

*The fictions of*  
**James Joyce**  
*and*  
**Wyndham**  
**Lewis**

*Monsters of nature  
and design*

TT W. KLEIN



THE FICTIONS OF  
JAMES JOYCE AND  
WYNDHAM LEWIS

MONSTERS OF NATURE AND DESIGN

藏书章

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*For Karen and Benjamin*

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In *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus berates Buck Mulligan with a telegram reading "the sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done." Rather than stand so accused, I must also acknowledge my immense debtorship to my parents, Norman and Sonya Klein. Their love and support over the years have provided me with fundamental opportunities without which this book could not exist; these thanks can be only meager repayment. Finally, to my wife Karen, who supported me unwaveringly through this work's prolonged creation and lent her considerable professional skills as editor and proofreader at every stage, my debtorship exceeds even the author's traditional claim of insufficient ability to acknowledge. While she shares the dedication with our son Benjamin, the whole is for her, with love.

## Abbreviations

### WORKS BY JAMES JOYCE

- FW* *Finnegans Wake*. New York: The Viking Press, 1939. References indicate page and line number; for section II.ii footnotes are indicated by "F" and note number; right and left side notes are indicated by "R" or "L" and order on page.
- P* *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975.
- U* *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Random House, 1986. References indicate chapter and line number.

### WORKS BY WYNDHAM LEWIS

- AG* *The Apes of God*. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981.
- B* *Blast*, ed. Wyndham Lewis. No. 1, June 1914; No.2, July 1915. Reprinted Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981. References to the two issues are indicated as *B*<sub>1</sub> and *B*<sub>2</sub> followed by page number. Obvious misprints in the original are corrected.
- MWA* *Men Without Art*. London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1934.
- T* *Tarr* (1928 version). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982.
- TWM* *Time and Western Man*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928.
- WB* *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982.

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## *Introduction: opposition and representation*

In the struggle today between the infinite number of modes that have been successively accumulated in the practice of modern painting, an older and more permanent struggle has been forgotten. I refer to the opposition between the methods of those painters who devoured Nature to feed a restless Monster of Design within them; and those who, on the other hand, offered their talents upon the altar of the Monster Nature; which talents, after absorption into the body of this mechanism, refused to be digested, and led a precarious and sometimes glorious existence in its depths.

Wyndham Lewis, "Prevalent Design"

[S]urely to be double and to be 2 are not the same.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 987a

Nature and design: As Wyndham Lewis argues in his 1919 essay "Prevalent Design," the two are the poles of representational procedure. To surrender to the first is to cede control to pure content; to insist upon the other is to master nature's content within the pure figurations of form. Yet the two are not benign opposites. Within Lewis's rhetoric, nature and design are the subjects and objects of struggle, alternately predator and prey. The artist devours or is devoured, and is master or victim of a representational procedure that is figured as the division of monster against equivalent monster. Such is the vision of opposition, simultaneously Darwinian and Manichaeian, that typifies Lewis's work in all of its rhetorical forms: painting, fiction, and artistic and ideological polemics. Throughout his extensive career Lewis divided and subdivided experience into patterns of opposition rooted in the painter's stance of mastery

towards the perceived object. He set the ego against everything in the world that was in perceived defiance of the ego. Lewis's work develops a theory of proclaimed unity – particularly of the self and of the image – that finds its strength in the artist's ontological posture towards the world, and survives through its recognition and establishment of difference.

This adherence to opposition provided Lewis with both subject matter and a program for his position towards others. The most powerful, and surely the best known, of these oppositions was Lewis's championship of space in aesthetics against time. For Lewis form equaled spatiality, and he claimed that this philosophic fissure divided him irreconcilably from the prevalent practices of modernism, in virulent criticism of which he was matched only by Georg Lukács. The modernists were obsessed with temporality, according to Lewis, and their representational assumptions were based upon a faulty ontology that accepted flux as the source and end of being. The supreme literary representative of this obsession was James Joyce. In his famous attack on *Ulysses* in *Time and Western Man*, Lewis charged Joyce with valorizing temporality at the expense of concrete form in narrative, and of surrendering to a Bergsonian vision of reality that dangerously typified the modern intellect. The assumption of this vision, which Lewis also saw as implicit in the works of Proust, led Joyce to the "very nightmare of the naturalistic method" (*TWM*, 91). To adhere to temporality was to cling to the things of the world that were exclusive of artistic ordering: to cede control to nature rather than design. *Ulysses* presented a universe open to all sensory and psychological phenomena, and as such was the opposite of true art. Joyce left what was perceived by his characters unshaped, thereby nullifying the meaning of what they experienced. Moreover, since Joyce paid more attention to style than to the content of his representations, which Lewis considered excessive, traditional, and sentimental, the work as a whole deflected attention from the conservatism of its materials onto the extrinsic experimentation of its styles. "What stimulates him," Lewis writes, "is *ways of doing things*, and technical processes, and not *things to be done*" (*TWM*, 90). Like Picasso, Joyce fell

prey to what Lewis called early in his career “the perpetual peril of virtuosity” (*B1*, 145). The combination of this lack of shaping and fetishism of style led both to the fragmentation of characters’ personalities and to a false creation of the artistic self through an Eliotic delusion:

In *Ulysses* we find on the surface the naturalist tradition of a scientific “impersonality.” But the “time,” the “mental,” – the telling-from-the-inside-method – makes it gravitate everywhere on to the ego of the author, to the confusion of the naturalist machinery pulled out and set going for nothing. (*TWM*, 262–63)

By surrendering to the monster of Nature, according to Lewis, Joyce succeeded only in creating the modern self, fragmented and passive in the face of the perceptual world.

Lewis’s critical reaction to Joyce is significant, for it signals textual relationships in both authors’ work whose formal and thematic importance well exceeds the attention they have been granted hitherto. Joyce took Lewis’s criticism seriously. He admitted that Lewis’s was the best hostile criticism written about *Ulysses*, but complained to Frank Budgen: “Allowing that the whole of what Lewis says about my book is true, is it more than ten per cent of the truth?”<sup>1</sup> Joyce, in turn, sought his own revenge by parodying Lewis in *Finnegans Wake*, recasting his one-time friend as a significant component of Shaun, his “everdevoting fiend” (*FW*, 408.18). Such exchanges have served as useful footnotes to elucidations of *Finnegans Wake*, for the relationship between Joyce and Lewis has remained for critics largely a matter of biographical and literary anecdote. Yet these biographical exchanges point to a larger dynamic within both Lewis’s and Joyce’s writings. Ever the truculent partisan of duality, Lewis cast Joyce as his aesthetic opponent, explicitly in his criticism and implicitly in his own massive fictions, particularly *The Apes of God*. And rather than ignoring this challenge – the artist’s likely response to noisome criticism – Joyce entered into the argument. Where Lewis declared his separation from the mainstream of modernism, Joyce refused to allow that separation to remain unquestioned. Lewis becomes, as literary archetype, a fundamental aspect of Joyce’s last work.

Why that should be so is the express question posed by the present work, which takes Lewis's self-declared dichotomy between "space" and "time" not as the singular determining factor that sets Lewis off from Joyce, but rather as an exemplary pair of oppositions standing for the inclusive dichotomies that define both their aesthetic projects. Opposition, rather than the simply western or "logocentric" structure discovered everywhere by post-structuralist thought, is a particularly enabling figuration for Joycean and Lewisian representation. Both authors make opposition an explicit structural principle in their work, as a source of thematic conflict and as an intrinsic aspect of form. The seeing eye and the world, the creating mind and fiction, representational language and its aesthetic or political object, and the processes of history: all appear within Lewis's and Joyce's work, albeit in variable combinations and with differing emphases, as structural centers around which both authors explore fundamental questions of binarism, dialectic, and the reconciliation of opposites.

These structures are by no means unproblematic. One may see irresolution in Lewis's statement on the struggle between the artists of nature and design, written in 1919 but already demonstrating the aesthetic purview that would later take Joyce as its ideal adversary. While Lewis condemned Joyce for his unmediated apprehension of the things of the world, Lewis was best known to his admiring contemporaries as a painterly and writerly stylist *per se*. For Pound he was "one of the greatest masters of design yet born in the Occident," for Eliot "the greatest prose master of style of my generation."<sup>2</sup> Yet Lewis's description of the monsters of nature and design contains a representative and proleptic paradox. "Monstrousness" is by definition unnatural, a distortion of a norm. To declare nature itself to be monstrous is to emulate Lear in dramatic contradiction, eliding the context by which monstrousness itself can be known. The idea of a "monster of design" is similarly ambiguous. If the alternative to the "monster nature" is to feed a monster of design within oneself, then design becomes by definition a distortion rather than a truthful representation, a "monstrous" recasting of the unmediated nature without.

What is external becomes organic, design subsumed within the presumably natural processes of the body.

