyped aspects of reality' is at play (*SB* 5-6). The corrections are in fact straightforwardly applied to the text, unsignalled, and according to Lafourcade's own judgement duly recorded at the end of the volume. The editor admitted having operated an idiosyncratic distinction between *all* errors affecting the use of foreign languages, although only *some* aspects of the typography and *some* of the misspellings. Furthermore, by positioning the list of variants at the end of the volume, Lafourcade removed the reader from a process which could potentially reveal itself (as the editor himself subtly admitted) as central to the stylistic purpose of the work. An analogous editorial process applied to the materials of a painting, an installation or even a poem, would automatically compromise the work's artistic value. Moreover, in addition to a set of explanatory notes in which all of the sources cited in *Snooty Baronet* are listed, Lafourcade adds a further explanatory section titled 'A Bibliography of *Snooty Baronet*' in which a list of relevant critical works supposedly read by Lewis are listed to 'shed light', 'discuss' or 'comment' on different aspects of the novel (*SB* 311-313). This editorial approach gives little importance to the phenomenon of reading which is replaced by an explanatory and streamlining effort that artificially polishes the stylistic surface of a difficult work, compromising the unique texture originally intended for the purpose of a specific exchange.

In this chapter, I aim to counteract this critical tendency through a discussion of the value of the artistic materials of *Snooty Baronet* and their significance in relation to Lewis's phenomenological enquiry through literary style. An extensive close reading section will show that it is by bypassing style that the phenomenological achievements of *Snooty Baronet* are missed altogether and presented as mere dramatisations of contemporary theories and simplistic displays of self-sufficient dichotomies channelled by an autobiographical and contradictory protagonist. I argue that it is only through a thorough examination of

Lewis's speech act in its alive status that we are able to grasp the significance of a work aimed at bringing into being a revaluation of our expressive consciousness and its relation to reality. I will conclude that the satirical purpose of *Snooty Baronet* is to reinstate *intentionality* at the centre of human consciousness through the restoration of a healthy dialectic within a modern self which has been fractured by scientific and philosophical absolutes, so unfit to account for our lived experience.

Contrary to the triviality imputed by criticism, an underlying seriousness pervades *Snooty Baronet,* which has crucial philosophical issues at its core. Emblematic of Lewis's mood around the appearance of *Snooty Baronet* is a passage in *Notes on the Way* in which the disgruntled mention of the book's ban is reflected on as a merely 'personal note' of less importance than Lewis's serious concerns for the 'very alarming situation' uncovered by the Lytton Report[192] (*CHC* 184). Lewis discerned patterns emerging from the contemporary geopolitical situation, which had uncomfortable similarities with what contributed to the onset of the First World War:

> Such colossal and threatening facts belong to an order of things which forces upon us willy-nilly a super-radical valuation. […] The ultimate possibilities of human life in the mass is the monstrous interrogation-mark always awaiting us at the end of those world-political avenues. And the overwhelming majority of men are so utterly unable to grasp the meaning of even the simplest and most recognisable dangers besetting them. (*CHC* 184)

The dangers Lewis referred to are discussed extensively in the chapter titled 'The Subject Conceived as the King of the Psychological World' in *Time and Western Man*, which solidly outlined the extent of Lewis's concern with what he referred to as the 'final extinction of "the Subject"', which saw its origins at the onset of modern mass-democracy and drew to a close with the rise of behaviourist psychology (*TWM* 308). To Lewis, a treacherous ideological affinity could be detected across the spectrum of modern human disciplines, from political movements to 'the tendency in scientific (in which is included philosophical) thought', by which everything appeared to be driven by 'the same movement of human training' (*TWM* 318-319). Moreover, a fundamental shift by which 'the new-sacred books of Science' substituted for religion advanced the new kind of 'public magic' of a 'Democratic God letting his creatures into the secrets of their creation'

[192] The report by the League of Nations provided an account of the 1931 Mudken Incident as the Japanese army seized Chinese Manchuria.

(*TWM* 311-314). The resulting worship of scientific fact, truth, common-sense and progress caused 'the White conqueror [to begin] regarding himself as a kind of monkey, no longer so very little beneath the angels but wholly of the animal creation' (*TWM* 313). An artificially conceived utilitarian design emerged from this shift:

> Horrors that make the industrial and other savages flesh creep (for the White civilisation now knows that it has 'savages' and natives of its own, and treats them accordingly) are found in *one,* of more ruthless struggles for existence that even he has ever known. But they are also full, in the *other* section, of melting pictures of 'progress', the gift of the good God, Science. (*TWM* 314)

It was, in fact, in favour of progress and at the mercy of a scientific type of factual common-sensical truth about *what it is like to be human* that the individual renounced their 'sense of power [and] instinct for freedom', discouraged against 'all exercise of will, or belief in individual power' (*TWM* 316). The individual systematically handed over their life to the community relying on the new 'dummy, sham independence' of modern democracy which condemned the self to a 'death in action'; which Lewis meant as "action' in the 'motor' explanations of contemporary psychological research' (*TWM* 316-317). An instinctual life of perversely monitored action emerged with the common objective of making systems 'more systematised and brought into a rigid conformity with the effective practical life of the child—that is, of the future worker' (*TWM* 319). This represented the finishing blow in the shape of a 'mortal division' (*TWM* 338) which turned humanity into a 'gigantic plague of numberless mechanical toys' and a 'horde of particularly helpless children' (*TWM* 315). While the individual was successfully and efficiently vanishing into a crowd resigned to 'living in bits', the 'intellectualist monster' (*TWM* 318-319) of the mind together with the life of consciousness became the scientist, the philosopher and the politician's new targets:

> 'Consciousness', it is said, is […] not at all necessary. We should get on just as well without it. On every hand some sort of *unconscious* life is recommended and heavily advertised, in place of the *conscious* life of will and intellect which humanly has been such a failure, and is such a poor thing compared to the life of 'instinct'. But what would Rousseau have thought of Professor Watson or of Mr Yerke's American army-tests, and our militarised, 'dry', over-controlled, industrial colonies?
>
> (*TWM* 318)

Scientists and philosophers robbed humanity of a fundamental unity, inciting a 'civil war taken up in the interior economy of the personality' (*TWM* 319-320). To Lewis, however,

the cultural triumph of the instinct-led deceptive unconscious was not the isolated result of the scientific movement but the outcome of a more considerable intellectual effort: 'there must be an abstract man, as it were, if there is to be a philosopher' (*TWM* 332).

Tracing back the modern conception of the unconscious to Plato's positioning of sensational life in the 'mob of senses', as the place in which 'we live in a state of common humanity', Lewis attributed the further refinement of the concept to Leibniz's development of the unconscious as a 'pantheistic egalitarian heaven for his monads' (*TWM* 321). Furthermore, with Schopenhauer the unconscious turned into the *will* considered as 'a vast, undirected, purposeless impulse' which Lewis stated: '[is] not like us, conscious: but blind, powerful, restless and unconscious' (*TWM* 332). The Schopenhauerian *will*, acting 'unerringly at once needing no documentation, no memory, or any of the intellectual machinery we carry about', was highly evocative to Lewis of 'the great "Unconscious", dated 1918' (*TWM* 329). In fact, Lewis firmly believed that a fundamental perpetuation of an inherent misconstruction re-emerged from philosophical and scientific thought to serve a wicked pragmatic purpose:

> Schopenhauer's Will is really the 'life force' or 'elan vital' the hypostasized 'duration' of Bergson, the Time-god of Spengler, Alexander, Whitehead, etc. By means of it, which is *Ding an sich*, we share the 'inner life' of other individuals […]. (*TWM* 327)

Lewis identified the first source of this fraudulent conception in the belief that all that pertained to the life of consciousness was wholly and solely an interior impulse, and that all things visible from the outside were merely the manifestation of such internal impulse. Secondly, the conclusion that this internal impulse was innate, aimless, irrational and an *in-itself*, therefore unknowable. Thirdly, as the principle controlling all human action, this innate and aimless impulse possessed a crucial universal value which humanity also shared with all objects in the world, animate or inanimate.

To Lewis, this unknowable and irrational psychic force accompanied by pseudo-animistic implications to which philosophers perennially resorted, caused humanity's fall into the philosophical myth of 'the purposelessness of everything', awarding to science the 'philosophical meaning' (*TWM* 334) required to legitimise the capitalist mechanised existence to which humanity was gradually but steadily abiding:

> […] In order to fit in with the only explanation of [consciousness] that science is able to provide—the mechanistic behaviouristic explanation—the actual standard of human consciousness and human ambition will have to be infinitely lowered and debased. For it is only by approximating themselves *en masse* with the performing dogs and social hymenoptera of the laboratory of positive science, that men will not confuse and discomfort the scientific investigator. Only in that way can they satisfy the requirements imposed on life by the necessarily limited powers of mechanical explanation possessed by the scientific method. (*TWM* 322)

Lewis considered behaviourist psychology a menacing dogma which 'could have existed in no time or place except modern Industrial America' and as the pseudo-science responsible for the 'final finishing off of our 'consciousness" (*TWM* 340). The American psychology professor turned advertising agent John B. Watson, had in fact embellished behaviourism theoretically, turning it into a political weapon of mass control. The pseudo-scientist of behaviourism acted as a 'peripheral observer, and recorder of the inevitable reflex, that the "mind" is action' (*TWM* 341) and regarded the totality of human existence as the mere workings of 're-action' masses which could be wholly observed from the outside as *responses-to-stimuli* and processes of *habit-formation*. On the inside, on the other hand, there was nothing to be accounted for.

Behaviourism recorded, classified and stereotyped habits with utilitarian and surveillant aims while its pseudo-scientists were employed by governments to write 'books for the educationalist department of health, for the employer of labour and […] anyone who may be interested to learn how to train human beings and transform them into tractable machines' (*TWM* 341). In this regard Lewis highlighted the chilling connection between the renowned 'Tester', a stereotyped intelligence test developed by psychologists, and the Yerkes-Yoakum tests performed by the American army to classify World War I recruits. He quoted directly from *Mental Tests in the American Army*:

> *Great will be our good fortune if the lesson in human engineering which the War has taught us is carried over, directly and effectively, into our civil institutions and activities*.
> (emphasis in original, *TWM* 342)

The successful 'mechanising of millions of mankind' in the war had proven an effective and valuable operation which, with the support of behaviourist psychology, had to be 'carried over into "civil life"' to maximise productivity (*TWM* 343). To Lewis, in fact, the behaviourist represented a new breed of 'dogmatic destructive philosopher[s…] disguised

as […men] of science' (*TWM* 348) and serving the capitalist democratic machine with the aim of manufacturing the behaviour of 'unfortunate men and women' by way of 'organised interference' (*TWM* 350). Lewis identified such a coordinated shift developing as part of

> a practical scheme for getting rid of masses of people, by concentrating them in big centres, like millions of specialised insects, and leaving them to go on turning their silly wheel eternally […]. (*TWM* 349)

The ultimate aim of behaviourist psychology was the indoctrination and classification of the modern workforce. This pragmatic plan however called for the complete eradication of the individual, a plan which had to be legitimised in the eyes of society to succeed. Embellishing this process with an aura of scientific discovery was identified as the most effective course of action. In this respect, Lewis particularly relished the ways in which speech caused a great deal of trouble to behaviourism's attempts to legitimise its doctrine and efficiently filter every aspect of human existence through the dogmas of *response-to stimulus* and *habit formation*.

Highlighting the inadequacy of behaviourism for the purpose of unravelling the uniquely human capacity for language, Lewis concluded that 'of all enemies of behaviour (and the behaviourist is not slow to see it) Words and Speech (next to consciousness) are the greatest' (*TWM* 351). Watson, in fact, with noticeable difficulty, classified language merely as a further type of behaviour, an acquired system of habits functioning through *response-to-stimulus*, just as 'do movements of the arms and legs' (*TWM* 349). Watson's conclusion was that the totality of language could be explained through a pseudo-scientific account of the manipulation of the larynx for the production of sound. A fundamental difficulty however resided in accounting satisfactorily for a typical aspect of language, which is the passing of time between the assumed stimulus and the response, which is often considerable, as with the composition of a poem, for example. This delay escaped Watson's straightforward physiological explanation as he concluded that perhaps, while language in its totality could be defined as movements in the speech musculature, the unobservable internal processes at work causing the delay were to be attributed to the product of laryngeal habits and not of thought process, which was a mere

misconception.[193] As language did not seem to lend itself so straightforwardly to the pragmatical immediacy of behaviourism, Watson simply reclassified certain aspects of speech as *implicit* behaviour, against the ordinary *explicit* forms of behaviour, admitting more generally that a certain unimportant delay between stimulus and response could in fact occur. In *Time and Western Man,* Lewis analysed this behaviourist view of language, outlining its consequences as he quoted Watson's own problematic statements on the acquisition and the function of language:

> As language habits become more and more complex, behaviour takes a refinement: short-cuts are formed, and finally words come to be, on occasion, substituted for acts. (TWM 351)

For the *stimulus-response* paradigm to apply, then, behaviourism had to see words as mere symbols whose function was to operate as symptomatic substitutes for actions, objects and situations. To Lewis, this was an eerie account of human existence which took place in 'an indirect world of *symbols*', thus an 'unreal word-world' in which humanity was driven by 'a frenzied dogma of action' and aversion to any unnecessary delay or withholding of natural responses in favour of conversion into words (*TWM* 351-352). For Lewis, this shift illustrated an unexpected intersection between two fundamental doctrines traditionally at odds with each other:

> *Hostility to the word* goes hand in hand with propaganda for the intuitional, mystical chaos. It is here that we touch the point at which Watson and the time-mystic connect.
>
> (emphasis in original, *TWM* 352)

Bergson, in fact, perpetuated an analogous distrust of language as he accounted for words as symbols standing in the way of continuity and interrupting the *duration,* therefore misguiding us towards the realm of illusions and away from reality. The characteristic time delay of language represented the same insurmountable obstacle to the successful application of both behaviourist theories and time philosophy to specific characteristics of human existence. What Lewis thought most fascinating was that both the disembodied mind of the time-philosopher, living an introspective life, and the mechanical creature of behaviourist psychology, existing as an external apparatus of instinctual muscular habits,

[193] See John Broadus Watson, *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views it* (United States: Bobbs-Merrill, 1913). John Broadus Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (United Kingdom: Arno Press, 1972).

arrived at the same conclusion despite their diametrically opposed premises. Both doctrines, however, had in common a refusal to account for a life of consciousness, describing human existence as immersed in a chaotic and incontrollable flux of stimuli in which humanity plays a passive role. Moreover, both views situated human existence in one domain, with no need for contact or exchange with the other merely secondary domain. Despite time-philosophy advocating an innate internal life impulse, and behaviourist psychology supporting multiple external impulses acquired by repetition and *habit-formation* (or rather training), both doctrines denied the existence of a dialectic and posited an instinctual, unconscious and aimless humanity. Examining the implications of the shared obstacle that language represented for both doctrines, Lewis concluded that the fundamental agenda of science and philosophy resided in their shared campaign for a disembodied human existence which crucially denied a life proper to consciousness by rejecting the basic structures of human perception as:

> The distinction between sensation and sense-datum vanishes. You are forced to a fusion of the world of objects with the fact of apprehension, so that when you see a tree you *are* the tree—or, since there is no 'you', *the seeing of* the tree *is* the tree. If there is no *you* this must be so: there is only the tree—which, however, is not a tree properly speaking. (*TWM* 362)

In both accounts human perception is not properly articulated as both *élan vital* and *stimulus-response* advocated for unidirectional simultaneity and a frenzy of action carried out in an uncontrollable flux. The concept of universality also took a suspicious turn for Lewis, as humanity could be seen either sharing its internal life with the material world in a grotesque animistic psychologism, or merely participating in a mechanistic material existence in a purposeless fellowship with the world phenomena. In both cases, a crowd replaced the individual as a result of a 'war between "matter" and "mind"' initiated at the expenses of a self that was either unknowable, or not worth knowing, and that could only be accounted for through visible and immediate *action* (*TWM* 363). Any time-delay getting in the way of *action* was to be treated as suspicious as:

> things […] are meant to *pass through*: and […] in any well-regulated organism, should issue immediately, or with as brief delay as possible, in *action*.
> If a fine tree passes into our consciousness we should not hold it up inside, idly contemplating it. We should at once do something about it […] by a suitable instantaneous 'response'[…]. (emphasis in original, *TWM* 361)

To Lewis, the substitution of perception with action represented a crucial shift in humanity's 'principle of life and endurance' (*TWM* 362) as it encouraged a 'relaxed, amusing [and] sensational view' (*TWM* 364) of the self, utilitarian and unstable by design, hence devoid of obligations. As a result, the traditionally complex philosophical challenges which unendingly defined a typically human inclination for self-discovery had been collectively abandoned and replaced by the straightforward 'ideologic disintegration of the notion of the one personality' (*TWM* 364). A mass gradually emerged from this shift in which 'each man is *every man*, an abstraction, not a *concrete person*' (emphasis in original, *TWM* 365). To Lewis, this was an artificially conceived 'actor's world' (*TWM* 365) in which humanity was encouraged by design to worship instability; all this, however, induced feelings of impotence and helplessness, triggered by a desire for freedom which could only be a fictitious freedom.

In the last ten years of his life, Merleau-Ponty expanded on his early research on the problem of meaning and composed *Signs*, a collection of essays in which he strived for a description of speech as the fundamental category of human existence. In the preface to the essays, he expressed candidly his own astonishment at the multifaceted temperament of the collection:

> How different—how downright incongruous—the philosophical essays and the ad hoc, primarily political observations which make this volume seem!'[194]

With *Signs* in fact Merleau-Ponty witnessed his philosophy of expression branching out into politics, physics, sociology and psychology, as he composed the collection with the aim to outline the centrality to the life of consciousness of a typically human expressive nature, which includes language but that goes beyond language to encompass the richness of the human gestural universe. Despite the preface having been composed thirty-three years after *Time and Western Man*, the similarities between the far-reaching socio-political assessments and the reflections on the centrality of language and expression for the purpose of rehabilitating a healthy dialectic within the modern life of consciousness are compelling. This is not to suggest a biographical connection or even less so a political affinity between the two thinkers (it is, in fact, fascinating to notice the diametrically opposite nature of their temporary political affiliations, with Lewis's engagement with fascist ideologies and Merleau-Ponty's pragmatic interactions with the communist party)

[194] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 3.

but rather to identify the series of common intuitions which led to the same phenomenological conclusions and called for an analogous critical revision of the historical and political events that turned consciousness into an abstraction. Merleau-Ponty recognised after all that Marxism was no longer a valid opponent to the treacherous structures brought forward by capitalism:

> At present, the development of industrial society here is marked by extraordinary disorder. Capitalism haphazardly extends its giant branches, puts the economies of nations at the mercy of dominant industries […] and *destroys the classical forms of the human establishment*. At all levels immense problems appear; not just techniques but political forms, motives, a spirit, reasons for living need to be found.[195]

Lewis's insights in the 1920s, as he began to detect detrimental paradigm-shifting forces emerging from evolving capitalist settings, are echoed in full force in Merleau-Ponty's practical commentary on contemporary socio-political developments in the 1960s. Merleau-Ponty perceived the rising of a systemic disorder which induced the collapse of the human 'classical forms' and generated immense, and overlooked, complications across all human domains. Furthermore, as part of his reassessment of Marxism and Communism, Merleau-Ponty re-evaluated the consequences of modern collective life:

> Where is it, let us not even say in public life, but in the masses? Freedom and invention are in the minority, of the opposition. Man is hidden, well hidden, and this time we must make no mistake about it: this does not mean that he is there beneath a mask, ready to appear. Alienation is not simply privation of what was our own by natural right; and to bring it to an end, it will not suffice to steal what was stolen, to give us back our due. The situation is far more serious: there are no faces underneath the masks, historical man has never been human, and yet no man is alone.[196]

Merleau-Ponty reported on the rise of an abstracted humanity which is alienated to the point of utter disappearance in the hyper structured collectivity: 'there are no faces underneath the masks'. Political and philosophical doctrines in fact replaced humanity's traditional enquiries on 'the place of mind and matter, man and nature, and consciousness and existence' with a 'metaphysical centre' which delivered a 'total reconstruction of human origin'.[197] Like Lewis, Merleau-Ponty believed the convergence between

[195] My emphasis, Ibid., 4.
[196] Ibid., 33.
[197] Ibid., 6.

philosophy and politics was highly detrimental to humanity's propensity for self-reflection:

> Instead of combining their virtues, philosophy and politics exchanged their vices: practice became tricky and thought superstitious. […] as if Universal History, Revolution, Dialectic, and Negativity were really present in these frugal Eucharistic species. In fact, these great historico-philosophical concepts—deprived of all contact with knowledge, technics, art, and changes in the economy—were bloodless. Except in the best, political strictness gave its hand to laziness, lack of curiosity, and improvisation. If this was the marriage of philosophy and politics, we are likely to think we can only be pleased with their divorce.[198]

This crisis had been brought forward by the 'bloodless', hence inhuman, character of a philosophy at the service of political aims which distanced humanity from lived experience and relegated existence to a discontinuous series of actions and the life of consciousness to a superstition. In Merleau-Ponty's view, humanity had been robbed of its expressive powers as relentless abstractions of *what it is like to be human* deprived people of their fundamental contact with the living present, giving rise to an inhuman humanity. The classical foundations of science, philosophy and intellectualism were responsible for initiating such process which was gradually distancing humanity from the lived reality of incarnated *intersubjective* experience.

