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**Vorticism and Flâneurism in Wyndham Lewis'**  
***The Wild Body***

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## Abstract

Generally packed together and labelled as ‘avant-gardes’ the truth is that the many ‘isms’ that popped up in the 20th century correspond to significantly different and genuine ways of responding to the identity crisis caused by the consequences of the industrial revolution and the horrors of WWI. Vorticism has been traditionally approached as an extremely short-lived movement doubly limited to the figure of Wyndham Lewis and the field of the visual arts, namely painting, sculpture and visual poetry. The aim of this analysis is, first, double check to what extent Lewis’ short story collection *The Wild Body* abides by the artistic postulates promulgated in the movement’s eponymous manifesto (Head 140) published in the *Blast* magazine in 1914. Secondly, the analysis will result in the proposal of a ‘vortex manoeuvre’ to account for the different literary devices and narrational strategies that conform the vorticist literary perspective by providing textual evidence from the primary source. The striking similarities found between the *vorticist* character of Kerr-Orr and the nineteenth century figure of the French *flâneur* will finally lead the study towards an analysis on the degree of subordination this figure holds in relation to the canonical twentieth-century ‘Make It New’ avant-gardist motto.

**Keywords:** Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body*, vortex manoeuvre, flâneur, Vorticism.



## 1.1 Lewis as a Modernist

Despite all personal efforts to avoid being labelled as *a modernist*, the truth is that considering Lewis' professional career and views on art it is hard to frame him outside the mentioned category. Like many of his other contemporaries, Lewis' will to firmly break with the artistic tradition and conventions coming from the certainty promulgated in the Enlightenment and the previous realist forms of art are to be found at the basis for such affiliation. The artists perceived the world of art was in the need of a breakthrough able to mirror the undeniable social and economic changes that had so much modified lifestyle in the continent. Modernism effectively proved to be the way to express such disenchantment. The problem of labelling things in such a straightforward way, however, tends to lead to underestimations and lack of comprehensive understanding. Framing Lewis within the constraining category of 'modernist' —as well as any other artist— triggers an exercise of homogenization that inevitably blurs the essence contained in the artist's aspiration. But labels do facilitate an initial approach for the reader, and it is in this respect that describing Lewis as a modernist requires further development.

The term 'modernism' is highly elusive for it is commonly associated with contemporaneity and present time. However, the term itself nourishes from a highly subjective perception and an inherent personal judgement that links newness to quality. It is likewise true that two contemporary items could at the same time be distinguished in terms of objective quality features —which we would also perceive as *more modern*— and that inevitably makes us consider one of the items/ideas/techniques objectively better than the other. This conception is what precisely defines the modernist movement: its will to objectively improve the way in which the arts captured

the human condition. The fact that modernism emerged in the late nineteenth century and flourished in the first half of the twentieth century is therefore not coincidental. The disruptions and profound social changes triggered by the industrial revolution and the First World War are key to understanding the grounds on which a crisis of the individual takes place. The benefits of the age of the machine and the urbanisation of societies that had been promoted by Meliorism<sup>1</sup> such as the existence of a tacit social contract and the emergence of the state as protector were now being questioned. The ways in which this social debate is engaged are to be found in all areas of socialisation, from the domestic sphere to the world of politics, from finance to culture. Charles Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936) or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) are probably the clearest examples of how this social contract is questioned and materialises the alienation cast on the worker in the industrialised society. The reaction against such disintegration of the notion of the individual is at the heart of the avant-garde spirit, there is a need to look for a new identity, a new means of interpretation by which the individual could fit in the new panorama posed by the age of the machine. Interpreting 'modernism' as a unique and single trend ignores the multiple ways in which its ideology was turned into art. The difficulty in interpreting the term 'modernism' lies in the ability to perceive and value the richness and variety of trends that served its premises and searched for the most efficient way to achieve its goal: doing things objectively better. The flourishing of science in particular provided artists with completely new ways to look at the world such as the appearance of the first movie recorders. It makes sense, therefore, that so many 'isms' appeared at that time. Modernism was more than a cultural trend, it defined an era, and it influenced all social spheres including politics. The number of political leanings that flourished at the time mirrored the many -isms that characterised European

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<sup>1</sup> Definition: The belief that the world tends to improve and that humans can aid its betterment. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meliorism> (accessed on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021)

cultural life. Socialism, anarchism, fascism, capitalism... They all also aimed at improving a post-industrial political and economic organisation that was far from perfection and the discovery of a most efficient way to *rule* society. The trend chosen, however, proved to be the deadliest in history.

Lewis' determination to get rid of the constraints imposed by the state of affairs in the arts before World War I led him to take action in all possible artistic disciplines. He embodied the essence of the late nineteenth century French postulate of *art total* which —under different labels— influenced all arts in continental Europe: music, philosophy, architecture, painting, and literature. Lewis cultivated the last two and tried to forge a movement on which *his* revolution could also find some shelter. Ezra Pound's statement 'Make it new' was literally taken by Lewis; it can be used to account for his determination to, first, bring about a definite rupture with traditional constraints, thus, pushing the modernist principle to the limit and, secondly, avoid being associated with continental avant-gardes. It is within this panorama that Vorticism roots its principles.

The avant-gardes are just part of the way-out that culture offered to the lost artist; the notorious links they showed in relation to the already mentioned dilemmas do not more than reassure their true nature. The fierceness used in their statements and their determination and clarity in their postulates respond to the collapse in which they find themselves and the manifesto proved to be the most efficient means of communication to assert such ideas. These texts are characterised by the lack of ambiguity inferred in their declarations, they conform a set of plans, views and interpretations that look for the promulgation of a particular perspective or approach the scope of which can range from the most limited to the most abstract. The first text of this type associated with a cultural movement was F. T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*

(1909) which was translated into several European languages, a most effective declaration of intentions. The tone of the text, its grammar and even its content organisation respond to the will of illuminating the ‘good’ art, thus stating what was to be considered ‘bad’.

Vorticism also chose the manifesto to promote its ideas and the *Vorticist Manifesto* saw the light in June 1914, right before the outbreak of World War I. Its intentionality does not differ very much from the already mentioned manifestos though the way in which it asserts its postulates is, as shall be seen, significantly innovative. This manifesto condenses —as could not be otherwise— the essence of the movement, the devotion of a full page for the inclusion of the image of a wrecking ball (see fig. 1) materialises the intimate relationship based on the idea of violence and destruction as well as functions as a most straightforward declaration of intentions.

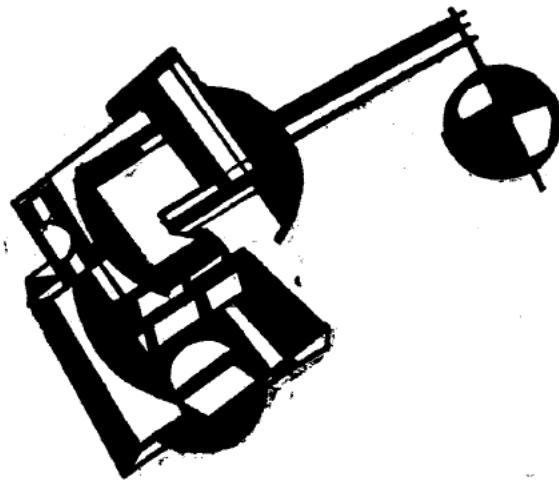


Fig. 1. Wrecking Ball illustration inside the first issue of *Blast*, p.118.

