



THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Ana Gabriela Vilela Pereira de Macedo

April 1989

**WYNDHAM LEWIS'S LITERARY WORK: 1908-1928**

VORTICISM, FUTURISM AND THE POETICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Ana Gabriela Vilela Pereira de Macedo

Capa: Edições Húmus a partir de layout de António Pedro

© EDIÇÕES HÚMUS, 2014

Apartado 7081 – 4764-908 Ribeirão – V. N. Famalicão

Tel. 926 375 305

E-mail: humus@humus.com.pt

Impressão: Papelmunde, SMG, Lda. – V. N. Famalicão

1.ª edição: Novembro de 2014

Depósito legal: 383957/14

ISBN: 978-989-755-090-4

To *Claudio*

## Every Year

1

Now, in this night in which I love you  
White clouds skim across the heavens without a sound  
And the waters snarl over the pebbles  
And the wind shudders along the barren ground.

2

White waters go trickling  
Downhill every year.  
Up in the heavens  
The clouds are always there.

3

Later, when the years grow lonely  
Clouds, white clouds, will still be found.  
And the waters will snarl over the pebbles  
And the wind shudder along the barren ground.

*Bertolt Brecht*



## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the guidance, endless support and extreme kindness that Dr. Geof Hemstedt demonstrated towards me, since the early days of my arrival at the University of Sussex as a foreign postgraduate student, until the completion of my doctorate.

I wish to invoke the memory of Dr. Allon White, who was to me a precious friend and an inexhaustible source of intellectual support and encouragement.

I wish to thank Dr. Alistair Davies for his help and guidance during part of my research.

I am indebted to Dr. Robert Young, and Dr. Chris Wagstaff for reading and commenting on parts of my work, and giving me incentive to pursue it.

I must also thank the staff of the University of Sussex Library for their efficient and kind assistance at all times of my research.

The accomplishment of this thesis would however never have been possible without the support of the Universidade do Minho in Portugal and the Scholarship of the Gulbenkian Foundation.

To my parents, all my friends, and especially the community of Sussex graduates, my gratitude for their solidarity and infinite encouragement.



## Wyndham Lewis's Literary Work 1908-1928; Vorticism, Futurism and the Poetics of the Avant-Garde

### SUMMARY

The focus of this thesis is Wyndham Lewis's early literary work, namely: *The Wild Body*, an anthology of stories mainly written in the pre-war years and revised in 1927, *Tarr*, a semi-autobiographical Vorticist novel first published in 1918, and *Enemy of the Stars*, a Vorticist play first published in the magazine *Blast* in 1914. These texts are studied in the context of the Vorticist movement, of which Lewis was a leader and main entrepreneur and also in connection with the principles and manifestos of the Futurist movement. The methodology used draws on the work of Julia Kristeva on the poetics of the avant-garde for the analysis of the vorticist/futurist "revolution in language", and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "carnavalesque literary genre". Thus, the texts by Lewis referred to above will be analysed in the light of the concepts of popular and modernist grotesque, carnivalesque and polyphony. The poetics and politics of Wyndham Lewis's vorticist discourse are here analysed and understood as aesthetics of challenge and provocation, transgressive in its incorporation of society's own fragmentation and ideological crisis, rather than as an aesthetics of compensation within the context of Modernity.





# Contents

7	Acknowledgements
9	Summary
15	<b>Foreword</b>
17	<b>Introduction</b>
27	<b>PART I</b>
29	<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>
	<b>JULIA KRISTEVA AND THE POETICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND MIKHAIL BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL</b>
30	<b>1. Julia Kristeva and the Revolution of Poetic Language</b>
33	1.1. Kristeva's theory of language
37	1.2. Manifestations of the pre-symbolic in avant-garde poetics
39	<b>2. "Une littérature à venir"; Futurism and the "future anterior of language"</b>
44	<b>3. A critique of Kristeva's poetics of the avant-garde</b>
51	<b>4. Mikhail Bakhtin, his Circle and theory of the novel</b>
53	<b>5. The concept of dialogism</b>
59	5.1. Carnival
61	5.2. Carnival Laughter
63	5.3. Carnival; the "communal performance" and the "masquerade culture"
64	<b>6. Conclusion</b>
69	<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>
	<b>FUTURISM</b>
69	<b>1. Futurism; Italian and Russian</b>
73	<b>2. The influence of late 19th century French poetry</b>
79	<b>3. Futurism: aesthetics and ethic of the movement</b>
79	3.1. Futurism: origins and first manifestos

84	Painting
85	Music
87	Photography
88	Sculpture
90	3.2. The Futurist revolution in language
103	3.3. Futurist Stage Manifestos
113	3.4. The banner “War, the World’s Only Hygiene” and futurist misogyny
139	<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> <b>THE VORTICIST MOVEMENT, <i>BLAST</i>, AND THE RECEPTION OF FUTURISM IN ENGLAND</b>
139	<b>1. The reception of Futurism in England</b>
144	<b>2. The Rebel Art Centre</b>
151	<b>3. <i>Blast</i> and the launching of Vorticism</b>
153	<b>4. The Reception of <i>Blast</i> and Vorticism</b>
157	<b>5. The Vorticist Manifestos</b>
166	<b>6. The <i>Blast</i> Manifesto</b>
168	<b>7. Futurism and Vorticism reviewed</b>
171	8.1. The aesthetical and philosophical context of Vorticism; the influence of T. E. Hulme
171	8.2. Bergson and Nietzsche
176	
181	<b>PART II</b>
183	<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> <b>THE WILD BODY</b>
183	<b>1. The making of “The Wild Body”</b>
185	<b>2. Lewis on Satire</b>
188	3.1. Visual and narrative satire and the problem of representation
190	3.2. The “Tyros”
192	<b>4. “A Soldier of Humour” and the identity of “The Wild Body”’s narrator</b>
198	<b>5. The carnivalized language of “The Wild Body”</b>
205	<b>6. “Bestre”</b>
212	<b>7. Beau-Séjour</b>
212	<b>8. “Sigismund”. “The Death of the Ankou” and “Franciscan Adventures”</b>

217	<b>9. “The Cornac and His Wife”</b>
223	<b>10. “Brotcotnaz”</b>
228	<b>11. Conclusion</b>
231	<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>
	<b>TARR</b>
232	<b>1. Satire in Tarr</b>
235	<b>2. Tarr, the showman as the narrator’s alter-ego</b>
243	<b>3. The representation of the rape</b>
249	Sex and Power
251	<b>4. Kreisler</b>
255	<b>5. Dialogism and Hybridization in “Tarr”</b>
257	<b>6. Carnival in “Tarr”</b>
259	Crowning and decrowning
261	The Threshold in the Novel
263	<b>7. Conclusion</b>
265	<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>
	<b>ENEMY OF THE STARS – A THESIS AND A PERFORMANCE</b>
265	<b>1. The play – an introduction</b>
266	<b>2. The play’s dialogism</b>
280	<b>3. The Modernist grotesque style of “Enemy of the Stars”</b>
282	<b>4. The structure and style of the play</b>
289	5.1. The theatrical structure of the play
296	5.2. Enemy of the Stars and the “Futurist Theatre”
300	<b>6. Conclusion</b>
303	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
311	<b>Appendix I</b>
313	<b>Appendix II</b>
316	<b>Appendix III</b>
321	<b>Appendix IV</b>
323	<b>Appendix V</b>
325	<b>Bibliography</b>



## FOREWORD

1914 saw the launching of *Blast*, the bright pink magazine which claimed to be the *Review of the great English Vortex*, that announced to the world the outburst of *Vorticism*, probably the only recognizable face of the English Avant-Garde, a movement that grew at exactly the same time as the world was being overwhelmed by the roaring sound of the cannons of the most bloodstained of wars, the *First World War*. One hundred years have gone past each of these indissolubly linked events, at least in as much as aesthetics and politics can be considered proximate, but very poignantly so if we pause to consider the number of artists and writers who fought in this war and died on the front and in the trenches. Thus, the word commemoration while substantially appropriate in one case, is totally perverse and almost disrespectful when the abyss and the carnage of the other are evoked. Evocation of the latter is probably the more just word for all it stands for in terms of preserving memory and vindicating humanist values.

*Vorticism* and *Futurism*, Wyndham Lewis and Marinetti, one the founder and key figure in art and literature of the English movement, the other the self-proclaimed “caffeine of Europe”! Difficult to tell apart, when the role, the pose and the performance of each of them is considered, but totally antagonistic figures, with the animosity and the malignancy twin brothers can have against each other! “*Futurism as preached by Marinetti, is largely Impressionism up-to-date. To this is added his Automobilmism and Nietzsche stunt*”, proclaimed Lewis in “*The*

*Melodrama of Modernity*” (*Blast* 1, p.143). And he further claimed “*Futurism (...) is a picturesque, superficial and romantic rebellion of young Milanese painters against the Academism which surrounded them*” (Ibid.). And yet one can hardly ignore the strident language and the vibrancy of the 1909 Futurist Manifesto when reading the *Blast* Manifesto.

The publication of this thesis in its original form is meant to make available for further consideration and analysis the research done on a particularly controversial literary and artistic movement, crucial in the making of Modernity in England and in bringing to the fore its links with the European Avant-Garde, namely Futurism, from a comparativist perspective.

One hundred years have gone by the launching of *Blast* and the founding of *Vorticism* with its vindication of a crude yet audacious aesthetics indissolubly linked to the outburst of the *First World War*, no doubt a hazardous contiguity very much in need of further reflection today.

“*We only want the world to live, and to feel it’s crude energy flowing through us*” (“Long Live the Vortex!”, *Blast* I)

“*We only want Tragedy if it can clench its side-muscles like hands on it’s [sic] belly, and bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb*” (“Manifesto”, *Blast* I, pp.30-1)

Ana Gabriela Macedo  
November 2014

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to produce an analysis of Wyndham Lewis's writing in the context of Vorticism and to study its insertion in the avant-garde aesthetics of the beginning of the twentieth century.

The thesis is structured in two parts. Part I begins with a discussion of avant-garde poetics, essentially based on Julia Kristeva's studies on the subject and a discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the novel genre. This discussion launches the presentation of the methodology that will be followed in the thesis, as well as the theoretical propositions that support the textual analysis elaborated in Part II. Chapters Two and Three give an account of the main postulates of Futurism and Vorticism, and the factual relations established between them, and contextualizes the latter in the scene of British Modernism. My purpose in giving a detailed description of both movements, tracing the publication and reception of their manifestos has a double nature: on the one hand I want to emphasize the common tone and objectives of Futurism and Vorticism, despite the struggle of their respective leaders to champion the distinct or even opposite identities of their movements. This fact will help us to locate the avant-garde phenomenon historically and sociologically, as a collective response to a collapsing society on the edge of a World War and in the process of high industrialization, rather than as an individual and isolated aesthetics of provocation. On the

other hand, I want to show that the analysis of Lewis's vorticist texts, particularly at the level of language and performance, is enriched when contextualized within the avant-garde aesthetics.

Part II, offers an analysis of Lewis's writing of the vorticist years, from *Blast* and the Vorticist Manifestos, to the texts of *The Wild Body*, *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars*. Is that writing to be understood as a monologic and conservative reply to a modern industrialized and reified society, or is Lewis's style ultimately a challenging reply to modern reification? As Fredric Jameson has said<sup>1</sup>:

Lewis's style, the only true English futurism, an immense hangar in which we may still learn to tap the almost extinct sources of verbal production, does not in the clattering, deafening noise of its own mechanical emergence seek to be preserved as an object for contemplation but rather consents to abolish itself in time, freeing us in turn from the fetishistic spell of style itself (p. 329).

I will thus analyse Lewis's writing as being inscribed in the avant-garde provocative affirmation of its own perishable nature, its "transitoriness". Its technique of parody and pastiche will be seen to be translated in the production of a reified discourse representing a reified society. Jameson, addressing the epistemological dimension of Lewis's writing, sees as a crucial task of criticism the ultimate motivation of his "tirelessly producing amalgams of words whose function is no longer to reproduce the real, but rather, as it were, to testify to our powerlessness to do so and to the inescapable contamination of the collective mind and of language itself" (*Ibid.* p. 325).

The analysis of the nature and the sociological motives of the avant-garde is thus given a central role in this thesis. I propose to approach these issues through Kristeva's studies on avant-

---

1 Fredric Jameson, "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist" in *Hudson Review*, 26, Summer 1973/74, New York.



garde poetics, particularly in *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974), *Polylogue* (1977), and the anthology of translated essays *Desire in Language* (1980). As I will relate in Chapter One, Kristeva argues that avant-garde aesthetics is subversive not just at the level of the linguistic code and the syntactical order of discourse, but also because it embodies and reveals a social crisis and consequently a disruption of the individual's identity. Kristeva's studies are centered on late 19th century French poetry and the early 20th century avant-garde, e. g., Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Artaud, Mayakovsky. My aim, as I will be establishing a parallel between Futurism and Vorticism, is to show that the "negative radicalism" which characterizes avant-garde poetics is a response in both cases to the demands of Modernity, on the personal and the aesthetic level. I will thus analyse the nature and the meaning of the conflict between the avant-garde aesthetics of transgression and compromise as expressed in the manifestos of Futurism and Vorticism, as well as in Lewis's writing of the vorticist years.

My consideration of the concept "avant-garde" is not confined to situating Vorticism as a version of avant-garde discourse. Current discussions concerning the Postmodern have brought the issue of Modernism and early 20th century avant-garde to the forefront of intellectual debate. Jean Frangois Lyotard writes in *The Postmodern Condition*:

A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Post-modernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant (1984:79).

Lyotard defines Modernism as an aesthetic of the "nostalgic sublime". "It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure" (*Ibid.* p. 81). On the other hand, the post-modern "denies itself the solace of good forms, and consensus

of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable” (*Ibid.*). The rules and categories of the postmodern work are not pre-established, but they are “what the work of art is looking for”. Hence:

The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been* done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (*modo*). (*Ibid.*)

Curiously, as we shall see in some detail in Chapter One, a very similar formulation is used by Kristeva to define the early 20th century *avant-garde*, as “une littérature à venir” or a “future anterior of language”<sup>2</sup>:

The poem’s time frame is some “future anterior” that will never take place, never come about as such, but only as an upheaval of present place and meaning. Now, by thus suspending the present moment, by straddling rhythmic, meaningless, anterior memory with meaning intended for later or forever, poetic language structures itself as the very nucleus of a monumental historicity (1982:32).

Mayakovsky’s rule, expressed in *How Are Verses Made?*: “You have to bring the poem to the highest pitch of expressiveness” is, Kristeva says, a symptom of his awareness of the “anteriority” of his poetry in relation to the established canons

---

2 Vide *Polylogue* (Seuil, 1977): “Politique de la Littérature” (pp. 13-21) and *Desire in Language* (Blackwell, 1982): “The Ethics of Linguistics” (pp. 23-35).

of literary history, as well as an anteriority in social and political terms. Such anteriority was ultimately responsible for the collapse of Futurism, which took the most heterogeneous forms, from Mayakovsky's suicide, to Marinetti joining the Fascist ranks.

Nevertheless, the "negative radicalism" which characterizes avant-garde aesthetics, the feeling of estrangement it provokes, is at the root of the "jouissance" emanating from the freeing of the text from the logical and syntactical rules of language. This "jouissance" ultimately constitutes a challenge to ideological constraints, or the "symbolic order", in Kristeva's phrasing. However, Kristeva adds, this fact does not prevent avant-garde's "future anterior" from being rejected as an "impossible, aristocratic and elitist demand" (1982:32). The specific project of the avant-garde of the early 20th century is its global critical aesthetics, its revolt against a romantic aestheticism or, as Peter Bürger<sup>3</sup> puts it: "the attempt to sublimate the autonomy claims and to reintegrate art into the practice of everyday life".

Walter Benjamin had instigated a similarly positive evaluation of the avant-garde in his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"<sup>4</sup>. As he writes, the masses' immediate and emotional rejection of the avant-garde as to do with the fact that generally, "the conventional is critically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion" (1979:236). The rejection and the aversion that the masses demonstrate before the avant-garde comes from their incapacity of relating to it and the awe it provokes. The same public that responds positively to a progressive film by Chaplin, is likely to respond in a negative way to a painting by Picasso or to a Surrealist text. In Benjamin's view, this is a sign that the masses cannot enjoy the latter, because there is no fusion of their emotions with their intellectual perceptions. Hence the aversion. However, even

3 Peter Bürger, "Avant-garde and Contemporary Aesthetics", in *New German Critique*, 22, 1981, (p. 21).

4 In Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Fontana, 1979.

though he criticizes the avant-garde for its elitism, Benjamin stresses that a crucial element prevails in its aesthetics: the loss of the “aura” of the object of art, that is to say the loss of its romantic autonomy and its remote holiness. This is, according to Benjamin, a fundamental element in the democratization of art which was brought about by the “age of mechanical reproduction” and the support of modern technology. Thus, the process of desacralization of art, initiated by the early 20th century avant-garde, is seen as a possible means of redeeming the work of art from a decadent aestheticism, in order to be “visually and emotionally enjoyed” outside the vitiated circuit of museums and art-galleries.

Both avant-garde and postmodernist aesthetics are deeply concerned with the appropriation of technology for high-art and the rupture of the autonomy of art. However, despite this common project, there lies between early 20th century aesthetics and the aesthetics of the late 70’s and the 80’s a big historical gap, with inevitable social and political implications. In Andreas Huyssen’s words<sup>5</sup> :

The historical avant-garde’s appropriation of technology for high-art (e. g. film, photography, montage principle) could produce shock since it broke with the aestheticism and the doctrine of art’s autonomy from “real” life which were dominant in the late 19th century. The postmodernist espousal of space age technology and electronic media in the wake of McLuhan, however, could scarcely shock an audience which had been inculturated to modernism via the very same media.

Furthermore, with the exception of Italian Futurism, the early 20th century avant-garde relied on a critical aesthetic and political project which was broadly oriented towards the left, an

---

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Avant-garde and Postmodernism”, in *New German Critique*. 22, 1981, (p. 33).

assignment which the postmodernist rebellion against the culture and tradition of the 1950's on the whole lacked. Again quoting Andreas Huyssen, "the search for tradition combined with an attempt at recuperation seems more basic to postmodernism than innovation and breakthrough" (*Ibid.* p. 32).

The analysis of Lewis's vorticist prose in Part II is informed by Bakhtin's studies on the novel genre and the carnivalesque. Lewis's particular style of representation is a deliberate parody of mankind, a "non-sentimental satire", where "comedy is the embryo of tragedy" as he himself claims. As Jameson says in the article quoted earlier, Lewis's technique produces a kind of "satire-collage", which, however, "yields not some decorative and beautified pastiche, but rather the most jarring and energetic mimesis of the mechanical, and breathes a passionate revulsion for the standardized manipulations of contemporary existence" (*Ibid.* p. 325).

In the texts which will be particularly considered here Lewis offers a carnivalesque representation of the world, in a variety of styles, from the early pre-war texts of *The Wild Body*, through their later revisions in 1917 and 1927, to the novel *Tarr*, first published in 1918 and rewritten in 1928, and the play *Enemy of the Stars*, first published in 1914 and rewritten in 1932. My aim is to demonstrate that those three texts, the first being closer to what Bakhtin defines as the "medieval popular grotesque" and the others expressions of the "chamber masquerade line" of the modernist grotesque, all reveal the "polyphonic" and "dialogic ambivalence" characteristic of carnivalesque satire. Rather than presenting a finished and coherent picture of the world, these texts challenge the alienation and reification of the modern world in a discourse which consciously incorporates that very alienation and reification, leaving no other certainties but those of the "duality of the body" and the "incompleteness of the world". My analysis of the three texts nominated above will show that Lewis's style, despite its apparent monologism, is after all deeply heteroglossic. This fact derives not only from

the clash of the inner or micro-dialogue of the different characters, particularly of the antagonistic pairs that define the structure of *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars*, but, more strikingly, from the position taken by the author vis-a-vis his characters. Thus, intentionally, Lewis creates an alternative voice in the narrative, which, through the narrator's ambivalent laughter and his cynical commentary, emphasizes speech diversity and dialogism. This process corresponds to that defined by Bakhtin in relation to Dostoevsky's novels:

This position excludes all one-sided or dogmatic seriousness and does not permit any simple point of view, any single polar extreme of life or of thought, to be absolutized. All one-sided seriousness (of life and thought), all one-sided pathos is handed over to the heroes, but the author, who causes them all to collide in the "great dialogue" of the novel, leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end (1984a):165).

The study of Lewis's writing in the two main lines which I propose to follow, (i. e., first in the context of avant-garde aesthetics, under the impact of Futurism and Vorticism, and secondly, as a form of grotesque and carnivalized literature) though not a conventional approach to Lewis, has been reflected in recent criticism. Fredric Jameson's work has been the most important, combining socio-political and psychoanalytic approaches<sup>6</sup>. An anthology edited by Giovanni Cianci, (Palermo, 1982) with texts in English and Italian, *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura* also reflects the growing interest in Lewis's early texts and the vorticist

---

<sup>6</sup> Vide the article cited above, "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist" and particularly the book, *Fables of Aggression Wyndham Lewis the Modernist as Fascist* (1979). In the latter Jameson develops a seminal theoretical and analytical study of Lewis's narrative style and technique, which has largely contributed to revitalize the current critique of Lewis, as well as to redeem him as one of the most challenging voices of Modernism.

period<sup>7</sup>. These texts contribute various valuable insights on the narrative style of Wyndham Lewis's early work, either emphasizing its avantgardism or its grotesque and carnivalesque genre.

---

<sup>7</sup> This analysis is particularly undertaken in the following essays: Giovanni Cianci, "Un futurismo in panni neoclassici: sul primo Wyndham Lewis vorticista"; Ian Duncan, "Towards a Modernist Poetic: Wyndham Lewis's Early Fiction"; Alan Munton, "Wyndham Lewis: The Transformation of Carnival"; Michael Durman and Alan Munton, "Wyndham Lewis and the Nature of Vorticism"; Sara Tamone, "Il vivisezionatore della propria risata: Tarr tra decadentismo e avanguardia" and Attlio Carapezza, "Il comico e il satirico nell'opera di Wyndham Lewis".





# PART I



## CHAPTER ONE

### JULIA KRISTEVA AND THE POETICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND MIKHAIL BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL

The aim of this chapter is to enunciate the methodology used in this thesis, which is based on the theoretical work of Julia Kristeva on the poetics of the avant-garde and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel genre. This chapter will thus discuss the most relevant issues raised by the works of both critics, since they provide the background for my interpretation of the texts by Wyndham Lewis considered in this thesis, in the context of the modernist challenge to language and the principles of realistic representation.

I will start with a review of Kristeva's theory of the avant-garde, making however explicit that the literary examples upon which Kristeva founds her theories are drawn from late 19th century French poetry and Russian Futurism. She develops this account in the following texts: *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974), *La Traversée des Signes* (1975), *Polylogue* (1977), and the English edition, *Desire in Language* (1982), a compilation of translated essays from *Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* (1969) and *Polylogue*.

I will be drawing on Kristeva's theory and referring to the examples she gives in order to make it possible, in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, to extend her theory to establish my own analysis of Vorticism: a) in a synchronic relation to kindred expressions of the European avant-garde, (with particular emphasis on Italian Futurism) and b) in the context of the aesthetics and philosophy of its time.

## 1. Julia Kristeva and the Revolution of Poetic Language

The questions Kristeva raises both about the nature and the future of literary discourse inaugurated by late 19th century French poetry are crucial to a deeper understanding of avant-garde poetics, especially in relation to the nature and the limits of its power of transgression. For she examines a literary discourse whose experimentalism transgresses linguistic and syntactic rules, while, at the same time, its social and cultural practice is confined to an elitist and bourgeois audience. Kristeva highlights the contradictions of a discourse which not only questions literature itself, but also the relation between subject and writing, and, at a deeper level, the relation between literary discourse and the social context that produces it. Kristeva calls the latter the “ambivalence” of the text, meaning by this the insertion of history and society into the text, and, reciprocally, the text’s insertion into history and society.

This concept is allied to the principle of “intertextuality”, which sees the text as an “ideologeme”, a concept Kristeva acknowledges to have borrowed from Bakhtin (Kristeva, 1982:59, note 2). This is not surprising since Kristeva’s early work on theory of literature is imbued with a “Bakhtinian post-formalism”, developing in the same line as Bakhtin’s studies on late Medieval and early Renaissance texts, (e. g. Kristeva’s *Le Texte du Roman*, a study on the beginning of the novel form). By the concept of “intertextuality” she means that each discourse exists not only in an ambivalent relation to the history and society of its time, but also in a relative position to those discourses that diachronically precede or follow it:

The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history. (1982:37)

The ideologeme of a text materializes the intersection of the ideological with the linguistic, i. e. the intertextual function, without giving priority to one over the other. As such, the text is understood as a totality, itself inserted in another totality, that of the historical and social text. Or, in Kristeva's schematic language:

To put it another way, the functions defined according to the extra-novelistic textual set (Te) take on value within the novelistic textual set (Tn). The ideologeme of the novel is precisely this intertextual function defined according to *Te* and having value within Tn. (1982:37, first published in *Semiotike*. 1969:113-42)

In *Le Texte du Roman* (1976:89), Kristeva developed this same concept in relation to what Bakhtin termed "dialogism", which is for him the principle that defines language as subjectivity and communication. For Bakhtin, writing was the reading of an anterior literary corpus and the new text the absorption of and reply to another earlier text. This theory expressed the need for a new science, which Bakhtin called "translinguistics", which affirmed the dialogic nature of language and was aware of its intertextual relations (Kristeva, 1976:90). However, the source of Bakhtin's "translinguistics", according to Kristeva, is not far from the notions of "moral message" and "social value" that 19th century discourse valorized in literature. As examples, she cites Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868) and *Poésies* (1870), which she sees in a perpetual contest with preceding concepts of writing, as well as a challenge to the morality of its own time. Thus, it is through a writing which displays dialogue and ambivalence that a writer enters the (text of) history of his time and brings it to his own text (1976:12;90). A text may equally well refuse history, and this refusal will remain inscribed, if only through silence, in the text.

Kristeva defines "polyphony" in the novel in terms which concern not only the narrative itself, but also the very linguistic

process of formulating meaning and producing signification. In principle, she says, the novel, with the exception of the epic, is always a polyphonic discourse, (1976:176). The distinctive characteristic of Joyce's, Proust's or Kafka's novels, however, is that the nature of their dialogism is no longer at the level of the fictional narrative, like Rabelais', Swift's or Dostoevsky's, but is characterized by an "unreadability", a rupture in the logic and syntax of writing. This discourse raises the question of intertextuality as a subversive principle, the expression of a disruption which is not only literary, but also social, political and philosophical (1976:93)<sup>1</sup>.

According to Kristeva, it is the presence of dialogue and ambivalence that characterizes the literary language of modernity. These allow the writer to enter history professing an ambivalent morality, which she will call a "negativity": "celle de la négation qui postule", (1976:90), [a postulating negativity]. This "modern" literature, which ruptures representation and authority in the sign, expresses a crisis in the identity of the subject which is in its turn a symptom of social crisis.

1 Mayakovsky and the group of artists that formed LEF tried to prove that the belief in and campaign for a new, radical art form did not compulsorily exclude the commitment to the Socialist Revolution. However, the possibility of such double commitment was not seen with benevolent eyes by the revolutionary Party, who, suspicious of the nature of the work of these young avant-garde artists and finding there traces of a "bourgeois decadence", considered it an elitist art not close enough to the proletariat, so, not following the ideals of the revolution.

The case of Mayakovsky, which Viktor Shklovsky movingly exalts in his book, *Mayakovsky and his Circle*, is a striking one. Five years after Mayakovsky's suicide, the Party decided to rehabilitate this "enfant terrible" of the October Revolution, celebrating him as the hero of the proletarian art thus forgiving him for (or trying to forget) his "youth errors". This happened in 1935, after Stalin had remarked that he considered Mayakovsky the most talented Soviet poet. Afterwards, as Shklovsky writes:

"Mayakovsky is streamlined and glorified, but editions of his works are deleted and his plays are not performed. Streets, cities, airplanes, even mountain peaks are named after him, but his role is limited to being "the drummer of the revolution" (1974:222-3).

The controversial nature of this debate and the polemics it generated require a thorough appreciation of Kristeva's theory of language, which is in fact the key to her interpretation of avant-garde poetics. Hence, section 2 of this chapter will look at Kristeva's formulation of a theory of language and its articulation with the literature of modernity.

### 1.1. Kristeva's theory of language

Fundamentally, Kristeva distinguishes two modalities in language: the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*. The first is responsible for meaning and signification, the second is prior to signification. Avant-garde texts have a potential to display the semiotic modality of language, which means a rupture in the symbolic order, a loss of authorial subjectivity and a leap beyond signification.

Kristeva sees the eruption of the semiotic modality in the symbolic as a transgression of linguistic and social norms, having therefore ambivalent results. On the one hand, it brings a "state of bliss" to the text, product of the writer's "jouissance". But, on the other hand, implying a loss of subjectivity of the speaking "I", it is felt as a threat, bringing a sense of discomfort to the reader, who no longer feels the reassuring presence of the consciousness of the author organizing the structure of the text.

Kristeva discusses these two "modalities of signifiante", (her terminology), in her major thesis on late 19th century French poetry and avant-garde discourse, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974). Here she constructs a detailed theory of the revolutionary potential of this particular discourse, projecting its linguistic and syntactic rupture onto the social sphere.

In 1975, in a collection of essays published by the *Tel Quel* group, *La Traversée des Signes*, in a chapter called "Pratique Signifiante et Mode de Production", she emphasizes the importance of distinguishing those two functioning modes of language, stressing the relevance of the semiotic in avant-garde discourse.

In 1977, in *Polylogue*, a collection of essays on diverse subjects, from painting, literature, linguistics and psychoanalysis to discussions on the feminist movement in France and Kristeva's impressions from her recent visit to China, the semiotic and symbolic functions of language are again discussed. Now, they are more directly set in the context of a politics of literature, and seen in the relation that the subject of this new, revolutionary practice, "the subject in process" has, to a society, itself ideally always in transformation, in motion, "in process".

On the whole, the definition Kristeva gives of the "semiotic" and the "symbolic" in *La Traversée des Signes* successfully synthesizes her concept of these two modalities in language:

«Nous appellerons *symbolique* le fonctionnement logique et syntaxique du langage et ce qui, dans des pratiques translinguistiques, est assimilable au système de la langue. *Sémiotique* sera, par contre, d'une part ce qui peut être hypothétiquement posé comme précédant l'imposition du symbolique à travers le stade du miroir et l'acquisition du langage, encore présent dans le système symbolique sous l'aspect de rythmes, intonations, transformations lexicales, syntaxiques, rhétoriques. (Kristeva, 1975:17)<sup>2</sup>.

The symbolic is thus responsible for signification, while the semiotic's presence in language is beyond sign, signifier or signified.

In *Polylogue*, Kristeva wrote that the symbolic modality of language comprehended the sign, signification and denotation

---

2 [We call symbolic the logical and syntactical functioning of language, and that which, in translinguistic practices, is assimilated to the system of language. On the other hand, semiotic will be what can hypothetically be considered as preceding the imposition of the symbolic, through the mirror stage and the acquisition of language, still present in the symbolic system in the aspect of rhythms, intonations, lexical, syntactical and rhetorical transformations. ] (When not otherwise stated translations of foreign quotations in this thesis are mine.)



of an object, scientific truth, nomination and syntax. The semi-otic, chronologically anterior to the symbolic, is synchronically transversal to the sign, syntax, denotation and signification. It is a non-expressive rhythm, present in the cry, the babbling and the gestures of the child and in the rhythm, word-puns, alliterations, intonations, nonsense, tears and laughter of the adult (1977:14).

The semiotic is responsible for the introduction of ruptures and heterogeneity in signification. Such heterogeneity is the “negativity principle” in language, which, by ignoring the logic and rules of syntax is the principal element of avant-garde discourse. (Kristeva, 1977:61).

In *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*, Kristeva describes avant-garde discourse as one which ruptures the symbolic order of language and introduces heterogeneity to signification, pervading the text with an afflux of “jouissance”, pleasure, and freedom from the logical symbolic order of language<sup>3</sup>.

The afflux of “jouissance” in language is thus brought about by the semiotisation of the symbolic in the order of language, achieved throughout its own process of formulation, struggling against, (but within) the signifying function, invading the symbolic order and destroying its homogeneity.

Kristeva writes in *Polylogue*, in a chapter translated in *Desire in Language*, “From One Identity to Another”:

Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic

3 «Ce sera donné en fissurant cet ordre, en le coupant, en changeant le vocabulaire, la syntaxe, le mot même, en dégageant sous eux la pulsion telle que la porte la différence vocalique ou kinesique, que la jouissance s'introduira à travers l'ordre socio-symbolique» (Kristeva, 1974:77).  
[Thus, by disrupting this order, by breaking it, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, by finding underneath the drive such as it is displayed by the vocalic or kinesic difference, that “jouissance” will pervade the socio-symbolic order. ]

language (...) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element (1982:136).

Kristeva gives examples from French late 19th century poetry and some early 20th century English novels: Mallarmé's experimentalism in the poem "Un Coup de Dés", his unfinished life-project, *Livre*, Lautréamont's morally subversive narratives in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Bataille's sexually perverse narratives, Joyce's experimental narrative technique and unorthodox syntax.

In *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* Kristeva had already introduced a psychoanalytic discussion in her theory of language. There, she defines the semiotic modality of language in psychoanalytic terms, as a disposition of language which structures the drives or energetic charges, which are themselves articulated in a "chora", a concept she draws from Plato, meaning a maternal vessel or nourishing receptacle. This "chora" is a non-expressive totality, a site of these linguistic drives, which is permanently endowed with a rhythm, a movement, and is in a pre-symbolic state.

It is in relation to this "chora", this maternal body, that the subject constructs itself linguistically and socially, separating itself gradually from it, allowing the symbolic law to regulate the semiotic "chora" and organize the social relations, through a process Kristeva calls a "negativity"<sup>4</sup>.

This negativity, introduced in the process of signification by the semiotic function, works as Kristeva says, "à l'intérieur et à l'encontre de l'ordre social" (1974:79), [from within and

---

4 «Lieu d'engendrement du sujet, la chora sémiotique est pour lui le lieu de sa négation, ou son unité cède devant le procès de changes et de stases la produisant. Nous appellerons ce processus d'engendrement sémiotique, une négativité en la distinguant de la négation comme acte du sujet jugeant» (1974:27-8).

[The semiotic chora, site of the making of the subject, is also the site of its negation, where its unity gives in to the process of changes and stases which produce it. We call this process of semiotization a negativity, in order to distinguish it from negation, an act of the judging subject. ]

against the social order]. Which means that, in spite of stressing the existence and the importance of *a* semiotic function or negativity erupting in the system of language, Kristeva is aware that this one can only exist side by side with the symbolic principle of signification that organizes language and structures communication, for the sake of preserving the latter.

According to Kristeva, the organization of the symbolic order of language against the semiotic, is parallel to the diachronic process of development of the subject and the making of its identity. This process only becomes visible, she says, in the analysis of the logic of dreams and the production of signification in a text, (e. g. through displacements and condensations, metaphors and metonymies). She stresses that her theory of language cannot be separated from a theory of the subject depending upon a Freudian theory of the unconscious (1974:30).

## 1.2. Manifestations of the pre-symbolic in avant-garde poetics

In Kristeva's view, art and poetry in particular, reveal the first pre-symbolic disposition of language, by escaping or subverting symbolic censorship, producing ruptures in the signifying process and displacements in the logical and syntactic order of language. Those rhythms, rhymes, alliterations, different graphic patterns, etc. (e. g. Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de Dés*), which, more or less subtly modify the structure of language, disturb the authorial identity and the unity of language through a dialectical process between "drive" and signifier, introducing a transgressive element in language: "jouissance". That is, according to her, the function of art, and particularly of poetic language: to introduce in the socio-symbolic order that "menacing" and "subversively disruptive element", "jouissance" (1974:79). Or, as she puts it in *Polylogue*, as translated in *Desire in Language*:

Through the permanent contradiction between these two dispositions (semiotic/symbolic), of which the internal setting off of the

sign (signifier/signified) is merely a witness, poetic language in its most disruptive form (unreadable for meaning, dangerous for the subject), shows the constraints of a civilization dominated by transcendental rationality. Consequently, it is a means of overriding this constraint (1982:139-40).

Kristeva sees the radical literary discourse of the early 20th century (e. g. Joyce, Bataille) already announced in the texts of Mallarmé and Lautréamont. They inaugurate a type of discourse in which language is revealed as a site of the dialectics of the subject in the process of signification, which, at the same time, interrogates the linguistic and the social order<sup>5</sup>.

According to Kristeva, these two writers were first engaged in a writing conforming with the artistic tradition of their own time; in due course they rejected it, attacking its very essence: the phonetics, syntax and logic of language, and, then, the symbolic and its ideology – the moral, familial, scientific, economic and political code. In order to enter into dialogue with the society of their epoch, they had to reach first the linguistic logic that systematized it, the institutions which embodied it, and, finally, the ideologies that manipulated it (1974:81).

Thus, Mallarmé's and Lautréamont's writing is, as Kristeva says, endowed with an ambivalent status: the "negativity principle" that makes it simultaneously represent the society which produced it, and at the same time challenge society's linguistic and ideological constraints. Hence, the transgression

---

5 «Faire de la littérature une épreuve de la dialectique du sujet dans le procès de la signifiante, impliquait surtout pour les deux écrivains de la fin du XIXème siècle, un refus de la poésie comme fuite folle, et un combat contre la poésie comme fétichisme (jeu de langage, hypostase de l'oeuvre, acceptation de la rhétorique incontournable)» (Kristeva, 1974:80).  
[To make of literature a proof of the dialectics of the subject in the process of signification, meant, especially to the two writers of the end of the 19th century, the refusal of poetry as escapism, and a struggle against poetry as fetishism (language puns, hypostatization of the work, acceptance of the overwhelming rhetoric)].

they perpetrated is not only confined to linguistic parameters, but overlaps them, inveighing against the social order (1974:80). This radicalization of writing that initiates the questioning of the dialectical experience of the subject will be, in Kristeva's opinion, the principle of 20th century avant-garde discourse (*Ibid.*).

## 2. "Une littérature à venir"; Futurism and the "future anterior of language"

In another chapter of *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*, "Le Texte à l'Intérieur d'une Formation Économique et Sociale", Kristeva emphasizes the fact that the radical experience of literary discourse historically matches revolutionary periods, where the social order and its ideology are in crisis and ideological apparatuses are the object of direct confrontation. Such is the case of Futurism, which growing in the historical context of a pre-war Europe in political and social crisis, also bears witness to that reflection of the social in the aesthetic. This discourse, characterized by its "ambiguity" and "negativity", becomes in relation to language and ideology a "future anterior". By this, Kristeva means that this discourse is neither prior to, nor posterior to its epoch: it is simultaneously an echo of its own time and it is also an announcement, a precursor of the movements responsible for change in that very epoch. At the same time that, linguistically and ideologically, it "represents" and is subordinated to its epoch, it nevertheless challenges and disrupts that same representation<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> «(...) il est par ailleurs de son temps au point qu'il représente dans la phase thétique du rejet, c'est à dire par sa disposition linguistique et idéologique. Par sa négativité le texte est toujours un «futur antérieur»: écho et précurseur, hors-temps, télescopage, d'avant» et d'après», brisure de la succession, de la téléologie, du devenir, instant du saut. Mais, par sa disposition et seulement par elle, le texte est un contemporain: il est présent, subordonné à son époque dont il épouse les limites pénibles» (Kristeva, 1974:364).

The disturbing element of these texts lies in their capacity to upset and “disarticulate” the symbolic order of language and, in so doing, dismantle the unity of the subject and its perception of the world. However, they often end up being incorporated into literary tradition as “textes maudits”, and consequently relegated to the universe of the marginal, a-temporal and a-political elites<sup>7</sup>.

Subversive art is thus made to construct its own “ghettos”, in accordance with society’s own needs and for the benefit of the latter. The individual collapse of most of these agents of a new, radical discourse is, in that sense, also very revealing. The fact that many of them stopped writing, failing to see there any more purpose, withdrawing from any creative activity, (with tragic results to some of them, e. g. Rimbaud, Artaud, Mayakovsky), proves that the nature of their personal engagement in art interfered with their social praxis and could ultimately result in a total inability to deal with the world, often leading to insanity or death.

Kristeva raises then a set of crucial questions on the possibility of ever reaching an articulation between a subversive aesthetic praxis, whose subject is in “process”, and the political subversion of a society, itself “in process”, as well. She expresses her belief in the necessity to create a new revolutionary literature, continuously questioning all subjective and ideological identifications; a literature which cannot be made socially “redundant” by an aesthetics of consumption, and which not only represents social struggle, but also, due to its own open, pluri-signifying structure, is the guarantee of the non-closure of the revolutionary process.

---

7 The essence of Mallarmé’s poetry, characterized by the “dissolving negativity which he wanted to oppose to the a-social corrosion of the pre-homeric orphic poetry” (Kristeva, 1974:365) was completely ignored in his own time, and, in its place, the myth of the poet as master of the preciousities of language and obscurities of poetic creation, was worshipped. Lautréamont and Rimbaud, also marginalized in their own time, were negatively acknowledged through the cover of “perversion”, with which society conveniently sheltered itself against the social and historical impact of their texts.

She calls this literature “une littérature à venir” [a literature to come], citing as its forerunners: Whitman, Joyce, Mayakovsky and Pound, among many others (194:367). In the introductory chapter to *Polylogue*, “Politique de la Littérature”, Kristeva defends the reciprocity of the concept of change in literature and politics. As such, the understanding of language as a signifying practice presupposes a radical change in the relations between literature and politics. In her view, the outburst of avant-garde discourse has proved it, inveighing simultaneously against ideological, (morality, family, religion, the state) and linguistic codes. The latter, codifying the submission of the subject to the symbolic order of language and the socio-symbolic order is, as Kristeva says, “the last guarantee of the unity of the subject” (1977:16) and, at the same time, a perfect, deeply rooted instrument of social control. In this sense, any attempt to challenge or transform the traditional linguistic code in order to express new or unspoken needs and desires is felt as an assault on or provocation to the system of law and order and, consequently, is in its own time either repressed or ignored.

Examples of such libertarian discourses have been countless through history, although often not spoken of, i. e. the “poètes maudits” of each literary period, the expressions of popular or underground cultures or of countries under colonization, the literature of women, etc.

In *Polylogue*, (transl. in *Desire in Language*, 23-35), Kristeva calls attention to Futurism as a very particular moment of avant-garde poetics. She regards Russian Futurism as a potentially “new” revolutionary discourse, which, having been produced in the context of the Russian Revolution was, as a consequence of its radical nature and the power of its transgression, felt as a social threat and, therefore, silenced in its own historical time.

Here Kristeva addresses a subject which is essential to this thesis: the transgressive potential of *Futurism* in the social sphere, beyond the linguistic and syntactical revolution.

Would Futurism ever have been felt as a menace if it had been socially and politically inoffensive? Why, then, was it banned, especially in a time and a place where all possibilities for reformulation seemed to have been opened?

Although Kristeva's analysis is restricted to Russian Futurism, the questions she raises can pertinently be widened to other expressions of the avant-garde, namely the movements this thesis is concerned with, Italian Futurism and Vorticism.

The futurist "aestheticization of the real" (either in its Italian or Russian version) is not necessarily reactionary; it has a progressive social dimension in its attempt to break through the barriers between art and "non-art". It has thus to be understood in the context of the modernist assault on a passive, status-quo aesthetics. Futurism's experience of language as a "risky practice" where the "speaking animal" was allowed to sense at the same time "the rhythm of the body and the upheavals of history", (Kristeva 1982:34), naturally brought about more controversy than a discourse conforming to tradition and neutrality, and still provokes uneasiness whenever contemporary theories want to classify it.

For Kristeva, Futurism is another "future anterior", where "the word is perceived as word" (*Ibid.*) accounting for the semiotic rhythms of language, "the anteriority of language" (1982:32), breaking logical and syntactical rules and simultaneously erupting in the symbolic order in an outburst of "jouissance":

The poem's time frame is some "future anterior" that will never take place, never come about as such, but only as an upheaval of present place and meaning. Now, by thus suspending the present moment, by straddling rhythmic, meaningless, anterior memory with meaning intended for later or forever, poetic language structures itself as the very nucleus of monumental historicity. Futurism succeeded in making this poetic law explicit solely because it extended further than anyone else the signifier's autonomy,



restored its instinctual value, and aimed at a transmental language (*Ibid.*).

Therefore, in spite of the fact that futurist poetic discourse became, as Kristeva recognizes, “an impossible, aristocratic and elitist demand” (1982:33), as such doomed to disintegration, it was, historically, a courageous attempt to go beyond the limits of the enclosure of art: first, by expressing the rupture of meaning and the breakdown of the identity of the subject “in process”; secondly, by exploring the possibilities of a new revolutionary discourse, where heterogeneity, plurisignification and “jouissance” confront the symbolic order.

A similar case is that of Vorticism and *Blast*, the magazine it launched: besides announcing its immediate aims of provocation and scandal, it was also genuinely engaged in the search for a new literary discourse that challenged orthodox aesthetics and deliberately transposed its limits.

In this context, the “modernism” of Wyndham Lewis, a subject that will be discussed in detail in part *II* of this thesis, reveals the “negativity principle” that Kristeva detected in avant-garde poetics. Lewis’s writing, undoubtedly “a symptom and reflex of the reification of late capitalist social relations”, (Jameson, 1979:13), confronts the realist aim of representation in declaring its own reification and assuming it as a dilemma which the author knows he cannot resolve in the text. This confrontation arises because, in the first instance, the representation refers not to a “real” world, but to a reified world peopled by men-machines, puppets and clowns. Secondly, the reader encounters a style which is set up as self-mocking, and a discourse articulated upon parody and pastiche. In Kristeva’s terminology, that dilemma reveals the very “intertextuality” of Lewis’s text, which means, as I have noted above, the intersection of the ideological with the linguistic.

As Jameson writes, if one grasps the phenomenon of reification as a concrete historical situation, then Lewis’s modernism “is to be understood as just a protest against the reified experience of

an alienated social life, in which, against its own will, it remains formally and ideologically locked” (1979:14).

From this follows the need for the study of the “political unconscious” in Lewis’s work, i. e., the making of “connections between the findings of narrative analysis, psychoanalysis and traditional as well as modern approaches to ideology” (Jameson 1979:6). This study will reveal that Lewis’s writing is “a symbolic act in its own right” (1979:8), not only experimental and “explosive” at the level of the words themselves and the sentence structure, but also a systematic unmasking and undermining of the “general ideology” of the period, and a specific calling into question of the dominant “aesthetic ideology”:

(...) that repudiation of the hegemonic naturalist and representational conventions which he shares with other modernisms is in Lewis reduplicated by a prophetic assault on the very conventions of the emergent modernisms themselves, which will become hegemonic in their turn only after World War II (Jameson, 1979:19).

Understood in this context, Lewis’s writing is then also a “future anterior” in relation to the aesthetic of its own time, already a signal of the dissolution of the modernist canons and foretelling postmodernism, i. e., “stressing discontinuity, allegory, the mechanical, the gap between signifier and signified, the lapse in meaning, the syncope in the experience of the subject” (Jameson 1979:20).

### **3. A critique of Kristeva's poetics of the avant-garde**

As I have already suggested, Kristeva’s theory of the intertextual relations between the poetics and the politics of avant-garde has given rise to a wide-ranging controversy. In this section I will analyse a critique which raises a number of very pertinent issues in relation to Kristeva’s theory.

Jennifer Stone's essay "Mirror Image/Collage: Reality, Representation and Revolution in Pirandello" proposes a semiotic approach to the avant-garde text that will attempt to deconstruct it in order to reveal the relation of the authorial discourse to the discourse in power and the presence of the dominant ideology in the text. Stone wants to read the avant-garde text in relation to fascist ideology, in order to prove that "the dominant discursive formation can be revealed as a hegemonic fact, which along with other means, is culturally sustained" (Stone 1979:40). According to her critique: "the notion of a literature of avant-garde "rupturing" or "subverting" the established literary practices, cannot be sacramentalised in isolation, but should be conceived of in terms of (...) its "realisation" or "restoration" to a position as dominant discourse" (1979:39). She comes to the extreme conclusion that Kristeva's theory of avant-garde "disguises" the politics of fascism and lacks a direct political analysis (1978:49). Citing the examples of Marinetti and Pirandello, Stone adds that avant-garde texts often only apparently subvert the discourse in power, or in the process of assuming power.

Despite the pertinence of Stone's remarks in relation to the politics of Italian Futurism, a different perspective must however be maintained in relation to Russian Futurism. One cannot simply say that Mayakovsky is an exception to this state of things or that he is an exemplary avant-garde radical. He stands in fact, in his own time, against the "revolutionary aesthetics" in power, as a believer that "public taste has to be hit", rather than be "educated" by socialist realism and the defendants of the "reflectionist theory". His aesthetics, as well as that of the members of LEF, was felt as a transgression in relation to pre-revolutionary times, as much as in relation to the aesthetics of compromise with tradition in post-revolutionary Russia, in the understanding that, to make a political revolution leaving the dominant culture untouched, is a betrayal of the former. Nevertheless, one should insist on the fact that to make of Mayakovsky the "enfant terrible" of the "Proletkultists" is as unfair as to make

of him the hero of the “Proletkult”. Stone’s critique epitomizes Kristeva’s belief in the avant-garde’s “Utopia of language”, as the guarantee of a discourse which, through the production of semiotic ruptures and polyphony in the text will “undermine its unity and revolutionise its meaning” (Stone, 1979:49). Stone, on the other hand, perceives avant-garde discourse as a “language of Utopia”, which will be ultimately recuperated<sup>8</sup> by the dominant ideology as yet another genre. According to her, the avant-garde is gradually assimilated into the dominant discourse, and thus transformed from a “literature of subversion” to a “literature of performance”. In the case of Marinetti and Pirandello this experience meant, according to Stone, their appropriation by fascism and the corroboration of their aesthetics by the discourse in power:

the defamiliarisation and sense of unease is reconnected to the dominant discourse by absorption, the unexpected has become customary, and the disfigurement of the genre is now recognisable as

---

8 In order to clarify my usage of the term “recuperated”, and in the understanding that Futurism is a “Utopia of language” which aimed at translating in the language of art the new world of Modernity, I quote here Roland Barthes’s definition of the meaning of “utopia of language”, which he says is often “recuperated” as “the language of Utopia”: “L’utopie, bien entendu, ne préserve pas du pouvoir: l’utopie de la langue est récupérée comme langue de l’utopie – qui est un genre comme un autre. On peut dire qu’aucun des écrivains qui sont partis d’un combat assez solitaire contre le pouvoir de la langue n’a pu ou ne peut éviter d’être récupéré par lui, soit sous la forme posthume d’une inscription dans la culture officielle, soit sous la forme présente d’une mode qui impose son image et lui prescrit d’être conforme à ce qu’on attend de lui (Leçon 1978:25).

[Naturally, utopia is not alien to power: the utopia of language is recuperated as the language of Utopia – which is a genre like any other. We could say, that never any writer who started off from a rather lonely struggle against the power of language has been successful in avoiding to be recuperated by it, either through a posthumous inscription in the official culture, or through a present tag, under a fashion which restores its image, but, at the same time, demands that he should behave in accordance with what is expected from him. ]

a figure. What has been formerly deconsecrated by the avant-garde now finds fulfilment and the displacement is restored (1979:55).

In Stone's opinion Kristeva indulges in "a romantic nostalgia for violent revolutionary rupture rather than social transformations" (1979:49), which leads her to give a "dubious privilege to the heterogeneous semiotic drives over the linguistic organization of the text", which can be a dangerous valorization of the unconscious and the irrational, close to the fascist valorization of the vitalist elements, (war, sport, machines, the triumphant male, etc.), (*Ibid.*).

This critique, although emphasizing the important issue of the necessity to correlate avant-garde aesthetics with its historical context, and warning against an immediate identification of avant-garde disruption in language and politics, is nevertheless taking Kristeva's theory out of the literary and historical context in which she bases it. In this essay, Stone is only bringing into focus Italian Futurism, and criticising Kristeva's theory in relation to it, whereas Kristeva clearly addresses what she calls the avant-garde discourse of late 19th century and early 20th century French poetry, (Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Bataille). As I have already noted, she sets out these writers as the pioneers of a revolutionary discourse, addressing their criticism not only at the symbolic linguistic code, but also at the socio-ideological one. Kristeva argues that, on the one hand, the marginality of the individual personality of these "poètes maudits", and on the other hand the translation of that same marginality into a kind of writing opposed to the monologic discourse in power, (embodied in society's ideological apparatuses), are in themselves a direct attack on the bourgeois institutions of state, family, property, religion and art.

Furthermore, when Kristeva refers to the case of Futurism, she clearly names Russian Futurism ("Le Futur des Futuristes", 1977:366), considering it in a very particular historical context: a group of artists fighting for the creation of a new radical art form,

inside a politically revolutionary society, a society “in process”. As such, this avant-garde art is the product of subjects who are themselves “in process”, i. e., engaged in a radical transformation of human relations within a particular historical situation, where the relation between art and life could stop being stale or non-existent and assume new prospects of vitality.

As Mayakovsky wrote:

I know the power of words,  
I know the tocsin of words.  
They are not those  
that make theater boxes applaud.  
Words like that  
make coffins break out  
make them  
pace with their four oak legs.  
It happens —  
they are thrown out,  
not printed, not published.  
But the word gallops,  
its saddle girth tightened,  
it rings through the ages  
and trains creep nearer  
to lick  
poetry’s toil-hardened hands.  
(Mayakovsky’s untitled last poem, quoted from  
Shklovsky, 1974:203)

Kristeva stresses that the eruption of the avant-garde semi-otic heteroglossia within the linguistic code subverting at the same time syntactic, structural rules and the modes of achieving signification is also a threat to the religious and political monologism which fascist law imposes, (“le fascisme est le retour du refoulé dans le monologisme religieux ou politique”, 1977:17).

While stating this fact, Kristeva is placing her theory in a historical perspective and at the same time calling attention to art's potential subversion of the social. Many critiques of Kristeva's theory of avant-garde tend, however, to ignore the importance she gives to the concept of "intertextuality", which considers the text as an "ideologeme", i. e., bearing the traces of the society and the historical situation where it was produced. As she writes in "The Ethics of Linguistics" (*Desire in Language*. 1982:33-4), it is as wrong to believe in an aesthetic revolution without a social one, as to believe in the reverse situation.

Here lies the political nature of Kristeva's argument about the radicalism of avant-garde discourse, its "jouissance", its polyphony and its "negativity principle", through which the text of the author enters in dialogue with the text of society. This is what demarcates the avant-garde text from others, e. g., the realist text, since, while creating a greater distance or "estrangement" between author-text-reader, it gives scope for a more accurate and radical social critique. (As we shall see, a similar reason led Bakhtin to study carnivalesque texts, as those where a liberating subversive discourse explodes, revealing the ills and contradictions of the ruling ideology.)

However, in spite of this optimistic approach to avant-garde aesthetics, one realizes that, as often happens, the products of the avant-garde circulate largely amongst an elitist audience. This contradiction is inherent to avant-garde's own aims and principles: the attempt to make popular a new, non-familiar form of art, its disquieting experimentalism and the challenge to what is the very essence of literature, i. e. the code of linguistic communication itself.

This conflict is at the root of the failure of Russian Futurism's Utopian dream of popularizing avantgardist art: an attempt to challenge at the same time the bourgeois social order, and the linguistic order where the first is reproduced. In other countries of Europe where Futurism flourished, as in the case of Italy, this problem did not arise. The Futurists asserted from the very

beginning that the movement was aristocratic and elitist and that, in terms of its audience, it did not have any obvious democratic or popularizing aims. However, this does not mean that the sheer performance of its aesthetic transgression was not *per se* felt as a challenge and an assault on the bourgeois *status quo*. Vorticism emerges in a similar context to Italian Futurism and is characterized by the same political anarchy and incipient contradictions. The first claim of the launching manifesto *Long Live The Vortex!* is that “Blast will be popular”, but at the same time, it will “have nothing to do with the People” and it is aimed at the “Individual”. *Blast* wants to stand for “the Reality of the Present” but it is created for “the timeless fundamental Artist that exists in everybody” (Blast J).

The following two chapters of this thesis will analyse the main principles of Futurism and Vorticism, seeing the nature of their revolution in language, the radicalism and non-conformism of their aesthetics, in the light of Kristeva’s concept of the text as intertextuality, i. e. within the text of history and society. The Futurist/Vorticist challenge to the codes of representation in the arts, the “negativity principle” of both movements, as well as their potentially libertarian “jouissance”, will be seen in the context of the search for the identity of the subject within modern, urban, industrialized society.

But does the disintegration of Russian Futurism, the alliance of Italian Futurism with Fascism, prove that there is “no future” for this discourse? In trying to answer Kristeva’s questions on the future of avant-garde discourse, one is faced with the need to look back over the history of avant-garde movements and their appearance in the context of Modernity.

The calling into question of the “future of Futurism” leads one to evaluate the nature of the transgression it introduced in the discourse of art, towards the change of relations between art and life, the artist and the world and the function of art in an industrialized urban society. These questions, which were seminal in the eruption of an aesthetics of Modernity, are still pertinent



to the current discussions on Modernism and Postmodernism. That is why an indifferent or dismissive attitude towards Futurism, even if in the name of its alleged reactionary politics, its alliance with Fascism in Italy, and the elitism and chauvinism of its aesthetics, becomes itself reactionary.

#### 4. Mikhail Bakhtin, his Circle and theory of the novel<sup>9</sup>

I will now attempt to make a synthesis of the most relevant issues raised by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on the theory of the novel. As I have already indicated, his studies on the grotesque genre have provided the essential methodological tools for my analysis of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist prose, which will be carried out in the second part of this thesis.

The Bakhtinian school existed in Russia from the middle of the 1920s to the middle of the 1930s. M. Bakhtin, P. N. Mevdev and V. N. Voloshinov were its principal members. Together, on the basis of a non-Stalinist Marxism, they attempted the creation of a "sociological poetics", approaching literature as a sign system analysed by a new Marxist semiology. During the period of coexistence of this group, Bakhtin wrote his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*, (1929), which in 1963 was published under the title of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

The Bakhtinian school took as its starting point a critical view of Formalism, wanting to go beyond its a-historicist study of the object of art. It reacted against Formalism as well as against a crude sociology of literature, and instead wanted to create a science of language based on the social nature of the sign in art. In particular, it concentrated not on the differences between ordinary language and literary language, but saw language as a system in the system of ideologies. From very early on Bakhtin's manuscripts suffered various vicissitudes. Some were lost, or

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed and critical account of this subject, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, vide Michael Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin*, London 1984.

unfinished, or suddenly left unpublished. It was only after many years of research and discussion within his circle of friends, poets, artists, scientists, that his first book appeared in 1929, under the title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*. This introduced his immensely important theory of “dialogism” and “polyphony”. Though controversial the book was well received. (A revised second edition of this book however only appeared in 1963). In 1929 Bakhtin was arrested, sent into exile, and spent six years in obscurity pursuing his writing. From 1940 until 1945 Bakhtin lived in Moscow. He had by then submitted his long dissertation on Rabelais, but had to wait until after the war before he could defend it academically. When finally time for this defence arrived, the stormy discussions it provoked meant a rejection of Bakhtin’s award of the doctorate degree. Hence, *The World of François Rabelais* was only published in Moscow in 1965.

It was only during the final years of his life that Bakhtin’s name and work were publicly acknowledged, with the republishing of the book on Dostoevsky, the publishing of *Rabelais*, and the collection of essays *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics* (1975), proposing a historical poetics of the novel, from which the English collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) was issued.

Besides these there are other books whose authorship had been uncertain and attributed to other members of the Bakhtin Circle, until V. V. Ivanov’s and M. Holquist’s research proved they are, to a very large extent, the work of Bakhtin himself (vide M. Holquist, 1982:XXVI and V. V. Ivanov, 1976:43). Such is the case of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, first edited in Leningrad in 1929 and translated into English in 1973; *Freudianism; a Marxist Critique* (Leningrad. 1927-N. Y. 1976); and *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (Leningrad. 1928-Baltimore 1978).

*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* is the result of Bakhtin and Voloshinov’s study of the “dialogical nature of language”, i. e. the modes and functions of dialogue within speech, and

of the “polyphony” of Dostoevsky’s novels, where not only the characters enter into dialogue among themselves, but also the reader and the text exchange a dialogue. Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnavalesque”, or the “carnivalization” of literature, the challenging relationship between the language of literature and the language of Carnival, is already present in that early book.

The Bakhtinian school fell into oblivion; only Bakhtin himself survived with occasional translations of his work, to which only very recently a proper place among the theories of language and literature has been ascribed. According to Kristeva’s Prologue to *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, the Bakhtinian school raised again in Russia the issue of the need for a historical poetics, which the Formalists had ignored. It confronted them with various questions. First, poetic language exists in a concrete relation to the history of meaning-systems and in a relationship to the speaker. As such, literary science is considered to be a branch of the sciences of ideology. From this viewpoint, Bakhtin concentrated his studies on the *history* of literary genres, rather than on the actual *construction* of the literary work, as the Formalists had done. Secondly, he proposed a synchronic as well as diachronic study of the structure of fiction, situated in relation to a specific literary tradition and to a concrete historical context, privileging the “genre” as the “storehouse” of literary memory. Bakhtin’s methodology is the process of confirmation of a synchronic analysis in the diachronic, i. e., from the study of a particular narrative structure to the “genre”; for instance, from his study of Dostoevsky’s fiction to the setting of the Menippean satire tradition and Carnival.

## 5. The concept of dialogism

Thus, against the detailed inventory of the components of the narrative, which the Formalists tried to set as pattern for their narrative analysis, Bakhtin put forward a typology of literary

universes, the *polyphonic*<sup>10</sup> or dialogic, giving as examples Dostoevsky's novels and the tradition' of the Menippean satire and Carnival, and the *monologic*, giving Tolstoi as example.

These two narrative models or meaning-systems, given their historical contextualization, are not only artistic models, but also meaningful practices, or models of the world.

The fact that Bakhtin emphasized in Dostoevsky's novels the dialogic element and the rupture of the voice of the author or the main characters, in confrontation with the discourse of the other "I's" in the text, raises the important issue of the relation of the polyphonic text to ideology. Bakhtin called the science of language that studies this polyphony "metalinguistics" and gave the novel as its privileged site. At the centre of this theory of language is the "slovo" or word, which is the place where several instances of discourse become audible and enter into dialogue. The Bakhtinian word is also "polyphonic" because it does not have a fixed user or a fixed meaning. As such, the polyphonic text is not ideological, since it does not lie in the unity of a speaking "I" whose voice carries it through the text.