In his early research for *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty provided a critique of intellectualist thought and behaviourism with the purpose of demonstrating their respective failures in describing consciousness and its relation to the world. By adopting the scientific mode of enquiry of *the outside spectator* for his extensive scientific exploration of reflex theory, Merleau-Ponty was able to show that behaviourism was just as futile as alternative introspective modes of enquiry in providing an accurate account of human experience. In fact, concluding with a complete dismissal of ontological dualisms with the aim of exploring the life of consciousness of the integrated subject, Merleau-Ponty stated that it is crucial to establish that 'behaviour is not a thing, but neither is it an idea'.[199]

Rejecting behaviourist psychology's mechanical view of relations between a subject and its milieu, Merleau-Ponty demonstrated that human action cannot be decomposed into a unidirectionally related series of causes and effects. In fact, what is simplistically seen

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A. L. Fisher (Boston: MA Beacon Press, 1963), 127.

through behaviourism as an effect can only be a 'global response' and a response to an *occasion* rather than to a cause.[200] Furthermore, the type of response depends on the 'vital significance' of the organism 'rather than on the material properties of the stimuli'.[201] As a result, the relation between action and stimulus is not one of cause and effect, but 'a relation of meaning, an intrinsic relation'.[202] To Merleau-Ponty, this was not a subject for a 'return to any form whatsoever of vitalism or animism', but it represented the fundamental recognition 'that behaviour has a meaning and depends upon the vital significance of situations'.[203] What was required for science and philosophy to really begin to grasp the essence of humanity was a satisfactory notion of consciousness as a fundamental 'unity of signification', and, furthermore, a consciousness of life that 'distinguishes a gesture from a sum of movements'.[204]

For Merleau-Ponty, however, this still remained a partial description as rather than the 'projection into the world of a new "milieu"', the human order of behaviour is characterised by the constant renewal of structures which are continually built, rejected and surpassed in 'a third dialectic', the *perceived situation-work*.[205] In fact, Merleau-Ponty replaced the term 'action' with the Hegelian term '*work*' because 'although there is nothing more common than to link consciousness and action, it is rare that human action is taken with its original meaning and its concrete content'.[206] Bergson's account of pure perception was an example of this fundamental error and Merleau-Ponty rejected Bergson's conception of human action either as a type of 'vital action, […] by which the organism maintains itself in existence', or 'a mystical action which is directed to no determinate object'.[207] In Bergson's account, even the most human of actions such as 'the act of speech, of work, [and] the act of clothing oneself' have no intrinsic meaning as they are merely 'understood in reference to the aims of life'.[208] Merleau-Ponty, however declared, 'there is more'.[209] Failing to come to terms with the complexities of perception, both behaviourist psychology and Bergson's time philosophy favoured 'a notion of *here-*

[200] Ibid., 161.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 162.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 163.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

*and-now consciousness*' as their erroneous interpretation of consciousness and action would 'not make an internal communication between them possible'.[210]

Like Lewis Merleau-Ponty concluded that time philosophy and behaviourism equally failed to account for human action because they saw it as passive, unidirectional and instinctive owing to a shared inability to properly engage with the problem of perception. To Merleau-Ponty, both doctrines lacked a fundamental understanding of the paramount function that perception and action have, which is 'to "root" consciousness in being' through 'knowledge and modification on reality' as they determine the fundamental 'relation between *what exists* and *the fact* of existence'.[211] The philosopher, then, rather than remaining 'content with the "concrete general"', and leaving consciousness 'indeterminate', must abandon the definition of consciousness as knowledge of the self and 'introduce a notion of a life of consciousness' by which the 'structures of knowledge and action in which consciousness is engaged' are explored in detail and redefined accordingly.[212] Merleau-Ponty in fact dismissed Bergson's bringing of perception ever so close to vital action, whose only function is merely 'to adapt us to the "unorganised mass"'[213] leaving the fundamental issues related to the life of consciousness unexplored: 'the problem is still to understand how the objects of nature are constituted for us'.[214]

Both time philosophy and behaviourism dealt with perception inaccurately as the mere juxtaposition of a series of 'impersonal forces' implying an 'impartial thinking subject' which 'docilely executes' as a result of their primal needs being 'released over a mosaic of pure sensations' or a flux of stimuli.[215] To Merleau-Ponty, this interpretation was a mere attempt to 'construct perception arbitrarily' owing to the lack of 'an adequate notion of real consciousness'.[216] On the contrary, a subject perceives 'melodic unities' and 'significant wholes experienced in an indivisible manner as poles of action and nuclei of knowledge'.[217] When properly accounting for human action, the notion of sensation emerging as a mere sign from the chaos of the physical world must be abandoned altogether, as Merleau-Ponty stated:

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[210] Ibid., 164.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 165.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 165-166.
[216] Ibid., 166.
[217] Ibid.

> Perception is a moment of the living dialectic of a concrete subject; it participates in its total structure and, correlatively, it has as its original object, not the "unorganised mass," but the actions of other human subjects.[218]

Human perception is 'haunted by human presence',[219] with human reality belonging to a dialectic rooted in the human body as the centre of expression which does not merely perceive, but it is perceived, and perceives itself, in a field of meaning composed of use-objects disseminating a typically 'human mark'.[220] All abstract conceptions of an instinctual life of the unconscious in a flux must be rejected in favour of an accurate examination of nascent perception '*in existendo*':

> What is called unconsciousness is only an inapperceived signification: it may happen that we ourselves do not grasp the true meaning of life, not because an unconscious personality is deep within us and governs our actions, but because we understand our lived states only through an idea which is not adequate for them.[221]

It is only through exercising a mode of aesthetic perception on ourselves and our reality that we are able to abandon these inadequate ideas and explore the emergence of consciousness in the world by temporarily suspending the 'involvement that binds us to the human world' and allowing 'a nature "in itself" [...] to show through'.[222] To Merleau-Ponty, we must artificially return to a state as close as possible to the time when things appeared 'marvellous' to us, because 'we did not know what they were for'.[223] The objects of our perception must be then 'lived as realities […] rather than known as true objects'.[224] Only then will we be able to describe 'the emergence of an indecomposable signification in the moment of experience itself' which 'demands a reformulation of the notion of consciousness'.[225]

In what follows, I will demonstrate that contrary to the 'lack of structure and emptiness of […] subject matter' recorded by previous scholarship, *Snooty Baronet* is a meticulously crafted phenomenological work calling precisely for a reformulation of the notion of

[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 172.
[220] Ibid., 167.
[221] Ibid., 220-221.
[222] Ibid., 167.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid., 168.
[225] Ibid., 169-170.

consciousness. In *Snooty Baronet* Lewis brings the intrinsic relationship between human behaviour and the emergence of meaning into being through style, looking to address both the advantages and the limitations of human perception which crucially both haunts and is haunted by reality. *Snooty Baronet* is ultimately a work about the expressive power of consciousness and a radical act of complete revaluation of crystallised human meaning infused with new semantic vigour dynamically re-emerging from within the reading act.

The plot of *Snooty Baronet* develops around the bizarre journey of three characters (two authors and a publishing agent) from London to Persia and the events that shortly precede and follow it. The trip is merely a marketing stunt organised by the publishing agent, keen to refresh the image of the protagonist (one of his most notorious authors) by artificially inducing him to produce a best-selling title. The marketing strategy is based on the pretend kidnapping of the author by fake desert bandits and his subsequent miraculous release during a research trip for a bestselling book on Mithraism. Under precise instructions of the agent, the protagonist attempts the recruitment of a fourth character for participation to the trip, a popular London poet turned bohemian outcast in the French countryside. As part of the agent's masterplan, the presence of the amateur bull fighter poet would dramatically increase the epic character of the expedition for publicity purposes. The poet, however, declines the invitation and dies shortly after in ironic circumstances, killed by a bull as a tragic modern version of Mithras. The trip goes ahead nevertheless and, despite the impeccable stage coordination of the publishing agent things do not go as planned and the agent dies tragicomically as a result.

The story, narrated in the first-person by the protagonist is motivated, we are told, by a wish to expose the real version of events, as the narrator announces: 'this book then has been written to vindicate my name' (*SB* 102) In the final three chapters however, the protagonist perplexingly admits responsibility for the murder of the agent in a sensationalist twist supposedly aimed at rectifying the version of events presented by an already published book by his travel companion which had exonerated him from the murder. *Snooty Baronet* is thus the bestselling confession of an exiled murderer published as a sequel to an erotic novel inspired by the same events.

As a crucial element of a multi-layered system of *coherent deformation,* the frivolous plot acts as the first set of primary materials. Lewis, in fact, distilled the form of the bestseller from

reality, selecting as his satirical subject the contemporary publishing world at the mercy of consumer capitalism shaped by manipulative mass-marketing interventions. *Snooty Baronet* is chiefly a book about books and consequently about writing, reading, language and human expression, or rather about finding ways to counteract the demise of human expression and the consequent death of human consciousness. In what follows, I will observe how Lewis uses literary form to break with the perpetuation of sterile, preconceived meaning and restore an active search for a fully expressive self.

In addition to the sensationalist bestseller plot, Lewis's coherently manipulated system includes an intricate and seemingly interminable entanglement of distorted quotations from classic literary works, scientific treatises, philosophical works, religious books, poetry, songs, proverbs, mythology, nursery rhymes, newspaper cuttings and text from advertising posters. In his afterword to the Black Sparrow Press edition, Lafourcade identifies forty-seven authors and sources for what he refers to as a series of 'neo-, proto-, para-, peri-, pseudo-manifestations' (*SB* 259) of written and oral tradition. As extensive as the list may seem for appearance in such a brief novel, it is not comprehensive in terms of what appears in *Snooty Baronet* as a kaleidoscopic refraction of past expressions of the human condition in the shape of established human beliefs, human origins, values and theories on the workings of nature, colliding in a very specific way as they *become* the materials of the novel through manipulation. Taken over by a speaking subject, all materials reclaim their expressive vigour and return to the realm of *speaking speech*, abandoning the impersonal third person *spoken speech* of past expressions. The neo-, proto-, para-, peri-, pseudo- materials, no longer treated as a static series of word-images, are resurrected with revived signification emerging from within the reading act as a restored human mythology in the shape of an up-to-date spoken story of humanity. Emblematically, the protagonist reflects on the medium of the novel in the first three pages, referring to his own writing as the practice of a 'myth maker' (*SB* 16). In conjunction with this human mythology, a more personal mythology emerges from the materials of *Snooty Baronet* as Lewis's own past expressions in the form of character creations and previous literary works appear coherently manipulated in the novel like the satyrs, nymphs, mermaids and heroes of Lewis's own reality.

The publishing agent Captain Humphrey Cooper, nicknamed Humph and based on real life publisher Rupert Grayson, is clearly connected via name, smoking habits and rough

invading physicality (he is in fact described throughout the novel as an enormous menacing chin) to the archetypal bodily character Hanp of *Enemy of The Stars*. A version of the Vorticist play's second character Arghol, the mind principle, necessary for completion of Lewis's archetypal pair, is now substituted by a modern up-to-date version. In fact, Valerie Ritter, nicknamed Val, based on real life writer Marjorie Firminger takes the role of Humph's antagonist in *Snooty Baronet*. Embodying the modern unconscious mind, a feminine principle, idoliser of complexes and writer of erotic novels, Val's characterisation evokes a series of other female creations, such as the bourgeois-bohemian Bertha in *Tarr* and the decrepit ex-gossip column star Lady Fredigonde. Finally, and most importantly, we are introduced to the radiating characterisation of the protagonist and first-person narrator Sir Michael Kell-Imrie who is 'a sort of disciple of Watson' (*SB* 64) by his own admission. Kell-Imrie, also known as Mike, Snooty and Snoots, is an ever-yawning World War I veteran with a metal plaque implanted in his skull, a mechanical prosthetic leg and a characteristic linguistic tic: 'Duty First!' Sir Michael Kell-Imrie, turned Baronet through inheritance, is modelled on real life war veteran Sir Michael Bruce whom Lewis met through Marjorie Firminger. The character however is modelled through showmanship, research interests and overall attitude on the protagonist and narrator of *The Wild Body* stories, Kerr-Orr. He crucially appears in the two manuscripts, firstly as 'Lewis' and later as 'Carr-Orr', linking him directly to Lewis himself and evidently to the soldier of humour of *The Wild Body*. As with past yarn-spinner creations by Lewis, autobiographical elements are infused in the characterisation of the protagonist. Sir Michael Kell-Imrie in fact shares with Lewis his literary practice composed of a specific type of 'field-work' which he also shares with the 'soldier of humour' and the absent Pierpoint in *The Apes of God*. Kell-Imrie claims to have 'invented a new literary technique' as he published three books titled *The Proper Study of Mankind is Fish, Blurbs for Humanity* and *People Behaving,* on which he reflects as follows:

> Since my fish book, two books of mine have been published. In these I have taken up the study of Man upon exactly the same footing as ape or insect. The regular anthropologist had done that, it is true, but only with a "backward" race, or an "inferior" class. I on the other hand make no distinctions. My victims are 'progressive', popular, even 'fashionable' persons, of topdog race and showy class, not prominent politicians of course […] (because they are only lifeless puppets, they have no power or significance at all). (*SB* 64)

*The Proper Study of Mankind is Fish* appears as the distorted version of *Snooty Baronet* itself. The fictional book title is a play on Alexander Pope's line from the acclaimed

philosophical poem *An Essay on Man*. The line 'the proper study of mankind is man'[226] in fact belongs to the first section of Epistle II in which Pope reflects on the ambiguous state of the human being, in perpetual uncertainty about whether 'his mind or body to prefer'.[227] To Pope, the scientific enterprise detached us dangerously from reality causing humanity to be buried in a hopeless search for an absolute truth which is 'the glory, jest, and riddle of the world'.[228] It is by 'quitting sense' and 'imitating God'[229] that humanity lost sight of our typical way of existing in a world we no longer perceive.

While the reference to Pope's poem evokes *Snooty Baronet*'s philosophical framework, the substitution of 'man' with 'fish' completes the distorted version of *Snooty Baronet* by including a direct reference to *Moby Dick*. The reading of this specific literary work is a life-changing experience for Kell-Imrie who references the text over and over again, constantly revaluating its meaning in the novel. Furthermore, *Blurbs for Humanity* and *People Behaving,* the fictional composition of both based on Kell-Imrie's literary technique of the 'field-work', stand for distorted versions of *The Apes of God* and *The Wild Body*. Kell-Imrie, in fact, compares *People Behaving* to 'Babbitville', whose 'author compiled an account of the lives and habits of the inhabitants as if he had been studying a tribe of backward Indians' (*SB* 65). This is clearly a distortion of *Babbitt*, a controversial novel satirising middle class America by Sinclair Lewis, who rather conveniently shares Lewis's surname. Kell-Imrie also emblematically professes that he has treated his 'specimens' in both books 'as if they were characters in a novel' (*SB* 65).

Contrary to the attribution by a number of critics of the modelling of the fictional world of *Snooty Baronet* on contemporary reality to lack of imagination and deadline pressures from publishers, the references are part of the stylistic technique of *hyperecognition* that we saw meta-referenced extensively in *The Apes of God* and theorised in *The Wild Body* and now appearing elucidated in *Snooty Baronet* through the analysis of *People Behaving* as a distorted version of *The Apes of God*. Speaking through the protagonist Kell-Imrie, Lewis acknowledged the importance of featuring coherently distorted versions of his own past expressions, complying with the phenomenological principle at the root of the ontological

[226] Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, Vol. III (United Kingdom: J. Johnson, 1806), 63.
[227] Ibid., 64.
[228] Ibid., 65.
[229] Ibid., 66.

efficiency of his satirical practice by which '*everyone* should be laughed at or else *no one* should be laughed at' (*MWA* 89):

> I do not hide behind the waving arms and nodding heads of my marionettes. Anything but—why, I will dance a *pas de quatre* with the worst of them, and I will pick myself to pieces for the benefit of the Public as soon as I look at it! As readily as I pick a member of the Public to pieces, I will pick my own self, bit by bit.
> (*SB* 102)

As with the sophisticated tripartite satirical self-portrait in *The Apes of God*, the satirised autobiographical elements in *Snooty Baronet* reaffirm Lewis's personal investment in his ontological enquiry as well as renewing his commitment to a phenomenological conception of truth as 'the truth in which we participate'[230] guiding his phenomenologically ethical approach to satire. Seeking to extend this attitude to the reader, Lewis develops a system of stylistic devices aimed at soliciting the reader's embodied attention for the purpose of contemplating the truth about ourselves and experiencing our relation to reality.

The strategy behind the crafting of the reading act of *Snooty Baronet* is the preservation of a distinctive rawness by which constant interruptions, revaluations, adjustments, reality breaches and metareferences are deliberately juxtaposed to exceedingly intense revelatory passages calling for an embodied reader to spring into action. The behaviourist narrator appears regularly at the reader's elbow taking over and depriving the reader of their independence by systematically arranging little mazes, memory tests, readjustments and presence-of-mind tests. The emerging stylistic strategy develops as the opposite of a flux, thus taking into consideration the temporal and spatial flow of the reading experience precisely. As a result, the conventional and preferable reader's complete immersion in the text is replaced by a relentless awareness of the linguistic texture induced by exposed compositional processes ('I suppose now I have to boil down for you what I read' (*SB* 87)), a programmatic series of interstitial interventions ('I will explain in a moment the reason for my sitting down to write this book' (*SB* 45)), as the reading act is never taken for granted ('read this of course if you like' (*SB* 87)). The narrator in fact finds increasingly outlandish ways to sustain the relentless interruptions and ensure their effectiveness:

[230] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 133.

> If you like desert-travel I suppose I shall disappoint you, but, if you don't mind, we will blot out as much as possible of this part of the affair. Let us in fact make our minds into a complete blank! For ten minutes lie back in your chair and relax. Or if you are in bed, just go to sleep.
> […]
> After forty winks, come to your senses again, then imagine that we have all arrived at the opening of a sort of upland valley, up which the caravan track mounts.
> (*SB* 230)

The desert-travel section of the story is remarkably withheld in what is supposed to be a desert-travel bestseller and substituted with instructions for a relaxation exercise by which the reader pauses the reading act to reach an artificial relaxed state or simply sleep. As an example of the workings of these interventions, this extract develops as a satire of the type of reader engagement solicited by desert-travel bestsellers, triggering a performative reflection on the purpose of fashionable literary formats and turning a reader's own response into satirical materials.

The phenomenon of reading and the workings of language also become central topics in many of the monologues by Kell-Imrie, whose internal world is a monument to books as he is in the process of narrating the events of a book with a cast of characters made of a publisher, a poet and two authors:

> Once you recognise a danger—similar to that of locusts in the tropics—in the growing abuse of mere human speech (*Language Habit*, as nicknamed by my chief master) then you are confronted by a problem that goes far deeper than gender. No, gentlemen! The very existence of art and of formal and symbolic expression is involved I am afraid—*may be said to be at stake*—in this. (*SB* 38)

Following a lengthy criticism of Val's erotic writing practice as a woman's confusion of '*tongue* and *pen*' (*SB* 38), Kell-Imrie quotes Watson directly, referencing his conception of *language habit* which outlined a specific *habit-formation* process involving firstly the neuro-muscular system of the head and progressively extending to the entire human body. Despite his declared behaviourist beliefs, Kell-Imrie identifies this view of language as a threat to 'the very existence of art and of formal and symbolic expression' (*SB* 38), a stance which is reinforced across the novel through a series of scenes challenging the behaviourist view of language and aimed at breaking off our worn-out relationship with words.

In the chapter titled 'A Lord of Language and his Boat', entirely dedicated to the fictional poet Rob McPhail (based on Roy Campbell) and his sardonic death in a bogus bullfight, we are exposed to this compelling rendering of poetry composition:

> his kitchen-work with words, little and big, but especially those massive winged ones that propel themselves like bats or wild water-fowl, is beyond praise or blame. (*SB* 147)

Transporting the reader away from a behaviourist conception of the word as a mere symbol, this epic passage infuses words with a spark of existence. Words are primordial flying creatures inhabiting a world in which the poet is described as a hunter and 'a powerful verse-craftsman—at the head of a towering vocabulary, at once up-to-date and barbaric' (*SB* 146), supposedly capturing and dissecting words. This rendition is however juxtaposed to a lengthy section of direct speech between Kell-Imrie and MacPhail discussing the Persian expedition. Most sentences uttered by MacPhail are introduced by the verbal tick 'Good Lord!', appearing over and over again in the text, the expression gradually weakening through repetition until the two words cease to influence meaning completely. Towards the end of the conversation the expression is a stimulus-response empty gesture which causes much fastidiousness in Kell-Imrie (and the reader).

Merleau-Ponty was fascinated by this phenomenon by which words could suddenly become 'alien and absurd as are for us names which we go on repeating for too long a time'.[231] Utilising his observations of aphasic patients to illuminate this phenomenon further, he observed how the breakage of a word's link with its living meaning leaves it seeming to have 'suffered deterioration, like some inanimate body'.[232] He also observed, however that in such instances, while the word stops expressing immediate thoughts, it still carries on expressing 'a gestural or existential significance', as it 'present[ed] or rather it [was] the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings'.[233] This very phenomenon is replicated through the juxtaposition of McPhail's verbal tics and his celebrated mastery of language featured throughout the chapter. Moreover, the effect is reinforced through the layering of a second juxtaposition: McPhail's death in action and his apparent intellectual superiority, as he is singled out by Kell-Imrie as a representative of 'the togaed ones laughing (of the senatorial caste, the great Freed-men) above the

[231] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2003), 224.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., 225.

death-pit of the circus' (*SB* 155). As the senseless manifestation of a mechanical will to nothingness, McPhail drives himself towards a ridiculous and completely preventable death in a pantomimical bullfight apt to satisfy the sensationalist attitudes of a rapacious audience. These parallel juxtapositions establish a crucial continuity of meaning between McPhail's use of words and his behaviour, as his linguistic choices perfectly coincide with his manner or style of *being-in-the-world*. Emblematically, shortly after the accident in the bullring, the image of McPhail's comatose body 'lifeless, secretive and urbane—alien to us' (*SB* 183) is juxtaposed to Kell-Imrie's bitter recollection of 'Good Lord!' as the last words reaching him from McPhail.

The encounter with McPhail allows for an experience of words elevated to much more than a series of symbols, or mere external accompaniments to thought, with speech considered as a true expressive gesture. As in Merleau-Ponty's account, words are the 'presence of thought in the phenomenal world' and the bringers of meaning into existence, as language is a speaking subject's expression of a 'certain style of being'.[234] It is 'beneath the conceptual meaning of the words' which we witnessed in its deteriorated state with McPhail's verbal tic that 'an existential meaning' can be discerned which is inseparable from the words as this type of meaning inhabits words.[235]

In chapter ten the reader is subtly invited to break with our habit of taking words for granted in our everyday use of language through what begins as a series of bizarre remarks on the spelling of individual Persian words:

> (The latter word is generally spelt *bagh*, but if you can do anything with the h once you have said bag I can't. So I will just write it bag, as I pronounce it.) A bag is a Persian garden. (*SB* 198)

And again:

> […] Humph came to tell me and told me that the next step was to go to the city of YES. (Consonants that I can do nothing with only bore me. I dislike seeing them on paper. So let us call the place *Yes*. […]). (*SB* 208)

Although slightly disorienting and unusual, the two interventions, appearing separately ten pages away from each other and in brackets, are simply overlooked by the reader

[234] Ibid., 211-213.
[235] Ibid., 212.

engaged in a highly theatrical chapter of pantomimical conflicts between Kell-Imrie, Humph and Val, with visits to a Persian brothel and lengthy breaks into staged versions of Iranian myths. Twenty pages later, however, the reader's attention is drawn back to the two remarks with the following sentence: 'I really had strange dreams in our bag at Yes.' (*SB* 227)[236]

The sentence can only be deciphered for the immediate purposes of the narrative through a return to the previous remarks; however, even before the deciphering takes place, an exceptionally complex and almost instantaneous process is triggered in the mind of the reader. By manipulating the sound-image (or signifier) of the two Persian words 'bāgh' (garden) and 'Yazd' (name of an Iranian city), their signified (or concept meaning) is artificially released and secured to the English common words 'bag' and 'yes'. Consequently, and analogously, the English word pair is temporarily disassociated from their English signified, or conceptual meaning. However, it is not until the new words composed of the English signifiers attached to the Persian signifieds are released into the text and brought into being in a speech act, that the meaning entanglements described above collide in the mind of a reader whose attention is drawn to psycholinguistic processes that would usually go unnoticed. The phenomenological aim of this stylistic intervention is to transport the reader to the origins of language where a glimpse of the authentic act that transformed silence into speech can be transiently caught.