It is mandatory to pay close attention to it in order to understand to what extent the ideas contained frame a different and new way to approach the arts. The manifesto is used as a machine gun shooting its bullets onto all traces of fussiness, sensationalism,

sentimentality, snobbery, stylism, amateurism or anything to do with the values of the Victorian era, the Bourgeoisie, or the institutionalisation of culture. The text exhibits a universal spirit by choosing a magazine as its primary means of communication—probably the cheapest one—to spread its ideas and reach their potential audience. However, such an interpretation can be easily challenged by the contradiction inherently posed in the limited geographical scope of the manifesto. Lewis himself stated that the artist had to “get Painting, Sculpture, and Design out of the studio and into life” (Gąsiorek 36). The fierceness and radicality of the text are exemplified by the duality and extreme distinction that it establishes between what is considered to be ‘blasted’, ‘cursed’ or ‘damned’ and what should be ‘blessed’. The tone and vocabulary used is taken directly from the battlefield and seems to anticipate the factual disaster of World War I. The unbreathable whirling atmosphere in Europe in the spring of 1914 is placed on the pages of the *Blast* magazine. The layout and font used do not obey the rules of traditional publishing any longer, the ideas—though clear in content—are mixed and displayed in a contradictory way forcing the reader to feel himself somehow lost in a whirlwind and utterly unable to make sense of it all. The text, which is signed by a group of eleven artists including Lewis, is divided into three main parts: the “blast”-to-be, the “blessed” and a final list of statements grouped together under the title of “manifesto”. The narrative whirl is initially powered by the first two sections in which both England and France are to be blasted and blessed at the same time by means of the use of different types of font sizes and layout. The last part delivers a series of statements aiming at the definition of the vorticist artist with similar abstraction although this time the text is presented without visual effects. The manifesto displays an intentional lack of argumentation and delivers to the audience a mixture of clichés, popular products, customs, abstract purposes and contradictions that make it almost

impossible for the reader to initially grasp the ideas proposed while forcing him to stand back and contemplate the message from a distance. This effect on the audience will, as shall be seen, become essential for future discussion.

Vorticism as a cultural movement, however, has proved unable to escape the shadow of its most celebrated form of expression: painting. Lewis and Ezra Pound's efforts to unlink the movement from Futurism and the rest of the avant-gardes might have taxed the chances for the movement to get attention on its content instead of the political noise it produced during its short-lived existence<sup>2</sup>. However, Lewis' powerful visual texts offer a new interpretation of the world that still nowadays claims for its validity.

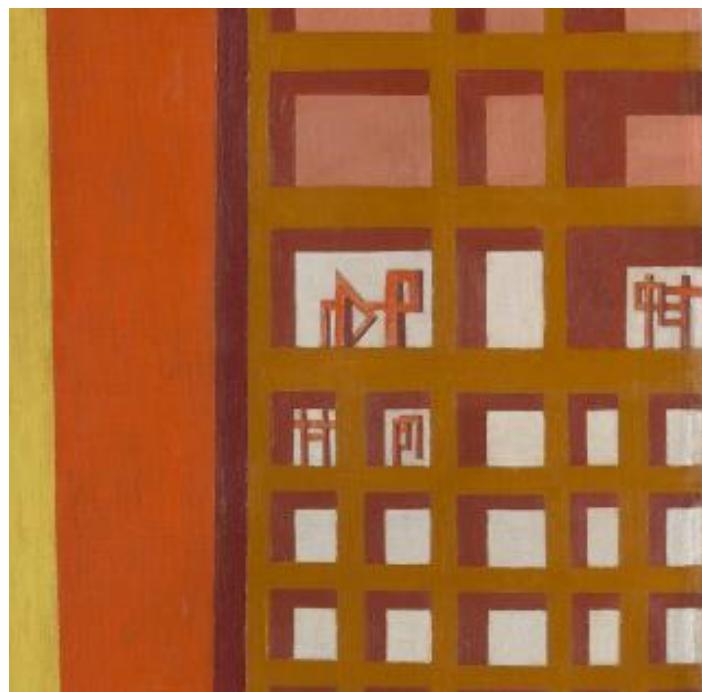


Fig. 2. Detail from painting *The Crowd* (1915) by Wyndham Lewis. Geometrical figures representing office workers at their workplace.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/vorticism/> (accessed on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021)

His paintings (see fig. 2) are just an example of the visionary power of Lewis' ability to foresee and describe the modern society which literally cages people in the new post-industrial production system. The visual description of the individuals goes beyond the mere representation of the machine, it explains how the machine destroys the humanity of the bodies and turns people into the parts that make the (social) engine work. It makes sense, therefore, that the movement would so quickly disappear after the impact that World War I had on the western world. The end of the meliorist myth and the idealisation of the machine is here revealed in a most Luddite form. Little is also said about the inclusion of female artists in the movement; contrary to movements such as cubism or futurism which explicitly banned women from actively taking part in the production of art, Vorticism did not make such a ban so explicitly and had Jessica Dismorr and Helen Sanders as formal signatories of the Vorticist manifesto. Fellow Vorticist artist William Robert painted years after the movement became extinct in 1965 a scene that captures the very first steps towards gender equality in a cultural world so long dominated by male figures (see fig. 23).



Fig. 3. Painting *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel: Spring, 1915* by William Robert (1965)

Lewis was, above all, a man of the arts. His artistic postulates are wide and clearly voiced by many of his most memorable literary characters. Art criticism permeates practically all his literary production and is displayed without complexes. The trilogy *The Human Age* (1928-1955) includes the story “The Chiltern Mass” in which a character named Pullman —an alter ego of Lewis himself— considers Gertrude Stein’s writing as “decadent”. In *The Apes of God* (1930) Horace Zagreus mocks the Bloomsbury group by trying to introduce untalented artist Dan into the art scene, and in *The Revenge for Love* (1937) communist Percy produces a speech in which he criticises the postulates of left movements and the political leanings of left-wing artists. But such a striking and overtly displayed opinion on art is to be read according to Lewis’ visual equivalent statements. His way to understand art led him to break with all his major

acquaintances to the extreme that Vorticism itself was later considered by some critics to be just a movement of his own (Miller 7).