In relation to this theory, Kristeva argues in "The Ruin of a Poetics" (English translation, 1973) that what is really at stake in Bakhtin's concept of the polyphony of the word, is the "polymorphism" of the "I", or the division of the language-user. The dialogism of the word, which Bakhtin sees as a confrontation of discourses, is given by Kristeva a psychoanalytic interpretation, – the "Spaltung" of the speaker – and she links this with Lacan's

---

10 By polyphony in the novel Bakhtin means the existence of a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses (...) with equal rights and each other with its world" which exist and combine in the novel, but do not merge in the unity of the event, where the characters are "subjects of their own directly signifying discourse" (1984a):6-7). On the other hand, a monologic novel is that which is illuminated by a "single authorial consciousness", where the characters are mere "objects of authorial discourse" (*Ibid.*).

description of the “topology of the speaker to the treasure-house of meaning systems” (1973:109).

Kristeva emphasizes the importance of Bakhtin’s theoretical approach to the “word” as a material sign operating in language, and the relation of language, as a meaning-system, to ideology. And at the same time that she criticises him for a certain psychologistic and Christian inheritance in terminology, (in his usage of words like the “consciousness” and “soul” of the characters) she mentions the importance of Bakhtin’s awareness of the presence of the “other” in language, prior to a fully theorized psychoanalytic study of the language-user:

Poetic language must be studied in the concrete literary construct and for its differentiating place in the history of meaning-systems, without reference to any unified field of meaning or a consciousness (1973:105).

The importance and novelty of Bakhtin’s historical poetics, according to Kristeva, lies in its being a mediated expression of socio-historical structures rather than being their mere reflection. She is one of the first critics to call our attention to the potential value of Bakhtin’s theories for the study of modernism and a “culture beyond representation”. By the phrase, “a culture beyond representation and the monologic discourse”, I mean a culture where the ambivalence of the speaking “I” is displayed and the subject’s identity is ruptured, and which itself becomes the stage of the polyphony of discourses and ideologies in confrontation. However, Bakhtin himself made no explicit studies of modernism and 20th century literature.

“Monologic” is identifiable with “repressive” inasmuch as there will be only one ideology pervading the text: i. e., the discourse of the author, narrator or main character does not allow the space for other ideologies to be represented in the text. By definition, the monologic discourse silences this potential dialogue, by transcending the “voices” of other characters and

excluding them from the making of the discourse of the text. On the other hand, a non-representational text displays polyphony, i. e. a plurality of voices and ideologies at play, thus also calling for a plurality of readings and a set of dialogic relations with the readers. However, as Kristeva has argued, this kind of text acquires a degree of “unreadability” for the majority of the readers, which, in her opinion, is justified by the difficulty that such a text presents to all those brought up under monologic and repressive cultural discourses, when confronted with polyphonic and non-representational discourses.

This point is crucial for the understanding of the place Bakhtin is given in this thesis, which wants to reflect upon the poetics of a certain avant-garde discourse. In fact, the avant-garde text is, like the fictional discourse of the narrative genre Bakhtin studied, in Kristeva’s words, “an exploration of the speaker in his relationship with language and with sex, and through these, with ideology and the social system” (1973:115). The polyphony or heteroglossia of the avant-garde text and its break through representation, as well as its “intertextual” relations, i. e., the dialogical relations that situate each text or “enoncé” in relation to its anterior or future condition, construct it as a privileged focus for the development of a poetics of non-representation.

This broadening of the concept of the dialogism of the “enoncé” into “intertextuality” is very relevant. Bakhtin works it through in his book, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. There he establishes a grading between the “great dialogue” and the “microdialogue”, distinguishing between “the relationships among external and internal parts and elements of his (Dostoevsky’s) novel” (1984a):40), which are all dialogic in character. Within this “great dialogue”, the “microdialogue”, which is characteristic of Dostoevsky’s verbal style, is “illuminating it and thickening its texture, the compositionally expressed dialogues of the heroes; ultimately, dialogue penetrates within, into every word of the novel, making it double-voiced, into every gesture, every mimic movement on the hero’s face, making it

convulsive and anguished" (*Ibid.*). Bakhtin defines dialogic relationships as essentially a universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life (*Ibid.*).

The reception of Bakhtin's studies in Europe mainly follows two different trends. One reinforces the importance of Bakhtin for a theory of the "énoncé" and is based on the inferred concept of intertextuality, considering the "carnavalesque" as the key-word of his analysis of literature and interpretation of the world. It was summed up by Kristeva in "The Ruin of a Poetics" (French edition published in *Critique* 1966, English translation 1973) and in another article she published in 1967 in *Critique*. "Le mot, le dialogue et le roman". According to these, Bakhtin's historical poetics announces the ruin of a poetics in the tradition of mimesis and representation and proposes, instead, the dialogical principle and the concept of literary science as a branch of the sciences of ideology.

This position, which gave an important stimulus to the acknowledgement and development of Bakhtin's theories both in Europe and in the United States, was challenged by other theoreticians, notably Tzvetan Todorov, whose emphasis on Bakhtin's theories is essentially at the level of the "énonciation", taking into consideration the importance Bakhtin gives to the roles of the *subject* and *consciousness* in the discourse.

Todorov's book, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Le Principe Dialogique* (1981), is mainly concerned with Bakhtin's "critical dialogism" and the science Bakhtin called "translinguistics", based on the belief that each "énoncé" is never the outcome of a mere individual act. Todorov sees the dialogism of the "énoncé" in its intertextual dimension: each "énoncé" exists as a result of the interaction of language and the historical context of the "énonciation", where each discourse enters into dialogue with discourses of the past and those of the future. Hence, the time and space where each "énonciation" is produced are to be historically and socially conceived.

Todorov's major contribution to the Bakhtin studies was to call attention to the fact that with his theory of a "critical dialogism" Bakhtin is in fact providing us with a new interpretation of culture. Culture is composed of discourses that are retained by the collective memory, in relation to which each subject places himself and his own discourse. Hence, at the centre of Bakhtin's poetics exists an anthropology, since Bakhtin's "critical dialogism" exists already at the level of the subject of the "énonciation": the human being himself is heterogeneous in his own nature and cannot exist but in dialogue, ["Au sein de l'être on trouve l'autre", says Todorov (1981:9)].

For Bakhtin, any process in which the human being becomes conscious, thinks, feels or desires, implies verbalization, even if it is only through a "covert" or inner speech, which is as material as the outward one. (*Freudianism*. 1976:129) The latter is always constructed in relation to the norms of the social code, particularly the social group of the speaker (1976:136). Bakhtin is constantly emphasizing the sociological nature of the structure of language. For example, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* he writes:

the utterance, as such, obtains between speakers. The individual speech act (in the strict sense of the word "individual") is *contradictio in adjecto* (1973:98).

It is precisely such emphasis on the "consciousness" and "subjectivity" of the characters in Bakhtin's theory of the novel, which is criticized by Kristeva as "psychologism", that leads her to see the major relevance of Bakhtin's theory at the level of the "énoncé", rather than at the level of the individual "énonciation"<sup>11</sup>.

11 In relation to this polemic, it is interesting to compare the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism with Umberto Eco's concept of "opera aperta" and Barthes' "texte pluriel". This relation has been explored in an article by Celia Britton, "The Dialogic Text and the Texte Pluriel" (1974). Britton



## 5.1. Carnival

Kristeva interprets Bakhtin's theory of the role of Carnival and the Carnavalesque in literature as a loss of the subject's identity and consciousness, whereas Bakhtin, as I have just suggested, gives extreme importance to the role of subjectivity and consciousness in the making of a dialogic text.

Besides the centrality that Kristeva attributes to the carnivalesque in Bakhtin's theory of the novel, her contribution to the recognition of the novelty of his work is focussed through a psychoanalytic point of view, which can be regarded as bringing a new dimension to it, but as other critics have argued, might unfairly displace Bakhtin's work from its historical perspective.

Hence, emphasizing the role of the mask and the inversion of roles during Carnival Kristeva says: 'In this open and undecided universe the "character" is nothing more than a discursive point of view of the "I" who writes through another "I"; a discourse maintaining a dialogue with the discourse of the "I" who writes and with itself (1973:111). Thus is constructed the authentic

---

analyses in detail Barthes concepts "texte lisible" and "texte scriptible" (the "texte pluriel" in its purest form, an ideal, an abstraction), in relation to the increasing absence of subjectivity and representation in the text, approaching the ideal plurality of voices and presenting itself in its totality of "game" ("jeu"). In the same way that Kristeva rejected the importance Bakhtin gives to the subject and consciousness, Barthes also dismisses them, although for Bakhtin they are objective entities, materialized in each speech act. But while Bakhtin sees the dialogue mainly taking place between author and character as voices in the text, Barthes brings in a new entity, the reader, active and pleasurably engaged in the process of reconstructing the text, left incomplete by the author, whose subjectivity had disintegrated in the "weaving" of a text beyond representation and the "signifié", (the "texte scriptible"). Thus, for Barthes the ambivalence of the text is not created by the dialogue existing between the voices of the author and the characters, but is a product of the nature of the text itself, i. e., considering the text as a plurality of meanings.

polyphonic discourse where, in Kristeva's words, the "polymorphism of the I", its fragmentation, can be heard<sup>12</sup>.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is materialized in the ambivalence of a text and is created by a non-homogeneous language, in contrast to what happens in a monologic text. Bakhtin sees Carnival as a historical expression of dialogism in the tradition of the Menippean Satire, which he defines through its: "comic familiarity, the liberty to cruelly degrade, to turn inside out the lofty aspects of the world and world views" (1981:26).

The dialogic narrative or polyphonic text is seen in a wider perspective, as the heir of the Carnavalesque tradition in art. What Bakhtin describes in his book on Rabelais as the carnivalization of literature is as V. V. Ivanov very rightly points out, "the interrelation between the language of carnival and the language of literature, rather than between the festive speech genres and the author's speech" (1976:24).

The language of Carnival is that which transgresses social rules and the linguistic code, writes Kristeva, (1976:104). Carnival itself is described by Bakhtin as a world inside-out where there can be no absolute norms or values, which neutralizes any binary oppositions, i. e. life/ death, birth/decay, praise/abuse, youth/old age, top/bottom, face/backside, stupidity/wisdom, comic/tragic, etc. As such, Carnival is a desacralizing and transgressive praxis and its discourse addressed subversively at social and moral values, institutions, hierarchies and codified roles. It establishes a "gay relativity" and an atmosphere of ambivalence, at the same time representing and inverting its representations.

12 Similarly, in «Le mot, le dialogue et le roman», she writes: «Celui qui participe au carnaval est à la fois acteur et spectateur; il perd sa conscience de personne pour passer par le zéro de l'activité carnavalesque et se dédoubler en sujet du spectacle et objet du jeu. Dans le carnaval le sujet est anéanti: la s'accomplit la structure de l'auteur comme anonymat qui crée et se voit créer, comme moi et comme autre, comme homme et comme masque» (1969:99). This shatters the importance Bakhtin gives to the character in the novel, as the other voice of the dialogue and Bakhtin's constant use of the concept of consciousness as the definition of the character's identity.

Carnival is not the purely artistic form of theatrical performance. Bakhtin insists that Carnival does not in fact belong to the realm of art; it is rather at the threshold of art and life, since it is life presented as a game and vice-versa. Besides, in Carnival there is no distinction between actors and audience. They are all part of it and live it. In the Medieval period, Carnival was the people's second life, based on the principle of laughter, where new and renovated relationships were established amongst the people. For the time it lasted, which in some medieval European cities could be up to three months<sup>13</sup>, the alienation of ordinary life disappeared, giving rise to a refreshed vision of the world.

The representation of this carnivalesque world was made through a language of excesses and profanations, permutations, inversions and transvestisms, ("carnivalistic *mésalliances*"), emphasizing the reproductive power of earth and body, the corporal and the grotesque. The hero of Carnival is the grotesque body, which is always incomplete and unfinished, its essence revealed through basic acts like those of birth, agony, pregnancy, mating, drinking, eating, vomiting, defecation. It is this corporalisation that Bakhtin calls the Renaissance grotesque realism, giving Rabelais as its best example.

## 5.2. Carnival Laughter

As Bakhtin says, Carnival uses laughter as a means of abolishing epic distance, investigating the person freely and familiarly, turning him/her inside out and exposing his/her disparities. As he says in *The Dialogic Imagination*, laughter meant abuse,

<sup>13</sup> The awareness of this fact leads Bakhtin to say that a person in the Middle Ages lived, as it were, two lives, both legitimate, but separated by strictly temporal boundaries: "one was the official life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of dogmatism, reverence and piety; the other was the life of the carnival square, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything" (1984a):130).

the performing of a “comical operation of dismemberment: the object is broken apart, laid bare... ; the naked object is ridiculous, its empty clothing stripped and separated from its person is also ridiculous” (1931:24)

However, Bakhtin insists that Carnival’s laughter is not a plain parody, it is no less tragic than it is comic, it is serious, it is an alternative to tragedy and comedy because of its political potential and its socially disturbing function. Carnival’s ambivalent laughter is: “a profoundly universal laughter, a laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world” (1984a):127). Bakhtin says that it is linked to “ancient forms of ritual laughter”, always directed towards something higher: the sun, the gods, the highest earthly authority. These were ridiculed and forced to *renew themselves*. Carnival laughter is a reaction to crises, dealing with processes of change, fusing death and rebirth, negation and affirmation, ridicule and rejoicing (*Ibid.*).

However, as Bakhtin also writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*; “Carnival itself is not a literary phenomenon, it is syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort” (1984a):122). It is only when the language of Carnival is transposed into the language of literature that one can speak of a “carnivalized literature”, at the root of which is the “serio-comical genre”, to which belonged the mimes of Sophron, the Socratic dialogue, the Symposiasts, early memoir literature, pamphlets, the whole of bucolic poetry, the Menippean satire, etc.

All these genres are united by their deep bond with a “carnivalistic folklore” and are saturated with a specific “carnival sense of the world”. They all bear a strong rhetorical element but their atmosphere of “joyful relativity” produces a weakening of its one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singular meaning and its dogmatism, as Bakhtin says in the same book, (1984a):107). The “Menippean satire”<sup>14</sup> is the genre that Bakhtin

14 The “Menippean satire” is characterized by an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention; moral-psychological experimentation;

believes to be the closest to the carnivalized novel genre, having however been renewed and transformed in each epoch, according to the literary movements and personality of the writer.

Over the course of the centuries, Carnival was “reincarnated in literature”: “carnival forms, transposed into the language of literature, became a powerful means for comprehending life in art, became a special language whose words and forms possess an extraordinary capacity for symbolic generalizations, for generalizations in depth” (1984a):157).

### 5.3. Carnival; the “communal performance” and the “masquerade culture”

As Bakhtin writes, Carnival knew “neither stage nor footlights” (1984a):128). Carnival acts used to be performed in the main square and streets adjoining it, because Carnival’s central idea is that it belonged to the whole people and everyone must participate in its familiar contact. The public square was as such regarded as the “symbol of communal performance” (*Ibid.*).

After the Renaissance this concept of Carnival starts to decline and what Bakhtin calls a “festive court masquerade culture” begins to develop, followed by a broader “masquerade line” which is no longer limited to the court and which still exists nowadays. Although this experience of carnivalization is no longer unmediated, certain forms of a carnivalistic folklore have been preserved and are still alive in street parodies, circuses, bullfights, etc.

However, in Bakhtin’s opinion, in order fully to understand the problem of carnivalization in literature, one should put aside the “masquerade line” of modern times as well as a more bohemian understanding of Carnival and concentrate on its origins

---

scandal scenes, eccentric behaviour, inappropriate speeches and performances, violations of the accepted norms of behaviour and etiquette; an “inappropriate world”; a cynical frankness; sharp contrasts, abrupt transitions; an “upside-down world” (1984a):117).

and peaks in Antiquity, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. The presence of carnivalization in literature defines a genre which, in spite of differences of literary movements or individual personalities has a *fundamental common ground* which is the carnivalesque sense of the world:

opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order. (...) But there is not a grain of nihilism in it, nor a grain of empty frivolity or vulgar bohemian individualism (1984a):160).

Unfortunately, according to Bakhtin, Carnival in modern societies has been made purely caricatural. Its dramatic character, its cynical, subversive and satirical functions have been left aside. While the ambivalence of popular laughter is the expression of a whole world in evolution, which comprehends the one that laughs as well as the one that is laughed at, the negativity of the satirical laughter of our epoch sets the author of the satire as exterior to his object of satire, in a superior, estranged position.

This distinction between Carnival's two lines of development will prove to be crucial further on in my analysis of Lewis's *Wild Body*, *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars*. *The Wild Body*, constituted in great part of revised pre-war stories, will appear to fit into the first line described by Bakhtin: the "out-door Carnival" of the "communal performance", representing an ambivalent and unfinished world of becoming. On the other hand, *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars*' post-war narratives, concern a private performance of a carnivalesque, unfamiliar and estranged grotesque world. Laughter has here been saddened by a negativist, cynical and caricaturesque attitude. The feeling of anxiety and impotence before an alien world that characterizes these two texts was, as we shall see, on the whole absent from *The Wild Body* light serio-comical atmosphere.

## 6. Conclusion

I want to conclude this chapter with a discussion of two recent critiques of Bakhtin which emphasize two main principles of his theory that are also seminal to my analysis of Lewis's narratives in this thesis. These principles are: the "word" perceived in its inherently dialogical nature and the study of literature as a cultural discourse fighting against the monologism of the dominant culture and ideology.

Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory* (1983) calls our attention to an important shifting of focus of the theory of language, after Bakhtin's critique of Saussure's "objectivist linguistics". Saussure's theory of language, based on the dichotomy "langue/parole", was centered on the abstract system of the "langue", while Bakhtin shifts the focus of his theory of language to a materialist conception of the linguistic sign. According to the latter, the word is never an abstract entity but exists always in a concrete utterance ("parole"); it is defined by its inherent dialogic "openness" and its "pluriaccentuation", serving the purpose of communication in a society that is essentially "heterogeneous".

As such, Bakhtin's theory of language is by definition critical of subjectivist, humanist theories, at the same time that it proposes a materialist theory of consciousness, where "consciousness" and "language" are inseparable from each other, since the latter materializes the first and the first cannot exist without the latter.

In fact, the "word" as Bakhtin says in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is, first of all, an ideological phenomenon. Consciousness, being mediated by the word, only acquires its full dimension during the process of social interaction, i. e., of communication. The *word* is the semiotic material of the inner life, and its "social ubiquity", as Bakhtin says, rather than its sign purity, is what really matters as a fundamental object for the study of ideologies:

The word is implicated in literally each and every act or contact between people (...) countless ideological threads running through all areas of social intercourse register effect in the word. It stands to reason, then, that the word is the most sensitive *index of social changes*, and what is more, of changes still in the process of growth, still without definitive shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularized and fully defined ideological systems (1973:19).

As Bakhtin says, different social classes use the same language, the same code of communication; consequently, different and contradictory social interests are confronted in the same semiotic community. Thus, the word, which is in fact “pluri-accented”, no matter how much the dominant class wants to silence it or reduce it to a “monoaccented” sign, becomes an arena of class-struggle: “Each word is, as we know, a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents” (1973:41). In each speech act the word is the product of the interaction of different social forces at play, thus, the act of enunciation can never be considered as an individual performance, but as an act of a social nature, which can always become a disturbing factor in the social order, when socio-political conditions for it arise:

The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual (...) In actual fact, each living ideological sign has two faces, like Janus (...) *This inner dialectic quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes*. In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradictions embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established, dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary (...) (1973:23-24).



Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) follows the Bakhtin principle of dialogism in his analysis of class discourses, between what he calls the hegemonic social discourse and the marginal one. He only adds that this dialogism is essentially antagonistic, since: “the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code” (1981:84).

However, since by definition the discourse of the hegemonic class is the only one that appears clearly through the history of cultures, because it repressed and silenced the voices of the marginal discourses of the past, the popular expressions of essentially peasant cultures (such as folk songs, fairy tales, popular festivals, magic and witchcraft), have to be artificially reconstructed. Similarly, the marginalized discourses of our own time, (such as those of ethnic and racial minorities, feminist and gay movements, folk art, etc.)/ have to fight for the recognition of their own existence.

Jameson gives a strong emphasis to the fact that the simple evocation of these marginal discourses is not enough to restore the lost dialogism of different cultural and class discourses. The full restoration of these marginal discourses to the context of a lost cultural dialogism, is only effective and subversive when, at the same time that they free themselves from a long historical silence, they show the process by which the dominant culture appropriated and reified them, thus provoking a rereading and rewriting of the hegemonic forms themselves (1981:86).

This means, if we establish a parallel with Bakhtin's theory of the function of the carnivalization of literature, the rupture of the monologic text of bourgeois narrative, or, in Jameson's words: “The carnivalesque dispersal of the hegemonic order of a dominant culture” (1981:285). This concept will prove to be of great importance in my analysis of Lewis's carnivalized narrative genre.



## CHAPTER TWO FUTURISM

In this chapter I will be looking at the antecedents of Vorticism in the context of the European avant-garde. I will be giving a particular emphasis to the Futurist movement, since it was temporally the closest to Vorticism and, as we shall see, defended almost identical aims, despite their intrinsic differences and the contest of their leaders to champion the supremacy of the movement each of them represented. The texts and manifestos of Italian Futurism provide a fundamental source and means of comparison for the understanding of Vorticism. Furthermore, the historical and aesthetic developments of Futurism in Italy and the role played by Marinetti as its leader were crucial, not only to the rising of a kindred movement in England, but also to the subsequent development of the European avant-garde, (e. g. Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism).

### 1. Futurism; Italian and Russian

An absolute distinction is often established between Italian and Russian Futurism; “two Futurisms”, with two opposing ideologies, world-views, with an aesthetics kindred only at the level of performance, anti-tradition, provocative and scandal-oriented. Italian Futurism is generally described as a decadent, bourgeois phenomenon, symptom of a decadent, pre-war bourgeois society; Russian Futurism, depending on the politics of the critic, is either identified with a minor sector of a bohemian intellectual elite, or is otherwise “recuperated” (not without having first

been censored) as a revolutionary art devoted to the cause of the people and at the service of the proletariat. Critics from the left have often merely dismissed Futurism (Italian or Russian), and the avant-garde in general, as a bourgeois phenomenon operating “within and with the system” which no longer bothers to sanction or repress it, (Stone, 1979:39).

In 1924 Nicholas Gorlov published “On Futurisms and Futurism”, where he claims the existence of only *one* Futurism. This article, published in *LEF*. (the organ of the Russian avant-garde created by Mayakovsky after the Revolution), was meant as a reply to Trotsky, who had attacked Russian Futurism for being a bourgeois art, product of the rebellion of a “persecuted intellectual bohemianism”, much in the same way as he had attacked Italian Futurism for being “the ideology of the imperialist bourgeoisie”. Gorlov argues that Futurism is a revolutionary art as much as Marxism is a revolutionary science, and the former is “predestined by its nature to foment revolution” (1979:170). Both had however been used by the bourgeoisie for its counter-revolutionary purposes. He establishes a comparison between Italian Futurism and Menshevism, saying that, although the latter had served the cause of imperialism, one cannot simply label it “an ideology of imperialism” (*Ibid.*), the same being the case for Futurism.

He continues this argument in another article of 1924, “Futurism and Revolution”, asking whether Marxism had become a reactionary ideology, since the Mensheviks had established a pact with the White generals. Similarly, one could not say that Futurism had stopped being a revolutionary aesthetics because some of the Italian Futurists tried to “adjust” Futurism to fascism: “One may say in advance that apart from empty space, nothing will come of fascistic futurism, just as nothing came of Menshevik Marxism”, (Gorlov, 1979:190).

As Gorlov bitterly remarks, those who “have invented” a variety of “futurisms”, (an imperialist Futurism, a populist Futurism, a quasi-proletarian Futurism), when they do not see

Italian and Russian Futurism on different sides of the barricade, find reasons to blame Italian Futurism for the “errors” of the Russian avant-garde. Although not dismissive of Western Futurism, believing in its initial revolutionary positions, its impact on “the old way of life” and its positive influence upon the Russian avant-garde, Gorlov criticises the former for its political narrowness: its insurrection had remained confined to the realm of the aesthetic, and had never really confronted the political *status quo*. On the other hand, Russian Futurism, having germinated side by side with the Russian Revolution, had nevertheless not been spared the pain of being ostracized, misapprehended and criticized on all fronts for adventurism, charlatanism, bourgeois bohemianism, etc., precisely the same labels that the bourgeoisie gave to the Bolsheviks.

The revolutionary task of Russian Futurism consisted in the reconstruction of language, recognizing in the “word”, (“zaum”), a way of life. Thus the fight against a petit-bourgeois language meant the fight against a petit-bourgeois way of life. As Gorlov writes:

The revolution as word, just like the revolution as deed, proceeds along two basic lines: the destruction of old, obsolete forms and the creation of new ones which correspond to the new content which is flooding into life. (...) The language created by revolution should be wider, fuller, richer, more subtle than the old language (Gorlov,1979:204).

Russian Futurism and its “zaum” emancipated the word, “hit” it, wanting to liberate thought and overthrow the “dictatorship” of grammar. Its language aims to be the “language of the streets”, and of the crowds of the new industrial cities: “it is daring, alive, energetic, accurate, condensed and trenchant” (Gorlov, 1979:210). As Mayakovsky wrote in 1914: “Each word must, like a soldier in the army, be made of meat that is healthy, of meat that is red!” (Proffer, 1980:188).

In the last part of his article, Gorlov compares extracts of Marinetti's manifestos with extracts of Mayakovsky's poems to suggest the contiguity of their historical combat against a sclerotic literary tradition and a worn-out poetic language, revealing the language of the modern urban crowds in their daily struggle. Mayakovsky himself admitted that Italian and Russian Futurism had both similar and dissimilar features. Their "formal methods" are the same, it is in their "aims" that they are distinct. "For example, both the Tula and foreign Croesus factories, manufacture armaments, however, the aim of the armaments<sup>7</sup> application is different", as he writes in "Futurism Today", a lecture delivered on the 3rd of April 1923 (Proffer, 1980:193-194). There he also writes that Futurism is the most significant movement in modern literature, since it was "the first to raise the questions demanded by the present", (*Ibid.* p. 194).

Italian and Russian Futurism are, then, not two opposed routes towards the creation of a new radical art, but the same one, symptom of a broad social crisis. For Gorlov, it seems to me that there is only one Futurism, which is *potentially* revolutionary and, if in a particular historical situation it became an ally of fascism, in another historical situation and a different political context, it became a fervent ally of a socialist revolution, even if, in terms of its recognition as a revolutionary aesthetics, it did not gain much from it<sup>1</sup>.

---

1 As Andreas Huyssen writes in *New German Critique* (22, Winter 1981, p. 27), "the major impact of avant-garde discourse must be seen in its break-through of traditional aesthetics and its contradictions must be understood as part of its radicalism in the context of Europe, living through a particularly unsettled historical moment: The avant-garde posited the reintegration of art and life as its major project at a time when that traditional society, (especially in Italy, Russia and Germany), was undergoing a major transformation toward a qualitatively "new stage of modernity". (...) social and political ferment of the 1910's and 1920's was the breeding ground for avant-garde radicalism in art and literature as well as in politics" (p. 27).

## 2. The influence of late 19th century French poetry

Giovanni Lista, author of the anthology *Futurisme. Manifestes. Documents. Proclamations* (1973), asserted in his introduction, “Un Siècle Futuriste”, that Futurism was the pioneer of the 20th century “antitradition aesthetics”, representing an attitude of anarchic struggle for freedom, by way of the refusal of historical conformism and the continuous exploration of new forms of expression. However, at the roots of 20th century avant-garde is a whole generation of “experimental” and “anti-traditional” poets, in their majority belonging to the French Symbolist and Decadent movements, (e. g. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, etc.), without whom this avant-garde could not have existed.

Among these, Rimbaud’s role as a forerunner of Modernism has often been singled out; his direct influence on the renovation of Italian poetry, and the example he set forth to the Futurists, as a personality and as a poet, reached the proportions of a true “Rimbaldian wave”<sup>2</sup>. The man responsible for this idolatry was Angelo Soffici, who in 1911 published in *Quaderni della Voce* an enthusiastic monograph concerning Rimbaud, recognizing in the image of the French poet “the living symbol of a disturbing genius”, a prophet of the modern times and modern literature.

In 1912, another article published in *La Voce* by the futurist, Piero Jahier, claimed that the Italian new generation of poets was being transformed in a “cerce Rimbaldiste”. Rimbaud remained an overwhelming influence on Futurism, often invoked by Marinetti and a constant presence in the futurist magazines.

Ugo Piscopo in “Les Futuristes et Rimbaud” stresses Rimbaud’s role as a forerunner of modern poetry. He refers us to Giovanni Papini’s article “Cio che dobbiamo alia Francia”, (published in *Lacerba*. a. II, n. 17, 1/9/1914), where Papini says:

2 As Ugo Piscopo ironically calls it in “Les Futuristes et Rimbaud”, (*Europe*, vol. 51, May-June, n. 529-530, pp. 133-146).

Rimbaud est l'homme nouveau de la littérature française et universelle. Avec lui, la lyrique pure, coït violent du réalisme acide et de la profondeur spirituelle effrayante, établit une fois pour toutes son indépendance. Presque toute la poésie moderne, qui est vraiment poésie et non pacotille de décalques infidèles sort de lui. (Vide Piscopo, p. 145).

The essence of Rimbaud's influence on Futurism lies on the two main principles that ruled his life and his poetry: "trouver une langue" and "changer la vie", which he believed to be indissociable from each other. His theory of the "poète-voyant" implied a vow of rebellion against all orders, either poetic or social, which directly appealed to the avant-garde's claims of non-conformism and transgression. Rimbaud, like the Futurists, was engaged in a search for the "true poetic level of language"<sup>3</sup>, which meant a search for the pre-rational in language. In the well-known letter to his friend Paul Demeny, Rimbaud says that this search for "a new language", a "language of excesses", ("énormité devenant norme", R. O. 1981:349), required "un long, immense et raisonne dérèglement de tous les sens" (*Ibid.* p. 348). He defined the experience of "voyance" as an "inéffable torture" (*Ibid.*), a complete loss of the sense of reality, a denial of his own self, the recognition of his death to give birth to the "other", the poet: "Car JE est un autre" (R. O. 1981:347).

Rimbaud's "hallucination des mots" challenges the symbolic constraint of the structure of language, struggling to grasp the pre-symbolic and make it present in the text, displaying it in all its primitive "jouissance". The "voyance", together with the "hallucination des mots" is an attempt to transcend the abyss between the self and the other, ("Je est un autre"), while acknowledging that split as a condition of its own existence. According to Kristeva, the recognition of this split alienates the

3 Vide Gérard Genette's *Figures II*: "le langage a l'état poétique ou l'état poétique du langage. on dira sans trop forcer la métaphore qu'il est le langage a l'état de rêve. (1969:152).



subject from a previous semiotic harmony or infantile heterogeneity, at the same time that it enables him to enter the symbolic order of language.

At a certain stage of his poetical experimentation, Rimbaud calls this process of writing a “verbal alchemy” a “magical” method for the creation of a new and “enlightening” language, (vide his *Illuminations*), as he writes in “Délires”: “J’écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l’inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges” (R. O. 1981:228).

Rimbaud’s genuine radicalism and his life commitment to the creation of a language capable of expressing a new world in violent transformation, makes him the pioneer of the futurist struggle to bring art and life close to each other and to grasp the words in their *statu nascendi*.

The centre of Rimbaud’s poetics is his “Alchimie du Verbe”, (1873), which Albert Beguin defines as “the metamorphosis of life through the sorcery of the word”<sup>4</sup>, in which he shows his awareness of the “unreal reality of language”, through the production of a literature that interrogates the real and language as its representation<sup>5</sup>. His early and well known poem “Voyelles”, is a perfect illustration of that challenge to realism, a typical case of “language consciousness”, based on what he defined as a “new sensorial language”: “un verbe poétique accessible un jour ou l’autre à tous les sens” (R. O. 1981:228). In “Voyelles” he explores the most “hidden” poetic resources of language, playing with the words as pure signifiers, that is to say, relying

4 As defined by Albert Beguin in “Poetry and Occultisme”, *Yale French Studies*. IV Study, vol. 2, n. 2, (1965:25).

5 Vide Roland Barthes, “La Littérature Aujourd’hui”, (*Essais Critiques*. 1964:164-165): “Le réalisme, ici, ce ne peut être la copie des choses, mais la connaissance du langage; l’oeuvre la plus “réaliste” ne sera pas celle qui “peint” la réalité, mais qui se servant du monde comme contenu (...) explorera le plus profondément possible *la réalité irréalité du langage*”.

on the “natural” or “defective”<sup>6</sup> bonds between signifier and signified, by creating onomatopoeias, synaesthesias, lexical associations, and so on:

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles, Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes (...) (R. O. 1981:110)

Rimbaud replaces in this text the space of expression by a space of seduction or “jouissance”, refusing to give a univocal poetic message and asserting a seminal principle of all modernist literature, “language-consciousness”<sup>7</sup>. “Voyelles” is as such immediately close to the futurist “Parole in Libertà” which wanted to express “in synthesis and in depth the forces that constitute the universe” and “the new futurist sensibility”:

Le parole in libertà altro non sono che questo maggior coraggio nel liberarsi da tutte le forme imposte (prosodie e sintassi) per esprimere in sintesi e in profondità le forze che costituiscono il nostro universo (Lista, 1977:66-67).

Rimbaud’s poetics, like the Futurists’, proposes thus a “utopia of writing” based on a sensorial apperception of reality and a voluntary regression towards the pre-rational, or, in Kristeva’s terminology, the semiotic in language. Rimbaud’s “anteriority” to his time, his struggle in search of “le lieu et la formule”, (R. O. 1981:278), left him trapped in a total isolation within his

---

6 “Defective” is here used to define a relation between signifier/signified, which, invoking poetical freedom denies the Saussurian “arbitrariness” of the linguistic sign and explores its supposedly “natural” bond. According to Kristeva, the Futurists were the most successful in this aim and “extended further than anyone else the signifier’s autonomy, restored its *instinctual value*, and aimed at a «transmental language»” (Kristeva, 1980:32, my italics).

7 As Stephen Heath writes in “Realism. Modernism and Language-Consciousness”, (in *Realism in European Literature*), realism is a “utopia of writing and reality”, rather than a “property of reality” (1986:120).

time and milieu; his poetic discourse is pervaded with the same tension and anxiety to “symbolize the semiotic rhythm”, which, according to Kristeva, characterizes avant-garde discourse.

Another late 19th century French poet whose influence was essential to the 20th avant-garde is Stéphane Mallarmé. His difficult and intellectualized poetry, which T. S. Eliot had called a “laboured opacity” compared with Rimbaud’s “sincerity”<sup>8</sup>, was later recognized by Eliot himself as a “metaphysical poetry” which, relying on the power of “incantation” of the word and the mastery of syntax, transmuted “de l’accidentel en réel”<sup>9</sup>.

Mallarmé’s disrupted syntax, his use of words almost as musical notes or signs deprived of their logical meaning, strikingly announced the techniques of the 20th century avant-garde, from Futurism to Dada and Surrealism. Furthermore, Mallarmé’s poetic experimentation at the level of the typography inaugurated the kind of futurist “typographical revolution” celebrated by Marinetti in his “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” as “typographical variety and brutality”.

Guillaume Apollinaire’s poetry, ranging from a late symbolism to a daring vanguardism, probably still stands as one of the most striking influences amongst the French “fin de siècle” poetry on the advent of 20th century avant-garde.

Apollinaire’s manifesto “L’Anti-Tradition Futuriste”, published in June 1913 and dedicated to Marinetti, is certainly the most obvious link with Futurism and Vorticism. In fact, as we shall see, the “aggressive layout” of the Vorticist manifesto “Blast”, draws on it directly<sup>10</sup>.

As early as 1912, Apollinaire had already given notice of his relationship with Cubism and Futurism, by suppressing all the

8 T. S. Eliot, “The Borderline of Prose”, in *New Statesman*, 19 May 1917, p. 158.

9 T. S. Eliot “Note sur Mallarmé et Poe” in *la Nouvelle Revue Française*. 14, 1 November 1926, pp. 524-526.

10 Bernard Bergonzi, “Wyndham Lewis: coming to terms with the Enemy”, in *The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth Century Literature* (1986:39).

punctuation from his volume of poetry *Alcools*, and reciting the poem “Zone”<sup>11</sup> at a “Cubist reunion” in December. In fact, the aggressive modernity of the poem’s imagery and its celebration of an aesthetics of the city, as David Kelly has said<sup>12</sup>, shows that “even when Apollinaire seems to be working within a tradition which would seem to be at the opposite extreme from a poetry of the city (...) he tends also to be doing something with that tradition which can only be read within the context of a modern, urban, experience”, (Kelly, 1985:87). Apollinaire belongs to the group of poets at the turn of the century for whom the changing aspect of urban life with its industrial and technological advances began to be perceived positively and even assumed as a “source of enthusiasm” (*Ibid.* p. 82).

In *Calligrammes*, written between 1913-1916, and particularly in “Ondes”, the first section, Apollinaire’s experimentalism with the word, syntax, the typographical space, tries to synthesize a poetic experience of city life close to the futurist notion of “simultaneity”, (e. g. Apollinaire’s “Lettre-Ocean”, 1965:183-186), by playing with the ways in which language conventionally refers to the outside world.

Another section of *Calligrammes* that is particularly close to the futurist aims of celebration of war is “Obus Couleur de Lune”, which not only exalts the “beauty” of war, (e. g. the poem “Merveille de Guerre”, 1965:271-272), but also proclaims the need for the creation of a new language capable of expressing the transient and fragmentary reality of the twentieth century world:

O bouches l’homme est à la recherche d’un nouveau langage  
 Auquel le grammairien d’aucune langue n’aura rien à dire («La  
 Victoire», 1965:310).

11 Apollinaire *Oeuvres Poétiques*, (1965:39-44).

12 David Kelly, “Defeat and rebirth: the city poetry of Apollinaire”, in Timms and Kelly eds. *Unreal City – Urban Experience in Modern European Literature*.

### 3. Futurism: aesthetics and ethic of the movement

I will now try to give a detailed description of Futurism attending to the main principles contemplated in its manifestos and proclamations in order to try to establish a semiotics of the movement. Especial attention will be given to some issues whose influence on other currents and protagonists of the avant-garde was particularly relevant, – in the context of this thesis, Vorticism and its main propagandist, Wyndham Lewis.

Thus, this analysis of Futurism will concentrate on:

1. The futurist origins and first manifestos; its relationship to traditional aesthetics
2. The futurist revolution in language
3. The futurist stage manifestos
4. The banner “War, the World’s only hygiene” and futurist misogyny.

#### 3.1. Futurism: origins and first manifestos

Futurism’s first and most important genre is the pamphlet, the manifesto. On the one hand, this choice is a proof of the Futurists’ refusal to enter the discussions on the poetics of art through a traditional, finished art form. Through the rebellious use of a non-literary medium, they assert their belief in the necessity to desacralize art and confront its relationship to daily life. On the other hand, the manifesto, being the Futurist art-form par excellence, is itself the message: staking a claim against the past and tradition, and, at the same time, urging the creation of a dynamic and provocative art aware of its own limited “tempo” and inevitable destruction in the natural course of History. Analysis of the manifestos of the different arts will show us such principles and awareness.

The first Futurist manifesto was published by *Le Figaro* in Paris, 28 February 1909 and the next month in *Poesia*, the Italian

magazine published in Milan. It was signed by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and it described the launching of the movement and its main principles: the love of danger, energy and tearfulness; courage, audacity and revolt; the eulogy of aggressive action and the beauty of speed; the hymn to the man at the wheel; the glorification of war, “the world’s only hygiene”, militarism, patriotism; scorn for woman; the destruction of museums, libraries, academies; the fight against moralism and feminism; the praise of the crowds at work in the modern industrial capitals and all the technological outcomes of industrial society: steamers and locomotives, electricity, factories, airplanes, etc. (1972:41-2, summary of R. W. Flint’s translation of Marinetti’s manifesto, which is transcribed in Appendix I).

In this manifesto one finds the eulogy of modern industrial life and the need to put it in touch with art, and vice-versa, and the definition of futurist poetics as an aesthetics of anti-tradition and anti-classicism, based on the belief in the *desacralization of art*, meaning the withdrawal of art from its quasi-religious context in museums, academies, libraries, and so on.

If, on one hand this “futurist realism” resulted in the mythification of the recent wonders of technology, (seen by marxist criticism as an “aestheticization of the real”<sup>13</sup>, on the other hand, it meant a drastic challenge to the arts, traditionally divorced from any sort of contact with daily life, and even more from technological progress.

Probably the most crucial point of this first manifesto, which gives it its strength and coherence, is the awareness of the *transitoriness* of the very principles it proclaims: the awareness that in ten years time these same principles, now subversive and scandal provoking, will have the decaying smell of corpses, and will already have been assigned to the literary catacombs (1972:43).

---

13 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations*, (1979:244).

Against them, from everywhere, younger and stronger men will come:

Verranno contro di noi, i nostri successori; verranno di lontano, da ogni parte, (...)e fiutando caninamente, alle porte delle accademie, il buon odore delle nostre menti in putrefazione, già promesse alle catacombe delle biblioteche (1968:12)<sup>14</sup>.

But the “Futurists” will not be there. They will be “proudly” lighting a great fire with their own manifestos and books, which time has transformed into “useless manuscripts”. But, as they claim in their first manifesto, they “want it to happen!”

“Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!”, (“Let’s Murder the Moonshine”), written by Marinetti and published in the magazine *Poesia* during the months of August, September and October 1909, is full of aggressive war-like resonances and images of aeroplanes, trains and guns, trying to fight the “languid and carnal moon of lovely warm thighs”. It is at the same time an anti-romantic and anti-symbolist parody and a beautifully written epic poem full of the fascination and glitter of technology. It is also a hymn to war, against women’s supplicating arms that prevent men from leaving for war, and against everything consecrated by time:

Si, i nostri nervi esigono la guerra e disprezzano la donna, poiché noi temiamo che braccia supplici s’intreccino alle nostre ginocchia, la mattina della partenza!... (1968:14)

<sup>14</sup> All quotations of the Futurist Manifestos in Italian are from: F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista*, intro., testo e note a cura di Luciano De Maria, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Verona, 1968. English translations of the manifestos are, when written by Marinetti, by R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli from R. W. Flint’s anthology *Marinetti Selected Writings*, Seeker and Warburg, London, 1972; otherwise, the translations of the manifestos are from Umbro Apollonio’s anthology *Futurist Manifestos*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973. When no source is indicated, it means that translation is mine.

Amidst an extravagant scenario where the cries of war are mixed with the roaring noises of the railroad, aeroplanes, and wild beasts, the song of nightingales erupts and sighs of swimming women emerge from the fluctuations of the meadows, and a perverse carnal moon rises, ensnaring the men in her "lovely warm thighs".

The "army of the mad" by then falling into a sweet drowsiness, wakes up at this cry "Uccidiamo il chiaro di Luna!" And the frantic struggle starts anew, with apocalyptic imagery, against the "Past", "Intoxication", "Nightingales", "Moon", "Women" the "great swarming population of Paralysis and Gout, disgusting leprosy devouring the mountainsides" where the massacre continues:

"Ecco la furibonda copula della battaglia, vulva gigantesca irritata dalla foia del coraggio, vulva informe che si squarcia per offrirsi meglio al terrifico spasimo della vittoria imminente! É nostra, la vittoria... " (1968:23-4).

[See the furious coitus of war, gigantic vulva stirred by the friction of courage, shapeless vulva that spreads to offer itself to the terrific spasm of final victory! It's ours the victory... " ] (1972:53-4).

Although written one year later, in April 1910, the manifesto "Contro Venezia Passatista" and the "Discorso Futurista ai Veneziani" follows the same lines of "Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!", as the manifesto itself says:

"Quando gridammo: *Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!* pensavamo a voi, Veneziani, pensavamo a te, Venezia fradicia di romanticismo. (...) Siamo stanchi di avventure erotiche, di lussuria, di sentimentalismo e di nostalgia!" (1968:230)

[When we cried out, "Let's murder the moonshine!" we were thinking of you, old Venice soiled with romanticism! (...) We are sick of erotic adventures, of lechery, sentimentality, and nostalgia!"] (1972:56)



In place of a romantic and nostalgic Venice, filled with crowds of tourists, antiquarians and lovers, a modern, business-like, industrialized town will rise:

“Vogliamo preparare la nascita di una Venezia industriale e militare che dominerà sul Mare Adriatico, gran lago italiano. (...) Bruciamo le gondole, poltrone a dondolo per cretini, innalziamo fino al cielo l'imponente geometria dei ponte metallici e degli opifici chiomati di fumo per abolire le curve cascanti delle vecchie architetture, e la divina Luce Elettrica liberi finalmente Venezia dal suo venale chiaro di Luna da camera ammobigliata” (1968:230).

[We want to prepare the birth of an industrial and military Venice that can dominate the Adriatic Sea, that great Italian lake. (...) Let us burn the gondolas, rocking chairs for cretins, and raise to the heavens the imposing geometry of metal bridges and howitzers plumed with smoke, to abolish the falling curves of the old architecture. Let the reign of Holy Electric Light finally come, to liberate Venice from its venal moonshine of furnished rooms] (1972:55).

The manifesto “La Bataglia di Venezia” signed by Filippo Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra and Luigi Russolo and launched from the Clock Tower of Venice onto the crowd returning from the Lido was followed by Marinetti’s “Speech to the Venetians”. The latter provoked great scandal, since it exhorted the people of Venice to destroy their old, “nauseatingly romantic” town, full of alluring shadows, and instead to welcome the arrival of trains, trams, automobiles and bicycles circulating on wide roads finally built over the nostalgic Venetian canals.

The tone of these manifestos is very much the same as that of the “Proclama Futurista agli Spagnuoli” (published in Madrid in June 1911) and the “Discorso Futurista agli Inglesi” (1910) an exhortation against the past, tradition, and the myths of romanticism, and a hymn to Modernity and Industrialization.

## Painting

The “Manifesto of Futurist Painting” was published in *Poesia* (11 Feb. 1910) by Boccioni, Carra, Russolo, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini. This manifesto, addressed to the “young artists of Italy”, starts off by expressing its solidarity with the Futurist poets and their cry of rebellion, expression of the “violent desire which boils in the veins of every creative artist today” not just the fruit of any “aesthetic clique” (1973:24).

The first cry of the futurist painters goes against the “religion of the past” expressly encouraged by the “vicious existence of museums”. Between the “docile slaves” of past tradition and the “free moderns”, the triumphant progress of science was giving confidence to the young rebel artists.

The manifesto evokes the same principles that the first “Futurist Manifesto” had made public: the eulogy of the machine age; the hatred of the past and tradition in art, and the imitation of celebrated models; emphasis on the relation between art and life: “living art draws its life from the surrounding environment”. Against the “religious atmosphere” of past art, the celebration of a “futurist realism”:

“(...)we must breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life – the iron network of speedy communications which envelops the earth, the transatlantic liners, the dreadnoughts, those marvelous flights which furrow our skies, the profound courage of our submarine navigators, and the spasmodic struggle to conquer the unknown” (1973:25).

The futurist painters will then bring “support and glory in our day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious science”. Youth, violence and daring will be their tools. Two months later this manifesto was followed by a leaflet also published in *Poesia*, signed by the same artists and called “Technical Manifesto of

Futurist Painting”. Its aim was to refine the programme of the previous manifestos. The first issue addressed was the principle of *dynamism* that the canvas should express:

The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the *dynamic sensation* itself (1973:27).

The principle is close to the futurist belief in the transitoriness of their own art. Echoing the principles Marinetti had expressed in the first “Futurist Manifesto”, the Futurist Painters say: “Nothing is absolute in painting”, because, just as in life, all things move, and constantly change. Art should come closer to life, draw from it its inspiration, and “disowning its past”, engage itself completely in the project of “re-entering into life”:

we would at any price re-enter into life. Victorious science has nowadays disowned its past in order the better to serve the material needs of our time; we would that art, disowning its past, were able to serve at last the intellectual needs which are within us (1973:27-28).

## Music

Balilla Pratella’s manifesto of Futurist Musicians, dated 11 October 1910, is an appeal to young musicians to gather themselves under the flag of Futurism, to despise musical academies and conservatories, and liberate themselves from the musical traditions of the past, creating in Italy “a Futurist musical taste, destroying doctrinaire, academic and soporific values” (1973:37).

This manifesto is completed in 1913 by Luigi Russolo, in “The Art of Noises”, (“L’Arte dei Rumori”) published first in Milan and the following month in Paris. In 1914 he presented it to the British public, at the London Coliseum, and once more in Paris.

Drawing upon the noises of modern city life, it proposes a new futurist music, based on the “selection, coordination and domination” of all these noises, “harmonically and rhythmically attuned” which will enrich men with a “new and unexpected sensual pleasure” (1973:85-86). Once again, the focus of this manifesto is on the tying together of art and life, and the demythification of art as a supra-human category:

Let us cross a great modern capital with our ears more alert than our eyes, and we will get enjoyment from distinguishing the eddying of water, air and gas in metal pipes, the grumbling of noises that breathe and pulse with indisputable animality, the palpitation of valves, the coming and going of pistons, the howl of mechanical saws, the jolting of a tram in its rails, the cracking of whips, the flapping of curtains and flags. (...) Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. The noise, therefore, is familiar to our ear, and has the power to conjure up life itself (1973:85).

Russolo distinguishes the concept of sound from that of noise; the first, having since long ago been given a religious, “sacred” meaning, has been considered “a thing in itself distinct and independent of life”, and resulted in the not less sacred and inviolable word “music”, which is, as Russolo says, a “fantastic world superimposed on the real”. Later on, experimentation in the realm of music extended itself towards dissonance and polyphony, becoming ever closer to “musical noise”. This evolution, Russolo explains, has been parallel with the development of modern life and the machine age. Pure sound, musical sound, cannot compete with the variety of noises that modern industrial life has created. The “exiguity and monotony” of traditional harmonic sounds no longer arouse any feelings, he says. It needs “noise”, “noise-sound”, to excite and exalt the modern man’s sensibility.

Russolo does not ignore traditional music. He simply considers it “a thing of the past”:

We Futurists have deeply loved and enjoyed the harmonies of the great masters. For many years Beethoven and Wagner shook our nerves and hearts. Now we are satiated and we find more enjoyment in the combination of the noises of trams, backfiring motors, carriages and bawling crowds than in rehearing, for example the “Eroica” or the “Pastoral” (1973:76).

It is interesting to note that Russolo himself is not a musician. He is a painter, and it is in this medium that he engages his energies, as he says, in “renewing everything”. This “irreverent” incursion through the realm of music, provocatively coming from a painter, is a testimony of the futurist eagerness to touch all the spheres of human sensitivity, so far untouched, and the Utopian belief in the totality of all arts engaged in the same apprehension of modern life:

I am a Futurist painter using a much loved art to project my determination to renew everything. And so, bolder than a professional musician could be, unconcerned by my apparent incompetence and convinced that all rights and all possibilities open up to daring, *I* have been able to initiate the great renewal of music by means of the Art of Noises (1973:88).

## Photography

Giulio Bragaglia’s “Manifesto of Photodynamism”, published in 1911, gives the same emphasis to art’s recalling of life, beyond the capacity of photography merely to represent static reality. Through the repetition of the different stages of an action, e. g. the action of a dancer, (moving a foot, in mid-air, pirouetting), photodynamism will, according to Bragaglia, represent a reality in motion and produce a dynamic picture, rather than one single frozen image of the same dancer. By invoking the “intermovemental” stages of an action, photodynamism brings the image closer to life; by “making the anatomy of action” it “seeks the interior essence of things”. As Bragaglia writes:

The picture therefore can be invaded and pervaded by the essence of the subject. It can be obsessed by the subject to the extent that it energetically invades and obsesses the public with its own values (1973:44).

But, rather than just representing reality with “insipid facility”, this will be:

(...)a vertiginous lyrical expression of life, the lively invoker of the magnificent dynamic feeling with which the universe incessantly vibrates. (1973:45)

According to Bragaglia, photodynamism, although not competing with painting, is, through its use of photographic means and research, much more in agreement with technological progress and “evolution in life” than any other means of representation. (See pictures n. 28, 29 and 30 in Appendix III).

## Sculpture

The “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture”, by Umberto Boccioni, published in *Poesia* in April 1912, is the apologia of modern sculpture, outside the rules and models of classical Greek, Roman or Egyptian sculpture: a new plastic art, sectionized and traversed by the vibrations of lights and interceptions of planes, a kind of “sculptural block” whose basis will be architectural, containing the

architectural elements of the *sculptural environment* in which the object exists (1973:62).

Boccioni wants to operate in sculpture a revolution similar to that of futurist poetry and futurist painting:

Why should sculpture be the one to lag behind, loaded down with laws which no one has the right to impose? Let's turn everything upside down and proclaim the *Absolute and Complete Abolition of Finite Lines and the Contained Statue. Let's split open our figures and place the environment inside them* (1973:63).

The aim, as expressed by Boccioni is to “achieve reality”. All kinds of contraptions, materials or colours should be used to give an adequate sense of rhythmic movement to different planes or lines. However, it is not “figurativism” or “realistic, episodic structures” that are aimed at, but “an abstract reconstruction of planes and volumes in order to determine the form of sculpture. ”

Futurist sculpture will only use up-to-date subjects, modern materials, (like glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights), avoiding the “dignity” of marble or bronze, and it will aim for the discovery of “new plastic ideas. ” The sculptor should engage in all sorts of experiments involving elements from other arts, since:

there is neither painting nor sculpture, neither music nor poetry:  
there is only creation! (1973:64)

In December 1913, Boccioni published an article in *Lacerba*. (a futurist magazine edited in Florence), with the title “Plastic Dynamism”, defending the creation of “pure plastic rhythm” in sculpture, by which he meant not the construction of an object, but the construction of an “object's action”. The principle emphasized is that of *dynamism*. meaning the ideal style that art should achieve in order to express the modern age of “speed and simultaneity”. The aim of the Futurists, he says, is to “recreate everything anew”, to express in the forms and objects created the power and force of the real living form, e. g. the creation of an architectural construction in the shape of a spiral, (1973:94).

Whereas traditional art creates “static and dead forms”, which Boccioni calls “unnatural abstractions”, because they are an “outrage, a violation and a separation” from reality, the Futurists, following the laws of dynamism and movement, achieve the creation of forms which are much closer to reality. As Boccioni writes:

We are not, therefore, anti-nature, as many simpler-minded reactionary exponents of realism and naturalism like to think; we are anti art; in other words, we are against the stasis which has reigned for centuries in art, except for a few rare attempts found in the most warm-blooded works and in the liveliest periods. (...) Dynamism in painting and sculpture is, therefore, an evolutionary concept of a plastic reality. It is the reflexion of a sensibility which conceives the world as an infinite prolonging of an evolutionary species. This is life itself. We Futurists have been able to create the model form – the form of forms – continuity (1973:94-95).

### 3.2. The Futurist revolution in language

In May 1912, Marinetti wrote his “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature”, followed a few months later by a supplement where he tried to answer the objections and questions that the first had raised.

The aim of this manifesto was to liberate language from the “prison of syntax” and operate a revolution in language similar to the one operated by engines and speed in modern technology. Hence, it establishes a poetics based on the multiplication of nouns/signifiers, the maximum reduction of adjectives, adverbs and punctuation; on the whole, the refusal of a traditional syntax, which, according to Marinetti, restrained dynamism and produced coarse language<sup>15</sup>.

---

15 1 – *Bisogna distruggere la sintassi disponendo i sostantivi a caso, come nascono.*



The focus of this poetics is the *sensorial perception of the object* considered in its simultaneity of movements, inner dynamism and pluri-signification, wanting to grasp reality as a whole and wanting to give of it a direct, precise and expressive account.

Destroy the *I* in literature: that is, all psychology. (...) To substitute for human psychology, now exhausted, the lyric obsession with matter (Flint 1972:87).

---

2 – *Si deve usare il verbo all' infinito*, perché si adatti elasticamente al sostantivo e non lo sottoponga all'io dello scrittore che osserva o immagina. (...)

3 – *Si deve abolire l'aggettivo*, perché il sostantivo nudo conservi il suo colore essenziale (...)

4 – *Si deve abolire l'avverbio*, vecchia fibbia che tiene unite l'una all'altra le parole. (...)

5 – *Ogni sostantivo deve avere il suo doppio*, cioè il sostantivo deve essere seguito, senza congiunzione, dal sostantivo a cui è legato per analogia. Esempio: uomo-torpediniera, donna-golfo, folla-risacca, piazza-imbuto, porta-rubinetto. (...)

6 – *Abolire anche la punteggiatura*. Essendo soppressi gli aggettivi, gli avverbi e le congiunzioni, la punteggiatura è naturalmente annullata, nella continuità varia di uno stile *vivo* che si crea da se, senza le soste assurde delle virgole e dei punti (...) (1968:41-2).

[1 – One must abolish syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born.

2 – One should use infinitives, because they adapt themselves elastically to nouns and don't subordinate them to the writer's I that observes or imagines.

3 – One must abolish the adjective, to allow the naked noun to preserve its essential colour.

4 – One must abolish the adverb, old belt buckle that holds two words together.

5 – Every noun should have its double; that is, the noun should be followed, with no conjunction, by the noun to which it is related by analogy. Example: man-torpedo-boat, woman-gulf, crowd-surf, piazza-funnel, door-faucet.

6 – Abolish every punctuation. After adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions have been suppressed, punctuation is naturally annulled, in the varying continuity of a living style that creates itself without the foolish pauses made by commas and periods].

Hence, it seeks to reduce all conventionalities of the linguistic code, considered as obstacles to the speed and expression of language and, at the same time, multiply concrete images and material metaphors, as referents of the objects, i. e. relating to shape, sound, smell, weight, etc.

The dynamic object should be observed from many and unexpected perspectives, alien to the reader, in order to provoke in the latter a new, more accurate and intuitive apprehension of reality:

We want to make literature out of the life of a motor, a new instinctive animal whose general instincts we will know when we have learned the instincts of the different forces that make it up (1972:87).

The key to this new poetics is the use of “imagination without strings”, “words in freedom” and “free intuition”, building up a profusion of unusual images:

Images are not flowers to be chosen and picked with parsimony, as Voltaire said. They are the very lifeblood of poetry. Poetry should be an uninterrupted sequence of new images, or it is mere anaemia and greensickness (1972:85).

The broader the affinities of these images, the longer will they keep their power to amaze the reader and enhance his perception of the real, Marinetti says. The *intuitive* poet, who can free himself from:

traditional, heavy, limited syntax that is stuck in the ground, armless and wingless, being merely intelligent (1972:88).

He must renounce *logic* and concern himself with *matter* where all “courage, will-power and absolute force” lie. “It is not necessary to be understood”, Marinetti adds, emphasizing

instead the benefits of intuition. Intuition he defines as a level of thought that is almost unconscious and opposed to intelligence, which, in its turn, is an intellectual and voluntary state.

Deep intuitions of life joined to one another, word for word according to their illogical birth, will give us the general lines of an *intuitive psychology of matter* (*Ibid.*).

The Futurists<sup>7</sup> intuition is very distinct from traditional poetic intuition and is, in fact, very close to what, a few years later, the Surrealists will call “automatism” or “automatic writing”.

Syntax, a kind of “interpreter and monotonous cicerone” of reality, is an intermediary to be suppressed, “in order that literature may enter directly into the universe and become one body with it”. The Futurists do not want to create the beautiful in literature or beautify reality,

We make use, instead, of every ugly sound, every expressive cry from the violent life that surrounds us. We bravely create the “ugly” in literature, and everywhere we murder solemnity. (...) We are entering the unbounded domain of free intuition. After free verse, here finally are *words in freedom* (1972:89).

Through intuition and “imagination without strings”, the Futurists will be “spitting on the Altar of Art”, and preparing the creation of the “mechanical man”, liberated from “the death of logical intelligence”. They will “conquer the seemingly unconquerable hostility that separates out human flesh from the metal of motors” (*Ibid.*). Marinetti gives some examples of his “Words in Freedom”, and “strict nets of images or allegories” from his book *Mafarka il Futurista*. e. g:

Intorno al pozzo della Bumeliana, sotto gli olivi folti, tre cammelli comodamente accovacciati nella sabbia si gargarizzavano dalla contentezza, come vecchie grondaie di pietra, mescolando il ciac-

ciac dei loro sputacchi ai tonfi regolari della pompa a vapore che dà da bere alla città (...) (1968:44).

Around the well of Bumeliana, beneath the thick olive trees, three camels squatting comfortably on the sand were gurgling with contentment, like old stone gutters, blending the chalk-chalk of their spitting with the steady beat of the steam pump that supplies water to the city (...) (1972:86-7).

This extract exemplifies Marinetti's technique of writing through an "intuitive psychology of matter", i. e. refusing a conventional psychologism or a mimetic play with logically articulated metaphors, which in most cases are stylistically redundant since they bring to the text nothing that is not rational and real, credible and true, even under poetic licence.

Marinetti assaults the traditional concept of "poetics" and invades its territory with his "brutal" style of concrete, material imagery, drawing his inspiration from the most prosaic and unsophisticated subjects, objects and instruments of daily life. However, he avoids falling into a "naturalistic" pattern by cleverly blending the most bizarre or exotic subjects with the ordinary, common ones:

*Three camels squatting comfortably on the sand... like old stone gutters.*

*The chalk-chalk of their spitting... the steady beat of the steam pump that supplies water to the city.*

In this way, he offers a new conception of poetry, which does not involve romantic, idealized landscapes and traditionally "beautiful" imagery.