To Merleau-Ponty re-experiencing language in such a way helps us overcome the limiting focus on established expression promoted by the very study of language. In fact, the classifying and streamlining tendencies of linguistics impair our relation to language, taking away our fundamental sense of wonder at these prodigious processes and redirecting our attention away from the paramount function that the birth of meaning has in the life of consciousness:

> We live in a world where speech is an *institution*. For all these many commonplace utterances, we possess within ourselves ready-made meanings. They arouse in us only second order thought; these in turn are translated into other words which demand from us no real effort of expression and will demand from our hearers no effort. The language and the understanding of language apparently raise no problems. The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no

[236] Ibid., 227.

> longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think.[237]

It is by restoring the 'effort of expression' that was there at the beginning of language that Lewis aimed at reinvigorating our relationship with our expressive nature. To Merleau-Ponty, it is only by 'bending the resources of constituted language to some fresh usage' that we are able to rediscover an 'originating speech' which brings thought into existence.[238] Merleau-Ponty further remarked that 'all words which have become mere signs for a univocal thought' started as originating words before losing their 'primordial function of expression'.[239] We must strive to 'remember with what richness […] [words] appeared to be endowed and how they were like a landscape new to us'[240] as this rediscovery is humanity's only access point to the workings of our consciousness:

> Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world.[241]

To Merleau-Ponty only a renewed perspective on the phenomenon of language would allow humanity to surpass the limitations of empiricism and intellectualism and to finally transcend the subject-object dichotomy which caused such inadequate descriptions of the life of consciousness. While for empiricism and behaviourist psychology speech was merely a series of third-person processes dictated by the causality of stimuli acting on a body taken into consideration *partes extra partes*; intellectualism viewed speech as an external vehicle for thought. Merleau-Ponty rejected both views, recalibrating his enquiry towards a *speaking subject* which is an embodied subject, as 'there is no *thought* and language' since the two are inseparable, but 'there is sensible speech, which is called thought, and abortive speech, which is called language'.[242] The structures of expression and speech are analogous to the structures of our embodied perceptual consciousness and it is through a phenomenology of speech that we can truly expose 'the enigmatic nature of one's own body'.[243] In expression and speech, in fact, we experience the body synthetised in its natural power of expression, preforming gestures which are the result of the 'perceptible

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[237] Ibid., 213-214.
[238] Ibid., 453.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid., 214.
[242] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 18.
[243] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 229.

world's explosion within us'.[244] It is thus through expression that we transcend our biology and position ourselves in a world of meaning.

In *Snooty Baronet*, Lewis demonstrated a deep awareness of how the structures of language and expression mirror the structures of perceptual consciousness and utilised literary expression to draw the reader's attention to this crucial iteration. In this metareferential passage, Kell-Imrie presents the reader with a powerful phenomenological description of the phenomenon of reading:

> In the case of "Moby Dick," I was astonished at what I read. It passed into me—I scarcely can be said to read, like other people. For some time I could think of nothing else but its dark meanings. I attempted to penetrate them, with my clumsy imperfectly-trained intellect. I have never fathomed that book even now (it is my Magnetic Pole)—it is deep water, it is cold, it is mysterious. My mind encountered some barrier beneath the surface of the words. That was like a barrier-reef—yes if you wish, the walls of a tank (what is the sea but that?) that was a sensorium, cut out of the surface of a star. These were the limits where two universes met, element above element—atmosphere above the watery plane. But I (as the ideal Mystacocetus) I was born from both! What then? All the while I felt strong and free. Yet I knew henceforth I had been in some strange manner entrapped. What exactly did I experience can you tell me? It was I think an understanding of my anger that it gave me, as I read on. All I can say for certain is that as far as I was concerned I gradually became conscious of the fact—I felt like the hunted fish. (*SB* 61)

The reader is drawn to a reconsideration of the phenomenon of reading (and of their own immediate reading act) with this challenging account of Kell-Imrie's taxing encounter with linguistic materials which permeated his body ('it passed into me'), but that are also perceived as a bodily descent into deep waters which are cold and mysterious. Approaching the materials with his mind, Kell-Imrie is immediately faced with a barrier which epitomises the connecting point between the surface of the words and the ungraspable 'dark meaning', also epitomising the exact location where 'two universes met' at a sensorium, or rather an entire sensory and intellectual apparatus which in this case originated from a fragment of the physical world ('cut out of the surface of a star'). This remarkable creation myth accounting for the coming into being of meaning progresses with Kell-Imrie's feeling of strength and freedom at the realisation that he was 'born from both' universes and that until then he had been forcefully kept into one or the other. The powerful direct address: 'what exactly did I experience can you tell me?' wraps up this

[244] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 20.

complex vision, amplifying the reader's involvement as we too experience an analogous struggle with the challenging style of the passage.

This highly suggestive rendition of the phenomenon of reading is carried forward through a series of explicit references to *Moby Dick* appearing repeatedly in the novel. The meaning of the literary work is constantly rediscovered and reassessed as Kell-Imrie's first sympathetic interpretation towards the individualistic character of Captain Ahab, with whom he shares an artificial limb, shifts dramatically against the power-hungry hunter and to the side of the white whale as a metaphor for the modern individual persecuted by power structures. Kell-Imrie gradually turns into an embodiment of the work of literature as his existence modulates the meaning of the work, while the meaning of the work is in turn modulated by Kell-Imrie's existence to the point at which he transcends the signs completely and 'nothing separates […] [him] from that meaning any more'.[245]

Furthermore, the reader's own preconceived opinion of the literary classic, as a previous act of cultural expression, collides with a suspended and fluctuating meaning constantly redeveloping and readjusting throughout the novel, refracting the existential world of the protagonist. As Merleau-Ponty observes, 'nowhere does […] [language] stop and leave a place for pure meaning'; in fact, we must surpass the idea of language as 'a technique for ciphering and deciphering' because language is 'much more like a sort of being than a means'.[246] Throughout *Snooty Baronet* we experience the fundamental qualities of indirectness, ambiguity and opaqueness being returned to the *spoken speech* of *Moby Dick* which is wielded back into an original *speaking speech* and restored to its original fluidity, left to exist and metamorphosise in the world of the novel and in the mind of the reader.

As part of these pre-reflective experiences of meaning and human expression Lewis sets in motion a series of phenomenological thought experiments contemplating human existence through a gradual reinstatement of meaning into human action. Without a narrative function proper to it, chapter six, titled 'The Hatter's Automaton', is the phenomenological turning point in the novel by which the behaviourist view of humanity as a commodified abstraction deprived of its expressive powers is brought into being.

[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid., 42.

The chapter opens with a rendition of Kell-Imrie's internal monologue as he walks aimlessly down the Strand after a business meeting at the literary agency. Dismissing Humph through a popular behaviourist theory by describing his actions as the 'pantomime of a person glandularly affected' (*SB* 129), Kell-Imrie expresses his frustration at the publicity-led authorial personas the agency has imposed on him for marketing purposes, as he concludes:

> They desired me to be their automaton! I would in the end become their Frankenstein! I said loudly to myself—in these words I said it (against my custom—I am no talker, I do not allow my mind to chatter). (*SB* 131)

Despite Kell-Imrie's declared aversion to Humph's promotional strategy, which he feels is so damaging to his sense of self, the constant references to scientific theories reaffirming his distrust of consciousness and his firm belief in behaviourism damage Kell-Imrie's credibility in the eyes of the reader. Furthermore, his opposition to 'mind chatter' is discredited by the form of the chapter which gradually evolves from a conventional interior monologue to a total immersion into the workings of Kell-Imrie's consciousness. The attention of the reader is peculiarly drawn to the fact that Kell-Imrie is not wearing his hat, but he is carrying it in his hand; a seemingly worthless detail with its relevance only highlighted by the direct address breaching the internal monologue: 'I give you this detail because of what next happened to me.' (*SB* 131) With no immediate follow up on the relevance of Kell-Imrie's hat, a powerful connection to the crude biology of the human body is established:

> My intestines had thrown up the picture in bold plaster-cast relief of a big chicken-hearted Club-sandwich. My spittle-ducts had squirted with a will and all together at the sight of it: so with the above life-size model, in crisp yellow-crusted impasto, of a super-Club-sandwich swelling inside me (blocked out in wind in mid stomach—a cave, a receptacle—my thunderous belly had modelled a cavity, with a contour of such an object as a monstrous Club-sandwich, to attract my attention) and with my hat hanging in my hand, I took the root my destiny had traced out. (*SB* 132)

Following an accurately behaviourist interpretation, Kell-Imrie's specific desire for a Club Sandwich originates in the intestines and not the mind, as the subsequent concrete visualisations of the will to seek said sandwich are produced by his 'spittle-ducts' not his mind's eye and his 'destiny' is fully determined by his hunger. The fact that such a primal stimulus as hunger is met with a response which is not as primal adds to Kell-Imrie's

already damaged credibility in the eyes of the reader. Kell-Imrie is not simply hunting for food but he is seeking a very specific type of food, the fashionable country-club-originated Club Sandwich. The walk down the Strand resumes on this hunger-driven search, as we are reminded of Kell-Imrie's 'field-work' which involves staring 'pretty hard at all the people' he meets 'for research purposes' (*SB* 132). The scene shifts when the system stimulus/hunger and appropriate response /search-for-Club-sandwich is disrupted by the sudden appearance of a crowd gathered around the hatter's shop-window. Kell-Imrie joins the crowd as he catches the sight of what he perceives as a 'well-kept' and 'fashionably-dressed' life-size puppet in the window who is advertising a new product by repeatedly lifting his hat off (*SB* 133). An appropriately automatic response follows:

> I placed my hat upon my head (it may have seemed a retort) at the moment the puppet removed his, with a roughish civility darting his eye at me as a new-comer—just as I thrust my way in amongst his spellbound admirers. (*SB* 132)

The puppet's acknowledgement of Kell-Imrie's arrival, thought accidental, causes Kell-Imrie to suddenly abandon his behaviourist stance declaring that 'it is absurd to say these things […] have no character' as 'like characters in books', they are 'often much more real than live people' (*SB* 133). At this point, a comparison is established between the reader as the only 'live person' in this scene, and Kell-Imrie himself, a book character, as we are compelled to consider the fictional reality against ours: Kell-Imrie observes the automaton as we in turn observe Kell-Imrie observing the automaton. In the spirit of this arrangement, we receive a full report on Kell-Imrie's 'field-work' on the puppet in this disorienting passage:

> he was evidently speaking, in a rather mincing way, not loud, but with his lips, and reinforcing his words, with a consummate salesmanship, by a half-closing, seductive veiling, of his eyes. He slowly winked and blinked once or twice. […] he carried to his eyes a monocle, and, turning swiftly, looked up into the ceiling of the shop, then slowly he turned back his head, and scrutinised the door upon his right, smiling slightly to himself. […] delivering, well-chosen words, his little lecture—moving his eyes from one to the other of us, seeking to read the effect of his words upon our faces—then straightening himself out, put on his hat again at a somewhat rakish angle in his particular, a little dandyish, manner: raised his eyebrows, to admit the insertion of the monocle, parted his lips to show a well-kept set of teeth—his smile spoke volumes as to his feelings at his position in the window—his nose was wrinkled slightly as he smiled, and I could swear that his eyes lightened as he looked down for a moment in our direction. (*SB* 133)

Although Kell-Imrie is unable to hear any actual words being spoken owing to the shop window separating him from the scene, he detects a series of typically human expressive behaviours as the puppet's lips move accompanied by the appropriate facial expressions providing a credible enough impression of spoken language. In addition to the articulation of language, the automaton performs typically conscious acts signalling reflection, programmatic examination of the audience's reactions and even style awareness, as he positions his hat in the appropriate fashionable manner. As Kell-Imrie remarks, 'it was impossible as one watched him not to feel that he was in some real sense alive' and even though 'at certain moments of course the imperfections of the apparatus would betray' this impression, it was not much different, Kell-Imrie admits, from instances in which analogous imperfections are observed in 'the best of us' (*SB* 133). Could this perhaps simply be a shop assistant delivering a well-rehearsed sales pitch? Or is Kell-Imrie's inability to hear the puppet speak distorting our perception of what is in fact merely a puppet? A forceful reinstatement of dogmatic behaviourism in the subsequent passage adds further complications. Hesitantly asserting that he is 'a profoundly dense person' interested in 'purely mechanical things of an external order', Kell-Imrie remarks that 'if there is such a thing as a "soul"', though he doubts that there is one, he had always been 'unable to catch it' as it seemed to 'stick in the surface shell', remaining 'embedded in the bone' (*SB* 134).

The nature of Kell-Imrie's interventions is dialectical and meta-referenced through the wearing of an emblematic 'mask' giving Kell-Imrie the 'painful baffled' (*SB* 134) attitude necessary for his performative confusion which develops as the relentless juxtaposition of behaviourist dogma and perplexed revaluations triggered by the observations of the puppet. The high level of ambiguity sustained in the first section of the chapter is then suspended by a powerful revelation which cancels out the behaviourist stance overturning the scene completely:

> As for the puppet, he went through his evolutions over and over again—each cycle was quite elaborate. I watched him with a painful amazement, *attempting to penetrate what he meant, by being what he was*. I had replaced my hat—I again removed it, as it happened it was just as he was taking off his. The fellow that was standing at my elbow had been watching me […] He had I supposed remarked that I was *partly* mechanical myself […] I became conscious of this. He was looking at *me*, instead of the puppet.
>
> (*SB* 135)

Kell-Imrie's 'painful amazement' is induced by his revelatory experience of *the meaning of the automaton* through multiple *intrasubjective* and *intersubjective* observations. The process is initiated by Kell-Imrie and the puppet's gazes at each other triggering the conventional motions of a hat salute. To conceal the fact that he was caught up in this choreography with a mere puppet, Kell-Imrie convinces himself and the reader of a certain causality at play, remarking that it was in fact 'as it happened' that he lifted his hat and not in response to the automaton. The process is then enhanced by a further layer of *intersubjective* observation, as Kell-Imrie *becomes conscious* of a fellow audience member losing interest in the automaton and beginning his own suspicious observations intrigued by Kell-Imrie's prosthetic leg. A series of compelling revelations begin to unfold gradually from the multidirectional gazes with the process growing more and more revelatory.

Merleau-Ponty performs analogous thought experiments featuring complex systems of multidirectional mediated and unmediated gazes in an attempt at drawing attention to the recurring and overlooked human experiences through which the other grants us access to our own mysterious way of existing:

> What is it like when one of the others turns upon me, meets my gaze, and fastens his own upon my body and my face? Unless we have recourse to the ruse of speech, putting a common domain of thoughts between us and as a third party, the experience is intolerable. There is nothing else to look at but a look. Seer and seen are exactly interchangeable. The two glances are immobilised upon one another. Nothing can distract them and distinguish them from one another, since things are abolished and each no longer has to do with anything but its duplicate.[247]

This vexing type of unmediated human gaze on itself has a mysterious unifying power, calling attention to our *universal singularity* as we *envelop* the world with our bodies through perception, but we are also simultaneously *enveloped* by the world as our bodies are *of* the world. Merleau-Ponty's poetic rendering of this experience he deems fundamental to the life of human consciousness is: 'something visible to man is becoming a viewer. I am present at the metamorphosis'.[248] The overlapping of gazes promoted by our unmediated experiences of the other, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'that tele-vision which makes us simultaneous with others and the world',[249] has the power of bringing the *reversibility* of

[247] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 16.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.

the human body into being as we witness the body's opening of its flesh through perception, becoming 'immediately filled by the universal flesh of the world'.[250]

In 'The Hatter's Automaton' Lewis brings this experience of the other into being for the reader through style. From witnessing the dialectical workings of Kell-Imrie's consciousness, the reader turns into an embodied participant in a revelatory series of phenomenological observations through the most incisive direct address in the novel:

> If I could come out of this paper at you, you would find me a manner of man such as you did not expect I think, you would burst your eyes in your effort to fix me, if I rose from the floor at your feet—terribly real, with a whiff of stale tobacco, rough, crippled, with my staring startled difficulty-focused glances and corn-lemon hair—that tense-as-well-as-dense expression, which when it lifts leaves an empty face behind it—for me to grin with and yawn with. (*SB* 135)

The reference to a very specific aspect of the reader's spatial reality ('from the floor at your feet') accomplishes the intricate web of *intersubjective* observations, with multiple gazes colliding (the automaton's, the curious audience member's, Kell-Imrie's, the reader's) necessary for the thought experiment to proceed.

At this point, contradicting his previous hesitant assessments of the puppet, Kell-Imrie declares with confidence that he 'knew that he was not *real*', although the use of 'he' and the sudden admission that there was 'something abstruse and unfathomable' about the automaton discredits once again Kell-Imrie's judgement (*SB* 135). Furthermore, perceiving the curious audience member's suspicious gaze fluctuating between his prosthetic leg and the automaton, Kell-Imrie wonders: 'was not perhaps this fellow who had come up beside me a puppet too?' Although he suddenly remarks, '*but equally so am I!*' describing himself as 'a very thoughtful and important puppet—wandering in this sinister thoroughfare, in search of an American Club-sandwich' (*SB* 136). This multidirectional system of *intersubjective* and *intrasubjective* observations breaches the reality of the reader, iterating as follows: in the reality of the novel Kell-Imrie observes the playact of the automaton through the interposition of the shop window and the curious audience member observes both the automaton and Kell-Imrie, while the automaton in turn gazes at both Kell-Imrie and the curious audience member. Furthermore, Kell-Imrie is conscious of the audience member's gaze on himself and the automaton.

[250] Ibid.

While the audience member doubts the reality of both Kell-Imrie and the automaton, Kell-Imrie's own perplexity is based on doubting the reality of the automaton and the audience member. However, there is a third system at play, with the reader observing Kell-Imrie's observation of the automaton, the audience member's observation of Kell-Imrie, and, finally, Kell-Imrie's own self-observation, through the interposition of the linguistic medium. Paired with Kell-Imrie's invasion of the reader's reality earlier in the chapter, the effect on the reader is one of an eerie involvement as the observational Kell-Imrie/window/automaton system is replicated exactly in the reader/linguistic medium/Kell-Imrie system, forcing us to reflect on Kell-Imrie's self-observation and inescapably self-observe.

To Merleau-Ponty, induced experiences of *intersubjective* systems through art and literature promote a recognition which descriptions and reflections never attain. A mere description in fact could not preserve the bizarre sense of rivalry that is responsible for setting self-observation in motion, as it emerges from speechless interaction during which 'each […] ["I think"] can believe itself the winner of the trial'.[251] Furthermore, a fundamental struggle must be conveyed:

> Vision produces what reflection will never understand—a combat which at times has no victor, and a thought for which there is from now on no titular incumbent. I look at him. He sees that I look at him. I see that he sees it. He sees that I see that he sees it. The analysis is endless; and if it were the measure of all things, glances would slip from one another indefinitely—*there would never be but a single cogito at the time.*[252]

This phenomenological exercise initiates the reader into a chain of intense philosophical revelations. In the subsequent passage Kell-Imrie reflects intensely on the zealous smile of the curious audience member in response to Kell-Imrie's greeting of the automaton. The same gesture, Kell-Imrie hypothesises, performed by one of the audience member's acquaintances on a 'Sunday walk' would not have provoked the same comic reaction as it would have simply been perceived as a 'natural' gesture. When performed by Kell-Imrie and the automaton, however, the gesture is stripped of a certain human quality causing laughter in the curious audience member who is experiencing human behaviour as an *in-*

[251] Ibid., 17.
[252] Ibid.

*itself*. Kell-Imrie however reveals that in his distinctive attitude to the world does not allow for the 'natural' outlook, as he approaches everything in the same way:

> To me *nothing* seemed natural. Often I have smiled upon occasions of that sort. Every day I was smiling hard at such common or garden things. Everything that passed as natural with him, looked exceedingly odd to me. The most customary things in the world struck me continually as particularly ludicrous. (*SB* 136)

With this added intervention, we are compelled to exercise renewed gaze on human behaviour considering the hat salute as an *in itself*, examined at the same level of 'common and garden things' and all 'customary things' in the world. The hat salute provokes laughter when it is devoid of its human meaning, as in the case of an automaton or an animal performing it, just as an object stripped of its human context is suddenly pervaded with an aura of strangeness. But why does the same behaviour lack a certain quality when performed by the automaton and what is the nature of this quality? As the reader begins to come to terms with the implications of this further exercise, another shift in perspective is achieved:

> There were six of us now. I regarded with a dark astonishment our uneasy superiority, insecure as everything else about us—we outside (wrapped in our thoughts, disturbed in the sacred places of our consciousness) with someone there so profoundly of our kind exhibited for our amusement within the show-window. We stood in a contemplative group without on the pavement (rather an absurd collection), the puppet he stood within. He was on show, but we were not.
> There was something *absolute* in this distinction, recognised by everybody there excepting myself. I alone did not see it. (*SB* 136)

In this passage, the focus shifts to the crucial fact that the automaton is behind a window thus 'on show'. The act of perceiving 'someone […] so profoundly of our kind' through the medium of the window disturbs 'the sacred places of our consciousness' in a way that Kell-Imrie cannot properly articulate. To Kell-Imrie, the fact that the automaton looked, dressed and behaved like a person coincided unproblematically with the assumptions of a behaviourist theory of humanity as 'that word *looked*', Kell-Imrie declares, was '*everything*'. This switch in perspective placates Kell-Imrie's behaviourist boastfulness and triggers a sense of 'dark astonishment' and insecurity about 'everything else about us'. The stylistic presence of the window in fact allows for a peculiar type of perception outside human reality, as Merleau-Ponty uncovers in his thought experiments:

> In adults, ordinary reality is a human reality and when use-objects […] with their human mark are placed among natural objects and are contemplated as things for the first time, or when events on the street—a crowd gathering, an accident—are seen through the panes of a window, which shouts out their sound, and are brought to the condition of pure spectacle and invested with a sort of eternity, we have the impression of acceding to another world, to a surreality, because the involvement which binds us to the human world is broken for the first time, because a nature "in itself" (*en soi*) is allowed to show through.[253]

This rare viewpoint is extremely difficult to achieve in our everyday lives during which we mistake our perception for absolute reality, just as we confuse action with consciousness and therefore behaviour with the fact of existence. To finally abandon these assumptions and experience reality and consciousness not as abstract concepts but as they come into being, we must find ways of breaking our worn-out involvement in the human world. Only then will we be able to access what appears to us as a surreality, but is in fact an awareness of the eccentricity and ambivalence of the human condition. The shop window is the crucial element capable of bringing this viewpoint into being stylistically, metareferencing the linguistic medium of the novel capable of providing an analogous spectacle for the reader.

Having established this particular viewpoint as a revelatory one, further reflections are released into the mind of the reader as Kell-Imrie begins his analysis of a new arrangement, concluding that while observing the actions of the automaton and believing it to be 'real', he was 'beneath the spell of [the automaton's] reality' (*SB* 137). He suddenly, rather logically, applies the same rationale to Humph:

> But while Humph was beneath my eyes—how was that really so different? There was just what I *saw* there, with my eyes, nothing else. And often he seemed to creak, did he not, or to weaken, or slightly wobble, like a dummy suddenly out of his depth—a machine attempting something for which it was not quite fitted. (Constantly there was this sensation of *strain*, was there not?) (*SB* 137)

The effect of involving a character absent from this scene is one of amplifying Kell-Imrie's reflection, dislocating it from the reality of the fiction and releasing it into the mind of the reader as a far-reaching enquiry into the human experience of *intersubjectivity*. Furthermore, both Humph and the automaton display an analogous 'strain', as Kell-Imrie reports a striking similarity in his perception of both behaviours. Where does the

[253] Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior,* 167.

difference lie then, and is there really a difference between the two? Are both Humph and the automaton real? Do they both exist? What does it mean to exist? What is the relationship between displayed behaviour and the fact of existence? The enquiries develop further with the scene shifting once more for the benefit of the reader.