Lewis's metaphor of opposition thus reveals in each of its halves a paradoxical aesthetic. The first artist may devour nature in order to digest it into design, but the monstrosity of form refines that original nature out of existence. The second artist sacrifices the self to an alien nature, but he imports organism into "mechanism," living rather than dying within its distorting embrace. In either case, that which is set out as oppositional is rhetorically implicated in its antithesis. In one case the artist imports nature within the bounds of the self, and organism becomes the site of design. In the other, the self is imported within the bounds of nature, but design flourishes within the nature that presumably devours it. Lewis compromises the autonomies of nature and design even as he rhetorically establishes their "struggle." One adheres within the other as a sign of its own rhetorical disfiguration or "monstrosity," organism and mechanism circling one another in restless prowl.

Lewis notes this elsewhere. In a somewhat later study he writes:

According to present arrangements, in the presence of nature the artist or writer is almost always apriorist... he tends to lose his powers of observation (which, through reliance upon external nature, in the classical ages gave him freedom) altogether... So he takes his nature, in practice, from theoretic fields, and resigns himself to see only what conforms to his syllabus of patterns. He deals with the raw life, thinks he sees arabesques in it; but in fact the arabesques that he sees more often than not emanate from his theoretic borrowing, he has put them there.<sup>3</sup>

What seems to be nature in mimesis may actually be design, a sign that theory has imposed upon observational practice. What is set out as a duality emerges as a problematic interrelationship between the self and what lies beyond the self: an interrelationship that Lewis implicates thematically with representation.

This is typical, as the pages that follow will show, of Lewis's aesthetic and fictional rhetoric, in which the subject's quest for



unity – of the observer, of the authoritative and authoritarian voice – coexists uneasily with his recognition of the role played in potential unities by the doubleness of opposition. “I prefer *one* thing,” Lewis declared to the Italian futurist Marinetti,<sup>4</sup> and he spent a career of painting and writing dedicated to capturing a unity that remains defined by its paradoxical internal and external doubleness. In *Time and Western Man* Lewis wrote “action is impossible without an *opposite* – ‘it takes two to make a quarrel’” (*TWM*, 21). If observer and observed must struggle as indistinct opposites, so must the singular artist guarantee his strength by choosing and defining his antagonist.

Lewis’s desire for both “one thing” and engagement with the problematics of multiplicity provide the rationale for exploring his relationship with Joyce. Joyce, like Lewis, was deeply concerned with the thematics of unity and multiplicity, particularly as these issues merged with theological and philosophical speculation about the nature of the reconciliation of opposites. The status of the Trinity, which obsesses Stephen throughout *Ulysses*, and the disposition of Stephen and Bloom as opposite yet substitutive characters (most comically as they become “Blephen” and “Stoom” in the “Ithaca” chapter of *Ulysses* [*U*, 17.549–51]) point to Joyce’s larger fascination with issues of opposition, which are recalled philosophically in his work through the ideas of Aristotle and Giordano Bruno. Yet Stephen’s contemplations, like Lewis’s description of nature and design, provide a doubled source of paradox. Stephen erects irreconcilable visions of the Trinity in his consideration of the heresiarchs Arius and Sabellius. In attempting to determine the relationship between the persons of the Trinity he tries to solve the logically impossible task of choosing between a simultaneous unity and diversity, an impossibility that, as we shall see, has reverberations for *Ulysses* as a whole. Aristotle and Bruno, moreover, are themselves figures of an irreconcilable intellectual opposition. Aristotle states in the *Metaphysics* “contraries are the principles of things,”<sup>5</sup> but offers no overarching reconciliation of these contraries. For Bruno, on the other hand, oppositions come into being precisely to resolve themselves. As Joyce quoted from Bruno in a letter: “Every power in nature

must evolve an opposite in order to realize itself and opposition brings reunion."<sup>6</sup> The coincidence of Aristotle and Bruno in Joyce's thought is itself irreconcilable. It marks out the importance of contraries while establishing a second-order opposition in their place. Each philosopher insists upon the existence of contraries while establishing a vision of the nature of opposition that is irreconcilable with its own opposite.

These Joycean juxtapositions, like that of "nature" with "design" for Lewis, are examples of the larger issues represented within each author's work. That such oppositions are central to both Lewis and Joyce is not a novel observation. The reconciliation of contraries is, after all, one of the things *Finnegans Wake* is famously "about," while one of Lewis's earliest critics, Hugh Porteus, noted "In all Mr. Lewis's work it is possible to trace the presence of a conflict between two opposite principles," continuing to compare Lewis's treatment of character to Joyce's separation of his own creative self into the "intellectual" Stephen and the "sensualist" Bloom.<sup>7</sup> The counterbalance of oppositions in both Lewis's and Joyce's work, however, suggests a concomitant and problematic reflection of their own artistic opposition. Lewis considered Joyce to be his opponent or "Enemy," while Joyce made Lewis, in *Finnegans Wake*, an idiosyncratic and archetypal figure of aesthetic conflict. The relationship of thematic and stylistic oppositions within Lewis's and Joyce's texts can thus be taken as a reflection or measure of the announced philosophical opposition of their respective aesthetic projects, an opposition that can be traced throughout their works.