The musicality of his style is achieved through the creation of a chain of alliterations, assonances, consonances and onomatopoeias, which again by their very nature avoid the traditional romantic stereotypes, although they succeed in involving the reader in an atmosphere of rhythm and dynamic cadence:

*Sotto gli olivi folti*

(The vowel *o* is consistently repeated, creating an assonance which suggests the cool and sheltered atmosphere under the shade of the brownish olive trees);

*tre cammelli comodamente accovacciati nella sabbia si gargarizzavano*

(The alliteration of the consonants *c* and *s* and the repetition of the sibilants *s* and *z* create an atmosphere suggesting the torpor of the heat and the wind of the desert blowing soft and hot; besides, the onomatopoeic verb *gargarizzavano*, (gurgling), evokes the peculiar voice/ noise of the camels and at the same time suggests the cadenced sound of the water flushing out of an *old* stone gutter in a hot afternoon);

*mescolando il ciac-ciac dei loro sputacchi ai tonfi regolari della pompa a vapore*

(The assonance created by the repetition of the vowels *o* and *i* alternating with the repetition of the vowel *o* and the consonance of the letter *p* suggests the rhythmic movement of the camels ruminating and salivating, stressed by an onomatopoeic “ciac-ciac” for chewing, followed by another image evoking cadence and the dynamic environment of this setting, “the steady beat of the steam pump that supplies water to the city”).

The 1913 manifesto “Destruction of Syntax-Imagination Without Strings-Words in Freedom” explores the principles exposed in the “Technical Manifesto” in a broader and more daring fashion, insisting on the death of literary psychologism and on the need to feed literature with the essence of the material world:

Instead of *humanizing* animals, vegetables and minerals (an outmoded system) we will be able to *animalize. vegetalize. mineralize,*

*electrify, or liquefy our style* making it live the life of material (Apollonio 1973:100).

In order to achieve a kind of literary discourse, pregnant with the dynamism, the speed, the sounds and noises of modern life, Marinetti proposes:

a swift, brutal and immediate lyricism, a lyricism that must seem antipoetic to all our predecessors, a telegraphic lyricism with no taste of the book about it but, rather, as much as possible of the taste of life (1973:104).

This lyricism which Marinetti calls “multilinear” wants to grasp the sensorial *totality* of the material world and express it in several parallel chains of lines with images, metaphors and onomatopoeias evoking sensations of colour, sound, smell, noise, weight, and thickness. But, although expressing a multiplicity of sensations, these chains of nouns and adjectives created by *imagination without strings*, should be completely distinct from the Symbolists’ synaesthesias, the aim of which was to convey *in one word* a simultaneity of sensations and emotions.

According to Marinetti, the *Words in Freedom* would produce:

condensed metaphors. Telegraphic images. Maximum vibrations. Modes of thought. Closed or open forms of movement. Compressed analogies. Colour balances. Dimensions, weights, measures, and the speed of sensibility, minus the concentric circles that the word produces. Restful moments of intuition. Movements in two, three, four, five different rhythms. The analytic, explanatory poles that sustain the bundle of intuitive strings (1973:100).

These *words in freedom*, or “unhampered words with no connecting strings of syntax and with no punctuation” (1973:99), were illuminated by “semaphoric adjectives” or “atmosphere

adjectives”, which were as Marinetti says a kind of “lighthouse” of the sentences, spreading light over a whole zone of *words in freedom*.

The use of the *infinitive verb* was meant to “prevent the style from slowing and stopping at a definite point” (1973:103); it was indispensable in a “violent and dynamic lyricism”, and constituted the “very speed of the style” (*Ibid.*).

The expressive force of the futurist poetics is also to be emphasized by a “typographical revolution” (different, as Marinetti stresses, from Mallarmé’s “static ideal” of the empty page, silences and blank spaces), which is intended to create a harmony between futurist style and thought and the empty page where the typographical characters are printed, expressing the velocity of stars, clouds, aeroplanes, trains, waves, explosives, molecules, atoms, etc. For that purpose, different kinds of ink, different typefaces, blank spaces and capital letters ought to be used. And Marinetti adds in a style recalling Mayakovsky’s *Slap in the Face of Public Taste*;

I want to grasp them (ideas/sensations) brutally and hurl them in the reader’s face (1973:105)<sup>16</sup>.

In the introduction to his book *Gli Indomabili*. Marinetti describes what is meant by the “parolibero” (words in freedom) style, which he then applies in the same book. First, while searching for the right label for *Gli Indomabili*, (The Untameables), – should it be called a book of adventures? Fiction? A socio-philosophic analysis? A symbolic poem? A fable? – he ends up by calling it simply a “parolibero” book. By “parolibero” he means: “a crude, synthetic, simultaneous, polychromatic, polyrumourist, vast, violent, dynamic book”, (translated from Marinetti, 1968:841). The creation of this book is, according to

16 See Appendix III: For a longer sample of Marinetti’s *Words in Freedom*, with a copy and a translation of an extract of Marinetti’s poem *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, published in *Poesia*, in 1914 and reprinted in Marinetti’s *Selected Writings*, 1968:561-699.

Marinetti, related to his last trip to Upper-Egypt, the memory of which had suddenly assaulted him in the drowsiness of a September morning, (*Ibid.*).

In the book's introduction, the "parole in libertà" are defined in the following way:

Le parole in libertà orchestrano i colori, i rumori e i suoni, combinano i materiali delle lingue e dei dialetti, le formole aritmetiche e geometriche, i segni musicali, le parole vecchie, deformate o nuove, i gridi degli animali, delle belve e dei motori (1968:842).

[The words in freedom orchestrate colours, noises and sounds, combine the material of languages and dialects, arithmetical and geometric formulae, musical signs, out-dated, distorted and new words, the cries of animals, beasts and engines].

According to Marinetti, the "parole in libertà" divide in two the history of human thought and poetry: from Homer to the latest epic poem that has been sung, and then the new era with the "parolibrist" poets. Before them, all poets had sung like Homer: their narratives following temporal succession and the logic of facts, images and ideas. But futurist poetry, Marinetti writes, is finally distinct from Homer's because it does not follow those rules; it is instead, "the simultaneous polyexpression of the world", (*Ibid.*), a new way of seeing the universe, considered as an essential valuation of its forces in movement, intersecting each other before the creative "I", who then registers them through all possible expressive means. It is from the futurist "parole in libertà" that the new Italian style was born, says Marinetti. This new style, "synthetic, incisive, swift, free from all redundancies of the classical style", is the only one capable of expressing the modern era of speed and technology: using short sentences, scarce punctuation, no verbs, isolated words scattered in the text between two full stops, thus creating the right atmosphere. In order to prove how far the influence of the "parolibero" style



had gone and how deeply entrenched in Italian contemporary writing it was, Marinetti then chooses a few examples from different writers and different genres, novels, poetic descriptions, journalistic prose, and so on. He quotes, for example, an extract from *Corriere della Sera*, entitled “Frontiere”, (“Frontiers”):

Alpi, valli, gallerie, (chiudere i finestrini, presto!) il Ticino che scroscia, paesetti con le case incappucciate, angolo acuto, pochissima neve sulle cime più alte, un vento di frescura, ferrovieri svizzeri che parlano in lombardo-ticinese a voi, in tedesco al vostro vicino col cranio rasato, in francese a quella signora in libertà (1968:844).

[Alps, valleys, tunnels, (close the windows, quickly!) the Ticino crackling, small villages with their acute-angle-hooded houses, very little snow on the highest peaks, a fresh wind, swiss railway officers who speak in Lombard-Ticinio to you, in German to your shaved-head neighbour, in French to that lady at liberty].

In the same introduction, Marinetti quotes an article by Giuseppe Lipparini in *Resto del Carlino*, where his campaign against syntax and for “le parole in libertà” are enthusiastically recalled: the need to liberate the word from the oppression of syntax, reducing to a minimum the idea of subordination and coordination, in order to restore the full expressive power and purity of the word standing by itself, according to an almost “plastic concept”, rather than to any logical order and grammatical rules.

Così la parola, meravigliosa creatura viva, avrebbe riacquisito il suo splendore e si sarebbe liberata dal greve velo di nebbia e di tedio che le velava la faccia luminosa (1968:845-846).

[This way, the word, wonderful alive creature, would reconquer its splendour and would liberate itself from the heavy veil of mist and tedium which has been concealing its luminous face].

One other text quoted by Marinetti to exemplify the reach of the futurist influence, is an extract from the autobiographical prose-poem *Notturmo* by Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was already one of the most celebrated contemporary poets. Although Marinetti could not have said that D'Annunzio was a futurist writer, he wanted to prove how inconceivable it was for any great contemporary writer of D'Annunzio's rank not to have absorbed the main signs of the new "parolibero style", or, in other words, to have escaped his, (Marinetti's) influence. A few "typically paroliberi" passages of *Notturmo* are quoted, sometimes at first hand by Marinetti, others through the comments of other futurists like Balilla Pratella or Giovanni Lipparini, e. g. :

La città e piena di fantasmi. Gli uomini camminano senza rumore, fasciate di caligine. I canali fumigano. Qualche canto d'ubriaco, qualche vocio, qualche schiamazzo. I fanali azzurri nella fumea. Il grido delle vedette aeree arrochito dalla nebbia (1968:846).

[The town is full of ghosts. Men walk without any noise, wrapped in fog. The canals smoke. Some drunkard's song, some shouting, some uproar. The blue lanterns in the mist. The cry of the air-patrol hoarse from the fog].

Now, an extract from Marinetti's own book *Gli Indomabili*. (The Untameables). a description of the luxuriant vegetation of an Egyptian oasis, where the metaphors and imagery used play to a large extent with the fantastic, the nightmarish and the sensorial, at the same time that they preserve what Marinetti called a "material lyricism", or an almost "antipoetical lyricism", trying to grasp and convey the sensorial totality of the material world through images, metaphors and onomatopoeias of the material world itself. In fact, the Futurists wanted to create a style that would "animalize, vegetalize, mineralize, electrify or liquify" writing, rather than humanize nature, believing in a lyricism full of the "taste of life", rather than "a taste of the book":

Giganteschi e strabilianti dominavano i cactus e le agavi. In alto sembravano regnare riposandosi come dopo una lotta. Ma sotto già riprendeva con rinnovata violenza la battaglia delle forme vegetali. Cactus e agavi mostruosi, come elefanti e rinoceronti a brandelli, schiacciati da un assalto di coccodrilli. Questi intrecciavano gli smisurati forbicioni aperti delle loro bocche. (...) Cactus e agavi erano realmente mani tagliate di giganti strette in catene rugginose. Giocondamente esplodevano gare bizzarre di cricket e di lawn-tennis irte di racchette. Fughe di gambe veloci che schizzavano in alto frutti-palloncini. Ma nessuno correva. Tutto era impietrito. Griglie o Guglie? Altissime di metallo. Tenebrosi setacci di bronzo, con una spuma gocciante di facce prigioniere. A destra un'evasione di mostri. A sinistra altri coccodrilli mal sepolti nella mota. Ed erano in realtà cento duelli di cactus e agavi camuffati. Con fiera snellezza guizzante di squali le agavi assalivano i cactus, a fondo, a parate, cavate, a fondo. Sopra, si scatenava immobile il pietrificato applauso d'un loggione di mani mostruose. Più alti ancora, eretti e sverginatori i grandi falli delle agavi si inturgidivano con una spavalda foia di stelle. I cactus tortuosi avevano intanto formato un quadro difensivo e ridevano con migliaia di risate negre beffeggiando le agavi che li minacciavano da ogni parte. Queste, verdi schermidori, ostentavano le molle dei bicipiti, allungavano colli metallici e torsi di caucciù ma non osavano slanciarsi sopra i cactus, forse perché, elegantissimi, avevano schifo di quelle luride forme negre (1968:878-9).

[Gigantic and amazing cacti and aloes dominated. They seemed to be ruling from on high, as if they were resting after a fight. But below the battle of vegetal nature was restarting with renewed violence. Monstrous cacti and aloes, like elephants and rhinoceri ripped in shreds by the assault of crocodiles. These entwined the formidable open scissors of their mouths. Cacti and aloes were really the cut-off hands of giants bound in rusty chains. Bizarre matches of cricket and lawn-tennis bristling with rackets broke out playfully. Flights of swift legs spurting succulent fruit/ball in the

air. But nobody was running. Everything was petrified. Spikes or spirals? Very tall metallic. Gloomy sieves of bronze dripping with foam from imprisoned faces. On the right, monsters escaping. On the left, other crocodiles half buried in the mud. And in reality, it was a hundred duels of cacti and aloes, camouflaged. With the proud flickering slenderness of sharks the aloes attacked the cacti, to the heart, barricading themselves, penetratingly, to the heart. Above, arose motionlessly the petrified applause of a gallery of monstrous hands. Higher up, the big phalli of the aloes, erect and rapacious swelled up with the aggressive lust of stars. The twisted cacti had meanwhile formed their defences and were laughing with a thousand black laughs full of scorn for the aloes that menaced them from all sides. These, like green fencers, held out their projecting biceps, lengthened metallic necks and rubber torsos, but did not dare to throw themselves at the cacti, perhaps because, being so elegant, they were disgusted by those lurid black shapes].

In March 1914, Marinetti published another manifesto, “Geometric and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility”, with which he wanted to replace the “passéist beauty” sung in traditional literature. Instead, the Futurists will express a “new beauty” that has sprung from “the chaos of the new contradictory sensibilities” of modern life (1972:97). In this manifesto, Marinetti explains the different categories of onomatopoeias that he used in his “Parole in Libertà” poem “Zang Tumb Tuuum” and his usage of abstract mathematical signs in order to avoid any hints of psychologism, express all sorts of rapports existing between different sensations and thus

achieve the marvellous synthesis and share, with their abstract simplicity of anonymous gears, in expressing the geometric and mechanical splendor (Flint 1972:102).

The Futurists’ eagerness to create an aesthetics that interfered with all aspects of human life led them to publish documents

and manifestos addressing particular facets of life which art had not until then touched. This controversial “aestheticization of the real”, in many cases mainly oriented to provoking scandal, brought moreover the positive result of creating polemic, not only in the public or social sphere, but also in so-called private or personal matters. Manifestos and counter-manifestos were then published on the most varied subjects, from Music-hall Theatre, Dance, Photography and Cinema, to Clothes, Marriage, Lust, Love, War, Women, and Luxury.

### 3.3. Futurist Stage Manifestos

The theatre is one of the areas which received particular attention from Futurism. It became a field where the Futurists invested a lot of their energy and imagination, being by definition the area of performance and thus open to experimentalism.

The manifestos of the Futurist Theatre written between 1913 and 1915 will be summarized at this point, as part of a general description of the Futurist Manifestos on Art, but a more detailed analysis of the relation and influence of the Futurist Theatre on Vorticism will be offered further on in this thesis, as part of the study of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist play, *Enemy of the Stars*.

Before the advent of Futurism, Marinetti had published two plays. Both were written in French and under the influence of French post-symbolism. The first, *Le Roi Bombance*, published in 1905, is the story of a collective rebellion in the form of a satirical tragedy, grotesquely built around a gastronomic metaphor à la Rabelais. In 1909 he published his second play, *Les Poupeés Électriques*, in a style similar to the first, but situating its drama no longer within collective History, but within the private sphere, under the influence of Ibsen whose theatre had recently been introduced in Italy. Nevertheless, this play, as the title suggests, is already full of the disturbing presence of automata and machines that will people the futurist scenarios.

The theatrical activity of the Futurists started in 1910 with their “serate futuriste”, tumultuous happenings where art and politics were often discussed together, manifestos and proclamations were read, poems were recited, futurist music was played and bizarre dialogues were performed, all in an atmosphere of agitation and provocation, often inviting insults from the public, which the Futurists gladly reciprocated.

The first futurist manifesto of the Theatre, “The Variety Theatre”, had its origin in these “serate”. In this first manifesto, the Music-hall was iconized as the model of the Futurist Theatre<sup>17</sup>. Being essentially a theatre of surprise, imagination and fantasy, with its roots in actuality, the Music-Hall provided the Futurists with the best source of inspiration. From it Futurism borrowed caricature and the comic, the surprise-effect, the paraphernalia of lights, sounds and dynamic movements, an anti-conventional culture based on improvisation, the grotesque and the absurd.

As Marinetti says in the “Variety Theatre Manifesto”:

The Variety Theatre, being a profitable show-window for countless inventive forces, naturally generates what I call the *Futurist marvellous*, produced by modern mechanics. (1973:126) (...) The Variety Theatre offers the healthiest of all spectacles in its dynamism of form and colour (simultaneous movement of jugglers,

---

17 The *Literary Digest* of 13 September 1913 dedicated an interesting article to this manifesto, claiming what a relief it had been for “those at a loss in trying to place Futurism”, to see the leader of the movement ally it with “the music-hall show or vaudeville”: “only he would have the music-hall manager try for even more daring effects by taking liberties with the audience.” The magazine reporter then comments on the “awful seriousness” with which England had taken the Variety Theatre: “It is only recently that the King and Queen paid their second visit to an amusement house of that ilk, and now all the newspaperdom, led by the Bishop of Kensington and Mr. Bernard Shaw, is discussing the morals of music-hall show.” This remark puts back in its historical place the level of Marinetti’s provocation in choosing the Variety Theatre as the most genuine inspiration of the Futurist Theatre.

ballerinas, gymnasts, colourful riding masters, spiral cyclones of dancers spinning on the points of their feet). (...) The Variety Theatre is alone in seeking the audience's collaboration. It doesn't remain static like a stupid voyeur, but joins noisily in the action, in the singing, accompanying the orchestra, communicating with the actors in surprising actions and bizarre dialogues (1973:127).

Besides, as Marinetti adds, while the conventional theatre exalts the inner life, meditation, "monotonous crises of conscience", "stupid analysis of feelings", in a word, "psychology", the Variety Theatre exalts:

action, heroism, life in the open air, dexterity, the authority of instinct and intuition. To psychology it opposes what I call "body-madness" (*fisicofollia*) (*Ibid.*).

Finally, Futurism wants to transform the Variety Theatre into a theatre of *Amazement. Record-Setting and Body-Madness*:

IL FUTURISMO VUOLE TRASFORMARE IL TEATRO DI VARIETÀ IN TEATRO DELLO STUPORE, DEL RECORD E DELIA FISICOFOLLIA (Marinetti, 1968:76).

In 1915, Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra published the manifesto of *The Futurist Synthetic Theatre*. This one starts off by situating the need for a futurist theatre socially and politically:

War – Futurism intensified – obliges us to march and not to rot [marciare, non marcire] in libraries and reading rooms. *Therefore we think that the only way to inspire Italy with the warlike spirit today is through the theatre* (Apollonio 1973:183).

Traditional theatre had become totally obsolete, because it did not respond to the demands of the new times and the new public:

We condemn the whole contemporary theatre because it is too prolix, analytic, pedantically psychological, explanatory, diluted, finicking, static, as full of prohibitions as a police station. (...) In other words it is a pacifist, neutralist theatre, the antithesis of the fierce, overwhelming, synthesizing velocity of the war (1973:183-4).

In total opposition to this “passéist” theatre, the futurist will be: “synthetic, atechanical, dynamic, simultaneous, autonomous, alogical and unreal”. The first of these prerogatives of the young. Futurist Theatre meant that it ought to be, as the manifesto states, *brief*:

To compress in a few minutes, into a few words and gestures, innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts and symbols (1973:184).

This particular theatre would not be subject to a traditional technique of representation, mimesis, the aims of which are, above all, to make its public believe in the verisimilitude of the plot. The struggle of traditional theatre against “theatricality” itself is absurd, since:

life itself (which consists of *actions vastly more awkward, uniform, and predictable* than those that unfold in the world of art) is for the most part *antitheatrical* and even in this offers *innumerable possibilities for the stage*. EVERYTHING OF ANY VALUE IS THEATRICAL (1973:193).

To emphasize the benefits of theatricality, the manifesto develops a series of arguments against verisimilitude, on the grounds that “talent and worth have little to do with it”, and life itself is not logical:

reality throbs around us, bombards us *with squalls of fragments of inter-connected events, mortised and tenoned together, confused, mixed up, chaotic* (1973:194).



The Futurist Theatre will be born of improvisation and intuition, “suggestive and revealing actuality”:

Our Futurist theatre jeers at Shakespeare but pays attention to the gossip of actors, is put to sleep by a line from Ibsen but is inspired by red or green reflections from the stalls (1973:195).

The dynamism of this theatre will be achieved “through the interpenetration of different atmospheres and times”, which means that while in the traditional theatre many important, dynamic events, (e. g. a death or a murder), do not happen on the stage, but are simply narrated, the futurist theatre puts all actions on the stage, performing them simultaneously regardless of real time by creating interpenetrating ambiances. (For an example of this, see Appendix IV, a translation of a synthetic play by Marinetti, *The Distant Soldier*, where three different actions are performed at the same time and in the same space, with a minimum of props and scene settings, by creating three different atmospheres in the limited space of a room. The feelings of the different characters and their individuality are successfully conveyed and each action takes place independently on the stage, although simultaneously before the eyes of the audience.)

According to the manifesto, the Futurist Theatre is a product of the new futurist sensibility:

Our frenzied passion for real, swift, elegant, complicated, cynical, muscular, fugitive, Futurist life (1973:195).

Hence, instead of traditional theatrical forms, the Futurists should put in their place the “many forms of the futurist theatre”:

lines written in free-words, simultaneity, interpenetration, the short, acted-out poem, the dramatized sensation, comic dialogue, the negative act, the reechoing line, “extra-logical” discussion, synthetic deformation, the scientific outburst that clears the air (1973:196).

The “Futurist Theatre” will, thus, excite its audience and make it forget the monotony of daily life, through “a labyrinth of sensations imprinted on the most exacerbated originality and combined in unpredictable ways” (1973:195). The aim of this theatre is to create between the stage and the crowd “a current of confidence rather than respectfulness”, and to “instill in the audience the dynamic vivacity of a new Futurist Theatricality”, (1973:196).

Instead of a “prolix”, “analytic”, “static”, “explanatory” space, the theatre will be “a gymnasium” where the crowds will be trained to live and cope with the “swift, dangerous enthusiasms” of these futurist years.

The “Futurist Stage Manifesto” which Enrico Prampolini published in 1915, is basically a technical manifesto encouraging the creation of a “dynamic stage” in opposition to the “static stage of the past”. It is full of instructions on practical matters related to the building of a futurist scenery, the use of lights, the creation of a different stage scene that will produce the desired “unforeseen dynamic effects”. Representation of “reality” is not at stake in futurist stage creation. Prampolini insists that the unnecessary preoccupation with realism only diminishes the intensity of the performance and decreases its emotional potential. One should use abstractions to interpret reality. As examples, he gives the banning of realistically painted scenery, in favour of “colourless electromechanical architectural” structures, “enlivened by chromatic emanations from a source of light” (1973:201). Lights will be arranged in accordance with the spirit of the action staged; the structures on stage will move, “letting loose metallic arms and overturning the sculptural planes” (*Ibid.*), producing noises and lit by an exuberance of light and shade. These are the fundamental principles for the creation of the “highest point of expression” on the stage, where the actors will produce “unforeseen dynamic effects” which traditional theatre, only concerned with the representation of reality, ignores. Prampolini ends his manifesto with the following words, a sort of summary of the manifesto:

Let us create the stage (...) Let us reverse the roles. Instead of the illuminated stage *let us create the stage that illuminates; expressive light radiating with great emotional intensity the colours appropriate to the action on stage.* (1973:201-2)

In the Winter of 1926, *The Little Review* published a special issue dedicated to the “Avant-garde Theatre”, where the concepts and definitions we have just summarized were reviewed by some of their original defendants and executors, and more recent formulations were brought into the debate.

There, in an article called “The Magnetic Theatre and the Futuristic Scenic Atmosphere”, Prampolini reviews the principles of what he calls his “scenic system”, not without first pointing out that they had proved their success in actual technical experiments before audiences in a number of European capitals. He starts by putting in parallel the scenic representations of the past, which he calls mere “suggestions of the real”, and the “new” (futuristic) plastic representations of magic and unreal scenic constructions” (L. R. 1926:102). He dismisses “scenography” as the traditional art of stage representation, a description of apparent reality, and a real fiction of the visual world. He proposes to replace it by the creation of the “futurist scenic dynamism”, the true essence of theatrical action.

The main futurist aesthetic principles, *dynamism, simultaneity and the unity of action between man and his environment* are also the key for the futurist theatre as a “living scenic synthesis”. On the other hand, Prampolini adds, the technique of the traditional theatre, ignoring these principles, created a dualism between “man, the dynamic element, and his environment —(the static element)”, (L. R. :103). Prampolini claims that the Futurists have not only proclaimed but also achieved this “scenic unity” by “interpenetrating the human element and the environmental element in a living scenic synthesis of theatrical action”:

*The theatre and futuristic art are therefore the consequent projection of the world of the mind, moving rhythmically in scenic space. The sphere of action in the futuristic scenic technique desires: 1) To epitomize the essential through the purity of synthesis. 2) To render dimensional evidence by means of plastic power. 3) To express the action of the forces involved in dynamism (Ibid.).*

These principles imply that the Futurist Theatre will give a great deal of attention to the creation of a *futurist stage*, and as Prampolini had warned poets and writers in his “Futurist Stage Manifesto”, the participation of painters and architects in the setting of a play was absolutely essential. In this article, “The Magnetic Theatre and the Futuristic Scenic Atmosphere”, he concretizes it. Instead of *scenography*, the futurist theatre will use: “sceno-synthesis”, “sceno-plastic” and “sceno-dynamic”:

(...) predominance of the chromatic element – intervention of architecture as a geometric element of linear synthesis (...) chromatic abstraction; predominance of the plastic element, intervention of architecture, not as a picture-like fiction of perspective, but as a living, plastic reality, a constructive organism; (...) plastic abstraction; volume; predominance of the architectonic element of space; intervention of rhythmical movement, as a dynamic element necessary to the unity and to the simultaneous development of the environment and of the theatrical action; abolition of painted scene; luminous architecture of chromatic spaces; poly-dimensional and poly-expressive scenic action; dynamic abstraction; space (L. R. :104).

The concept of a “poly-dimensional scenic space” is, according to Prampolini, essential for the creation of a Futurist Theatre. In his opinion, the traditional scenic-arc of the traditional theatre, as well as the flat, horizontal surface of its stage, no longer cope with the “technical and aesthetical requirements of the new spirit in the theatre”: they limit the development of

theatrical action, making it the slave of the scenic picture frame and of the visual angle of fixed perspective. Hence, Prampolini's theory is that with the abolition of the proscenium arch and the traditional stage surface, new technical possibilities are opened up for theatrical action:

By dividing the horizontal surface by new vertical oblique and polydimensional elements, by forcing the cubic resistance of the "scenic arc" by the spheric expansion of plastic planes moving rhythmically in space, we arrive at the *creation of a polydimensional and futuristic scenic space* (*Ibid.*).

From the description so far given of the futurist attempt to create an up-dated and "revolutionary" aesthetics in accordance with the demands and principles of the history of its time, one can see how the "future anterior" of Futurism was generally felt as a threat to contemporary establishment aesthetics, which supported immobility and the values of the past. The futurist aim of restoring the "full expressive power and purity of the word" regardless of its logical order in the sentence and grammatical rules, and the emphasis on the sensual, instinctive, intuitive and primitive nature of writing, the belief in the "simultaneous poly expression of the word", i. e., the "parole in liberà", as well as the Futurists' desire to "animalize, vegetalize, mineralize, electrify or liquify" writing rather than "humanize nature", is in fact in accordance with Kristeva's definition of the avant-garde writing. As we know, Kristeva defined avant-garde writing as the eruption of the semiotic in the symbolic order of language, simultaneously subverting the linguistic code and challenging the socio-symbolic order.

The following section will be considering Futurism within an ideological perspective, studying the nature of the social aims that its global aesthetics proposed to reach and the political implications that they bear.

### 3.4. The banner “War, the World's Only Hygiene” and futurist misogyny

My analysis will now concentrate on the attitudes of Futurism to War and the Woman Question, as displayed in the manifestos that particularly addressed both subjects. In fact, both issues had always been crucial to Futurism from the beginning. In the manifesto of 1909 Marinetti had written:

9-We will *glorify* war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom- bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and *scorn for woman*.

10-We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, *feminism*, every *opportunist* or *utilitarian cowardice* (1972:42).

In 1915, in “Guerra Sola Igiene del Mondo”, Marinetti produced the following synthesis of Futurism:

Era la *nuova formula dell’Arte-azione* e una legge d’igiene mentale. Era una giovane bandiera rinnovatrice, antitradizionale, ottimistica, eroica e dinamica, che se doveva inalberare sulle rovine del passatismo (stato d’anima statico, tradizionale, professorale, pessimistico, pacifista, nostalgico, decorative ed esteta). (1968:201)

[It was the new formula of the Art-action and a law of mental hygiene. It was a young flag of renovation, antitraditional, optimistic, heroic, dynamic that one should raise over the ruins of the past (static frame of mind, traditional, academic, pessimistic, pacifist, nostalgic, decorative and aesthetic].

In the same year the “Futurist Synthesis of the War” was published, (see Appendix V), where, in an appendix, Marinetti reinforced the heroic/belligerent intentions of the movement:

Il Futurismo dinamico e aggressive si realizza oggi pienamente nella grande guerra mondiale che solo – prevede e glorifico prima che scopiasse. La guerra attuale e il piu bel poema futurista apparso finora (...) (1968:286).

[A dynamic and aggressive Futurism achieves today its fulfilment in the great world war which, alone, it had forseen and glorified before it had exploded. The present war is the most beautiful poem that has so far appeared (...)].

As Edoardo Sanguineti wrote in *Ideologia e Linguaggio*, in Marinetti's worldview, war, and more precisely, *industrial war*, has the function of liberating mankind from an imperfect nature. An industrial war is not only the "hygiene of the world", but the "truth of the world", the ultimate truth of nature and history (Sanguineti, 1972:38). For Futurism, war is the true inspiration of art, the only purifying morality, the only stimulus of human nature and the new sparkle of man's intelligence.

Sanguineti calls our attention to a text often neglected, where the two seminal issues of Futurism, War and Women, are discussed together: it is the text by Marinetti *La Donna e La Guerra*, published in his book *Come Si Seducono le Donne*. (Milano, 1933), which begins:

La terra, il mare, il cielo e la donna esigevano la guerra come complemento naturale (1933:57).

[Earth, sea, sky and women demanded war as their natural complement].

First, Marinetti describes the world's urge for a gigantic war, and how he himself, since his childhood in Egypt, had always been eager for the moment when that would happen. Then, he swiftly changes the setting to an intimate atmosphere, where he says that he found himself in the arms of a certain Miss Macry,

“a beautiful American”, whose body he was exploring, willingly but without the “sentimentalities of love”. However pleasurable the moment was, and in spite of the beauty of the twilight, he felt “dissatisfied and incomplete”:

Fra le paure azzurre che il crepuscolo accumulava intorno a noi, io, senza amore, snidavo coi baci sotto le belle braccia l’allegria e lo spasimo cocente del corpo seminudo, ma i miei sguardi non la vedevano. Fissi sugli alberi violetti, i miei occhi cercavano, invocavano la piccola geometria nera di una mitragliatrice con le sue pazze orchidee candide e feroci, profumate di fuoco veloce (1933:59).

[Amongst the blue fears that the twilight was gathering around us, I, without love was calling out with kisses the joy and the ardent spasm of the half-naked body, but my eyes were not seeing her. Staring at the violet trees, my eyes were looking for, were calling for the little black geometry of a machine-gun with its mad, candid and wild orchids, perfumed by a swift fire].

When he told Macry what he was thinking, she did not understand him: “A machine-gun? What for? To kill me with?”, she asked. “No, to complete the beauty of the landscape and the taste of your lips”, Marinetti answered. He explained to her that she could not understand him, because, like the rest of nature, she was “hungry” for war:

Tu sei come un luigi dimenticato sul tappeto verde di una tavola da gioco senza giocatori e senza biscazzieri! I tuoi brillanti e le tue perle sono innocue esplosioni di luce! Tu devi adornare la tua bellezza di guerra! Questa volta stellata simboleggia milioni di “schrappnels” scoppiati! (1933:59-60)

[You are like a “luigi” forgotten on the green cover of a gaming-table without players and without casinos! Your diamonds



and your pearls are innocuous explosions of light! You ought to enhance your beauty with war! This scintillating dome symbolizes millions of exploded pieces of “shrapnel”!] ]

Until it finally came, he says, everything in nature had been exasperatedly calling for war... To all men between 35 and 50 years old, war had been like a second youth: a militarization of the muscles and nerves neglected by daily life, miracles being accomplished by the uniforms.

As an illustration of this theory, Marinetti tells Miss Macry how once, when he was enjoying a brief military leave, he had met a beautiful and “intelligent” Dutch woman and immediately started making love to her in his full military uniform. The lady did not seem the least bit disturbed by this fact. On the contrary, she praised “Italian men” for living so passionately the reality of the present moment, always indifferent to the day-after, always ready to improvise. When Marinetti asked her if she reproached him for his recent “erotic improvisation”, whether his spurs had disturbed her pleasure, she answered:

Anzi originalissimo. Mi piaci così, sempre pieno di guerra... Tu hai la mania della guerra? (1933:63)

[On the contrary, it was very original. You please me like that, always full of war... Do you have a craze for war?]

A woman without war is a meaningless rebellion, replies Marinetti. War gives to the woman’s body its true flavour, as it gives the mountains, the rivers and the forests their authentic beauty. A beautiful woman cannot have a better lover than a soldier in his war uniform, fresh from the front and ready to go again. Greaves, spurs and bandolier are essential to love. Dinner-jackets and tuxedos are only good for the atmosphere of rocking-chairs and arm-chairs, and they evoke the fetid breath of moralists, critics, teachers, philosophers and snobs. As a matter

of fact, he says, these are the husbands whom he systematically “crowns”: all enemies of divine speed<sup>18</sup>.

According to Marinetti, the new futurist religion of speed, collaborating with the war, had changed man radically: first, new industrial machinery had altered the landscape, then the war had come and the mountains were blown up with the fire of cannons.

In a powerful and violent prose, Marinetti praises here the drastic changes that progress and the new industries were operating in nature, ripping open mountains and diverting the course of rivers, destroying the romantic loneliness of the landscape with the building of roads. Tunnels had been excavated in the mountains for the trains to run through; from the heights of an aeroplane one could now see as far as the horizon. The war had finally come to join this epic, helping to decapitate the mountains with colossal mines.

Hence, when Marinetti exclaims:

Bisogna dunque velocizzare e sintetizzare anche l'amore!...  
(1933:64)

[Love ought to be speeded up and synthesized as well!... ]

he means it as a cry of war, rather than a whisper of love.

The roots of the Futurists' “Scorn for woman” are to be found, according to Marinetti's preface to his novel *Mafarka il Futurista* (1909), in the futurist hatred for the “tyranny of

---

18 La donna senza la guerra e una rivoltella scarica. La guerra da il suo vero sapore al corpo della donna come da la sua vera bellezza alle montagne, ai fiumi, ai boschi. (...) Una bella donna non può avere altro amante che un soldato armato in tutti i modi, che viene dal fronte e sta per ripartire. Il gambali, gli speroni e la bandoliera sono essenziali all' amore. La giacchetta, il frack, lo smocking e lo stiff elius sono fatti per la sedia e la poltrona, evocano la biblioteca, lo sverginamento lento dei libri intonsi, la lampada a paralume verde, l'alito fetido dei moralisti, dei professori, dei critici, dei filosofi e dei pedanti. Sono questi infatti i mariti che io incorono sistematicamente: tutti i nemici della divina velocità (1933:63).

love”, “sentimentalism”, “the obsession with the woman”, and “romantic moonshine”. Against those “slogans of the past”, the Futurists praised the “instinct” and “animal value of the woman”.

In one of their first manifestos, “Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!”, (“Let’s murder the moonshine”, April 1909), the reasons for the futurist “scorn for woman” are loudly and overtly expressed, leaving us no doubts concerning their misogynist nature:

What can they want, women, the sedentary, invalids, the sick, and all the prudent counsellors? To their vacillating lives, broken by dismal agonies, by fearful dreams and heavy nightmares, we prefer violent death and glorify it as the only thing worthy of man, that beast of prey (1972:46).

This early “disprezzo della donna” was, however, later reviewed, during the war and post-war years, and subsequently discussed in various manifestos written between 1911-15, under the general title “Guerra Sola Igiene del Mondo” and in the texts of “Democrazia Futurista” written during 1919, dealing with issues such as War, Women, Suffragettes, the Vote, Parliamentarism, Romanticism, Lust, the Machine-age, etc. With them Futurism tried to create a new image of woman, in opposition to the old myth of the romantic, fragile woman, that aroused the Futurists’ anger. The polemic around woman assumed a new and liberal face, although full of contradictions and paradoxes.

Suddenly, for sociological reasons, the Futurists found themselves faced with the impossibility of sustaining their early claims against women, as partly responsible for the illnesses of tradition, degeneration, death and stagnation in institutions and in daily life. Often side by side with them, in the streets and in the daily papers, the Suffragettes were themselves “at war” with an old-fashioned and oppressive system. They were giving the best proof of the qualities the Futurists praised in their first manifesto, and which they claimed to be absent from women:

courage, audacity, revolt, aggressive action, strength and perseverance. Thus, it is not surprising that Marinetti's lectures in England were often largely attended by Suffragettes, hoping to find support for their cause.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, in this attempt to create a new and more liberal face, although still faithful to the ideals of "Health, Force, Will, and Virility" (1968:83), Futurism ends up campaigning for the abolition of marriage and the family, for the right of women to education, for easy laws of divorce, for the emancipation of women, sexual freedom, the right to vote and participation in political activity.

In the manifesto *We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters the Last Lovers of the Moon*, Marinetti writes:

With us begins the reign of the man whose roots are cut, of the multiplied man who mixes himself with iron, who is fed by electricity and no longer understands anything except the lust for danger and daily heroism (1972:67).

Futurist lyricism wants to combat the four intellectual poisons that Gabriel d'Annunzio had identified:

- 1-the sickly, nostalgic poetry of distance and memory
- 2-romantic sentimentality drenched with moonshine that looks up adoringly to the ideal of woman-beauty
- 3-obsession with lechery, with the adulterous triangle, the pepper of incest, and the spice of Christian sin

---

19 Vide Margaret Nevinson's article in *The Vote*, "Futurism and Women", (31 December 1910), a comment on Marinetti's lecture at the Lyceum Club in London. Disregarding the presence of Suffragettes in the audience, Marinetti's "usual raillery at women" insisted on their "pernicious influence" and "snake-like coils" which "choked the noblest ideals of manhood" (p. 112). However the women, writes Nevinson, smiled ironically, knowing that "whether she be the subject of praise or censure, woman is now, as always, man's most interesting topic" (*Ibid.*).

4-the professional passion for the past and the mania for antiquity and collecting (1972:68).

In “Down with Tango and Parsifal” (January, 1914), which has as subtitle, “Futurist letter circulated among cosmopolitan women friends who give tango-teas and Parsifalize themselves”, Marinetti attacks the “Tango” as the paradigm of a “sentimental, decadent, paralytic romanticism towards the Fatal Woman of cardboard” (1972:69).

This text, a chauvinist hymn to man, “the beast of prey”, is also an amusing and accurate parody of the bourgeois salons and “tango-teas” of the time which provided the setting for frustrated loves and faked adulteries:

Clumsiness of English and German Tangos, mechanical lusts and spasms of bones and *fracs* unable to externalize their sensibilities. Mimicry of Parisian and Italian Tangos, mollusk-couples, savage felinity of the Argentine race, stupidly domesticated, morphinized, powdered over (*Ibid.*).

It is in the manifesto “Against Amore and Parliamentarism” (“Contro l’amore e il parlamentarismo”, Marinetti, 1968:250-4) that Marinetti addresses more clearly the subject of the Woman Question, trying to define the Futurists’ new attitude within a compromise with their early anti-woman slogan. He says:

This hatred, precisely, for the tyranny of *Amore* we express in a laconic phrase: “scorn for women”. We scorn women conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of Amore, the woman-poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman, obsessing and fatal (...) (1972:74).

*Amore*, which is here defined as “sentimentality and lechery” is “the last natural thing in the world”. The only natural and important thing is coitus, he says, because it assures “the futurism of the species”.

Trying to be ironical, he says that the Suffragettes are the Futurists<sup>7</sup> best allies in their campaign for the rights of women because:

The more rights and powers they win for women, the more she will be deprived of *Amore*, and by so much will she cease to be a magnet for sentimental passion or lust (1972:73).

As for the supposed inferiority of women, Marinetti writes:

we think that if her body and spirit had, for many generations past, been subjected to the same physical and spiritual education as man, it would perhaps be legitimate to speak of the equality of the sexes (*Ibid.*).

And, recalling the women's campaign for the vote, he writes:

It is obvious, in any case, that in her actual state of intellectual and erotic slavery, woman finds herself wholly inferior in respect to character and intelligence and can therefore be only a mediocre legislative instrument (*Ibid.*).

Therefore, although the Futurists "most enthusiastically" defend the rights of the Suffragettes, at the same time, they

*regret their childish eagerness for the miserable, ridiculous right to vote" (Ibid.).*

From this point onwards, the style of this pamphlet becomes loaded with irony, and cynicism, in spite of Marinetti's disclaimer: "How careful I am to avoid irony; I speak as seriously against that fact as I know how"<sup>20</sup>. There is no one more suited

---

<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that Lillie Lenton and Frieder Graham, two militant Suffragettes known for actions of arson and picture slashing in the National

than women to “destroy that grand foolishness, made up of corruption and banality, to which parliamentarism is now reduced”. In their present state of inferiority in all respects, women will be the best allies to destroy parliamentary assemblies, which are “mere noisy chicken coops, cow stalls or sewers” (*Ibid.*)\* Therefore, Marinetti says:

I welcome with pleasure the aggressive entrance of women into the parliaments. Where could we find a dynamite more impatient or more effective?” (*ibid.*) Then let us hasten to give women the vote (...) Let women hurry to make, with the speed of lightning, this great test of the total animalization of politics (...) Woman, as she has been shaped by our contemporary society, can only increase in splendor the principle of corruption inseparable from the principle of the vote” (1972:74).

Marinetti’s irony floods in, explaining how women in parliament will take over the monopoly of useless or harmful eloquence, and how they. will drag the world through

the paths of pacifism and Tolstoyan cowardice into the definite triumph of clericalism and moralistic hypocrisy (*Ibid.*).

By the end of this text, Marinetti suggests that the victory of feminism will end in the destruction of the principle of the family, an end of which he seems entirely to approve. However, after having said that, he contradicts himself: this same woman who has thus won her political rights is intimately sure that she

---

Gallery in London are blessed in *Blast I*, the Vorticist attitude towards them is as patronizing as that of the Futurists. In a pamphlet entitled “To Suffragettes – A Word of Advice”, (*Blast I*), they are ridiculed in the following words: “In destruction, as in other things, stick to what you understand. We make you a present of our votes. Only leave works of art alone. You might some day destroy a good picture by accident” (p. 151).

is “as a mother, as a wife and as a lover, a closed circle, purely animal and wholly without usefulness”:

I confess that before so intoxicating a spectacle we strong Futurists have felt ourselves suddenly detached from women, who have suddenly *become too earthly*, or to express it better, *have become a symbol of the earth that we ought to abandon*” (1972:75).

The misogynistic tone of this text culminates in the revelation of the ultimate Futurists<sup>7</sup> dream: We have even dreamed of one day being able to create a *mechanical son, the fruit of pure will, a synthesis of all the laws that science is on the brink of discovering* (*Ibid.*)<sup>21</sup>.

This new “mechanical man”, which Marinetti calls “the multiplied man”, is fully defined in another manifesto “Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine” (“L’Uomo Moltiplicato e il Regno della Machina”, Marinetti, 1968:255-8). This

---

21 My italics. In fact the son of *Mafarka il Futurista* accomplished this fantasy. Gazurmah was born as a “fruit of Mafarka’s will”, without the participation of woman as described in *Il Discorso Futurista di Mafarka* (1968:221;223):

“Io costruisco e partorisco mio figlio, uccello invincibile e gigantesco, che ha grandi ali flessibili fatte per abbracciare le stelle. (...) Con le mie proprie mani, io l’ho scolpito, mio figlio, nel legno di una giovine quercia! E ho trovato una mistura che trasforma le fibre vegetali in carne viva e in muscoli robusti!... (...) E sappiate che io ho generato mio figlio senza il concorso della vulva!... (...) Ed he ha concluso che e possibile procreare dalla propria carne senza il concorso e la puzzolente complicità della matrice della donna, un gigante immortale dalle ali infallibili!”

[I build and give birth to my child, an invincible and gigantic bird, who has huge and flexible wings made to embrace the stars! (...) With my own hands I’ve sculptred my son in the wood of a young oak! And I found a mixture which transforms the vegetable fibres in living flesh and robust muscles!... (...) And you ought to know that I engendered my son without any encounter with the vulva! (...) I came to the conclusion that it is possible to procreate an immortal giant with unfallible wings from one’s own flesh, without the concourse and the disgusting complicity of the female womb].



non human and mechanical being, constructed for an omnipresent velocity, will be naturally cruel, omniscient and combative (1972:91).

He will become identified with the machine as a lover identifies himself with the beloved. He will only know mechanical beauty, and will ignore all moral suffering, goodness of heart, affection and love,

those sole corrosive poisons of inexhaustible vital energy, sole interrupters of our powerful bodily electricity (*Ibid.*).

His heart will become a kind of “stomach for the brain”, it will be reduced to its true distributive function”: it will

methodically empty and fill so that the spirit can go into action (1972:92).

As such, he will not waste any of his precious time with love and with women. Therefore, sentimentality, lust and jealousy will vanish from the face of the earth.

*Amore* will be finally reduced to the conservation of the species, he writes. And, with absolute optimism in relation to the future of the *young modern male*, Marinetti hopes that:

finally nauseated by erotic books and the double alcohol of lust and sentiment, finally inoculated against the disease of *Amore*, (he) will methodically learn to destroy in himself all the sorrows of the heart, daily lacerating his affections and indefinitely distracting his sex with swift, casual contacts with women” (1972:92).

Hence, when Marinetti and the Futurists defend the abolition of Marriage, the Family, and the possibility of victory of the Women’s Movement, winning their right to independence, education and the vote, it is not that Futurism actually “sup-

ports” women in their struggle and genuinely wants to join their campaign. The fact is that Futurism with all its anti-tradition and “anti-passéist” rhetoric could not possibly ignore the actions of the Suffragettes, truly “futurist” behaviour in the full sense of the word.

In the pamphlets written in 1919 and assembled in “Democrazia Futurista”, (Futurist Democracy), the ideology and aims of Futurism are reviewed, from its formation until the proclamation of the Futurist Political Party. The Party is defined as a movement of a group of artists engaged in an “absolute practical politics”:

non-rhetorical, violently Italian, violently revolutionary, free, dynamic with absolutely practical methods (1968:297).

It is also said to be the product of the organization of “Futurist energy” ready to save Italy from its “passatismo” and cure it from all its illnesses. Futurism had always been “ultra-violent, anti-clerical, anti-socialist and anti-traditional”, an insurrection against all that was past and traditional. The Futurists had prophesied war as the “only hygiene of the world”, and now they had fought in one.

However, the Futurist Political Party would not be the same as the Futurist artistic movement. The latter would keep on with its struggle for artistic renovation, whilst any ordinary man or woman could enrol in the first, whose purpose was a “free futurist democracy”, seeking glory for Italy and despising all pacifist Utopias. The Futurist Political Party’s goals were maximum liberty, maximum welfare, maximum economic production; gradual abolition of marriage with easy divorce laws, women’s right to the vote and encouragement of their participation in national activity; abolition of the existing system of Defence, Police, Prison and Bureaucracy; intransigent anticlericalism, expulsion of the Pope; voluntary military service. The Futurist Political Party had as its only religion the “Italy of tomorrow” (1968:303).

Two of the texts of “Democrazia Futurista” deal with the issues of abolition of the family, marriage, defence of divorce and free-love.

“Contro il Matrimonio”, (Marinetti,1968:317-20), is a denunciation of sentimentality, vice and crime, seen as consequences of marriage, and the family, “school of hypocrisy, treason, equivocation and fear”:

The family lamp is a luminous broody hen who hatches her rotten eggs of cowardice (1972:76).

The family of marriage without divorce, Marinetti writes, is not only absurd, harmful and pre-historic, but also a prison. For the woman, it is either a “hypocritical masquerade”, or a “legal prostitution powdered over with moralism”:

With the words *my wife, my husband*, the family clearly establishes the law of adultery at any cost, or masked prostitution at any cost (1972:77). (...) We want to *destroy not only the ownership of land, but also the ownership of woman.* Whoever cannot work his land should be dispossessed. Whoever cannot give his woman strength and joy should never force his embrace or his company upon her(1972:78).

Women ought to be free agents who, however, “belong” to “the future and development of the race”. Women also ought to be freed from the education of their children, the manifesto claimed, but not as one would expect so that they had more time for their own development, but, ironically, so that “male babies” might develop far from direct female influence and the nursery “atmosphere of weeping and hands grasping skirts”. Male babies should be kept as much as possible,

far away from the little girls so that their first games can be entirely masculine, that is, free of every emotional morbidity, every woman

delicacy, so that they can be lively, pugnacious, muscular, and violently dynamic. When little boys and girls live together, the formation of the male character is always retarded (*Ibid.*).

Marinetti fears that the charm and “wilful seductiveness of the little woman”, will turn the young males into “little cicisbei or stupid little slaves, (*Ibid.*).

This sort of discourse quickly loses its progressive and libertarian mask, and inevitably falls into the most bizarre contradictions. At one and the same time, Futurism wanted to be “the avant-garde of art” and “in the avant-garde of social change”, i. e., producing an art that matched technological advance advocating a number of social changes that would support progress and cope with the demands of the new times, without however upsetting the ruling ideology. Based on principles of patriotism, individualism and male chauvinism, Futurism was trapped in an insoluble impasse: its ideological discourse conflicted with the revolutionary social transformations which it rhetorically advocated.

For example, in this same manifesto, Marinetti’s attacks on marriage as a “legal prostitution”, whose only function was to give the woman access to an “half freedom of adultery” and the “recovery of her ego through treason”, completely changed direction in its last sentences. Suddenly, Marinetti cannot hide his preoccupation with the “typical matrimonial grotesque” that the war situation had created. While the man was in the war, his wife had found a job, which she wanted to keep after the war had finished; meanwhile, the non-working husband concentrated all his activity on an “absurd preoccupation with domestic order”. The result is that the values and gender roles in the family were subverted, which in Marinetti’s opinion produced an inevitable clash, and the consequent defeat of the man:

the husband has become a useless woman with masculine vanities, and his wife has doubled her human and social value (1972:79).

The same style and similar contradictions can be found in two other texts written in 1919 and 1920, concerning women's rights and the male-female power relations: "Orgoglio Italiano Rivoluzionario e Libero Amore" and "Contro il Lusso Femile".

The first, (Marinetti, 1968:321-7), also includes a manifesto by the Futurist Arturo Blangino on the abolition of marriage and the education of children outside the institution of the family. It asks for easy divorce and the participation of women in political activity, at the same time that it proclaims itself anti-imperialist and asks for the end of Popery, Monarchy, Parliament, Senate, marriage, bureaucracy, old age, property, agricultural estates, and all sorts of parasitism and stagnant wealth.

As far as the family and women are concerned, v Blangino's manifesto makes his attitudes very clear. The woman is the first deposit and factory of human munitions, and for that reason she is a precious wealth to the nation. She ought to be protected as the bearer of strong, virile and healthy males.

Free-love is praised, but for the benefit of man, so that he might obtain "all the carnal pleasure" and "sensuality" from a woman that he was entitled to, and, once being satiated he might freely look for another. At that moment, society was "passatista, ignorante e fossilizzata dai convenzionalismi antichi" (1968:324), ["passatista", ignorant and fossilized by old-fashioned conventionalisms] and used the family to monopolize the "sensual instincts", and the "masculinity" of the male constrained by marriage with only one woman:

la colpa e della società (...) la quale lo obbliga ingiustamente a monopolizzare il suo istinto sensuale, la sua mascolinità, congiungendolo in matrimonio con una donna sola!... (*Ibid.*)<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Translation of quote:

[Only society is to be blamed (...) which unjustly forces him to monopolize his sensual instinct, his masculinity, uniting him in marriage with only one woman].

The same principle that leads Blangino to exalt the crude and purifying beauty of war leads him also to praise the sublime beauty of carnal pleasure and to propose the end of “false claustral virginity”, entirely (be it clearly understood), for the fulfilment of the male’s desires.

On the other hand, maternity is praised as the woman’s defining role:

Solo se è madre essa può degnamente chiamarsi donna, se è sterile essa e una femmina ignobile mercantessa di piacere; (*Ibid.*)

[Only the woman that is a mother can truly be called a woman; if she is sterile she is an ignoble female, a seller of pleasure;]

At the same time, all support ought to be given to the virile male, to the point of creating a tax, the “tassa di filiativo”, to be paid to all men in full command of their procreating ability.

Blangino’s pseudo-radical manifesto also advocates the creation of institutions to oversee the education of children; the right of pregnant women to free medical treatment; the abolition of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate children; the end of the misery of families with too many children and the complete eradication of brothels from all towns. But always the purpose is to protect and defend men:

Non lasciate sprecare inutilmente l’umore fecondante del maschio in uteri sterili e putridi, fate che ogni goccia della sua vitalità sia germe di nuova vita per un suddito, per un soldato futuro, ed ecco che allo Stato non mancherà mai materiale umano per difenderlo, per sfruttare le sue ricchezze, ecc. (1968:325).

[Male spunk should not be wasted in sterile and putrefied uteruses; make sure that every drop of his virility might be the germ of new life for a citizen, for a future soldier, so that the State will never lack in human resources to defend itself, to take advantage of its wealth, etc. ]

Thus, the Futurists' support of women's rights, from the right to education, to those of sexual freedom and the vote, although often stressed in the various futurist manifestos of the war and post-war period, serves only instrumentally as a means to the thorough fulfilment of the male's needs and pleasure. On the other hand, it exists as an unavoidable appendix to the programme of a movement whose primary definition is the creation of an "atmosphere of the avantgarde", as the "Futurist Political Program" (Marinetti, 1968:282), declared.

Before proceeding to analyze the response of the Futurist Women to the Futurists' attitude to the Woman Question and the social role of sexual difference, I want to call attention to another manifesto, written by Marinetti in 1920, which substantiates the above critique.

In this text, "Contro il Lusso Femile", ("Against Feminine Luxury"), a particularly mundane and stereotyped "feminine" issue is addressed, "Fashion". The articulation between subject-matter and sexual politics is here made through a discourse which barely hides its reactionary ideology, masked under a pretended liberation of women from the "slavery of fashion". The manifesto begins with a word of warning against "feminine luxury mania", which is growing as an illness, with the support of "male idiocy". Marinetti calls it a "toilettite":

Questa mania morbosa costringe sempre più la donna a una prostituzione mascherata ma inevitabile" (1968:476)<sup>23</sup>.

This sickening mania, he says, leads women more and more to a masked but unavoidable prostitution. And, he adds, this unconscious and self-conceited exposure of the female body can be found amongst all social classes. To change clothes three

<sup>23</sup> Translation of quote:

[This morbid mania forces woman more and more into a disguised but unavoidable prostitution].

times a day, Marinetti writes, means for a woman to put her own body in a window and offer herself to a market of male buyers:

Cambiare tre toilettes al giorno equivale a mettere il proprio corpo in vetrina per offrirsi ad un mercato di maschi compratori (*Ibid.*)<sup>24</sup>.

Cynically, he says that these women do not realize that by offering themselves so openly, they are reducing the two precious things a woman has: her value and her mystery. The offer scares the male away because he despises easy women and wants to have the pleasure of “discovery” and to struggle for his pleasure:

L’offerta allontana il maschio, che disprezza la donna facile e vuole scoprire e lottare per godere (*Ibid.*)<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, Marinetti nonchalantly says, the offer always excludes monopoly and male desire requires and expects monopoly!

Marinetti’s sexual politics in this text does not hide itself under progressive arguments concerning women’s needs or desires, or what the Futurists make of them. The pamphlet is simply structured accordingly to what the Futurists believe the modern man is missing in his erotic pleasures and sexual fulfillment. In this text the determining agent is always masculine, and the woman is the *object* of fruition, a mere circumstance: the use of jewelry and extravagant, soft clothes destroys “man’s pleasure” in touching feminine skin; perfumes are misleading since they disrupt the smell of female skin distracting “man’s olfactory imagination”. All these, adds Marinetti, besides destroying the

---

24 Translation of quote:

[To change clothes three times a day is equivalent to put her own body in a shopwindow to offer herself to a market of male buyers].

25 Translation of quote:

[Offer draws the male away, since he despises easy women and wishes to unveil and fight for his pleasure].



“true” feminine “charm”, are an incentive to pederasty: only women and pederasts can give a judgement on feminine underwear, he writes. A real male, however sophisticated he might be, can only judge upon the “pleasant ensemble” of the body of the woman that undresses before him:

Soltanto una donna concorrente o un pederasta valuta i dettagli delle sottovesti femminili. Il maschio, anche raffinato e artista, giudica in blocco l’assieme piacevole della donna che si sveste davanti a lui (1968:477)<sup>26</sup>.

As a sort of justification, Marinetti invokes the usual social reasons and futurist “hygienic” measures, to prepare a prosperous future for Italy in the name of the virile Italian men and the fertile women, joining them in a campaign against feminine luxury, prostitution, pederasty, and the sterility of the race:

Noi futuristi, barbari raffinatissimi, ma virilissimi, viviamo in tutti gli ambienti; siamo, se non sempre amati, mai trascurati. Abbiamo interrogati i maschi piu fortunati. Sono del nostro parere (...) Parliamo in nome della razza, che esige maschi accesi e donne fecondate. La fecondità, per una razza come la nostra, e in caso de guerra, la sua difesa indispensabile, e in tempo di pace la sua ricchezza di braccia lavoratrici e di teste geniale (1968:478).

[We futurists, very refined but very virile barbarians, live in all environments: we are, if not always loved, at least not despised. We asked the most successful males: they are of our opinion. We speak in the name of the race, which demands strong males and impregnated women. Fertility is, for a race like ours, in case of

<sup>26</sup> Translation of quote:

[Only a competitive woman or a pederast can value the details of the feminine underwear. The male, however sophisticated and artistic he may be, can only judge upon the pleasant ensemble of the woman undressing before him].

war its essential defence, and in peacetime its wealth of laborious arms and clever minds. ]

As Claudia Salaris writes in her *Storia del Futurismo*, the magazine *Poesia* which prepared and witnessed the birth of Futurism, and published in Italy its first manifesto, had always counted on the enthusiastic support of several women, even if their collaboration passed unnoticed. Later on, Marinetti, probably seeking for more efficacy in his campaign and wanting to appease many angry voices, finds a woman who will herself write the “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman”, (March 1912). Her name is Valentine de Saint-Point: a multi-talented French woman, niece of Lamartine, a poetess, a dancer, a musical actress. This controversial personality became at the same time the official feminine voice of Futurism and, in many senses, a strong challenge to the movement.

The “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman”, subtitled “Answer to F. T. Marinetti”, opens with a transcription from the first “Futurist Manifesto”:

We will glorify war- the world’s only hygiene-militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman (1972:42).

Therefore, from the start she makes clear that her manifesto will be a reply to the Futurists’ attitude towards women. The majority of women are neither superior nor inferior to men, Valentine writes. Both are equally to be despised. It is humanity itself that is mediocre, and, besides, she says, it is absurd to divide it into men and women. Humanity is composed of femininity and masculinity; a complete being, an epic hero or a superman, is the one who is composed of femininity and masculinity. An exclusively virile being is a “brute” in the same way as an exclusively feminine being is just a “female”. Nowadays, she writes, men and women lack “virility”. Hence, Futurism in spite of all

its exaggerations, is correct. Humanity needs a new dogma: “energy”. And, Valentine adds, most probably in search of a compromise with the main principles of Futurism and her own position as a woman:

Mais, dans la période de féminité dans laquelle nous vivons, seule l'exagération contraire est salutaire: *c'est la brute qu' il faut proposer pour modèle* (Lista, 1973:330).

Enough of “weak” women, guarding and taming men, protecting their children from all adventures, dangers and real pleasures; women who guard their daughters from love and their sons from war; over-protective women whose tentacles exhaust life in men and children, because they so excessively love them. But in fact women are not wise, pacifist or good, adds Valentine. They deserve to be an ally in any war, any revolution, and they will be the most fertile trophy to win, since they can multiply themselves.

However, Valentine de Saint-Point does not want to be mistaken for a feminist. Feminism should be avoided, she writes, because “feminism is a political mistake”, as well as a “cerebral mistake”. Valentine is here closely following Marinetti’s ideas on the subject, with the justification that the rights for women as claimed by the feminists will only bring about an “excess of order” and not the desired “futurist disorder”.

In de Saint Point’s opinion, women with political rights and obligations will lose all their “instinctive strength”. Woman has always been tamed by men, she has been a mere nurse of men, she writes. Her instinct has been dismissed, her charm and tenderness have been misused. Nevertheless, in times of war she recognises her true self, – her cruelty, her violence. Enough of preaching spiritual justice to woman! She ought to be unjust like all forces of nature! Free from any control woman will reassume her full sensuality, her right to pleasure, to lust. Lust, she writes, is a strength, it destroys the weak and renews the energy of the strong. The sensuality of the woman is the trophy of the warrior,

she writes, unaware of the enormity of this statement and how it immediately contradicts what she had said before: woman's right to pleasure, to lust. When she then speaks of women as a trophy of war, she is considering woman as man's property, one amongst his other goods; she is defending the right of the winner to plunder the woman's body as "the other man's property", one more of the spoils of war.

"All heroic people are sensual", she writes, underlining one of the most powerful and dangerous futurist themes, the alliance between Sex and War. Virility and heroism go together for Futurism, and they are the core of de Saint-Point's manifesto. At the same time that she proclaims the need for heroic, "virile" women capable of confronting these "soft, feminine times" she encourages women to be stronger than the males, like the Amazons, the Furies, Jeanne d'Arc, she asks women to give up everything before the male-hero, willingly to become the conqueror's trophy, the best symbol of his victory.

By the end of this manifesto, Valentine reproduces the stereotyped polarity of woman as mother or lover. Good mothers are always bad lovers, and mistresses will always be faulty mothers, she says. Even so, these two women complete each other—the woman who conceives a child is creating the future with the past, and the woman who exalts desire carries the future within herself.

As Claudia Salaris writes in *Le Futuriste*, (a seminal critical anthology of the avant-garde women writers in Italy from 1909 to 1944), de Saint-Point's "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman" tries to find a solution for her own unresolvable dilemma of being a "woman supporter of Futurism", which, from its very beginning declares "scorn for woman" as one of its major principles. Hence, reviving the symbolist myth of the androgyne, she imagines a world of heroes and heroines, equally provided with the same qualities of strength and energy. Nevertheless, as the official female voice of the movement, she cannot but give in to Marinetti; with him she rejects "the present state of things", and a world which is going through "times of feminization".