If a relation between displayed behaviour and the fact of existence really subsists, the next logical step is for Kell-Imrie to ask: 'was I certain, for instance, that Humph still existed, now that I no longer had him beneath my eyes?' (*SB* 137) This reductio ad absurdum elevates the enquiry further, as we are forced to recognise the futility of considering the fact of existence both as an absolute concept or as merely straightforwardly linked to displayed behaviour. Kell-Imrie cannot verify Humph's existence as he is not currently in his perceptive field. We are also aware, however, of Kell-Imrie's surprising insecurity in validating Humph's existence even in his presence owing to Humph's displays of behavioural similarities with the automaton. Through this series of complex and multidirectional changes in perspective, the reader is forced to consider the common-sense fact of existence anew, as their reasoning suddenly interrupted by a further direct address:

> There is of course nothing metaphysical or mysterious about these matters. The contrary in fact. So please do not allow yourself to be rebuffed by such a topic, because you believe it to be 'over your head' or anything of that sort. The world that we imagine—that we call the world of common sense—existing in independence of our senses, is a far odder one, about that there is no question at all, than that world to which we feel ourselves constrained to deny reality, what we can neither see, smell, touch nor hear!
>
> Now of course coming across this particularly vivid dummy did not teach me to reflect after that fashion. Such modes of thinking were habitual to me. It was the teaching of 'Behaviour,' and this had become so much a part of myself that I could with difficulty imagine the time when I saw the world with other eyes—when, in the grip of a complex inherited technique, I shut out illusion, and saw what I did not see, and heard what I did not hear! (*SB* 137)

The reader is eerily presented with a direct acknowledgement of the mental efforts of getting to grip with the ontological complexities arising from the scene. Despite the difficulty and the strangeness however, there is nothing metaphysical and mysterious about what has been raised and that the feeling of oddity is merely caused by our stereotypical idea of reality as 'the world of common sense'. In fact, Kell-Imrie acknowledges that there is so much more to reality than what we perceive with our senses

and that crucially the appearance of the automaton is not what exposed this oddity. In fact, owing to his expertise in behaviourism, Kell-Imrie was already familiar with the lesson to be drawn from the scene, as we are told that the automaton had been positioned there for the benefit of the reader.

In the closing paragraphs we are drawn back to the detail which opened the scene, namely the fact that Kell-Imrie was not wearing his hat. In fact, the very action of putting his hat back on, supposedly misinterpreted as a greeting, triggered the amused gaze of the curious audience member at Kell-Imrie who as a result was finally able to understand what the automaton '*meant by being what he was*' (*SB* 135). Kell-Imrie was able to perceive himself 'in the position *of the dummy*' (*SB* 138), thus recognising himself as a mere body in action and transcending this recognition in existence. The discovery is described as an 'inherited technique' insofar as it is the typically human capacity for transient self-observation.

A final reductio ad absurdum extends our cogitations when Kell-Imrie recognises with apprehension that he is 'not always existing' (*SB* 138). In fact, he realises that we are not only 'apt to go *out'* of anyone's perceptive field at every moment but also inevitably prone to compete with 'other creatures bursting up all over the imaginary field' (*SB* 138). Far from being an absolute construct, existence is meaningfully directed towards others. Immersed in these closing deliberations Kell-Imrie looks away from the shop window and raises his eyes to the lightbox on the façade of a cinema:

> THE MAN-MADE MONSTER.
>
> Beneath this, in smaller letters, was the word Frankenstein.—Was this by accident? Had I not said, as I emerged from the Adelphi, 'I will in the end become their Frankenstein?' (*SB* 138)

The sign connects the ending back to the premise of the chapter with the centred text in capital letters functioning as a second conclusive title. Both titles evoke the vision of the eerie automaton on display in a shop window as the embodiment of a man-made conception of humanity, as well as drawing attention to Kell-Imrie's anxiety at the fictitious marketing-driven personas taking over his own self, for narrative purposes. Like the well-trained automaton in the shop window, Kell-Imrie's rehearsed personalities are for sale and the chapter closes on Kell-Imrie looking back at the shop window 'as if to extract an answer from the being inside', which instead smiles 'sardonically' bowing 'with

a well-trained civility' (*SB* 138). In a sort of brotherly recognition, Kell-Imrie lifts his hat in response one last time, with his body taking centre stage as his stomach thunders for the Club-sandwich in response to this affiliation.

*Snooty Baronet* is an important book grappling with the peak of a crisis afflicting all human institutions. The reader of *Snooty Baronet* sets off on a complete revaluation of human expression, from the birth of meaning to its sedimentation and essential rejection. Lewis's main aim is the necessary reinstatement of meaning into human action in a world in which consciousness has ceased to live properly, broken-up and 'hallucinated by its objects', as in Merleau-Ponty's analysis:

> Consciousness can *live*, in existing things without reflection, can abandon itself to their concrete structure, which has not yet been converted into expressible signification; […] inoffensive objects, can imprison its liberty by their proper inertia, shrink its perception of the world, and impose stereotypes of behaviour; likewise, before having conceptualised our class or our milieu, we *are* that class or that milieu.[254]

This ontological malfunction is experienced by the reader through Kell-Imrie's relentless dogmatic interventions juxtaposed with his made-up self, which is an accumulation of abstract marketing-driven personas. Merleau-Ponty described the inevitable emergence of this specific type of personality driven by deceptive meaning as the product of the movement towards a gradual but relentless abstraction of what it means to be human:

> These pseudo-solutions are recognisable from the fact that the being of the person never coincides with what he says, what he thinks, or even with what he does. False art, false sanctity, and false love which *seeks* […] to "perform significant acts" give to human life only a borrowed significance, effect only an ideal transformation, a flight into transcendent ideas.[255]

Through the first-person narration, the reader is completely engrossed in the inner workings of a consciousness which 'never coincides' with its way of *being-in-the-world*. Kell-Imrie's mutilated mechanised body and his linguistic tic ('Duty First!') function, or rather malfunction as the two traumatised halves of a disembodied consciousness whose action in the world is completely devoid of intentionality. Kell-Imrie's entire expressive repertoire, from his dogmatic writing/scientific practice to his mechanised sexuality, is an

[254] Ibid., 222.
[255] Ibid., 180.

edifice of sedimented choices and borrowed significance, as excessive yawning (Kell-Imrie's main behavioural trait) accompanies his mediocre attempts to extricate himself from the inertia and viscosity of the pseudo-dialectics governing his existence.

It has been mainly as a result of a superficial assessment of Kell-Imrie's characterisation that scholarship judged *Snooty Baronet* as the trivial creation of a circus universe for an aimless and irritating character who acts as the mere mouthpiece for a scripted version of the author's criticism. As shown in the close reading, Kell-Imrie must be taken into consideration as a *speaking subject* delivering coherently deformed stylistic materials through the prism of his characterisation. I argue that the narrator's autobiographical components and Lewis's partial modelling of his fiction on real life has distracted previous scholarship from the main event of *Snooty Baronet,* or rather the speech-act of a modern and very important antihero epitomised in this compelling monologue:

> These are exceedingly hard and heavy times—hard in every sense. They are times of great and wonderful profusion and plenty and of technical powers of limitless production beyond man's dreams. But upon all that plenty, and that power to use it, is come a dark embargo. It is all locked away from us. By artificial systems of great cunning this land flowing with milk and honey has been transformed into a waterless desert. There all the nations of the earth come in tremendous masses as if afflicted with the pestilence that follows famine. From being skinned and fleeced, we shall at last have nothing. And it is not nature, but it is man who is responsible for this. That is why I have thrown in my lot with nature—that is why I break the social contract and the human pact. (*SB* 102)

In this intervention by Kell-Imrie, the action claimed for *Snooty Baronet* is announced as the breaking of 'the human pact', as a humanity entangled into 'artificial systems of great cunnings' and 'locked away' from its potentiality gets 'thrown in' and brought back to elemental scrutiny. In *Snooty Baronet* the unfamiliar gaze on the human species turns into a complex endeavour to highlight behaviourist psychology's perverse effort to make an unfamiliar gaze on the human species familiar—by abstracting human existence, by depriving human action of meaning. In place of battling this world bent on degrading humanity, the unheroic Kell-Imrie is a son of his age with an inherent passiveness, as his actions in the world are meaningless, 'acting at being in action' (*SB* 155), and his only desperate final claim to intentionality is a murderous act. Furthermore, although only verbally, Kell-Imrie asserts a belief in his own superiority which grants him the position of the absolute observer, the field-worker and the behaviourist scientist made author. Juxtaposed to the narcissism, the doubtful attitude, the immorality and cowardice that

make Kell-Imrie a superb antihero, his superiority complex is supported only by an apparatus of empiricist dogmatic declarations. What the reader witnesses is a narrator who is a self-appointed expert authority, who pays for sex, walks away from a dying friend, agrees to participate in a bogus research trip for a fake book, is involved in a fraudulent kidnapping by pretend desert bandits, kills (or lies about having killed) his publishing agent and finally abandons his smallpox-suffering travel companion in staged captivity. The strategy is clearly not the one of a reader sympathising or identifying with a first-person narrator, neither is it a simple case of the passing on of an attitude to the reader. Moreover, as highlighted in the close reading, the reader is not granted a secure vantage point from which to watch Kell-Imrie's fiascos and the contrary is often the case, with Kell-Imrie's constant surveillance of the reader. The essence of this troublesome cohabitation brought to its extreme by the first-person narration lies in the dynamic relationship between Kell-Imrie's characterisation and the reader's interaction with the materials of the speech act. No discovery can be found in Kell-Imrie's misadventures as this is not a ready-made discovery but a revelation to be achieved.

Through the protagonist's relentless and sardonic falling back, a crucial modern impairment of the typically human ability to reject and surpass is brought into being. The PTSD-suffering Kell-Imrie epitomises modernity's antihero in his failure to preserve a functioning human dialectic in a world active at exploiting the adhesiveness of human structures for the pragmatic purpose of abstracting human consciousness. Notwithstanding these antiheroic and anticlimactic features, the novel seeks to emphasise that the foundations that underlie the workings of our consciousness can and must be restored. Lewis's achievement, in fact, is not to be found in a straightforward display of a forlorn state of affairs but in the crucial transferral of the heroic action to the reader. Through participation in the speech-act of *Snooty Baronet*, the reader is simultaneously admitted into the intimate walls of a life of consciousness sunk by the catastrophic effects of sedimentation and abstraction, and equipped with a way out through a renewed perception of human behaviour in its dialectical unity, its intentionality and its human meaning.

In 'Man, the Hero' Merleau-Ponty recognises that the hero of modernity is no longer 'the Hegelian hero' who questioned 'the established order […] to bring another order into the

world', sacrificing 'his personal happiness […] to save history from chaos'.[256] Neither can the modern hero be 'the Nietzschean superman' who is 'interested only in power itself' and going 'beyond everything that *has been or is to be done*' always '*against* something or someone'.[257] To Merleau-Ponty, the modern hero 'is not Lucifer; he is not even Prometheus; *he is man*'.[258] In such an unprecedentedly adverse environment hostile to the life of consciousness, to simply be loyal 'to the natural movement which flings us toward things and toward others'[259] must be a heroic act:

> Today's hero is not sceptical, dilettantish, or decadent; he has simply experienced chance, disorder, and failure […] He lives at a time when duties and tasks are unclear. He has a sharper sense of human liberty and of the contingency of the future than anyone has ever had before. Taking everything into account, nothing is certain—not victory, which is still so far away, and not other people. Never before have men had such good evidence that the course of events is full of twists and turns, that much is asked of daring and that they are alone in the world and before one another. But sometimes […] a harmony is created […] there is that flash of fire, that streak of lightning, that moment of victory […].[260]

The contemporary hero, therefore, is any man/woman committed to 'be[ing] and think[ing] like a living person for as long as [they] live'[261] and this is precisely the challenge set to the reader of *Snooty Baronet.*

In the conclusive chapter, I propose *The Childermass* as Lewis's own metaphysical novel. In 'Metaphysics and the Novel', Merleau-Ponty recognises the failure of classical metaphysics in terms of a rationalistic and insurmountable *cul de sac* and he considers literature as able to fill the metaphysical gap of a complete phenomenological system. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's considerations, I will argue that *The Childermass* belongs to the field of phenomenological metaphysics as it provides the reader with a true experience of the world that precedes all knowledge about the world.

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[256] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 183.
[257] Ibid
[258] My emphasis, Ibid
[259] Ibid., 187.
[260] Ibid, 186.
[261] Ibid., 185

# Chapter 5

# A large ~~Book of Fiction~~: Phenomenological Metaphysics and *The Childermass*

> Stowed away […], hidden in the almost imperceptible movements of the language machinery, are all the mysteries and metaphysics of life.
>
> TWM 350

> At the beginning of the world it is an unfamiliar world in which one is uncomfortable and which forbids all human effusiveness.
>
> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 16

> I wish to communicate this view of the world to you exactly as it manifests itself: and so no human opinion will ever be able to get the better of you.
>
> Parmenides, Fragment VIII. 61. quoted in *ABR*, 375

> Instead of struggling against the monsters he has understood what makes them tick, has disarmed them by his attention, and has reduced them to the state of known things.
>
> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 22

When it was published in 1928, *The Childermass* 'caused no controversy' and as Lewis pointed out twenty-two years later reflecting on the significance of its reception, the book's history was 'the most peaceful of any of […] [his] books' (*RA* 214). The work, in fact, did not suffer malicious boycotts and no one came forward to claim 'they were "in it"'. This time, Lewis had no 'assailants with whom to settle accounts' (*RA* 214).

The draft editorial of *The Enemy* records an interesting deliberation as part of Lewis's plans to announce this book:

> A large book of, roughly, two hundred thousand words, *The Childermass*, ~~a book of fiction~~ <(coming under the head of what is technically known as fiction)>will be ready in the early spring.[262]

[262] Draft at Buffalo, B15 F8; *Enemy*, no.1, p. vii.

The thought process recorded by the strikethrough is one which Lewis stressed elsewhere, both in critical works—'A NOVEL—if you can call it that— ~~'~~The Childermass" (*RA* 124)—and private correspondence—'The Childermass […] will be my principal work in fiction I suppose (if you can call it "fiction")' (*L* 273). This ambiguous portrayal of the work remained actively endorsed by Lewis, as well as being often paired with declarations of intense fondness for this particular book: '*The Childermass* is the book I set most store by' (*L* 540).

These three aspects of Lewis's own relationship with *The Childermass* (Lewis's predilection for the work, the book's uncontroversial nature and its ambiguous framework) may appear unrelated; however, some specific connections can be made in relation to what will be discussed in this chapter. In view of Lewis's controversiality, for instance, it is interesting to consider his fondness for a book that did not deliver the kind of signature gesture in the world that his works managed without fail. Furthermore, despite the noticeable lack of (reactive) energy in the contemporary reception of this book, both before and after its publication, Lewis truly believed *The Childermass* to be his most far-reaching and influential work. Why would a master of controversy, with a keen focus on an aesthetic practice centred on the production of powerful audience responses, together with a track record in the delivery of contentious material, place such high expectations on a work which sparked no controversy? It is also compelling to consider these same observations in relation to Lewis's reluctance to classify *The Childermass* as a book of fiction, or indeed, to assign it to any genre or even to attempt a loose marketing-led definition. Lewis seemed perfectly content with the lack of specificity around the genre of *The Childermass*.

I believe these considerations are crucial signals, not simply of a recalibration or of an updated set of intentions on Lewis's side, but of a renewed phenomenological discovery in relation to literary form's potential and its ability to carry a remarkably intense philosophical undertaking. In what follows, I propose that the gesture delivered by Lewis with *The Childermass* does not belong in the real world, but in the realm of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'metaphysics in action',[263] or rather, to phenomenological metaphysics.

[263] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 83.

As I will discuss further, this is precisely the motive for Lewis's disinclination to classify *The Childermass,* as well as the basis for placing such a high set of expectations on a supposedly uncontroversial work. From the dissatisfactory (for Lewis) experiments of *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars*, the Vorticist *living abstraction* had evolved into a vigorous and purposely undefinable aesthetic which developed as Lewis's phenomenological method for permeating the elusive domain of metaphysics successfully. With *The Childermass* Lewis aims to neutralise humanity's gatekeepers and gatekeeping mechanisms, and replace our pseudo-dialectics with a fully functional *hyperdialectic* bringing the metaphysical nature of our existence into being and restoring our knowledge of *what is* prior to knowledge and to philosophical and scientific reflections. In this final chapter, I propose *The Childermass* as the pinnacle of Lewis's investigations into phenomenology through language, and as an unparalleled work of art, providing its audience with a method which grants significant contact with humanity's most fundamental type of knowledge, a knowledge which escapes systematisation and linguistic communication and that must remain tacit.

I will provide justifications for these claims founded in a close reading of *The Childermass*. This analysis, however, is preceded by an account of the genesis of the book, necessary to the correct placement of Lewis's discovery in the remainder of his examination of phenomenological aesthetics. A survey of selected readers' responses will follow the genesis of the book and function as an introduction to the close reading.

As reported by Paul Edwards, *The Childermass* plausibly developed as the spin-off from a much larger (early 1920s) project titled 'Joint'.[264] This ambitious, seven volume project has been interpreted by Edwards as the plan for a fictional counterpart to the post-war criticism of Lewis's other unpursued project: 'The Man of the World'. Just as with 'The Man of the World' (whose fate I explored in chapter three), 'Joint' was too extensive and its materials were extrapolated and redistributed into some of Lewis's most notable works published between 1926 and 1930. As Edwards records, the mind-body problem is a central concern in 'Joint', with its three main characters constructed as a triad: the earthly Joint, the spiritual Bully and the psychoanalytical denier of dualism Archie. It is fascinating to consider the design for these characters as the descendant of *Enemy of the Stars*' Arghol and Hanp, but also as the prototypes for several of Lewis's proofs of concept for phenomenological enquiries into the mind-body problem: *The Apes of God*'s Pierpoint,

[264] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 317-323.

Zagreus and Dan, *Snooty Baronet*'s Kell-Imre, Humph and Val, and finally, *The Childermass*'s Satterwhite, Pullman and the Bailiff/Hyperides, which I will be examining later in this chapter.

The seventh volume of 'Joint' is what is believed to be the precursor to *The Childermass*. Titled 'Infernal Fair', it is the account of Joint's oneiric travels to an after world in which he acts as a guide for Socrates, Dr Johnson and Paul Cézanne through an actual fair inhabited by philosophers ('from the sceptic Carneades […] to Kant').[265] Heavily philosophical by design, most of the theoretical materials conceived for 'Infernal Fair' ended up in *Time and Western Man*. For a series of aesthetic and structural reasons, which I will be taking into consideration in the final section of this chapter, it is important to highlight that volume six of 'Joint', titled 'London' (with a strikethrough in Lewis's notes, subsequently substituted with the title 'Life') is believed to be the precursor to *The Apes of God*. In *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1*, Lewis himself acknowledged an aesthetic intimacy between the two works as he pointed out that '*The Childermass* has technically much in common with *The Apes of God*' (*SF* 28).

Originally planned for publication in the spring of 1927, *The Childermass* did not make an appearance until 1928. Lewis, in fact, occupied with finalising *Paleface* for publication (in the summer of 1927) and revising his travel sketches for *The Wild Body* (in November 1927), only managed to submit a typescript for *The Childermass* in December 1927. The book was published in June 1928 by Chatto & Windus. *The Childermass* subsequently became itself part of a larger project titled *The Human Age*. In its second 1956 edition, the book eventually became *The Human Age, Book One, The Childermass*, and it was presented with a brief addition to the ending transitioning to a second volume. Originally conceived as a quadrilogy, *The Human Age* caused a lot of grief and frustration to Lewis as the struggle to raise funds to complete the sequels, paired with the rapid and relentless deterioration of his eyesight, meant that a second and a third volume were published as late as 1955, with the fourth volume never materialising.

While *The Childermass* is the design of a limbo-like application process to the next stage of the afterlife, supposedly the Magnetic City, the second volume, *Monstre Gai*, depicts the true destination of the deceived applicants as Third City—in which the social and political

[265] Ibid., 318.

blueprints for the inter-war civilisation contemporary to Lewis can be perceived. The third volume, titled *Malign Fiesta,* portrays yet another dimension: the hellish and futuristic Matapolis in which the characters unwillingly end up as they travel through 'monstrous starlight' in an attempt to escape the bleakness of Third City. The fourth unpublished volume, titled 'The Trial of Man', remained incomplete and unpublished.

These are valuable historical and genetic details exposing significant ties between *The Childermass* and some of Lewis's most phenomenologically significant works explored in previous chapters, such as *The Wild Body* and *The Apes of God,* and indicating a continuity across Lewis's ongoing experimentation with phenomenological aesthetics. Insights in *The Human Age* project also provide us with a deeper understanding of Lewis's investment in *The Childermass* and his keen commitment to turn the book into a larger project against insurmountable difficulties of extreme financial hardship and blindness caused by a rapidly progressing brain tumour. Later in this chapter, I argue that Lewis's commitment to *The Childermass* is directly connected to the significant phenomenological aesthetic advancements brought about by this book.

The most prominent view on *The Childermass* remains W. B. Yeats's, as he famously pointed out in a 1928 letter to Lewis, that the first section of the book appeared to him 'as powerful as "Gulliver" and much more exciting to a modern'.[266] Yeats further reported having registered 'moments in the first hundred pages that no writer of romance ha[d] surpassed' but he dismissed the second half of the book as simply 'too much of a pamphlet'.[267] Though not much has been written on *The Childermass*, most existing criticism seems to be in keeping in with Yeats's own. As a result, the architecture of the book is entirely misunderstood and there has been little to no attempt to deal with the book as a unified whole. The source of this misconception resides chiefly in the aims set by criticism, which can be effectively summarised with a reflection by Paul Edwards, who points out that the achievements of existing commentaries consist in the fact that '*The Childermass* has [now] become more manageable for criticism'.[268] As discussed in previous chapters, most readings which apply standard categories of literary criticism to Lewis's literary work often end up employing a simplifying rhetoric, striving for resolution through streamlining as the works *need* to be made "more manageable". The task of this

[266] W. B Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 733-734.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 330.

type of criticism seems to be one of freeing the reader from adversities, frustrations, obstacles, moments of crisis and complications through making everything unhindered. All aspects of the work must be accounted for and returned to familiar systemic patterns. Furthermore, whenever specific stylistic features resist this approach too radically, they tend to be hastily dismissed as ostentatious and driven by virtuosity with crucial aesthetic tensions assessed as dualism for dualism's sake. In this approach, the phenomenological value of functional stylistic features is missed altogether and replaced by attempts to reconcile the reader to the absence of permanence in the delivery of a type of phenomenological meaning which by design is never actually *delivered* (in the traditional sense). External preconceived structures of meaning, then, often either in the shape of materials from Lewis's critical works or of standard literary categories are forcibly imported into the works to overcome disturbances caused by such encounters with troublesome form. In what follows, I will discuss the case of *The Childermass* as an extreme illustration of this propensity. Selected commentaries by prominent scholars will be examined in contrast to H. G. Wells's reader response to *The Childermass* as an introduction to the close reading section of the chapter.