Lewis' first steps into the art scene began in London around the Camden Town Group and later on the Bloomsbury Group. He soon fell out with these circles and got acquainted with others before getting involved with the Omega Workshops, with whom he also ended up on bad terms. Lewis' difficult professional relationships have made him be considered a polemicist<sup>3</sup> and many are the examples of public discrepancy that he nurtured his audience with. Ernest Hemingway himself, after having been overtly criticised in Lewis' essay *The Dumb Ox* (1934), described him as having “the eyes of an unsuccessful rapist” (Hemingway 122). His quarrels were publicly disclosed, and it is even in the means of communication he used to rely on —mainly publications, pamphlets and critical essays— that one can foresee that he was really a singular artist. In 1915, at the age of 33, the artist held his first vorticist painting exhibition at the Doré Gallery in London and later on at the Penguin Club in New York (1917) were his first public appearances before being appointed war artist for the Canadian and British governments. His political writings and publications soon granted him a place in the literary scene. The satirical criticism of the Bloomsbury Group in *The Apes of God* (1930) was just the first literary success of the many he accumulated in the upcoming years, which ranged from poetry (*One-Way Song*, 1933) to critical essays (*Men Without Art*, 1934). Lewis went back to painting despite his literary success; however he was forever related to both artistic disciplines. T.S. Eliot stated Lewis' literary production had to be assessed apart from his visual output (Miller 6) but, as shall be seen in the analysis here proposed, the intimate link between the two, however, the

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<sup>3</sup> See article in The New York Times, September 22, 1985, Section 2, Page 31.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/22/arts/art-view-wyndham-lewis-painter-polemicist-iconoclast.html?scp=3&sq=%22wyndham%20lewis%22&st=cse> (accessed on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021)

interdisciplinary connection between his paintings and his fictional writing proves Eliot's argument to be, at least, a most challenging exercise. T.S. Eliot leads us to necessarily question to what extent Lewis' literary production does stand on his own without the overwhelming power of his visuals.

## **1.2 Politics in the twentieth century**

The traditional ways in which nations had related to each other radically changed throughout the twentieth century. War, as a means of territorial expansion, became industrialised and the killing of citizens raised from the thousands to the millions. The effects of the industrial revolution were taken here to the battlefield (Fussell 258) and modified the way in which nations faced international conflicts. This significant change in the professionalisation of man-slaughtering is at the heart of twentieth-century politics and accounts for the impact that politics had in the lives of ordinary people. Not only did war impact on the quality of life in the cities and villages but it also posed a threat on the lifestyle and values of a whole civilisation. War influenced all private and public spheres of society, from household affairs to national borders, from street markets to state finances. This does not mean 'traditional wars' were harmless to the heart of the society but now the objective of international quarrelling in the industrialised era was not so much the apprehension of territories but rather the annihilation of a lifestyle and the imposing of a new morality which aimed at the replacement of the very foundations of the so hard to gain democratic state. The public sphere on which politics had for so long been enclosed literally exploded and plunged into the private one; from that moment onwards it became almost non-viable to remain politically neutral.

The Battle of the Somme (1916) is just an example of the impact of industrialised war. This single battle caused more than a million human losses in a span of time of three months and showed that a single morning could harvest the life of practically 20.000 combatants, a figure that ignores those who —despite surviving— became seriously injured and useless for the rest of the war. The industrialisation of death and the unceasing need of combatants left both villages and cities practically empty of men (Fussell 342), war entered the household sphere in a most harsh way making every single person part of it regardless of its direct implication in the front. The fact World War I was coined ‘the war to end all wars’<sup>4</sup> shows to what extent the conflict was presented as a turning point in history and explains why politics —understood as the main actor in international conflicts by both its role as originator of violence and, ironically, its potential to put an end to it— played such a prominent role during the whole century. From that moment onwards, politics influenced people in a much more comprehensive way thus erasing the possibility to remain passive. The external conflict became an internal battle and favoured a crisis of identity at all levels which culminated in the search for an alternative one.

The very basis of the modern era is nurtured by this panorama. In a world where certainties are no longer reliable and every single aspect of society is threatened and placed on the verge of obliteration, one is forced to search for alternatives. William James’ essay *The Will to Believe* (1896) shows to what extent this overwhelming need to look for a way out justifies the adoption of replacements without prior evidence of success. Post-war official reviews of the conflict have centred the diplomatic relationships of the early 1930’s Nazis with Western Europe —and the United Kingdom

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<sup>4</sup> The origin comes from English author and social commentator H. G. Wells who published several articles in London newspapers that subsequently appeared as a book entitled *The War That Will End War* in 1914.

in particular— around the politics of appeasement and have purposefully ignored the compromising fact that most British upper-class did not hide their sympathy and agreement with most of the primal-Nazi regime proposals. Historian Richard Griffiths in *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-39* (1980) breaks through the *comfortable* politics of appeasement and pointed at the many diverse and numerous social figures of the time who formed part of these former sympathisers and enthusiasts, as Griffiths prefers to mention. The character of Lord Darlington in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) embodies the social and political atmosphere among the British upper classes after World War I and the Treaty of Versailles (1919) which condemned Germany to an almost impossible financial recovery. Not only Lord Darlington does feel unease with the conditions cast upon Germany but also gets personally involved with the promotion of spaces for discussion at his own estate. His German friend, Herr Bremann, commits suicide after the disastrous economic upheaval that shakes his country.

Culture also contributed to come up with alternatives. Several modernist movements including Vorticism, Futurism or Dadaism were clear on this and claimed it was necessary to get rid of anything that had to do with tradition and find 'new ways' to approach life. This is a crucial point in the world of the arts as what is questioned is not so much the content of the work of art but rather the way in which things are done. These extreme positions were represented by art critics and artists who stated what was to be accepted and what was rejected. Virginia Woolf, for instance, was highly critical against what she coined 'materialist writers' in her essay "Modern Fiction" and overtly blamed them for their lack of psychological interest in their characters. However what interests most for our analysis is the roughness and binary delineation that Mrs. Woolf

establishes on the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ writing. She approaches the issue under the term of ‘quarrel’ and continued as follows:

Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy have excited so many hopes and disappointed them so persistently that our gratitude largely takes the form of thanking them for having shown us what they might have done but have not done; what we certainly could not do, but as certainly, perhaps, do not wish to do. No single phrase will sum up the charge or grievance which we have to bring against a mass of work so large in its volume and embodying so many qualities, both admirable and the reverse. (Woolf, 6)

Wyndham Lewis didn’t hide his fierce criticism and harsh qualifications about the Bloomsbury Group either and stated that they were nothing more than “a select and snobbish club made up of monied middle-class descendants of Victorian literary splendour” (Gąsiorek 39).

The fact that the early twentieth century was referred to in literary terms as ‘the age of the manifesto’ partially responds to the already mentioned crisis of identity. Literature was the perfect means of communication to promote and offer new identities. Manifestos have their origin in the political sphere and help people better project their personal views onto the public sphere; in a way, manifestos were the ultimate form to claim an identity and argue for the genuine and what’s more, make it in the form of a contract. The *Communist Manifesto* written by Karl Marx and Frederich Engels in 1848 suits such purposes; it is the promulgation of a new identity, that of the proletarian, in an attempt to give account of their social uncertainties caused by the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism.