However, the emphasis de Saint-Point puts on the right of women to pleasure and lust and the theory of desire she elaborates are remarkable in such a context. As Salaris says, she deals a strong blow to the idea of sin and the feelings of guilt that enslave women, at the same time that she exalts a polymorphous and pagan eroticism (1982:28).

One year later, in January 1913, Valentine publishes the “Futurist Manifesto of Lust”, where she develops this issue fully. This manifesto is a vehement hymn to desire and lust and the equal right of both sexes to pursue them. One can hear here Marinetti’s voice through Valentine’s protests against romantic love, “the hypnotising complications of sentimentality”, artificial jealousies, ethereal fidelities under the moonlight, and other hypocrisies of love.

Conversely, lust stirs up energy and liberates human strength, writes Valentine. Like her “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman”, the “Manifesto of Lust” is both controversial and contradictory. While, on the one hand, it is quite radical in calling for the demystification of romantic love and the full accomplishment and enjoyment of desire by both sexes, on the other hand it faithfully reproduces the male-centered ideology of the movement:

Lust is the proper tribute of the victors. After a battle where many men have been killed it is natural that the victors, selected by war, will even rape, to recreate life. (transl. from Lista, 1973:333).

“Lust is a strength that kills the weak and exalts the strong”, “lust is a perpetual battle never won”, she repeats in the manifesto, always emphasising the analogy between lust and physical strength, sex and the warrior. In fact, de Saint-Point blindly confuses *lust* with rape; after having reclaimed the right of women to lust, she then says that “lust is the proper tribute of the victor” and women are his most desired “trophy”<sup>27</sup>! De Saint-Point’s

<sup>27</sup> Valentine de Saint-Point’s claims that “Art and War are the greatest demonstrations of sensuality and lust is their flower” (transl. from Lista, *Ibid.*),

naturalisation of rape follows the futurist line which equates War with Lust, the bloodiness of a battle with sexual climax<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the intrinsic contradictions of her argument, one has to acknowledge de Saint-Point's merit in publicly defending, as a woman, the issue of lust and desire, loaded with centuries of social and religious taboos. Physical prudishness, she writes, is an ephemeral social value, which varies according to time and place. She accuses Christian morality of covering lust with a veil and hiding it as a weakness, a vice, a sin. On the other hand, she stresses lust as a source of strength and energy: one must stop masking desire and making it look ridiculous. Only the petty sentimentalities of love are ridiculous. Desire is a virtue, she writes, it is the subtle and brutal attraction of the flesh, no matter of which sex; it has nothing fragile, hypnotising or decadent about it, it is all made of physicality, pleasure and energy. One should make out of it a work of art, informed by instinct and a full knowledge:

With the same full knowledge and will, one must lead the pleasures of coitus to its climax, in order to develop all its possibilities and to make all the flowers of the germs of the united bodies bloom.

---

distinctly echo Marinetti's "La Donna e la Guerra" in *Come Si Seducono le Donne*, where he describes love's strategies in war-like terminology and incites women to prefer soldiers as sexual partners. Woman, he says, is "incomplete", until war comes and gives her "her true flavour" ["Il suo vero sapore", (1933:63)].

- 28 As Anthony Wilden writes in "In the Penal Colony: The body as the Discourse of the Other", in *Semiotica*, 54, (1985:39), "Rape is the act of the conqueror": (...) from ideology and ignorance men deny the reality of rape, deny its history, deny its nature, deny its importance, and deny its violence. Men do not see rape as a physical and mental attack on the body and soul of another human being, but rather a crime against property, as the devaluation of a man's assets, as the invasion of a man's territory, as the violation of the possessor through the possessed (...)  
Rape is not a sexual act, it is a crime of power, a mark of fascism".

One must make out of lust a work of art, made like any other work of art, of instinct and knowledge (transl. from Lista, 1973:334).



In this review of the various Futurist Manifestos a special emphasis has been given to the futurist “revolution in language” and the futurist “eulogy of war” and misogyny. As we shall see in the following chapters of this thesis, those are also the crucial and most polemical subjects debated by Vorticism in the *Blast* texts and manifestos, as well as by Wyndham Lewis in his writings of that period both in essay form and in fiction.





## CHAPTER THREE

### THE VORTICIST MOVEMENT, *BLAST*, AND THE RECEPTION OF FUTURISM IN ENGLAND

This chapter will analyse the launching and formation of the Vorticist movement, and the prominence of Wyndham Lewis as leader and manager, taking into consideration its relationship with Futurism and seeing it in the context of British Modernism. Therefore, the main principles and manifestos of Vorticism will be analysed in order to establish a parallel with those that, as we have just seen, defined and organized the Futurist movement; besides, the knowledge and understanding of the former will provide us with the fundamental means for the analysis of the language, the style and the ideological rhetoric of the texts by Wyndham Lewis that will be studied in Part II of this thesis. Vorticism will also be here analysed in relation to the aesthetic doctrines of leading personalities of the epoch, such as Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme, as well as the philosophy of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche.

#### 1. The reception of Futurism in England

As we know, the first Futurist Manifesto was published in Paris, on the 20th of February 1909. From 1910 to 1914 Filippo Marinetti visited England regularly to give lectures, to perform, and to organize exhibitions. In April 1910, Marinetti came to the Lyceum Club in London to present a “Futurist Speech to the English”. As he said then, he was giving “the signal for the battle”. Following it, many exhibitions were held. One of the most important was held at the Sackville Gallery in March 1912,

having proved a great success at the Bernheim Gallery in Paris the previous month. In 1913 Gino Severini showed his futurist paintings at the Marlborough Galleries. Between November 1913 and June 1914 Marinetti propagandized and declaimed in many clubs and galleries in London. Futurism was infiltrating England and consolidating there.

By 1917, as W. C. Wees writes in *Vorticism and the English Avant-garde*. “Futurist became the favourite appellation for anything new in Art”. And Wees adds:

Because Futurism dominated the public consciousness and became the generic term for everything new in the popular and fine arts, England’s avant-garde artists had to work especially hard to establish a separate identity for themselves (1972:109).

“Futurist” had become the word of the day in the press of the time and a slogan on everybody’s lips, whether with ironical, cynical or appreciative connotations. Thus, English artists had to redefine their own territory in the disputed common ground of the avant-garde of art if they did not want their art to lose its identity and “Englishness” under a foreign appellation.

This anxiety helps to explain the discrepancy in response of English artists to Futurism during the period from 1910 to 1914. Their attitude had to be ambivalent. Personally they acknowledged the impulse which Futurism was bringing to the arts, but, on the other hand, they could not help fearing it as an intrusion. Marinetti, and the undeniable strength of his personality, was simultaneously admired and ridiculed<sup>1</sup>.

---

1 In November 1913, Lewis and his fellows from the “Rebel Art Centre” held a dinner in Marinetti’s honour (at the Florence Restaurant). In a letter written by Lewis to Mrs. Percy Harris he describes the “event” in the following words: “Dear Mrs Harris, I was sorry you did not come to the Cabaret Club last night, as Marinetti declaimed some peculiarly bloodthirsty concoctions with great dramatic force. – He is lecturing at the Doré Galleries at 8. 45 into direct rivalry with the Grand Guignol, I

Moreover, when in 1937 Lewis wrote his first autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, an account of the events he lived through during the Great War years and in what he calls the “great Peace afterwards”, he seems to have preserved in his memory only the things he disliked about Marinetti. In fact, Lewis’s account is a total mythologisation of the events, and he is often inconsistent in their chronology. Marinetti is described as the man “who put Mussolini up to Fascism”, who presumably only became an artist because “Mussolini was the better politician”. So Marinetti out of his frustration had become the creator of the “Futurist Putsch”<sup>2</sup>.

In reality however, Marinetti lectured in May 1914 in the recently created “Rebel Art Centre”, apparently to raise funds for the headquarters of the so-called “rebel artists”. There, as Richard Cork writes, quoting from the R. A. C. prospectus, a room was prophetically being kept empty for the next “-ism” to come along (Cork, 1976:158).

The scornful tone adopted by Lewis in his *Memoirs of 1937* when referring to the Marinetti he knew around 1910 probably does not adequately reflect the reality. Lewis’s strong individualism and his megalomania prevented him from remembering from those times much more than “his school”, “his” pictures, the articles from “his pen” in the daily papers:

But by August 1914 no newspaper was complete without news about “vorticism” and its arch-exponent Mr. Lewis... (1976:32)

---

imagine; but will no doubt be worth hearing”. (In W. K. Rose, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* 1963:53-54).

- 2 In the same chapter of *Blasting and Bombardiering* Lewis describes, fairly or not, a heated argument that he once had in a public lavatory with Marinetti, who was washing his sweaty face after a declamatory session. The row occurred because Marinetti insisted that Lewis should announce himself as a futurist and Lewis, in horror, refused to let himself be acknowledged as such. (From *Blasting and Bombardiering*, “Mr. Wyndham Lewis as Leader of the ‘Great London Vortex’”, 1967:33-35).

And no illustrated paper worth its salt but carried a photograph of some picture of mine or of my “school”, as I have said, or one of myself, smiling insinuatingly from its pages (*Ibid.* p. 36).

A similar cynical and scornful tone can be found in letters Lewis wrote around the same time, criticising Marinetti for his avant-garde mannerisms and theatricalities. For instance, in November 1941, Lewis writes to a publisher, describing the content of his book *The Ideas With Which We Fight*:

Next, the true innards of Fascism are uncovered: its rise traced back to the *cafe-philosopher*. Marinetti, with his *epileptic outpourings* in *praise of speed and force* (the “*father of fascism*: as he was described in Rome when he was fêted some years ago as such) (*The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*. 1963:310, italics mine).

In another letter<sup>3</sup>, dated 15 October 1943, Lewis wrote:

I remember that clown Marinetti (the “father of fascism”) and his bellowing about “passéisms” and his proposal to destroy all the pictures and buildings reminding people of the Past in Italy (*Ibid.* p. 368).

But a less rebarbative attitude to Futurism, notwithstanding the wish to demarcate English art from any foreign tags or alien appropriation, is displayed in Lewis’s “Cubist Room”, the title given to his foreword to the catalogue of the exhibition held by the “London Group” in Brighton from November 1913 to January 1914. This group, formerly known as the “Camden Town Group”, comprised “English Impressionists, Cubists and Others”. The group of painters to which Lewis’s foreword referred was exhibiting in a separate room, which was already a sign

---

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Edgar Preston Richardson, who had recently published *The Way of Western Art 1776-1914* (Cambridge, Mass. 1939).

that they wished to assert themselves to be a distinct group, independent of the Camden Town painters. The latter was the subject of the other foreword to the same catalogue, written by J. B. Manson.

In "Room III. The Cubist Room", Lewis wrote:

This room is chiefly composed of works by a group of painters consisting of Frederick Etchells, Cuthbert Hamilton, Edward Wadsworth, C. R. W. Nevison and the writer of this foreword. These painters are not accidentally associated here, but form a vertiginous, but not exotic, island in the placid and respectable archipelago of English art. This formation is undeniably of volcanic matter and even origin; for it appeared suddenly above the waves following certain seismic shakings beneath the surface. It is very closely knit and admirably adapted to withstand the imperturbable Britannic breakers which roll pleasantly against its sides (1969b):56-57).

Here, in a language full of metaphors of power and violence, which evokes the imagery of Marinetti's manifestos and echoes his triple symbolism of the natural elements, the machine and the arrogance of the modern man who defies the one and identifies himself with the other, Lewis reviews the situation of art at the time. He looks at the different "isms" and analyses the experiences of different groups then in existence promoting the work of the group of painters and sculptors, (e. g., Jacob Epstein) to which he is attached, as representing a new shift in art after Cubism and Futurism. Curiously, in his foreword, Lewis acknowledges the fact that there is a certain common ground to all "revolutionary painting" of the time:

(...) the rigid reflections of steel and stone in the spirit of the artist; that desire for stability as though a machine were being built to fly or kill with; an alienation from the traditional photographer's trade and realization of the value of colour and form as such,

independently of what recognizable form it covers or encloses (*Ibid.* p. 57).

However, he dissociates the group he represents from all other such groups, and particularly from the movement known as “Post-Impressionism”, which he calls “a pointless name invented by a journalist”, for which “Futurism” is a better word. But Futurism, he says, was patented in Milan and is an Italian version of the avant-garde in modern painting; it is “the art practised by the five or six Italian painters grouped beneath Marinetti’s influence” (*Ibid.* p. 56). Its meaning is, Lewis sarcastically adds, “the Present with the Past rigidly excluded, and flavoured strongly with H. G. Wells’ dreams of the dance of monstrous and arrogant machinery, to the frenzied clapping of men’s hands” (*Ibid.*)<sup>4</sup>.

Cubism, to which Lewis always felt more deeply attached, is defined here as an art “superbly severe and morose”, started by the “genius of Cézanne and his indiscriminate and grand labour”. It is the “reconstruction of a simpler earth, left as choked and muddy fragments by him”, (*Ibid.*) which indeed comes closer to the “geometrical bases and structure of life” that Lewis defines as the material on which the newly formed group of artists worked to create the “abstract and transposed universes” of their paintings (*Ibid.* p. 57).

## 2. The Rebel Art Centre

The practical outcome of the claim put forward in the “Cubist Room” as to the existence of a group within the “London

---

<sup>4</sup> Lewis will say later in 1915, in “The Review of Contemporary Art”, published in *Blast II*, p. 40, and also in *Wyndham Lewis on Art* (1969:63), that the Futurists had taken over “the plastic and the real, rather than the scientific, parts of the practice of the Cubists”, but that they did not improve in creativity the “force of invention and taste” of the Cubists. Of course, Lewis does not miss the opportunity to say here that this is in part the fault of Marinetti’s “propaganda” and “pedantry”.

Group” was the formation of the Rebel Art Centre in Great Ormond Street, with Lewis as organizer and Kate Lechmere as financial supporter.

To the R. A. C. belonged the artists already mentioned as the exhibitors of the “Cubist Room”, plus David Bomberg, Ezra Pound, C. R. W. Nevinson, Gaudier-Brzeska, Richard Aldington, the young William Roberts, Kate Lechmere, Helen Saunders and Jessica Dismorr. The ideas of the philosopher T. E. Hulme had an important role, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, although he was not openly associated with the group. He used to hold his own “Salon” at 67 Frith Street, where different fractions of the artistic milieu met regularly, thus showing his wish to safeguard the independence of his own theories of art from those of the Rebels. His relationship with the latter was however that of an attentive and interested observer who, departing from close observation and practical analysis, formulated his theories of modern art, and sought the principles of Classicism in Humanist, Renaissance and Romantic thought and art. (As an aside, it is interesting to know that later on his marriage with Kate Lechmere contributed to the disruption and closing down of the R. A. C. in July 1914).

A word should be said about the total oblivion to which the women who belonged to the R. A. C. are usually relegated. As a matter of fact, their presence and commitment there went beyond the painting and sewing of the R. A. C. curtains and the tea on Saturday afternoons, which Lewis thought was rather “a job for *women*, not *artists*”<sup>5</sup>. For similar reasons, Nevinson would publicly announce that he would have liked to get rid of those “damned women”, but ironically, the Centre depended first and foremost on the financial support of “female resources”, as even Lewis himself was forced to admit (*Ibid.*).

---

5 Reference taken from Richard Cork’s interview with Kate Lechmere in *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, “The Rebel Art Centre and Gaudier Brzeska”, (1976:148).

The position that Helen Saunders and Jessica Dismorr occupied in the R. A. C., in Kate Lechmere's words, was that of "little lap-dogs who wanted to be Lewis's slaves and do everything for him" (*Ibid.* p. 150). This shows how insecure they felt their position was amongst the male-dominated Centre, where their "gender-determined" role of serving the afternoon tea was regarded as preferable to that of potential rivals, competing on the same level. For obvious reasons, Kate Lechmere's position had to be different, so her name appears side by side with Lewis's on the R. A. C. Prospectus as "Director".

Another woman was occasionally present at the Centre, receiving special treatment: Dorothy Shakespeare, Pound's wife. She only made a minor contribution to *Blast 2*, with a decoration and an illustration, but she was quite independent in her own work, wanting to preserve it from Pound's influence and avoid being overshadowed by him.

Thus, later on, when the "Vorticist Manifesto" was written and *Blast* published, the Vorticists could not help acknowledging the Suffragette Movement, their energy and subversion, though at the same time they also could not help using an appallingly patronizing tone<sup>6</sup>.

With regard to the Rebel Art Centre and its projects, it is known that, when opening their doors, they also aimed to make it a venue for "public discussion, lectures, gatherings of people... (to) familiarise those who are interested with the ideas of the great modern revolution in Art" (Cork, 1976:158). As such, Lewis, Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska would teach painting,

6 "To Suffragettes: A word of advice. In destruction, as in other things, stick to what you understand. We make you a present of your votes. Only leave works of Art alone. You might some day destroy a good picture by accident. Then! Mais soyez bonnes filles! Nous vous aimons! We admire your energy, you and the artists are the only things (you don't mind being called things?) left in England with a little life in them (...)" (*Blast I*, p. 151, the letter type is not reproduced here). In the open letter To Suffragettes, there is also an implicit reference to Mary Richardson's attack to Velázquez's "Rokeby Venus", at the National Gallery, on 10 March 1914.



poetry and sculpture as well as the principles underlying Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism. But, funnily enough, as Richard Cork points out in *Vorticism and its Allies*, only two students wanted to enrol: “a crackpot inventor who wanted to improve the design of gasbrackets, and a lady pornographer” (1974:17).

The menace of Futurism was however always heavily felt, together with the constant and intrusive presence of Marinetti. The English artists just needed a pretext to break the umbilical cord that linked them to the patronizing Italian futurists. A disquieting atmosphere had already been created by frequent and unpleasant friction between Lewis and Marinetti, but the final blow was to be given by another event: the publication of the “Manifesto of the Vital English Art”, signed jointly by Marinetti and C. R. W. Nevinson, another R. A. C. member. It was published in *The Observer* of June 7th 1914, as a protest against the “passéism” of English art, and urged the public to recognize the effort of those English artists who, being “futurist painters”, were engaged in the task of promoting the “Vital English Art”. The Manifesto ended with a list of names – the Rebel artists – and Marinetti’s and Nevinson’s signature. The address given was that of the Rebel Art Centre. Naturally, this provoked great rage amongst the Rebels, especially Lewis, and as a response, a letter of repudiation was published in the daily papers from 11th to the 15th of June, accusing Marinetti and Nevinson of abuse and absolving the Rebels from any connection with Futurism whatsoever<sup>7</sup>.

7 In this letter the following passages could be read: “There are certain artists in England who do not belong to the Royal Academy nor to any of the passéist groups, and who do not on that account agree with the futurism of Sig. Marinetti. An assumption of such agreement either by Sig. Marinetti or by his followers is an impertinence. We, the undersigned, whose ideas were mentioned or implied, or who might by the opinion of others be implicated, beg to dissociate ourselves from the “futurist” manifesto which appeared in the pages of the *Observer* on Sunday June 7th (Signed). Richard Aldington, David Bomberg, Frederick Etchells, Edward Wadsworth, Ezra Pound, Lawrence Atkinson, Gaudier Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton, W. Roberts, Wyndham Lewis”. (From *The Egoist*, 15 June 1914).

Moreover, when the Marinetti/Nevinson Manifesto was read aloud on the 12th of June, the Rebels protested noisily and created scenes of chaos and, again, news of the events was published in the daily papers<sup>8</sup>.

Thus it is not by chance that the issue of *The Egoist* of the 15th June 1914 which published the Rebels' letter of repudiation also included an article by Ezra Pound and another by Gaudier-Brzeska, referring to the outstanding quality of Lewis's work and declaring that it marked "a new evolution in painting". It was a public acknowledgement of the fact that a new and genuinely English movement was already in existence, totally independent of any foreign "-isms" and with Lewis as its unquestionable leader.

"Plan of War" and "Timon of Athens" (1913) were the paintings by Lewis that were first acknowledged as examples of Vorticist aesthetics, as well as a premonition of war. Pound comments on them in the following terms:

I think that Mr Lewis has got into his work something which I recognise as the voice of my own age, an age which has not come into its own, which is different from any other age which has yet expressed itself intensely... We have in Mr Lewis our most articulate voice (*Ibid.* p. 234).

---

8 In the same chapter that I have been referring to, "Mr. Wyndham Lewis as leader of the *Great London Vortex*", (in *Blasting and Bombardiering*), Lewis gives an account of those events, which he calls the Nevinson's "Putsch", calling Nevinson a "interloper and a heretic" (p. 35). However, according to Nevinson's Memoirs, *Paint and Prejudice*, the enmity and "jealousy" of Lewis against him had started long ago, when Marinetti had been given a welcome dinner by the Rebels at the Florence Restaurant in November 1913. The affinities and closeness then established between Marinetti and Nevinson had provoked bitter feelings of resentment in Lewis. Nevinson seemed to regret this situation and he was still able to write in his Memoirs: "I found Lewis the most brilliant theorist I had ever met" (1937:56).

He goes on wanting to make sure that this new aesthetics owed nothing to Futurism:

This is not Futurism. The futurists are evidently ignorant of tradition. They have learned from their grandfathers that such and such a thing were done in 1850 and they conclude that 1850 was all “the past”. We do not desire to cut ourselves off from the great art of any period, we only demand a recognition of contemporary great art... A belief that great art will always be like the art of 1850 is “passéism”, a belief that great art will always be like art of 1911 is “futurism”. One hopes that one is not afflicted by either of these diseases (*Ibid.*).

These categoric refusals to acknowledge the influence of Futurism on English art, or even the importance and meaning of Futurism to the aesthetics of the avant-garde, are derived from the need that the English avant-garde had to assert its own identity in all its genuine Englishness. It must also be stressed that Pound’s article in *The Egoist* was published only a week after the “Manifesto of Vital English Art”, which precisely evidences Marinetti’s patronizing attitude towards the English artists. This manifesto starts with Marinetti speaking in the first person:

I am an Italian Futurist poet, and a passionate admirer of England. I wish, however, to cure English Art of that most grave of all maladies – passéism. I have the right to speak plainly and without compromise, and together with my friend Nevinson, an English Futurist painter, to give the signal for battle<sup>9</sup>.

This “signal for battle”, in fact, had already been given four years earlier, when Marinetti gave his *Futurist Speech to the English* at the Lyceum Club of London. Then, in 1910, Marinetti praised the English for their “indomitable bellicose patriotism”,

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from *The Observer*, 7th June 1914.

the “national pride” that guided their “great muscularly courageous race”; their “potent individualism” ; their “unbridled passion for every kind of struggle”<sup>10</sup>. Similarly in 1914, he and Nevinson would say in their Manifesto:

We want:

1 – (...)

2 – That English artists strengthen their Art by a recuperative optimism, a fearless desire of adventure, a heroic instinct of discovery, a worship of strength and a physical and moral courage – all sturdy virtues of the English race.

The objection to English “passéism” is present in both texts. In 1910 Marinetti said in the “Futurist Speech to the English”:

To a degree you are the victims of your traditionalism and its medieval trappings... you lack both a sharp, adventurous love of ideas and an impulse toward the unknowns of the imagination; you lack a passion for the future and a thirst for revolution... you adore the fine swift machines that deflower the earth, sea and clouds, yet you carefully preserve every least remnant of the past! (*Ibid.* pp. 60-64).

The tone of these recriminations against the “passéism” of English artists became stronger in the 1914 manifesto:

The worship of tradition and the conservatism of Academies, the commercial acquiescence of English artists, the effeminacy of their art and their complete absorption towards a purely decorative sense<sup>11</sup>.

---

10 From the “Futurist Speech to the English” in Marinetti’s *Selected Writings* by R. W. Flint, (1972:59).

11 It is also worthwhile comparing both manifestos with respect to the definition of English psychology, which each of them provides. In the “Futurist Speech to the English”, Marinetti said:

### 3. Blast and the launching of Vorticism

Thus we can see that Marinetti's campaign for the subversion of English art had started quite early, and his words of encouragement as well as his "discourtesies" to the English had been very welcome during his frequent visits to England. It is therefore no wonder that by 1914 he felt he had gained enough ground and supporters of his cause to be able to say that he had "the right to speak plainly and without compromise" of art and the artists of England from within. He called on them to create a "powerful advance guard" to save English art, and at the same time asked for the public to give support to its "pioneers" and "advancers".

But these same pioneers of English art, ignoring his appeal, and even offended by it, decided to go a step further and present the public with a document totally of their own formulation. Thus, the first issue of *Blast* was published on July 2nd 1914 and with it the Manifesto of the Vorticists.

No doubt the publishing of *Blast* was hastened by the "Vital English Art" Manifesto. The date shown on the front page is June 20th, though it was the following month before it reached the public. Moreover, *Blast* had already been advertised in *The Egoist* of April 1st, but with no reference to "Vorticism" at that

---

Your obsessive mania is to be always chic. For love of the *chic* you always renounce passionate action, violence of heart, exclamation, shouts and even tears. (...) This is how an obsessive desire unfolds in you, to save appearances at any price, a base, finicking mania for etiquette, masks, and screens of every sort, invested by *prudence* and a hypocritical morality (...). I allude to your snobbery, whether it consists of a mad, exclusive cult of racial purity, in your aristocracy, or whether it creates a kind of religion out of fashion (...). I also refer to your dogmatic and imperious norms for good living and the sacred tables of *comme il faut*, in the light of which you despise and abolish, with an astonishing light-heartedness, the fundamental worth of the individual (Flint, 1972:60-61).

This recriminating tone is maintained by Marinetti and Nevinson in their manifesto "Vital English Art":

The sentimentality with which you load your pictures – to compensate perhaps, for your praiseworthy utter lack of sentimentality in life.

time. Its contents were advertised as: “A discussion of Cubism, Futurism, Imagism, and all Vital Forms of Modern Art. The Cube. The Pyramid”.

The subtitle, “Review of the great English Vortex” was a later addition. The public was informed in the *Spectator* of June 13th that *Blast*, the new quarterly magazine about to come out, would include a “Manifesto of the Vorticists”.

It is only from that time on that the word “Vorticist” was publicly used even though it might have been used previously by Pound, as Cork affirms<sup>12</sup>. Cork’s thesis is that it is likely that the word “Vortex” (and the emphasis on “Vorticism”) was only later added to *Blast*, since only the first and the last texts in *Blast* use it, and in between “the great mass of intervening writing in the periodical scarcely contains an acknowledgement to Vorticism’s existence”. Lewis would then have written his own article on “The Vortex”, “Long Live the Vortex!”, and asked Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska to write their own. Cork goes even further, referring to a handwritten note by Lewis<sup>13</sup> in which he had written: “Blast – the bimonthly organ of Blasticism”<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, as it reached the public on July 2nd, *Blast*, as the “Review of the Great English Vortex”, contained anachronisms due both to a previous attachment to Futurism which was diffi-

12 According to Cork, Pound was the first to use the word “Vorticist”. First, in a letter to William Carlos Williams on December 19th 1913, where he expressed his uncertainties about the quality and meaning of the art that he and the group of artists he was involved with were producing. In another letter of the 10th March 1916 to John Quinn, he describes some of Lewis’s paintings as the most refined and accomplished use of the vortex technique: “every kind of whirlwind of force and emotion. Vortex. That is the right word, if I did find it myself”.

13 This note was kept with other unsigned papers of Lewis’s in the Department of Rare Books, Cornell University.

14 *In Paint and Prejudice* Nevinson gives us his own version of the creation of the title *Blast*: “Lewis was at that time anxious to produce a paper somehow on the lines of the Futurist Manifestos. He asked me to help him and I went so far as to suggest the title, which was Blast (1937:60).

cult to gloss over or rectify in some of the texts, and the desire to emphasize the rejection of Futurism which was prominent in others. It is this area that I now propose to concentrate on.

#### 4. The Reception of Blast and Vorticism

First, it is interesting to note the kind of reception *Blast* received. The 15th September 1914 issue of *The Little Review* announced *Blast* in an editorial. The tone of this editorial is throughout light and humorous, but it nevertheless shows the kind of expectations and even the apprehension that *Blast's* avant-gardism created in the artistic milieu:

*Blast* is the name of a new magazine, published in London by John Lane. Let us take it as it comes. The cover – after you have seen the cover you know all – is of a peculiar brilliancy, something between magenta and lavender, about the colour of an acute sick-headache. Running slantingly across both the front and the back is the single word *Blast* in solid black-faced type three inches high. That is all, but is it enough. Inside there is much food for thought. At least one feels sure there must be much food for thought, if only one could come near enough to understanding it to think about it. (...) So the quarterly street-urchin makes his bow on the literary stage. How much of this singular make-up will prove to be juvenile spleen and how much genuine integrity only time can tell. In the meanwhile his tongue is in his cheek<sup>15</sup>.

An article by Richard Aldington on the appearance of *Blast* was especially interesting in terms of a definition of “Vorticism” from the “inside”, since Aldington was involved in the production of the magazine. In his article, published in *The Egoist* of July 15th 1914, Aldington first welcomes *Blast* for being “a periodical which is designed to be the organ for new,

<sup>15</sup> *The Little Review*. 15th September 1914, pp. 33-34.

vigorous art in England”. Then, he stresses that the protests that *Blast* excited in its reviewers were surprisingly at odds with the “extra-ordinary amount of interest” that “a large section of the public” had been showing about it.

This is enough for Aldington to affirm that the Press “intentionally mis-represents the purpose and achievement” of *Blast*. Then, wanting to define precisely what kind of art it is that *Blast* postulates, he says that this “purely English art” is “quite naturally energetic, tremendously energetic, serious mostly, but with frequent British grins, and rather religious”<sup>16</sup>.

He then stresses the quality of Lewis’s *Enemy of the Stars*, though adding that he does not “understand it in the traditional “sense, but, as one understands a geometric problem or a legal document”. However, in contemplating it, he is able to share the emotion its author felt when creating it, which after all is what matters in relation to a work of art. The reproduction of pictures by the “Vorticists” also attracted Aldington’s attention and, while admitting that he is not an art critic, he goes on to claim that the Vorticist painters “have created something new like a new form of art”. He emphasizes the fact that Vorticism does not kill his enjoyment of the great works of the past. Vorticism only kills “any lingering feelings for imitative art – I mean art which was not the expression of anything of its own time but merely a copy of some earlier period” (*Ibid.* p. 273). The end of Aldington’s article is propagandizing:

Vorticism is the death of necrology in art. Only, I think, a pious wish that these painters and writers will continue to publish stuff as good as that in the first number (*Ibid.*).

So, while the great public, as well as the connoisseurs and the art critics, were divided in their judgements, Vorticism was insinuating its way into and consolidating its place not only in

<sup>16</sup> *The Egoist* 15th July 1914, p. 272.



the art scene but also in every-day life, from fashion to furniture, struggling to find a new language more adequate to the era of machine and speed.

When in January 14th 1915 Ezra Pound wrote an article about “Vorticism” in *The New Age*, he redefined it using much the same language in which he had written the article “Vortex” for *Blast I*. In both texts he stressed the representation of energy, of mechanical efficiency, of concentrated power; a refusal of mimesis in art; and an emphasis on the “primary pigment”, the image in poetry, sound in music, form in design, colour in painting, movement in dance. However, the new emphasis of the 1915 text is on the justification of Vorticism as a “legitimate expression of life” (p. 278). He says:

The political world is confronted with a great war, a species of insanity. The art world is confronted with a species of quiet and sober sanity called Vorticism... (p. 277).

Wanting to explain how Vorticism is not “meaningless” or “inexpressive”, but an “organization of forces” expressing “a confluence of forces”, he uses the following concrete example:

If you clap a strong magnet beneath a plateful of iron filings, the energies of the magnet will proceed to organise form. It is only by applying a particular and suitable force that you can bring order and vitality and thence beauty into a plate of iron filings, which are otherwise as “ugly” as anything under heaven (*Ibid.*).

In art, the arrangement of forms is, he says, called “expression”. Vorticism has brought a new arrangement of forms, producing different and new ways of seeing them. Perceiving the changing reality and expressing it in an accordingly “refreshed” form is the primary objective of Vorticism. And in a curious note, still with futurist echoes but in a much less harsh tone, he ends the article:

Note that I am not trying to destroy anyone's enjoyment of the Quattrocento, nor the Victory of Samothrace, nor any kind of work of art which is approximately the best of its kind. I state that there is a new gamut of artistic enjoyments and satisfactions; that vorticist painting is not meaningless; and that anyone who cares to may enjoy it (p. 278).

In 1913, Horace B. Samuel published a collection of essays, *Modernities*, in which he proposed to analyse the “spirit of modernity”. The ten studies he collected were devoted to outstanding individuals who had contributed to that movement since the French Revolution and up to 1913. Thus, amongst Stendhal, Heinrich Heine, Benjamin Disraeli, Friedrich Nietzsche, August Strindberg, Marie Corelli, Frank Wedekind, Arthur Schnitzler and Emile Verhaeren, there is an essay on Marinetti and “The Future of Futurism”. The latter had already been published in an issue of the *Fortnightly Review*. Samuel claims that the Futurist Weltanschauung is a legitimate representation of the Zeitgeist, a position which is close to Pound's defence of Vorticism as a “legitimate expression of life”, issuing from a specific context. Samuel supports the view that the Futurist aesthetic of “speed” and “machine” stops being ostentatious extravagance when understood as an “exaltation of the real impetus of life” (p. 218), an attempt to recreate the unity between Art and Life at a time when “steel, pride, fever and speed” make 20th century western civilization vibrate with emotion and thrills. In fact, as I suggested in Chapter Two of this thesis, (section 3. 1), the aesthetics of Futurism can “be understood as a form of “realism”, for its insistence on the immediate relation between art and life, as expressed through the different manifestos. The futurist preference for the manifesto as literary genre, as well as the open-air performances and public proclamations, are themselves already signs of the wish to transgress the literary conventions<sup>17</sup>. Besides, the

17 Vide the manifesto “La Bataglia di Venezia”, by Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà and Russolo, which was proclaimed with a public distribution of manifestos from the Tower of St. Marco in Venice and was followed by Marinetti's

futurist aesthetic was at the same time realist and “avant-gardist” in its very wish to intervene in spheres of public life which were then considered unorthodox, e. g., the art of photography, the music-hall, theatre, cinema, fashion, the woman question, politics, and so on.

In “The Future of Futurism”, Samuel claims that the Futurists’ “sublime vehemence of war and the aggressive fury of youth” and Marinetti’s “strident hallelujahs of the new god of sweat and agony and tension”, are essentially “a concentrated manifestation of the whole vital impetus of the 20th century” (1913:237). In this perspective, the futurist celebration of an aesthetics of dynamism and movement is no historical anachronism, but is in fact in syntony with the *Zeitgeist*, e. g., the idea of Progress, Speed, Machinery and the War itself, as a spectre of chaos and social upheaval. On the individual level, the Freudian studies in the human unconscious also supported the ideas of movement and dynamism. As Samuel writes:

As, according to our latest and most fashionable metaphysical authority, the ego, whether of a man, an insect, or a cosmos, is merely a movement, it should not strike us as altogether unreasonable if the dynamic idea of movement should enter very prominently into the Futurist paintings. (*Ibid.* p. 220)

The idea that the Futurist “world view” is in fact an articulation of the reality it stems from, rather than the vain and frivolous nonsense-art that some people still seem to believe it is, is expressed in a very interesting way by Marinetti himself in one of his many interviews with the London newspapers, in this case the *Evening News* of 4 March 1912. First, praising London for being a true futurist city, he says to the interviewer:

---

“Speech to the Venetians”, which provoked great scandal (vide Chapt II, section 3. 1 of this thesis); the Manifesto “Il Vestito Anti-Neutrale” by Balla and its propaganda in the coloured futurist clothes used by Marinetti and his supporters; “Zang Tumb Tuuum”, the long poem where Marinetti rehearsed his “Parole in Libertà”, (vide Appendix III of this thesis).

Look at those brilliant-hued motor buses, these enormous, glaring posters. Look at the coloured electric lights that flash advertisements in the night. Look at these comfortable interiors, replete with modern appliances, and devoid of any of those superfluities that (your) old-fashioned painters rejoice in.

Then he questions the interviewer as to why English painters live in nostalgic longings for the past, imagining they live in the pastoral age when they are really living in the midst of industrial conflict.

If it is a rest they want, why call it art? Pleasure is not art. The only true art is found in new sensations. You must come to art to learn, not to enjoy.

Then, describing his emotions when travelling by tube in London, he says he experienced a “totally new idea of motion, of speed”, and he ends up by saying:

That is what your own artists fail to give you. Turner once painted an engine, but it was a dead engine, just its outside appearance, not its soul, the soul of power and speed.

And he adds: “In fact, our movement might better be described as ‘presentism’ than as futurism”.

## 5. The Vorticist Manifestos

“The Great Preliminary Vortex” is the first text that strikes the reader of *Blast*; it is a sort of summary in pamphlet form of the vorticist argument against Futurism. It starts with a toast, “Long Live The Vortex!”, and is a greeting to *Blast*. It opposes the mythologisation of the future as well as the total rejection of the past:

We stand for the Reality of the Present – not for the sentimental Future, or the sacripant Past (*Blast* p. 7).

The Futurists in their first manifesto were anticipating the glory of the “future”:

We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed<sup>18</sup>.

The Vorticists scorned the futurist extremes in an attempt to emphasize the differences that existed between them:

We do not want to make people wear Futurist patches, or fuss men to take to pink and sky-blue trousers (*Blast Ibid.*).

For the Futurists, the design of their colourful and eccentric clothes was meant as a sign of their irreverent attitude towards the world, revealing their wish to intervene “futuristically”, i. e. provocatively, in Fashion, till then considered more as a craft than as an art:

We must destroy all Passéist clothes and everything about them which is tight-fitting, colourless, funereal, decadent, boring and unhygienic... We must invent Futurist clothes, hap-hap-hap-hap-

---

18 Translated from the 1st “Futurist Manifesto” in Flint, R. W. *Marinetti – Selected Writings*. (1972:41). The original version is the following: Nous sommes sur le promontoire extrême des siècles! À quoi bon regarder derrière nous, du moment qu’il nous faut défoncer les vantaux mystérieux de l’Impossible? Le Temps et l’Espace sont morts hier. Nous vivons déjà dans l’absolu, puisque nous avons déjà crée l’éternelle vitesse omniprésente (*Le Figaro*, Paris 1909).

happy clothes, daring clothes with brilliant colours and dynamic lines<sup>19</sup>.

Meanwhile the Vorticists said:

We do not want to change the appearance of the world, because we are not Naturalists, Impressionists or Futurists (the latest form of Impressionism), and do not depend on the appearance of the world for our art (*Blast Ibid.*).

Lewis and Pound see Futurism as a realization of an art of the past, Impressionism, and criticize it heavily. In his article “Vortex” in *Blast*, Pound wrote:

Impressionism, Futurism, which is only an accelerated sort of Impressionism, *deny* the vortex. They are the *Corpses of Vortices...* Marinetti is a Corpse (p. 154).

In the article “Review of Contemporary Art”, which has already been referred to, Lewis often establishes the parallel between Futurism and Impressionism. But he insists he is focusing his attention on the person of Marinetti:

---

<sup>19</sup> Translated in Apollonio, U. *Futurist Manifestos* (1973:132), from Giacomo Balla’s “Il Vestito Antineutrale – Manifesto Futurista”, which was only published in 1967 by M. Faggiolo Dell’Arco in *Omaggio a Balla*. This manifesto, which was undated, was probably written at the beginning of 1914. A later version was published by Marinetti, on 11 September, who added to it a political and war-like dimension, as referred by Giovanni Lista in *Marinetti et le Futurisme*. (1977:208). The Italian extract which is transcribed here is from this later version: “L’umanità si vesti sempre di *quiete*, di *paura*, di *cautela* o d’*indecisione*, portò sempre il lutto, o il piviale, o il mantello. Il corpo dell’uomo fu sempre diminuito da sfumature e da tinte *neutre*, avvilito dal nero, soffocato da cinture, imprigionato da panneggiamenti... Noi futuristi vogliamo liberare la nostra razza da ogni neutralità, dall’*indecisione* paurosa e quietista, dal pessimismo negatore...” (Taylor, C. 1979:79).

(...) They (the futurists) are too observant, impressionistic and scientific; they are too democratic and subjugated by indiscriminate objects, such as Marinetti's moustache<sup>20</sup>.

Again in "Long Live the Vortex!" Lewis refers to an ongoing polemic between himself and Marinetti, in which he attempts to hold the Italian movement and its entrepreneur up to ridicule:

Automobilism (Marinettism) bores us. We don't want to go about making a hulla-balloo about motor cars, any more than about knives and forks, elephants or gas-pipes... The futurist is a sensational and sentimental mixture of the aesthete of 1890 and the realist of 1870 (*Blast* p. 8).

Beyond the sardonic tone of this statement lies a perceptive definition of Futurism, touching on two of its essential assets: on one hand the futurist sensationalist and sentimentalist rhetoric, on the other the struggle of Futurism to assert as "realist" its "fin-de-siècle" aesthetic Utopia.

This "sensational and sentimental mixture" of aestheticism and realism which is conveyed in each futurist manifesto, constitutes the futurist plea against the past and tradition in art, but also establishes on a larger scale, the futurist "worldview", echoing the Rimbaudian demand to "change life". The first "Futurist Manifesto" proclaims it more passionately than any other futurist text:

The oldest of us is thirty: even so we have already scattered treasures, a thousand treasures of force, love, courage, astuteness and raw will-power; have thrown them impatiently away, with fury, carelessly, unhesitatingly, breathless and unresting... Look at us! We are still untired! Our hearts know no weariness because they

---

<sup>20</sup> In Michel and Fox *Wyndham Lewis on Art* (1969b):63), and also quoted in *Blast* 2., p. 40.

are fed with fire, hatred and speed!... Does that amaze you? It should, because you can never remember having lived! Erect on the summit of the world, once again, we hurl our defiance to the stars! (Apollonio, 1973:24).

Lewis wrote two articles for *The New Weekly* of 30th May and 20th June 1914, the first called “A Man of the Week. Marinetti”, and the other simply called “Automobilism”. In consequence of these, “Automobilism” equated with “Marinettism” became a recurrent joke among the Vorticists<sup>21</sup>. Its origin can be traced back to the first “Futurist Manifesto”, where Marinetti writes his well-known praise of the racing car and the machine:

We affirm that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grape-shot is more beautiful than the “Victory of Samothrace”<sup>22</sup>.

---

21 In both articles Lewis, in spite of the irony of his tone and the direct criticism he makes of Marinetti, does not hide his admiration for him either. In “A Man of the Week” he says the following: “ (...) You know Marinetti as an individual crackling with good sense, (...) as the inventor of genial tags such as his excellent one, “Futuriste”, and recognise in him one of the personal landmarks of our time (...)”. In the other text Lewis praises Marinetti’s vitality and affirms that he will attend the first lecture Marinetti would give to celebrate his divorce from “Automobilism”. However, as this vitality is “untranslatable”, the English artists had to find “a more direct expression of the Northern character. ” And Lewis ends this article by writing: “But England has needed these foreign auxiliaries to put her energies to right and restore order. Marinetti’s services, in this Home of aestheticism, crass snobbery and languors of distinguished flegm, are great. ”

22 Translated in Apollonio’s *Futurist Manifestos* (1973:21), from the original French version: “Nous déclarons que la splendeur du monde s’est enrichie d’une beauté nouvelle: la beauté de la vitesse. Une automobile de course avec son coffre orné de gros tuyaux tels des serpents à l’haleine explosive... une automobile rugissante, qui a l’air de courir sur de la mitraille, est plus belle que la Victoire de Samothrace” (sic Lista, G. *Futurisme – Manifestes – Proclamations – Documents*, 1973:87).



Another text in *Blast* which seems to have been written specifically to emphasize the differences between Vorticism and Futurism is Lewis's "Our Vortex". The "Vortex" is there defined vis-a-vis Futurism and its main tenets, as is also the case in Pound's text on the "Vortex". First we have "passéism" and the futurist emphasis on modern art as generically futurist art:

Our vortex is not afraid of the Past: it has forgotten its existence. Our vortex regards the Future as sentimental as the Past. The Future is distant, like the Past, and therefore sentimental (*Blast* p. 147).

Further on Lewis writes: "The new vortex plunges to the art of the Present" (*Ibid.* p. 148). This statement does not mark an unbridgeable gap between Futurism and Vorticism, since, as already mentioned, Marinetti was the first to have said, as early as 1912, that "futurism" was not the best name for the movement he represented; "presentism" was in fact more suitable.

Lewis's "Our Vortex" continues in its pamphleteering tone, putting forward the claims of Vorticism as the art of the Present, while at the same time "blasting" the Past and the Future with the obvious aim of attacking two different enemies: futurists and classicists.

The third arrow directly aimed at the futurists is the eulogy of Vorticist stillness against the futurist fuss about machines and speed:

In a vorticist universe we don't get excited at what we have invented... We hunt machines, they are our favourite game (...) (*Blast* p. 148). Our vortex is fed up with your dispersals, reasonable chicken-men (*Ibid.* p. 179).

The Vorticist, Lewis concludes, unlike the Futurist, "is at his maximum point of energy when stillest, because the Vorticist is not the Slave of Commotion but its Master" (*Ibid.* p. 148).

Lewis's article "The Melodrama of Modernity", also published in *Blast*, is the source of a polemic around the authenticity of *Blast* as "the organ of Vorticism". In fact, the formulation of "The Melodrama of Modernity" sounds prior to Lewis's anti-futurist claims: its announcement of *Blast*, makes the latter sound closer to Futurism than to any other contemporary "-ism". This slip might be explained by the rush in which *Blast* was published, as a reply to the publication of Marinetti's and Nevinson's "Manifesto of the Vital English Art". The tone of this text is much less acrimonious than the majority of the others we have been looking at. In spite of its patronising attitude, typical of Lewis, it is mainly ironical. Lewis shows himself and the English modern artist to be totally indebted to the movement of renovation in art brought about by Futurism and he accords due respect to the vitality of its main propagandist. He says:

As "futurist" in England does not mean anything more than a painter, either a little, or very much, occupying himself with questions of a renovation of art, and showing a tendency to rebellion against the domination of the Past, it is not necessary to correct it. We may hope before long to find a new word (*Blast* p. 142).

It is astonishing to find such a confession here, since "Vorticist" was the word being launched with *Blast*, with the precise intention of replacing "Futurist", which, according to Pound ("Vortex" in *Blast*), was a word of the past, a corpse:

Of all the tags going, "futurist" for general application, serves as well as any for the active painters of today... It is especially justifiable here in England where no particular care or knowledge of the exact (or any other in matters of art) signification of this word exist (p. 143).

The second part of this article is rather harsher, since it is directed against Marinetti, but it has nothing of the usual

linguistic aggressiveness that Lewis uses in other texts. Besides repeating the usual attacks on Futurism- “Impressionism up-to-date”, and “Automobilism and Nietzsche stunt”, Lewis says the following of Marinetti:

With a lot of good sense and vitality at his disposal, he hammers away in the blunt mechanism of his Manifestos, at the *idee fixe* of Modernity... This is of great use when one considers with what sort of person the artist today has to deal (*Blast* p. 143).

In addition, the provocative definition that Lewis gives here of Futurism is still very common today amongst traditional art historians and orthodox criticism:

Futurism, then, in its narrow sense and in the history of modern Painting, is a picturesque, superficial and romantic rebellion of young Milanese painters against the Academism which surrounded them (*Ibid.*).

What Lewis calls the “Melodrama of Modernity” is the Futurists’ “picturesque” and their “spectacular insistence” on a particular “Automobilist” subject-matter “motor omnibuses, cars, lifts (*sic*: sc. ‘lifts’ ?), aeroplanes, etc.” (*Ibid.* p. 144). Lewis advises them to get away from these, emphasizing the incentive Futurism was offering to the modern artist, and seeming still hopeful for its future:

If, divested of this element of illustration, H. G. Wells romance, and pedantic naturalism, Marinetti’s movement could produce profounder visions with this faith of novelty, something fine might be done (*Ibid.*).

Finally, Lewis adds that, unless the “sensible and energetic” Marinetti got over his “sentimental rubbish about Automobiles and Aeroplanes”, he would “become a rapidly fossilizing monu-

ment of puerility, cheap reaction and sensationalism” (*Ibid.*)- In others of his writings in *Blast* and elsewhere, this became precisely the opinion Lewis held of Marinetti.

## 6. The Blast Manifesto

Finally, the *Blast Manifesto* itself. Its structure is not very original. In fact, it is the same as *L'Antitradition Futuriste* by Guillaume Apollinaire and Marinetti, published in Paris in June 1913. The text is divided into the pairs of opposites “Bless/Blast”, similar to Apollinaire’s “Destruction/Construction”, “Merde aux/ Rose aux”. The contradictions of the text are assumed by the text itself, or, as Lewis later wrote in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, “... since there are two sides to every argument, you find me *blessing* what I had a moment ago *blasted*. An example of English fairness!”

So, England and the English are blasted first, for the climate, provincialism, domesticity, aestheticism, snobbery, the fixed grin of English humour; and then France, “its sentimental Gallic gush, sensationalism, fussiness and Parisian stereotypes”. Afterwards England is blessed for the “solitude” of its laughter, and its “ungregarious grin” (*Blast* p. 26).

The Manifesto which follows the preliminary “blasts” and “blesses” confirms what the pamphleteering language of “Long Live the Vortex!” had already exposed. A stronger emphasis is however put on the idiosyncrasies of England and the English, and therefore on the need for the creation of their own means of expression in art: “So we insist that what is actual and vital for the South is ineffectual and unactual in the North”, (p. 34). It is proudly claimed that the new Age of Modernity is an English achievement and, therefore, England owes nothing to “the South”:

1. The Modern world is due almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon genius, – its appearance and its spirit.

2. Machinery, trains, steam-ships, all that distinguishes externally our time, came far more from here than anywhere else (p. 39).

However there is consciousness of the fact that England is not a leader in terms of art:

4. But busy with this life effort, she has been the last to become conscious of the Art that is an organism of this new Order and Will of Man (*Ibid.*).

It is this awareness that justifies the launching of a movement like Vorticism, wanting to take on the responsibilities of formulating a genuinely English art, cutting off all ties to the Latin's "romantic" and "sentimental" modernism, with their "futurist gush over machines, aeroplanes etc." (p. 41). On the other hand, *Blast* was for the English avant-garde the affirmation of its empathy with European modernism, and, at the same time, the attempt to claim for the English, the "inventors of this bareness and hardness" (*Ibid.* p. 41), the right to be in the forefront of the battle against Romance.

## 7. Futurism and Vorticism reviewed

However much the Vorticists tried to divorce themselves and their movement from Futurism at a time when they were coexisting in the same arena and struggling for pride of place, both their aesthetic principles and their overall aims were in fact convergent, especially when viewed from a present-day perspective, as we shall see through the analysis of Lewis's Vorticist texts.

But in the less purist press of the epoch, non-specialized in matters of art, the polemics both movements indulged in to such glamorous effect were presented every day to the public as a uniform phenomenon, in sensationalist or alarmist terms according to the case and the journalist. Thus there was a proliferation of articles using the word "futurist" indiscriminately and often inaccurately:

“A Futurist Grumble” (*Daily Mirror*, 6 May 1914); “Are Futurists Mad?” (Newcastle-on-Tyne *Illustrated Chronicle*, 22 January 1914); “Futurist Art and Life” (*Graphic*, 23 May 1914); “Futurists Invade Buckingham Palace” (*London Life*, 4 April 1914); “Futurist Clothes” (*The Evening News*, 4 March 1912), etc. In fact, to the committed antagonists of the new aesthetics, it did not really matter whether it was called Futurist or Vorticist. What was really at stake was the need to extirpate from the art scene this rapidly spreading cancer that was corroding it from within.

Such was the level of discussion in some of the articles published in the art magazines reacting against this state of things. As an example, I shall take two articles by the same author, John Cournos, the first published in January 1917 in *The Egoist* and the second published in June 1919 in *The Little Review*. In the first, called *The Death of Futurism*, one finds the following:

Nothing is easier to prove than that Futurism is dead – as an art. And not alone Futurism, but also Vorticism and all those “brother” arts, whose masculomaniac spokesmen spoke glibly in their green-red-and-yellow becushioned boudoirs of “the glory of war” and “contempt for women”, of the necessity of “draughts”, “blasts”, and “blizzards”, of “maximum energy” and “dispersed energy”, etc., etc.

His point, regarding both Futurism and Vorticism, is that, as he says, quoting Mayakovsky, the Futurists lost their “raison d’etre” in the accomplishment of their idea. But unfortunately for Cournos’s argument he inadvertently quotes an extremely polemical line by Mayakovsky, which though affirming the death of Futurism as a particular group, claims that in its essence it remains alive:

Futurism has died as a particular group, but it has poured itself out in everyone in a flood. Today all are Futurists. The people is Futurist.

In the other article, “The Death of Vorticism”, Cournos defends the same idea, insisting that Vorticism, like Futurism, having been “created in the social cul-de-sac preceding the war” and being “prophetic of war”, was bound to die with the outburst of war itself. However, Cournos does not take into account the brief duration of Futurism and Vorticism proposed as a working principle in their manifestos, right from the very first *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909:

The oldest of us *is* thirty, so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen!<sup>23</sup>

This article reaches its climax of antagonism when referring to the article Pound had written for the February-March 1919 issue of *The Little Review*, showing that “Vorticism has not yet had its funeral”, (p. 48). The government was finally taking notice of it, acknowledging the painting of Lewis and even of the young Roberts, promoting an exhibition of Gaudier-Brzeska, who had been killed in the war, tearing off (to use Pound’s term), the “camouflage” under which Vorticism had been hidden.

Pound insisted that Vorticism had had an important role in the education of the people’s taste in matters of art, showing “how the human eye is affected by colours and patterns in relation”. Thus, he adds, “where there is some standard of judgement other than that of half educated dilettanti, Vorticist hard-headedness has made good”, (*The Little Review*. Feb-March 1919, p. 48).

This finale must have particularly irritated Cournos, who sarcastically comments on “Mr. Pound’s predilection for the

---

23 Translated in Apollonio’s *Futurist Manifestos*. (1973:23), from the French original. : “Les plus agés d’entre nous ont trente ans; nous avons donné au moins dix ans pour accomplir notre tâche. Quand nous aurons quarante ans, que de plus jeunes et plus vaillants que nous veuillent bien nous jeter au panier comme des manuscrits inutiles!” (Lista 1973:88).

dead” (p. 46), and proceeds to twist Pound’s affirmation to his own ends:

It is quite true that “Vorticism has not yet had its funeral”. The poor dear has died on the battlefield, and no one even knows where its decayed remains are (*The Little Review*, June 1919, p. 48).

Curiously, beneath Cournos’s article one can read a post-scriptum by the editor of the Journal, Margaret Anderson, which shows a radical change in the perspective in which *Blast* was then evaluated. Five years earlier *The Little Review* had given a rather cold welcome to *Blast*, as mentioned before. Now, Anderson simply says: “I am too much at war with the unenergized thinking in Mr. Cournos’s article (...) to go into it again” (*Ibid.*). She asks Lewis and Pound to take this task upon them, although she believes that they had already adequately done so in the two numbers of *Blast*.

Finally, a note on the exhibitions of Vorticism. The first and only contemporary Vorticist group exhibition in England was held at the Dore Galleries in London on 10 June 1915. The catalogue proudly announced: “But this is the first time in England that a gallery has been used for the special exhibition of nothing but the works of this tendency by English artists”. Another exhibition of the Vorticist artists was held in New York in January 1917, sponsored by John Quinn, at the Penguin Club. In 1956 the Tate Gallery held an exhibition of Lewis and Vorticism, for the catalogue of which Lewis wrote an introduction that badly misrepresented the movement and its dynamics<sup>24</sup>. In 1982, the year of the commemoration of Lewis’s centenary, there were exhibitions of his work in two major galleries in London, the Tate and the Anthony d’Offay.

---

24 In this introduction, Lewis provocatively wrote the following: “Vorticism, in fact, was what I, personally did, and said, at a certain period.”



### 8.1. The aesthetical and philosophical context of Vorticism; the influence of T. E. Hulme

As C. R. W. Nevinson writes in his *Memoirs*<sup>25</sup>, the Salon held regularly every Tuesday at 67 Frith Street by T. E. Hulme, was particularly remarkable for the extraordinary mixture of people it managed to gather in the most wide-ranging and enthusiastic discussion.

There were journalists, writers, poets, painters, politicians of all sorts, from Conservatives to new Socialists, fabians, Irish Yaps, American bums, and Labour leaders such as Cook and Larkin. From this atmosphere originated the London Group (1937:63-64).

Hulme was a regular, if not always punctual contributor to *The New Age*, edited by A. R. Orage, to which Katherine Mansfield, Aldington, Middleton Murry and Herbert Read also contributed. He helped to organise the “Poets’s Club”, where Ezra Pound started publicising his Imagism, a movement towards the renovation of poetry. However, according to Alun R. Jones<sup>26</sup>, it was “Hulme who led his friends towards experimentation in verse, (...) and also supplied the theory which gave these experiments authority and direction” (1960:35). While Pound considered that he was engaged in the manufacture of a “new Renaissance”, Hulme, less ambitious than Pound, was only concerned “with breaking free from the restrictions of a dead poetic tradition” (*Ibid.*). In his “Lecture on Modern Poetry” Hulme proposed the following poetic theory, which was an essential principle not only of Imagism, but also of Vorticism, as we shall see through the analysis of Lewis’s language in the texts considered in this thesis, particularly in *Enemy of the Stars*.

<sup>25</sup> C. R. W. Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*. Methuen, London 1937.

<sup>26</sup> *The Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme* by Alun R. Jones, London, Gollancz, 1960.

This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. (...) It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes. This material (...) is *image* and not *sound*. It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically under the hypnotic effect of rhythm (1955:75).

Hulme's philosophy<sup>27</sup> is deeply influenced by Bergson's theories of intuition as a superior way of knowing, and by his conception of reality as "a flux of interpenetrated elements unseizable by the intellect", (Jones, 1960:43), here associating himself with the Romantics' struggle against the authority of reason. For Hulme, language is the intuition and poetry has the power to regenerate language, invigorating it with new metaphors and fresh analogies. On the other hand, justifying imagist poetry with Bergson's aesthetics, he writes that the poetic images themselves have the power to restore us to immediate experience. A fundamental aspect of the poetic technique he announced was the disappearance of the poetic "I", a principle which was also crucial to Futurism.

As W. C. Wees says in *Vorticism and the English Avant-garde*. Hulme's interest in Bergson's theories of metaphysics, at first "did not seem relevant to avant-gardistes like Pound and Lewis", (Wees, 1972:78). It was only when he came across Wilhelm Worringer's aesthetics in 1913 that he became popular amongst the London avant-garde<sup>28</sup>. Under Worringer's influ-

27 Hulme's Collected essays, *Speculations*, were edited by Herbert Read in 1924; I will be here quoting from the 1960 edition of the same book. *Further Speculations*, were published in 1955 and edited by Sam Hynes.

28 Sanford Schwartz in *The Matrix of Modernism, Pound, Eliot and Early 20th Century Thought* stresses this fact, calling our attention to the impact that Hulme's lectures had on Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot: "(...) all of these writers stressed the opposition between intellectual abstraction and concrete sensation; they shared Bergson's belief that art is a principal means of lifting the veil of conventions interposed between us and our immediate experience" (1985:31).

ence, Hulme theorised the “new tendency towards abstraction”, associated with the “idea of machinery”, which he interpreted as the rebirth of an older geometric art bringing about the simultaneous downfall of humanism and naturalistic art. Hulme’s first extensive lecture on this subject entitled “Modern Art and its Philosophy”, was delivered before the “Quest Society” at Kensington Town Hall on the 22 January 1914. As Wees writes, quoting Pound’s comments in the *Egoist* (16 February 1914), this lecture was then “almost wholly unintelligible” to the audience, due to their total unfamiliarity with Worringer’s ideas<sup>29</sup>, though a half a year later, many of Hulme’s fundamental arguments had become part of the Vorticist aesthetics (Wees, 1972:82).

According to Hulme in the essay “On Modern Art and its Philosophy”, there are two kinds of art, “geometrical” and “vital” art, absolutely distinct in kind from one another, and “each of these arts springs from and corresponds to a certain general attitude towards the world” (Hulme, 1960:78). He stresses that the “re-emergence of geometrical art may be the precursor of the re-emergence of the corresponding attitude towards the world, and so, of the break-up of the Renaissance humanistic attitude” (*Ibid.*). Hulme associates “vital” and “naturalistic” art with ages in which man considers himself to be the centre of the world, (e. g. Renaissance humanism), and there is a “happy pantheistic relation between man and the outside world” (Hulme, 1960:86). On the other hand, he believes that geometrical art translates man’s “feeling of separation”, his “space-shyness in face of the varied confusion and arbitrariness of existence” (*Ibid.*), his limitations and weakness. Thus, in geometrical art (e. g. Egyptian, Indian, Byzantine art), man attempts to express permanence and escape fear and danger in abstract fixed lines, as a “refuge from the flux and impermanence of outside nature”

---

29 In Worringer’s aesthetics, “abstraction” and “empathy” describe two kinds of art that derive from two kinds of culture. The type of culture determines the type of art, and, conversely, the characteristics of the art reveal the nature of the culture that produced it. (Quoted from Wees, 1972:79).

(*Ibid.*). Hulme adds that the condition of “fear” is not a “necessary presupposition of the tendency towards abstraction”; it is the idea of “disharmony or separation between man and nature” that is essential (Hulme, 1960:87)<sup>30</sup>. Hulme concludes this essay with a statement which sounded like a premonitory announcement of Vorticism<sup>31</sup>:

the new *tendency towards abstraction* will culminate not so much in the simple geometrical forms found in archaic art, but in the more complicated ones associated in our minds with the idea of machinery. In this association with machinery will probably be found the specific differentiating quality of the new art (1960:104).

Hulme condemns the work of the Futurists as the “exact opposite” of the art he was describing, “being the deification of the flux, the last efflorescence of impressionism”, (1960:94), and rejecting their practice of making machinery “the subject of the picture”. According to Hulme, what should concern modern art is the machine’s impact on form, not content. On the other hand, he praises Cézanne, whom he calls the precursor of “analytical Cubism”, and where he finds “a hint of that tendency towards abstraction” and a balance between “naturalism and abstraction” (Hulme, 1960:101-102).

Hulme criticises in “modern abstract art” (e. g. Picasso, Wyndham Lewis and Epstein) the passive attitude that the artist takes in regard to machinery:

---

30 This definition of geometrical art as a translation of man’s “space-shyness” and “feeling of separation” from nature is not only accurate in relation to the visual arts, but also crucial to the understanding of a certain kind of literature from this period. The reading of Lewis’s novel *Tarr*, and his vorticist play *Enemy of the Stars*, (which will both be studied in *Part II* of this thesis), in the light of this comment, is very helpful.