Together with Yeats's dismissal of the second half of the book, which appeared hugely amplified in Hugh Kenner's uncompromising statement that *The Childermass* is 'simply *The Art of Being Ruled* dramatised', I. A. Richards's commentary stuck rather prominently:

> I think everyone who had tried to write or talk about *The Childermass* has found himself in the same hole—the very deep and dubious hole Wyndham Lewis so craftily keeps us in. We don't know—to an agonising degree we are not allowed to know—what it is all about. That very ignorance may be, of course, what it is all about.[269]

I argue that this tortured and rather emotional declaration of unconditional surrender from Richards is triggered by a set of unmet expectations. If the reader is unable to see *in* the work what the work is all about, then, what it really must be *about* is a nihilist 'deep and dubious hole'. The feeling of dystopic uneasiness promoted in Richards's statement is perpetuated in most critical commentaries on *The Childermass*. However, it is fascinating to consider this tendency in contrast with another set of widely accepted declarations on the traceability of the philosophical materials featured in the book. In fact, *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled* are often promoted as the key to the unnecessarily

[269] *Third Programme*, 'The Niceties of Salvation', a talk by I. A. Richards, aired 10th March 1952, on BBC Radio.

difficult *The Childermass*. Even David Ayers's commentary, which opens with a dismissal of previous criticism by asking why it 'should have been necessary for Lewis to dramatise ideas which he had already expounded elsewhere', concludes by reaffirming that, perhaps, if not a dramatisation of the critical works, *The Childermass* can be seen as 'an apotheosis of the polemical works'.[270] As a result of an inconclusive attempt to answer his initial question, Ayers seems to be merely substituting one category with another (the troublesome dialogues of the second part of the book are an apotheosis rather than a dramatisation) as he positively declares that 'there is little in *The Childermass* which cannot be accounted for with reference to the two polemical books'[271] (*Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled)*. Paul Edwards too, concludes that the book is 'too long',[272] with the philosophical materials appearing 'very lightly fictionalised',[273] as he furthermore concedes that *The Childermass* would 'stand as a more interesting and more expressive work of art' if readers allowed 'for some of the complexities […] in the non-fiction to emerge also in the fiction'.[274]

These evaluations, however, stand in direct conflict with other assessments appearing in those very same commentaries, as both scholars concurrently define *The Childermass* as 'the most difficult'[275] amongst Lewis's books and as an indication that 'Lewis's artistic style and methods had changed so fundamentally that *The Childermass* seemed like an alien fragment'.[276] These contradictions become increasingly fascinating when they are taken into consideration in relation to the critics' respective use of close reading, as both scholars select the same extract within the first ten pages of the book for analysis. After a long examination of the syntax in order to unravel the structure of the passage, Paul Edwards's reading (partially based on a reinterpretation of Fredric Jameson's own reading of the very same extract) records an 'extraordinary style', as he concludes:

> The previous qualifying phrases, promising information about it, have already run themselves into the sands of the technical construction of the old slippers, leaving all but the experienced shoemaker scratching their heads. To understand the description we need to know that the instep is the top of the foot from toe to ankle, and the vamp of a shoe is its top, covering this part of the foot. The 'japanned tongue' of the slipper is either lacquered or polished with blacking

[270] David Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), 99-100.
[271] Ibid., 99.
[272] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 323.
[273] Ibid., 322.
[274] Ibid., 326.
[275] Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, 99.
[276] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 322.

> (according to the OED, 'japanned'); in his notes for *The Childermass* […] Lewis drew a labelled diagram of a foot to help him in constructing the sentence.[277]

In direct opposition to this, David Ayers's reading of the same passage is treated as evidence for the conclusion that '*The Childermass* is […] to be seen as an examination of the plight of the self and of massified society'.[278] This is distinctly 'deployed', Ayers states, through the images in the first section of the book, as the scholar concludes:

> Except that this figure wears house-slippers in combination with his day-suit, nothing gives an indication that we are in the presence of anything much different to the most normalising narrative style, which gives the most secure image of the world, collective society, and of the individual understood as a collective and psychological entity.[279]

The discrepancy between the two close readings is compelling. In Paul Edward's analysis, an explicit intellectual account of each word and each syntactical relationship is vital and aimed at providing a comprehensive record of a linguistic scaffolding which is laid bare. The reader emerging from this account manufactures a type of meaning which is the result of a meticulous layering of external meanings onto the passage. A definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and a drawing from a notebook in the Cornell archive then become the key to a passage which 'leaves all but the experienced shoemaker scratching their heads'.[280] However precise Edward's account is and however valuable it undoubtedly remains for some readers, we never learn of the overall effect of this passage and its impact on the reader's mind. Is there a value in this head-scratching, and if so, what is it? I argue that this approach could perhaps prevent us from getting to the work at all.

In direct opposition to this analysis, the second close reading denies the presence of any stylistic difficulty, as Ayers describes what is an interaction with rather singular materials as an encounter with 'the most secure image' originated from the 'most normalising narrative'. In this reading, a forcibly permanent meaning is produced to validate an initial statement of intentions which is at variance with the aesthetic value of a stylistically difficult passage. Ayers's conclusion that '*The Childermass* is […] to be seen as an examination of the plight of the self and of massified society' seems to be, in fact, reverse

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[277] Ibid., 325.
[278] Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, 109.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 325.

engineered from the text, with the reader and the reading act completely removed from the process. Despite starting off from analogous premises which are then remarkably followed by utterly discordant textual analyses, both studies produce surprisingly similar attempts at classifying *The Childermass* as a war memoir, a utopia, a dystopia, a denial of the dystopian, a major cultural critique, an account of Lewis's philosophy or a validation of Lewis's world view. It is striking that both critics readily dismiss the second half of the book as a 'massively useless debate'[281] and 'lengthy arguments on the brink of a full-scale dialectical battle'.[282] I argue that it is by failing to reconcile the two parts of the book and maintaining the widely accepted existence of a Lewisian schema, purposely dichotomic and inscrutable, that both studies are inconclusive in identifying the overall aims of the work. This method inevitably leads to conclusions construing *The Childermass* as a work 'dominated by nihilism and antihumanism probably unrivalled in Modernist literature'.[283]

I will deliberately and only temporarily set these two studies of *The Childermass* aside to bring H. G. Wells's response into the discussion. It is interesting to consider that Lewis and Wells were never friends; in fact they only met informally through Rebecca West and corresponded sporadically to review each other's work. Lewis sent Wells a copy of *The Childermass* in 1928 and received (a good few months later) the following letter in response:

> Dear Wyndham Lewis,
>
> I have been reading the *Childermass* with growing appreciation. At first I shied at it badly. I read some of it and got impatient…But I had got something that made me go back to it. I'm an active man preoccupied by interests of my own and I don't read very much outside those interests. Your book therefore has had to make a real fight for my attention. You have a mind alien to mine. But I find myself more and more deeply impressed by your vivid imagination, your power of evocation and your profound queer humour. I haven't done with the *Childermass* and I shall look for the second and third volumes with an awakened curiosity. I am now your grateful reader.
>
> But when I consider how difficult it was for the book to make me your grateful reader I am really bothered by the problem of publication for such books (if one can imagine others in the same class) as the *Childermass*. Its potential readers are scattered through the world like particles of gold in a not very auriferous quartz. How is it to find them? possibly you have a score of thousands of people in the world who would do as I shall do and keep the book about to kind of fondle mentally now and then—if they knew of it. How the devil are they to know of it?

[281] Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, 101.
[282] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, 323.
[283] Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, 102.

> They, as their knowledge and opinion of you grow, may influence some other scores of thousands to borrow you or buy you, out of a kind intellectual snobbery. But, by Heaven! you have to be patient. *The Childermass* is bound to find its people sooner or later, provided it is kept in print and on sale. Meanwhile I salute you with gratitude and admiration.
> Yours,
> H. G. Wells.
>
> (*SF* 28)

This description of a highly complex and layered interaction with the materials of *The Childermass* appears to transcend the traditional time-bound quality of a reading act emerging from Wells's admission of an almost violent initial rejection of the work. What seems to have unsettled Wells the most is the book's ability 'to make [and win] a real fight for [his] attention', as an unusual type of lasting connection, capable of withstanding traditional spatial and temporal connections with a book, has been established. It is, in fact, the undefinable *something* urging Wells back to the book that stands as a most fascinating discovery which remained acknowledged, but unexpanded in the further correspondence between the two authors. Despite Wells's endeavour to pursue materials that had taken him aback so forcefully, his transaction with *The Childermass* remained unfinished. Furthermore, the issue of the book's readership is most compelling, as taking into consideration his own troublesome exchange with *The Childermass*, Wells is genuinely concerned that not enough readers would be willing to undertake such an endeavour. These reflections are paired with considerations around the commercial limitations of the publishing industry which would, according to Wells, make the few readers inclined to *read* the book extremely hard to reach. What is clear from Wells's spontaneous review is that he believed it important that *The Childermass* should reach its rightful readership.

Only briefly returning to the studies by Ayers and Edwards, it is relevant that although both readings perceive something of the metaphysical in the work, they seem to lack the ability to put their finger on how this may come into being and operate within the work. The metaphysical assessment is partially associated with the experience of difficulty, which nevertheless remains unexplored as the many questions emerging from *The Childermass* are deemed unanswerable and not literature-like. Despite both readings being explicitly troubled by their inability to apply clear-cut definitions, these most fascinating observations on the unanswerability of questions operating outside the conventional literary domain are not delved into much further, as the studies proceed to a search for steadier grounds outside the experience of the text. It is crucial to reassert, however, that

something of the metaphysical is nevertheless noticed, as it is perhaps so evidently (somewhere) there. On the other hand, Wells's readiness to remain satisfied with and to uphold a non-definition allows for an account of the gesture delivered through *The Childermass* that is so vaguely, yet so precisely presented. Despite his troublesome and shifting relationship with *The Childermass*, Wells's copy was not destined to be shelved away. A compelling lasting relationship is also established between the author and the book as he planned to have his copy readily available to 'fondle mentally now and then', as one would perhaps do with a painting or a sculpture, rather than with a work of fiction, whenever positively inclined towards a contemplatively productive state of mind.

What follows is an attempt to delve deeper into what is perceived by Wells as a *something* that he got from his first taxing reading of *The Childermass*. I argue that Wells's *something* is a phenomenological revelation with the precondition to remain unformulated in order to retain a very specific type of metaphysical edge. The reader of *The Childermass* is not simply shown metaphysical attitudes or exposed to metaphysical allegories, questions and formulas. As I will be discussing, the work calls its readership to rescue metaphysical consciousness from the dogma of structural dialectics and return metaphysics to its rightful place as a fundamentally intrinsic aspect of human existence. In his literary practice, Lewis often crafts a series of precise formal conditions which allow a metaphysical space to open up and emerge from within the reader's interaction with coherently deformed materials. With *The Childermass,* Lewis goes a step further, as he succeeds in coherently deforming the very materials of human expression (those same materials of which our shopping lists and breakfast orders are composed) in a way that allows for traditionally ungraspable metaphysics to be brought into being. What *The Childermass* is about is precisely that metaphysical dimension and the perplexing revelation that metaphysics permeates all aspects of our everyday existence. What I. A. Richards perceived as a 'dubious hole' is what Merleau-Ponty thought was a crucial abandonment of absolute foundations for the purpose of recovering life's texture through assuming a 'metaphysical view of the world'.[284] I argue that the fact that 'we don't know—to an agonising degree' is precisely what mesmerised Wells and what brought him back to materials able to transport readers to a dimension in which metaphysics can be contemplated in action whilst metaphysical consciousness is somehow rehabilitated.

[284] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 96.

Merleau-Ponty detected that all human disciplines seem to be inevitably 'oriented in […] [their] own way toward the revision of the subject-object relation'.[285] He concluded that this is because metaphysics is deeply rooted in human existence and what we are trained to think of as metaphysics is in fact merely a misleading discipline, no more than what 'Kantianism reduced to the system of principles employed by reason in constituting knowledge or the moral universe.'[286] It is, in fact, the tendency to assimilate the typically ambiguous, elusive and fleeing aspects of our world into the human edifice of knowledge—following an attitude which 'detach[es] the law from the facts, to make the facts disappear ideally into the law'[287]—that made us blind to the metaphysical quality of our own existence and, above all, to metaphysics' omnipresence. Metaphysics is essentially *what is* in our world but we are effectively unable to grasp due to a perceptive buffer erected between our senses and reality which interferes with our awareness of ourselves and of the world. This perceptive buffer, made of the ever-branching hyper-rationalising edifice of human systems, dissolves the textural quality of our existence by encasing our inconsistencies and paradoxes in reassuring motifs and leaving us with a false impression composed of patterns of rational resolutions.

Despite this typically human impulse to make sense of the world by resorting to absolute foundations which 'destroy the very thing [they are] supposed to support',[288] our consciousness is chiefly metaphysical and it is only by becoming aware of the movement which put those systems in place that we can catch a glimpse of what is really there, in our world and in ourselves, because 'metaphysical consciousness has no other objects than those of experience: this world, other people, human history, truth, culture'.[289] Describing a system as 'an arrangement of concepts which makes all the aspects of experience immediately compatible and compossible', Merleau-Ponty defines metaphysics as simply 'the opposite of a system'.[290] In fact, systems suppress metaphysics:

> Metaphysical and moral consciousness dies upon contact with the absolute because, beyond the dull world of habitual or dormant consciousness, this consciousness is itself living connection between myself and me and myself and others. Metaphysics is not a construction of concepts by which we try to make our paradoxes less noticeable but it is the experience we have of these paradoxes

[285] Ibid., 86.
[286] Ibid., 83.
[287] Ibid., 86.
[288] Ibid., 95.
[289] Ibid., 94.
[290] Ibid.

> in all situations of personal and collective history and the actions which, by assuming them, transform them into reason.[291]

I propose that in *The Childermass* Lewis sought to comprehend the workings of this 'living connection' which is our metaphysical consciousness as it needs to be brought into being. I argue, however, that the implications of what Lewis discovered in *The Childermass* are much more methodologically valuable than what he thought of his initial intent and, crucially, are the reason for Lewis's fondness for this particular work. The reader of *The Childermass* comes into contact with an anti-system made from the raw materials of what is the principal human system on which the entire edifice of knowledge stands: language. The experience of this essential paradox triggers an ephemeral but nevertheless compelling awareness of metaphysics' omnipresence and causes metaphysical consciousness to become alert. Furthermore, as metaphysics can only be experienced *in action*, the reader's own reality, which is fundamentally a linguistic reality, collides with the coherently deformed materials of *The Childermass* and it is through this process exclusively that the linguistic system of which *The Childermass* is effectively composed enters the anti-systemic realm of metaphysics. Lewis discovered that language can be coherently deformed in such a way as to trigger an iteration of all human paradoxes from the experience of its most fundamental paradox, simply because the structures of language, from which all the other human structures branch, mirror the structures of consciousness. As in a house of mirrors, with infinite fractal iterations of that living connection, the speech act becomes an arena from which metaphysics can be experienced and human paradoxes are not explained or considered as absolute concepts, but are lived simply through participation in the speech act.

At this point, it is important to introduce the close reading in this chapter with a disclaimer borrowed from Alan Munton: '*The Childermass* is by far the most difficult of Wyndham Lewis's fictions to explain'.[292] This statement is relevant here, even if the preceding four chapters in this study (and this one) were never really aimed at *explaining* in the traditional sense; but aimed rather at contemplating the role of style in Lewis's lifelong search for the most appropriate form with which to craft the gesture that is most effective at assessing, handling and experiencing the most baffling philosophical paradoxes humanity has stumbled upon. Having said this, I am aware that despite my best attempts, some of

[291] Ibid., 95-96.
[292] Alan Munton, 'A Reading of *The Childermass*,' in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 120-132.

the passages dealing with close reading in the preceding chapters inevitably fall victim to the typically human tendency to rationalise, reconcile and systematise our experiences. In his metaphysical work, Merleau-Ponty often referred to his writing metatextually, calling attention to his awareness of the limitations of extrapolating from what is experienced *in action* and *in existendo* for the purpose of attempting a description of phenomenological discoveries. It is the very act of attempting to articulate metaphysical insights that causes the phenomenological edge in those discoveries to suddenly stagnate and gradually evaporate:

> To do metaphysics is not to enter a world of isolated knowledge *nor to repeat sterile formulas such as we are using here:* it is thoroughly to test the paradoxes it indicates; continually to re-verify the discordant functioning of human intersubjectivity; to try to think through to the very end the same phenomena which science lays siege to, only restoring to them their original transcendence and strangeness.[293]

I argue that the very distinctive style in Merleau-Ponty's own writings is not coincidental but the clear expression of this constant struggle to keep as much possible of the phenomenological edge intact and circumvent philosophy's intrinsic weakness for explanations and 'sterile formula'. Merleau-Ponty's most evocative and stylish passages are in fact his most efficient. It is also worth recalling here that Merleau-Ponty's solution to the modern ontological crisis was a contemplation of the workings of literary language in conjunction with the formulation of a theory of expression built on the essential observation that the structures of human consciousness mirror the structures of language, exactly. The ramifications of placing what can ostensibly appear as an obvious (Saussurean) consideration at the centre of a phenomenological philosophy are ground-breaking: if the prime human structure, through which human reality is perceived and upon which the entire edifice of human structures is built, reflects the subject-object dialectic completely, then what we habitually regard either as a distant and inaccessible higher metaphysical realm or as unobservable enigmas within are really just deeply intrinsic aspects of our prosaic life iterating across the whole of human existence through linguistic systems.

This is all to say that whilst in principle I am in accord with the sentiment expressed by Munton's disclaimer that the handling of the materials of *The Childermass* is an astonishing and singular experience, I will unconditionally leave behind the category of 'fiction' and

[293] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 97.

the aspiration to 'explain' and announce that my handling of *The Childermass* will be precarious and unstable by design in an attempt to retain as much of the metaphysical edge infused in the materials as possible. As a result, much of the close reading in this chapter may appear bare when compared with the close reading of the preceding chapters. What follows aims its attention at witnessing the 'machine of language' of *The Childermass*, contemplating examples of stylistic manoeuvres and describing the effects those had on *this* reader.

The first enigmatic yet extremely functional page of *The Childermass* delivers a 'Scene' designation placing us 'OUTSIDE HEAVEN', followed by the *at rise* description of a seemingly terrestrial yet somehow unfamiliar place (*CM* 3-6). The walls of the 'magnetic city' can be just about discerned through a foggy 'tract of mist and dust' sitting between a mountainous wilderness and a river (*CM* 3-6). We learn that an 'immigrant mass is collected' in a camp immersed in this hazy 'shimmering obscurity' (*CM* 3-6). Ominous noises can be heard as 'lowing horns', 'a chorus of mournful messages', 'a heavy murmur' and 'the rolling of ritualistic drums' overwhelm the scene (*CM* 3-6). A few aspects of the traditional afterlife environment are evoked, with Beelzebub and his 'diabolic flame' (*CM* 6) as distant but threatening presences. Although some labour-like activity can be perceived, we are unable to detect explicit signs of a humanity which is brought into being merely through depictions of a series of typically human actions: the daily grind in the most bizarre countryside setting can be hypothesized but remains unconfirmed. The camp is depicted as a singular container-like entity disturbed by 'an exhausted movement' as it gets overflown by 'slow but incessant forms' which are 'like black drops falling into a cistern' (*CM* 6). A first character, Pullman, makes an appearance riverside as we perceive him eyeing a longshoreman:

> the man-sparrow, who multiplies precise movements, an organism which in place of speech has evolved a peripatetic system of response to a dead environment. It has wandered beside this Styx a lost automaton rather than a lost soul. It has taken the measure of its universe: man is the measure: it rears itself up, steadily confronts and moves along these shadows. (*CM* 7)

With this passage, we unexpectedly find ourselves confronted with an alive semi-human creature who has replaced speech with movement as the fitting response to an environment that is dead. Wandering between Earth and the Underworld ('beside this Styx'), the creature ('it') is not a soul as we would have expected, but a 'lost automaton'

assessing 'its universe' through a systematic process (it 'rears itself up, steadily confronts and moves along these shadows'). We then confusingly learn that 'man is the measure' of this creature's universe in a bewildering depiction awfully evocative of a dystopian abstracted humanity rendered so unfamiliar by its completely altered *Umwelt* based solely on movement which seemingly evolved as a coping mechanism for this strangely mutated environment. While the reader comes to terms with this vision and somehow tries to confirm whether this is in fact an afterlife setting, a second character, Satters, makes an appearance:

> 'Where did you spring from?'
> 'I thought I'd take a turn. I couldn't sleep.'
> 'What are you doing here?'
> 'I am damned if I know!'
> They laugh. Damned if he knows if he's damned, and damned if he cares! So this is Heaven?
> Here we are and that's that!
> And let the devil take the hindmost!
> And be damned to him for God's Ape!
> God's in his Heaven—all's well with us!—Lullabys. (*CM* 8)

Satters recognises his old friend Pullman but when the single quotation marks are dropped what begins as a casual conversation between two acquaintances rapidly merges with the reader's state of mind: what are we doing here? Are these characters damned? Is this Heaven? The answers to these questions are inconclusive, or not to be given: lullabies. The two characters then compare bewildering notes about the place they find themselves in. Satters is particularly disturbed by the outfit he has been forced to wear (a school uniform) and he notices a 'loud hollow sound' his chest makes when struck: 'One would say one was hollow! […] Sounds somehow empty doesn't it?' (*CM* 8) While the reader corroborates the fact that these seem to be rather paradoxical afterlife characters, as hollow bodies rather than disembodied souls, a third character is alluded to:

> At the word *Bailiff* Pullman withdraws into a hypnotic fixity of expression, as if something precise for him alone had been mentioned under an unexpected enigma. (*CM* 9-10)

This undetermined authoritative figure called the Bailiff causes Pullman to fall into a state of induced trance as Satters responds: 'I have got used to this along with the rest: haven't you?' (*CM* 10) Pullman hardly recovers from his spellbound state as Satters remarks: 'I suppose in the end we shall get more suitable. I am afraid——' (*CM* 10). We are unable

however to confirm what Satter is exactly afraid of as we are informed by a narratorial voice that 'the object of his fear is immaterial', while the double em dash draws the reader's attention to the empty space designated for a word that never materialises (*CM* 10). An emblematic passage, incompatible with the style of the preceding portion of the text, then assaults the reader:

> The ice is broken fresh bearings have to be taken. New worlds for old—all is in the melting-pot. (*CM* 10)

The imperative effect is endorsed by the combined use of present tense, minimalist syntax, a modal verb and an unconventional use of punctuation. Is this a riddle delivered by a sphynx-like voice granting safe passage? Is this a prediction of what is to come, or simply a set of instructions? In the meantime, the conversation between Pullman and Satters turns to rather mundane topics as they compare hairstyles (yellow curls versus a bald head), forcing the reader, once again, to consider the bodily configuration of the characters, as we are informed of the following:

> Their minds continue to work in silent rhythm, according to the system of habit set in motion by their meeting. (*CM* 11)

Seemingly uttered by a completely different narrative voice which fully contradicts the spirit of the preceding riddle-like message ('new worlds for old', possibly also an allusion to H. G. Wells's 1908 book on modern socialism *New Worlds for Old*), the passage indicates the potential branching of two incompatible realities enhancing and deeply connecting a series of destabilising details—could the characters and the reader be perhaps set on different paths? While the meeting between Satters and Pullman develops into a banal revival of their dynamic as old acquaintances, we learn that the pair is watched by an 'imposing bird' depicted as a clockwork golden cock on the top of a church-like building (*CM* 16). The bird suddenly explodes, releasing gold particles in the air that gradually turn into a red dust surrounding the characters and contributing to the hazy atmosphere of this astonishing place. At this point, the reader can substantiate that 'the ice' is not breaking for Satters and Pullman and that they are certainly not taking 'fresh bearings' but falling back into a 'system of habit', firstly supervised by the golden bird and then caught up into the thick red fog which sticks to their skin and clothes, saturating the atmosphere around them. Troubled by the explosion of the golden cock, Pullman is eager to proceed as he instructs Satters to 'come along' as 'it's best to keep moving here' (*CM* 16). A new

narrative voice describing Pullman, now exhausted, as a 'veteran rat' guiding a 'young rat' through an 'aerial gutter', gradually blends with Pullman's own thoughts:

> Once they get there he will rest, and a have a dream perhaps, of gigantic apparitions inhabiting the dangerous hollows inside the world. Meanwhile action is everything; to keep moving is the idea, this is his law of existence—to rattle along these beaten tracks. Has he not the golden secret, who knows as he does the right road to the proper place in record time, barring accidents? But the glamour of this outcast plan, rigid and forbidden, whose lines are marked out through the solid walls of matter, contrary to the purposes of nature, is lost on the newcomer. He only has eyes for the abyss. Intoxicated with the spaces plunging all around them, in passionate distances expressed as bright dizzy drops, let in at spyholes or thrown up as reflections, he walks upon air, truant in mind from the too-concrete circuit. It is ancestral, as all order is. Born to march and counter-march, two-dimensional and hieratic almost, he has had a revelation starting at the gold point occupied by the cock. He has reached chaos, the natural goal. (*CM*, 16)

What begins as the innocuous reveries of a fatigued Pullman hopeful for some rest shifts unexpectedly. The image of a dream 'of gigantic apparitions', extremely suggestive of the reader's unorthodox experience of the text so far, triggers a collision between Pullman's thoughts and the reader's considerations, promoting a type of distracted attention. We learn that this dream-like universe resides in the 'hollows inside the world' and although the 'law of existence' is 'action' and 'to rattle along', the 'newcomer' (Satters? The reader?) will be following 'an outcast plan' which is 'forbidden' and rooted into 'lines' which are 'marked out through the solid walls of matter'. The idea of a dream-like location conflicts with the emergence of a 'too-concrete circuit', as we learn that the 'newcomer' may be unable to grasp the 'glamour' of the plan, 'intoxicated' as they are by the perception of space which 'plunges' and of distances which are 'passionate' and no less 'expressed'. This latest remarkable description of an alien reality in which familiar perceptive modes are completely worthless, together with references to dreams, apparitions and intoxications, inevitably summon a reader undergoing an analogous experience in their own reading act. The passage ends with further cryptic findings: there has been 'a revelation', a 'golden secret' represented by the clockwork cock which somehow allowed Pullman (although the subject here remains unclear) to abandon the inherited order, which is 'ancestral', and reach 'chaos', which instead is the 'natural goal'.

If, in a thought experiment, we were to cast the reader in the role of the 'newcomer', we would belatedly establish that this is not an afterlife environment, but somewhere beyond

physical reality (the 'hollows inside the world') in which a plan at odds with already established avenues has been designed for us to follow. However, we could potentially fail to comprehend the plan, intoxicated by our perception of this alien *Umwelt*, and while order is what has been passed down to us, our natural ambition is chaos, achievable through 'a revelation' which has something to do with the clockwork golden cock. The nature of this revelation remains unclear.

We subsequently and eerily establish that, contrary to what is described in the passage, Pullman's plan is to keep moving, following the beaten tracks as recommended by the undetermined authority which appears to be running this place. Furthermore, we gradually learn that Satters, the first likely candidate for the role of the 'newcomer', is the less intoxicated of the pair and, despite his idiotic naivety and irritating childish behaviour, he sustains a scepticism throughout, questioning and attempting small-scale rebellions against the systems, principles and governance dominating the place. In contrast, Pullman, defined by Alan Munton as 'an incompetent Virgil',[294] accepts the outlandish physical and formal laws as given knowledge, gradually internalising them to the point of enforcing them on Satters whose inquiring attitude is ridiculed and attributed to unintelligence.

The overall impact of the passage is reinforced by a series of layered devices: the sudden change of narrative voice, the descriptions which only partially fit the experience of the protagonists and multiple references mirroring the experience of the text and invading the reader's own experience. The reader is suspicious, unsettled and reluctant to confirm whether they have been in fact summoned by this passage: something seems to be simultaneously so clearly there and yet not there. Readers of *The Childermass* endure the intensity of this astonishing passage in the first sixteen pages and what follows emerges progressively as an acutely demanding world, building on and amplifying the effects of this passage further when the reader is dropped into an alien and yet extraordinarily familiar environment.

I propose that the metaphysical edge sensed by most readers of *The Childermass* is propelled precisely by the paradoxical state in which we can feel simultaneously alienated and inexplicably at home in the same passage. We observed this perplexing phenomenon as a compelling feature of both Paul Edwards and David Ayers's studies, according to

[294] Munton, 'A Reading of *The Childermass*', *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation*, 122.

which *The Childermass* is simultaneously a difficult book and an alien fragment with metaphysical traits, but also a work providing readers with a clear image of the world and a content that can be easily traced and accounted for. The traditional display of binary oppositions, as something is either there or it is not, or things and situations are either alien or familiar, is replaced with a series of powerful suspensions which challenge common expectations and prevent the reader from regulating their perception of the work, usually effortlessly achieved through the simple articulation of a response. This effect is created by a 'machine of language'[295] shaped by meticulously crafted stylistic incoherence which is the 'obscure clarity of a particular style',[296] operating on multiple iterating dimensions with the ability to branch out in a singular way. As Merleau-Ponty remarks:

> when one is concerned with giving voice to the experience of the world and showing how consciousness escapes into the world one can no longer credit oneself with attaining a perfect transparency of expression.[297]

This lack of transparency and inability to account for a precise experience and provide a definite, regulatory and satisfying explanation is induced by the ambivalence of a familiar/alien state of mind which is typical of our ordinary state of consciousness. This irresoluteness mirrors our experience of ourselves as subject-object entities exactly, evoking and bringing attention to the mental framework at the root of all metaphysical enquiry. What lies at the centre of these materials is an awakening of the experience of what it is *really* like to be human, an awakening only achievable through changing 'the world completely into a spectacle to make visible *how the world touches us*'.[298]

A series of considerations by T. S. Eliot on *The Childermass* are useful in contemplating the practicalities of how such an ephemeral effect can be achieved with something as sculptural as this text. Eliot partially reflects on this as he remarks that Lewis 'has set himself a much more difficult feat to carry out than that of' Dante, Rabelais and Swift:

> If, for instance, one chooses to deposit a human being among a race of people either very much bigger or very much smaller than himself […] the *mechanics* of the story is not very difficult. The author has only to take care to have everything to scale; and the imaginative genius consists in making us feel what it would be

[295] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 30.
[296] Ibid., 19-20.
[297] Ibid., 27-28.
[298] Ibid., 18.

> like to be a giant among ordinary human beings […]. But Mr. Lewis has chosen to take his human beings […] to the world beyond the grave; and not as excursionists […] but as denizens. So that […] Mr. Lewis has to do without the normal standards of consistency.[299]

Despite the clear recognition of the complexity of the *mechanics*, what Eliot overlooks here is an aspect more fundamental than the simple choice of forgoing 'the normal standards of consistency'. In fact, in *The Childermass* the reader is no longer merely exercising an alien perspective on the human species. What we experience in *The Childermass* is what it would be like to be human if we were able to consistently perceive reality as it is, stripped of all the systemic layers conceived by humanity to make sense of a world that ultimately cannot be made sense of without obscuring the world's fundamental qualities and texture in the process. The reason why *The Childermass* is unlike the works produced by Dante, Rabelais and Swift is that it is not simply a metaphorical framework developed for the purpose of drawing attention to selected aspects of human reality, but a stylistic advancement aimed at what Merleau-Ponty identified as the fundamental practice of assimilating 'the culture down to its very foundations'[300] and contemplating 'what interior force holds the world together and caused the proliferation of visible forms'.[301] With *The Childermass,* Lewis aims to show that the human effort of *making sense of* the world is precisely what suppresses the functioning of our consciousness, denying us the awareness of our true ambiguous essence and eclipsing reality in the process. As Merleau-Ponty remarks:

> The artist is the one who arrests the spectacle in which most men take part without really seeing it and who makes it visible to the most "human" among them.[302]

To Merleau-Ponty, for such a complex vision to emerge an 'invasion of metaphysics' is required, causing 'what was only an "'old habit" to explode' and be delivered outside ordinary pre-established language, in the manner in which the first man spoke.[303]

In his subsequent comparison between *The Childermass* and its sequel, *Monstre Gai*, Eliot inadvertently points his finger at exactly how Lewis achieves this in practice. It is worth mentioning that *The Childermass* remained a one-off event and its "'epoch-making"'[304] style

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[299] T. S. Eliot, 'A Note on "Monstre Gai"', *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter, 1955): 522-526, 522.
[300] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 18-19.
[301] Ibid., 18.
[302] Ibid
[303] Ibid., 27-28.
[304] T. S. Eliot, 'A Note on "Monstre Gai"', *The Hudson Review*, 524.

did not feature in any of the sequels. Expressing his preference for the 'more explicit' and more coherent' philosophy of *Monstre Gai*, Eliot perceives a 'gain in *maturity*' in the sequel, as he remarks:[305]

> *Monstre Gai* is, I am convinced, a much better piece of construction. *The Childermass* strikes me […] as a brilliant, a long, interminable opening chapter or first scene, a first scene which breaks off abruptly at the end of a dialogue—or is the dialogue really ended? At the end we still do not know enough about the characters to be quite sure of what the author is up to. The reader's attention is held by the power of the style, the vividness of the picture […] and the brilliance of the debate. And yet, at the end, we have begun to be a bit impatient at being kept waiting so long, we know not for what. *Monstre Gai*, on the other hand tells a story […]. The story gets moving at once, and it moves in a definite direction. And beyond the structural improvement, the much greater skill at story-telling, I think I find a more important difference still: there is, it seems to me […], a gain in maturity.[306]

Eliot's fascination with *The Childermass* is as discernible as is his predilection for a sequel that demands much less of a reader who is thoroughly entertained by explicitness and clearly signposted philosophical movements. The 'interminable' prequel, on the other hand, keeps the reader waiting *we do not know for what*, breaking off abruptly during a conversation that *does not really end*. It is by looking for ways in which *The Childermass* is unlike *Monstre Gai* that Eliot succeeds in capturing in broad terms the mechanics of *The Childermass* which reside in the singular relationship between a powerful style, 'the vividness of the picture' and 'the brilliance of the debate'. While I have already partially considered examples of the style, I will attempt in what follows to account for the second and third elements identified by Eliot, starting with the 'picture'.

Moving further along into the world of *The Childermass*, we experience a world with an exceptional transformative quality. In fact, every physical aspect of this world disintegrates and recomposes itself into something completely different as soon as it comes into focus enough to allow the reader to properly discern and acquaint themselves with its features. This effect is mirrored by the characters' own experience as 'the whole city like a film-scene slides away perceptibly several inches to the rear' as soon '*as their eyes are fixed upon it*' (*CM* 32). Furthermore, this continuous metamorphosis neglects the traditional systemic logic by which changes in parts affect the whole system; such a relationship does not occur, preventing the reader from opting for an analysis of the wider reality to make sense

[305] Ibid
[306] Ibid., 523-524.

of individual changes in features. This peculiar direct connection between the reader's perception and the transformative quality of the physical world of *The Childermass* inhibits all readers' attempts to rationalise and systematise what has been experienced. This world is designed to escape us, as scenes have the capacity to suddenly expel characters, objects and landscapes which can vanish and reappear in different locations and time can be a place (the Time-Flats), a thing (the waves are years, the water is 'Time-stuff'), hallucinations, or even something that can evaporate altogether, as when the first fifty pages of *The Childermass* are completely eclipsed and the protagonists suddenly 'start completely afresh as though they had just met for the first time' (*CM* 52). These destabilising effects are amplified by constant references to the reader's experience of the text:

> 'Do let's get along don't you think? *Why does this path twist so much? I suppose we must follow.*' Satters indicates the habit of the track they have engaged on to baulk unaccountably a promising expanse, *without anything to show why its course has been altered, in favour of a rough approach*. By its vagaries they are pitchforked into bad patches of rocky litter. […] The scene is steadily redistributed, vamped from position to position intermittently at its boundaries. (my emphasis, *CM* 48)

This vivid account of the protagonists' frustration, paired with Satters's direct questioning, speaks directly to the reader's uneasiness in their (the characters and the reader's) hopeless search for steadier grounds. To complement the picture further, we are constantly made aware of an eerie presence which is promptly illustrated by Pullman with the precise definition that was given to him when he first enquired: 'it is the dissolving body of God's chimaera' (*CM* 52). We learn, however, that these are the same golden particles we observed released in the atmosphere after the explosion of the golden cock clockwork that gradually turned into a red dust and subsequently grew into 'fibres of gossamer' (*CM* 56). Invading the atmosphere fully, this eerie substance sticks to the protagonists' hair and clothes to begin with, but then makes its way inside their mouths, ears and nostrils. The gossamer causes a great deal of anxiety to Satters who repeatedly asks for clarifications and regularly comes up with more practical potential explanations for this bizarre phenomenon ('is it spiders?') (*CM* 56). On the other hand, Pullman is not troubled at all by this anomaly; he simply accepts it as a feature of this world. In fact, he polishes off his textbook definition every time the gossamer is brought up. In this highly suggestive passage, we are presented with an account of the gossamer in action:

> The mist is thickened around their knees with a cloudy gossamer that has begun to arrive from inland, moving north east. Only trunks and thighs of human figures are henceforth visible. There are torsos moving with bemused slowness on all sides, their helmet-capped testudinate heads jut this way and that. In thin clockwork cadence the exhausted splash of the waves is a sound that is a cold ribbon just existing in the massive heat. The delicate surf falls with the abrupt crash of the glass, section by section. (*CM* 46-47)

Like the physical rendering of an extremely specific state of affairs, the gossamer plays a role in maintaining the 'bemused slowness' and the 'clockwork cadence' of this scene as it turns the 'human figures' into alien marching torsos. It is in the middle of this incongruous setting that we encounter what is possibly the most vivid and destabilising picture brought to life in *The Childermass*. The semi-human longshoreman we encountered in the first few pages and the human figures distorted by the thick gossamer belong to an unsettling group of characters referred to simply as 'the peons':

> What they say about them is that they are masses of personalities whom God, having created them, is unable to destroy, but who are not distinct enough to remain more than what you see. (*CM* 30)

The peons are omnipresent and boisterous—picking fights is 'one of their only recreations' (*CM* 57). Pullman constantly urges a confused Satters to ignore the peons as 'many of them don't know they exist' and 'they don't expect you to see them!' (*CM* 30). Described as 'hardly human' and a 'group-mechanism', the peons seem to be responsible for all the labour taking place in and around the camp, including building the tracks traversed by the protagonists (*CM* 26-30):

> Grey-faced, a cracked parchment with beards of a like material, ragged wisps and lamellations of the skin, bandage-like turbans of the same shade, or long-peaked caps, their eyes are blank, like discoloured stones. A number of figures are collected with picks and shovels, baulks, a wheelbarrow in the shape of a steep trough, a gleaming sickle, two long-handled sledges and one heavy beetle-hammer. Their spindle limbs are in worn braided dungaree suitings. […] SHAM 101 is painted in letters of garnet-red upon the hull of the fly-boat. An ape crouches, chained, its hands on the tiller. (*CM* 21)

This distressing picture of mechanised humanity is very nearly painful to a reader discerning the typical instruments of labour carried by uniformed 'grey-faced' identical beings with blank eyes 'like discoloured stones'. The closing sardonic emblem of a chained

ape together with the capitalised phrase 'SHAM 101' resound in the reader's mind. A poignant vision equally alien and recognisable.

To amplify this effect further, when the reader is deeply persuaded of the crucial differences between the peons and the protagonists, presented multiple times as creatures living on two completely different planes of reality, Satters cries 'Why, you are a peon!', gazing at Pullman suddenly appearing 'blank and elementary' and gradually turning into 'the face of a clay-doll' (*CM* 42). Satters's alarm at this occurrence matches the reader's: is Pullman turning into a peon and, if so, is this the ultimate destiny of all newcomers? Could Pullman and Satters already be unaware peons? Despite being quickly reassured by Pullman's pedantic interpretation that the vision is merely the fruit of Satters's imagination, the reader is caused to doubt this very information immediately when Pullman then explains that peons 'are not *always* peons' (*CM* 43).

Following the unsettling encounter with the peons, the absent Bailiff makes his appearance in the shape of the '*Bailiff's paper*' (*CM* 59) the protagonists are presented with. The document is a grotesque behaviourist questionnaire aimed at classifying every aspect of the newcomers' previous existence: from the measurement of their chest, waist, neck, biceps and 'eyes. Size. Colour', to declaring which religious beliefs and philosophical doctrines they subscribed to and whether they 'had any subversive designs upon the celestial state' (*CM* 59-66). Pullman explains to a wavering Satters that there is only one 'proper way to answer' and that the questionnaire is 'not intended to be taken seriously' and is only meant to keep residents amused during the 'period of enforced idleness' in the camp (*CM* 60-61). Satters is not persuaded ('it's a sort of catch then?' (*CM* 60)), but Pullman guarantees the benign nature of the scheme:

> The Bailiff encourages jokes […] if you want to get into his good books you will find that that's the way. He is really not as black as he is painted. Haven't you ever gone and listened to him? […] He really can be extremely entertaining at times. He says himself that people come there as if he were a music-hall. (*CM* 64)

The reader, already suspicious of a mysterious governing figure with strangely familiar techniques, is faced almost immediately with a practical example of what has been evoked by this passage. When the protagonists witness two groups of peons fighting by the river, the 'naval engagement' is described by an alien narratorial voice as a 'game of marbles provided by the joking Bailiff', stating that 'the obscene facetiousness of the form

provided for this nursery constantly operates' (*CM* 66-67). The same voice intervenes again with a further commentary:

> *What is this?* the eyebrow curls in a fine voluble question-mark. Impressive danger signals have made their appearance, but they are trite, he does not trouble to check them. Still they are in for more trouble it is plain. (*CM* 67)

This passage closes a scene in which the completely uninteresting 'insect-conflict' between peons is observed from the point of view of Pullman's 'dutiful eye', with an overall feeling comparable to the perverse curiosity one may experience when passing by a not so compelling accident in the street that interrupts our humdrum daily existence (*CM* 67). The reader does not quite know why we are called to examine this inconclusive event with such keen attention and the sudden direct question ('*What is this?*'), paired with the depiction of a curling eyebrow, reflects this state of mind exactly. Furthermore, the use of the italics allows the question to stand out from the surrounding text and it isolates it from the subsequent paragraph, with the latter effect intensified by a sudden change of tone and the mysterious remarks of 'danger signals' that can, by some strange means, be both 'impressive' and 'trite' and therefore overlooked. The event that follows appears at first to be completely unrelated to the altercation between the peons. Pullman's attention, in fact, turns to Satters who has his nose pressed against the questionnaire 'as though every part of his face were shortsightedly participating in the Bailiff's expansive whim' (*CM* 67). Satters becomes hysterical:

> the parchment form […] has the appearance of a crushed mask, but without eyeholes, lips, hair, or any furnishings. […] The headless figure beneath vibrates in secret enjoyment, so it seems, of a tip-top joke, which it is essential should be kept to itself. It hides his face: it dies of laughing! (*CM* 68)

As he turns into an unhuman 'headless figure' shaken with frightening laughter, Satters's face is now fused completely with the document seemingly containing all the proper answers to the Bailiff's questionnaire. We soon learn that Satters is possessed by 'the mood that waits upon the Mons Star' and that 'the joke is too big for his capacity' (*CM* 68-69). The fighting peons and the questionnaire, originally depicted as merely jokes provided by the Bailiff, evoke a different state of affairs in Satters, as the reader is suddenly faced with this extreme picture:

> His body has become a kicking ordnance calibrated for the 'any-old-where' of happy-go-lucky Satters of Armenteers. Now he grovels before Nurse Pullman (so hard-boiled yet kindly), the victim of the devils of Humour, of war pestilence and famine. All outside is blank Nowhere, Pulley is abolished. His lips beneath the paper whimper with the anguish of this false too great joke, his mouth and nostrils full of Death-gas again, shell-shocked into automaton. […] A string of hiccups follow, punctual with the intestinal contractions.
> […]
>
> 'H'nch!' A low semi-rational sound comes from Satters, the shadow of a human *Well*! It is a voice from the intestines, too internal or private to be human. It is a stocktaking sound. (*CM* 69-70)

The world of *The Childermass* and our world collide strikingly in this passage, which is simultaneously the vivid account of a shell-shocked consciousness crippled by the trauma of the First World War and the depiction of the aftermath of the Bailiff's jokes on Satters. Some sort of equivalence inevitably transpires between the world conflict and the governing bodies which brought it into being on the one side, and the battles between peons and the Bailiff's methods for exercising control on the other. Whereas the reader's own reality is invaded and evoked only ambiguously in the rest of *The Childermass*, a choice is made here to allow for direct contact, bridging the two worlds plainly at the point of one of humanity's greatest traumas. The reader is then compelled to endure a gaze which pierces the pages as Satters's eyes 'level their alarmed blue signals of distress, in direct beams […] pick out spots, [and] settle in empty fixity' (*CM* 61).

This sudden transitory merging of the two realities causes the reader to reassess previously encountered pictures in relation to this new provision. The contingent state of the physical reality—the peons, the mutating omnipresent gossamer invading the protagonists' bodies, the Bailiff or 'Bailiff-habit', the questionnaire—everything suddenly radiates fractal meanings which are not straightforward equivalences, but are rather obscure parallelisms released *fully* only at this intersection, in which the borders have transiently dissolved. Spillage is palpable at this point and it carries on in a sustained though erratic fashion, preventing the reader from extrapolating recognisable formulas or patterns. The crucial scene that follows is designed to build on this spillage further with the reader joining the protagonists in various conversations.