There are numerous artistic manifestos in the twentieth century, in fact, as many as artistic movements were promulgated, each of them trying to distinguish themselves from the rest but obeying the very same principle: make things differently, in a new way. The influence of politics in the arts can also be traced through the texts and artistic

manifestos that were published. The vorticist manifesto itself also contains traces of clear political leaning at the service of the claiming of a new identity, an alternative for the order established. This new identity in the manifesto is materialised by the clear-cut delineation established between a *we* —which transcends the first section of the manifesto— and the rest, referred to as *they*, though less consistently. The plural first person subject is presented as a representative of a larger collectivity —“We quite agree” (Lewis, *Blast* 32)— determined to reject their own cultural background. Point 6 in the ‘blast’ section (18) reads: “BLAST / years 1837 to 1900”, all the Victorian tradition is intended to be discarded at one blow. The movement reacts against the ‘classification’ of society and the emergence of social labels. The rest of the Blast magazine in which the manifesto is included insists on the claiming of this new identity in the essay *Our Vortex*, its tone and the amount of statements in it contained show an almost obsessive discourse against the previous state of affairs and distil anger on the part of the signatory. There is also a direct reference to the proto-feminist group of the suffragettes, probably the clearest piece of political evidence in the text. Its tone —yet misogynist and extremely haughty— avoids a direct rejection of the right in dispute and ends with a subtle support, “WE ADMIRE YOUR ENERGY” (151).

Modernism is characterised by the uneven relationship between the arts and politics. Artists either ignored politics or got extreme, including both right and left-wing leanings. Despite there not being overtly anti-fascist artists in the vorticist movement, it is also equal that their postulates also avoided to display explicit specific preferences for particular political parties (contrary to other cultural movements such as Futurism). The figure of Wyndham Lewis, however, is particularly controversial in this respect. The publication of his essay *Hitler* in 1931 —in which he argues that the ‘emergency conditions’ in which the country is found proves necessary to give a chance to the

radical political ideas being promoted—is by far the clearest example of his personal political leanings for, at least, some years. Though unsuccessfully, his attempts to camouflage his personal preferences are there in the text. He claims not to be acting as a critic nor an advocate (4) and insists in the idea that he was simply visiting the city of Berlin when he “found himself at once encompassed by a strange political unrest” (5) and states he had not been previously attentive to politics. He presents himself as a passive subject, as almost an inanimate being simply swept in by the circumstances. The way he pretends to grant authority in his claims and the display of such an artificial subject is, as shall be seen, essential for the development of this dissertation.

Taking into consideration the tone and manners displayed in vorticist texts it is likewise reasonable to conclude that abiding by such strict postulates in just a similar way can only lead to extreme positions. Lewis’ own strictness and haughtiness might also account for the development of not only his personal trajectory—the endless list of personal quarrels and fallouts support this argument—but also his public image and, eventually, his personal decisions. As has already been mentioned, the twentieth century was a time for key decisions, it might very well have been Lewis made his and chose the defeated one.

### **1.3 Can we speak of vorticist literature?**

Balancing the advantages and disadvantages that labelling offers is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, labelling allows the apprentice to approach knowledge at an early stage but it is likewise true that labelling also limits the possibilities to account for the particularities and singularities of the subject of analysis. The research question of this study focuses on the plausibility of transferring the

principles of Vorticism —which proved to be a movement of its own in the field of the visuals— to the field of literature, and more specifically to the short story. The label of *vorticist literature* faces exactly the same challenges just mentioned. This question becomes even more controversial when the subject of analysis is thought to be almost exclusively represented by a single author (Miller 7).

Even though the field has been widely unexplored, there have been scholars who have claimed the validity of the mentioned label by establishing parallelisms with the Vorticist visual production (Humphreys 52). These arguments, however, rely on the premise that vorticist writing is merely a mirror for the canonical vorticist imaginary such as the vortex or physical dynamism. A comprehensive study must therefore go beyond the visual-literary correspondence and check the existence of a genuine vorticist ground on which the literary production can find its roots. Overwhelmingly shadowed by the unquestionable label of modernism, it seems reasonable that one should start this study by investigating to what extent Vorticism actually differs from its fellow cultural movements, in particular those with which coincided in time and space. Lewis did not leave room for discussion and despite having been closely linked to many of the European avant-gardes —as well as very well got on terms with them— he soon targeted some and identified them as almost mutually exclusive forms of expression. That was the case with Filippo Marinetti's Futurism or the well-known established Bloomsbury group. In this sense, a traditional approach to form and content might conveniently come here as a plausible starting point of departure to investigate potential differences between these cultural movements as well as provide further support to the literary label here proposed. However, the limitations of this study will force us to consider Lewis as the ambassador of vorticist literature, but it is necessary to state at

this point that this is an actual limitation and that under no circumstances should this statement be interpreted as unquestionable.

The figure of Virginia Woolf —a likewise ambassador for the label of Modernism— will serve us here to initially check the potential plausibility of Vorticist literature as a label of its own. The general reader would consider Woolf a difficult writer —she herself claimed that her prose required a professionalised reader— and Lewis himself would likely not differ in this respect as he is also commonly thought to be an uneasy writer to follow. Nonetheless, his consideration of the readership is characterised by a significantly remarkable amount of author-reader instruction; Lewis makes sure the reader is well advised on how to approach the text and rejects literary techniques such as the stream of consciousness or the epiphany because they could constitute a way of taxing the freedom of the narrative voice. Woolf's emphasis on the inner voice finds no correspondence in Lewis' treatment of the narrative. Whereas she claims respect for showing the mind, Lewis puts all his efforts in detaching the reader from the narrator's subjectiveness. What is more, by differentiating the material from the non-material —that is to say, body vs. mind— Lewis directs all his efforts to undermine the privileged position of the narrator and makes it available to the reader. The mixture of fictional and non-fictional spaces also challenges the modernist obsession with distinguishing fiction from reality. The influence of manifestos also marks a significant difference in terms of form. Manifestos are one of the most extreme forms of synthesis, similar to short stories, and its use in Lewis' production can be identified beyond his literary criticism. *The Wild Body* can also be read as a manifesto; part of the text displays a striking correspondence with this form of expression that became so influential throughout the twentieth century. So, to what extent can these incipient vague ideas support the will on Lewis' part to look for a new identity in the

literary circle? To what extent do they have some sort of consistency in Lewis' short story collection? What seems clear is that the answer to the primary question on the plausibility of the label of vorticist literature demands further investigation and a deeper analysis of, probably, one of the very few potential candidates to hold such a label.