31 Richard Cork, “The Cubist Room and The Theories of Hulme” in *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (1976:141).

He passively admires, for example, the superb steel structures which form the skeletons of modern buildings, and whose gradual envelopment in a parasitic covering of stone is one of the daily tragedies to be witnessed in London streets (Hulme, 1960:105).

Even though Hulme praises the modern artist's attempt to "create in art, structures whose organisation, such as it is, is very like that of machinery" (*Ibid.*), he adds that this tendency should not be "materialistically" interpreted as a mere "reflection of the mechanical environment"<sup>32</sup> (1960:109). It is rather the result of a "change of sensibility" following a "change in intention in art", (the tendency towards abstraction), and a "change of attitude which will become increasingly obvious" (*Ibid.*). It is this very association of modern geometrical art with machinery, that takes away any kind of "dilettantism" from the movement, and makes it appear at the eyes of the public, "more solid and inevitable" (*Ibid.*).

Hulme supported the new artists as a sensitive and enthusiastic art critic, explaining their work to his readers and listeners as a kind of "Public Relations Officer"<sup>33</sup>. However, despite his closeness to the members of the R. A. C., he always refused to let himself be entirely identified with them, on the grounds that their art still "departed from figuration" and was an "ephemeral romantic heresy" with "a certain kind of educative influence"<sup>34</sup>.

32 Hulme here probably had in mind Lewis's words in the "Cubist Room", justifying the use of the theme of the "machine" in the new abstract art, in relation to modern environment itself: "But a man who passes his days amid the rigid lines of houses, a plague of cheap ornamentation, noisy street locomotion, the Bedlam of the press, will evidently possess a different habit of vision to a man living amongst the lines of a landscape. (...) All revolutionary painting today has in common the rigid reflections of steel and stone in the spirit of the artist" (Michel and Fox, 1969b):57).

33 *Sic* William Roberts in W. C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-garde*, (1972:81).

34 *Vide* Hulme's lecture, "Modern Art III – The London Group" in *Further Speculations*, (1955:131). In this same lecture he writes an extensive criticism

## 8.2. Bergson and Nietzsche

After the publication of *L'Évolution Créatrice* in 1907 Bergson enjoyed a remarkable international reputation. As Sanford Schwartz writes in *The Matrix of Modernism*, Bergson's postulate of the "élan vital", "a spontaneous creative impetus which raises organic life to ever higher forms of development, dispelled the threatening implications of Darwinism: it incorporated the theory of biological evolution into a cosmology that reaffirmed the spiritual aspiration of mankind" (Schwartz, 1985:30). However, during the long and painful years of the First World War, all popular enthusiasm for this optimistic philosophy rapidly dissipated and the names of other philosophers supersede Bergson's influence on Modernism.

As I have already noted, the English artists who formed the Rebel Art Centre had always been critical of Bergson. Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man*, contemptuously writes that "the italian futurists (...) were thorough adepts of the time-philosophy: and Marinetti, their prophet, was a *pur-sang* bergsonian". In fact, Lewis devoted various chapters from *Time and Western Man* to what he calls "Bergson's time obsession". He criticises the Bergsonian concept of "durée", saying that it is responsible for the "hyphenated space-time in philosophy" (Lewis 1927:434) and the "mind overflowing the intellect" (*Ibid.* p. 436).

---

of Lewis's pictures: "Take Mr. Wyndham Lewis's large canvases, which at first look like mere arbitrary arrangements of bright colours and abstract forms. (...) They fail, in that they do not produce as a whole, the kind of coherent effect which, according to the theory, they ought to produce. (...) In Mr. Lewis's work there are always certain qualities of dash and decision, but it has the defect, of these qualities. (...) His imagination being quick and never fumbling, very interesting relations are generated in this way, but the whole sometimes lacks cohesion and unity" (1955:131-132). Nevertheless, Hulme praises Lewis's drawing "Enemy of the Stars" as "remarkable" (*Ibid.*).

The interpretation of the ancient problems of space and time that consists in amalgamating them into space-time is for us, then, no solution. For, to start with, space-time is no more real, but if anything a little less real, in our view, than Space and Time separately (p. 443).

The philosophy of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer was a particularly important influence on the “Weltanschauung” of Vorticism and the writing of Wyndham Lewis. As E. W. Tomlin writes in his essay on Lewis, “The Philosophical Influences”<sup>35</sup>, although Lewis’s critique centered on Bergson as the “chief modern European exponent” of the time philosophy, Lewis found in those two philosophers “two powerful precursors whose work provided the first direct challenge to the values that had animated Western Man over many centuries” (1980:30). In this same essay, Tomlin argues for Schopenhauer as the closest of the two philosophers to Lewis<sup>36</sup>. Lewis’s “extreme diffidence, a sense of disillusion and at the same time a veneration for timeless values” all call to mind Schopenhauer, writes Tomlin (1980:36-37). In fact, in *The Art of Being Ruled*<sup>37</sup>, Lewis acknowledges the admiration he had for Schopenhauer, comparing him to Nietzsche in the following words: “Schopenhauer was probably a wiser man, and came to better terms with life, than Nietzsche” (1969a):121).

As Patrick Bridgwater writes in *Nietzsche in Anglo Saxony*, Nietzsche began to receive serious recognition in England in 1902, the year which marks the opening of the “Nietzschean

35 In *W. Lewis: A Revaluation. New Essays*, Jeffrey Meyers ed., London 1980.

36 As Tomlin writes in the above mentioned essay, “Schopenhauer’s conception of the will as the principle in and behind all things (...) was to Lewis a signal example of the time-philosophy, above all on account of its *blindness*. (...) Thus Schopenhauer’s unconscious – the first modern unconscious dated 1818 – dissolved all values in its own inexorable passage as a *vast, undirected, purposeless impulse*” (1980:35-36).

37 Lewis’s *The Art of Being Ruled*, London, (1926); quoted from E. W. F. Tomlin’s edition, London, 1969a).

decade” in English literature (1972:13). However, the *Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy only appeared in 1909-13. According to Bridgwater, “Nietzsche’s arrival in England was timely (...) at the turn of the century he seemed to stand for liberation from the nineteenth century, and more especially from Victorianism; his initial appeal was to the anti-Victorian intellectual” (1972:14).

Wyndham Lewis, in the Chapter “Nietzsche as a Vulgarizer”, from *The Art of Being Ruled*, writes the following:

The influence of Nietzsche was similar to that of Bergson, James, Croce, etc. He provided a sanction and licence, as the others did, for LIFE – the very life that he never ceased himself to objurgate against; the life of the second rate and shoddily emotional, for the person, very unfortunately, smart and rich enough to be able to regard himself as an “aristocrat”, a man “beyond good and evil”, a destroying angel and cultivated Mephistopheles (Lewis, 1969a):117).

The tone of his essay is on the whole sarcastic. Lewis calls Nietzsche “the archetype of the vulgarizer”, saying that what he set out to vulgarize, “the notion of aristocracy and power”, were “the most absurd, illogical and meaningless things that he could have chosen for that purpose” (1969a):114).

Lewis recognizes, however, that Nietzsche had become “the greatest popular success of any philosopher of modern times” (1969a):116). And, as Paul Edwards<sup>38</sup> writes in his essay on Lewis and Nietzsche: “Certainly a number of Lewis’s attitudes can be paralleled in Nietzsche: his complete rejection of contemporary morality, his intermittent scorn for Socialism, his high valuation of laughter. Sometimes, indeed, we seem to be able to discover the origins of some of Lewis’s books in Nietzsche’s

---

38 Paul Edwards, “How Much Truth Does a Man Require?” in *Letteratura Pittura*, Cianci ed., Palermo, 1982.



writings” (1980:204). In fact, *The Wild Body*'s stories and Tarr bear the strong influence of Nietzsche's philosophy of laughter as expressed in *The Joyful Wisdom; Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Twilight of the Idols* are essential to the understanding of Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars*. *The Apes of God* or the essays in *Time and Western Man*. Nietzsche's "Will to Power", and the myth of the "Superman", left their indelible marks on Lewis, but so did misogyny, which Lewis openly exhibits in his fiction and to which he devotes many pages of his essays, particularly in *The Art of Being Ruled*.

In *Part II* of this thesis, the connections between Lewis's writing and Nietzsche's philosophy will be analysed in more detail.



# PART II



## CHAPTER FOUR THE WILD BODY

### 1. The making of *The Wild Body*

This chapter will concentrate on the writing of Lewis's *Wild Body*, a collection of stories, many of which first appeared in various reviews between the years 1909 and 1917, and which were later extensively revised, supplemented by some new texts and published in an anthology compilation in 1927. For my analysis I will be quoting from the 1982 edition by Bernard Lafourcade, who published all the original and revised stories in an anthology called *The Complete Wild Body*<sup>1</sup>.

The writing of *The Wild Body* marks the beginning of Lewis's career as a satirist, and in a sense it creates a style that Lewis was to develop in his subsequent literary output. As Lewis himself wrote in his memoir, *Rude Assignment*, all his writing might be related to *The Wild Body* stories: "What I started to do in Brittany I have been developing ever since" (1950:113).

According to Bernard Lafourcade's<sup>2</sup> detailed chronological account of *The Wild Body*, (1980:68), these texts are linked with Lewis's "formative years" between 1909 and 1927, but should also be traced back to his early youth and especially the years between 1901 and 1909, during which he lived in Paris and travelled through Europe.

---

1 WB – stands in this chapter for Bernard Lafourcade's 1982 edition of *The Wild Body*.

2 Bernard Lafourcade, "The Taming of *The Wild Body*" in Jeffrey Meyers, *Wyndham Lewis a Reevaluation*, The Athlone Press, London, 1980.

In his “Foreword” to the 1927 edition of *The Wild Body*, Lewis wrote that he had simply used these early versions as rough sketches for the new ones: “What I have done in this book is to take the original matter rather as a theme for a new story. My reason for doing this was that the material, when I took it up again with a view to republishing, seemed to me to deserve the hand of a better artist than I was when I made those hasty notes of very early travel” (WB, p. XIII). However, as Ian Duncan argues<sup>3</sup> this is not wholly accurate, and as is often the case with Lewis’s account of his own writings, it is misleading.

Thus, in Duncan’s opinion, the revision of *The Wild Body* was a “gradual organic process across the most complex and delicate phases of Lewis’s career” which was not just “a clear development from the vestigial to the fully realized” but beyond that involved a “formal shift of position, distinct kinds of writings”, and above all, “a redefinition of sensibility” (*Ibid.*).

Bernard Lafourcade distinguishes the early and later versions of the stories according to their degree of “fictionalization”. The early stories were a kind of “travelogue”, “documentaries where the emphasis is placed on sociological analysis”, whereas the revised ones are characterized by “a dramatized concentration of effects” (1980:75), and the introduction of a narrator with “a telling family background” (1980:72). Thus, “A Spanish Household” and “A Breton Innkeeper”, which according to Lafourcade’s research<sup>4</sup> belonged to the early *Wild Body*, were omitted in 1927 since “they contained no seeds of a plot”

3 Ian Duncan, “Towards a Modernist Poetics”: Wyndham Lewis’s Early Fiction” (in Cianci ed., *Wyndham Lewis. Letteratura/Pittura*, Sellerio ed., Palermo, 1982). Duncan notes that while Lewis in the 1927 Foreword to *The Wild Body* denigrates the early versions and exalts his revisions, in his 1950 memoir “he can afford to admit the importance of the former in their own right” (Duncan, 1982:80).

4 Bernard Lafourcade’s chronology of *The Wild Body* is based on a list published by Lewis in 1916. This list was published in *Enemy News*, N.10, May 1979 (Vide Lafourcade, 1980:70 and 1980:257).

(1980:76). The same happened to “Unlucky for Pringle”, where “the personality of the narrator was incompatible with the all-encompassing role bestowed on Ker-Orr” (*Ibid.*) – The 1910 poem “Grignolles” was also not included in the final version of *The Wild Body* due, as Lafourcade says, to “Lewis’s desire to offer a coherent fictional world”; but, he adds, “the degraded Unanimism of ‘Grignolles’ constitutes surely an intuition of what was later expressed in ‘Inferior Religions’” (WB, p. 286).

Lafourcade aptly raises the polemical issue of the presence of the “absurd” in *The Wild Body*. As he writes, the “fascinating veil of primitivism” which characterized the early stories was progressively reduced and replaced by “the discovery of the word ‘absurd’ which marked the fulfilment of *The Wild Body*” (1980:78). We will come back to the discussion of this issue later in this chapter.

As I mentioned earlier on, my own analysis of *The Wild Body* will be based on its final revised edition, where the impact of Vorticism and the War years are most strongly felt. However, I will be comparing this version of the stories with the earlier ones, in order to point out the stylistic and structural evolution that they underwent in parallel with Lewis’s change of commitments and objectives in art.

## 2. Lewis on Satire

In *Men Without Art*, (first published in 1934 and only reedited in 1964), Lewis defends the theory of a non-moral satire, which concerns “the outside” of the world and privileges a visual treatment of reality, as opposed to the method that allows the reader to “enter into the minds of the characters” and “see the play of their thoughts”, (1964:115).

Comparably Lewis relates his painting and his writing to his perception of the two as indissoluble, primarily linked to the same root, *the eye*. He does not, he declares, mean the “mind eye” of the “overt doctrinaires of a disembodied, a non-corporeal

artistic expression”, or the “time-eye” which “looks out equally upon the past and present but perceives the actual scene a little dimly, or at the best peeps out upon the contemporary scene,” (1964:145). Lewis draws on the “eye” as an instrument of pure satire, “satire for its own sake”, non-ethical and cold, upon which the “external approach to things” can rely. When trying to explain the function of “non-ethical satire”, Lewis says that the satirist should rely on the evidence and wisdom of the eye rather than on the more emotional organs of the senses. According to him, the “internal” method of approach in literature, i. e., the interior monologue, is delusive, romantically decadent and, finally, “a dope only”:

It may be an auriferous mud, but it must remain mud – not a clear but a murky picture (1964:127)<sup>5</sup>.

“Satire is cold, and that is good!”, he exclaims (1964:121).

That objective, non-emotional truth of the scientific intelligence sometimes takes on the exuberant sensuous quality of creative art (*Ibid.*).

On the whole, he writes, satire is a combination of “wit and humour”, it is not a “polite, soft parody”, but a “critical vehicle of ideas” (1964:139). Satire’s “healthy and attractive companion”, the grotesque, “stiffens” art, and enables the representation of the non-human outlook in the human, “beneath the fluff and pulp which is all that is seen by the majority and corrects our self conceit” (*Ibid.*). He adds sarcastically that this unemotional, grotesque satire will only appear as a distortion to

---

5 In his characteristic sarcastic tone, Lewis wonders about the sort of pictures these writers would produce if they “took to the brush instead of the pen”. He is directly aiming at D. H. Lawrence, about whom he writes: “As one might have expected, it turned out to be incompetent Gauguin!” (1964:128).



those who prefer to see the world “through spectacles couleur de rose” (*Ibid.*).

Lewis defines the satirist’s laughter as an “antitoxin”, a “healthy clatter”, that is at the same time non-personal, non-moral, inhuman, but infinitely “serious”, that is to say, a “tragic laughter”. Therefore men, like characters in a satire, are ultimately stagnated creatures and machines governed by routine:

Men are sometimes so palpably machines, their machination is so transparent, that they are *comic*, as we say. And all we mean by that, is that our consciousness is pitched up to the very moderate altitude of relative independence at which we live – at which level we have the illusion of being autonomous and free. But if one of us exposes too much his “works” and we start seeing him as a “thing”, then (...) we are astonished and shocked, and we bark at him – we laugh – in order to relieve our emotion (1964:116).

However, in spite of Lewis’s defence of a cold satire and a detached, non-moralist satirist, or his vehement attacks on those who regard the world from the “Dark Within” of consciousness, he also declares that he wants to avoid at all costs “a graceful diletantisra” and a fall into an “intellectual dressmaker’s hobby”. He wants to prevent his satire and laughter from “degenerating into a cultivated and snobbish game”<sup>6</sup>.

The analysis of Lewis’s satirical work, and particularly *The Wild Body*, with its grotesque world peopled by men-machines, clowns and puppets, presupposes the understanding of the meaning and nature of that dehumanization. In fact, Lewis’s cynical outlook on the world was not just the result of the indifference of a “poseur”, but rather a genuine gesture translating a philosophical strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Words from Lewis’s Foreword to the catalogue of the exhibition *Tyros and Portraits*, April 1921 (WB, p. 354).

Freedom is certainly our human goal, in the sense that all effort is directed to that end: and it is a dictate of nature that we should laugh, and laugh loudly, at those who have fallen into slavery, and still more, those who batten on it (1964:116).

Lewis's concepts of "tragic laughter" and "non-ethical satire" must also be understood in the context of the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy on Lewis's writing.

As I noted earlier, Paul Edwards<sup>7</sup> suggests that *The Wild Body* was directly influenced by Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom*. However, as Edwards emphasizes, quoting *The Art of Being Ruled*. Lewis criticizes the Nietzschean "Superman" as a mere "biological transformation of mankind", unable to transcend the post-Darwinian or Schopenhauerian pessimism (1982:215). Conversely, he says, Lewis endows the artist with the "ability to awaken human consciousness" (*Ibid.*). In fact, Lewis wrote in *Men Without Art* that he believed the artist was able to "step outside of the evolutionary upward march", and "explore cold-bloodedly the pattern of the evolutionary machine" (1964:116).

### 3.1. Visual and narrative satire and the problem of representation

In *Rude Assignment*, Lewis says that the writing of *The Wild Body*, (where he rehearsed the visual and critical power of narrative satire), was a creative and liberating activity, which helped him to "drag himself out of the abstractist cul-de-sac" (Lewis, 1950:128).

When in 1914 *Blast No. I* came out, the vorticist play *The Enemy of the Stars* was published. During 1914/15, Lewis was working on *Tarr*, a partly autobiographical novel. In 1916 he

---

<sup>7</sup> Paul Edwards, "Wyndham Lewis and Nietzsche: How Much Truth Does a Man Require"? in Cianci ed., *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1982.

was commissioned, and in 1917 he was sent to the front. This experience led to a number of vivid war pictures, (e. g. “A Battery Shelled” (1919)), representing the violence of war and human suffering. In February of the same year Lewis held a one-man exhibition in London, entitled “Guns”, where he tried to articulate his war experience with the principles claimed by Vorticism. This articulation is established in an essay, “The Caliph’s Design” also written in 1919, where he discusses the artist’s function:

Machinery should be regarded as a new pictorial resource as with a new mineral or oil, there to be exploited. A plant for the manufacture of the parts of a six-inch MK 19 gun should be regarded apart from its function. Absorbed into the aesthetic consciousness, it would no longer make so much as a pop-gun. Thenceforward, its function would change. Through its agency emotions would be manufactured, related, it is true, to its primitive efficiency, shininess, swiftness or slowness, elegance or power. But its meaning would be transformed<sup>8</sup>.

As Michael Durman and Alan Munton write, “war was an apt theme for the Vorticist, for life in the line forced men into situations in which their grasp upon consciousness was often brutally disturbed,” (1982:115). The compulsory dehumanization of men was contrasted with the tremendous “vitality” of the war machines. Lewis also addresses this subject in “Cantleman’s Spring-Mate”<sup>9</sup>, a war story first published in 1917 in the *Little*

8 “The Caliph’s Design: Architects! Where is your Vortex?”, in *Wyndham Lewis on Art; Collected Writings* (1913-1956), Walter Michel and C. J. Fox eds., (1969b):150).

9 “Cantleman’s Spring-Mate”, which has been considered by Robert Chapman as part of *The Wild Body* was not included by Bernard Lafourcade in his anthology of *The Wild Body*, on the grounds that it was a “war-story” and not a “Breton-tale”. Lafourcade’s argument is based on Lewis’s Foreword to the 1927 edition of *The Wild Body* (Vide Lafourcade’s essay “The Taming of *The Wild Body*”, p. 69).

*Review*, where the violent explosion of nature in Spring is treated as an allegory of the mechanical and the violence of war.

In fact, the war called for a redefinition of the forms of representation for Vorticism. Durman and Munton call our attention to the fact that Lewis's 1915 painting "The Crowd" already reveals that move towards figurativism, since it "contains many readily recognizable human and mechanical elements, and is far from being a thoroughgoing abstraction" (1982:114). However, this concern with anthropomorphic representation did not mean an abandonment of vorticist principles. In *Blast* 2., the war number, Lewis published an essay, "A Review of Contemporary Art", where he discusses the issue of representation in art extensively, reiterating the impossibility of avoiding representation in one way or another (p. 43). He writes that artists had always represented man as they wished him to be: "in our time it is natural that an artist should wish to endow his 'bonhomme' when he makes one in the grip of an heroic emotion, with something of the fatality, grandeur and efficiency of a machine" (*Ibid.*). The only question, he adds, is to know "how much, if at all", "the human and sentimental side of things (...) cripples or perverts the inhuman plastic nature of painting" (*Ibid.* p. 44).

### 3.2. The "Tyros"

In April 1921 Lewis held an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries entitled "Tyros and Portraits". In the "Foreword" to the catalogue of this exhibition, Lewis defined the "Tyros" as "partly religious explosions of laughing Elementals at once satires, pictures and stories" (WB, p. 354). The "Tyros" show Lewis's effort to work on two fronts simultaneously and they are still a hangover from the war.

The "Tyros" seem to have taken shape after the revision of "Bestre", one of the tales of the Breton cycle, written in 1909 under the title "Some Innkeepers and Bestre". The "Tyros", which Lewis claimed to be "a medium of getting at people by paint" since they

seemed to have become “impervious to logic”<sup>10</sup>, were the visual, pictorial face of their literary counterpart published in 1927 as *The Wild Body*. Thus the “Tyros” are “Wild Bodies” in as much as “Bestre”, one of *The Wild Body*'s heroes, is a “Tyro” and both are a valid expression of Lewis's technique as observer and satirist.

A “Tyro” is defined in his “naiveté” as a child or a Harlequin/Punchinello and in his “vacuity” as a mould that one can use as the bearer of satirical observations. “Tyros” are masks of human beings, animated puppets miming human laughter, human tears. Their rawness and purposelessness can be at times malignant, but all they will ever show is a gnashing of teeth. In the end, as Lewis says, they are bound to prefigure “death-masks” (WB, p. 359).

In the Tyronic dialogues between X. and F. (published in 1922 in *The Tyro No. 2*), there is the same tragi-comedy that divides the “Soldier of Humour”, displaying an ontological split that makes the life of each of them absurd without the other:

F. – You make me uncomfortable X. I feel that my words, as I utter them are issuing from a machine.

I appear to myself a machine whose destiny is to ask questions.

X. – The only difference is that I am a machine that is constructed to provide you with answers. I am alive, however. But I am beholden for life to machines that are asleep. (WB, pp. 369-370).

This ambivalence was also what the *Tyros* were made of, though their action was to be more restricted, as we see expressed in the editorial of the *Tyro No. 1*:

<sup>10</sup> This is Lewis speaking in an interview published by the *Daily Express* of April 21, 1921, on the occasion of his *Tyros* exhibition. There he also said: “Art to-day needs waking up. I am sick of these so-called modern artists amiably browsing about and playing at art for art's sake. What I want is to bring back art into touch with life – but it won't be the way of the academician” (WB, p. 359).

The action of a Tyro is necessarily very restricted; about that of a puppet worked with deft fingers, with a screaming voice underneath. (*Ibid.* p. 354).

Lewis's "Tyro" phase, as Lafourcade says, produced a few impressive designs and played an important role in relation to the rewriting of his early works, "both reactivating the old urge and permitting a clearer perception of the underlying absurdity which "determined it from the start" (WB, p. 352). This phase was only to be completed in 1927 with the writing of "The Meaning of the Wild Body".

The secret cornerstone of this philosophy is self-knowledge, which leads to the creation in *The Wild Body* of a self-mocking hero, an anti-hero, half Quixote, half Sancho Panza:

My sense of humour in its mature phase has arisen 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 coolly, and all men shy a little. (WB, p. 18).

#### **4. "A Soldier of Humour" and the identity of *The Wild Body's* narrator.**

The 1927 edition of *The Wild Body* contains seven stories, some more heavily revised than others, and two essays: "Inferior Religions" and "The Meaning of the Wild Body".

"Inferior Religions", first published by Pound in September 1917 in *The Little Review*, had been meant as a kind of introduction to *The Wild Body* stories. Due to the war, the publication of the stories was however postponed. Despite this fact, Pound decided to publish this essay on its own, declaring in an editorial note that he considered it "the most important single

document” written by Lewis. A year later, in *The Egoist*, (17 September 1918), T. S. Eliot echoed this judgement. The kind of revisions that this text underwent in 1927 concerned not so much its structure as its style.

“The Meaning of the Wild Body” was probably inspired by the essay Lewis published in 1910 in *The New Age*, “Our Wild Body”, already under the influence of Bergson, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. According to Lafourcade, this 1910 essay is vital, since it “contains the first seeds of the unifying theme which later enabled the author to organize in a coherent sequence texts which hitherto had been widely disparate” (1980:70). The 1910 essay was never republished, probably, Lafourcade says, “because it was too impressionistic and smacked too much of the pre-war age” (WB, p. 250).

*The Wild Body* is a world of puppets/machines, a kind of reified expression of human beings, moved by the strings of a clown who calls himself a “Soldier of Humour”. The latter maintains a double function through the narrator’s voice: on the one hand he participates in the events as one of the actors, while on the other he is an external observer. In fact, this dichotomy is similar to that discussed in “The Meaning of The Wild Body”, a dichotomy between “mind” and “body”:

the one watching and passive, the other enjoying its activity, (...) that is of course, the laughing observer, and the other is the Wild Body (WB, p. 157).

The one that has been referred to as the narrator’s voice, Ker-Orr, who bears slight autobiographical traces<sup>11</sup>, is described

---

11 A reference to Lewis’s separated parents, and to the fact that he was brought up by his mother, as well as to his travels on the Continent:” My father (...) I have not seen for a long time. My mother, who is separated (...) gives me the money (...) and it is she that I recognize as my principal parent (...) owing to protracted foreign travel at an early age, (...) I have known french very well since boyhood. ” (WB, pp. 18-19).

in “Inferior Religions” as “a fanciful wandering figure... the showman to whom the antics and solemn gambols of these wild children are to be a source of strange delight” (*Ibid.* p. 149).

But, at the same time that he is the showman, he is a clown himself, a “Soldier of Humour”:

My body is large, white and savage. But all the fierceness has become transformed into laughter (*Ibid.* p. 17).

In fact, these two categories remain together and flow through the relaxed cohesiveness of this set of stories. Comedy and tragedy are not antagonistic here, nor are aggressiveness and naiveté.

The title of the first story, also intended as a kind of preface to the collection, is illuminating: “A Soldier of Humour”. Such is the teller of the stories, who does not set himself aside from his tales, though he keeps his distance, his cool eye always on guard. The trace of his presence in the tales is more easily to be found in the echo of his laughter than in the action he develops as a character. Lewis comments on this fact:

A primitive unity is there, to which, with my laughter, I am appealing. Freud explains everything by sex, I explain everything by laughter (*Ibid.* p. IS).

This proves that he believes in the cathartic and therapeutic use of laughter, which is, as he wrote in *Men Without Art* more a preserver than a destroyer:

In a sense, *everyone* should be laughed at or else *no one* should be laughed at (1964:109).

Ker-Orr cynically maintains the ambiguity put forward, as clown/showman/fighting-machine; the effect is clever, but disquieting as well:



It still looks like a visigothic fighting-machine, but it is in reality a laughing machine. As I have remarked, when I laugh I gnash my teeth, which is another brutal survival and a thing laughter has taken over from war. Everywhere where formerly I would fly at throats, I now howl with laughter. That is me (WB, p. 17).

The transformation that the narrator of *The Wild Body* underwent from the early to the later version is substantial. As Ian Duncan writes, the early narrator is “anonymous (...) he is the passive, empirical recording medium of traditional travelogue” (1982:80); his position is that of a “detached, cool, elevated amusement” (*Ibid.* p. 81). In 1927, Duncan adds, the post-vorticist, “militant aggressiveness” of Ker-Orr takes the stage and completely redirects the narrative (*Ibid.*). Thus, it is through this newly-born character/narrator that the last revisions of *The Wild Body* are focused.

Bernard Lafourcade, in “The Taming of *The Wild Body*,” attempts a psychoanalytical interpretation of Ker-Orr’s personality and role, characterizing him as Lewis’s alter-ego, a voyeur, who is “far more than a simple mouth-piece for the author” (1980:80), since his “imaginary” family background is closely drawn on Lewis’s own:

My father is a family doctor on the Clyde. The Ker-Orrs have been doctors usually. I have not seen him for some time: my mother, who is separated from him, lives with a noted Hungarian physician. She gives me money that she gets from the physician, and it is she that I recognize as my principal parent (WB, p. 18).

According to Lafourcade, “it is only gropingly that Lewis (...) realized that the common denominator of those totems which had haunted his Summer in Brittany was the grotesque otherness of a Wild Body, which was to fascinate him until he could identify himself with it” (1980:80). Thus, the final version of *The Wild Body* is the outcome of Lewis’s ultimate identifica-

tion of the “voyeur” with himself. Lafourcade’s analysis stresses however that this does not mean that *The Wild Body* is “a sentimental ‘search for identity’”, but rather a “search for otherness”, which is “probably the source of Lewis’s fascination” with these grotesque and primitive puppets (*Ibid.*). In fact, as Lewis writes in “Inferior Religions”, “The Wild Body is this supreme survival that is us, the stark apparatus with its set of mysterious spasms: the most profound of which is laughter” (WB, p. 152).

The split between observer and observed, “I expose my essential *me* quite coolly”, is thus translated in terms of the narrative in the split between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated, voice and body:

This forked, strange scented, blond skinned gutbag, with its two bright rolling marbles... is my stalking horse. (...) I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment (WB, p. 18).

However, the kind of detachment the narrator enunciates does not mean that he will not have an active role in the narrative. It just means that the status of the “cool” observer will be kept safe, while his wild body “with his barbarianism and laughter” will be acting among the other characters, in a kind of carnivalesque “communal performance”. The latter, as Bakhtin writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, challenges all authority and allows the provisional establishment of a new and non-alienated order, i. e., the establishment of Carnival’s “joyful relativity and ambivalence”, which is “general, universal and contains a whole outlook on the world” (1984a):127-128).

The narrator of these stories is a self-mocking character to whom it is difficult to assign an identity or impute a very definite role. He never totally coincides with the author/narrator, neither with any of the characters of the stories, nor with the reader/audience. He saves his autonomy by being part of his own narratives and at the same time exterior to them. Thus, he mixes the omniscience of the classical narrator with a detached

position, allowing each character to present himself and build his own personality in the course of action, without the narrator's help to unveil him and reveal parts of his life which are not part of the diegesis. It is interesting to notice that this technique became popular with the "Nouveau-Roman", and has therefore attracted the attention of the post-structuralist critique to Lewis's narrative technique<sup>12</sup>.

The ambiguity of Ker-Orr's narrative level, (in a sense comparable to the level of compromise of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights* – committed to her tales to the point that her life depended on her ability as narrator, and simultaneously narrating them as "voyeur" of an alter-ego), is mainly sustained by the dialogic relation between himself as analyst and himself as the analysed subject.

This process of establishing a dialogue between author and narrator, as well as characters and narrator, creates a dialogic text, or "texte pluriel" which allows the interplay of voices, implying ruptures, oppositions, repetitions, double or second meanings, i. e., a non-homogeneity of languages and styles, and ultimately of signification.

Since the narrator is prioritizing an external focalization, he can afford a more rigorous insight, and give the reader the opportunity of also approaching the narrative from the exterior, without passion or identification. In fact, the narrator attempts a kind of "V-Effekt" in this carnivalesque representation of a reified world. This narrative technique is symbolically illustrated by the tale "The Cornac and his Wife", which ends in a complete reversal of roles between the showman and the public, creating a form of carnivalesque "upside-down-world". The public, recognizing the masks of the clowns as its own masks, joins the

---

12 As Lafourcade writes in «L'Actualité du Vorticisme» in *Cahiers du Centre George Pompidou*, 10/82: «La volonté d'externalité alliée à une structure spatialisante et au refus de l'univoque, permet, par exemple de rapprocher Lewis du Nouveau-Roman peu importe ce que lui-même en aurait bien pu penser».

performance, ultimately laughing at itself: “‘The Public’, as there constituted fell to pieces”, writes the narrator (WB, p. 104).

The narrative style of *The Wild Body* gains form in a simultaneous process of deconstruction of reality and construction of its partial expression, without aiming at any homogeneity. The reader finds himself in a symbiosis of involvement and detachment from the narrative, not only because of the bizarre nature of the plots, but mainly according to his adherence to or repulsion from this “masqueraded” world.

Having said this, I do not mean that Lewis was consciously and overtly “unmasking the establishment”, but that his constant and obsessive animation of machines and puppets and the consequent dehumanization of humans<sup>13</sup>, their excessive perversity and grotesqueness is not, as he himself says, “a pure dilettante game”. As such, this text resists closure and leaves the reader with an amount of “anarchic” data (eccentric situations, inappropriate behaviours, profanations of the hierarchy, blasphemies, parodies of customs and traditions, erratic language, obscenities, etc.), reaching a level of polyphony that challenges the “status quo” to the extent that any carnivalized form of literature does.

## 5. The carnivalized language of *The Wild Body*

To clarify this point it will be useful to reflect on the cornerstone of Lewis’s philosophy – the *use of laughter* and *the meaning of the comic* – which are condensed in two major essays of *The Wild Body*; “Inferior Religions” and “The Meaning of The Wild Body”.

“Inferior Religions” wants first of all to be the presentation of laughter as “the Wild Body’s song of triumph”, “the brain-

---

13 It is interesting to note that between the 1910s and the 1920s Lewis’s drawings and portraits show the same obsession with the non-human element in humans. Whether in his series of War pictures, as in the “Guns” exhibition (1918) or in portraits of friends such as Ezra Pound (1919) or Nancy Cunard (1922), one can find the same mechanical tension and potential energy or the same sense of absence of life and artificiality.

body's snort of exultation" which "expresses its wild sensation of power and speed" (WB, pp. 151-152). We recognize in this tone of buffoonery and aggressiveness the spirit of the time, and the intimate connection of this text with Vorticism and Futurism, which explains why Pound praised "Inferior Religions" so highly.

Defining as the subject of *The Wild Body* "the fascinating imbecility of the creaking men machines", Lewis reveals at the same time the position of the teller of these tales as one who merely "photographs" and "fixes" these "frigidballs, soapysnowmen, arctic carnival masks". Thus, through the eyes and the imagination of this "master of humour" the characters we see apparently moving and breathing are totally devoid of rational life and immobilized by his snapshots, like puppets whose strings have been cut.

The "Wild Body" as a "supreme survival" is aware of laughter's "uselessness and impersonality"; he knows that laughter is an "anarchist emotion":

it is all that remains physical in the flash of thought, its friction: or it may be a defiance flung at the hurrying fates (WB, p. 152).

The hero of the play Lewis fantasizes about, a carnivalesque figure of corruption and vice, is the arch-phantom that substantializes all the particular vices and vulgarities of each of the minor figures of this "feast". Out of him comes the most mysterious and profound of the body's spasms, laughter – the structure of meaning that unifies the whole text.

Hence, as one can see, Lewis carries on in "Inferior Religions" the language of inversions and the dialogue of opposites that he started in the creation of "A Soldier of Humour", the ambivalent image of a wandering clown whose fearsome weapon is *laughter*. He very aptly summed it up in the following words:

In this objective play-world, corresponding to our social consciousness, as opposed to our solitude, no final issue is decided (*Ibid.* p. 153).

The world of the *Wild Body* is a “world of becoming”; it continually emphasizes, whether in the essays or in the stories, the duality of the body and the incompleteness of the world, where death engenders renewal, praise abuse, stupidity wisdom, crowning decrowning, i. e., a world of “carnivalistic mesalliances”, which

excludes all one-sided or dogmatic seriousness and does not permit any single point of view, any single polar extreme of life or of thought, to be absolutized (Bakhtin 1984a):165).

The grotesque clown that Lewis describes as his hero has the wisdom of folly which is a signal of carnivalesque ambivalence. It is an “inverted wisdom”, a debasing, a destruction, but also renewal and truth. As Bakhtin says, it is

gay festive wisdom, free from all laws and restrictions, as well as from preoccupations and seriousness (1984b):260)<sup>14</sup>.

The hero of *The Wild Body* has a dual body; he is the *King of Play* and also the *Skeleton at the Feast* (WB, p. 153):

the soul lives in a cadaverous activity; its dramatic corruption thumps us like a racing engine in the body of a car. The finest humour is the great play-shapes blown up or given off by the tragic corpse of life underneath the world of the camera. This futile, grotesque and sometimes pretty spawn, is what in this book is snapshotted by the imagination (WB, p. 152).

---

14 The definition Bakhtin gives of the concept of “folly” in the Carnavalesque tradition. The “Feast of Fools” was a medieval feast which allowed the free expression of what was considered to be “our second nature”, which was opposed to “piousness and fear of God”, and once a year permitted people to see the world with “foolish eyes” (1984b):260).

His Pierrot costume is only a “uniform” to mask the bitterness and grotesqueness underneath; laughter is the Wild Body’s survival weapon. It is in itself also dual, “that arch-complexity that is really as simple as bread”:

Laughter is the representative of tragedy, when tragedy is away. Laughter is the emotion of tragic delight. Laughter is the female of tragedy (...) Laughter is the mind sneezing (WB, p. 151).

Bakhtin says in *Rabelais and His World*, that in medieval folk tradition laughter was the symbol of the defeat of fear of the netherworld. This fear was dual: at the same time both a “mystic terror” inspired by death and hell and a “terror of the authority and truth of the past”:

If the Christian hell devalued earth and drew men away from it, the carnivalesque hell affirmed earth and its lower stratum as the fertile womb, where death meets birth and a new life springs forth. This is why the images of the material bodily lower stratum pervade the carnivalized underworld (1984b):395).

The symbolism of the “Wild Body’s laughter is of a similar kind. The “fierceness” of this “visi-gothic fighting-machine” has become transformed into laughter; barbarism and laughter, defiance and a scornful optimism produced this new Don Quixote:

Mystical and humorous, astonished at everything at bottom (...) he inclines to worship and deride, to pursue like a riotous moth the comic and unconscious luminary he discovers; to make war on it and to cherish it like a lover, at once (WB, p. 20).

The carnivalesque ambivalence of Lewis’s outlook on the world, his emphasis on the grotesque and the regenerative power of laughter, is close to the spirit that Bakhtin finds in the Renaissance folk carnival tradition which permitted a new outlook on

the world, without nihilism, and positively emphasizing “change and becoming”.

Bakhtin writes that there is in Shakespeare’s drama a “fearless sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism”, as well as a “pathos of radical changes and renewals” (1984b):275). One could add that the latter is also undoubtedly at the heart of modernist literature.

In Bakhtin’s words, popular culture and carnival consciousness were a challenge to the official medieval culture’s belief in: “a static unchanging world order and in the eternal nature of all existence” (*Ibid.*).

In relation to Lewis’s *Wild Body* one could say something similar: ambivalent laughter and the consciousness of the grotesque inform these stories and essays, rendering *The Wild Body* a bitter but lucid social satire, which challenges the existing order undogmatically, and urges change and renewal.

In “The Meaning of the Wild Body”, Lewis gives a more explanatory and less imaginative frame for his theory of laughter, establishing the premises of the “Root of the Comic” in more philosophical terms.

What is here understood by laughter is slightly different from that previously expounded. Laughter now assumes a degree of absurdity; it is an illogical process that attempts to leap over “the chasm lying between being and non-being” (WB, p. 157), not always avoiding the fall into the abyss, into nothingness<sup>15</sup>.

From the dichotomy between the “essential us” – the laughing observer, and the one that “enjoys life” – our wild body, Lewis postulates his credo in dichotomies: being and non-being,

15 According to Bakhtin, laughter in carnivalized literature can be “loud” or “reduced” depending on each specific genre. In Antiquity it could be either. In the literature of the Renaissance it was generally loud. In 18th and 19th century literature it was as a rule “muffled” through irony, humour, etc. In the case of *The Wild Body*, which is often close to a farcical parody, laughter is to be loudly heard as the “Soldier of Humour” says, and as graphically expressed in the “Tyros”’s, permanent grin.



the body and the soul. This will be the basis for his understanding of the absurd:

There is nothing that is animal (and we as bodies are animals) that is not absurd. This sense of the absurdity, or if you like, the madness of our life, is at the root of every true philosophy (WB, p. 157).

Lewis's theory of the "absurd" is discussed at length in this essay. As Lafourcade writes, the concept of "absurd" or "absurdity" had been present since "the very inception of *The Wild Body*" (WB, p. 156). Although Lewis is certainly not the first Modernist to use the word "absurd", the completely external and formal nature of his concept of "absurd" is original.

His theory of the "absurd" is corroborated by his reversal of Bergson's definition of the comic. In fact, Lewis draws on Bergson for most of his theory of the comic. However, they differ in one important detail. For Bergson, the comic is basically the revelation of the *likeness of a person to a thing*:

(...) that aspect of human events which through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life (1913:87-88).

Consequently, laughter bursts out as a corrective, a social gesture that isolates and draws attention to a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events. Both Bergson and Lewis stress the incompatibility of laughter with emotion and see rigidity and automatism at the root of the comic, although they see them operating in opposite directions.

For Lewis the comic results from the observation of a *thing behaving like a person*. Thus, all men are comic for they all are things, or physical bodies behaving as persons; all men are ludicrous, because they are all "autonomously and intelligently moving matter". So man is ridiculous fundamentally because he is a man instead of a thing.

Man's detachment from his body, the consciousness that *his body* is not "him", permits the most irrepressible outbursts of laughter (such as the taxi-driver that Lewis describes in "The Meaning of the Wild Body", who drives extremely slowly because he does not identify "himself" with "the machine", or the fat man who drags "his body" painfully as if he was dragging a sack of potatoes), (WB, p. 160). Bergson also refers to a "rigid mechanism which we occasionally detect as a foreign body in the continuity of human affairs" (1913:87) and which makes the person seem ridiculous, as though "through some mental attribute resembling absentmindedness" (1913:169), which provokes a split between "the body and the soul":

The body is no more in our eyes than a heavy and cumbersome vesture, a kind of irksome ballast which holds down to earth a soul eager to rise aloft (1913:50).

In this "mal-adjustment" lies the root of the comic and the absurdity of life. But one can also see in Lewis's detachment and in the puppets and machines that he animates, a vision of an increasingly alienated man turned mute and irrational before a scene of war and devastation, machines growing in number and capacity, man's concept of self and sense of purpose being gradually destroyed.

Hence, Lewis's theory of the comic goes further than that of Bergson and gives way to satire, or in Bakhtin's terminology, it inscribes itself in the tradition of the "serio-comical genre".

*The Wild Body's* Carnival is not only a source of laughter: it is more the realm of the absurd, a generalized madness represented by a world where machines, puppets and clowns perform the routine roles of men and women. In a sense, the absurd situation in which they live displays the consciousness of their alienation. The ambiguity of the status of these Harlequins and Punchinellos, laughing whilst shedding an occasional tear for themselves, should be put in the context of the meaning

of comedy for Lewis: comedy as a victory over tragedy, which implies a move beyond the plain burlesque. Moreover, as Lewis wrote in a "Soldier of Humour":

I admit that I am disposed to forget that people are real—that they are, that is, not subjective patterns belonging specifically to me, in the course of this joke-life, which indeed has for its very principle the denial of the accepted actual (WB, p. 17).

"Notes on Tyros" had stressed the philosophical nature of these "satires, pictures and stories". Here Lewis reveals his belief in a new aesthetics, far from the "taboo of pure art" (which as he adds "is not even pure") and the passéism of "art for art's sake":

Twenty years ago, 'art for art's sake' was the slogan of the ancestor of this type of individual. Our present great general movement must be an emancipation towards complete human expression (WB, p. 354).

## 6. "Bestre"

It is likely that, as Lafourcade says (WB, p. 76), "the graphic Tyros were the epigones of the early literary Wild Bodies" since, in fact, the publication of "The Tyros" in 1921 seems to have been intimately connected with the revision of "Bestre". The latter was first published in 1909 in the *English Review* under the title "Some Innkeepers and Bestre", then again in 1922 in *The Tyro No. 2*, where it is fully developed as a mixture of grotesque and erotic horror, and finally in 1927, in the anthology of *The Wild Body*, with minor alterations.

The 1909 "Bestre" is introduced by an essay, "Some Innkeepers" (which remained unrevised and was never republished), a detailed sociological analysis of the inns of "fiction and history", particularly focussed on the "provincial French innkeeper". The style is pervaded by the typical Lewisian humour and love of the grotesque, e. g. :

I once knew a landlord who placed all his hopes in his wooden leg, in its at once laughable and friendly effect, and would not have his old leg back again if he could (WB, p. 223).

The tone of the narrator's detached irony is also enhanced either by frequent use of free indirect speech, or by voicing his philosophical remarks through an imaginary innkeeper, an "eloquent Frenchman":

Mean and worldly interests creep into all relationships that are most purified by money. It obviates many a baseness. It is sanitary, bracing, necessary, it is like an inoculation undergone at the outset. It clears the air. All the mercenary and mean sentiments go into the gold piece – that represents them and absorbs them, it purges the spirit (WB, p. 225).

The revision of "Bestre" after the war increased its aggressiveness and violence, and transformed the "pugnacity" of Bestre's "eye", the main motif of the story, into a real weapon, although it maintained as Bestre's "raison d'être" "his degeneracy – the irritable caricature of a war-like original" (WB, p. 233).

Bestre is like a Tyro, "raw and undeveloped; his vitality is immense, but purposeless, and hence sometimes malignant" (WB, p. 359). These epithets already apply to the "Bestre" of 1909, but in the later version his malignancy is increased out of all measure. In the latter, Bestre has lost part of his childish naiveté, assuming the proportions of a monster. His previous "weird dumb-passive method", (*Ibid.* p. 231) even in the course of violent actions, his absent-mindedness, has already something of the Tyro's vacuity; his bestiality bears traces of the Tyro's death mask. Although Lewis was not particularly interested in exploring sexual deviances, it seems undeniable that "the eye" has simultaneous connotations of sex and violence.

Bestre looks at reality with a "professional liar's eye", and his gaze at women is that amazing compound of passion and

violence which Lewis, in a melodramatic allusion to Cupid's arrows, calls the "Spanish mirada". Here, more as caricaturist than as satirist, he invokes the Spanish caballero's confidence in the ability of his glance to either "daunt a rival" or to "coerce a wavering adherent", and the magnetism of the "Spanish oeillade".

The 1927 "Bestre" has fully developed the grotesque, animal-like, ambivalent gender of its hero. The story has expanded into a longer, detailed description of Bestre's physique in a language of exaggeration, hyperbole and excess. A new and strong sexual element in relation to Bestre's "strategy" has been added to his previous image, i. e., the emphasis on his "libido", which, as Lafourcade writes, suggests "fresh acquaintance with Freudian theory" (WB, p. 220). There is also a new emphasis on the "unsupported female side of Bestre" (*Ibid.* p. 83), his "feminine vein" (*Ibid.* p. 80):

He offered himself, sometimes wincing coquettishly, occasionally rolling his eyes a little, as the lion might do to remind you of your natural dread and heighten the luxurious privilege (*Ibid.* p. 81).

Bestre's "eye-play", now invested with a sexual power, is directed as a "weapon" to his enemies. The victim this time was Mme Riviere, the wife of a "pretentious peppery Paris Salon artist" (WB, p. 84) who had installed himself with his family in the neighbourhood. The cause of the bellicose incident, was, so the narrator tells us, the deep antipathy between Bestre and the painter for which "the most insignificant pretext was absent" (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, war was in the air and Bestre "swelled and swelled" (*Ibid.*) for the painter. Finally, Mme Rivière initiates it: she passes by Bestre's kitchen and gazes glassily at Bestre's old sister, producing such a depressive effect on her that "it reduced her vitality considerably, and in the end brought on diarrhoea" (WB, p. 85). One day, as Mme Rivière is passing by and as usual looking into the room, Bestre is there, expecting her gaze. What happens then between the two is only hinted at, but the narrator leaves us no room to doubt that the nature of the incident is sexual:

What superlative shaft, with deadly aim, did he direct against her vitals? (...) He had brought her down with a stupendous rush (...) The eye was his chosen weapon. Had he any theory, however, that certain occasions warranted, or required, the auxiliary offices of some unit of the otherwise subordinated mass? Can the sex of his assailant give us a clue? (...) I am certain that he struck the death-blow with another engine than the eye (WB, p. 85).

On the other hand, as I indicated earlier, the 1909 version is confined to the impression that Bestre's outsized physique and particularly his intense and silent gaze has on Mme Rivière:

(...) there stood Bestre himself, alone, quite motionless, looking at her; looking with such a nauseating intensity of what seemed meaning, but in truth was nothing more than, by a tremendous effort of concentration, the transference to features and glance of all the unclean contents of his mind, that had he suddenly laid bare his entrails she could not have felt more revolted (WB, p. 230).

Apart from these stylistic variations between the earlier and the 1927 version of "Bestre", the latter also enhances the carnivalesque dimension of Bestre's grotesque "bodily lower stratum".

For the analysis of Bestre's typology I will be drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body, as he defines it in *Rabelais and His World*, in the chapter "The Grotesque Image of the Body and its Sources". Here Bakhtin says that the combination of human and animal is one of the most ancient forms. The grotesque body seeks to go out beyond the body's confines, ("to outgrow its own self, transgressing its own body" (1984b):317). It is a dual body, a body in the state of becoming:

It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world (*Ibid.*).

The bowels and the phallus are the parts of the body that play the leading role, since they can detach themselves from the body, outgrow it and engender a new body. Mouth and anus are also privileged, as orifices through which the world enters, is swallowed up and expelled; they are at the confines of the body and the outer world, symbolically tied to the beginning and end of life. The mouth is a “gaping mouth”, enhancing the comic image of these “gay monsters”, mocking and abusing the world. It is the “open gate leading downward into the bodily underworld” (Bakhtin, 1984b):325). The eyes are protruding, exaggerated, manifesting bodily tension again, as if seeking to outgrow the body’s confines. The nose is fundamental, since it is in itself already a “growth”. As Bakhtin says, “the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss” (1984b):317).

The acts of drinking, eating, defecating, as well as pregnancy, mating, dismemberment are favoured in this sphere, because they tighten the relation between the body and the world. If one now follows the description of Bestre’s body in its 1927 version, one will find a similar typification of the grotesque being, the emphasized bodily features being precisely the same ones, enhancing an inhuman and androgynous duality, resulting in malignancy and pugnacity:

With a flexible imbrication reminiscent of a shutter-lipped ape, a bud of tongue still showing, he shot the latch of his upper lip down in front of the nether one, and depressed the interior extremities of his eyebrows sharply from the quizzing perch – only this monkey-on-a-stick mechanical pull – down the face’s centre. (...) his arms still folded like bulky lizards (...) not a hair or muscle moving (WB, p. 78). (...) Sunburnt, with large yellow-white moustache, little eyes protruding with the cute strenuousness already noticed, when he meets any one for the first time his mouth stops open, a cigarette end adhering to the lower lip (*Ibid.* p. 81).

Bestre's "Eye" is capitalized and described in greater detail than in the 1909 version, enhancing its animalesque properties and transforming it into an almost autonomous entity. Its symbolic closeness to the "netherworld" of instincts, bodily functions and excrement is suggested through a chain of almost surreal metaphors and metonymies:

His very large eyeballs, the small saffron oscillation in their center, the tiny spot through which the light entered the obese wildness of his body; his bronzed bovine arms, swollen handles for a variety of indolent little ingenuities; (...) 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 (WB, p. 78). (...) The Eye was really Bestre's weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded 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, with the same certainty in its unsavoury appulsion (*Ibid.* p. 83).

Bestre's grotesque body bears the "insult of the comic" and assumes "implications of indecency":

His tongue stuck out, his lips eructated with the incredible indecorum that appears to be the true 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, pp. 78-79).

His relationship with the narrator also assumes sexual connotations and conveys the ambivalence of Bestre's gender:

We were the best of friends: he thought I slapped him because contact with his fat gladdened me, and to establish contact with



the feminine vein in his brown-coated ducts and muscles. (...) He offered himself, sometimes wincing coquettishly, occasionally rolling his eyes a little, as the lion might do to remind you of your natural dread, and heighten the luxurious privilege (*Ibid.* pp. 80-81).

Among all the corporeal details of Bestre's image, the eye protrudes as a metaphor of violence, as a true weapon. The large descriptive section on Bestre's Spanish ancestry which existed only in a very limited form in the first version relating his murderous glance to the Spanish "mirada", is a very good example of Lewis's mastery of the language of humour and reveals his wonderful capacities as an observer:

The Spanish beauty imprisoned behind her casement can only roll her eyes at her lover in the street below. The result of these and similar Eastern restraint develops the eye almost out of recognition. (...) Eyes, eyes: for defiance, for shrivelling subordinates, for courtesy, for love. A "Spanish eye" might be used as we say, "Toledo blade" (*Ibid.* p. 83).

Bestre is thus not only an accomplished example of Lewis's grotesque realism, but as an extended metonymy, a fascinating "story of the eye". Its narrative style is highly transgressive at the level of the language of the body, as it is its use of the paradigms of violence/eroticism.

## 7. "Beau-Séjour"

Other stories in *The Wild Body* employ a lighter form of humour, and are near to farce. Such is the case of "Beau-Séjour", a development of "The Pole", a version written in 1909, where the burlesque combines with an interesting satire on customs. In his "Foreword" to *The Wild Body*, Lewis says that "Beau-Séjour" is "the first hotel at which Ker-Orr stops". The setting is an

inn in the French countryside, and the action involves types more than characters: the young innkeeper, her half-hidden love affair with an always-drunk, always-penniless, maid-hunting German “fiancé”, and to complete the triangle, Zoborov, the bitter, “exceedingly quiet” Polish emigré always ready to take advantage of the situation.

The comic effect of this story results mainly from the flexibility of the style and the different uses of language, as well as the occasional combination of French and English. The narrator mimics Mlle Péronnette’s swearing, combining the “prolix dignity of the French language” together with her remarks in English, as he mimics the clumsiness and buffoonery of Charles (“our boche exhibitionist”), without paying much attention to the one’s anger or the other’s grief. The outcome is, all the same, a subversion of the previous order of things: Zoborov, “the Pole”, always ready to defend his “satellites”, becomes the “comic proprietor” of the completely renewed French hotel. He has become fatter, well dressed, and is now happy to welcome Americans to his “chic hotel”, and even quicker at getting rid of old “fellow pensionnaires”: “Oh, I’ve cleared all that rubbish out!” (WB, p. 70), he exclaims. Thus, at the end of “Beau-Séjour” we can still catch a glimpse of a Tyronic grin.

## 8. “Sigismund”, “The Death of the Ankou” and “Franciscan Adventures”

Proceeding on the journey of our “Soldier of Humour”, we find other less bitter, but by no means less grotesque stories like “Sigismund”<sup>16</sup>, “The Death of the Ankou” or “Franciscan

---

16 “Sigismund”, first published in 1920 in *Arts and Letters*, belonged to an appendix in *The Wild Body*, since it does not date from the time of the Breton stories. It was, however, revised in 1927 and included in the new anthology. In fact, although temporally and spatially distant from the Breton stories, its theme of human alienation, the grotesque and absurd world of the English country aristocracy is developed in the same tragi-comic style

Aventures”, whose lunacy retains much of what Lewis considered in “The Meaning of the Wild Body” as the absurdity, or “the madness of our life”.

Their world is peopled with beggars, vagabonds, often perverse or insane beings, whom the narrator now mocks or laughs at, now secretly fears as if in the presence of spectres, but whose exhibition of eccentricity he always attentively observes:

I examined this old song-bird with scorn. (...) this shell I had arrested and attracted in here to inspect. I settled down to watch (WB, p. 121).

His attitude is that of an attentive but only semi-participating actor, playing a minor role in the “dumb-show” of his “finds”. The concept of “tragic-laughter” that “Inferior Religions” had proclaimed assumes its human shape in the “types of humanity” that each of these stories reveals to us.

The hero of “Sigismund”, because of his lunacy, his collector-manias and the absurd self-centred world he builds for himself, ends up in an asylum for the insane while his wife, for her violent temper and her growing more and more “animal” (WB, p. 175), ends up first in jail and then in an asylum as well. “The Death of the Ankou” sets ambivalent ideas of mystic terror and death against the naiveté/fear of the Breton peasants. The duality persists in the character of the Ankou, an “illuminated” blind beggar, who strolls through the Pardons of the Brittany villages. “Franciscan Adventures” is a more explicit tale about the frontiers of madness and sanity.

The heroes of these last two tales are both outcasts from reality. One, the “Ankou”, thrills the narrator as a death-god, an insolent and “impervious figure” (WB, p. 110), alien to life,

---

that Lewis used to narrate his Breton tales. One should also mention here “Unlucky for Pringle”, a longer narrative which was first published in *The Tramp* (1911) and which was not included in *The Wild Body* because it has a more complex narrative style than the latter, and is in fact closer to *Tarr*.

movement, colour. The other, Francis, having lost touch with “unlyricized reality”, spends his days singing and dancing; his being at the same time both “elemental and silly” (WB, p. 121), as well as his irresponsible happiness, involuntarily irritates the narrator (“he irritated me like an aimlessly howling wind”, *Ibid.*), perhaps because his madness represents an unconscious challenge to “reason”.

In both tales the cynical attitude of the narrator is often threatened, and his supercilious grin is “à contre-cœur” wiped out. It is not without emotion that he writes of the French vagabond: “So he would lose touch more and more with unlyricized reality, which would in due course vomit him into the outcast void” (WB, p. 121).

“Franciscan Adventures” is a rewriting of a 1910 tale published in *The Tramp*, entitled “Le Père François (A Full-length Portrait of a Tramp)”. The latter was a descriptive sketch of a tramp, where dialogue and dramatization were absent as in the other Breton stories. The main difference between the earlier and later version concerns the tone of the narrative. The 1910 text uses a semi-compassionate, understanding and almost supportive tone, which does not completely disappear in the 1927 version, but is all the same undermined by the cool and detached narrator’s pose. For instance, the comparison of this kind of tramp to harmless and innocent children, which is often referred to in “Le Père François”, totally disappears in “Franciscan Adventures”, simply because it does not fit in with the kind of colder and more cynical outlook on the world of the 1927 narrator. In 1910 the narrator says:

The Père François and his like spend their lives in a ceaseless dramatic effervescence. Their furious gestures, their dark sayings and invectives are as harmless as the vacant menace of lonely and excited little boys (...) the only difference is that the children are conventional and romantic, whereas his impersonations are often of the most blood-curdling realism. (...) This type of man feels as

much in another plane of existence as a child does. But instead of feeling not yet “grown up” his feeling is rather that of having in some mysterious way outgrown mankind, so that it is no longer very easy to understand them (WB, p. 279).

On the other hand, the 1927 narrator enhances the absurdity and purposelessness of the vagabond's life. He is here described, or rather “examined” or “inspected”, as the text says, “with scorn” (WB, p. 121). As I have already stressed, this attitude has emotional relapses and later on seems to be transformed into some kind of solidarity between narrator and tramp. It is as if they had something to share, possibly the contempt for the rest of humanity, prefigured in the group of peasants that usually gathered to watch the vagabond's “dumb-show”. The terms this later narrator chooses to qualify him range from “old song-bird” to “frenzied machine”, “elemental and silly”, “automaton” or simply, in a gesture of total reification: “shell” (WB, p. 121).

The “dreadful intensity” that one perceives in the French vagabond, his obscure use of language, full of sayings and catch-words, as well as the silence and the blind and dead-looking face of the Ankou, exert however a kind of mystical fascination upon the narrator akin to respect or fear.

“The Death of the Ankou” was published for the first time in 1927. It is a visionary tale which plays with the metonymy of “blindness” through the images of light and darkness, mystical illumination and death. The tale is throughout pictorial and “visual”. It starts in a light and ironical tone, an account given by a guide-book of the myth of a Breton Death-god, the Ankou, who had been punished with blindness by St. Peter. This is articulated with the tale of the encounter of the narrator with Ludo, the blind beggar:

The blinded figure had burst into my daydream so unexpectedly and so pat, that I was taken aback by this sudden close-up of so trite a tragedy (WB, p. 110).

This is when real mysticism and fascination start invading the text. The legend of the Ankou is a deeply symbolic metanarrative, functioning as a relay to the second one, to which it is cleverly articulated through the striking resemblance of Ludo to the legendary Death-god. To cast away the spell, or even the fear the vision had inspired in him, the narrator tries to joke, and takes refuge in his habitual cynicism:

It was noon. I said to myself that, as it was noon, that should give me twelve months more to live. I brushed aside the suggestion that day was not night, that I was not a breton peasant, and that the beggar was probably not Death. (...) His attendant, a sad-faced child, rattled a lead mug under my nose. I put two sous in. I had no doubt averted the omen, I reflected, with this bribe (WB, p. 110).

When the narrator meets Ludo again, (and the reader feels that the narrator's excursion into the Breton countryside was unconsciously aimed at that new meeting), the roles that each of them had first played are reversed. Ludo is sitting outside his cave, and he looks ill. "My sensation of mock superstition has passed" writes the narrator (Wb, p. 112). He recovers the sense that he is not only "unseen" by the blind beggar, but he is also a foreigner and therefore he represents an alien power to Ludo. Blind people's faces "are hung there like a dead lantern", they "have the appearance of things that have been abandoned by the mind", (*Ibid*, p. 113). But Ludo's face was particularly "blind" that day. Thoughtlessly, the narrator says, he asks Ludo if he has met the Ankou. At the name of the Ankou, Ludo gets more and more nervous, stops acknowledging the presence of his visitor and finally returns to hide back in his cave. Ker-Orr leaves, feeling disturbed and uneasy. Later that summer, the narrator tells us, "the fishermen I had been with at the Pardon told me that Ludo was dead" (WB, p. 115).

"And Death once dead, there's no more dying then": this is the Shakespearean epigraph that opens the tale. Referring to this

epigraph Alan Munton writes in his essay, “Wyndham Lewis: The Transformations of Carnival”, that with the death of the blind beggar, who prefigures a Death-god, Death has died. This is “the ultimate Carnival triumph of youth and vitality over death itself”, writes Munton (1982:151), echoing Bakhtin’s remark that death never completes a folk tale:

The end must contain the potentialities of the new beginning, just as death leads to a new birth (1984b):283).