When Satters revives, he is consumed by an acute resentment and accuses Pullman of being a 'lickspittle', a 'charlatan' and a spy of the Bailiff:

> 'You think I can't see you. I know you—it's no use your turning your head away. *Your——head——*'
> Pullman starts as though shot, Satters stops. *What?* The head——! not the little hairy head that carries the eyes? ——it is swivelled swiftly but the memory of the face is a tell-tale phantom projected by Satters. Concealment is vain, Satters *sees* you, he has you in his mind's eye, the game's up! (*CM* 73)

In this most perplexing exchange, the reader is addressed directly through a stylistic device analogous to Bestre's haunting monologue in *The Wild Body*: the fictional character reaches out to the reader directly, telling us that they have been watching us. Outside the quotation marks, in fact, another version of the conversation takes place with the intimidation now directed at *you*, the reader, now temporarily entangled with Pullman. The words in italics crop up as a mysterious riddle: *your, head, What?, sees*. The conversation carries on between Satters and the new Pullman/reader pair:

> *'Why did you bring me out here alone?'*
> Ah! That is the question now we're coming to it! Alone to be brought out, into the remote heat, with nothing but peons, under the menace of the magnetic city, without an object! That is something like. Pullman smiles a little.
> *'You know why!'*
> The head is attacked by Satter's eyes, though the real eyes are not exposed to this fire. *It* knows why it brought, it does, the little sulking hairy ball. Pullman shakes his head at the audience, in the opposite direction.
> *'Yes you do!'*
> You know why you brought, Pullman shakes his shoulders.
> *'So do I!'*
> I know why you brought. The knowledge of your bringing is privy to me.
> *'I know!'*
> It is unspoken, but your object was clear! (*CM* 74)

This powerful passage encapsulates the reader in a singular way, deregulating the conventions of speech representation and interlocking multiple dimensions of speech and internal monologue by several inconsistent voices into one scene. The direct speech in italics, which at first sight appears as the plain back and forth between Satters and Pullman, in truth accommodates several speakers unaccounted for. In fact, while the second line by a speaker *B* (You know why!) is a plain response to the first question by a speaker *A* ('Why did you bring me out here alone?'), the third line ('Yes you do!') is an endorsement in agreement of the line spoken by speaker *B* by a different speaker, *C*. The same arrangement can be perceived in the fourth line ('So do I!'), possibly by a speaker *D* endorsing the previous line by speaker *C*, and again, in the fifth line ('I know!') which

could be either by a speaker *F*, endorsing the previous line by speaker *D*, or by speaker *A* coming to an epiphany. Is this perhaps a group conversation?

In addition to these already perplexing bearings, we face additional radiating layers of text between the lines of direct speech. This is a carefully crafted mixture of unattributable interior monologue, narratorial commentaries (although the identity of this narrator is unclear) and stage directions. Considering the passage in its entirety, further complexities emerge; in fact, the question 'why did you bring me out here alone?', presumably uttered by Satters, is completely entangled with the reader's current state of mind. At this point, the reader is far into *The Childermass* yet unable to straightforwardly articulate their experience of this universe and its significance or to detect the rationale underpinning an alien reality in which we sometimes feel strangely at home. In some such way, this is a world that is simultaneously in intimate contact with our world and utterly inarticulable. The text that follows describes these circumstances exactly, as they conveniently match Satters's current struggle of having been dragged around this unbearable place against his will, except for one discrepancy: the voice expresses satisfaction at the fact that the very question 'why did you bring me out here alone?' has been finally asked ('ah!'). What could have appeared as interior monologue by Satters is discordant with Satters' characterisation; in fact, he posed the same question many times before but received no sensible explanation. In addition, the remark of having been left 'without an object' cannot apply to Satters who has been overwhelmed by objects of all kinds, including his inglorious body, if 'object' was to be intended this way. Could this be a reference to yet another object perhaps unrelated to Satters, then? Additionally, Pullman is amused by all this, with the stage directions informing us of his grin.

The conversation continues with a second portion of unattributable interior monologue summoning 'the head', once again, but this time 'attacked by Satters's eyes', although a pair of 'real eyes' are featured and those are 'not exposed' to this attack: could these perhaps be the reader's actual physical eyes? The voice continues emblematically remarking that '*it',* the head (whose head? Satters's? The reader's?), is aware of the reason why *it* has been brought to this place: *it* already has the answer. This time, the stage directions inform us of Pullman's interaction with an 'audience' located 'in the opposite direction'. In fact, he has to purposely turn his head towards the audience to shake it in disappointment. Although we have confirmed that there is in fact an audience, we are not

told who they are, and the direction of Pullman's gesture suggests that they are somehow spatially away from the core of the conversation between Satters and Pullman. Is the author or the narratorial voice involved perhaps? In the third and fourth section ('You know why you brought' and 'I know why you brought') further interior monologue addresses a 'you' which replaces the 'it' previously referred to as 'the head' (perhaps: it=the and head=you?), intensifying the haunting effect until the closing remark epitomises the overall ramifications of this passage: 'It is unspoken, but your object was clear!'

There has been no perceivable logic or pattern to be followed, conventions of both syntax and speech representation are corrupted, and the few clues provided are either ambiguous or they purposely misdirect the reader, rendering us unable to disentangle the multiple voices and confirm whether and when we have been addressed and who exactly is speaking. This is what makes 'the object' of this passage (and perhaps everything we experience in *The Childermass)* 'unspoken', even though the reader is perplexingly aware of the leading role they play in this exchange and is left with a distinct feeling that the perception of the materials of *The Childermass* (whether Satters' or our own, or both simultaneously) was the focus of that conversation.

The power of these passages resides in the reader's conscious act of witnessing language's paradoxical ability to *speak* of a reality which is nevertheless left unspoken. Reality can only truly be brought into being when the textural incongruities of life *in existendo* are left exposed as a bewildering type of obscure clarity advances, increasingly taking over the reader's instinctual desire for definitions, straightforwardness, rationality and logic. The experience of such text is taxing, poignant, mesmerising and generally perplexing with the reader involuntarily appropriating the line: 'I feel rotten', uttered by an exhausted and nauseated Satters caught in the enigmatic gossamer gradually thickening and turning into 'slime' and 'red mucilage' (*CM* 77-78). While the two characters repeatedly recall the recent moment of crisis, Satters's account of the events that triggered his fit change completely:

> 'I remember perfectly you were holding up a mirror somehow for me to look——— Wasn't that it; of course!'
> 'Don't be absurd.'
> 'It was a looking-glass you——'
> 'Hardly! Haven't you ever seen that before?'
> 'What? —— You *had*.'

> 'You were dreaming evidently. A glass! Why a glass? Where did I get it from?'
> 'How do I know? You had a glass. —— I ought to have. I forget.'
> 'Well, you thought you saw a glass there is that it? Is that the first?'
> 'You had you know quite well.'
> 'Think! Try and bring to mind, now. Don't upset yourself. You often have seen that. Of course! A *large glass*. It is life-size.'
> 'What?'
> 'Why, what you thought you ——'
> '*Life-size*?' […] (*CM* 78)

The passage causes further confounding equivalences, forcing the reader to reassess previous occurrences once again. In Satters's entirely new account, his recent outburst was caused by the unbearable sight of his own reflection in a mirror held by Pullman. This new version of events which is unsupported by the narration, brings the enigmatic '*life-size*' looking glass inevitably into close contact with previously established triggers: the questionnaire and the battle between peons. In the mind of a reader attempting to handle a reality suddenly branching out, the comparison between the two versions of events is unavoidable: in the first version Satters's face sticks to the Bailiff's questionnaire until they become one, while in the second version, Satters is troubled by his own reflection in a mirror. In a way, the questionnaire also contains a reflection of Satters in the form of his answers to a meticulous series of questions aimed at classifying the totality of his existence, answers which were not provided freely but preconceived and imposed on Satters because there is only one proper way to answer. The already dubious questionnaire now radiates additional layers of attributes and significance which the reader is however unable to articulate coherently in the light of this additional reality. Are we simply the victims of one of *The Childermass*'s 'time traps'? Did the same episode take place twice? Was Satters just hallucinating, and the first version never actually took place? Is this another obscure parallelism (the questionnaire and the peons' battle = life size looking glass)? If so, does the equivalence then iterate further into our reality, in the same way we witnessed it iterating in the previous version of this episode? Is therefore the life size looking glass parallel to both dimensions: the questionnaire and the battle of the peons, and the world conflict and the governing bodies which brought it into being?

Unsurprisingly, we are unable to settle any of this while Pullman, initially adhering to the original account ('you were dreaming evidently'), gradually recognises that Satters could have indeed been the victim of such a 'disagreeable' vision, as it is in fact a common one:

> people are warned of attacks you know by the appearance of their own image, as though in a mirror. Do you follow? That's where the mirror comes in. I have no mirror. But with us it's rather different, so they say here—whatever *we* may be […] They talk all day long you know. The Bailiff discussed it a week or two since. He said it had a different significance here—there is no occasion to be alarmed. (*CM* 81)

Pullman illustrates that these are merely attacks which are 'quickly over' and 'quite usual', taking place 'as though' a mirror had been erected, when in fact there is no mirror. The question 'do you follow?' resounds in the reader's disoriented mind when we also discover that the Bailiff often talks about this phenomenon attributing 'a different significance' to it. Pullman also recalls his own experience of an attack:

> It was a little upsetting at first, I admit, when I saw myself for the first time, seated a few yards away, surprised, like myself, at finding me there. I've got used to it that's all. What does it matter? (*CM* 82)

The reader is still unable to pin down the precise nature of the phenomenon in relation to Satters's crisis. This is a vision so disturbing as to trigger the symptoms of Satters's post-traumatic stress disorder. We learn that Pullman however 'got used to it' which, together with the previous mention of the Bailiff's frequent discussions of the topic, suggests that this is a phenomenon the characters are often faced with. *Seeing oneself* and pondering the significance of that vision ('whatever *we* may be') in an emblematic mirror agitates Satters who admits: 'I'd give my head to be able—to feel the way—it's no use I've tried my damnest I *can't* get acclimatized' (*CM* 82). While Pullman perseveres with one of his characteristic lectures, he advises Satters to follow 'a most handy pair' of maxims recommended by the Bailiff: 'one maxim covers the *intellect*, the other the *will*' (*CM* 82). Satters suffers a new crisis described as a 'lymphatic despair', accusing Pullman of being frightening and 'not the same' (*CM* 82), when this conversation unfolds:

> 'My mind was made up,' he says, 'I was all in and I should have refused not to be like that any longer but to be always alone with what I can't understand, it's too difficult that is awful. To absolutely pass out absolutely, I have meant to but what is it prevents us, I'm sure it does what is it?'
> 'What?'
> 'Oh, I don't know!'
> '[…] *what does it all mean* can you tell me? No you can't. Am I mad I wonder if I am, why do I see things that are not there? It must mean something or is it nothing or it's silly to notice as you say?'

> 'I don't think so, it's nothing to worry about. It is the atmosphere that produces them generally they're hallucinations. They are only mirages […] That's how the Bailiff explains it […].' (*CM* 83)

Satters's concern here is entangled with the reader's inability to find steady grounds on which to articulate straightforwardly the significance of the two competing scenes. The difficulty of being alone with what cannot be understood, the direct question in italics '*what does it all mean* can you tell me?', and the reference to 'seeing things that are not there', all mirror the experience of the text which is then objectified as 'the atmosphere' which the Bailiff dismisses as responsible for producing what are merely hallucinations. Pullman's account does not satisfy Satters, who is increasingly concerned: 'I know there's something wrong', he says, 'there's something on the cross in this show it's a pretty dud Heaven if it's *Heaven*. If!' (*CM* 83)

Satters also expresses the feeling of being 'in a *trap*' and, although he is unable to properly explain why ('I haven't the least idea don't ask me to tell you *that*'), he knows that everything is 'rotten all through from beginning to end' (*CM* 84-86). The object of Satters's anxiety then shifts from Pullman to the Bailiff: 'He obsesses me his eyes haunt me I always see them!', 'he just terrifies me' (*CM* 85). The comments amplify previous perplexing and ominous considerations around the still absent character of the Bailiff as we know that Satters never actually met the Bailiff, or saw his eyes. Satters's fear and anxiety increase together with a commitment to address his concerns which are portrayed as child-like, as once again he asks: 'what is this place we are in?' Pullman puts him back into his place once and for all: 'we're not supposed to talk about […] those things except at the place appointed for that purpose that's what it's there for. You're aware of the rule I suppose Satters?' (*CM* 87) The reader is losing all hope for answers when a highly suggestive image encapsulates the current situation and corresponding state of mind, temporarily placating our need for clarity:

> A return to earth! out of the fire-zones, the *restless kissing circles* whose uproar you cannot help catching, *when you are too still, out of the machines of this mad millennium*, out of the presence of *this imperturbable ghost caressing these abstractions*—oh! to be outside again for a refreshing holiday on the earth […]' (*CM* 93)

An earthly holiday is certainly not granted to the reader who is now compelled to join the characters on a journey outside the structures of the Camp and into the wilderness of the Time Flats.

In this engrossing series of episodes presented as a 'time hallucination' (*CM* 105), the reader is faced with a complex series of thought experiments in space and time. We are promptly told that we are in fact 'behind the scenes', where 'time […] giv[es] up its secrets' (*CM* 115). In the first scene, the characters enter a static rural setting frozen in space and time which Pullman recognises as England as 'time stands still' and 'nothing moves' (*CM* 109). Satters is highly anxious and his repetitive remarks about a feeling of being watched ('Don't you feel like someone is watching?', 'Haven't you the sensation that some one is watching us?' (*CM* 113)) leave us wondering if this is an acknowledgement of the reader's gaze or if we are in the presence of the ominous Bailiff's gaze. Furthermore, Satters is affected by the features of this place and is gradually turning into a 'scowling sleep-walker' as 'a painful lethargy [takes] possession of him like a rough drug engross[ing] his attention' (*CM* 108-112). One of Pullman's monologues contributes to Satters's drowsiness, as a haunting picture appears fracturing the text with a distinctive register:

> He laughs, clearing up the atmosphere. Exit Fathers like a cohort of witches, turning tail at sight of the bristling righteous phalanx of incestuous masculine matrons, with hittite profiles, hanging out like hatchets just clear of the chest, Eton-cropped, short stout necks firmly anchored in asthmatic lungs, with single eyeglasses, and ten diamond corking-pins representing the decaceraphorous beast of the deliverance. They guard the child-herds. Revolutionary cockades bouquet'd with spatulate figleaves, symbolic of absolute divorce anti-family son-love and purple passion, dissimulate their abdominal nudity. Pullman barks fiercely: he is the gelded herd-dog. He barks at the heels of the Fathers, bearded despotic but now despatched.
> 'You don't find it slightly intoxicating?'
> Enter unobserved at the other extremity of the stage a small select chorus of stealthy matronly papas. They applaud as one man, community-singing the national anthem of the New Babel jazzed. They take up their position in the nursery modestly as regards The Average, with caressing eyes like head-lights of Santa Claus doing his rounds. Sweetly handwashing their stand aside retiring Big Businessmen. Featuring as their spokesman, a super-shopwalker offers meat-pale Sunkist fleshings of celanese silk stuffed with chocolates, crossword-puzzles, tombola-tickets for crystal-sets, and free-passes for warfilms, to the million-headed herd of tiny tots of all ages but one size.
> (*CM* 116-117)

This abrupt suspension of the conversation between Satters and Pullman in the form of two solid blocks of text interposed by the eerie direct address which mirrors the effect of the intense syntax ('You don't find it slightly intoxicating?') invokes an epic vision of modern societal shifts. The raising of a 'chorus of stealthy matronly papas', as they replace

exiting 'Fathers' on 'the stage', is underpinned by an incessant flow of images bringing the ghosts of two ensuing societies into being. The spell-like address 'Exit Fathers […]'/'Enter […] papas' is cast, with the two interposed blocks of text visually endorsing a cause-and-effect relationship. At this point, an anxious and increasingly drowsy Satters expresses his apprehension at the possibility that the motionless rural inhabitants of this landscape could 'all come to life suddenly', possibly referencing H. G. Wells' *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) as an example of an 'objectionable' awakened sleeper (*CM* 116-117). The epic vision consolidates further and aligns with the initial reference to England, when a 'zealous' Pullman described as Satters's master dismisses all concerns, advocating for 'a measure of Home Rule' and 'Dominion Rule eventually' (*CM* 116-117). In a further odd conversation, the effects of the preceding text are replicated with Pullman expressing his excitement at 'this running to and fro' and his aversion to provocations which 'were throughout gages merely, nothing you could bite on, a symbol here and a symbol there' (*CM* 118). After a brief 'interval', Pullman takes up the conversation again, addressing 'our relations to time and space' and stating confusingly that 'the removal of the space-barrier makes a tremendous difference' (*CM* 118). He further reveals that he too 'was on the slow side to start with', until the 'Bailiff-habit' he got from going 'to mass at the Bailiff's court […] with the utmost regularity' provided him with an 'additional plasticity' (*CM* 118-119).

The arduousness and intensity of these passages become objectified by way of an incessant 'hammering' perceived for the first time by Satters at the entrance of the Time Flats and tentatively attributed to 'a sculptor' by an unusually hesitant Pullman (*CM* 119). The noise persists and appears reinvigorated each time a particularly bewildering passage unfolds in the mind of the reader, as an 'ominous hollow thumping' (*CM* 119), 'a thunder of blows' or 'a slight vibration under the foot' (*CM* 120) and 'heavy metallic blows' (*CM* 127). The most comprehensive description of the hammering is triggered by a reflection on the workings of the many interconnective points of spillage at which the world of *The Childermass* and our world come into contact in a circuitous way. In fact, Pullman's account of an episode from his earthly life becomes perplexingly and involuntarily entangled with his early experiences at the Bailiff's court. Pullman describes this phenomenon as one of those instances in which 'things grown together in your mind, for no reason [just as] in dreams they always occur together, when you're in one you're in the other' (*CM* 120).

This revelation matches the reader's preceding experiences of these referential bridges in the text, and prompts the sculpting noise to intensify:

> The hammering proceeds, from underneath it sounds. The blows become as expressive as the midnight blowings of a shunting goods-locomotive, the reports subsiding to whispered taps then thudding up into increasingly loud blows suddenly, with thrilling echoes attached to form a long determined sound. (*CM* 119)

Pullman's warping monologues on 'the sensation of durational depth' and how 'two hundred years or more is like five miles up' and 'it actually smells different', paired with the 'increasingly loud blows' caused by the work of an emblematic sculptor, which are 'expressive' with 'thrilling echoes attached to form', agitate Satters whose state of mind is now analogous to the reader's: 'If you go on like this I shall scream' and again 'oh do shut up!' (*CM* 122-123) At this point, the second Time Flat emerges as the most intense mind-bending scene of a panorama ruled by 'diminishing perspective' (*CM* 123).

At the entrance, we are crucially informed by a narratorial voice that 'the complexion of the Time-scene is altered by the discovery of the device upon which it depends' (*CM* 123) and we subsequently witness the characters seemingly experiencing visual perspective physically, as they quickly become aware of the panorama literally shrinking systematically around them as they walk through it, surpassing the 'life-size part' at the entrance (*CM* 125). What initially looks like a place frozen in a faithful physical replica of what would customarily be a mere visual effect soon reveals itself to be a dynamic reality run by the laws of visual perspective turned into actual physical laws. What reveals this insight is a regular sized leaf collected by Satters in the life-size part of the panorama, gradually turning into a miniature leaf matching the diminishing surroundings as the characters walk along the tree-lined road. The size of the characters, however, remains unaffected because they are 'evidently not affected by the same laws as this leaf' and Pullman observes the phenomenon eerily remarking: 'do you see the significance in that?' (*CM* 125-126) With this perplexing episode the reader is confronted with the turning of an optical effect typical of the human way of seeing the world into a reality. Visual perspective no longer depends on the gaze of a subject at the centre of a given scene; in fact the shrinking of the landscape is completely independent and not contingent on the advancement of the characters as the life-size leaf shrinks according to its own position in space, rather than according to the position of the subject viewing it. In this eccentric version of the world,

visual perspective exists as an independent and non-human ensemble of physical laws. Such vision implies a renewed consideration of the way humans give shape to the world with their senses, triggering an intense revaluation of the problem of human perception and its relation to reality. It is by extracting our visual perspective from the matrixes of human cultural systems and turning it into a spectacle that this scene so effectively delves into an iterating series of complex phenomenological examinations.

In his extended study on the use of visual perspective in classical and modern visual art, Merleau-Ponty makes an analogous attempt to examine perspective through a non-human gaze:

> Perspective is much more than a secret technique for imitating a reality given as such to all men. It is the invention of a world which is dominated and possessed through and through in an instantaneous synthesis which is at best roughed out by our glance when it vainly tries to hold together all these things seeking individually to monopolize it.[307]

As a way of dealing with an overwhelming reality in which all objects are simultaneously competing for our attention, perspective becomes the 'means of arbitrating their conflict'[308], allowing objects into our field of vision as they take 'on an air of propriety and discretion. Things no longer call upon [us] to answer, and [we are] no longer compromised by them.' [309] By renouncing the way in which objects occur in 'peaceful coexistence in a single scale of sizes', however, we also cease to be open to the world as beings 'situated in it'.[310] Reality seen this way, from an 'immobile eye fixed on a "vanishing point"', is a cultural and fabricated reality by which the perceived world is concealed and slotted into comforting matrixes in which 'nothing holds my glance', apart from myself as I 'dominate my vision as God can when he considers his *idea* of me'.[311] In this demanding thought experiment perspective exists as an *itself,* as a set of environmental rules independent of the gaze of the subject, giving the reader a unique phenomenological insight in what it would be like to see the world as a human freed of the cultural conventions imposed on our vision.

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[307] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 50-51.
[308] Ibid., 49.
[309] Ibid., 50.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid

A further series of bewildering occurrences in the Time Flats afflict an agonised Satters who, as a result of his futile attempts to shake off and resist the outlandish physical and governmental laws assaulting his reality, ends up lying naked 'upon his face' as 'an obese mass plunged into unconsciousness' (*CM* 143). Persuaded with great difficulty to get his mandatory set of clothes back on, Satters's conclusion is that they are 'enslaved' and 'held down by this magic' (*CM* 145-146). Pullman, on the other hand, dismisses Satters's suspicions, stating that their previous life on earth was 'just as much *magic*' and that as 'creatures of imagination' they are 'not real in the sense of men' but 'organic with the things around' them, including their clothes (*CM* 145-146). Satters retaliates with a naïve fury—'Rot. You talk rot, you're not right, […] It's you who listen to what people tell you not me my poor old son you're potty' (*CM* 147)—while a menacing red cloud appears on the scene announcing that the Bailiff 'will be up quite soon' (*CM* 153). In fact we are informed that the Bailiff 'sends a storm every morning to clear the atmosphere' (*CM* 153-154) in preparation for his daily appearances.

The second half of *The Childermass,* with the much-anticipated coming into sight of the mysterious character who haunted the first half of the book, is preceded by a prophecy by Pullman that most people don't take the Bailiff's 'simple pleasantry' in its own right, and instead 'hunt in it for some hidden meaning. —always something hidden!' (*CM* 154). He then advises that 'if they only understood him, the Bailiff's as simple as a child—and as open!' (*CM* 154). This bewildering assessment is completely at odds with everything we know about the Bailiff and his governance so far, from his hypnotic impact on Pullman and despotic modes of surveillance, to his terrifying ever-present gaze and his manipulation of the peons, fighting to entertain. With these divergent assessments of the character, the reader is once again pressured to revise a binary view of reality and is faced with customarily mutually exclusive oppositions in a state of coexistence.