## 2. The Vorticist frame in *The Wild Body*

Approaching the text as a mere collection of short stories is clearly insufficient. Just like the rest of publications in the avant-gardes, this collection follows a similar dissonance as far as text organisation and content is concerned. The author needs to make clear by means of a foreword the origin of the stories contained but still fails to account for the obvious lack of standardisation that the reader has to initially face. Broadly speaking, the collection is divided into two main parts: on the one hand, a group of stories which explain the journey of a middle-age European male named Kerr-Orr (close to an alter ego for Wyndham Lewis himself) through the north-west part of France and northern Spain. On the other hand, there is a group of non story-like texts that contain a semi-manifesto narration which works as a means of help for the reader, a guide to understand the author's use of humour and a couple of brand-new final short stories without Kerr-Orr's appearance. The text organisation clearly mirrors the movement's publication of the magazine *Blast* in 1914 mixing both literary production and art criticism. The story "Inferior Religions" occupies the last but one position in the collection and is used by Lewis to address the reader and provide them with assistance for a better understanding of the stories. Following the structure of the vorticist manifesto this text makes use of a bullet-point layout to proclaim the ideas contained in the stories while constantly echoing the dogmas stated in the first edition of *Blast*. Such assistance from the author is not to be found in any other publication by Lewis, which emphasises the need to nurture the movement with new forms of expression beyond painting and sculpture. The title is of particular interest as it delineates the existence of a hierarchic positioning between what seems to echo as 'high' and 'low' religion, a distinction that also mirrors the physical journey experienced by the protagonist, a citizen of the north visiting the villagers of the south. This recurrent idea initially stated

in the manifesto is here once more stressed from the title to its very last sentence highlighting the prominence of the modern world through the figure of a well-known aviator and inventor of the hydravion Henri Fabre, who “was in every way a superior being” (155). Art criticism permeates both the stories and this semi-manifesto and points at direct examples to exemplify the endless binary distinction that vorticism makes between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art. In “Inferior Religions” Lewis highlights the *vitality* of the characters in the stories and state that, contrary to the characters in Dostoevski’s *Crime and Punishment*, they are not “congealed and frozen into logic and an exuberant hysterical truth” (151). The characters in *The Wild Body* are defined as “monuments of dead imperfection” (151). These ideas insist on the blessing of France in the vorticist manifesto, “BLESS FRANCE for its BUSHELS of VITALITY” (Lewis, *Blast* 27).

Location plays a fundamental role in the book, in fact location is the very first contact the reader has with the text which places him in the territory of Spain. The rest of the sentence introduces the reader to the sort of country in which the story is going to develop: “Spain is an overflow of sombreness” (5). This first paragraph precedes the introduction of the main character which covers the rest of the first section of the story. The importance of such a paragraph lies in the importance given to the historical background and imagery behind the text. The reader is soon launched into a historical journey heading for “the ancient Fair of LIFE” (Lewis, *Blast* 26) which corresponds to an almost dogmatic interpretation of the principles and ideas welded in the vorticist manifesto. The story “A Soldier of Humour” reads: “at the gates of Spain the landscape gradually becomes historic with Roland” (5). Despite this being the only reference to Roland —apart from a later reference to Charlemagne— the text has enough to show the reader the scope of its ambitious historical journey. The geographical location of the

story in southern France not only establishes a direct connection between Kerr-Orr's journey and the already mentioned historical voyage but also draws a most superb delineation with its literary ancestors. On the one hand, Roland becomes the standard-bearer of the mediaeval Matter of France —Frankish military Roland, and his superior Charlemagne— with the whole first story actually taking place in this precise country (Hardman & Ailes 89). On the other hand, the main character (and here it would be interesting to delve into the actual role of Lewis himself as an ambassador of British culture) becomes the standard-bearer of the Matter of Britain, and its corresponding King Arthur unmentioned in the text. The territorial and cultural delineation explained leads us to another interesting and expected correlation between the vorticist manifesto and its analogous argumentative structure with France and Britain as unique subjects of analysis (see section 1.2).

Part II in "A Soldier of Humour" initiates with a change of location, from Paris to Bayonne, at the gates of Spain, very close to the Roncevaux Pass where the 11<sup>th</sup> century Chanson de Roland immortalised Roland's death in his attempt to defend the country from the Muslim threat to Christianity. The territorial delineation of the vorticist manifesto is transferred to the very beginning of the story and frames Kerr-Orr's journey. Far from being coincidental, Spain represents the furthest southern location of the journey, which takes place mostly in southern France with some incursions into Spain. Abiding by the manifesto, Kerr-Orr avoids the doomed "Parisian parochialism" (4) and visits their best "ballads of its prehistoric apache" (18) who live in the rural world, understood as primitive forms of the modern city. Zoborov, Bestre and Cornac are to be found among the clearest examples of such *apaches*, the already mentioned "bushels of vitality". The manifesto is clear on its positioning towards France; just like England, it is *blasted* and *blessed* at the same time. Whereas the

blasting section mainly falls into the Parisian cosmopolitan lifestyle, the blessing highlights the “great flood of life pouring out of the wound of 1797” (Lewis, *Blast* 27) —the Napoleonian glorious past— and the rural world contained in its bushels, a word used to quantify liquids and grain in the rural word. So, there could not be a better location for Kerr-Orr’s experiential journey.

France is a major cultural reference for Vorticism, it is considered —along with Britain, and more specifically England— the cradle of art. The movement’s manifesto levels both national producers of culture and structures its content in relation to these two exclusively, intentionally ignoring the rest of the countries. The link is established through the identification of writers such as Chaucer (fourteenth century) and François Villon (fifteenth century) as “cousins” and the sharing of a single literature between Shakespeare and Michel de Montaigne (Lewis, *Blast* 37). The movement’s intentions, though, are not hidden from the audience. Whereas France is devoted a place in both ‘Bless’ and ‘Blast’ sections of the magazine, it is England that centres the point of interest with deeper criticism and attention. Lewis’ fierce determination to differentiate Vorticism from the rest of the avant-gardes nurtures the vigour of the manifesto’s statements.

However, the mentioned historical journey does not end in the mediaeval period at all. The stories in *The Wild Body* share a common search for the *primitive* that materialises through the displaying of a Breton angle that permeates the stories and aims at anchoring the narration at the very origins of western civilisation. Kerr-Orr pursues the recreation, re-discovering and experience of the *primitive* according to the principles promulgated in his manifesto: “We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World” (Lewis, *Blast* 30), “The Art-instinct is permanently primitive” (Lewis, *Blast* 33).

What defines Kerr-Orr's journey is the focus on the primitive, the pagan and harshness of the rural world since it represents the opposite to the current 'modern world'. This Breton angle establishes a direct connection with these origins and more specifically with the Celtic culture. As scholar Nora Chadwick explained in her still unchallenged book *The Celts* (1970) the most pure forms of Celtic cultural manifestations are to be found in the Hallstatt tribes (1000 BC) and the La Tène culture (17-41) which would roughly correspond to present-day central Europe —mainly France and Germany— southern Britain and the west part of Spain. These tribes were a scission of the Untice culture that occupied the most centric part of present-day Europe (1500 BC) which spread in search of raw materials such as tin, gold, copper and skin (27). At the same time, this culture is thought to derive from the most primitive cultural group, the Kungan, which settled in the lower area of the Volga river (3000 BC). These different cultural groups are thought to have shared some primitive vocabulary items that have academically been termed under the label of Ur-language.