According to Munton, it is Ker-Orr, the “showman” and narrator of the Breton tales who is reborn here: “his presence binds together the *Wild Body* stories and creates this world of puppets. In this story his defeat of death is an assertion of the vitality of the story-telling function” (1982:152). Whereas in Bakhtin’s model a “Carnival killing regenerates the life of the community”, he adds, “in Lewis’s altered symbolic system it is the isolated story-teller who benefits” (1982:152).

## 9. “The Cornac and His Wife”

Following the “Soldier of Humour”’s excursions, we will hear his laughter again in another “dangerous form of absolute revelation” (WB, p. 157). We will find him now as a spectator, gathering with peasants around a circus. “The Cornac and His Wife” is a later development of a discursive essay, “Les Saltimbanques”, published in August 1909 in *The English Review*. The 1927 version expanded the first and incorporated some new material, but in the end it did not alter the theories of the first about the misery and primitivism of the circus troupe, and, as Lafourcade’s editorial note says, it remained much more a “semi-pictorial essay than a real story” (WB, p. 90)

The narrator’s interest in the circus has to do with his interest in the philosophy of laughter. The kind of laughter one finds here

is extremely primitive and violent in origin, “a realistic firework, reminiscent of war”.

The story is the anatomy of a circus troupe and its small world, rather than of the putting-on of a show. The description challenges all our expectations of a jolly crowd, from the bitter, sickly showman to his skinny wife and “haggard offspring”. They do not perform gladly for the public, but play *against* people, always presenting them with an “implacable grudge”. Animosity and terror are the constant feelings of this troupe. Moreover, both the Cornac and his wife, as well as the public, are described as inhuman antagonists, the former containing their anger with difficulty:

(...) like a dog under lock and key (...) maddened by this other animal presence, the perspiring mastodon that roared at it with cheap luxurious superiority (WB, p. 91).

All the characters of this little joyless unit are lifeless automatons or mechanical beings displaying their sad and routine performance:

These displays involved the insane contortions of an indignant man and his dirty, breathless wife, of whose ugly misery it was required that a daily mournful exhibition should be made of her shrivelled legs, in pantomime hose. She must crucify herself with a scarecrow abandon, this iron and blood automaton, and affect to represent the factor of sex in a geometrical posturing (WB, pp. 91-92).

These shows are repeated over and over again, in a desperate attempt to charm and appease the monster/public. Public and showman, though, are identified through one wish: both wait for the moment when the family of acrobats will crash to the floor, or the clown smash his face on the ground.

The showman’s rage is contained with difficulty within the “walls of the acrobatic vessel known as the patron”;



He wished steadily and all the time, it was quite certain, that the earth would open with a frantic avulsion, roaring as it parted, (...) that everybody there would immediately be hurled into this chasm, and be crushed flat as it closed up (*Ibid.* p. 92).

The public in turn share the patron's eschatological desire:

The Public on its side, of course, merely wished that the entire family might break their necks one after the other, the clown smash his face every minute he fell, and so on (*Ibid.*).

The narrator emphasizes the sheer material relations of exchange that existed between the public and the circus troupe.

Producer and consumer both were bestially conscious of the passage of coppers from one pocket to another. The public lay back and enjoyed itself hardly, closely, and savagely. The showman contorted himself madly in response (*Ibid.*).

The clown's description is also given in terms of his automatism, like a "Punch and Judy Show", springing up and falling down at each blow the patron, now transformed into a "cheerful automaton", gives him. The detailed deconstruction of the usual "scherzos" of the circus show is illuminating in relation to what Lewis believes is the role of the showman, "the man who invents posers for the clown". His physical and intellectual superiority is "legendary and indisputable", and consequently the clowns respect and fear him,

(...) despite the brutal measures he adopts to cover his confusion and meet their ridicule. He seems to be a man with a marked predilection for evening dress. As a result he is a far more absurd figure than his painted and degenerate opponent (*Ibid.* p. 95).

The reason for this might be "the respect of the clown for rank", the narrator ironically insinuates. The patron/clown

relationship, stands as a paradigm for the employer/employee relationship.

Suddenly, this narrative, which was becoming ever more painfully grotesque, is broken and a new one emerges, where the clown's position is totally reversed:

(...)the clown, I remember, 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 (*Ibid.* pp. 97-98).

Amidst a few more grotesque exhibitions of the unhealthy proprietor performing acrobatics with crepitations of his joints and exhibiting his bulky, unathletic stomach, his wife makes an unexpected entrance to complain, in a "harsh and indignant voice", against the mean rewards the public is giving them. Far from resenting her intrusion, the public throws a few coins into the arena and seems to "relish the entertainment all the more after this confirmation from the proprietress of its quality, instead of being put in a more critical frame of mind" (*Ibid.* p. 100).

By the end of the narrative, an interesting intrusion by the narrator seems to provide an important element for the comprehension of this unusual circus performance, which turns out to be an upside-down world, systematically defying the public's expectations.

Violence is of the essence of *laughter* (as distinguished of course from smiling wit): it is merely the inversion or failure of *force*. To put it in another way, it is the *grin* upon the Deathshead. It must be extremely primitive in origin, though of course its function in civilized life is to keep the primitive at bay. (...) It is a realistic firework, reminiscent of war (*Ibid.* p. 101).

In a similar way, the laughter of the peasants of Brittany is sharp and mirthless and designed usually to wound. With their grins

and quips they are like armed men who never meet without clashing their weapons together (*Ibid.*).

The narrator identifies his laughter with that of the Breton peasants, which has a “constant tendency to sarcasm”, and is “caustic and mindless” (*Ibid.*) He says that both their comedies are comedies of action, and thus have a tragic and primitive element in them, though the peasant is mainly concerned with his own fate, and “has little sense of the beauty of his life”. Both associate their laughter with “mock-violent events”, “tragic material” and “primitive stuff”.

The difference is that pure physical action provides him with his, whereas mine deal with the phantoms of action and the human character. For me *everything* is tragically primitive: whereas the peasant only feels ‘primitively’ at stated times (WB, pp. 102-103).

The narrator maintains a dual presence in this 1927 version of the tale: on the one hand, he remains very close to the role played in the 1909 version, as “an attentive, intelligent, but hardly individualized spectator”, as Lafourcade writes, (WB, p. 90). On the other hand, in the later version the relation between Ker-Orr and the showman of this “troupe” becomes clearer. Ker-Orr finds in the personality of the show-man an alter-ego, whose knowledge of the world is above that of the common peasant, and through him he expresses once more his theories of laughter and the meaning of the comic.

The member of a peasant community is trained by fate, and his law is to accept its manifestations—one of which is comic, one of love, one of work, and so on. There is little flowering of tenderness for a moment in the love one. The comic is always strenuous and cruel, like the work. It never flowers. The intermediary, the showman, knows that. He knows the brutal *frisson* in contact with danger

that draws the laughter up from the deepest bowel in a refreshing unearthly gush (WB, p. 102).

When Ker-Orr identifies his laughter with the Breton peasants', he is assigning a popular root to his theory of the comic, and moreover, a popular root to his *grotesque realism*, as defined in the "Soldier of Humour":

'Sex' makes me yawn my head off; but my eye sparkles at once if I catch sight of some stylistic anomaly that will provide me with a new pattern for my grotesque realism (WB, p. 18).

This tale ends in an allegorical "carnivalistic mésalliance": due to an unexpected incident, a boy from the audience enters the show and starts performing under the angry eyes of the showman. The latter and the rest of his crew are displaced and take on a different status. They themselves become part of the public. Thus, the showman having become public and the public transformed into showman, there is a total reversal of the normal situation, reducing "that organism, *the Public*, to pieces". The circle had been completed, the narrator concludes.

There had been two Publics, however, this time. It had been a good show.

## 10. "Brotcotnaz"

As we have seen, Lewis said in *The Cornac and his Wife* that the function of his humour was to "evoke the primitive" and at the same time, "keep the primitive at bay"; his grin wants to transform the "drama of mock-violence of every social relationship" into a "simulacrum of mortal combat" (WB, p. 101). We will see that happening again in the last of the Breton stories analyzed here, *Brotcotnaz*, which closes the cycle of *The Wild Body* in an atmosphere of "disorder" and "emptiness" (WB, p. 144).

The 1911 tale “Brobdingnag”, published in *The New Age*, is the source of this 1927 narrative, to which more movement and a livelier dialogue were added. The 1911 tale is simultaneously more descriptive and less elliptical than its rewritten version. Nothing crucial has been altered in relation to the nature of the episode that is being told nor to its causes; the main difference lies in the interpretation of the episode itself and in the kind of stylistic account that is given of it. Mme Brobdingnag/Brotcotnaz suffers from a regular “illness” which she calls “erysipelas”, which is caused by equally regular beatings by her husband. The cynical tone the 1911 narrator uses to describe Mme Brobdingnag’s “recurrent indispositions” is maintained by the 1927 narrator, but the revelation of their real motive is postponed in this second version until the last minute, thus enhancing its suspense and comicality. In this new version Ker-Orr plays quite an active role, akin to that he played in “Bestre” and “The Death of the Ankou”. The fact that he has become the focus of this new narrative emphasizes its picturesque and grotesque side and, as with the other revised stories, its “malignancy”.

The tale starts with a sarcastic portrait of Mme Brotcotnaz, immediately putting us on the right track for finding out her most secret vice:

The distillations of the breton orchard have almost subdued the obstinate yellow of jaundice, and Julie’s face is a dull claret. In many tiny strongholds of eruptive red the more recent colour has entrenched itself. (...) Her eyebrows are for ever raised. She could not depress them, I suppose, any more, if she wanted to. (...) The flesh of the mouth is slightly more alive: it is parched and pinched in, so that she seems always hiding a faint snicker by diving it primly into her mouth. Her eyes are black and moist, with the furtive intensity of a rat (WB, p. 133).

It is a crude and merciless description. Lewis was in fact never very fond of women, and in most of his writings he does not hide his misogynistic tendencies.

Julie's character is close to the image of woman in the popular comic tradition. Here the woman is not exactly regarded negatively, but she is always a deeply ambivalent figure. At the same time that she is related to fertility, the womb, the earth, she is also seen (particularly due to the influence of Christianity) as the incarnation of sin and the temptation of the flesh. In medieval fabliaux and farces, this ambivalence becomes trivialized and she appears as merely a "wayward, sensual, concupiscent character of falsehood, materialism and baseness"<sup>17</sup>.

In his turn, Mr. Brotcotnaz is a "smiling giant" who has already beaten to death a previous wife, which has not however prevented Julie from marrying him. The day after battering his wife, he will be lovingly looking after her, like a doctor looking after a patient, addressing her with a compassionate gentleness, and receiving the neighbours' "commiserations on her behalf". The routine of the Brotcotnaz couple is described in the most sarcastic way:

The morning after a beating – Julie lying seriously battered upon her bed, or sitting rocking herself quietly in the débet, her head a turban of bandages, he noiselessly attends to her wants, enquires how she feels, and applies remedies. (...) He is grave, and receives pleasantly your commiserations on her behalf, if you offer them. He has a delicate wife, that is the idea: she suffers from a chronic complaint (WB, p. 139).

The apex of this new tragicomedy, told in almost identical words in both versions, is when Julie is found in bed all bandaged

---

17 This quotation is from Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1984b):240, where the medieval *Querelle des Femmes* and the different lines of the image of woman in the "Gallic tradition" are discussed. One of these lines sees the positive side of woman's ambivalence, but the other sees her as the "bodily grave of man, the inexhaustible vessel of conception which dooms all that is old and terminated" (*Ibid.*). As I noted, Julie's ambivalence, simultaneously mocking and destructive, is closer to the image of woman in popular comic tradition.

and bruised, as a consequence of a “real” accident. Ker-Orr cannot repress an exclamation when he sees Julie in this state: “She looked like a beggar at a church door”, he writes. The atmosphere of the house is however noticeably different, with the neighbours all around her and Brotcotnaz looking miserable, a “dejected figure”:

But he whom I was always accustomed to see master of the situation was stunned and changed, like a man not yet recovered from some horrid experience. He, the recognized agent of Fate. (...) Now he looked another man, like somebody deprived of a coveted office, or from whom some privilege had been withheld. Had Fate acted without him? (WB, p. 141).

Her husband sees the “real” accident as a “rival cause”, with which he cannot contend.

He is assailed with a sudden incapacity to think of injuries in his wife’s case except as caused by a human hand. He is solicited by the reflection that he himself had not been there (...). All his wild jealousy surges up. A cause, a rival cause is incarnated in his excited brain, and goes in an overbearing manner to claim its effect (WB, p. 143).

Brotcotnaz’s suspicion of a rival cause, his jealousy, is the highest comic moment in this story. The extent of Julie’s injuries is described by Ker-Orr in minute detail and there is doubtless a close identification between his voyeurism and Brotcotnaz’s sadistic care for his wife:

You have seen my wife’s fingers? (...) Higher up it is worse. The bone is broken. The doctor says that it is possible she will lose her arm. Her leg is also in a bad state (*Ibid.* p. 142).

The narrator gruesomely observes: “He could scarcely proceed to the destruction of the trunk only” (*Ibid.*). In her turn,

Julie only seems to regret the fact that she was still there: “in all likelihood, she meant that arm to come off”. However, Julie’s “dismembered body” is responsible for the complete reversal of the household relations. Unable to continue with his set routine, Brotcotnaz falls into a deep depression. His violence having become pointless, he feels threatened and powerless:

Whatever the upshot of the accident as regards the threatened amputations, the disorder and emptiness that had declared itself in his mind would remain (WB, p. 144).

The ending of Brobdingnag was not any brighter,

(...) his recovered wisdom becoming at first insecure, and then no longer confident, and more and more sombreness remaining with him, and finally the complete ruin of his ancient self (*Ibid.* p. 296).

The 1927 conclusion of the tale is grotesque, but no doubt the narrator rejoices in this transgression of the previous hierarchy:

After the removal of her arm and possibly a foot, I realized that she would be more difficult to get on with than formerly. The bottle of eau-de-vie would remain no doubt in full view, to hand, on the counter, and Brotcotnaz would be unable to lay a finger on her (WB, p. 144).

This tale is aptly interpreted by Alan Munton (1982:150) as an image of the carnivalesque beatings or “cuffing”, which are always “unserious”: “they both kill (injure) and regenerate”. This echoes Bakhtin’s study of this symbolic carnivalesque practice in *Rabelais and His World*:

The blows have here a broadened, symbolic, ambivalent meaning; they at once kill and regenerate, put an end to the old life and start the new (1984b):205).



It is worth noting that Bakhtin also remarks that the word “cuffing” in the popular carnivalesque tradition has sexual connotations, as in “the bridal cuffing”. These sexual connotations might not altogether be absent from the world of Brobdingnag/Brotcotnaz.

The carnivalesque beatings and “dismemberments” are, according to Bakhtin, carried out as a ritual, as comic play. They are the “tangible equivalent to improper speech” and supposedly “organized in great style”, in an atmosphere of freedom and impunity (1984b):269-270). In fact, the kind of beatings that Julie suffers from her husband are “unserious”, not regarded by either of them as “real injuries”. When Brotcotnaz hears of his wife’s accident, he can only repeat: “What’s that? My wife injured? My wife seriously injured! (...) – ‘Seriously’ was the word stressed naively by him. He repeated these words and imitated his expression” (WB, p. 143).

The comic and farcical tone, of this tale is recovered at the end, with Julie peacefully drinking from her bottle of eau-de-vie, following Ker-Orr’s suggestion, before the whole assembly of neighbours and her “changed” husband.

## 11. Conclusion

From the foregoing analyses of *The Wild Body* stories one can see that they are in fact closer to an original medieval carnivalized grotesque genre than to the modernist carnivalesque masquerade line, (see Chapter One). Their world is an ambivalent and unfinished one, where clowns and wise men, fools and ascetic monks, insane inn-keepers and their drunken wives, perverse beings and young bachelors who carry along with them a curse of misfortune mix, quarrel, and strive to live and survive.

Furthermore, *The Wild Body* is almost always an *outdoor performance* (its settings are streets, markets, fairs, “Pardons”), and is most of the time a “communal performance” which takes place in the main square, “without stage nor footlights”, as

Bakhtin writes, (1984a):128). If, on the other hand, the setting is indoors, it is never in the cosy bourgeois household, but, enacting a constant ordeal of moving in and out of houses, often at the “threshold” of pensions, inns, hotels, etc., furniture and belongings being laboriously removed from place to place. As Bakhtin also remarks, the “threshold” is the symbolic place where “the crisis and the turning point occur” and, in medieval carnivalized literature, an alternative site to the public square (1984a):149).

Like the “Menippean satire”, *The Wild Body*’s style is throughout serio-comical, pervaded with exaggerations, hyperboles, and a deeply carnivalesque sense of the world. It is an “inappropriate world” that is uncovered before our eyes, mixing the fantastic with philosophical remarks, extraordinary people, eccentric behaviour, parodies, blasphemies and obscene language; in sum, a satirical and picturesque “upside-down world”.

As Fredric Jameson writes in his seminal article, “Wyndham Lewis as Futurist”, (1974), Lewis’s narrative technique is essentially “compositional”, i. e., he composes his scenes by interpreting them and the actors’ behaviour, thus producing “a bustling and lively second-degree narrative”, which replaces the initial “inert and static” story-line (p. 310). According to Jameson, this is Lewis’s characteristic mode of producing a “dialogical narrative”:

In the long run, however the dialogical mode comes to displace the dramatic “scene” as a narrative form, and to tie the raw materials, of the situation together in a new and closer kind of systematization. (...) In so many ways, the novelist “edits” his footage and like a movie-maker transforms the givens of his initial story into a finished montage, as into purely cinematographic events which live a temporal life of their own on their own terms (p. 312).

This technique is, in fact, typical of the writing of *The Wild Body*, particularly of the last revised text. Beneath the first degree narrative, the action and the actors’ performance, there is the

ironical, serio-comical voice of the narrator, destroying all possible homogeneity of tone and dispersing any potential unity of meaning.

The writing of *The Wild Body* thus confirms that, as Jameson writes, "(...) in Lewis it is not the unification but rather the dispersal of subjectivity which is aimed at; (...) homogeneity of tone is neither desired nor achieved" (*Ibid.* p. 318).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### TARR

As we have seen in the previous chapter, *The Wild Body* is primarily a comedy of action, where the tragic is a direct consequence of the primitive. On the other hand, *Tarr* stems from the line of “grotesque modernism”, in which, according to Bakhtin, (1984b):53), “carnival has been made purely caricatural” and its primitive atmosphere of joyful relativity, the positive pole of grotesque realism, has been dropped and replaced by “moral sententiousness and abstract concepts”. The essence of the Modernist grotesque which Bakhtin sees as an evolution of the Romantic tradition under the influence of Existentialism, lies in a materialist concept of being, which does not mean that its emphasis is always on “something hostile, alien and inhuman”<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the essence of the Realist grotesque is based on the tradition of Realism and folk culture. An essential element of the Modernist grotesque is also its quest to grasp and represent “the very act of becoming and growth, the eternal incomplete

---

1 Thus, Bakhtin stresses the crucial fact that the modernist grotesque does not necessarily concentrate on “something hostile, alien and inhuman”, but rather that the element of alienation is only characteristic of “certain manifestations of modernist form of the grotesque”. He adds that in all other forms of the grotesque the decadence of the old world is followed by the joys of regeneration and renewal, even if in Romanticism “sanity and joy are reduced to their minimum” (Bakhtin,(1965), 1984b):47-51). Wolfgang Kayser in “*The Grotesque in Art and Literature*” ((1957);1981), offers a much more negative view on this subject, reducing the modernist grotesque to the treatment of the subject of alienation in the modern world.

and unfinished nature of being” (Bakhtin 1984b):52). These concepts will prove to be essential in my analysis of *Tarr*.

*Tarr* is no doubt a heavily intellectualized drama of ideas, almost a “Bildungsroman”, but in spite of that feature of its narrative structure, it is not a “static” drama. In fact, its narrative is held together by a number of “voices” in permanent duality and opposition, creating a dialogue, a polyphony that opens a breach in its “close-ended” pattern. It is the very making and the nature of this polyphony that I will try to analyse in *Tarr*.

The spirit of parody and celebration of a carnivalesque world that we found in *The Wild Body* gives place here to a more restrained and at the same time more elaborate tragi-comedy where laughter is not as loud and extravert, but assumes the form of irony and sarcasm. However, now and then the farcical element erupts, especially concentrated in the anti-hero of the novel, Kreisler, a kind of ambivalent wise-fool whose tragi-comic performance keeps the narrative at the threshold of pathos, saving it from degenerating completely into a “roman à thèse”<sup>2</sup>.

## 1. Satire in *Tarr*

As I have stated, the plain burlesque parody that we found in *The Wild Body*’s tales, which naturally engenders satire and brings about a critical view of the world, does not exist in *Tarr*. The pair Tarr/Kreisler is not identical to the pair showman/wild body, partly because in *Tarr*, as stated in the Preface to the novel, there is a greater personal commitment between hero and narrator. However, beyond that, there is the burlesque satire of the stiff “institutionalised English grin”, the superior man’s “annihilating laughter”<sup>3</sup>, his only channel of communication with the world.

2 As Robert Chapman defines *Tarr* in *Wyndham Lewis; Fictions and Satires* (1973:69).

3 Sic Davies, A., “Tarr; a Nietzschean Novel” in Meyers, J., ed., *Wyndham Lewis a Revaluation*. (1980:110). Davies adds the following: “Humour in relationships allows men to disguise the inequalities of Nature. It provides

According to the Preface to the novel, *Tarr* is neither a “grin” nor the “worship of the ridiculous” but a “very logical and deliberate grimace” (p. VII): its intention is to prove that “seriousness and unsentimentality are quite compatible whereas a grin usually accompanies loose emotionality” (p. VI).

The narrator presents this picture from an externalising grotesque and exaggerated point of view, and avoids any internal insights. The characters often move in artificial, almost theatrical scenes, resembling marionettes in a parodic atmosphere of Romantic drama: e. g. the ball at the Lipmann’s “Salon”, the duel between Kreisler and Soltyk, Bertha, the seduced and abandoned woman, Kreisler’s suicide, Anastasya the “femme-fatale” and Russian émigré, and so on. But this picture of a decadent, individualistic bourgeois world is never left bleak and static; the element of sheer mocking laughter erupts now and then with burlesque episodes.

Lewis tries once more to prove in *Tarr* that the grotesque is a “healthy and attractive companion” which represents the non-human outlook in the human, and is the “twin of satire”, as he wrote in *Men Without Art*. (1964:127). In *Tarr* as in *The Wild Body*, satirical laughter is directed at men behaving like machines, or irrational puppets. Laughter erupts, first of all, from our shock at the reality of this fact. It is meant to relieve emotion and be an “anti-toxin” to sentimentality.

As a novel, *Tarr* uses this concept in a far more developed way than *The Wild Body*. *The Wild Body*’s tales about symbolic characters (the village idiot, the errant clown, the monk, the mad innkeeper, etc.) performing the irrationality of life give way to a “Bildungsroman”, the story of the life of an almost ordinary man, an artist, surrounded by other men and women performing to a greater or lesser extent the comic-tragedy of their lives. On the

---

the principal means of illusion by which the English disguise the cruelty, indifference and ruthlessness of Nature in the social and cosmic order” (*Ibid.*, p. 113).

whole, however, the aim is the same – the exercise of grotesque satire as an instigation to freedom: “it is a dictate of nature that we should laugh, and laugh loudly, at those that have fallen into slavery, and still more, those who batten on it”, as Lewis wrote in *Men Without Art* (1964:116). *Tarr* is in a sense a staging of Lewis’s belief that humanity is divided into two – free men and slaves; for the latter, as he wrote in *The Art of Being Ruled*, there is no hope, no teaching or “forcing them into freedom”<sup>4</sup>. In *Tarr* the characters are slaves of their self-image, or slaves of art, or even slaves of their emotions, but they are not as syncretic as those in *The Wild Body*. The characters in *Tarr* are representations of ideas, typifications of concepts. They are easily isolated and susceptible of individual analysis under the direct control of their primitive “showman”, the narrator, whose hand is still quite visibly pulling the strings of their fate. Their personalities (with the exception of Tarr’s) do not develop: they reveal themselves in isolated shots and their behaviour is easily predictable and their future foreseen. Kreisler’s fall, for instance, has been inevitable since the beginning of his “intrusion” in the narrative: he has always been an outsider, rejecting society and being ostracised. In the course of the action he establishes a pact with Bertha, consequently dragging her down in his fall, and another pact against *Tarr*, his other self. As I said before, Kreisler’s death means Tarr’s release from his twin image. However, for *Tarr* there is no possible authentic release from his fate: his life is a vicious circle and the novel ends with an ironical awareness of that fact, showing him subdued within the prisons of marriage and procreation, able only to pursue his dream of being a great artist.

4 “For the mass people wish to be automata: they wish to be conventional: they hate you teaching them or forcing them into freedom: they wish to be obedient, hard-working machines, as near dead as possible – as near dead (feelingless and thoughtless) as they can get, without actually dying” (Vide Wyndham Lewis. *An Anthology of His Prose*. Tomlin ed., 1969a):153. Subsequent references to *The Art of Being Ruled*, are from the edition cited above).



## 2. *Tarr*, the showman as the narrator's alter-ego

I shall now analyse the development of the narrative, focusing on the characters and episodes which, I argue, reveal the novel's underlying polyphony. *Tarr* is organized in a series of "tableaux" or "scenes" following an almost theatrical structure; props are carefully arranged for each scene and details are minutely described creating an almost visual atmosphere, (as in the "Overture" at the *Café Berne*). The characters pose as on a stage, addressing their speeches beyond their immediate intradiegetic listener, as if reaching a larger and "real" audience. This fact is corroborated by the detached and mocking attitude the narrator assumes in relation to the action to be developed in the novel. He describes the hero as one of his "showmen", therefore implying that the other characters are potential clowns and the action we will watch is the performance of their lives. The relationship existing between the hero, *Tarr*, and the narrator himself is, as the Preface says, very close:

In this book you are introduced to a gentleman named *Tarr*. I associate myself with all he says on the subject of humour. In fact I put him up to it. He is one of my showmen (p. VII).

However, the narrator makes the point of warning the reader that his hero "has a private life of his own, for which (he) should be very sorry to be held responsible" (*Ibid.*).

The novel's opening scene is a vivid and at the same time cynical description of the Latin Quarter in Paris at the beginning of the century. *Tarr* is one of the regular customers of the *Café Berne* in the Boulevard du Paradis. There he meets his "arty" friends. In this first scene he comes across Hobson, an émigré English artist educated at Cambridge. Critically *Tarr* observes the "art-touch" of Hobson's "shabby tweeds" and the uneasiness with which his body moves, and feels for him a mixture of contempt and embarrassment. In this tense atmosphere *Tarr* starts

a discussion revolving around art and sex, which gives him the means to expand on the subject which most preoccupies him, rhetorically elaborating his prejudices and misogynous ideas:

How foul and wrong this haunting of women is! – They are everywhere! – Confusing, blurring, libelling, with their half-baked, gushing, tawdry presences! (...) Their silly flood of cheap illusion comes in between friendships, stagnates complacently around a softened mind (p. 15).

Continuing this pseudo-dialogue with Hobson, *Tarr* describes himself in relation to art and sex in the following words:

I do not mean that sex is my tragedy, but art. (...) First, I am an artist. (...) The artist is he in whom this emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment. – Its first creation is the Artist himself, a new sort of person, the creative man (p. 12).

The atmosphere of the novel is thus created and the discussion is set on the two major topics that will remain central until the end: Art and Sex.

*Tarr*'s personality, although bearing many resemblances to the Nietzschean "Superman", represents an alternative to the latter<sup>5</sup>. *Tarr* is the artist who, through his "creative surplus", is capable of rejecting all that ties him to the world (women, love, friendship), and thus will transcend "the average wordly man's struggle for existence" (Lewis 1969a):121).

In sex, *Tarr* describes himself as "romantic and arrièré":

---

5 In *The Art of Being Ruled*, (as I have previously referred in my analysis of *The Wild Body*), Lewis criticized Nietzsche for the passivity of his "Superman": although he had plenty of "will to struggle" he no longer had any "will to live" (Lewis, 1969a):121).

Well, I cannot see myself attracted by a special woman -"spiritual" woman -"noble soul", or even a particularly refined and witty animal - I do not understand attraction for such beings. Their existence appears to me quite natural and proper, but not being as fine as men; not being as fine as pictures or poems; not being as fine as housewives or classical Mothers of Men; they appear to me to occupy an unfortunate position on this earth (...) (p. 25).

His ideas on women are straightforwardly expressed to anyone who happens to be his audience at a particular moment: "they ought to be convex if you are concave - stupid if you are intelligent, hot if you are cold, frigid if you are volcanic" (p. 33); most of them are "foolish, or doll-like or log-like bitches" (p. 15). He also acknowledges that women are "directer" than men, closer to nature, but they do not have "the same resources" as men, therefore they are unable to understand art, which is a "product of the mind". "Sex is a monstrosity", he says, "the soft quivering and quick flesh is as far from art as it is possible for an object to be".

Here it seems to me crucial to raise again the question of the identification of the hero in *Tarr* and the personality of the author/narrator. Beyond their association on the subject of Humour, which as we have seen the narrator stresses in the Preface, there is however their striking but unconfessed identification on the subject of gender and attitudes concerning the rapport of the sexes.

The issue of sexuality in the novel has only been taken up to argue marginally the issue of Lewis's misogyny in *Tarr*, whereas I would like to argue that beyond the question of Lewis's misogyny lies the centrality of a discourse on sex and the use of the figure of the woman as passive, submissive and consenting. Fredric Jameson in *Fables of Aggression* writes the following:

It should be noted that while women, the organic, and sex itself are here all identified within a mythic, clearly negative term, there

is no correlative celebration of the male principle. The peculiarity of Lewis's sexual ideology is that, while openly misogynist, and sexist in the obvious senses of the word, it is not for all that phallogocentric. The positive term which logically corresponds to the negative one of the female principle is not the male, as in D. H. Lawrence, but rather art, which is not the place of a subject, masculine or otherwise, but rather impersonal and inhuman (...) (1979:97).

I believe there is in *Tarr* an explicit identification of the artist with the male principle, i. e., the artist is by definition male in *Tarr* and never otherwise. The women are always safely kept at the level of their "animality" and "machine-like" condition. If they reach beyond this level and interfere in the "man's world" – art and the intellect – they are not just rejected as a nuisance, as with Bertha; they are simply eliminated as an aberration of nature. (Vide Anastasya's meteoric disappearance from Tarr's life, after he discovered that she was his equal in all respects, even on the subject of art, and therefore their relationship had become impossible: "a superfluity and destructive conflict").

In Tarr's world-view, women can only fit in on a lower stratum of life, which *Tarr*, the hero, identifies with raw, untamed nature, to which he is submissive but which he also ultimately fears. Art is a result of a strenuous sublimation process, where the "true artist" invests all energy, all emotion that would otherwise be absorbed by sex and women. Women cannot transcend the "natural" human state, they are autonomous, mechanical, emotional beings living through their instincts; any man wanting to be an artist, to transcend nature, ought to beware the woman's touch. When *Tarr* says, "surrender to a woman was a sort of suicide to an artist", he is in fact echoing the futurist/vorticist "scorn for woman". Thus, *Tarr* is also in this respect the narrator's alter-ego and the prototype of the vorticist artist, close to the Lewis of 1914.

The argument that women were closer to nature and therefore alien to culture was a common one<sup>6</sup>, and was particularly used by the Anti-suffragists. Lewis himself defended it vehemently in *The Art of Being Ruled*, where he writes that “women are men with a handicap” (1969a):160), and feminists are defined as an “unsexed, rawboned, unattractive tribe of female cranks” (1969a):179). No wonder, he adds, there is a sex war for them! Does any pretty girl think there is such a thing as a sex war? (*Ibid.*).

The second most important female character in the novel is a Russian woman, Anastasya, in relation to whom Tarr's feelings and thoughts are very ambiguous. Tarr's first meeting with Anastasya is at the Lipmann's “aesthetic saloon”, as the narrator ironically refers to Fraulein Lipmann's Salon.

“What a big brute ! She would be just as good as Bertha to kiss. And you get a respectable human being into the bargain!” -He was not intimately convinced that she would be as satisfactory. Let us see how it would be; he considered. This *larger machine of*

---

6 In fact, the identification “woman-nature” versus “man- culture” is still a common one. An article published by Sherry Ortner in *The Woman Question*, entitled “Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture”? (Fontana, 1982:485-507), presents an interesting discussion of this stereotype. In her argument Ortner reviews historically this sub- positioning of women. First, woman's “bodily functions” place her in social roles that are considered to be at a lower order of the cultural process than man's. Secondly, the traditional roles that are imposed on her because of these same “bodily functions” give her a “different psychic structure” which is seen as closer to nature (1982:491).

Woman's enslavement to the species emphasises her animality; the fact that she is permanently associated with the context of her confinement, i. e., domestic family life, (her social space), enhances her relation to nature, (“a woman's place is in the home”). On the other hand, as Ortner says, “woman's nearly universal unquestioning acceptance of her own devaluation is ironically a proof of her commitment to culture's project of transcendence over nature” (1982:494). Thus she appears to be as “something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than man” (1982:495).

*repressed moping senses, did attract.* To take it to pieces, bit by bit and penetrate to its intimacy, might give a similar pleasure to undressing Bertha! (p. 218. Italic mine).

This “exceptional woman, a particularly refined and witty animal” is not on the whole very different from Bertha. In Tarr’s view, women are “a-social machines”. The “intensity” of Anastasya as well as the “animality” of Bertha produce in *Tarr* the same thoughts, the same reaction of uneasiness before their uncontrollable nature. Submitting to love for a woman (“animalism”), means “to betray the artist in him” (p. 217). However, in spite of himself, “sex surged up and martyred him, but he held it down rather than satisfy himself with its elementary servants” (p. 209). In fact, Tarr’s repugnance for women has much to do with his fear of his own sexuality, which is responsible for the panic and haste with which *Tarr* rejects both Bertha and Anastasya:

Possessed of such an intense life as Anastasya, women always appear on the verge of a dark spasm of unconsciousness. With their organism of fierce mechanical reactions, their self-possession was rather bluff. So much more accomplished socially than men, yet they were not the social creatures, but men (pp. 218-219).

Superior women like Anastasya he thinks are “parvenus” to the male world of intellect; on the other hand, in Bertha he feels the appeal of the mediocre and her slavish dependency:

She does nothing it is the man’s place to do. She remains “woman” as she would say. Only she is so intensely alive in her passivity, so maelstrom-like in her surrender, so cataclysmic in her sacrifice, that very little remains to be done. The man’s position is a mere sinecure (p. 59).

The parallel between Anastasya and Bertha exposes Tarr’s conflicts in relation to women and his belief that women are

merely physical, mechanical beings. The following passage demonstrates the point. *Tarr* is having lunch with Anastasya and the latter catches a glimpse of Bertha through the window. *Tarr* catches only the vision of Bertha going away.

It was a large trapped fly on the pane. It withdrew with a glutinous, sweet slowness. The heavy white jowl seemed putting itself out of some fluid trap where it had been caught like a weighty body. (...) Everything about her in the chilly night would give an impression of warmth and system. The sleek cloth fitting the square shoulders tightly, the underclothes carefully tight as well, the breath from her nostrils the slight steam from a contented machine (p. 305).

The superiority of one woman, as well as the surrender of the other, provokes in him the same reaction; however, before Anastasya he feels a strange uneasiness because he cannot quite categorize her yet. Anastasya, as a cultured woman, is seen as “too male”, a surrogate of man, her main error having been to step into the forbidden terrain of manhood – the intellect – ignoring *Tarr*’s rule that “there was only one God, and he was man, the woman was a lower form of life” (p. 334).

The feminine is for *Tarr* synonymous with “vulgarity”: it is “ordinary”, “time-bound”, close to the earthly instincts; it involves surrender which means suicide for the artist. Hence, he must disregard the fascination he feels for each of these women and simply find a woman-procreator who gives him security and sexual reward, without being a hindrance to his work.

Although biased through Kreisler’s half-mocking language, *Tarr*’s misogynous world-view comes out crudely in the following dialogue between the two male characters:

“When you go to take a woman you should be careful not to forget your *whip!* *That* Nietzsche said too!” “Are you going to give her a beating?” *Tarr* asked. Kreisler laughed in a ferocious and ironical

manner. “You consider that you are being fooled, in some way, by Fraulein Lunken?” “She would if she could. She is nothing but deceit. She is a snake. Pfui!” “You consider her a very cunning and double-faced woman?” Kreisler nodded sulkily. “With the soul of a prostitute?” “She is an innocent face like a Madonna. But she is a prostitute. I have the proof of it!” “In what way has she tricked me?” “In the way that women always trick men!” (p. 233)

This misogyny is visible again during the drunken conversation between *Tarr* and Anastasya.

“I don’t want you!” *Tarr* said.

“Oh! Tell me what you want?”

“I *want a woman!*”

“ But I am a woman, stupid!”

“I want a *slave.* ”

(...) “No! You may be a woman, but you’re not a slave!” (p. 322)

In the course of this argument he ends up calling her “a famous whore, who becomes rather acid in her cups” (p. 323) and he offers 25 francs for her. In the event, she later goes to his flat begging him to accept her as “model”. However, *Tarr* cannot stand having to compete intellectually with her. His reasoning about Anastasya is expressed in the following way:

He and Anastasya were *a* superfluity and destructive conflict. – It was like a mother being given a child to bear the same size already as herself. Anastasya was in every way too big; (pp. 333-334)

His fears in relation to women are openly expressed:

Everything was female to begin with. A jellyish diffuseness spread itself and gaped on the beds and in the bas-fonds of everything. Above a certain level of life sex disappeared (...) And on the other hand, *everything* beneath that line was female (p. 334).



*Tarr* regarded his short affair with Anastasya “as a sort of personal defeat” (*Ibid.*), for he felt he was giving in to a woman.

### 3. The representation of the rape

Bertha's feelings and thoughts always reach the reader biased through *Tarr* or displayed by the omniscient narrator in the sharp unquestioning way used to describe an object or enumerate the qualities of an animal:

She is full of good sense. = She is a high standard Aryan female, in good condition, superbly made; of the succulent, obedient, clear peasant type. (...) She is unfortunately not a peasant. She has German culture, and a florid philosophy of love. = She is an art-student. = She is absurd (pp. 23-24).

The only situation where this patronizing omniscience is abandoned and Bertha is allowed to voice some personal feelings is during the scene of her rape, a term which the narrator avoids. He ironically titles the section where the event is described: “A Jest too deep for Laughter”. Lewis's choice of the grotesque, the mechanical and the absurd assumes here a new refinement of style: the omniscient narrator withdraws, allowing the scene to open itself before the eyes of the reader. At first, the narrator adopts the comfortable position of a detached observer, using a technique similar to the “Nouveau Roman”'s “mise en abîme”, where the narrator is established as a complete stranger to the narrative, and the picture obtained is as though a camera has been slowly filming the scene. What makes him avoid his usual omniscience? Why does he inform us of what has happened through a flashforward followed by a flashback, leaving the crude picture to speak for itself, rather than representing the scene in a sequential chronology?

He starts with a view of the room, bathed by the light of sunset, the clock striking eight o'clock. The “camera” approaches

Kreisler, inert, absorbed at the window, “incandescent with steady saffron rays” (p. 192). Then, the camera focuses on Bertha:

She was leaning on the mantelshelf, had sunk forward, with the action of a person about to be sick. She had struggled up from bed a moment before (*Ibid.*).

The narrator concentrates only on the character’s feelings, her hatred, her disgust, all arising from a cause which is not yet explicit:

All the hatred and repulsion of her being, in a raw, indecent heat, seemed turned into this fearful sonority, gushing up like blood (*Ibid.*).

Bertha, we are told, is “outraged” by Kreisler. The narrator translates the expression of her hatred for him in a powerful metaphor, the darkest face of the carnivalesque grotesque:

An exasperated falling deepening sing-song in the “hasslicher Mensch!” something of the disgusting sound of the brutal relishing and gobbling of food. Hatred expresses itself like the satisfaction of an appetite. The outrage was spat out of her body onto him (pp. 192-193).

She looks as if someone has played a “practical joke” on her, “such as drenching with dirty water”, “she had been decoyed into swallowing something disgusting” (*Ibid.*). We will only later understand the full extent of these metaphors of “dirt” and “disgust”, when we learn that Bertha has been the victim of a rape; as she says in her elliptical style, “*this* had happened to her” (p. 194). Bertha has been “victim of an eeriness”, the narrator adds, giving us a few scattered details of the scene:

A folded blouse lay on the corner of Kreisler's trunk. Bertha's arms and shoulders were bare, her hair hanging in wisps and strips: generally a salon picture was the result. (...) A jagged tear in her chemise over her right breast also seemed the doing of a salon artist of facile and commercial invention (p. 193).

Returning to his usual omniscience, the narrator immerses himself totally in the character's feelings and "interprets" them. All Bertha can feel is the "inanity" of what has happened, which she senses as the "unreality of a nightmare", but, at the same time, she has "the strength to admit the "logic of this act", even more disgusting than its "illogic", the narrator hastily adds.

Through the eyes of the male narrator, she starts scrutinizing her own behaviour, finding moral reasons to put the blame on herself and socially redeem the man:

her being there at all, her eccentric conduct of the last week, what folly! Ever since she had known *Tarr*, her "sentiment" had been castigating her (pp. 193-194).

She has a glimpse of Kreisler's Bertha:

the woman that you couldn't shake off, who, for some unimaginable reason, was always hanging on to you (p. 194).

Tarr's laughter echoes in her ears. What a "silly and vulgar mush" she was! She was "the cause of all this" (p. 196), she even had "the strength to admit the logic of this act" (p. 194).

The man standing immobile at the window, who had a moment ago thrown himself at her, blind with violence, was what everybody knew: a brutal and mad beast. The whole thing was "senseless", she admits: "It was like some violent accident of the high road, the brutality of a tramp", (p. 194). Given this her rape was only to be expected: "was she to proceed with her explanations and her part?" (*Ibid.*).

As the narrator says, Bertha admits that her rape has been a logical act which her eccentric conduct has provoked. It does not seem to occur to Bertha that the sexual assault of which she had been victim is an act of revenge against the social humiliations that her assaulter has been continuously suffering. Kreisler had thrown himself at her with the violence of a man who finally sees himself in a position of power and finds his chance to affirm himself.

The fact that the actual rape is not represented in the text is significant. (Probably conscious of that, in his 1928 version of the novel, Lewis adds a few more details that prove the “irresponsible” and provocative behaviour of the female character). We are just given an anti-climax, very cautiously staged, as if the man and the woman were like exhausted and speechless actors after a violent performance.

As a matter of fact, it would not have been an easy task to represent the rape itself without trivializing it or, as Michael Levenson writes<sup>7</sup>, without running the risk that the action might fall in “comic irreverence”. Thus, in spite of the consequences this episode has in the further development of the novel (accelerating

7 Michael Levenson in the article, “Form’s Body, Wyndham Lewis’ Tarr” (in *Modern Languages Quarterly*, Vol. 45, N°3, 1984), writes the following about the ambiguous tone of the rape scene in Tarr; “The risk in such a scene is that it may seem to encourage the thought that no action is immune from comic irreverence” (p. 249).

Levenson does however believe that Lewis is aiming “at a more worthy and sophisticated idea: not that grave events are susceptible to travesty, but that travesty can itself lead to moral catastrophe – as surely as (...) passionate sincerity”. Levenson’s interpretation of this scene is inferred from Lewis’s definition of the comic as the action of “a thing behaving as a person”; conversely, he adds, “the tragic perception in Lewis is that of a person behaving like a thing, the descent from the voluntary to the involuntary, from the imagination into an unimaginative world” (p. 250). Thus, rejecting the possibility of mere “comic irreverence” in this scene, which he qualifies as repellent, Levenson chooses to interpret it in a rather moralistic way. However, in my point of view, this interpretation reduces drastically the language of ambiguity and the serio-comical style of this scene, which is crucial here, and which is generally an essential stylistic device of Lewis’s writing, as I will try to show later in this chapter.

Kreisler's isolation and decay; forcing Bertha under the protection of Tarr's name and safeguard of her honour), the act is reconstructed through a prolepsis and a flashback, a clever leap in time which avoids the climax of the scene, thus making it less explicit and crude. In this way, the reader has time to find out less abruptly that a rape has occurred and, the narrator has time to blame one character and excuse another. When the whole picture is finally drawn, the woman's guilt seems unproblematic and the man's desperate, "insane", "natural beastly" behaviour has been justified.

Aware of the impasse created, the narrator transforms the anti-climax of the novel in a conciliatory and ironical tone. Bertha is made to "swallow" her disgust and her rage and leave Kreisler's room casually. The act is dispossessed of its tragic momentum; it appears now futile and meaningless:

She had come there, got what she did not expect and must now go away again. (...) What *Tarr* laughed at her for – that silly and vulgar mush, was the cause of all this (p. 196).

Kreisler, impassively unlocks the door and lets her out:

She was let out as a workman would have been, who had been there to mend a shutter or rectify a bolt (*Ibid.*).

This blunt metaphor very aptly translates the narrator's uneasiness about expressing *in language* the nature of the act; he finds a way out by awkwardly reverting to irony and hastened dramatization. In fact, the act of raping a woman, literally "seizing her by force", means not only a male attempt at the appropriation of the woman's body, but also of her identity, of her self, since the nature of its violence is beyond the physical. For that very reason, its representation in language is difficult: although perpetrated as a direct assault on the woman's body, she feels it more as an attack on the integrity of her self, an invasion

of her wholeness. In such a situation, the woman may convince herself that “nothing” has happened to her, which is precisely what we are told of Bertha’s feelings in this novel. As she said, “all that” seemed utterly “senseless” to her; her body was where she felt less the pain, “her body was of little importance” (p. 196), and materially it was still “whole”: thus, the rape becomes redundant in the very eyes of the victim, and consequently also redundant to the reader.

The non-representation of Bertha’s rape gives us the key to the deconstruction of a discourse on sex which is unable to cope with what is central to itself and therefore has to be concealed under the cover of silence. As the narrator is powerless to inscribe the “real” of the woman’s body in the symbolic order of language, he renounces the full representation of the act that is perpetrated against it, seeking refuge in an elliptical silence and a cumbersome irony.

It is thus in this highlighting of a discourse on sex and the consequent deflecting of the actual rape that, as I suggested earlier, the narrator’s and Tarr’s voices most clearly merge, rather than merely on the subject of Humour. In this particular scene, the attitude of the narrator towards women and sexuality is displayed in all its misogyny, though not as crudely as in some of the passages quoted earlier, (e. g., Tarr’s dialogues with Hobson or with Kreisler on the subject of women). His misogyny is expressed subtly, almost unconsciously through language itself, what it “tells” and what it silences. This process is similar to what Eagleton discerns in the non-representationality of Clarissa’s rape in Richardson’s novel. As he says, despite all expectations of a great sexual climax, the narrator fails to represent the rape because of: “the reality of the woman’s body, a body which resists all representation and remains stubbornly recalcitrant to his fictions. (...) The violated body of Clarissa slips through the net of writing to baffle representation; (...) the rape defies signification for reasons other than those of literary decorum” (1982:60-61). And Eagleton adds: “Lovelace’s sexual climax

is also the novel's great anti-climax, a purely impersonal act of violence which refuses entry into discourse and brusquely unveils the real for what it is: a ceaseless digressive supplement which (...) will never succeed in nailing down the real" (1982:61).

## Sex and Power

Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex.

Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. (...) The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator (...) (Foucault 1981:83).

As Foucault says in *The History of Sexuality*, power's hold on sex is maintained through language, where it is articulated as a rule, as law.

Thus, in a patriarchal society, rape is, in a sense, a punishment for the woman who disobeys the sexual rules of institutionalized power. A woman who leads an illicit and unconventional sexual life, exposes herself to sexual and social sanctions, and she cannot expect the law to protect her because she will always be the first to raise suspicions. The law/power will often not see rape as an invasion of the woman's physical space, an offence against her right to control her own sexuality, her own life.

In *Tarr* Bertha sees herself in a similar situation. Socially, her conduct had always been considered immoral; aware of that, having internalized the law, she has difficulty in deciding whether the kind of sex she has just had (although she had been forced to it) was either more or less illegal and immoral than the pattern of her sexual life. She is not seeing herself through her own eyes, but through the eyes of a puritanical and philistine society, which justifies rape as the result of "natural male urges" against which a virtuous woman should always be in position to guard herself. Bertha decides to remain silent about the act that has victimized her, thus unconsciously becoming an accomplice to it:

Discourse transmits and produces power. (...) Silence and secrecy are a shelter for power (Foucault 1981:101).

If, as Foucault says, power and knowledge are joined together in discourse (1981:100), we must pay attention to its enunciations as well as to what it silences. While discourse exposes itself and openly transmits and engenders power, silence provides the necessary cover for what is most ignominious or shameful, for fear of exposing its innermost contradictions, which, as such, are silently sheltered and silently tolerated.

In the case of this novel, the word “rape” is never pronounced, as the act itself is not described. The narrator passes it by “in silence”, leaving the post-rape images to speak for themselves and the woman to express her doubts about the nature of the act. The narrator is thus not compromised. He does not have to answer for the acts of his male character. The woman herself seems to “understand” the male logic behind it.

Thus, the next chapter starts with Bertha’s decision to conceal her rape from anyone. The reader is expected to take it like her, casually, in silence, without focusing on it as essential to the understanding of the power game pervading the set of male/female relationships that are built throughout the novel.

However, Bertha is aware that, by not telling anyone of the sexual attack she has suffered from Kreisler, she is somehow shutting herself in with him for good, in spite of her “growing wish to make it known at once somewhere, in some shape” (p. 197). At the same time, angrily and painfully, she feels the irreversibility of this process, the vicious circle in which she has been caught:

Kreisler by doing this had made an absolute finishing with Kreisler perhaps impossible (...). There was nobody now in any sense on her side, or on whose side she could range herself (*Ibid.*).

She is completely isolated, caught in the game, whether she speaks of it or keeps silent. This is what she tells Kreisler when, out of some unknown motive other than the feeling of guilt, he comes to “apologize”! It is not the act itself that worries her,



but the man. And, as the man is worthless, so is the act. The omniscient narrator comments through free indirect speech: "It was nothing – a bagatelle! = Pooh! it is nothing after all! How can it be of any importance, seeing that?" (p. 203)

So, appealing to his chivalrous silence, in a very lady-like manner Bertha asks Kreisler to leave. She will not give any more importance to the matter:

Let us leave all that, if you please – It was all my fault. – I should have known better what I was doing. You must have been mad, as you say. But if you wish to show yourself a gentleman now, the only obvious thing is to go away, as I have said and not to molest or remind me any further of what has passed. There is nothing more to say, is there? – Go now, please! (p. 204)

#### 4. Kreisler

As Bakhtin writes, "a monotone character of thought and style almost always prevails in the official spheres of art and ideology" (1984b):433). In fact, Tarr's speeches on sex, women, art and humor would irretrievably tend to the monologic if it was not for the discourse and performance of his double, Kreisler, Tarr's antithesis in every respect. The duo Tarr/Kreisler, representing "the two-faced aspect of the world" (Bakhtin 1984b):430), sustain the novel's dialogical tone, preventing it from degenerating into a monotonous and authoritarian "Bildungsroman" or "roman à thèse", i. e., the creation of the artist as "new sort of person", a metamorphosis of the Nietzschean "Superman". Kreisler breaks the monologic tone of Tarr's speeches, introducing a disrupting farcical element which, restoring the dialogical tone of the narrative, corroborates the Preface: "There is no necessity to be literal to be in earnest". On the other hand, Tarr's discourse on Humour in the "Overture", as "a first rate means of evading reality" (p. 26), is preponderantly an ambivalent one, since it is after all directed at Tarr himself:

Humour paralyzes the sense for Reality and wraps people in a phlegmatic and hysterical dream-world, full of the delicious swirls of the switch-back, the drunkenness of the merry-go-round-screaming leaps from idea to idea (p. 28).

In his talk with Butcher, another of his friends from the art milieu, Tarr enunciates his theory of Humour:

Humour and pathos are such near twins, that Humour may be exactly described as the most feminine attribute of men, and the only one of which women show hardly any trace! (...) Comedy being always the embryo of Tragedy, the director nature weeps. Women are of course director than men. But they have not the same resources (pp. 56-57).

Kreisler is the “German clown”, Tarr’s feminine counterpart, his inclination to “loose emotionality”, tears, rage and impulsive action opposing Tarr’s self-control and strict behaviour. In the same way that the narrator claims that “Humour and pathos are such near twins” and “comedy (is) the embryo of Tragedy”, the duo Tarr/Kreisler fight each other, while remaining inseparable. The aggressivity that they show towards each other is, as Jameson writes, “structurally inherent in the agon itself, (...) and expresses the rage and frustration of the fragmented subject at the chains that implacably bind it to its other and its mirror image” (1979:61)<sup>8</sup>.

---

8 According to Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, the “agon” is a dialogue of pairs, a reflection of the “ancient dual-bodied image”, as in Don Quixote and Sancho. Bakhtin writes the following: “The dialogue of these pairs is of considerable interest, since it marks the as yet incomplete disintegration of the dual tone. In reality, it is a dialogue of the face with the buttocks, of birth with death. We find a similar manifestation in the antique and medieval debates between winter and spring, old age and youth, fasting and abundance, old times and new, parents and children” (1984b):434). These agons and debates are also “dialogues of the forces and phenomena of different times, of two poles of becoming, of the beginning and the end

The partners Tarr/Kreisler constitute what Jameson calls a “pseudo-couple”, i. e., a “new collective subject, both reduplicated and divided all at once” (1979:58). They are:

(...) neither active, independent subjects in their own right, nor have they succumbed to their schizophrenic fetishization which characterizes contemporary consciousness. They remain legal subjects who none the less lack genuine autonomy and find themselves thereby obliged to lean on one another in a simulation of psychic unity which is little better than neurotic dependency (1979:59).

The “pseudo-couple” acts, in the particular case of Lewis’s writing, as essentially a “structural device to preserve narrative as such” (Jameson, *Ibid.*). In fact, the “very logical and deliberate grimace” which Lewis wants to produce in *Tarr* is, after all, the result of the opposition between Tarr’s “grin” and Kreisler’s emotionality, his loud and farcical laughter.

The “pseudo-couple” Tarr/Kreisler is at the core of Lewis’s philosophy of art, as well as of his philosophy of satire. It contrasts the idealized image of the artist, as a superior aristocratic being, an ascetic person in total control of his emotions with all the potential for achieving “true freedom”, with the “bourgeois bohemian” artist, a poor spirit, a weak man, succumbing to instincts and emotions. Therefore it is not surprising that Kreisler establishes a “pact” with Bertha, who is his female counterpart, and they trap each other in a relationship of tacit silence and inertia. An equivalent but opposite bond is established between Tarr and Anastasya, which is also doomed to fail.

As we have seen, Kreisler’s fall is inevitable, adumbrated from the beginning of the narrative. Like any social outcast, he

---

of a metamorphosis. They unfolded and to a certain extent rationalized or rhetoricized the dialogue element inherent in the dual-tone speech” (*Ibid.*). Bakhtin adds that the “agons” and “debates” are considered to be “one of the folkloric roots of the novel and of its specific dialogue” (*Ibid.*).

rejects and is rejected by society. His death is expected by the reader and felt not as a suicide but as a voluntary expiation of his “original sin”, a self-immolation which does not attain pathos because it is staged like a trivial, almost comic performance.

Kreisler’s image is built as the anti-hero: a “graceless Hamlet” (p. 148), who, having lost faith in conquering his Ophelia, kills a man by mistake in an impromptu duel and never manages to redeem his honour.

The duel with Soltyk, which Kreisler sets up with almost desperate energy and a sudden “wild assertion of vitality”, is a first staging of his death:

He was seeking reparation by arms. He had been libelled and outraged. “A beautiful woman” was at the bottom of it! Life had no value for him (p. 281).

However, Kreisler’s new outburst of confidence and snobbery, his “good behaviour”, comes from the tragic knowledge that:

He was almost dead (he had promised his father his body for the next month and must be punctual) but people had already begun treading on him, and striking matches on his boots. As to fighting with a man who was practically dead to all intents and purposes, one mass of worms – a worm, in short, – that was not to be expected of anybody (p. 277).

Nevertheless, the emotional intensity of this moment never reaches its climax, and is completely dissipated into a series of new farcical episodes. The staged duel scene symbolizes the whole of Kreisler’s mishaps and results in a new humiliation for him. When both parties were about to agree that the duel should be forgone, Kreisler kills his rival by mistake. He decides to give himself up to the police, but even then he is scorned and thrown out into the road. Finally, against all odds, Kreisler manages to

get arrested and slowly, in a completely unemotional frame of mind, he proceeds to arrange the scenery of his death:

He began slowly drawing off his boots. He took out the laces, and tied them together for greater strength. Then he tore several strips of his shirt and made a short cord with them. He went through these actions deliberately and deftly, as though it were a routine and a daily happening (...) He gently worked the bed outwards from under him, giving it a last steady shove. He hung, gradually choking, the last thing he was conscious of, his tongue(p. 301).

### 5. Dialogism and Hybridization in *Tarr*

According to Bakhtin, the phenomenon of hybridization, i. e., “the mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter between two different linguistic consciousnesses” (1981:358)<sup>9</sup>, is seminal in the novel genre. In fact, in Bakhtin’s view, every novel is a *hybrid*, when taken as the “totality of all the languages and consciousness of language embodied in it”. Yet, in an important qualification, it is an “intentional and conscious hybrid, one artistically organized and not an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages” (1981:366). If, as Bakhtin also says, “intentional semantic hybrids are internally dialogic” (*Ibid.*), the phenomenon of hybridization in the novel brings about *heteroglossia*, which he defines as: “another’s speech in another’s language”. Thus, to a certain extent, each character’s speech being “the speech of another in another’s language”, constitutes “a second language of the author” (*Ibid*, p. 315) and breaks the apparent unity and consistency of his voice. The role of the critic in relation to the novel is thus to uncover and be able to understand the different languages existing in the novel and their dialogic

9 The speaking person in the novel is always an *ideologue* and his words are always *ideologemes*: “it is precisely as ideologeme that discourse becomes the object of representation in the novel, and for that reason novels are never in danger of becoming a mere aimless verbal play” (Bakhtin 1981:333).

relationships, since, according to Bakhtin, beneath the “smooth single-languaged surface of a novel, one can nevertheless uncover prose’s three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and is its determining factor” (*Ibid.*).

In fact, there are in *Tarr* different world views which are distinctly voiced and dialogically set against each other, i. e. “dispersed” in antagonistic pairs of characters (Tarr/Kreisler, Bertha/Anastasya), some voicing the hero’s desires and aims, others his concealed fears and secret wishes, allowing “stratification and speech diversity” to be introduced in the narrative. Besides, the narrator’s voice, with its persistently ironizing and mocking tone, also has a dialogical function, contributing to the ambivalence of the text. As I remarked earlier<sup>10</sup>, this narrative technique which Fredric Jameson calls “compositional”<sup>11</sup> produces a kind of “second-degree narrative” and an alternative story-line challenging the main one.

Dialogism is here kept alive through an internal dialogue between the characters structured in antagonistic pairs: i. e., what at first seems to be the monologism of Tarr’s personality has its double in Kreisler, and becomes therefore mocked and challenged by Tarr’s clown-Imago, whom he scorns and despises but secretly fears. Tarr expresses his self *against* Kreisler. His total disregard for feelings and emotions is contrasted to Kreisler’s total abandon to them; the arrogant grin Tarr presents to the world is similar to the “clownesque”, plaintive mask that Kreisler wears. Tarr is the showman whose “stiff solemnity”<sup>1</sup> is often ridiculed through the clown, who, completely assuming his caricatural role, becomes the satirist himself.

Tarr seems to use humour in order to achieve isolation from reality, in spite of his awareness that humour is that “wonderful panacea” which “paralyzes the sense for Reality and wraps

<sup>10</sup> As I noted earlier in my analysis of *The Wild Body*.

<sup>11</sup> Vide Fredric Jameson’s article “Wyndham Lewis as Futurist”, *Hudson Review*, 26, 1973/74, p. 310.

people in a phlegmatic and hysterical dream-world” (pp. 27-28). Humour *protects* Tarr from the world: he has his own “private comedy” which succeeds in alienating him from the real world of the struggle and emotions of all the people around him. His seriousness and authority are only, and in spite of himself, challenged by his instinctive fear of Kreisler’s proximity and his irrepressible admiration for Anastasya. Kreisler remains, however, the character in the novel where the serio-comical ambivalence, the dialogue between pathos and humour are most thoroughly achieved.

Anastasya and Bertha, playing antagonistic female roles in the novel, never seem to have a “real” life, independent of the hero’s whims, fears and frustrations. Anastasya, who is meant to be the female match of Tarr, remains an artificial picture of a woman, “too male” and “too big”, as Tarr himself acknowledged. On the other hand, Bertha is made to remain in our eyes “vulgar”, “ordinary” and “always woman”<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, the concomitance of these two distinct female voices in the narrative contributes to the heteroglossia of the novel.

## 6. Carnival in *Tarr*

*Tarr* is not a primitive Carnavalesque picture of the world, a “straightforward menippean satire”, in the manner discernible in *The Wild Body*. Apart from a few isolated scenes, it is essentially an intellectualized “drama of words” kept alive by interior dialogism.

In the frame of the carnivalesque, *Tarr* is closer to the “masquerade line” of grotesque modernism, which according to Bakhtin’s Introduction to *The World of François Rabelais* came from the evolution of the Romantic tradition under the

<sup>12</sup> As Judith Mitchell writes in “Women and Wyndham Lewis”, (*Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 16, 24/2 Summer 1978, p. 226), “Bertha’s romanticism makes her a robot, controlled by the men in the novel”.

influence of Existentialism, and differs from grotesque realism, which is related to the tradition of Realism and folk culture. Thus, the Romantic grotesque genre differed from the Medieval and Renaissance in that it was no longer related to folk culture and “belonged to all the people”, but acquired a “chamber” character:

it became as it were, an individual carnival marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic philosophy. It ceased to be the concrete (one might say bodily) experience of the one, inexhaustible being, as it was in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Bakhtin, 1984b):37).