At this point, 'thunder and lightning', followed by 'a trumpet-note' suggestively described as 'an obscene grating vibration, stopping as though a furious hand had been slapped down abruptly on its mouth' (*CM* 156), mark the fundamental stylistic shift which defines the second half of *The Childermass*, meticulously illustrated, first, for the benefit of the reader:

> Two characters who have occupied the opening scene, they conventionally stand aside to observe the entrance of the massed cast in stately procession, Pullman's

> manner suggests; withdrawing discreetly a little into the mist, and peering at the massive business of the show as it unfolds itself at the centre of the stage of the Miracle heralded by the sudden detonation of a solitary furious trumpet. Are they observed by their stately silent fellow-actors? Nothing indicates this is the case. If so, their personal affairs are effaced, as, in attitudes of stylised attention, marking the coming of the new event with whispered asides, they stand for the time being aloof puppets. (*CM* 156)

In this stage-direction-like passage it is made clear that Satters and Pullman have been stripped of their protagonists' roles as they are now simply enrolled with the expectant audience at the Bailiff's court. This shift in perspective, which is curiously announced, is further endorsed by what could be read as an eerie reference to the reader: the protagonists' 'stately silent fellow-actors' (the crowd at the Bailiff's court is in fact a rather vociferous one), who can choose whether or not to be observers and are 'for the time being' standing aside as 'aloof puppets'. The 'new event' we are called to witness is defined by 'attitudes of stylised attention' and involves 'whispered asides'. In contrast with the straightforwardness of Pullman and Satters's demotion, details of the substitution to the main act are delivered obscurely through complex syntax, a direct question and the ambiguous use of pronouns. This shift in the conventions of literary characterisation overturns a further system, with the protagonists now overshadowed and a vacuum demanding to be filled.

What follows in the second half is composed of dialogues presented in the form of a playscript, interposed by narratorial interventions, stage directions and a series of monologues. The unsettling appearance of the Pulcinella-like character of the Bailiff levitating onto the stage inaugurates the pageantry which precedes the daily session. The venue functions as an unconventional court room, but it is in fact an amphitheatre complete with an orchestra and decorated with an interminable cacophony of symbols. The Bailiff presides over the proceedings aided by a multifunctional army of characters which could be soldiers, functionaries and administrators, just as well as slaves, courtiers, prop managers or wardrobe supervisors. Between the lengthy monologues delivered by the Bailiff in the form of lectures, sermons and political speeches, with both curated and spontaneous interventions from the audience, petitioners are called to the stand to argue their case for suitability to the next stage of the afterlife. Each petitioner is questioned by the Bailiff with the aim of establishing 'their proper point of crystallisation' (*CM* 290), or rather how closely they align with the systems and values at stake. When a particular aspect of the petitioner's existence diverges too radically, the Bailiff employs persuasive

rhetorical marketing techniques to cause the appellant to reconsider themselves and eventually shake off what is undesirable or alternatively to offer a level of compromise acceptable to the Bailiff. The entire audience is composed of potential petitioners and we are not informed of any specific criteria of selection for appearance. Two massed groups of petitioners, however, stand out from the crowd because of their explicit affiliations: the Bailiffites placed at the very front as a chorus of benevolent and supportive voices, and the Hyperidians, an aggressive opposition attacking the Bailiff at every turn:

> When they hurry about they are seen with the trailing black wings of their cloaks scudding in their wake […], supers of a highly-disciplined Miracle. At the slightest hint they take fire, in everything over-zealous, they leap into every suggestion of a breach, theirs is the legion of Lost-Causes. (*CM* 316)

Dressed in cloaks and sandals, modelling their looks on a black version of ancient Greek fashion, in contrast to the traditional white and neutral attire, the Hyperidians are a cult of the personality of the charismatic Hyperides.

Whether by Hyperides, individual supporters, or choruses of Hyperidians, the incessant interventions in each debate, supposedly insurgent action against the reign of the Bailiff, quickly take the shape of an entertainment feature, with their subversive attitude fading into a well-rehearsed and necessary antagonistic element. Consciousness, reality, space, time, perception, knowledge, aesthetics, justice, truth and God are discussed, among many other topics during the session, interposed by musical interventions, changes of costume and dancing interludes. The poignant beheading of Macrob, the only independent appellant who is guilty of truly opposing the Bailiff's rhetoric grasping him by the nose, marks the violent climax of this dialectical carousel.

Keeping these dynamics in mind, I will explore in the remainder of this chapter the mechanics and the significance of the form selected by Lewis for the second half of the book in relation to its first half. As argued earlier in this chapter, the architecture of *The Childermass* is crucial to the experience of its materials and one Lewis experimented with elsewhere. Lewis himself, in fact, in *Satire and Fiction: Enemy Pamphlet No. 1*, reported a stylistic affinity between *The Childermass* and *The Apes of God* and although he never discussed the details of this relationship, significant aesthetic points of contact can be discerned, with the dynamics between the leading characters in both works as the first noticeable affinity. Dan, the 'Dante-young' handsome *tabula rasa* of *The Apes of God* is like

Satters, a bodily and naïve simpleton and both are guided through exotic environments, either by Zagreus, the 'broadcaster' Oxonian highbrow and self-appointed mentor, or Pullman, similarly hyper-intellectualised and ultimately an incompetent Virgil-like figure. There is a third fundamental element to this dynamic: the haunting, despotic, rule-establishing and power-bearing, and for a significant part, physically absent, figures of Pierpoint and the Bailiff. The two corresponding character frameworks are further proofs of concept for the elemental and prototypical trio in *Enemy of the Stars*. The bodily Hanp and the cerebral Arghol, in fact, exist in an exotic environment controlled by a despotic uncle. As I will be discussing, in contrast with the character pairs of mind and bodily principles which remain somewhat stable, Pierpoint, the Bailiff and the uncle, as environmental power-structure radiating principles, evolve in profoundly different ways in the various proofs of concept, as they epitomise the domain Lewis is contending with. Before delving into this evolution and its significance, I should address the phenomenon by which the character triads are only functional when brought into being as a result of a fourth dynamic emerging from the encounter between the reader and the stylistic architecture of the works. In fact, in addition to the phenomenological stylistic interventions identified earlier in this chapter, and in previous chapters, the three works share a distinguishing dialectical feature designed to embed the reader completely. This feature consists of an unbound playscript structure interposed by sections of floating commentary underpinned by complex syntax and eerie direct addresses to the reader. Whereas the playscript structure is featured throughout in *Enemy of the Stars*, which is explicitly presented as a play, in *The Apes of God* and *The Childermass* the feature is intrinsic to the plot, emerging unexpectedly, thus eliciting a more compelling effect on the reader. In *The Apes of God*, Zagreus and Dan's expedition into the mediocre subworlds of a contemporary corrupted art scene culminates at Lord Osmund's Lenten Party, which utterly shakes up the structure of the first half of the book with the sudden appearance of dialogic features which dominates the second half. Zagreus and Dan are no longer the protagonists, and the reader simply turns into a party guest, thrown into the bewildering theatrical spectacle of a multitude of characters taking the stage in turns. This important shift in perspective forces the reader into participation with the aim of inducing us to revaluate the truth and ethics presented as absolute in the first half, as the truth and ethics in which we participate, arising from the fundamental *intersubjective* and *intrasubjective* experiences of human existence. Similarly, in *The Childermass*, Pullman and Satters's expeditions into the Time Flats of the alien but strangely recognisable afterlife 'Outside

Heaven' culminates with the protagonists' disappearance into the crowds at the Bailiff's amphitheatre. Through this perspectival shift, the reader is compelled to join the audience too, turned into a potential petitioner partaking in the Bailiff's trial. We too will be judged.

Both works depend on an analogous strategy reinforced by their overall architecture. In the first halves the fictional reality is perceived through the mind-body principles of the character pairs and the reader is incorporated ambivalently, through occasional direct addresses and intermittent references invading the reader's own reality. In the second halves, on the other hand, the medium of the mind-body principles is outdone, with the reader embedded more radically and turned into an unconditional interlocutor. While the dialogic feature in *The Apes of God*'s Lenten party builds on the model of the unperformable playscript in *Enemy of the Stars*, in which the speakers' names are mostly undesignated, with the characters' lines blending in the mind of the reader, *The Childermass* follows the conventions of a standard stage playscript, each line clearly designated by the speaker's name all in caps. The designations work on multiple levels, firstly overthrowing the convention they exploit as the form of the playscript, typically designed for practical use by multiple actors in rehearsals, is in this case designed to be read, and read by an individual reader. Moreover, when used conventionally in a playscript, character designations are not destined to be verbalised, but are merely included as a practical means to assign lines to different actors already familiar with the character they are required to embody. In this case, however, the character designations come into being through verbalisation, calling attention to 'the most essential power of speech' residing in the relationship between dialogue and the perception of the other 'as a replica of myself, a wandering double which haunts my surroundings'.[312] The reader gradually absorbs all the available voices through the written text, as a multitude of dialogic relationships are released, calling attention to the fact that 'speaking and hearing are indiscernible' and 'to speak [is] to be spoken to'.[313] Like portals into the dialogic dimension of each character, promptly merging with the author's (as it is a written text) and the reader's own, the designations trigger further chains of dialogical relationships. By verbalising the character designation through the act of reading, I take over the voice of each character, I speak the line as well as listen to it while it simultaneously rejoins my own mental speech. Merleau-Ponty suggestively describes this chain of effects:

[312] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 133-134.
[313] Ibid., 140.

> When I speak to another person and listen to him, what I understand begins to insert itself in the intervals between my saying things, my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me.[314]

This augmentation of ordinary direct speech aims for the reader's highest level of engrossment and unconditional participation. In fact, with the advancing of the proceedings at the Bailiff's court it becomes clearer that we are not the mere witnesses to a straightforward dialogical situation but active participants in a stylised dialectic, intending to overturn the dogma of structural dialectics. Even though we are seemingly provided with all the correct prerequisites, the movement of this dialectic is not a conventional vector, starting from opposite sides and progressing from *thesis*, to *antithesis* and concluding in a *synthesis*. The dialogue is shaped around each case brought to the stand by the petitioners, triggering a sequence of monologues by the Bailiff on the workings of consciousness, morality, power, human perception, space-time, knowledge, aesthetics, justice, truth and God, which are interposed with interventions by the Hyperidians, seemingly standing for the opposite principle, or so we would conventionally expect. The highly pliable rhetoric of the Bailiff, however, moulds itself effortlessly around the rebuttals put forward by the Hyperidians as they either become craftily assimilated in the mainstream flow of approved speech, or remain completely unaddressed floating in the mind of the reader. With further topics introduced by the petitioners, Hyperides and the Bailiff radiate increasingly analogous structures with conflict becoming only superficial and reduced to mere entertainment value. Beyond the more obvious references of high discipline, neoclassicism and black uniforms of the Hyperidians evoking despotic tendencies akin to the Bailiff's own, the reader soon stops perceiving subversiveness in the Hyperidians' rhetoric as it turns functional in relation to the Bailiff's, helping it flow and adding a necessary movement to the proceedings. There is no linear progression to this dialectic and the philosophical arguments put forward develop as a whirlwind of suspended positions incessantly metamorphosing, switching sides, and changing direction.

This is precisely how the environmental power-structure radiating principles in *Enemy of the Stars* and *The Apes of God*, designed with restricted exploratory aims in prescribed human domains, evolve in *The Childermass* to serve metaphysical aspirations. While the

[314] Ibid., 142.

uncle, merely a puppet, provided consciousness-numbing elemental systems to the mind-body prototypical pair, Pierpoint, in the form of a disembodied univocal voice, appeared as the more sophisticated subversive principle, in truth, a disguised system. The Bailiff/Hyperides principle, on the other hand, is composed of two powerful gestures radiating infinite iterations of the movement that put all human systems into place. In the first half of the book, the Bailiff and Hyperides are mentioned occasionally but their principle is physically present in the shape of the ubiquitous Gossamer, which originated from the golden clockwork cock, a seemingly theological manifestation at the top of a church, and metamorphosed into the emblematical red mist with supervising and taming functions which modifies the space around the characters both visually and sensorially, as well as their bodies. Continuously unfolding paradoxically, the Bailiff/Hyperides principle can only be fully perceived in the domain of *hyperdialectics*, or rather of 'a thought that […] is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity'.[315]

Merleau-Ponty believed that the institutionalising tendencies of empiricism and intellectualism could be circumvented by true dialectical reasoning which mirrors the structures of our ambivalent way of *being-in-the-world*, and gives shape to the relations between our different orders of reality. Dialectical reasoning, however, is misused by philosophers and turned into an intellectualist apparatus, 'against its own principles, impos[ing] an external law and framework upon the content and restor[ing] for its own uses the pre-dialectical thought'.[316] This misleading practice falsely maintains that 'it recomposes being by a thetic thought' when in fact it merely provides an 'assemblage of statements' which inescapably 'end[…] up at cynicism [and] formalism, for having eluded its double meaning'.[317] *Hyperdialectic*, on the other hand, which is true dialectical reasoning, 'excludes all extrapolation'[318] and can only be sustained in an environment in which the ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions of our lived existence are preserved. Merleau-Ponty summarises the fundamental traits of *hyperdialectic* as follows:

> good dialectic is conscious of the fact that every *thesis* is an idealization, that Being is not made of idealizations or things said, as the old logic believed, but of bound wholes *where signification never is except in tendency*, where the inertia of the content

[315] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 94.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

> never permits the defining of one term as positive, another term as negative, and still less a third term as absolute suppression of the negative by itself.[319]

Merleau-Ponty concludes that such unstable meaning (that '*never is* except in tendency') can only emerge from expression and be lived through our bodies. *Hyperdialectic* reasoning, in fact, does not possess a meaning but a *sense*, insofar as it cannot be witnessed or extrapolated but participated in as it continuously 'criticizes itself and surpasses itself as a separate statement'.[320]

In the first half of *The Childermass* the reader is called to abandon a knowledge of the world and to restore a *perceptual faith* in the world, which is 'our experience, prior to every opinion […] without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true'.[321] As the accomplished version of the Vorticist *living abstraction*, the first half of *The Childermass* explores *what it is like for the world to exist*, providing the reader with an unparalleled experience of *Being* in a pre-reflective world: 'the bite of the world as [we] feel it upon [our] bod[ies]'.[322] As observed in the close reading, this is achieved through an intricate type of *coherent deformation* by which the referential 'bits of complete naturalistic fragments of noses and ears' (*B1* 144) which Lewis craved in those Futurist abstractions make their necessary appearance, though fundamentally restored to their original strangeness. This stylistic deformation dissolves binary oppositions completely and releases a compelling ambiguous feature through which the reader perceives the world of *The Childermass* as both alien and familiar. This mode mirrors our incarnated state of consciousness as we are simultaneously both *in the world* and *of the world*.

In the second half of *The Childermass,* this linguistic world and all its energetic ephemerality, plurality, ambiguity, reversals and paradoxes is offered as a method, with the reader called to recognise the metaphysical nature of our consciousness and rescue it from the coercion of structural dialectics, which is responsible for all 'the solutions invented by civilisation to the problem of [human's] relations to nature and to other [humans]'.[323] As the fortuitous participant in the *hyperdialectic* emerging forcefully from the plot of *The Childermass*, the reader is called to experience *what it is like to be human* through becoming

[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid., 94.
[321] Ibid., 28.
[322] Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 137.
[323] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 90.

conscious of how 'the fundamental contingency of our lives makes us feel like *strangers* at the *trial* to which others have brought us'.[324] Furthermore, the *hyperdialectical* iterating ambiguity of the fictional proceedings allows the reader to contemplate how:

> There is no last judgement. Not only do we not know the truth of the drama, but there is no truth—no other side of things where true and false, fair and unfair are separated out.[325]

Previous scholarship interpreted the absence of a last judgement as the unforgivable shortcoming of a useless debate which offers no alternative and merely showcases Lewis's own stylistic inability to build the credible scheme of a debate which seems to collapse as oppositions break down.[326] These observations busied themselves with extrapolating the philosophical arguments in *The Childermass*, transporting them outside the troublesome style and comfortably decoding them from the steadier grounds of Lewis's non-fictional work. The experience of the coherently deformed materials from the standpoint of a reader who has been called to restore a *perceptual faith* in the world and who is now the principal interlocutor in a *hyperdialectic* is not taken into consideration. The debate, which may indeed be 'massively useless' when extrapolated and left to stagnate on the page, opens up the most decisive philosophical revelations in the consciousness of a reader, which now gradually becomes aware of the fact that,

> There is undoubtedly no *solution* to human problems; no way for example to eliminate the transcendence of time, the separation of consciousness which may always reappear to threaten our commitments; no way to test the authenticity of these commitments, which may always in a moment of fatigue, seem artificial conventions to us. But between these two extremes at which existence perishes, total existence is our decision by which we enter time to create our life within it. All human projects are contradictory because they simultaneously attract and repel their realization […] True morality does not consist in following exterior rules or in respecting objective values: there are no ways to *be* just or to *be* saved. […] For the value […] consists of actively being what we are by chance, of establishing that communication with others and with ourselves for which our temporal structure gives us the opportunity and of which liberty is only the rough outline.[327]

What Lewis handed over to readers of *The Childermass* is firstly a method for enquiring productively into metaphysics, and secondly the awareness of language as the domain in which the 'perpetual uneasiness in the state of being conscious'[328] can be given a *sense*.

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[324] Ibid., 38.
[325] Ibid., 36.
[326] See Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* and Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*.
[327] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 39-40.
[328] Ibid., 29.

Lewis's chief discovery and personal achievement in *The Childermass*, which followed several proofs of concept and tireless phenomenological research in the shape of his enormous corpus of literary work, is that *Being* is accessible to us as long as we are committed to *expressing* it. I argue that the *something* perceived by Wells is precisely an access point from within language which lies 'not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross'.[329]

This is the discovery that made Lewis wish for *The Childermass* to be the book he would be remembered by.

[329] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 95.

# Conclusion

In this study I have set out to transcend the academic orthodoxies of literary scholarship by restoring the reader to their rightful place as the subject of Lewis's literary practice, which developed as a phenomenological method aimed at neutralising humanity's gatekeepers and gatekeeping mechanisms and *expressing* the human encounter with the world. In established scholarship, in fact, a fascination with Lewis's highly complex intellect and imposing biography takes centre stage as a set of abiding interpretative clues to the troublesome materials of a style which demands to be deciphered and rendered more manageable, all in order to bring into view the overall achievement that would grant the Lewisian corpus access to the modernist canon. This critical approach has produced assessments of nihilism, idiosyncrasy, formalism, contradiction, impenetrable irresoluteness and dualism for dualism's sake, and removed the reader's contribution to a phenomenological transaction which remained unfulfilled.

As T. S. Eliot observed, Lewis 'has never been concerned with finding a new style for the next spring' and the many forms his art and literature took never represented 'a "phase"' [and] none [was] ever finally abandoned: the painter, draughtsman or writer would return to any of them when it suited his *purpose*'.[330] Despite the unconventional approach and the high level of diversification, Eliot decisively declared:

> The opinion to which I do not hesitate to commit myself, is that Mr Lewis is […] perhaps the only one to have invented a new style. And by "style" I do not mean "craftmanship" […].[331]

Unable to articulate further, Eliot detected a curious magnetic quality in Lewis's style observing that people attempting to 'write sympathetically or appreciatively about him, […] tend to mimic his style', as he also admitted: 'I detect traces in this piece that I have just written'.[332] This ever-branching and somehow coherent stylistic manifestation, which can be observed migrating across expressive consciousnesses, is notoriously resistant to rationalising, reconciling and streamlining, as a style that is not simply a descriptive or representational way of using language to account for the world, but the formulation of

[330] My emphasis. T. S. Eliot, 'A Note on "Monstre Gai"', *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter, 1955): 522-526, 525.
[331] Ibid., 526.
[332] Ibid.

'an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world'.[333] At the core of Lewis's aesthetic practice is in fact the preservation of the human life of consciousness which is chiefly the life of a perceptual and fully expressive consciousness capable of withstanding modernity's relentless movement towards the throwing of the vast paradoxical complexities of human experience into a colossal abstraction of *what it is like to be human*. To Lewis, the coercive societal pseudo-dialectics of modernity propelled by the capitalist democratic project compelled humanity to 'posit the body as what best may stand for what is "savage", and the spirit as what best may stand for what is "polite"' (*CHC* 207-208). In this new dysfunctional state, driven by intellectualist or empiricist dogmas, humanity began exercising a damaging 'familiarity […] which […] develops a matter-of-factness' detaching us from our 'physical manner of feeling' (*CHC* 207-208). The convergence of Lewis's chiefly ontological concerns with his profound commitment to the workings of form generated a series of phenomenological solutions rooted in a literary practice, which developed as a searchlight into the *Being* of humanity and culminated in a great awareness of the dialectical analogies between language, perception and consciousness.

As I have shown across the five chapters, analysing existing reader responses and producing original close reading of the primary sources, meaning cannot be plainly found in Lewis's coherently deformed language and the most profitable encounters with such materials happen beyond *difficulty* and are intrinsic to an unconditional willingness to remain satisfied with a *sense* which is not an equivalence or a last judgement but the induction of a state of *Being*. The productive Lewisian reader is an *incarnated consciousness* unafraid to experience our typically human ambiguities and disposed to contemplate the 'perpetual uneasiness in the state of being conscious'[334] as an epistemological solution.

Merleau-Ponty's radical deviation of all phenomenological enquiry to the processes behind the production/reception of the coherently deformed materials of genuine literary compositions, based on the conclusion that the *Being* of humanity can never be rationalised or articulated but only expressed, functioned as the philosophical sounding board for the phenomenological approach to literary criticism presented in this study. Despite Lewis and Merleau-Ponty's astonishingly analogous premises and corresponding

[333] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 28.
[334] Ibid., 29.

solutions, this study was never intended as a comparative proposition, but a case study for a phenomenological approach to literary criticism rooted in an exploration of the potentialities of literary language. What we witnessed gradually establishing itself in Merleau-Ponty's enquiries and executed pragmatically in Lewis's stylistic practice is that literary expression *is* the fundamental human domain in which we can decide to *live* the hard problem of consciousness, committing to a contemplation of its *expression* as a solution to the fact that there is no solution to what is not a problem (in the conventional sense), but the reality of our mysterious way of existing.

While the working concept of the hypertechnological neuroscientific project is an embodied mind, seen as the processes of a brain within a body interacting with its environment with the rather unscientific and untechnological implication that there are no eternal forms and permanent sources of knowledge; quantum physics, whose everyday applications are as pragmatic as transistors is grappling with the ramifications of the observation paradox by which humanity supposedly witnessed consciousness escaping into the world to affect reality at a physical level.

As Merleau-Ponty pointed out, all human disciplines seem to ultimately converge at the hard problem of consciousness which resists conventional methodologies so strongly, disturbing the entire human apparatus of established certitudes and calling for increasingly intradisciplinary efforts. A phenomenological literary criticism would contribute greatly to such efforts, in equipping humanity with what are at once practical and dynamic accounts of the way individual consciousnesses relate to the world, alleviating the human anxiety of having to explain the concept of redness in a redless world.

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