The design of the characters Kerr-Orr meets along his way abides by the mentioned search for the primitive and conditions the focus of attention of the character's *eyeing* attitude. The character of Zoborov in *Beau Séjour* is described as a "solitary man who did not make friends easily" (46) and is consistently driven by the most primitive instinct of all. Zoborov shows serious difficulties in empathising with the rest of the hosts at the inn and his sexual impulses becomes Kerr-Orr's first focus of attention. The character's somberness prevents the protagonist from getting a picture of him and misguides him thinking he might be homosexual. Zoborov's sexuality is in fact even grimmer; lacking any sort of emotional involvement, the character fulfills his sexual needs at night with the many servants hired by Madame Peronette at the pension. He is aware of the many abuses Charles casts on Madame Peronette but does not

interfere at all. The character of Bestre is likewise primitive in his personal drives. He is described with the language of animal farming, “corpulent and ox-like” (80) and his character is equally gloomy and humourless, “Bestre’s kingly indifference can be accounted for [...] this misappropriation of the general resources of the body” (80). He is wisely attuned to the needs of his clientele but surprisingly violent at trivial events such as the one in which the new neighbour stares at Bestre’s sister and causes her diarrhoea. The way he fights back is of particular interest, just like an animal showing their teeth to threaten an enemy face to face Bestre removes his garments to show his scars. “While showing his scars he slaps his body, with a sort of sneering rattle or chuckle between his words, his eyes protruding more than usual” (87). The focus on the primitive is once more addressed in the story of “The Cornac and His Wife” where violence becomes almost another character in the story, this time triggering a fatal destiny to the children in the family. The narrator in this story addresses the reader to give account on the reasons why violence plays such a fundamental role.

I have described the nature of my own humour -how, as I said, it went over into everything, making a drama of mock-violence of every social relationship. Why should it be so violent —so mock-violent— you may at the time have been disposed to enquire? [...] Why always violence? However, I have often asked that myself. [...]

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. But it hoists the primitive with its own explosive. It is a realistic firework, reminiscent of war. (102)

This search on the primitive is also to be found in the rural world and non-urban lifestyle. The stories are located in both real geographical references such as Brasparts, Venta de Baños or Leon and fictional places such as Pointaisandra, Pardon at Rot or Kermenac. There is, however, a common element among them all: the unexpected

absence of the busy and mechanised life of the city so central in the vorticist imagery. Contradictory as it may seem, the stories do not include a single reference to the modern city, instead they keep the search on the primitive by plunging into the life of the peasant as well as its wider cultural world. As Lewis himself included in his article *Our Vortex* published in the first edition of *Blast* (147).

We wish the Past and Future with us, the Past to mop up our melancholy, the Future to absorb our troublesome optimism.

With our Vortex the Present is the only active thing.

Life is the Past and the Future.

The Present is Art.

The story “The Death of the Ankou” is probably the most evident and accessible link of the collection with the Celtic world. No matter whether the action actually takes place in a fictional or a real place the narrative heavily nurtures on the mentioned Breton culture, a fact that contributes to the text cohesion and its intertextuality. The Ankou legend is one of these examples, the story is connected to other short stories where the village of Brasparts is mentioned. It is nowadays still possible to find the sentence ‘I Will Kill You All’ engraved on the walls of ossuaries and churches in the villages around the Armorique natural reservoir<sup>5</sup>. The village is not mentioned in the Ankow story but it does appear in “Bestre” and “Franciscan Adventures”. Another characteristic of the Breton culture is dancing; the *festouù-noz* (night festival) or *fest-deiz* (day festival) of peasant society also appears in the collection but without the gloomy romanticism of the past, it is the act of dancing what is to be portrayed as a sign of identity. Nicholas in the story “Brotcotnaz” is a professional dancer and knows how to perform Breton dancing, however it is a minuet —a non-purely Breton type of dance—

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bretagne.com/fr/la-bretagne/sa-culture/ses-legendes/la-legende-de-lankou>

that he and his partner Julie exercise. Likewise, dancing appears again at the very end of “Franciscan Adventures” when Kerr-Orr glances over the inn window and sees vagabond Francis amusing the guests at the place.

Another way to account for the vorticity of *The Wild Body* is to look at its clear-cut determination to oppose the very foundations of Victorian literature. The canonical life-struggling narration, the providential benefits of love as well as the classy portrayals of nobility and courtly behaviour are all erased from the very first pages of the collection. Kerr-Orr embodies the anti-victorian hero and challenges the mentioned tradition from its most remarkable achievements in literary artificism to its indistinguishable moralistic attitude. Despite the fact that Lewis showed a rather constant tendency to include personal references in his writings, this collection does not by putting aside such aggressiveness. The lack of personal references and clear targets allows scholars to include endless candidates.

Intertextuality is key in this respect as the narration and character development in *The Wild Body* can be easily placed in direct opposition to the so worn out traditional triumph of love, luck and virtue in Samuel Richardson, the hardships that Charles Dickens’s heroes endure or the social gaming Jane Austen’s novels promote, to name but a few. Kerr-Orr oversees the stories to be told not only do not belong to this tradition but rather stand against such literary standards. The very first pages of the collection include Kerr-Orr’s personal introduction to the reader and functions as a framing device for both the text and the reader. The character does not show any attempt to instruct or influence the reader, in fact, he states he is “never serious about anything” (6) and that he “simply cannot help converting everything into burlesque patterns” (6). The 1927 version of *The Wild Body* —which Lewis himself confirms is a

revision made by “a better artist than I was when I made those few hasty notes of very early travel” (1) — includes an interesting personal introduction of the character. Despite here making specific reference to himself, Kerr-Orr already points out the focus of his narration onto the mentioned ‘burlesque patterns’ so as to warn the reader about the fact that the stories are not centred on him nor his personal circumstances. A brief family commentary places the narrator in a privileged position freed from any sort of economic distress for his family is a rich one: “the Kerr-Orrs have been doctors usually” (6). The protagonist can not only live on his mother’s income but also afford to experience such an unconventional journey.

Nonetheless, the ideas mentioned so far only partially account for the whole potential that vorticism expected from its cultural production. Following the —contradictory— traditional ‘Make It New’ motto that had defined mainstream avant-gardes the story collection incorporates much of the vorticist imagery. The motif of the *eye* is probably the clearest example of all. It concentrates the very essence of the vortex as the emblem of the whole cultural movement. Such imagery is particularly present in the first issue of *Blast*. The movement developed mainly in the field of painting, a fact that is undeniably present in the way the literary side of the movement promoted its ideas. The magazine includes many illustrations and paintings of the artists who signed the document representing the jewel of the movement, the vortex. The pun with the personal pronoun *I* is most expected. Section Bless point 3 (Lewis, *Blast* 26) includes a direct reference to the eye, the ‘English eye’. Versing on the notion of humour the manifesto reads:

BLESS SWIFT for his solemn bleak  
wisdom of laughter.  
SHAKESPEARE for his bitter Northern  
Rhetoric of humour.  
BLESS ALL ENGLISH EYES

that grow crows-feet with their  
FANCY and ENERGY.