Carnival became here almost purely caricatural. In this new form of the carnivalesque, laughter was “reduced” to cold irony and sarcasm. Its essential “regenerating power” was lost and a new element of terror before a hostile, alienating world was introduced; similarly, the ambivalence and gaiety of the medieval sense of terror, the monstrous, also disintegrated. The relationship that people established with *madness* and the usage of the *mask* changed drastically. From a “gay parody of official reason and of the narrow seriousness of official truth”, madness became the “somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation” (1984b):39). The mask, used in the medieval grotesque as a symbol of relativity and ambivalence, “the merry negation of uniformity and similarity” (*Ibid.*) became a device to hide and deceive. Finally, the puppet (which is particularly relevant in the case of *Tarr*), became the corporealization of the alien, inhuman force which rules over men and transforms them into marionettes and often into “tragic dolls” (1984b):40).

*Tarr* is not a tragedy of marionettes, although its characters and action are imbued with a belief that the modern world transforms people into primitive and mechanical beings. In *Tarr*, the carnivalesque side of any situation often takes over and raises laughter before pity or terror: whenever a pathetic situation is



created, its climax is immediately destroyed by a comic intrusion or a bizarre episode. Power situations are constantly menaced. Grotesque caricatures deform sublime faces and pathetic feelings. Masks are often exchanged as the “wise” become degraded and the fools or clowns suddenly assume a new and unexpected power position. The latter constitute, in Bakhtin’s terminology, the *crowning* and *decrowning* typical of the carnivalesque world.

### Crowning and decrowning

As a novel, *Tarr* presents no “*conclusive conclusions*”, which in Carnival terms, as Bakhtin wrote in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* means that: “all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again” (1984a):165).

*Tarr* is *crowned* in the beginning of the novel as the hero, the superior man, the artist, the master of his emotions. However, through a series of reversals of fortune he sees himself trapped in situations where he loses control, and gradually he is publicly *decrowned*. The first “*deercrowning*” takes place before the eyes of Kreisler, whom Tarr contemptuously ignores as human being as well as artist. This scene is narrated in the chapter “A Megrim of Humour”, which marks a turning point for the two main characters. One day, suddenly surprised at not seeing him in the usual Café, and preoccupied with the nature of Kreisler’s interest for Anastasya, Tarr decides to look him up in his own house. As soon as Tarr arrives at Kreisler’s flat he feels “that he had gone a step too far” and even that he has “miscalculated” his rival (p. 249). Kreisler, behaving coldly and confidently, enquires about the reason for this unexpected visit; finding no reasons to explain it, Tarr sees “the absurdity in the situation he had got himself into” and feels trapped: “Neither comedy nor hypocrisy were usable for the moment”, the narrator adds (p. 251). For the first time Tarr is at a disadvantage before Kreisler, who, in his turn, feeling totally in control of the situation and, understanding the sudden reversal of roles, grows more and more violent, and ends

up showing Tarr the way to the door “flourishing an old dog whip in his hand” (*Ibid.*). Regretting his own “unreadiness, his dislike for action, his fear of ridicule” (p. 253), Tarr decides to ignore the whole episode – though still feeling the “belittlement” of his “unsavoury role”. He starts coming to the conclusion that “his contempt for everybody degraded him” (*Ibid.*) and realizes that he is “a sort of Quixotic dreamer of inverse illusions”:

He, instead of having conceived the world as more chivalrous and marvellous than it was, had conceived it as emptied of all dignity, sense and generousness (...) The curse of humor was in him, anchoring him at one end of the sea-saw whose movement and contradiction was life (p. 254).

Tarr is also “uncrowned” in relation to the two female characters in the novel. Before Anastasya with whom (in spite of himself) he has fallen in love, he confesses to having suffered “a sort of personal defeat” (p. 334). Seeing her he feels “a sudden humbleness” (*Ibid.*) and he becomes aware that “none of his ego was required by this new woman. She possessed plenty of her own” (p. 335).

Regarding Bertha, Tarr’s attitude is even more surprising: when told that she is pregnant by Kreisler, and in order to save her from further humiliation, he proposes to marry her. Bertha’s first reaction is one of suspicion, but then she realizes that “at last things had turned -Sorbert was denying reality ! He was ending with miracles against himself” (p. 331). In spite of that, as we are told, two years after the birth of the child, Bertha divorces Tarr, who does not marry Anastasya but, as the narrator ironically writes:

however, had three children by a lady of the name of Rose Fawcett, who consoled him eventually for the splendours of his “perfect woman” (p. 341).

## Parody in Tarr

As Bakhtin writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, parody is organically inherent in all carnivalized genres and parodying doubles became a common phenomenon in carnivalized literature, especially in Dostoevsky's:

In each of them (...) the hero dies, (that is, is negated) in order to be renewed (that is, in order to be purified and to rise above himself) (1984a):128).

Even though he also adds that in modern times the connection of formal literary parody with a carnival sense of the world is almost entirely broken, I want to show that in *Tarr* parody preserved some of its ambivalent potential and its “bond with death/renewal” (Bakhtin, *Ibid.*).

Kreisler's suicide means the elimination of the anti-hero through his self-destruction, which happens almost simultaneously with Tarr's suffering a painful series of “decrownings” and self-negations. Tarr is “purified” and “rises above himself”. This does not however imply that the “serio-comical” tone of the novel is dropped and is replaced by some sort of moralistic happy ending. Instead, *Tarr* presents, as I said before, “no conclusive conclusions”: it only happens that the initially monologic hero's confidence and authority is threatened towards the end of the novel, when he is compelled to compromise for social survival.

## The Threshold in the Novel

As we saw in *The Wild Body*, the main arena for carnival acts was the open-air performance in the village square, as well as the tavern, the inn, the road and other “meeting – and contact – points for heterogeneous people” (Bakhtin 1984a):128). However, as we have been seeing, the same does not happen in *Tarr*.

According to Bakhtin, when the “festive court masquerade culture” begins to develop, the carnival space becomes more

restricted and protected, thus giving origin to the “chamber masquerade line” (*Ibid.* p. 131), where some of the license and some reflections of the carnival sense of the world were preserved (*Ibid.* p. 130). However, despite the narrowing down of its space, following the transformation from the popular medieval to the modernist grotesque genre, the carnivalesque action still concentrates, as Bakhtin writes:

on the *threshold* (in doorways, entrance ways, on staircases, in corridors and so forth), where the crisis and the turning point occur, or on the *public square*. whose substitute is usually the drawing room (the hall, the dining room), where the catastrophe, the scandal take place (*Ibid.* p. 149).

*Tarr's* “Overture” is staged in the open air. The Café Berne in the “Boulevard du Paradis” and the Latin Quarter are the settings for most of the discussions about art and life where *Tarr's* personality and his world are defined. However, these pseudo-dialogues take place in almost complete intimacy, at times giving one the impression that they are mere monologues, since the other speaker is reduced to silent acquiescence. Bedrooms, Bertha’s and Kreisler’s, are also important spaces for the affirmation and withdrawal of *Tarr's* positions: both are small, narrow, leading to corridors and staircases. In relation to Anastasya’s role, it is the open air that is privileged: long walks in the park or “tête-à-tête” situations in public places, such as cafés and restaurants.

Fraulein Lipmann’s *Salon* is another substitute for a “communal place”, a point of casual meetings and social reunions. In the section “Bourgeois-Bohemians” a major carnival action takes place: Kreisler abruptly bursts into one of these meetings and provokes great scandal and panic. Here he completely assumes the image of the tragic clown, living his own ridicule to the end, covering himself and all the others around him with the scandal of his presence and behaviour, destroying the peace and

harmony of the entire social gathering. Uninvited, inadequately dressed while every other man is in “frac”, he invades Fraulein Lipmann’s “drawing-room” hoping to find Anastasya there. He gets completely drunk, insults women, dances madly around the ball-room, quotes Hamlet, but in spite of his anger and violence only ends up provoking laughter at himself:

Anastasya’s eyes were scourging him. He felt like a martyr. -Suddenly conscious of an awkwardness in his legs, he changed his position. His arms were ludicrously disabled. The sensation of standing neck deep in horrid filth beset him. Compelled to remain in soaking wet clothes and unable to change them, his body gradually drying them, would have been a similar discomfort (p. 155).

## 7. Conclusion

As we have seen, Kreisler is largely responsible for the carnivalesque ambivalence of the novel. He has the primitive violence of the clown, in opposition to the dramatic “seriousness” of the hero, and maintains the narrative at the threshold between comedy and tragedy. He is “the clown of the night”<sup>13</sup>, a “night watchman (who) laughs in church and weeps in the bordello” (Bakhtin, 1984b: 41). Having thus created in Kreisler the hero’s double, the narrator succeeds in disrupting the apparent monologic structure of *Tarr*, particularly striking in its “Overture”.

The conflicts Art/Life, Instinct/Intellect, are not resolved. The collision between mind and body which was the subject of *The Wild Body*, (the body untamed), is also the subject of *Tarr*, (the

13 As Allon White writes in his article “Pigs and Pierrots: The Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction” (*Raritan*. 1982, vol. 2 No2, ed. Poirier, pp. 55-56): the Harlequin provides in the 19th and 20th century, “*the wan and wistful symbols of an anomic disenchantment with bourgeois life (...) transformed from popular comic figures (embroiled in social turmoil and domestic farce) into remote and moony victims with no place to go (...) Harlequin was not born sad, and his withdrawal into helpless melancholy was forced upon him by the tragicomedy of bourgeois individualism*”.

taming of the body). However, the ambivalent allegory of *The Wild Body* gives way in *Tarr* to a more introspective picture of the conflict Art/Life, embodied in the “pseudo-couple” Tarr/Kreisler. Tarr, as the hero, does not accomplish his fate: he never manages to become the “Superman” entirely devoted to his art and divorced from life, despite his asceticism and misogyny. Tarr who is initially described as an outsider in total control of his actions and emotions, becomes gradually humanized, his stiffness and arrogance softened. Kreisler’s destiny, acted out, *frees* Tarr as Jameson says (1979:100), releasing him from his clownesque Imago. His death has a cathartic effect on Tarr. If, as the narrator says, Kreisler is a “vomit”, the symbolic act of expelling “Germany’s large leaden brain” from the centre of Europe, Tarr is also the expurgation of a load that Lewis had been carrying for a long time, since the early Vorticist days: the struggle between the grotesque and the sublime, embodied in the image of the artist.

However, *Tarr* does not reach the expected climax. Its outcome, rather, is a compromise between the ideal of the artist as a superior being to whom surrender to feelings is a suicide, and Lewis’s plea that the Englishman should “cease to be ashamed of his feelings”. Tarr’s grin becomes, in fact, a “logical grimace” which, though still a mask, is of a more human kind.

Tarr, as the showman and hero of this novel is, as W. Pritchard says, “the metaphysical satirist”, as Lewis was the showman and clown of *The Wild Body*; both hold the same position of universal satirists, acting with detachment and disregard for feelings. Kreisler, the tragic clown, establishes the link between these two modes of satire: sometimes he is a lot more human than Tarr, despite completely assuming his caricatural role. At other times, when the sublime and the grotesque touch, he becomes in his clownesque naivety the satirist himself.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **ENEMY OF THE STARS – A THESIS AND A PERFORMANCE**

#### **1. The play – an introduction**

*Enemy of the Stars* was first published in 1914, as part of *Blast 1*. It is a play with a double purpose: to present a theoretical thesis on the dialogic conflict between Body/Mind, Senses/Intellect, corporealized in the individual struggle of two different beings, and to propose a concrete response to the experimentalist demands of Vorticism on the privileged space of performance, the stage.

My analysis of this play will be based on these two aspects: dialogism and experimentalism. For the study of the first I will draw on Bakhtin's research on the "carnavalesque genre", as I did in relation to *The Wild Body* and *Tarr*. The study of the play's experimentalism, at the level both of language and syntax and of theatrical structure, will be based on the principles of *Blast* and the manifestos of Futurism.

In fact, nothing could be better suited to the vorticist and futurist claims for dynamism and objectivity than a text designed for the stage, even when it only wished to represent an intellectual conflict of ideas. Moreover, the physical distance that the formal distinction between actors and audience suggests allows the creation of a space for reflection which the reader of narrative cannot experience.

Lewis had already attempted to convey the message of the play in different genres, probably in search of its most thorough expression. These projects included the narrative form of *Tarr*, and the short-story picaresque style of *The Wild Body*, (especially

in the essays “The Meaning of the Wild Body” and “Inferior Religions”), and also, through lines and colour, his paintings of the same epoch<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. The play's dialogism

*Enemy of the Stars* is a symbolic play formally structured in the line of the modernist grotesque, putting forward a carnivalized vision of the modern world peopled by mechanical, automaton-like beings, split between their automatism and insanity and the painful awareness of their very nature<sup>2</sup>.

Dialogue in the play is created by a split of personality into two characters with separate but twin lives, Arghol and Hanp. The reality in which they move is a cold world of “metal and heavy structures”, conveying the feeling of oppression and disorientation in a dark and heavy atmosphere. Like animals imprisoned in a cage with immense walls, these two beings move in circles, reaching for light.

*Enemy of the Stars* has however mainly been acknowledged as representing the individual struggle for recognition, the Ego against Mankind, the One against the Crowd, or even, in a more strict sense, the elitist appeal of the “artist” among and against

- 1 His portraits and paintings of men-machines, automata making war, totally devoid of any appearance of life and displaying emptiness, also have a prefiguration of death in their masks. The *Tyros*, (1921/22), which are self-defined as “raw” and “undeveloped” puppets “worked with deft fingers, with a screaming voice underneath” (WB, p. 354), thoroughly display this idea, both as texts and as portraits.
- 2 The modern world’s “insanity”, “ugliness” and “tragic nature” had also been proclaimed in the *Blast* manifesto, “The Exploitation of Vulgarity”: “Rare and cheap, fine and poor, these contrasts are the male and female, the principle of creation today. This pessimism is the triumphant note in modern art. A man could make just as fine an art in discords, and with nothing but “ugly” trivial and terrible materials, as any classic artist did with only “beautiful” and pleasant means. (...) Life today is giddily frank, and the fool is everywhere serene and blatant. Human insanity has never flowered so colossally.” (*Blast* p. 145)



the “common man”. Some of the critical discussions of the play emphasize this larger aspect. For instance, Timothy Materer, in *Wyndham Lewis the Novelist*, calls it a “tragic meditation on the fate of the artist”, (1976:50), though he also underlines the recurrent opposition between Mind and Body, which results from the fact that Hanp is an aspect of Arghol. Materer sees the play as a “monodrama”, the action being concentrated on one leading figure, creating the hero:

Hanp provides an hostile audience for Arghol’s ponderous insights. (...) Having destroyed the personality his existence depended on, as humanity depends upon the artist to give form and meaning to life, Hanp is then driven to suicide (*Ibid.*).

This position is mystifying as far as the role of the artist in society is concerned, and Materer’s conclusions about the development of this play seem, in a sense, unfair to its purposes. Materer emphasizes that there is no winner in the play: the Universe, the archetypal hostility to all possibility of human creation, is the real victor of this battle. Nevertheless, by consigning a static quality to what Lewis wanted to be a *dynamic* play, one is implicitly muffling the distinct sounds of the two different voices (Arghol/Hanp) with which Lewis wanted to have himself and his audience confronted. Each of the two discourses follows its own flow, has its own reasoning and creates its own destiny. If this play were to be a “monodrama”, then we would not have to consider Arghol and Hanp as two distinct voices, but the narrator himself as the supreme hero, his absent voice resolving the actors’ conflict.

As such, the confrontation between Arghol and Hanp is similar to that represented in *Tarr* through the pairs, Tarr and Kreisler or Anastasya and Bertha, as well as that between showman and clown, mind and wild body, in the symbolic universe of *The Wild Body*. Transformed into dramatic categories, confronted in antagonistic positions, none of them emerges as the winner or the

defeated. The awareness of their chaotic and grotesque situation, as well as the splitting of their subjectivities, is clearly stated by each of them. Thus, one could say that Lewis creates in Arghol and Hanp a new “pseudo-couple”, which according to Fredric Jameson’s definition means that each of the partners has absolutely no autonomy in relation to the other, but rather exists in a relationship of “neurotic dependency”, rage, frustration and aggressivity (1979:61). As I noted in relation to Tarr, Jameson adds that this is an inherent characteristic of the “agon” itself, rather than a “private characteristic of the novelist” (*Ibid.*).

Robert Chapman, in *Wyndham Lewis: Fictions and Satires*, offers an exposition close to Materer’s:

The struggle between Hanp and Arghol is a symbolic one and the conflict it represents (...) is that between the one and the many, the artist and the world, the individual and the crowd, Natures and Puppets, (...) Personality and Mankind. Arghol is hated for his vision and made to feel guilt for his uniqueness; yet, however much he tries, he cannot escape his destiny. Life, he sees, is nasty, brutish and short, and he is very much aware of its inherent absurdity: Hanp on the other hand, merely endures it (1973:21-22).

In fact, the play does not point any way out, neither does it reassure us about any principles. Not even Hanp or Arghol seem to have come to any final conclusion. There is not a super-valuation of the artist against or above the crowd, and there is not one Hanp-Mankind, just as there is not one Arghol-Personality. Each of these categories is present in the same being. Hanp and Arghol are undissociated and they are able to recognize their own conflict because each one of them is in the other: “You are an unclean little beast, crept gloomily out of my ego”, says Arghol to Hanp (p. 73).

Thus, in *Enemy of the Stars*, the real confrontation is not between Arghol and Hanp as the “intellectual wordly-wise” against “dull-witted and violent Mankind”. It is rather the con-

frontation of these two “heathen clowns”, “cynical athletes” with themselves, and symbolically, Lewis confronting his own aesthetics, his own beliefs and cynicism, within an existentialist dimension. *Enemy of the Stars* presents a metaphysical argument on the essence of art and the meaning of life, rather than asserting principles or displaying pairs of opposites simplistically reduced to antagonistic value categories.

Even though one might agree that this play is a sort of Vorticist allegory, (as Thomas Kush says in *Wyndham Lewis Pictorial Integer*, 1981:79), it achieves this status only by approaching (in Lewis’s own words), “the level of experimental daring that characterized vorticist painting”, and effectively conveying a strong anti-naturalistic message by means of a powerful visual medium.

In *Enemy of the Stars* the stage is beyond doubt an allegoric “vortex-like arena”: the relation between the scenic space with its futuristic avatars and the actors as clowns is in fact allegorical and symbolic, but Arghol and Hanp only taken as *one* entity can be seen as the allegory of the vorticist/futurist man, striving to be “erect on the summit of the world” and “hurl defiance to the stars” (Vide Marinetti, “Futurist Manifesto”, 1909).

“The stars are his cast”, says the narrator in relation to Arghol. He has come to fight a ghost, “Humanity”, which is his other self. Later on in the play, Arghol will painfully confess to Hanp:

You are the world, brother, with its family objections to me (p. 73).

Hanp is his twin-self, his “other”. Arghol’s mistake is his “greed” to reach the integrity of his self, to try to put an end to the split that is causing his collapse.

In fact, this is the aim of Vorticist man in all his important manifestations. Painting the Vortex, narrating the Vortex, staging the Vortex, is but the anxiety to reach that state of ideal and complete commitment of the artist to his work, which singled him out from the rest of mankind, making him a “super-man”

immune to the passions and sentimentalism of the “common man”. This was seen as the main attribute of the “vorticist artist” = “the interpreter”, “the seer”; in the words of the “Vorticist Manifesto”: “our cause is no-man’s”, “the Artist of the modern world is a Savage”<sup>3</sup>.

In *Enemy of the Stars*, Arghol expresses this fear, this anxiety that he cannot overcome his human condition. Such personal conflict reflects a contradiction inherent in “Vorticism” as ideology. Its recurrence in Lewis’s writing proves that Lewis himself is well aware of it:

The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation, and “souillure” of the original solitude of the soul (p. 70).

Arghol is the Nietzschean “Superman” thwarted between his self and the “other”, “in immense collapse of chronic philosophy” (E. S. p. 59). He is: “Central as stone. Poised magnet of subtle, vast, selfish things” (p. 61); whereas Hanp, the “other, is an “appalling ‘gamin’, black bourgeois aspirations undermining blatant virtuosity of self” (p. 59).

To return to the possibility of an allegory in the play: perhaps Arghol and Hanp together, the “self” and the “other”, can be considered as an allegory of the Vorticist or the Futurist man; but not Arghol/Personality as the allegory of the artist, versus Hanp/Mankind, the allegory of the common-non-artist man. This way the play would be rather more like a “miracle play” than a vorticist, experimentalist drama.

---

3 Gaudier-Brzeska, the young and brilliant sculptor who died in the war, became the symbol and icon of the true vorticist artist, the one who could most thoroughly fulfil all his wishes and needs in art. For this reason Pound called him “The Savage Messiah”. As one can see from my analysis of the Futurist Manifestos, (see Chapter Two), these principles can also be applied to Futurism.

Moreover, Arghol is not, as Kush writes, “striving toward the contemplative understanding that is the foundation of Lewis’s aesthetics” (1981:79). Lewis is allowing his very aesthetics to be dialogically challenged by a double confrontation, arising from the characters’ split subjectivities: Arghol (the intellectual) versus Arghol (the wheelwright); Hanp (the disciple) versus Hanp (the wild body, life); Arghol (the master, solitude of the soul) versus Hanp (“souillure” of the soul); and, finally, Hanp, instinct of life, versus Arghol, mask of death.

When Arghol is beaten up by an anonymous, giant “jack-boot”, it is just his fear, his self-guilt, his incapacities, that he is painfully feeling, the awareness of the split he allowed to grow and even cultivated within himself. He is not heroic, nor does he stoically suffer this violence which life has inflicted on him, because he does not want to be “assimilated into mankind” and have all his “signs of excellence extinguished” (Chapman, 1973:23). The blows he feels in his body are the formal representation of the blows he suffers in his divided ego: “Self, sacred act of violence, is like murder on my face and hands” (E. S. p. 66).

Kush’s affirmation that in Lewis’s *Wild Bodies*, (in the texts and in the paintings), “the human and tragic awareness of the body’s limitation is incipient” (1981:41), makes one realize that in *Enemy of the Stars* Hanp’s awareness of the limitations of his body is as tragic as Arghol’s awareness of the limitations of his mind.

In the discursive style of “Inferior Religions”, Lewis presents a view of the “wild body” where the split body/mind is not yet made perceivable. The “wild body” *intact* is a “supreme survival”. It is a compound of “that small, primitive, literally antediluvian vessel in which we set out for our adventures”, and “which regarded as a brain, is rather a winged magic horse, that transports us hither and thither (...)” (WB, p. 152).

The dichotomy body/mind is an “essential separation”, as Lewis said in “The Meaning of the Wild Body”, but each one

is part of the other and in the end they form a whole. He adds that we have “to postulate two creatures, one that never enters into life, but that travels about in a vessel to whose destiny it is momentarily attached. That is, of course, the laughing observer, and the other is the Wild Body” (WB, p. 157). However, these two do not have separate lives; “this fundamental observation, then, can never on the whole be absolute. We are not constructed to be absolute observers” (WB, p. 158). Similarly, the conflict represented by Arghol and Hanp in *Enemy of the Stars*, displaying the split in each individual between Mankind/Personality, is not only tragic, but an aberration in its essence.

If what inclines us to consider Arghol as the hero of “Enemy of the Stars”, or Tarr as the hero of the novel with the same name, is the level of consciousness that they attain in the process of each narrative, we must then also see that they never reach the clear-cut “lucidity” of the epic hero, or the level of unawareness of the anti-hero. They reach a state in between, the consciousness of their limitations translated in a tempering of their arrogance and an increasing flexibility in their attitudes, as their self-esteem has been lowered and ultimately damaged.

In *Enemy of the Stars* Lewis puts himself in the drama and calls us into it as well. On the one hand, following his recognition of the false discrimination between actors and audience, showmen and clowns, he wants to make sure that the scene that is being performed in this open arena, or circus under the stars – the world – is also “his” drama, as it is “ours” (the audience/reader). This is suggested in a phrase in the “Advertisement” of the play: “very well acted by you and me” (p. 55). On the other hand, we must keep on being the cold observers, as he himself wants to preserve his distance before this drama:

“yet you and me: why not from the English metropolis?” – Listen: it is our honeymoon. We go abroad for first scene of our drama (p. 59).

The narrator of this play assumes again the status from which he manipulated the action of *The Wild Body's* stories:

This forked, strange scented, blond skinned gutbag, with its two bright rolling marbles (...) is my stalking horse (...). I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment (WB, p. 18)

He is the *omniscient* narrator who knows from within the world where his characters move, while at the same time often allowing himself the distance of an external focalization and presenting the characters under our eyes as complete strangers to him, for whose behaviour he does not therefore feel responsible. This accounts for Lewis's ability to expose himself completely in his texts, and through this very movement, to hide himself most effectively.

Wendy Stallard Flory in her essay "Enemy of the Stars"<sup>4</sup>, quotes the second edition of the play, a highly revised and enlarged version published in 1932, and especially the essay that precedes it, "Physics of the Not-Self". This is offered as:

A metaphysical commentary upon the ideas suggested by the action of *Enemy of the Stars*. Briefly, it is intended to show the human mind in its traditional role of the enemy of life, as an oddity outside the machine (1932:51).

The revised edition of the play shows its message more clearly, both because the text was expanded and made more explicit, and also because less attention was given to the futuristic/vorticist scenic avatars.

Flory sees Arghol as Lewis's persona and Hanp as his anti-thesis, but she refuses to see their struggle as "an obvious and simplistic dramatization of some of Lewis's strongly-held

<sup>4</sup> Wendy Stallard Flory, "Enemy of the Stars", in J. Meyers ed. *Wyndham Lewis a Reevaluation*, 1980 (pp. 92-106).

opinions about the inevitable antipathy between the artist-intellectual and the rest of society” (1980:92). Arghol is in her perspective “the enemy of life”, always denying his Wild Body, “the machine” (1980:99). Hence, her argument is that the play exposes Lewis’s philosophy of the dichotomy Mind and Body, and the impossibility of resolving their conflict: “the ‘machine’ is, of course, the ‘wild body’ and the mind is the enemy of life because it knows about death” (*Ibid.*). The acknowledgement of the “Not-Self”, or Death, is “the concern of the true philosopher” (*Ibid.*).

Arghol is, then, the denial of life, who sees Hanp as the inevitable, grotesque “souillure” of the original solitude of the soul (E. S:70). Arghol represents a blow to the last hope of Mankind, destroying any possible existence of a fulfilled, integral being under the stars. Flory says that Arghol is the “Enemy of the Stars”, because they witness his fate, as they “epitomize the indissolubility of time and his double” (1980:96). In my view, Hanp himself is also an “Enemy of the Stars”. In fact, Arghol never rebels against the stars; he sits in the yard, answers the voice of the “self-centered and elemental shadow” that calls him, and stays there, kneeling on the ground, submissive and suffering punishment.

A boot battered his right hand ribs (...) At each blow, in muscular spasm, he made the pain pass out. Rolled and jumped, crouched and flung his grovelling Enceladus weight against it, like swimmer with wave (p. 63).

There is nothing left of the futurist arrogance hurling “defiance to the stars”: Arghol is shown to be defeated from the very beginning of the play. When addressed by Hanp, (“Come you fool”) and asked why he suffers all that humiliation, why he doesn’t “kill” that speck, he confesses his impotence, and acknowledges the pain caused by what makes him different: “Self, sacred act of violence, is like murder on my face and hands.



The stain won't come out" (p. 66). He seems to be aware of his fate and willing to submit to it. All he can show is anger against this state of things. He does not go as far as to fight for a reverse of the situation, but seems to have come to the conclusion that he cannot escape his fate. All his attempts are bound to fail:

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. (...) I am too vain to do harm, too superb ever to lift a finger where harmed (pp. 66-67).

This absence of true rebellion is another part of the vorticist credo. In this sense, *Enemy of the Stars* is a genuine extension of the *Blast Manifesto*, and "exists side by side with Lewis's use of the mechanical motif and abstract forms in painting"<sup>5</sup>. As *Blast* proclaims, the Vorticists do not want "to change the appearance of the world" as do the Naturalists, Impressionists or even Futurists. They do not believe in revolution, because that is part of the romantic, sentimental, latin temperament:

It is only the second-rate people in France or Italy who are thorough revolutionaries (*Blast* VII-6).

In England, on the other hand, there is no vulgarity in revolt (VII-7).

Or rather, there is no revolt, it is the normal state (VII-8).

---

<sup>5</sup> As Kush writes in *Wyndham Lewis's Pictorial Integer*, "rather than celebrating or denigrating machinery and the artificial world, Lewis uses the skeletal, primary image of metal and human artifacts as a notation for modern man's permanently primitive condition". He adds that in his later fiction Lewis turned his attention away from "simple analysis of the self, and looking instead at the social structure of the post-war world" used this "composite fictional form to present a world in chaotic, grotesque evolution" (1981:86).

Arghol's intellectual perception of the world and of men denounces the "dog-eat-dog" fight between Self, "the race that lost", and Mankind, "encrusted in the self from the beginning of time"; an innate "souillure", which will gradually develop and degrade the essential solitude of the soul. He proclaims the vortical world view of a grotesque and chaotic world in evolution, defends "tragic laughter" (which Lewis reaffirmed in *Physics of the Not-Self*) and the absurdity of life:

Existence; loud feeble sunset, blaring like lumpish, savage clown, alive with rigid tinsel, before a misty door: announcing events, tricks and a thousand follies to penniless herds, their eyes red with stupidity (p. 67).

In fact, when Hanp reproaches Arghol for his inertia, he puts his finger in the wound: why has Arghol come back from the town to this isolated place, volunteering to suffer these humiliations?

To have read all the books of the town, Arghol, and to come back here to take up this life again (p. 68).

Arghol defends himself coyly:

In the town I felt unrighteous in escaping blows, home anger, destiny of here (...) Energy has been fixed on me from nowhere – heavy and astonished: resigned. Or is it for remote sin ! I will use it, anyway, as prisoner his bowl or sheet for escape: not as means of idle humiliation (*Ibid.*).

But we cannot follow the track of that energy in the play any more. It looks more like something Arghol wants to believe in, in order to escape Death, the thought of which obsesses him, however much he tries to pull away from it:

Anything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is. I do not feel clean enough to die, or to make it worth while killing myself (p. 70).  
Then Hanp raises the second and most important question:

“And you let yourself be kicked to death here out of spite” (*Ibid.*).

In fact, Hanp wants to make Arghol realize that he has been waiting for Death to come and “naturally” put an end to his struggle. But Arghol refuses to see the crude truth. He prefers to play with words and build a wall of knowledge and reverence around himself, while he cannot see the growing threat in his disciple’s mockery: “Why do you talk to me?”, Hanp asks him.

“Arghol-the-book” is at the same time “Arghol-the-clown”: “poudre de riz on face of knights sleeping effigy”. His feet are “two heavy closed books, before the disciple” (p. 71). These are the preparations for his lecturing, while cynically announcing that “the doctoring is often fouler than disease”.

Hanp listens to Arghol’s talk about the Self, – “men’s loathsome deformity” – and the “social excrescence” which Hanp understands himself to be. He seems to have become enlightened after so much lecturing, or just contaminated with the “sharp vision” of his master. He sees his own reflex in his master – “sunken mirror”.

Arghol uses the energy that he can still dispose of to thrust his sour words and acrimonious discourse at Hanp. In the latter, “physical repulsion” and a “nausea of humility” is growing. Unaware, Arghol proceeds with professional dilettantism:

You seemed such a contemptible sort of fellow that there was some hope for you. Or to be clear, there was *nothing* to hope from your vile character.

(...)

I am amazed to find that you are like me.

I talk to you for an hour and get more disgusted with myself.

I find I wanted to make a naif yapping Poodle-parasite of you. – I shall always be a prostitute. I wanted to make you myself; you understand? (p. 73)

In reply, Hanp simply jumps at him.

As a flashback, through a dream of Arghol's, we are shown all the scenery of his demolished world, his "appalling tabernacle of Self and unbelief" torn to pieces. His books are "parasites", his friends are "companions of parasite Self. No single one a brother"; he finds out that all that life devoted to art "is wrong" (p. 77). Wanting to undergo a "purge", his image breaks – he no longer recognizes his Self: "I am not Arghol, (...) this man has been masquerading as me" (p. 78). But no one can see that, except Hanp. Therefore, Hanp's power grows; he will dare to accomplish the act which Arghol cannot bear to ask for, death.

Arghol is only Arghol again when confronted with Hanp: "Suddenly he had discovered Arghol who had followed him, in Hanp" (p. 80). He acknowledges that "he had ventured in his solitude and failed" (*Ibid.*); his name sounds now sinister to his own ears, as a "toilet-necessity, he, to scrub the soul" (*Ibid.*).

This is the prefiguration of his impotence, an avowal of his defeat. With this first attack of violence the mask that was still half protecting Arghol falls: "Violence in him was indecent" (*Ibid.*). Hanp no longer sees him as his master. He no longer grants Arghol the right to suppress him: "He had just been feeding on him – Hanp!" (p. 81). Hanp rebels, knowing that Arghol was finally getting prepared for death:

Death, taciturn refrain of his being. (...) Tip him over into cauldron in which he persistently gazed: see what happened! (p. 82).

Death comes to Hanp's mind wearing the mask of the clown in the circus, "springing on horses back", grotesquely following "when the elegant riders have hopped, with obsequious dignity, down gangway" (*Ibid.*).

The essence of the play's dialogism lies perhaps in the fact that, out of this battle of words/world views between Arghol and Hanp, neither of them emerges as the victor. Thus the authority of the narratorial voice is ultimately being questioned, and the play's ambivalence is enhanced. The play presents two different levels of dialogue: the microdialogue of the characters and the macrodialogue between characters and narrator. The initial dichotomy Hanp/grotesque clown versus Arghol/wiseman is completely reversed as we approach the final scenes. Now, the magic of the show and the pleasure of the staging are totally withdrawn; it becomes a rigorous and crude visualisation of a bleak, crude scenery, where tension grows image by image.

Arghol is all flesh now. He is asleep, vulnerable. His snore is the catalyst of the action. "Drawn-out, clumsy, self-centered", it is the animal echo of the voice that has subdued Hanp so often. Bestial, reified, it is the "snoring of a malodorous, bloody sink, emptying its water" (p. 83). "How can I stand it! How can I stand it!" is Hanp's cry, totally exposed to the bestiality of his former master, his other self. To free himself from this snore, he must relieve the world of its sound – "Cut out this noise like a cancer". Hanp looks for his knife. He wipes "blood" out of his face (Arghol has injured him during their fight). But we can "see" him already perspiring blood.

We watch this scene through Hanp's hypertrophied eyes, his "goggles". It is painfully slow. Hanp finds his knife, "he could hardly help plunging it in himself, the nearest flesh to him", and then he strikes Arghol's flesh. Like a toy, Arghol springs up from his sleep. Startled with the movement, Hanp falls on his back. Arghol is dead. Now, "there was only flesh there, and all flesh is the same" (p. 84). Outside, the absurdly impassive and peaceful night.

This is not, however, the end of the play. The "relief of grateful universe" that Hanp experiences after Arghol's murder freezes into "rapid despair": Hanp feels his master's eyes at the other end of the yard, still following him. The "wise-fool"

knows that he is also trapped in his confined world of pettiness and abjection, and thus the way to suicide is almost the natural one. There is no pathos, the night is peaceful and Hanp springs “clumsily” from the low stone bridge, and sinks “like lead”. The play ends in a total void and absence of purpose, enabling the reader and also the characters themselves to gain distance from the finalizing melodramatic action, which, as we have been noticing, is a stylistic device characteristic of Lewis’s writing.

### 3. The Modernist grotesque style of “Enemy of the Stars”

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser argues that the “grotesque expresses not the fear of death but the fear of life”. On the other hand, as I have previously noted, Bakhtin argues that only the modern grotesque presents an opposition of life to death, one which was completely contrary to the system of popular Medieval and Renaissance grotesque imagery (1984b):50). There, death was not seen as a negation of life, the great body of all the people, but as part of life as a whole, --”its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation” (*Ibid.*)- The struggle between life and death was conceived as the necessary crisis of change: “the struggle of the old life stubbornly resisting the new life about to be born” (*Ibid.*).

The modernist grotesque style is thus, according to Bakhtin, connected in various degrees with the Romantic tradition, and influenced by Existentialism. This double context demarcates it from the tradition of folk culture which is associated with the realist grotesque.

In the light of this debate, I will now describe the elements in *Enemy of the Stars* which ally it with the modernist grotesque.

The *tragic laughter* and the *night watchman*; the theme of *madness* and the *marionette*

At the core of the modernist grotesque, there is a sense of terror and of the impotence of modern man before the world, disintegrating all possibilities of the subversive power of a “regenerative laughter” characteristic of the Medieval and Renaissance grotesque, that chased fear away and mocked authority.

The world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man(...) (Bakhtin 1934b):38).

The roles of the *clown*, the *puppet*, the *mask* and *madness* also suffer radical changes in the transformation of the light-hearted and popular festivities of the early Carnavalesque genre to its later form of private “chamber masquerade”.

We have seen that the world of *Enemy of the Stars* is overshadowed by emptiness, absurdity and ultimate loneliness to a degree that was not yet present in the clownesque ambivalence of *Tarr* and was particularly absent from the popular and mocking clowns of *The Wild Body*. The grotesque image of life in *Enemy of the Stars* leaves no possibility of “renewal” or “rejuvenation”; its world of absurdity and madness is far from the “gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official truth” (Bakhtin 1984b):39), typical of folk grotesque. It is not a festive, ambivalent madness, challenging values and authority, but rather a tragic symbol of the modern individual’s isolation in an adverse world. The image of the clown is here sad and cynical; he is the heir of the romantic “night watchman”, a lonely eccentric “who laughs in church and weeps in the bordello” (Bakhtin 1984b):41), replacing the “ancient popular derision of divinity and medieval humour” (*Ibid.*).

The mask he uses does not have the “inexhaustible and merry-coloured life” of the folk grotesque, but a “somber hue”:

“a terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it” (*Ibid*:40), thus losing part of its ambivalence.

The atmosphere of *Enemy of the Stars*, as we have seen, has nothing of the festive, but translates the tragic conflict of the individuals’s existence and his ultimate isolation in the world. Arghol’s “mad” normative authority is challenged by Hanp’s “foolish” license, but no joy can be extracted from it. Arghol lives in a world of hallucination and apocalyptic delirium: he suffers the blows of an imaginary “jack-boot” which kicks him methodically under the indifferent “mad” gaze of the stars and the “blank wilderness of the universe” (p. 64).

Arghol revolves on the ground with pain; he has hallucinations; he talks to himself as to another ego, whom he does not recognize and whom he despises. Hanp’s madness is of a more primitive kind. He does not live in his master’s unreal world of books, but he cannot find sense in his own world either. He simply accepts the insanity of his absurd life. He is more a “fool” in the ancient sense of the word than a madman.

In a way, both appear as *puppets* commanded by the strings of an alien force, which leaves them powerless to control their own lives. Here, as Bakhtin says, the image of the marionette in the modernist grotesque imagery has followed the Romantic trend: the “tragic doll”, “victim of alien inhuman force, which rules over men by turning them into marionettes” (Bakhtin 1984b):40). This image is completely unknown in folk culture, according to Bakhtin.

Finally, the space of *Enemy of the Stars*: the play is supposedly an open-stage performance, a symbolic “arena under the stars”, which is however confined to the intimacy of the walls of the self where this intense dialogue takes place, thus once more reaffirming the confined space of the “chamber masquerade” carnival.



#### 4. The structure and style of the play

One may wonder whether the subject of *Enemy of the Stars* is genuinely a vorticist or futurist one. However, the nature of its formal experimentalism, the avantgardism of its dramatic structure and style could seem to be totally in conformity with the tenets of either Vorticism or Futurism.

It seems to me that Lewis successfully attempted in this play at the level of language, what he and other artists were creating and innovating in the realm of visual arts. In 1956, Lewis wrote in the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition “*Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism*”, held in the Tate Gallery:

As regards *visual Vorticism* it was dogmatically *anti-real*. It was my ultimate aim to *exclude* from painting the *everyday visual real* altogether. The idea was to build up a *visual language* as abstract as music.

Curiously, what is found in *Enemy of the Stars*, even more clearly than in Tarr, is a “visual language”. Here Lewis rehearses an accurate, clear-cut, imaginative language; a style reproducing the mechanicity of movements and robot-like cadence, representing a soulless, absurdly clownesque world, in the same way that the precise lines and geometric structures of his visual compositions did<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, what has been called Lewis’s “telegraphic style”<sup>7</sup>, admired by contemporaries like Pound and Eliot, meant a para-

6 See for instance Lewis’s paintings and compositions during the years 1910-1920 – considering the end of Vorticism “just before the beginning of the 20s”, as he himself sees it – and the production of compositions like *Timon of Athens* (1913-14) ; the War Series, exhibited in 1919 in the Goupil Gallery, under the title of “Guns”; some portraits of intellectuals of his milieu; some abstract compositions with well-defined titles, “The Dancers” (1912), “The Vorticist” (1912), “Two Vorticist Figures” (1912), “Futurist Figure” (1912), etc.

7 Vide Timothy Materer in *Wyndham Lewis the Novelist*, (1976:51).

digmatic concern with the visual representation of words and colours translated in the non-figurative, non-naturalistic style of his writing, as well as of his painting.

Aware of the double nature of the word, which conveys its objective information both as signifier and as signified in terms of sound, image and concept, Lewis's style avoids the proliferation of articles, verbs and determinatives. It is concentrated on the noun, conciseness of phrase and parallelism of sentence construction. The profuse use of onomatopoeias, alliterations, assonances, consonances and short and long sentences impregnates the text with a beat, a rhythm, an almost musical elasticity of movement.

The ice field of the sky swept and crashed silently. Blowing wild organism into the hard splendid clouds, some will cast its glare, as well, over him. The canal ran in one direction, his blood, weakly, in the opposite. The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey. Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight. Tigers are beautiful imperfect brutes (p. 64).

Lewis worked his style in a way different from what the Symbolists and the Impressionists had done before him, searching for a prodigality and rarity of vocabulary, or a diffused rarified light that could best convey the nuances and obscurities of their concepts, feelings and perceptions. The dynamics of the avant-garde mode of discourse in *Enemy of the Stars* is conversely revealed through a concise and tense speech, in parallel with the use of an explosive, versatile and polysemantic imagery, within the heavy cadence pattern of the sentence structure.

The deep female strain succumbed to his ragged spirit of crude manhood, masculine with blunt wilfulness and hideous stupidity of the fecund horde of men, phallic wand-like cataract incessantly

poured into God. This pip of icy spray struck him on the mouth. He tasted it with new pleasure, before spitting it out: acrid (p. 65).

On the whole, the dynamics of this text is created by the speech confrontation of two characters in one, gradually blocking each other's movements in an asphyxiating atmosphere, where tension grows every minute. Formally, however, the result is a slow movement or an almost static drama.

But, since "tragedy" as such is always avoided by Lewis, "pathos" is never actually reached in the play, because the tension never openly explodes. The climax is in some way led astray from its peak, and the blockage suddenly loosened up by a staged clownesque death blow. It is as if the feeling of an urgent and irrepressible need for action which has developed in a crescendo during the course of the play, being concentrated in Arghol's casual murder and Hanp's clumsy suicide, suddenly turns into a grotesque finale, a farcical ketchup bloodshed: Lewis's favourite provocative, tragi-comic form of happy ending<sup>8</sup>.

8 This is the reason why Giovanni Cianci in "Un futurismo in panni neo-classici: sul primo Wyndhan Lewis Vorticista", in *Wyndham Lewis, Letteratura/Pittura* (Palermo, 1982) comments: "Dopo la *tragoedia* di *Enemy of the Stars* incipit la *parodia* di Tarr" (p. 47) (After the tragedy of *Enemy of the Stars*, begins the parody of Tarr). Cianci finds the element of unity between *Enemy of the Stars* and Tarr in Lewis's choice of the clown as the best mask, and the use of "tragic laughter". He refers to Lewis's own words in *Men Without Art* (1964:113): "it is tragic, if a thing can be tragic without pity and terror, and it seems to me it can". *Enemy of the Stars* and Tarr are, according to Cianci, the texts where Lewis displays the "main ingredients" of the Vorticist grotesque poetics – the ugliness, the hideous, the banal, the stupidity – which, as I have already indicated are defined in *Blast* n.° 1's Manifesto "The Exploitation of Vulgarly": "The condition of our enjoyment of vulgarity, discord, cheapness or noise is an unimpaired and keen disgust with it". (1914:145) As stated in that same manifesto, "pessimism" and "human insanity" are the highest stimulants of modern art, and the source of "a very tragic and pure creative instinct", that is translated in cynical and grotesque art forms (*Ibid.*).

In relation to this, Materer writes that Lewis's aim of providing an objective lesson for his "too bookish contemporaries" and showing them how literature should be "keeping pace with the visual revolution", had not been successfully achieved in *Enemy of the Stars* (1976:50-51):

Despite what Pound called its "abundance of conceptual bustle" Lewis's Vorticist style never gathers dramatic momentum. It relies heavily on parallel phrases and nouns in apposition, which generate a slow-moving rhythm (p. 51).

However, Materer acknowledges the fact that Lewis's "telegraphic style", had indeed influenced Ezra Pound, as the latter recognized. Materer adds that while Pound in his *Cantos* "provides a violent background of action that justifies the style" (*Ibid.* p. 52), the action of Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars* "on the contrary, is not powerful enough to shine through the thick layers of static images" (*Ibid.*). Tarr, he says, would ensure the success of the project initiated with *Enemy of the Stars*.

The existence of a vorticist writing seems to be less of a problem than, for example, the existence of a cubist writing<sup>9</sup>.

---

9 An interesting debate on the subject of the possibility of the existence of a Cubist literature was published in No. 6 of the *Cahiers G. Pompidou* (1981), an issue especially dedicated to Guillaume Apollinaire. Many contemporary artists were asked for their testimony. The first statement is taken from Apollinaire himself, who when the epithet "cubist" was applied to him and a group of other writers, among whom were Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Pierre Reverdy, declared that the term was improper. Instead he calls their style "esprit nouveau" or "surrealist". However, most of the writers whose opinions were sought agreed that the general attitude of art towards reality should be creative and not mimetic, using techniques of fragmentation, simultaneity and discontinuity, such as "collage", for instance. Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* presumably represented the peak of what could be reached in this experimental field. The debate did not produce conclusions, but all the participants seemed to agree on one point: the vital importance of opening up such a debate and attending to the relationship of art and life – matter in movement.

Lewis's "new and original prose style", (T. S. Eliot in *The Egoist*, September 1918) is considered to be the true pattern for vorticist writing. His laconic, imagistic and metaphoric writing is in fact very different from the simple "collage" technique that the cubists attempted – a more adequate type of writing, producing in the literary form what was being successfully realized in the vanguard of the visual arts<sup>10</sup>.

In my view, and in spite of Lewis's claim that his language in *Enemy of the Stars* and in *Tarr* is a true "vorticist" expression, ("the excellent expression of vorticist language")<sup>11</sup>, it is very close to what the Futurists had been expressing since 1909 in their various manifestos. It is particularly close to the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912), in which Marinetti expressed the three main claims for the reinvention of language and the renovation of style, in the context of the Futurist revolution: *Destruction of Syntax, Imagination without strings, words in Freedom*. In Marinetti's own words:

With words in freedom we will have: condensed metaphors. Telegraphic images. Maximum vibrations. Nodes of thought. Closed or open fans of movement. Compressed analogies. Colour balances. Dimensions, weights, measures, and the speed of sensations.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lafourcade, for instance, is categorical on this issue. He says in «L'Actualité du Vorticisme», published in No. 10 of *Cahiers G. Pompidou*; «... ce qui caractérise ce style est éminemment vorticiste: l'important c'est l'isolement des unités fondamentales – le paragraphe, la phrase, le mot – qui se dressent les unes contre les autres dans le refus d'élaborer une vision organique à la Lawrence, à la Woolf ou à la Joyce. La phrase n'entraîne pas le lecteur, elle l'oblige, par de constants court-circuits, à se dégager d'une histoire à laquelle il voudrait mollement s'abandonner et croire (...) les «collages» ne sont pas ceux très formalistes des cubistes (...)» (1982:277) Lafourcade links Lewis's writing to the "nouveau roman" technique and he finds there an absurd surreality, as a witness "du grand désordre de la vie", a favourite subject of post-modernist writing.

<sup>11</sup> As Lewis writes in the Introduction to the exhibition "Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism" (1956).

The plunge of the essential word into the water of sensibility, minus the concentric circles that the word produces. Restful moments of intuition. Movements in two, three, four, five different rhythms. The analytic, exploratory poles that sustain the bundle of intuitive strings (Apollonio 1973:100).

When in 1913 Marinetti reviewed his former *Technical Manifesto*, he added some more details and indications which he said would be useful to other forms of writing besides poetry. These might also have influenced Lewis's style. First, the "semaphoric adjective", or the "lighthouse", "atmosphere adjective", which stands isolated, apart from nouns. Its function is, as the name indicates, to illuminate, to impregnate, to spread light over a whole zone of "words in freedom". The *infinitive verb*, which "prevents the style from slowing and stopping at a definitive point" constitutes the very speed of style, as Marinetti puts it. The *onomatopoeic harmonies*, whose role is to bring to the writing the "crude and vital elements of reality", or to give it as much as possible the taste of life, in opposition to the taste of books, he says.

Another usage in *Enemy of the Stars* where Lewis comes particularly close to Futurism is the technique of *multilinear lyricism*, which is defined as a succession of several chains or parallel lines of colour, sound, smell, noise, weight or density expressing a globality or simultaneity of sensations, in opposition to the Symbolists" synaesthesias. Such waves of nouns and adjectives produce in *Enemy of the Stars* its characteristic dense atmosphere, e. g. :

Fungi of sullen violet thoughts, investing primitive vegetation. Hot words drummed on his ear every evening: abuse: question. Groping hands strummed toppling Byzantine organ of his mind, producing monotonous black fugue. Harsh bayadere – shepherdess of Pamir, with her Chinese beauty: living on from month to month in utmost tent with wastrel, lean as mandrake root, red and precocious: with heavy black odour of vast Manchurian garden – deserts, and the

disreputable muddy gold squandered by the unknown sun of the Amur (p. 65).

Finally, there is the *typography of revolution*, new for Lewis, who had used it extensively in *Blast*, but a quite common aspect of avant-garde poetics, from Apollinaire's "Anti-tradition Futuriste" to Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurism", and Mayakovsky's "Slap in the Face of Public Taste". Marinetti explains this practice as an urge to impress the words "with the velocity of the stars, the clouds, aeroplanes, trains, waves, explosives, globules of seafoam, molecules and atoms" (Apollonio 1973:105). The "typographical revolution" is intended as the opposite of a decorative and precious aesthetic "à la Mallarmé", which suggests "an idea with passéist air and graces" (*Ibid.*); instead, in a provocative gesture, it proposes to "grasp (the words) brutally and hurl them in the reader's face" (*Ibid.*).

### 5.1. The theatrical structure of the play

This section concerns the dramatic structure of *Enemy of the Stars*. The text is overcrowded with stage directions, to a point at which the dialogue becomes almost secondary. However, this fact was not merely accidental and does not reflect the author's incapacity or inexperience as a playwright. In my view, as the title of this chapter suggests, *Enemy of the Stars* is first and foremost an experimental avant-garde *performance*, resulting from Lewis's deliberate decision to rehearse on the stage his thesis of the need for a revolution in literature, identical to that which was taking place in the visual arts. This Lewis himself acknowledges in his Autobiography of the 50's, *Rude Assignment*<sup>12</sup>. Essentially, *Enemy of the Stars* is the rehearsing of that possibility, projected

12 Vide Lewis's *Rude Assignment*, (1950:129): "My literary contemporaries I looked upon as too bookish and not keeping pace with the visual revolution. A kind of play, the *Enemy of the Stars* (...) was my attempt to show them the way".

at two main levels: language, and the relation of actor to scenic space, envisaged not as separate elements in the structure of the play, but coexisting in an absolute interdependence. The abundance of detailed stage-directions and careful descriptions of the relation of actor to scenic space and even of the audience in relation to the actor, accounts for Lewis's clear choice of breaking with the conventional dramatic categories. This, as I shall indicate, was a common concern among different avant-garde movements, particularly Futurism. However, that same issue, given the fact that the dialogue in the play is as a result diluted amongst the paraphernalia of stage directions, has raised the question whether the play can succeed in performance. Ezra Pound in an article published in *The Criterion* in July 1937<sup>13</sup>, praised the "vividness" of *Enemy of The Stars*, which he called a "Radio Drama" before the invention of the medium, adding however that it could not conceivably be presented in the theatre:

A drama for Radio because no material theatre and no conceivably effective precentor with a megaphone standing in the pit bellowing the stage directions could move the theatre goer as could the proper changes of voice by a great speaker "on the air" (1973:424).

However, Pound stresses that the "conceptual bustle" of *Enemy of the Stars* is to be praised as a vigorous renovation of the word, comparable to Joyce, without being a "diarrhoetic imitation of Mr. Joyce's leisurely flow and murmurous permuting", and "infinitely less digestible" (1973:425). Lewis's language in *Enemy of the Stars*, he says, is "radically inimitable in that it can only come from a think-organism in action, a mind actually initiating concepts, or at least very busily chucking them from one side of a head to another" (*Ibid.*).

<sup>13</sup> Vide Ezra Pound, "D'Artagnan Twenty Years After" in William Cookson, ed. *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose 1909-1965* (1973:424).



Materer, also thinks that the action of the play is not “powerful enough to shine through the thick layers of static images” (1976:52). He adds that Lewis was “more successful with his next version of the plot of the *Enemy* in his first novel *Tarr*” (*Ibid.*).

Hence, there seems to exist some consensus in relation to the difficulty of actually putting the play on the stage, because of the “excess” of stage directions and the long discursive intrusions of the narrator. However, as I have said, the narrator is aware of this and, moreover, he does it deliberately. *Enemy of the Stars* is primarily a “performance” and, as such, it is intended to stress the importance of the scenic space and the language that the objects establish with the environment, which the playwright wants to let “hear” (see). The symbolic nature of the play relies deeply on this condition. The dialogue between the characters is one of many different languages of the play, like the lights, (“red of stained copper predominant colour”), the objects, (ordinary, scattered at random, e. g. “overturned cases” and “old sail canvas”), the stage itself, (an “arena”, a “bleak circus”), the intimate calling of the audience into the drama: (“Yet you and me: why not from the English metropolis?”). All are used in the play to convey the message of the individual’s isolation in the world, the split of the modern man’s identity in two antagonistic agents each of them trying to defeat the other through an insane and doomed struggle for survival. Man is depicted in his ultimate loneliness, without trust in love or friendship:

Every man who wants to make another *Himself*, is seeking a companion for his detached ailment of a self (p. 73).

Arghol is a “star”<sup>14</sup>, but he knows the impossibility of releasing himself from his human slavery, the dependence upon his

<sup>14</sup> As Hugh Kenner points out in his book, *Wyndham Lewis*, Arghol’s name is very likely derived from Algol, (Alpha Persi), a star (1954:23). This

“other”, the “appalling ‘gamin’ with bourgeois aspirations”. Hence, painfully, he endures his life under the awesome blank indifference of the stars.

In many respects *Enemy of the Stars* prefigures the “Theatre of the Absurd”, not just through the kind of nonsense atmosphere it creates, but also through its style and language. The interaction between Arghol and Hanp bears many resemblances to that between Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, each pair constituting a “pseudo-couple”, rather than independent dramatic categories. As we have noted the term “pseudo-couple” is used by Fredric Jameson in *Fables of Aggression* to define the situation of some pairs in literature, especially in Lewis’s narrative. Though Jameson does not specifically mention *Enemy of the Stars*, he uses the term “pseudo-couple”, which he acknowledges as Beckett’s in *The Unnamable*, to define situations of “symbiotic ‘unity’ of this new ‘collective’ subject, both reduplicated and divided” (1979:58). Michael Beatty<sup>15</sup>, establishes and discusses that similarity in more detail:

Lewis’s procedure, then, shows him constructing a play which, like Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, is a kind of non-play, or a verbal construct of mutually negating aspects. He extends the concept of drama and blurs the usual distinctions between the categories of actor, character, action, language, and audience with the purpose of involving his reader in the ‘cruel’ experience of a metaphysical reality (1976:44).

---

interpretation is however contested by Alan Munton in *Wyndham Lewis Collected Poems and Plays*, who writes in his “Notes” to the play: “The play’s setting, on the borders of Europe and Asia, the characters’ ‘broad face where Europe grows Arctic’, the reference to Pamir in central Asia, suggest the appropriateness of an Asian name” (1979:220).

15 Vide Michael Beatty, “*Enemy of The Stars: Vorticist Experimental Play*” in *Theoria*. Vol. 46, 1976.

For Beatty, with *Enemy of the Stars* Lewis earns a place “in the direct literary and stage lineage of which Samuel Beckett is a major figure” (1976:59).

The play’s total syntony with the aesthetic proposals, the language and the typography of the manifestos published in *Blast*, as well as its intention of achieving a kind of avantgardist plastic language<sup>16</sup>, is reinforced by the inclusion in the printing in *Blast* of six of Lewis’s vorticist designs: “Plan of War”, “Timon of Athens”, “Slow Attack”, “Decoration for the Countess of Drogheda’s House”, “Portrait of an Englishwoman” and “The Enemy of the Stars”.

In the “Synopsis” of the play one already notices the emphasis on the relation of actor to scenic space, which, as we shall see, is analogous to the futurist emphasis on the relation of objects to environment:

*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 (p. 55).

Implicitly this will be a play of thoughts, ideas on the stage, with actors as mere speakers voicing them:

*The characters* – two heathen clowns, grave booth animals, cynical athletes (*Ibid.*).

The “Advertisement” proclaims that the play will be “Very well acted by you and me”. Both playwright and spectator are part of the action, the heroes of the plot, reflecting the belief in abolishing the barriers between writer-actor-audience, then very much in the air. This “scenic unity” seems to be already in Lewis’s mind when he writes:

<sup>16</sup> As stressed by Michael Beatty, (*Op. cit.*, pp. 56-57).

“*Yet you and me*; Why not from the English metropolis?” – Listen: it is our honeymoon. We go abroad for first scene of our drama. Such a strange thing as our coming together requires a strange place for the initial stages of our intimate ceremonious acquaintance (p. 59). (My italics)

*Enemy of the Stars* emphasizes the action within the scenic space and its symbolic meaning, as well as the use of space, speech and colour, in order to create suggestiveness and dynamism. Scenic appearances are given such relevance in the performance that they draw us towards the necessity of their own “introspective interpretation” alongside the action being performed by the characters. This is a means of essentializing and materializing the concepts on the stage; the actors, abstract entities themselves, embody these ideas, these philosophic concepts. They are symbolic characters, whose voices and bodies are vehicles for the expression of abstractions: the search for integrity, the search for meaning in art, life, and survival.

The action takes place at night, a “vivid” and “violent” night. The audience, “silent and expectant”, (possibly identified with the “pathetic posterity” described in the “Advertisement” of the play (p. 55)), looks “down into scene”, which is a “hut rolled half on its back, door upwards, characters giddily mounting in its opening” (p. 60). The unreality and mystical quality of this set is increased by other scenic devices: “a gust such as is met in the corridors of the tube, makes their clothes shiver or flap and blares up their voices. Masks fitted with trumpets of antique theatre, with effect of two children blowing at each other with tin trumpets” (*Ibid.*).

Arghol’s description is highly imagistic, syncretic, no articles, essentialized nouns and profusion of adjectives, words in a chain, “in freedom”:

Investment of red universe. Each force attempts to shake him.  
Central as stone. Poised magnet of subtle, vast, selfish things.

He lies like human strata of infernal biologies. Walks like wary shifting of bodies in distant equipoise. Sits like a god built by an architectural stream, fecunded by mad blasts sunlight (p. 61).

Like a “gladiator” in the arena, the “red walls of the universe” clutching him, in a “close atmosphere of terror and necessity till the execution is over”, he is from the beginning a “condemned protagonist”.

This kind of epic language continues until it is abruptly cut off by unexpected vorticism “blague” – “The box office receipts have been enormous” (*Ibid.*) – indicating that the sense of self-mocking irony, typical of Lewis is not absent from the play, despite its tragic tone.

The action opens with the description of the yard; a totally futuristic setting, oscillating between the grandiosity of the speech and the triviality of the objects.

The Earth *has burst*, a *granite flower*, and disclosed the scene. A wheelwright's yard. Full of dry, *white volcanic* light. Full of emblems of one trade: *stacks of pine, iron, wheels stranded* (p. 62). (My italics)

There are premonitions of tragedy:

A canal at one side, the *night pouring* into it like *blood* from a *butcher's pail*. Rough *mask* in *alluminum mirror*, sunset's *grimace* through the night. A *leaden gob*, slipped at zenith, first *drop of violent* night, *spreads cataclysmically* in *harsh water* of coming (p. 62).

Above, the *Night*, the *Stars*. Nature in an hallucinatory combination of nouns and adjectives, suggest the mechanical and the nightmarish:

The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey. Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight. Tigers are beautiful imperfect brutes. Throats iron eternities, drinking heavy radiance, limbs towers of blatant light, the stars poised, immensely distant, with their metal sides, pantheistic machines (p. 64).

The description of Nature is conceptualized and symbolic:

The farther, the more violent and vivid, Nature: weakness crushed out of creation! Hard weakness a flea's size, pinched to death in a second, could it get so far (*Ibid.*).

The atmosphere has been created. The characters are introduced, and the action may start: *Argbol* – “the violences of all things had left him so far intact” (*Ibid.*). *Hanp* – violence personified. They are men crushed under the stars.

## 5.2. Enemy of the Stars and the “Futurist Theatre”

I will now review some aspects of the manifestos of the “Futurist Theatre” in order to situate *Enemy of the Stars* as part of a wider movement for the renewal of the stage.

Umbro Apollonio, in the “Introduction” to his edition of the *Futurist Manifestos* (1973), offers helpful perspectives. The Futurists’ desire to reach beyond the conventional barriers of the “aesthetic” and interfere in the different expressions of reality is displayed in the diversity and scope of their manifestos.

The object the Futurists presented, whether it was a painting, a poem, a sculpture, a play, or a pamphlet, had to express the dynamics of its surroundings. The different axes they used, crossing each other and crossing the object, introduced “a combinatory play of multiple intersections” simulating the projection of the object into the space which contained and conditioned it (Apollonio, 1973:12-13). Thus the Futurists’ desire to present the object in

all its immanent dynamism by superimposing one object onto the other, or the environment on the object, reflects their perception of the constant movement of the surrounding environment. On the other hand, the statics of the cubist object is a result of the tensions arising from its subjection to exterior forces. In this context, the stage appeared as a privileged place for the testing of new techniques for the expression of movement, rhythm and communication.