The patterns of these works are in some respects parallel, although in the first instances coincidentally so. Joyce's and Lewis's earliest fictions derive from similar concerns about art and selfhood. Both *Stephen Hero* and *Blast* treat problems of mediation between the artist and the world, the championship of the Classical versus the Romantic temper, and the elevation of individual talent above the levelling mass considerations of nationalism and politics.<sup>8</sup> Both authors began their mature careers with collections of stories rooted in the ethos of a particular place; the Dublin of *Dubliners* finds its counterpart in

the Breton that serves as setting for Lewis's *The Wild Body*. Their first significant novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Tarr*, autobiographically based novels about young artists, were serialized in *The Egoist*, *A Portrait* appearing from February 1914 to September 1915, and *Tarr* following from April 1916 to November 1917. There coincidence ends. Lewis intentionally challenges Joyce's *Ulysses* with *The Apes of God*, a massive fiction that satirizes the artistic world of London. And as drafts of *Finnegans Wake* appeared in the 1930s, Lewis further responded in kind with *The Childermass*. In this work Lewis transforms Joyce's landscape of the dreaming mind into a different vision of a world beyond the known world, a surreal plain of the afterlife born from the embers of the First World War. Lewis's most important fictions, in other words, are in large part parodic responses to Joyce. *The Apes of God* is a kind of anti-*Ulysses*, which attempts to put into fictional practice a revisionary theory of modernist representation, satirizing Joyce's achievements and deflating the pretensions of Bloomsbury. *The Childermass* adds a share of *ad hominem* criticism to literary parody. James Pullman, its protagonist, had taught at the Berlitz in Trieste, breaks his glasses when pushed over, and "never looks at the objects of his solicitude but busies himself in the abstract."<sup>9</sup> He is a patent portrait of Joyce as Lewis understood him, while Lewis's gnome-like and authoritarian antagonist, the Bailiff, spouts paragraphs of pseudo-Wakean nonsense as part of his erratic rule of the other world. When Joyce satirized Lewis in *Finnegans Wake*, Lewis earned such treatment through more than his comments on *Ulysses* in *Time and Western Man*.

The importance of these parallelisms was not lost on their contemporaries, who thought of Joyce and Lewis together as the most experimental prose stylists of their time. Ezra Pound wrote in 1920 "the English prose fiction of my decade is the work of this pair of authors."<sup>10</sup> Such contemporary literary judgements are historically suspect – after all, John Ruskin loudly championed the poetry of Charles Kingsley over that of Pope – yet Pound's grouping of Lewis and Joyce persists in studies of modernism as a truism about antagonism, if not about their



subjects' literary value.<sup>11</sup> Less well recognized is the importance of Lewis to the shape of Joycean criticism, which may be with some justice traced to Lewis's essay on *Ulysses*. Lewis's argument was not new in every aspect. While he emphasized that *Ulysses*' shapelessness was a function of its Romantic abandonment to the ravages of Time, commentators had previously complained about Joyce's lack of formal rigor. Richard Aldington, in a 1921 review of *Ulysses* in *The English Review*, bewailed *Ulysses*' chaotic presentation and its seeming lack of classical order. In "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923) T. S. Eliot explicitly countered Aldington's strictures, and by emphasizing the work's continuous parallel with the *Odyssey* stressed that the apparent formlessness masks a rigorous and new form of "classicism," in which myth provides a possible structure for the aimlessness of contemporary history.<sup>12</sup>

Only when Lewis published "An Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce" in *The Enemy* (1927) and reprinted it the following year in *Time and Western Man* did defense of Joyce begin in earnest and neatly chronological response. Joyce authorized the earliest books on his work, and they are as much defensive manifestoes as critical analyses. The first, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, a collection of essays written on behalf of the emergent *Finnegans Wake*, appeared in 1929. The abundance of its attacks against Lewis, and its appearance the year after *Time and Western Man*, suggests a more than casual relationship between Lewis's analysis – which included criticisms of the sections of *Work in Progress* then appearing in serialization – and Joyce's self-organized defense.

This exchange had lasting critical ramifications. The timing and thematic emphases of Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's "Ulysses"* (1930) and Frank Budgen's *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (1934) suggest that they were further attempts to counter Lewis's aggressive voice. Concentrating on the structural elements of *Ulysses*, Gilbert's study expands Eliot's defense of "classicism" of design at book length. Joyce's unusual patience with Gilbert's interrogations and with his excessive attention to esoteric themes suggests that Joyce desired a more