The movement is clear in its will to connect with the great satirists of the English tradition by mentioning Jonathan Swift and William Shakespeare in the Bless section of the manifesto. These are the references for the development of Lewis' personal theory on laughter included in *The Wild Body*. However, what is of particular interest at this point is the blessing of the English *eye* stated in the fifth line. These eyes represent a particular way to get hold of the surrounding reality, the way in which Vorticism so persistently insists the world must be interpreted. Thus, the *eye* becomes the *I* of the experiencer, including here an interesting gap waiting for an experiencer —whoever it might be—to fill it. The exercise proposed in *The Wild Body* is one of high precision, it allows the reader to experience the vorticist eyeing attitude. The common reader finds it very hard to identify such manipulation, it is later on once Kerr-Orr's journey is over that the author accounts for the argumentation of his theory on laughter and establishes the mentioned clear-cut distinction between body and mind. The proposed dissection of the protagonist turns him into a mere means of transport for the real traveller: the reader. Kerr-Orr's eyes are partially anthropomorphised, reaching the status of almost a character in itself and appearing in all the stories without a single exception. In fact, the introduction of Kerr-Orr's eyes takes place at the very beginning, within Kerr-Orr's own introduction: "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" (7). The word 'eye' appears almost two hundred times in the whole text, and it does so with endless connotations. They are endowed with the ability to decide on the focus of attention, "'From Paris,' I answered, my eyes fixed on a piece of cheese which the high voltage of the electricity revealed in all its instability" (12), "At this moment my eye

caught something else, a door ajar on the other side of the passage" (28). Likewise, the image of the eye is also used to convey major themes such as nationalism; Monsieur de Valmore has "the eyes of the forty-eight States of the Union" (15), Zoborov has his national identity challenged as "possibly no russian eye would recognize it" (44). The eye can also improve its skills, "My practised eye had soon measured the inconsistencies of most of the Pensions of the town" (30) and even master its ability to capture the character's surroundings, Bestre's eye is described as a "professional eye" (88) and again the eye is used to represent major themes such as warfare, "The Eye was really Bestre's weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded it was drawn from all the most skunk-like provender" (83). The Ankou also used his eyes to choose its next victims.

Another interesting image related to the vorticist eye is that of the shell. Shells, along with corners, gyroducts, whirlwinds or eyes all form part of the same imagery. In the story "Franciscan Adventures", the homeless wanderer Francis is strongly identified with this image.

"I thought I would stop and interrogate this shell. I watched his performance from a distance. He soon saw me and left the children. (119)

[...]

What emotions had this automaton experienced before he accepted outcast life? In the rounded personality, known as Father Francis, the answer was neatly engraved. *The emotions provoked by the bad, late, topical sentimental songs of Republican France.* (121)

[...]

That was the likeliest story of this shell I had arrested and attracted in here to inspect." (122)

The richness of the imagery used in the passage is by no means coincidental. The first question to address is whether the very first word is actually a first person-pronoun or, once more, the character's eye functioning as an empowered subject who has literally 'arrested and attracted' Francis to be treated as a subject of a scientific study. The

duality played between these two subjects is present throughout the whole narration, but it is not the only word pun in the text. The shell, embodied here by the character of Francis completely captures the attention of the protagonist, it is a *specimen* worth analysing and another example of Kerr-Orr's never-ceasing search for the primitive. The biological meaning of the word shell refers to one of the very first forms of life on Earth. Mollusks date back to the Cambrian stage, the first geological period of the Paleozoic Era<sup>6</sup>. The vorticist perspective is pushed to the limit and casts light onto the worth observing elements surrounding the experience, namely Kerr-Orr's journey. Accessory elements, uninteresting characters, voids of life... are all removed from the experiencer's eye and obliterated from Kerr-Orr's account of the journey. The beginning of "Franciscan Adventures" —as well as many of the stories— leave no room for distractions or vagueness in the direction of the *eye*; "I found him in front of a crowd of awestruck children, the french vagabond" (118). The reader is directed on what to pay attention to, the focus of the story is narrowed from the start, and a first hypothesis of an apparently scientific study is launched. Kerr-Orr links the fate of the character to his distancing from reality due to the effects of *romanticism* on him. The dogmas of the vorticist principles are here displayed mirroring the ones promulgated in the manifesto where "sentimental gallic gush" is listed in the blast section (Lewis, *Blast* 13). Another of the shells inspected by Kerr-Orr is that of Madame Brotcotnaz in her eponymous short story. With a similar 'in-media res' introduction, the character is likewise targeted by its primitiveness, the images associated with her are again those of the imagery exposed; "Her eyes are black and moist, with the furtive intensity of a rat. They move circumspectly in this bloated shell" (134).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mollusca>

As has already been stated, the influence of the visual side of Vorticism has a clear influence on the literarian. The use of angles and corners is also one of the clearest manifestations of vorticist painting. The *Blast* magazine —which could certainly be taken as the one of the most relevant manifestations of vorticist literature— includes several paintings by both signatories or non-signatories of the manifesto the basis of which root on the geometrical forms of angles and lines. These forms are, too, materialised in the writing forms of Vorticism and are used in the text to incorporate new and unexpected narrational events. In “A Soldier of Humour” Kerr-Orr meets the nationalist-obsessed character of Monsieur de Valmore —a Frenchman who declares himself to be American in opposition to English— who attacks him for his Englishness. It is after a sudden unexpected shift in the events that Kerr-Orr can trace a plan to fight Monsieur de Valmore back; “On turning the corner I at once became aware of three anomalous figures walking just in front of me” (35). The appearance of Kerr-Orr’s friends radically changes the outcome of the story, the protagonist decides to remain in the place instead of changing lodging so as to take revenge. The language of war is present throughout the whole story and after this unexpected meeting the protagonist feels overpowered and able to defeat his opponent, “possessed of a couple of dozen [war elephants] himself” (37). However, corners do not always necessarily anticipate a positive outcome for the narration. In “Brotcotnaz”, abuser Nicholas’ imminent arrival is anticipated by the haunting presence of his boat “round the corner” (137) and in “Bestre”, after Kerr-Orr having first established eye contact with brute Bestre through the pension window and decided to avoid him, the protagonist emerged “on the quay once more, and turning along the front of the house, I again discovered myself in contact with Bestre. He was facing towards me, and down the quay, immobile as before” (77). The oblique forms of the narration leave room for the unexpected, for

what the vorticist principles consider to be real; it is the eye of the observer who must cope with it and avoid getting lost within the absorbing forces of the powerful vortex of life.