In Chapter II, we considered the publication by Marinetti, Emilio Settemelli and Bruno Carrà in 1915 of the pamphlet “The Futurist Synthetic Theatre”, which opens by claiming war as the immediate occasion for a futurist theatre:

War – Futurism intensified – obliges us to march and not to rot in libraries and reading rooms. Therefore we think that the only way to inspire Italy with the warlike spirit today is through the theatre (Apollonio, 1973:183).

By this account traditional theatre does not respond to the demands of the new times and the new public, because it is “too prolix, analytic, pedantically psychological, explanatory, diluted, finicky, static, as full of prohibitions as a police station (...)” (*Ibid.*). In total opposition to this passéist theatre, they claimed that the futurist theatre would be “synthetic”, “a-technical”, “dynamic”, “simultaneous”, “autonomous”, “alogical” and “unreal”.

The aim of the futurist theatre was to “compress in a few minutes, into a few words and gestures, innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts and symbols” (1973:184), without being subject to a passéist technique, the only aim of which was to produce a mimetic representation obsessed with verisimilitude. The Futurists believed that fighting against the prejudice of “*theatricality*” was pointless, since life itself “offers innumerable possibilities for the stage” (*Ibid.*). Their theatre should be born from improvisation and intuition, and from the interpretation of the times; they wanted to create between

the public and the actors “a current of confidence rather than respectfulness”, to invade the public, “throwing nets of sensation between stage and audience” (1973:196).

Enrico Prampolini’s “Futurist Stage Manifesto”, published in 1915, essentially claims the creation of a “*dynamic stage*” in opposition to the “*static stage of the past*”; it gives technical instructions on practical matters like scenery, lights and the creation of a different stage scene that will produce the desired “unforeseen dynamic effects”. Authenticity in the representation of reality was not at stake; Prampolini says that the unnecessary preoccupation with realism only diminishes intensity and decreases emotional content. One should use “abstractions” to interpret these realities. Therefore, he wishes to ban realistically painted scenery in favour of “colourless electromechanical architectural” structures, “enlivened by chromatic emanations from a source of light”. Lights will be arranged in accordance with the spirit of the action staged. The structures on stage will move, produce noises and be lit in an exuberance of light and shade: “Instead of the illuminated stage let us create the stage that illuminates” says Prampolini (Apollonio, 1973:201-202).

Thus, “The Futurist Synthetic Theatre” and “The Futurist Stage Manifesto” express a concern with the kind of issues which are particularly innovative in *Enemy of the Stars*: the “dynamic stage”, the emphasis on the relation of object to environment, (space, speech and colour), the creation of a non-realist atmosphere, and the presence of abstract, mechanical structures on the stage.

*The Little Review* of the Winter 1926 published a theatre number, which was dedicated to the “Futurist Theatre”, and the concepts and definitions we have just recalled were again reviewed and others introduced into the debate. One of them was Enrico Prampolini’s “The Magnetic Theatre and the Futuristic Scenic Atmosphere”. There he establishes a parallel between the scenic representations of the past, which he calls mere suggestions of the real, and the “new”, “plastic representations of magic and unreal scenic constructions”. Prampolini rejects “scenogra-



phy” as a passéist, traditional art of stage representation, a mere description of apparent reality, and proposes a new “scenic dynamism” which will summarize the *essence of theatrical action*. The essential futurist aesthetic principles, dynamism and simultaneity, validate the unity of action between *man* and his *environment*, transforming the futurist theatre into a “living scenic synthesis”. The futurist theatre is thus “the consequent projection of the world of the mind, moving rhythmically in scenic space” (p. 103). This point Lewis anticipates in the stage directions of *Enemy of the Stars*. Furthermore, the “plastic power” which Prampolini sees implicit in the creation of the stage’s “dimensional evidence” and its “synthetic” character (“to epitomize the essential”), as well as the expression of the “dynamism of the forces involved in the action”, had already been materialized in the dense atmosphere of *Enemy of the Stars*, its compact language and minimal action circumscribed to an arena-like “bleak circus”.

The *polydimensional scenic space* designed by Prampolini was to replace the traditional proscenium arch and the traditional stage which he thought limited the visibility of the performance. Thus, it required the intervention of architecture in the acting area and the predominance of chromatic and kinetic plastic elements moving on the center of the scenic space. The obsolete proscenium arch was thus destroyed, and the visual perspective of the audience enlarged; the stage would become a “constructive organism”, a “poly-dimensional scenic space” which opened new technical possibilities for theatrical action and allowed the audience to have a new relation with the action on the stage.

The actors are here considered “a useless element in theatrical action”, and their intervention as interpreters of reality or mediators of ideas an “absurd compromise”. Actors should be a personification of the space, the “dynamic and inter-acting element of expression between the scenic medium and the public” (p. 106). This new “polyexpressive magnetic theatre”, (Prampolini’s expression), aspires to be a means of spiritual education, departing from episodic extemporization on the life of a single

person, to undertake “spiritual education in the collective life” (p. 107). Its actor is preferably a clown or a marionette who does not destroy “the mystery ‘of the beyond’, which must rule in the theatre, a temple of spiritual abstraction” (p. 105)<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the “polyexpressive magnetic theatre”, wants to be “a stamping ground for the gymnastics of thought – not merely for that of the eye”. It aims to be the stage of “abstract forces at play”, and to translate the elements of *daily reality* into abstract elements of the *eternal fiction*, as well as to *unite* the action of thought to the system of interpretation (p. 108; my italics).

Even though these ideas were developed after Lewis had written *Enemy of the Stars*, they seem to be inspired in the same radical spirit of innovation, rejecting formal theatrical structure and conventional dramatic categories, even if more plausibly on a theoretical than on a practical level.

---

17 Having said that the marionette is a favourite in this kind of experimental theatre, I want to look for the explanation of these words in another futurist, Remo Bufano. In the article “The Marionette in the Theatre”, published in the same 1926 issue of *The Little Review*. Bufano insists on the benefits of the use of the marionette in the theatre, although he thinks that it will never completely replace the actor. The marionette has an identity of its own, he says: being purely artificial, purely symbolic, it should always be present when the artificial and the symbolic are needed. The actor, being flesh and blood, is tied to them, and should make use of them on stage. Hence, Bufano’s theatrical aesthetics do not do without the actor, but he asks for the specific participation of the marionette in particular cases. As an example, he cites “Hamlet’s ghost”: “Has there ever been an actor who has really made an audience believe he was Hamlet’s ghost?”, he asks. He believes that a renaissance of the theatre cannot do without the renaissance of the marionette. As I have stated earlier Lewis himself also saw a favourite in the marionette, not only as a character in his writing and painting, together with his men-machines and his clowns, but also as a subject of his aesthetics and a material interpreter of his world view. Besides, the actors of *Enemy of the Stars*, are themselves “heathen clowns” as well.

## 6. Conclusion

*Enemy of the Stars* is essentially a symbolic and “magnetic” performance (in Prampolini’s sense of the term). It represents an experimentalist rupture in the traditional concept of the theatre as a realistic and mimetic representation of reality, and accords with vorticist/futurist principles in relation to the language, style and structure of the avant-garde text, regardless of genre. The play is a “condensed” performance of a struggle between essences and world views. Its actors, mere clowns or marionettes, enable the public to focus all its attention on one issue – the discussion of abstract concepts: “The magnetic theatre wants to unite the action of thought to the system of interpretation”, as Prampolini writes in the manifesto of the “Magnetic Theatre” ( p. 108).

This seems to be Lewis’s intention: to establish a cohesive link between his line of thought and the performance, through the integration of the actor in the scenic-space, and the public in the performance, thus emphasizing the close relation between man and his environment.



## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to try to rethink the poetics of the avant-garde in its early years, its revolution in language, as a symptom of a society in crisis and violent rupture or, to put it in Kristeva's words, seeing its fragmented discourse as the product of a subject "in process", and a reflection of a society "in process" as well.

Vorticism and Futurism, though interdependent movements, share the celebration of a "realist" aesthetics, the main purpose of which is to revitalize the articulation between art and life in all possible directions. Thus they seek to promote music as an "aesthetics of noises", literature as an aesthetics of "words in freedom and imagination without strings", sculpture as the aesthetics of "pure plastic rhythm", photography as the art of making the "anatomy of action" or creating "photodynamism", theatre as the aesthetics of a "polydimensional", "dynamic" and "magnetic space", and so forth.

This futurist/vorticist aesthetics, was wonderfully synthesized by the group of painters who subscribed to the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" in 1910:

We would at any price re-enter into life. Victorious science has nowadays disowned its past in order the better to serve the material needs of our time; we would that art, disowning its past, were able to serve at last the intellectual needs which are within us (Apollonio 1973:28-29).

This need to express the feeling of the *transitoriness*, *simultaneity* and *dynamism* of modern life underlies the futurist quasi-mythical eulogy of the Machine Age and the cry for “War, only hygiene of the world”, against the passivity and rigidity of an equally mythologized “past” and “tradition”.

In addressing the issue of the presence and role of women in the futurist movement, I have tried to lift the veil of futurist/vorticist misogyny and its essentially contradictory gender politics. On the one hand the movement loudly claims to despise women and particularly to hate the feminist, but on the other hand it is full of praise and admiration for the strong and independent woman, including the Suffragette. Further it calls for the destruction of the family and of the “ownership of woman” in the “legal prostitution of marriage”, (vide the futurist manifesto *Contro il Matrimonio*). As I tried to show in Part One Futurism and Vorticism were trapped in the ideological conflicts of their own megalomania. They were based on principles of patriotism, individualism, “Health, Force, Will and Virility”, and at the same time wanted to be on the avant-garde of art, as well as of social change.

In Part Two my study of Wyndham Lewis’s early narrative prose and his obsession with the man-machine, the marionette, the clown, the sub-human, the alienated and grotesque being, has had two aims: a stylistic analysis of the language and form of Vorticism, and a sociological study of the “degenerescence” of Lewis’s “popular” carnivalesque grotesque into the modernist grotesque representation of an “up-side-down-world”, manipulated by his “cold and non-moral satire”. However, in various degrees and through different forms of his “satire-collage” technique, Lewis achieved in *The Wild Body*, *Tarr* and *Enemy of the Stars* different polyphonic responses to a modern, reified society.

In relation to the first issue, the analysis of Vorticism in Lewis’s writing, its abruptness, its mechanical rhythm, as well as its deliberately shocking and explosive imagery, was in total

syntony with the kind of tense and bleak world that it sought to represent. Among the texts here considered, it is particularly in the poetic prose of *Enemy of the Stars* that Lewis achieves the peak of the vorticist “word hallucination”, in parallel with the futurist “Words in Freedom and Imagination without Strings”, or Rimbaud’s verbal “Délires”.

Fungi of sullen violet thoughts, investing primitive vegetation.  
Hot words drummed on his ear every evening: abuse: question.  
Groping hands strummed toppling Byzantine organ of his mind,  
producing monotonous bleak fugue (E. S., p. 65).

As we have seen, Lewis’s style in *The Wild Body* oscillates between mocking irony and poetic allegory, partly due to the “travelogue” nature of the tales, and also to the kind of parody that they sustain. In *Tarr*, Lewis’s language is essentially provocative, deliberately shocking in its detached cynical outlook on human beings, their precarious existence and the artificial relations they establish among themselves. Bertha, Tarr’s lover, is a case in point.

She is full of good sense – She is a high standard Aryan female, in good condition, superbly made; of the succulent, obedient, clear peasant type. It is natural that in my early youth, living in these Bohemian wastes, I should catch fire (1918:23).

I have said that Vorticism and Futurism have in common their rejection of a “decorative and precious aesthetics” (“Technical Manifesto of Futurism”) and the demand that the words should be “brutally grasped and hurled in then reader’s face”. For this very reason, I want to call attention to the difficulty of translating their texts into another language. In this thesis, I have had to try to translate some of Marinetti’s writing, because of the absence of such translations in English and often also in French. “Come si Seducono le Donne” (Milano, 1933), for example,

is essential for the understanding of the parallel importance of the issues of War and Women in the ideology of Futurism. Because of the highly imagistic language used, the extravagant metaphors and Marinetti's provocative style, which I have tried to preserve, the translation sounds irretrievably awkward in English (vide Chapter Two, *Futurism*, pp. 47-48).

Fra le paure azzurre che il crepuscolo accumulava intorno a noi, io, senza amore, snidavo coibaci sotto le belle braccia l'allegria e lo spasimo cocente del corpo seminudo, ma i miei sguardi non la vedevano... (1933:59).

[Amongst the blue fears that the twilight was gathering around us, I, without love was driving with kisses the joy and the ardent spasm of the half naked body but my eyes were not seeing her... ]

Lewis's carnivalesque representation of the world should be understood simultaneously as an aesthetics of estrangement, and as a provocation within the historical frame of Modernism. As Jameson says, in the Prologue to *Fables of Aggression Wyndham Lewis the Modernist as Fascist*, Lewis's representation of social reification is transgressive in its incorporation and reproduction of society's own fragmentation, as well as in its challenge of language as communication code, rather than as the product of an aesthetics of compensation, using language as a set code of significations or a finished system of meanings. Lewis's writing, thus understood in the context of modernist poetics, is a "symbolic act in its own right, an explosion and window-breaking praxis on the level of words themselves", (Jameson 1979:8).

It is in this perspective that this thesis tries to understand avant-garde poetics. I have tried not to rush to judgement, condemning it for its "negative radicalism", its "lack of purpose" or "seriousness", its "systematic anti-aestheticism" and "farical dehumanization", but rather to understand it as a "deliberate



and self-conscious parody of modernity itself"<sup>1</sup>, as a perilous attempt to bridge the gap between the traditionally antagonistic spheres of art and life.

Lewis's narrative technique, which was described earlier on as a process of "satire-collage", is thus not a mere pastiche of the mechanical and the reified in the modern world, but rather, as Jameson writes<sup>2</sup>, "the most jarring and energetic mimesis of the mechanical", and at the same time, a reflection of the "massive and wellnigh impenetrable obstacles which literary production must overcome in the consumer age".

The process of the evolution of avant-garde to Kitsch, suggests the relation of parody to pastiche. While parody represents the critical relation that the avant-garde assumes towards the world in the beginning of the century, pastiche defines the very absence of that critique in the late capitalist world. As Jameson writes in "Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"<sup>3</sup>, despite the fact that both are "the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language", pastiche is a "neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists".

Similarly, as Matei Calinescu writes in *Faces of Modernity*, the Futurists<sup>7</sup> attack on the art of the past, namely their assault on classical sculpture, like the Victoria di Samotracia or the Venus di Milo, should be interpreted as an insurgence against the "kitschification" and the "pastichification" of the original. This means that assault is actually a vindication of the original object of art, rather than an insult to classicism. Calinescu speaking of

1 Vide Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, (1977:141).

2 Fredric Jameson, "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist", *Hudson Review*, (1973:325).

3 "Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *New Left Review*, (1984:65).

the relationship between avant-garde and kitsch, observes that they have often been identified and mistaken one with the other. Even though, historically, it was with the advent of the avant-garde that kitsch flourished, they must be differentiated from each other. The interest of the avant-garde in kitsch has often been for subversive and ironic aesthetic purposes, a “transgressive practice”, (e. g. Marcel Duchamp’s portrait of Mona Lisa with a moustache). Contrastingly kitsch uses the avant-garde with the purpose of a mere aesthetic imitation, without any risks or commitment to goals of provocation of the public or intention of arousing social scandal, but for plain commercial motives. (The example here would be the cheap replicas of that same Mona Lisa portrait reproduced by the thousand, to be hung on the fireplaces of the most peaceful bourgeois households.)

Clement Greenberg in his 1939 essay, “Avant-garde and Kitsch”, though assuming a very critical stand towards what he calls the avant-garde subordination to the “ruling class”, ends up defending the avant-garde from the easy consumption afforded by kitsch, saying that “the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to “experiment” but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence” (1973:5). Further, claiming kitsch as the “art of the masses”, which can be enjoyed without effort, when on the other hand there is no “natural” urgency that drives them to superior culture, he writes:

As a matter of fact, the main trouble with avant-garde art and literature, from the point of view of fascists and Stalinists, is not they are too critical, but that they are too “innocent”, that it is too difficult to inject effective propaganda into them, that kitsch is more pliable to this end. Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the “soul” of the people. Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be a danger of isolation (1973:19).

The politics of avant-garde aesthetics must be seen in each historical context and for each artist or movement, rather than too rapidly dismissed for its eventual affiliation with right-wing politics. As Edoardo Sanguineti writes in *Ideologia e Linguaggio*, (where he takes a very critical attitude in relation to the politics of the avant-garde), even though the phenomenon of the avant-garde is the product of bourgeois society and its economic conditioning of art, one cannot simply say that the avant-garde is a mechanical expression of the bourgeoisie in power (1972:64-65).

Rather, as I suggested at the outset in considering the renewed importance of Modernism in relation to current debates about postmodern aesthetics, the same avant-garde that has often been attacked as decadent, bourgeois, or futile, is at the root of the present movement in the arts, and lies behind what has been called our “nervous present”. Its “negative radicalism”, its “far-cical disrespect” and grotesque epic mode, assume a purpose and a meaning in the context of the search for the identity of the subject in modern society. Within Modernity, the fragmentary, lonely voice of the text, sometimes even reduced to silence, becomes articulated and audible amongst the noises of urban, industrial communities. As Susan Sontag wrote in *Aesthetics of Silence*, “silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in the dialogue of modern societies” (1969:11).



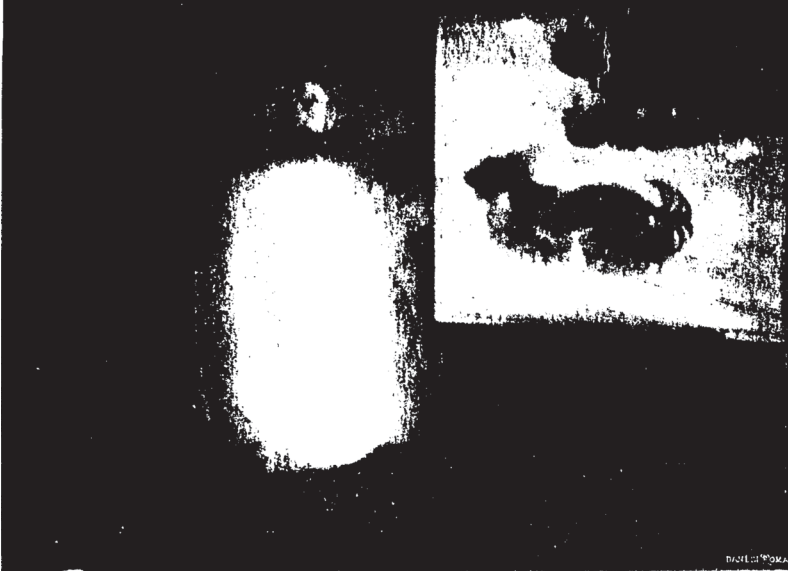
## Appendix I

### Manifesto del Futurismo (extract)

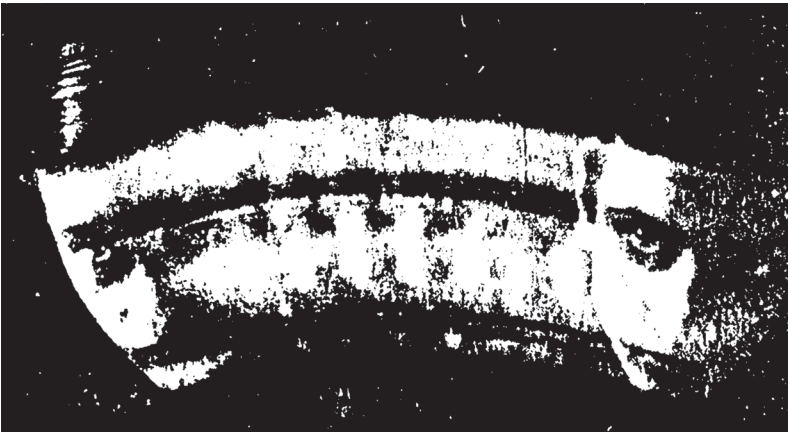
1. Noi vogliamo cantare l'amor del pericolo, l'abitudine all'energia e alla temerità...
2. Il coraggio, l'audacia; la ribellione, saranno elementi essenziali della nostra poesia.
3. La letteratura esaltò fino ad oggi l'immobilità pensosa, l'estasi e il sonno. Noi vogliamo esaltare il movimento aggressivo, l'insonnia febbrile, il passo di corsa, il salto mortale, lo schiaffo ed il pugno.
4. Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una bellezza nuova: la bellezza della velocità. Un automobile da corsa col suo cofano adorno di grossi tubi simili a serpenti dall'alito esplosivo... un automobile ruggente, che sembra correre sulla mitraglia, e più bello della *Vittoria di Samotracia*.
5. Noi vogliamo inneggiare all'uomo che tiene il volante, la cui asta ideale attraversa la Terra, lanciata a corsa, essa pure, sul circuito della sua orbita.
6. Bisogna che il poeta si prodighi, con ardore, sfarzo e munificenza, per aumentare l'entusiastico fervore degli elementi primordiali.
7. Non v'è più bellezza, se non nella lotta. Nessuna opera che non abbia un carattere aggressivo può essere un capolavoro. La poesia deve essere concepita come un violento assalto contra le forze ignote, per ridurle a prostrarsi davanti all'uomo.
8. Noi siamo sul promontorio estremo dei secoli!... Perché dovremmo guardarci alle spalle, se vogliamo sfondare le misteriose porte dell'Impossibile? Il Tempo e lo Spazio morirono ieri. Noi viviamo già nell'assoluto, poiché abbiamo già creata l'eterna velocità onnipresente.

9. Noi vogliamo glorificare la guerra – sola igiene del mondo – il militarismo, il patriottismo, il gesto distruttore dei libertari, le belle idee per cui si muore e il disprezzo della donna.
10. Noi vogliamo distruggere i musei, le biblioteche, le accademie d'ogni specie, e combattere contro il moralismo, il femminismo e contro ogni viltà opportunistica o utilitaria.
11. Noi canteremo le grandi folle agitate dal lavoro, dal piacere o dalla sommossa: canteremo le maree multicolori e polifoniche delle rivoluzioni nelle capitali moderne; canteremo il vibrante fervore notturno degli arsenali e dei cantieri incendiati da violente lune elettriche; le stazioni ingorde, divoratrici di serpi che fumano; le officine appese alle nuvole pei contorti fili dei loro fumi; i ponti simili a ginnasti giganti che scavalcano. i fiumi, balenanti al sole con un luccichio di coltelli; i piroscafi avventurosi che fiutano l'orizzonte, le locomotive dall'ampio petto, che scalpitano sulle rotaie, come enormi cavalli d'acciaio imbrigliati di tubi, e il volo scivolante degli aeroplani, la cui elica garrisce al vento come una bandiera e sembra applaudire come una folla entusiasta.

## Appendix II



Anton Giulio Bragaglia *Balla in Front of his Picture* 1912

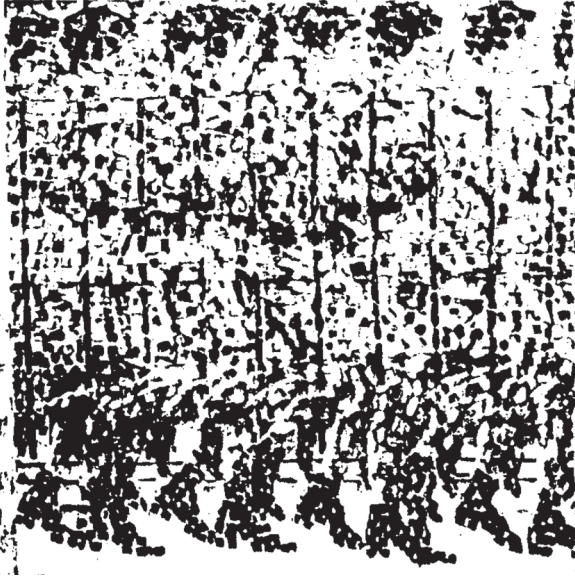


Anton Giulio Bragaglia *Young Man Rocking* 1911



Giacomo Balla *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* 1912





Giacomo Balla *Little Girl Running on a Balcony* 1912



E. J. Marey *Chronophotograph* 1884 (?)

### Appendix III

ZANG TUMB TUUUM (WORDS IN FREEDOM)

Corrections of rough drafts + desires at speed

No poetry before us with our *imagination without strings* words in freedom looooong live Futurism at last at last at last at last At Last Poetry is born train train train train *tren tron tron tron* (an iron bridge: *tataluuuntlin*) *ssssssiii ssiissii ssiisssssiii* fever of my train express-expressssssss-expressssssss press-press-press-press-press- press-press-press-press-press-press stung with tes sea salt perfumed with oranges to seek the sea raaaaiiiiils (greedy salty purple in fire inevitable slopping imponderable fragile dancing magnetic) I will explain these words I mean that sky sea mountains are greedy salty purple etc. everything which is outside of me but *also in me* totality simultaneity absolute synthesis superiority of my poetry over all others Villa San Giovanni catching+fishing+engulfment of the dogfish train to push it into the ferry-boat-whale departure from the floating station solidity of the sea of polished oak indigo ventilation (imperceptible daily methodical silky padded metallic trmbling cut out wrapped polished new) ascent of a sailing boat oil lamp + 12 lampshades + a green carpet + circle of solitude serenity family the method of a second sailing boat prow to work at the lathe the metal of the sea shavings of foam to lower temperature= 3 fans on top of the Monti Calabri (Bluuuuuuuuue slow of indulgent sceptical) The Rubble of Messina in the strait

**F. T. MARINETTI**  
**FUTURISTA**

# **ZANG TUMB TUUUM**

**ADRIANOPOLI OTTOBRE 1912**

**PAROLE IN LIBERTÀ**

**EDIZIONI FUTURISTE**  
**DI "POESIA,,**  
**Corso Venezia, 61 - MILANO**  
**1914**

Correzione  
di bozze + desideri  
in velocità

Nessuna poesia prima di noi  
colla nostra immaginazione senza fili parole  
in libertà vivaaaaAAA il FUTURISMO fi-  
nalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente  
finalmente

FINALMENTE

POESIA NASCERE

treno treno treno treno **tren tron**  
**tron tron** (ponte di ferro: **tatatluuun-**  
**tlin) ssssssslll sllssll slllssssllll**  
treno treno febbre del mio

treno express-express-expressssssss press-press  
 press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press-  
 press-press-pressssssss punzecchiato dal sale  
 marino aromatizzato dagli aranci cercare mare  
 mare mare balzare balzare rotaie rott-  
 ttaie balzare rooooootttaie rooooooottaie  
*(GOLOSO SALATO PURPUREO FALOTICO INE-  
 VITABILE INCLINATO IMPONDERABILE FRA-  
 GILE DANZANTE CALAMITATO)* spiegherò  
 queste parole voglio dire che cielo mare  
 montagne sono golosi salati purpurei ecc.  
 e che io sono goloso salato purpureo ecc.  
 tutto ciò fuori di me ma **anche in**  
**me** totalità simultaneità sintesi assoluta =  
 superiorità della mia poesia su tutte le  
 altre stop Villa San Giovanni  
 cattura + pesca -+ ingoiamento  
 del treno-pescecane immagliarlo spingerlo nel

ferry-boat-balena partenza della  
stazione galleggiante solidità  
del mare di quercia piallata  
indaco venti-  
lazione (**INSENSIBILE QUOTIDIANO METODICO  
SERICO IMBOTTITO METALLICO TREPIDANTE  
BITAGLIATO IMPACCHETTATO CESELLATO  
NUOVO**) accensione di un ve-  
liero = lampada a petrolio +- 12 para-  
lumi bianchi +- tappeto verde + cerchio  
di solitudine serenità famiglia  
metodo d'un secondo veliero prua lavorare  
al tornio il metallo del mare  
trucioli di schiuma abbassarsi della tempera-  
tura = 3 ventagli al disopra dei Monti  
Calabri (**AZZZZZURRRRRRO LENTO INDUL-  
GENTE SCETTICO**)  
Macerie di Messina nello stretto

## Appendix IV

### THE DISTANT SOLDIER (Strategic Plan of Feelings)

A room plainly furnished. A large table; over the table a lamp, the only one in the room, dimly lighting it. On the left, a lit fireplace, facing it an *Old Woman* working on a lambskin vest. She is sitting in such a way that the audience will see her profile. Near the table there is a *Young Woman*, also working, almost with her back to the public. Facing her, and at the same side of the table, there is a *Young Man* sitting – and leaning towards her – the *Young Man* is talking to her with commotion, half whispering, so that no one can hear what he is saying. At the other side of the table, showing his profile from the right to the left, motionless, his body projected forwards over the table, a *Soldier*, who must seem much taller and bigger than all the other characters. Wrapped up in warm clothes, from the edge, he is pointing his rifle in a way that his fixed bayonet will appear between the *Young Woman* and the *Young Man*, almost touching the back of the *Old Woman* who is sitting with her back to the table. The *Soldier* is invisible to the other characters, who must seem to ignore his presence. Behind the *Soldier*, a closed door.

The *Old Woman* (in a suffocated voice) : My poor son! How he's going to freeze tonight in the rifle-pit.

The *Young Woman* (pushing away the *Young Man* who is trying to take hold of her hand) : My vest will keep him warm, with his beautiful name, Paolo, which I will have embroidered with these hands... He will be happy... But 'm scared that it might get lost...

The *Old Woman*;... Oh, no! I was told that the mail is going through well these days... How unfortunate if your beautiful present wouldn't reach him!... Paolo is forgetting me... He thinks of nothing else but his little cousin!

[Meanwhile, the *Young Man*, always leaning towards the *Young Woman*, still insisting in trying to call her attention and still trying to take hold of her hand. The *Young Woman*, politely, but still pushing him away without looking at him. Suddenly one hears from the outside, far away, the violent but suffocated roar of voices shouting: Savooooooooie!!!

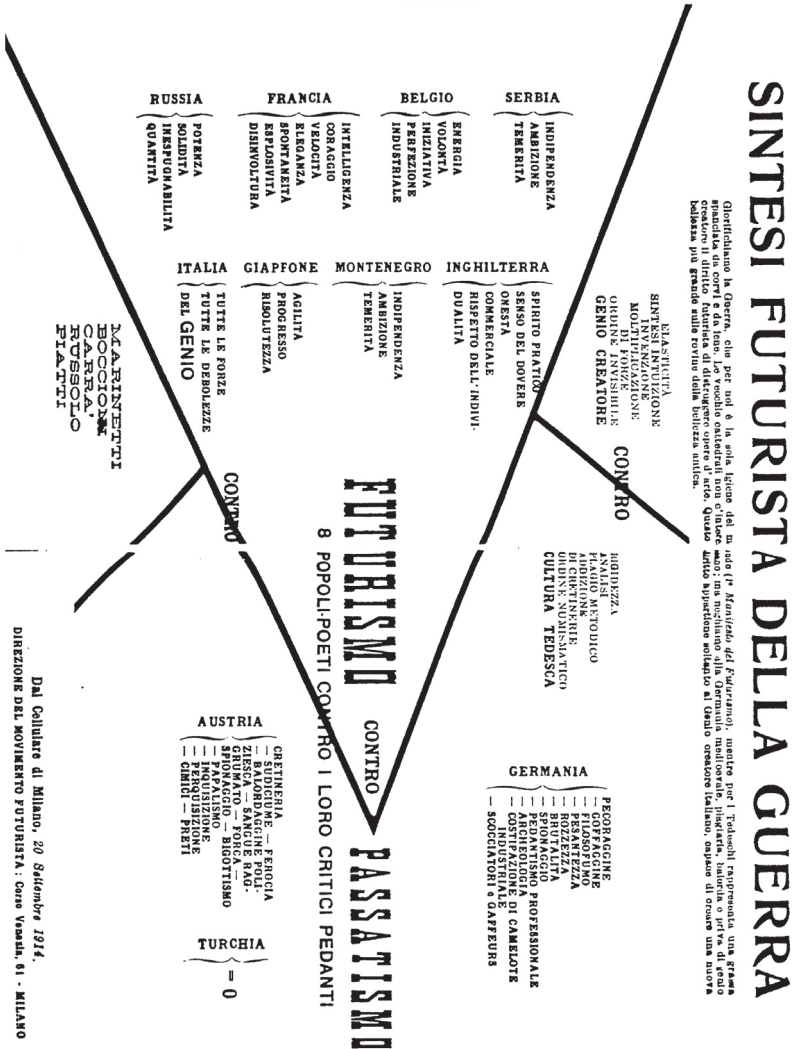
The *Old Woman* and the *Young Woman* suddenly stand up, petrified, loose arms at the side of the body, eyes popping out of their sockets, blank face. The *Young Man* remains sat, his elbows resting on his knees, holding the head between his hands. The moment when, far away, the uproar bursts out, the *Soldier* opens his mouth wide. ]... Slowly the curtain falls.

F. T. Marinetti, 1916

(translated from *Le Soldat Lointain* in G. Lista's *Théâtre Futuriste Italien*, I, L'Age D'Homme, Lausanne, 1976).



Appendix V





## Bibliography

### 1-a) Works by Mikhail Bakhtin

- BAKHTIN, Mikhail, (Voloshinov, V. N.), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. (Leningrad, 1929) ; Seminar Press, N. Y. and London, 1973.
- , (Voloshinov, V. N.), *Freudianism: a Marxist Critique*. (Leningrad, 1927); Titunik, I. R. and Bruss, N. H. eds., N. Y. and London, Academic Press, 1976.
- , *The Dialogic Imagination; four Essays*. Holquist, M. and Emerson, C. eds., Univ. Texas Press, 1981.
- , *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (Leningrad, 1929; Revised ed., Moscow, 1963); in *Theory and History of Literature*: 8, Manchester Univ. Press, 1984a).
- , *Rabelais and His World*, (Moscow, 1965); Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, 1984b).

### 1-b) commentaries on Mikhail Bakhtin

- BERNSTEIN, M. André, "When the Carnival Turns Bitter", in *Bakhtin*, Gary Saul Morson ed., Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986.
- BOVE, Carol Mastrangelo, "The Text as Dialogue in Bakhtin and Kristeva", in *University of Ottawa Quarterly*, January-March 1983, vol. 53, n. 1, Ottawa.
- BRISTOL, Michael D., *Carnival, and Theater*, Methuen, New York and London, 1985.
- BRITTON, Celia, "The Dialogic Text and the Texte Pluriel", in *University of Essex Occasional Papers*, Poetics 14, 1974.
- ECO, Umberto, "Carnival and the Roots of Comic Freedom" in *Carnival!*, (*Approaches to Semiotics 64*), Sebeok, Thomas, ed., Berlin, N. Y., Amsterdam, Mouton, 1984.
- HOLQUIST, Michael and Clark, Katerina, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1984.

- IVANOV, V. V., "The Significance of Bakhtin's Ideas on Sign, Utterance and Dialogue for Modern Semiotics" in *Papers on Poetics and Semiotics*, Tel-aviv Univ., 1976.
- IVANOV, V. V., "The semiotic theory of carnival as the inversion of bipolar opposites", in *Carnival!, (Approaches to Semiotics 64)*, Sebeok, Thomas, ed., Berlin, N. Y., Amsterdam, Mouton, 1984.
- MALCUZYNSKI, M. Pierrette, "M. Bakhtin and Contemporary Narrative Today", in *University of Ottawa Quarterly*, January-March 1983, vol. 53, n. 1, Ottawa.
- MORSON, Gary Saul, ed., *Bakhtin – Essays and Dialogues on his Work*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, (1981), 1986.
- SANTAYANA, G., "The Comic Mask and Carnival" in Corrigan ed., *Comedy, Meaning and Form*, Chandler Publ. Co., 1965.
- SEBEOK, Thomas ed., *Carnival!, (Approaches to Semiotics 64)*, articles by U. Eco, V. V. Ivanov and M. Rector, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, N. Y., Amsterdam, 1984.
- SHUKMAN Ann, ed., *Bakhtin School Papers, (Russian Poetics in Translation n. 10, 1983)*, RPT Publications, Oxford.
- STALLYBRASS, Peter and White, Allon, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Methuen, London, 1986.
- THOMSON, Clive, "Bakhtin- Baxtin-Bachtin-Bakutin (on the Evolution of Bakhtin Criticism)" in *Collogue Internationale*, Queen's Univ., 1983: M. M. Bakhtine, *son cercle, son influence*.
- TODOROV, Tzvetan, «La Place de Bakhtine dans l'Histoire des Ideologies» in *Collogue Internationale*, Queen's Univ., 1983: M. M. Bakhtine, *son cercle, son influence*.
- , *Mikhail Bakhtine: le Principe Dialogique*, Poetique, Seuil, Paris, 1981.
- WHITE, Allon, "Pigs and Pierrots: the Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction" in *Raritan*, 11,2 (Fall), New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1982.
- , "Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics and Deconstruction" in *The Theory of Reading*, Groversmith, F. ed., Harvester Press, Brighton, 1984.
- , "The Carnavalesque: Bakhtin", (taped), in a series of lectures on *Introduction to Structuralism*, Univ. of Sussex, 1983.

## 2-a) Works by Julia Kristeva

- KRISTEVA, Julia, *Sêmeiôtikê; Recherches Pour Une Sémanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1969.
- , *Desire in Language*, Roudiez, L. S., Basil Blackwell, Oxford, (1980), 1982.
- , *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*, Seuil, Paris, 1974.
- , *La Traversée des Signes*, Tel Quel Coll., Seuil, Paris, 1975.
- , *Le Texte du Roman*, Mouton, The Hague, Paris, 1970, 1976.
- , *Polylogue*, Seuil, Paris, 1977.
- , «Le mot, le dialogue et le roman» in *Recherches pour une Sémanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1969.
- , “The Ruin of a Poetics” in *Russian Formalism*, Scottish Academic Press, Bann and Bowlts eds. 1973.

## 2-b) Commentaries on Julia Kristeva

- HEATH, Stephen, *Théâtre du Langage*, in *Critique* 331, 1974.
- WHITE, Allon, *The Theoretical Work of Julia Kristeva*, “L'éclatement du sujet”, (Unpublished paper), Cambridge 1977.

## 3 – Futurism

- APOLLONIO, Umbro ed., *Futurist Manifestos; Documents of Twentieth Century Art*, Thames and Hudson, London 1973.
- BALDACCI, L., “Il Futurismo a Firenze”, in *Libretti d'Opera*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1974.
- BANN, S. and Bowlts, J. E. eds., *Russian Formalism: a Collection of Articles and Essays in Translation*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1973.
- BRAGALIA, ANTON, “The Theatrical Theater” in *The Little Review*, Anderson, M. and Heap, J. eds., Winter 1926, Kraus Reprint Corp., N. Y. 1967.
- BUFFANO, Remo, “The Marionette in the Theater” in *The Little Review*, Anderson, M. and Heap, J. eds., Winter 1926, Kraus Reprint Corp., N. Y. 1967.
- FLINT, R. W. and Coppotelli, A. A. eds., *Marinetti; Selected Writings*, Seeker and Warburg, London, 1972.

- GAUDIBERT, Pierre, «À Propos de Futurisme et Fascisme ou Plus Généralement d'Avant-garde et Politique», in Lista, Giovanni, ed., *Marinetti et le Futurisme*, *op. cit.*
- GHERARDUCCI, Isabella, *II Futurismo Italiano*, ed. Riuniti, Roma, 1976.
- GORLOV, Nicholas, "On Futurisms and Futurism" in *The Futurists, the Formalists and the Marxist Critique*, Pike, C. ed., Ink Links Ltd, London, 1979.
- KIESLER, F., "Débâcle of the Modern Theater" in *The Little Review* Winter 1926, Anderson, M. and Heap, J. eds. (Kraus Reprint Corp. N. Y. 1967).
- LISTA, Giovanni, *Futurisme. Manifestes. Proclamations. Documents. L'Age d'Homme*, Lausanne, 1973.
- , *Marinetti et le Futurisme*, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1977.
- , *Théâtre Futuriste Italien* Vol. I, II., L'Age d'Homme, La Cite, Lausanne, 1976.
- MALVANO, Laura, «Futurisme et Fascisme: Dynamique de Rapports Inégaux», in Lista, Giovanni, ed., *Marinetti et le Futurisme. op. cit.*
- MARIA, Luciano De, "Marinetti Poete et Ideologue" in Lista, Giovanni ed., *Marinetti et le Futurisme, op. cit.*
- MARINETTI, Filippo, T., *Come si Seducono le Donne e si Tradiscono gli Uomini*, Sonzogno editore, Milano, 1933.
- , *Les Mots en Liberté Futuriste*, Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, Milano, 1919, (Saifer, Albert ed., Philadelphia, 1970).
- , and Robert, Enif, *Un Ventre di Donna Romanzo Chirurgico*, Facchi editore, Milano, 1919.
- , "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism", (1909), in *Futurist Manifestos*, Apollonio, Umbro ed. Thames and Hudson, London 1973.
- , *Destruction of Syntax – Imagination Without Strings – Words in Freedom* (1913), in *Futurist Manifestos*, Apollonio, Umbro ed. Thames and Hudson, London 1973.
- , *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista*, a cura di Luciano De Maria, Arnoldo Mondadori ed., Verona, 1968.
- MARINETTI, F., Settimelli, E., Corrà, B., "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre", (1915) in *Futurist Manifestos*, Apollonio, Umbro ed. Thames and Hudson, London 1973.
- MARKOV, Vladimir, *Russian Futurism; A History*, Meggibon and Kee eds., Los Angeles, University of California Press, London, 1969.

- MARTIN, Marianne W., *Futurist Art and Theory (1909-1915)*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968.
- PAGLIA, Luigi *Invito alla lettura di Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, Mursia editore, Milano, 1977.
- PIKE, Chris ed. *Futurists, Formalists and the Marxist Critique*, Ink Links Ltd, London, 1979.
- PISCOPO, Ugo, «Les Futuristes et Rimbaud», in *Europe*, vol. 51, May-June, n. 529-530, pp. 133-146.
- PRAMPOLINI, Emilio, "The Futurist Stage", (1915) in *Futurist Manifestos*, Apollonio, Umbro ed. Thames and Hudson, London, 1973.
- PRAMPOLINI, Enrico, "The Magnetic Theater and the Futuristic Scenic Atmosphere" in *The Little Review* Winter 1926, Anderson, M. and Heap, J. eds. (Krus Reprint Corp. N. Y. 1967).
- PROFFER, E. and Proffer, C. eds., *Russian Futurism*, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1980.
- SALARIS, Claudia, *Le Futuriste. Donne e Letteratura d'Avanguardia in Italia (1909-1944)*, Edizioni delle Donne, Milano, 1982.
- , *Storia del Futurismo*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1985.
- SAMUEL, Horace, "The Future of Futurism" in *Modernities*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, Co. Ltd., London 1913.
- SANGUINETI, Edoardo, "La Guerre Futuriste", in Lista, Giovanni, ed., *Marinetti et le Futurisme*, op. cit.
- SCALIA, Gianni ed., *La Cultura Italiana del 1900 attraverso le riviste*, vol. IV, Lacerba e La Voce (1914-16), Giulio Einaudi editore, Torino, 1961.
- TAYLOR, Christiana J., *Futurism Politics. Painting and Performance*, UMI Research Press, Michigan 1978.
- TESSARI, Roberto, *Il Mito della Machina Letteratura e Industria nel Primo Novecento Italiano*, U. di Mursia e C., Milano, 1973.
- VINALL, Shirley, "The Emergence of Machine Imagery in Marinetti's Poetry", in *Romance Studies*, No. 6, Summer 1985, (Issue on *The Machine in Literature*, Univ. College of Wales).
- WAGSTAFF, Christopher, "Dead Man Erect: Marinetti, L'Alcova d'Acciaio", in *The First World War in Fiction*, Klein, Holger, ed., Macmillan, London, 1976.

## 4 – Vorticism

- CORK, Richard, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, 2 volumes, Gordon Fraser, London 1976.
- CORK, Richard, *Vorticism and its Allies*, Arts Council 1974 (Introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, 27 March /2 June).
- HUMPHREYS, Richard, “Demon Pantechnicon Driver: Pound in the London Vortex 1908-1920”, in *Pound’s Artists – Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London. Paris and Italy*, The Tate Gallery, London, 1985.
- MATERER, Timothy, *Vortex. Pound, Eliot and Lewis*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1979.
- NEVINSON, C. R. W., *Paint and Prejudice*, Methuen, London, 1937.
- WEES, W. C., *Vorticism and The English Avantgarde*, Toronto and Manchester Univ. Press 1972.
- ZACH, Natan, “Imagism and Vorticism”, in Malcom Bradbury and J. MacFarlane, *Modernism*, Pelican Guide to European Literature, Harvester, Sussex, 1978.

## 5-a) Works by Wyndham Lewis

- LEWIS, P. Wyndham, *Tarr*, Jubilee Books Inc. New York, 1973, (Copyright 1918).
- LEWIS, P. Wyndham, *The Art of Being Ruled*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1926.
- , *Time and Western Man*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1927.
- , *Rude Assignment*, A Narrative of my Career. Hutchinson, London, 1950.
- , *The Revenge for Love*, (1937); Methuen, London, 1952.
- , *Self-Condemned*, (Methuen, London, 1954); Carcanet Press, Manchester, 1983.
- , *Introduction to Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism*, Catalogue of the Tate Gallery Exhibition, 1956.
- , *Men Without Art*, (Cassel and Co. Ltd., London, Toronto, Melbourne, Sydney,, 1934); second edition Russell and Russell Inc. N. Y. 1964.



- , *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Calders and Boyars Ltd., London, 1967.
- , *An Anthology of his Prose*, E. W. F. Tomlined., Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1969a).
- , *Wyndham Lewis on Art Collected Writings (1913-1956)*, Michel, Walter and Fox, C. J., Thames and Hudson, London, 1969b).
- ed., *The Tyro: a Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design*, Frank Cass and Company Ltd., London, (1921-1922); 1970.
- , “Cantleman’s Spring Mate”, in *Unlucky for Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories*, Fox, C. J. and Chapman, Robert, T., eds., Vision Press Ltd., London, 1973.
- , *Collected Poems and Plays*, Alan Munton ed., Carcanet, Manchester, 1979.
- , *Mrs. Dukes’ Million*, (1977) ; George Prior, London, 1980.
- , *The Apes of God*, (1930); Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1981.
- , *Enemy of the Stars* in *Blast 1*, (Lewis, W. ed., 1914); 2nd ed. includes *Physics of the Not Self*, Desmond Harmsworth ed. ltd. London, 1932; Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1981.
- ed., *Blast 1 and Blast 2*, (1914-1915); second edition by Black Sparrow Press, 1981.
- , *The Complete Wild Body*, Lafourcade, Bernard, ed., Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1982.

## 5-b) Commentaries on Wyndham Lewis

- BEATTY, Michael, “Enemy of the Stars: Vorticist Experimental Play”, in *Theoria*, vol. 46, p. 41-60, Univ. of Natal Press, 1976.
- CARAPEZZA, Attilio, “Il comico e il satirico nell’opera di Wyndham Lewis” in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura* a cura di G. Cianci, Sellerio editore, Palermo, 1982.
- CHAPMAN, Robert, T., *Wyndham Lewis: Fiction and Satires*, Vision Press, Plymouth, 1973.
- CIANCI, Giovanni, “Un futurismo in panni neoclassici: sul primo Wyndham Lewis vorticista” in *Wyndham Lewis, Letteratura/Pittura*, a cura di G. Cianci, Sellerio editore, Palermo 1982.

- COOKSON, W. ed., *Agenda*, (Wyndham Lewis Special Issue), vol. 7 and vol. 8, Autumn-Winter, London, 1969-70.
- DAVIES, Alistair, "Tarr; a Nietzschean Novel" in *Wyndham Lewis a Revaluation: New Essays*, Meyers J. ed., The Athlone Press, London, 1980.
- DURMAN, Michael and Munton, Alan, "Wyndham Lewis and the Nature of Vorticism", in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Cianci ed., Sellerio, Palermo, 1982.
- DUNCAN, Ian, "Towards a Modernist Poetic: Wyndham Lewis's Early Fiction" in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Cianci ed., Sellerio, Palermo, 1982.
- EDWARDS, Paul, "Wyndham Lewis and Nietzsche: 'How\_Much Truth Does a Man Require?'" in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Cianci ed., Sellerio, Palermo, 1982.
- FLORY, Wendy, "Enemy of the Stars", in *Wyndham Lewisj. A Revaluation; New Essays*, Meyers, J. ed., The Athlone Press, London, 1980.
- HOLLOWAY, John, "Wyndham Lewis", in *The Charted Mirror; Literary and Critical Essays*, Routledge, London, 1960.
- JAMESON, Fredric, "Wyndham Lewis as Futurist", in *Hudson Review*, 26, No. 2, Summer 1973-74, New York, USA.
- JAMESON, Fredric, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis the Modernist as Fascist*. University of California Press, London, 1979.
- KENNER, Hugh, *Wyndham Lewis*, Methuen Co. Ltd. London, 1954.
- , *The Pound Era*, Faber, 1972.
- KUSH, Thomas, *Wyndham Lewis's Pictorial Integer*, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1981.
- LAFOURCADE, Bernard, "The Taming of the Wild Body", in *Wyndham Lewis; a Revaluation (New Essays)*, Meyers, Jeffrey, ed., The Athlone Press, London, 1980.
- LEVENSON, Michael, "Form's Body Wyndham Lewis's Tarr", in *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 45, n. 3, 1984.
- MATERER, Timothy, *W. Lewis The Novelist*, University of Missouri, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1976.
- MC LUHAN, Marshall, "Lewis's Prose Style" in *Wyndham Lewis a Revaluation; New Essays*, Meyers, J. ed., The Athlone Press, London, 1980.

- , “The Lewis Vortex: Art and Politics as Masks of Power” in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, a cura di G. Cianci, Sellerio editore, Palermo, 1982.
- MEYERS, Jeffrey, *The Enemy: a Biography of Wyndham Lewis*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980.
- MITCHELL, Judith, “Women and Wyndham Lewis”, in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 16, 24/2, Summer 1978, Purdue Univ., Dept. of English, Indiana.
- MUNTON, Alan, “Wyndham Lewis; The Transformations of Carnival” in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Cianci, ed., Palermo, 1982.
- PARKER, V., “Enemies of the Absolute”, in *Wyndham Lewis a Revaluation; New Essays*, Meyers J. ed., The Athlone Press, London, 1980.
- PRITCHARD, William, H., *Wyndham Lewis*, Twayne Publ. Press, N. Y. 1968.
- ROSE, W. K. ed., *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London 1963.
- SCHENKER, Daniel, “Homo Ex Machina: Wyndham Lewis on the Definitions of Man”, in *Blast 3*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1984, (pp. 96-107).
- STARR, Alan, “Tarr and Wyndham Lewis”, in *ELH*, vol. 49, John Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- TOMLIN, E. W. F., “Wyndham Lewis The Emancipator”, in *Blast 3*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, 1984, (pp. 109-113) Methuen and Co. Ltd, London 1969.
- WINDSOR, Alan, “Wyndham Lewis’s Blast and Bless” in *Wyndham Lewis Letteratura/Pittura*, Cianci, ed., Palermo, 1982.

## 6 – Other works cited and consulted

- APOLLINAIRE, Guillaume, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, Gallimard, Paris, 1965.
- APOLLINAIRE, Guillaume, *L’Antitradition Futuriste*, in Archivi del Futurismo, Rome, De Lucas Editore, 1958, Vol. 1.
- BARBOSA, Pedro, *Teoria do Teatro Moderno: Axiomas e Teoremas*, Ed. Afrontamento, Porto, 1982.
- BARRETT, Michèle and Radford, Jean, “Modernism in the 1930’s: Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf”, in *1936: The Sociology of Literature. The Politics of Modernism*, vol. I, Barker F. et al. eds., Essex, 1979.

- BARTHES, Roland, *Essais Critiques*, Seuil, Paris, 1964.
- BATAILLE, George, *Histoire de L'Oeil*, (1928), in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, (transl. *Story of the Eye*, N.Y., Urizen Books, 1977).
- SEGUIN, Albert, "Poetry and Occultisme", in *Yale French Studies*, IV Study, vol.2, n.2, 1965.
- BENJAMIN, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, NBL, London, 1973.
- , *Illuminations*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1979.
- BERGONZI, Bernard, *The Myth, of Modernism and Twentieth Century Literature*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1986.
- BERGSON, Henri, *Laughter*, Macmillan, London, 1913.
- , *L'Évolution Créatrice*, PUF, Paris, 1959.
- BRIDGWATER, P., *Nietzsche in the Anglo Saxony: a Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature*, Leicester Univ. Press, 1972.
- BROWNMILLER, Susan, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1975.
- BÜRGER, Peter, "Avant-garde and Contemporary Aesthetics" in *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981 (Special issue on Modernism), (pp.19-22), Univ. of Wisconsin, German Dept., Wisconsin.
- , *Theory of the Avant-garde, (Theory and History, of Literature 4)*, Manchester U. P., 1984.
- BURGIN, Victor, *The End of Art Theory, (Criticism and Postmodernism)*, Macmillan, London, 1986.
- BUSH, Ronald, "Modern/Postmodern: Eliot, Perse, Mallarmé and the Future of the Barbarians" in *Modernism Reconsidered*, Robert Kiely ed., Harvard U. P., Cambridge Mass., London, 1983.
- CALINESCU, Mate!, "Faces of Modernity: Avant-garde, Decadence and Kitsch", Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1977.
- CORELLI, Marie, *Woman or Suffragette? A Question, of National Choice*, Arthur Parsons Ltd., London, 1907.
- CORRIGAN, R.W.ed., *Comedy Meaning and Form*, N.Y. Univ. Chandler Publ. Co. 1965.
- COWARD, Rosalind and Ellis, John, *Language and Materialism. Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*, Routledge and Kegan, Paul, London, 1977, 1979.

- DOSTOEVSKY, Fyodor, *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, Lindsay Drummond Ltd., London, 1945.
- , *The Gambler, Bobok, A Nasty, Story*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1968.
- DOWLING, William C., *Jameson, Althusser, Marx, an Introduction to the Political Unconscious*, Methuen, London 1984.
- EAGLETON, Terry, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.
- EAGLETON, Terry, *The Rape, of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982.
- ELIOT, T. S., "The Borderline of Prose", in *New Statesman*, 19 May 1917.
- , "Note sur Mallarmé et Poe", in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 14, 1 November 1926.
- , *On Poetry and Poets*, Faber, London, 1979.
- ELLIOT, Robert. C., *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*, Princeton U. P., N.Y., 1960.
- ENZENSBERGER, Hans Magnus, *The Consciousness Industry: on Literature, Politics and the Media*, Seabury Press, N.Y., 1974.
- FAULKNER, Peter, *A Modernist Reader*, B. T. Batsford Ltd., London 1986.
- FOUCAULT, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: an Introduction*, Pelican, London, 1981.
- FREUD, Sigmund, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Pelican, 1981.
- GENETTE, Gerard, *Figures II*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1969.
- GIDDENS, Anthony, "Modernism and Postmodernism" in *New German Critique*, 22, Winter 1981 (Special Issue on Modernism), Univ. of Wisconsin, German Dept., Wisconsin.
- GREENBERG, Clement, *Art and Culture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973.
- HABERMAS, Jurgen, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity" in *New German Critique*, 22, Winter 1981 (Special Issue on Modernism), (ps. 3-14), Univ. of Wisconsin, German Dept. Wisconsin.
- HASSAN, Ihab, "Post-Modernism" in *New Literary History*, 1971, vol.3-1, (ps. 5-30), Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- , *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Post Modern Literature*, N.Y. Oxford University Press, 1971.

- HEATH, Stephen, "Realism, modernism and 'language consciousness'", in *Realism in European Literature*, Nicholas Boyle and Martin Swales eds., Cambridge U. P., 1986.
- HENRIC, J., "Pour une Avant-garde Révolutionnaire" in *Tel Quel* Number 40, 1970.
- Hulme, T. E., *Speculations*, Herbert Read, ed., Routledge, London (1924), 1960.
- , *Further Speculations*, Sam Hynes, ed., University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1955.
- HUYSEN, Andreas, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-garde and Postmodernism in the 1970's" in *New German Critique*, 22, Winter 1981, (Special Issue on Modernism), (ps. 23-40), Univ. of Wisconsin, German Dept., Wisconsin.
- JAMESON, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act*, Methuen, London, 1981.
- , "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in *New Left Review*, 146, London, 1984.
- JONES, Peter, ed., *Imagist Poetry*, Penguin, (1972), 1981.
- JONES, Alun, R., *Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme*, Gollancz, London, 1960.
- KAYSER, Wolfgang, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, (Hamburg, 1957), Columbia Univ. Press, N. Y., 1981.
- KRADOR, Aileen S., *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*, W. W. Norton and Co., N. Y., London, 1981.
- LEMON, L. T. and Reis, M. J. eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, University of Nebraska, 1965.
- LEVENSON, Michael, *A Genealogy of Modernism (1908-1922)*, Cambridge UP, 1984.
- LIDDINGTON, Jill and Norris, Jill, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Woman's Suffrage Movement*, Virago, London, 1984.
- LOVELL, Terry, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure*, London, BFI, 1980.
- LYOTARD, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, (Theory and History of Literature Vol. 10), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *Le Gai Savoir*, Gallimard, Paris, 1957.

- , *The Joyful Wisdom*, vol. 10 *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, T. N. Foulis, Edinburgh, London, 1910.
- ORTEGA y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, Princeton, N. Y., 1968.
- ORTNER, Sherry, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”, in *The Woman Question*, Evans, Mary, ed., Fontana, London, 1982.
- POUND, Ezra, *ABC of Reading*, Faber, London, (1951), 1973.
- , *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot, London (1954), 1985.
- , *Selected Prose (1909-1965)*, ed. William Cookson, Faber, London, 1973.
- PRESS, John, *A Map of Modern English Verse*, OUP, London, (1969), 1976.
- PUGH, Martin, *Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1867-1928*, Historical Association, Pamphlets Gen. Series No. 97, London, 1980.
- REABURN, Antonia, *The Militant Suffragettes*, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1973.
- RIMBAUD, Arthur, *Oeuvres*, Garnier, Paris, 1981.
- ROBERTS, Michael, *T. E. Hulme*, Faber, 1938.
- ROCHBERG, GEORGE, “The Avant-garde and the Aesthetics of Survival” in *New Literary History*, 1971, vol. 3-1, (pp. 71-92), Cohen, R. ed., Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- ROOT, Jane, *Pictures of Women: Sexuality*, Pandora, 1984.
- SANGUINETI, Edoardo, *Ideologia e Linguagem*, Codigos, Porto, 1972, (transl. from *Ideologia e Linguaggio*, 1965).
- , “Pour une Avant-garde Revolutionnaire” in *Tel Quel* No. 29, 1965.
- SCHWARTZ, Sanford, *The Matrix of Modernism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1985.
- SONTAG, Susan, “The Aesthetics of Silence”, in *Styles of Radical Will*, Seeker and Warburg, London, 1969.
- STAROBINSKI, Jean, *Les Sentiers de la Création*, ed. Albert Skira, Genève, 1970.
- , *Portrait de l’Artiste en Saltimbague*, ed. de l’Art, Albert Skira, Genève, 1970.
- STEAD, C. K., *The New Poetic – Yeats to Eliot*, Hutchinson, London, (1964), 1975.
- STEIN, Gertrude, *As Fine as Melanctha*, (Yale University Press), Oxford University Press, London, 1954.
- , *How to Write*, Dover publ., N. Y., 1975.

- , *What are Masterpieces*, N. Y., Toronto, London, Pitmann Publ. Corp., 1970.
- STERN, J. P., *Nietzsche*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1981.
- STOCK, Noel, *The Life of Ezra Pound*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1970.
- STOEKL, Allan ed., *Georges Bataille Visions of Excess Selected Writings 1927-1939*, Manchester Univ. Press, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 14, 1985.
- STONE, Jennifer, “Mirror Image/Collage: Reality, Representation and Revolution in Pirandello”, in *1936: The Sociology of Literature. The Politics of Modernism*, vol. I, Barker, F. et al. eds., Essex, 1979.
- SULLIVAN, J. P., ed., *Ezra Pound*, Penguin Critical Anthologies, 1975.
- SZABOLCSI, Micklos, “Avant-garde, Neo-Avant-garde, Modernism: Questions and Suggestions” in *New Literary History*, 1971. vol. 3-1, (ps. 49-70), Cohen, R. ed., Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- THATCHER, David, *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto and Buffalo, 1970.
- TIMMS, Edward and Kelley, David, eds., *Unreal City – Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, Manchester U. P., 1986.
- VOLPE, Galvano Delia, *Critique of Taste*, NLB, London, 1978.
- WILDEN, Anthony, “In the penal colony: the body as the discourse of the other”, in *Semiotica*, ed. T. A. Sebeok, 54-1/2, Mouton Publ., Amsterdam, 1985.
- WRIGHT, Almroth E., *The Unexpurgated Case Against Woman Suffrage*, Constable and Co. Ltd., London, 1913.

## Journals and Periodicals

- CAHIERS DU MUSÉE NATIONALE D'ART MODERNE, Centre George Pompidou, No. 6, 1981 and No. 10, 1982, Paris.
- FEMINIST REVIEW, (Issue on “Sexuality”), Summer 1982, Pluto Press, London.
- THE GRAPHIC, May 23, 1914, London.
- LONDON LIFE, April 4, 1914.
- NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE ILLUSTRATED CHRONICLE, January 22, 1914.
- PALL MALL GAZETTE, May 28, 1914, W. Hunt Publisher, London.
- PUNCH, 1907-1914, The Whitefriars Press, London.



WYNDHAM LEWIS'S LITERARY WORK: 1908-1928

THE DAILY MIRROR, May 6, 1914, London.

THE EGOIST, 15 June 1914 and 18 September 1918, London (previously The New Freewoman), eds., Weaver, H. S. and Aldington, R.

THE EVENING NEWS, March 4, 1912, London.

THE LITTLE REVIEW (ed. Margaret Anderson, Kraus reprint Corp, New York 1967).

THE NEW AGE (Orage, A. R. ed., "The New Age Press", London).

THE NEW WEEKLY, 21 March 1914-13 June 1914; Scott James, R. A. ed., London.

THE OBSERVER, 7 June 1914, London.

THE VOTE (*The Organ of the Women's Freedom League*), 31 December 1910, London.