### **3. The *vortex manoeuvre*: Kerr-Orr as a professional vorticist artist.**

A key aspect in the analysis of Kerr-Orr as a narrator is that his positioning does not constrain his own perspective exclusively, it also conditions that of the reader. Although the analysis of the protagonist will be addressed in the following section what is clear is that the “puppeting” stated in “Inferior Religions” (149) calls into question the actual puppeting of the reader itself. In this section a vortex manoeuvre is proposed so as to account for the reverse in roles that takes place between the narrator and the reader. The audience of this ‘little comedy’ (5) is somehow forced to feel the power of still motion: the vorticists’ fashion to look at things. The lack of an omniscient narrator undermines the reader-narrator’s confidence and removes the audience from the comforts that an omniscient narrator usually provides. The reader must judge for themselves the validity and personal judgements of the teller. The powerful presence of Kerr-Orr’s first-person narration guides the reader through the journey and directs his —vorticist— eye to what he considers to be worth watching. The striking time-space dissonance in the text is one of the clearest examples that contribute to the arguing of such a vortex manoeuvre but, as shall be seen, it is not the only one. Kerr-Orr filters the experience of the reader and directs an eyeing process to grant him with a privileged position in the so-called vortex. This process is not done without advising the reader, before initiating his journey Kerr-Orr states: “I will show you myself in action, manoeuvring in the heart of the reality” (8). There is a didactic purpose in this formulation which is not hidden, and which permeates the whole journey. Despite the inconsistency in the backing up of the reader’s understanding, the narrator offers himself to accompany the reader along the journey and provide all necessary off-text clarifications. In “Franciscan Adventures”, for instance, the narrator appears in brackets

to again address the reader and translate for them Francis' dialogues in French “(I will translate the sort of rigmarole that followed)” (124).

This subtle guidance is consistent throughout the whole text. As has already been pointed out in the previous section, the *I* of the protagonist is disassociated from the *eye* which directs the focus of attention. Such distinction allows the reader to fill an interesting gap in the narration, that of the vorticist observer. Kerr-Orr's guidance instructs his fellow traveller -the reader- on how to glimpse life from the daily routine. The narrator backgrounds himself very elegantly and melts in between the first-person pronoun and the vorticist directing eye. The introduction of Madame Brotcotnaz in the eponymous short story is worth observing if one is to capture the subtle manner in which the narration constrains the reader's interpretation. The character is introduced from a different perspective, a different eye, that of one of the most celebrated realist painters of all times: Franz Hals. Widely recognized for his ability to capture the essence of those whom he painted; this XVII century Dutch portrait-painter is used in the text with two main purposes. First, he is an example of a good artist and an ambassador of realism; and secondly, he is used by the narrator to offer the reader someone else's realist *eyeing* on the character. The narration delves on how Madame Brotcotnaz would have been painted by Hals and offers a gloomy and sickly image of her. The protagonist's dissolution can also be addressed by analysing other details. The name of Kerr-Orr appears only twice in the whole collection and both cases appear in the very first story “A Soldier of Humour” and are mentioned by a third character. Such a fact would remain insubstantial were it not for the continuous use of the first-person pronoun *I* which undeniably plays a pun with the so vanguardist image of the *eye*. These homophones trespass the simplicity of the pun and condense the very essence of the mentioned Vortex manoeuvre that distinguishes the observer from the act of observing.

Following a detailed and precise application of the vorticist programme (Head 140) *The Wild Body* mirrors the Vorticist Manifesto by locating most of the action in a most expected territory: France. Despite the locative element has already been addressed, it is interesting to highlight how this collection places the events in the same geographical space and establishes a clear-cut delineation between England —embodied in the figure of Kerr-Orr— and France. The protagonist is introduced to the reader as an ambassador of a new way to look at things through the *eye* of vorticism. The very first story “A Soldier of Humour” is the only one that takes place just a few kilometres away from the French border.

The character of Kerr-Orr is of high interest when it comes to analysing its adherence to the vorticist postulates, as scholar D. Head has already pointed out. His position as “detached observer” is justified by his acknowledgement of the distinction between mind and body (Head 143) and the presumed objectiveness this fact is thought to grant to his telling. This conscious distancing from the action, however, implies much more than a detailed and precise observation of events. In the article “Our Vortex” published in the 1914 issue of *Blast*, Lewis tried to account for the ways in which the movement approached the relationship between art, the artist and reality. Using the fashionable semi-manifesto textual structure, the artist sentenced “The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest” (Lewis, *Blast* 148). The opposing forces of action and stillness give evidence of not only the undeniable ability Lewis had to turn into words the visual power of movement but also of the precise description of the vorticist artist’s perspective. The canonical visual references of the movement (whirlwinds, gyroducts, tornados, shells...) share this particular opposition of forces in which the central point —which is at complete stillness— contrasts with the increasingly energetic dynamism of the surrounding environment. From a vorticist

perspective, the stiller the observer is, the more attentive and better positioned. This imaginary construction is central for the understanding of the vorticist's perspective because it accounts for the apparent inconsistencies that arise when confronting movement with the act of capturing reality. Such *stillness* is under no circumstance to be interpreted as a sign of passiveness or disregard on the part of the subject but rather as the application of a pseudo-scientific procedure to the way in which art establishes itself in relation to reality. In this procedure the artist executes a work order freed from their own personal interferences —Lewis' critique on “sentimentality”<sup>7</sup>—. The controversial figure of Kerr-Orr as a narrator is just the result of such a mechanism. The short story “Brotcotnaz” shows to what extent the position of the narrator is factually at a still point. The continuous abuses Julie suffers from her own partner and the evident signs of physical mistreatment contrast with Kerr-Orr's conscious refrain from interference. Kerr-Orr notices Julie is wearing a head bandage and asks her if she is suffering from neuralgia, a kind of strong headache that does not require a head bandage to be treated. Kerr-Orr consciously refrains himself from addressing the real reasons behind the supposed interest in Julie's health. So, the reader is forced to question Kerr-Orr's real interest in Julie. The answer —I propose— can be found in the already mentioned vorticist manoeuvre and the strict clear-cut postulates of the vorticist doctrine.

The Present is Art.

Our Vortex insists on water-tight compartments.

There is no Present--there is Past and Future, and there is Art.

[...]

“Just Life” or *soi-disant* “Reality” is a fourth quantity, made up of the Past, the Future and Art.

This impure Present our Vortex despises and ignores.

For our Vortex is uncompromising. (Lewis, “Our Vortex”, *Blast*, 1914. 147-148)

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis, Wyndham. “Long Life the Vortex!”, *Blast*, 1914. p7.

Such an explicit lack of emotional involvement and sensitivity must necessarily come at the cost of the reader-narrator contract, thus putting into question the artificiality of its very own construction. The narrator's impassiveness towards gender violence —or child abuse as in “The Cornac and His Wife”— is the consequence of the character's obstination in executing his work order and capturing “shells” to inspect (119). However, complementary readings to the positioning of the vorticist artist should not remain unacknowledged. The meticulous selection of specimens Kerr-Orr proposes is done according to the vorticist postulates and not the character's personal interests, in other words, these specimens represent Lewis' “essays in a new human mathematic” (149) and not Kerr-Orr's. Contrary to the rest of avant-gardists —who were much more overt in their display of personal involvement towards their social reality— vorticism proposes a fully impersonal and objective methodology that —the common reader will acknowledge— feels at odds with the canonical role of traditional omniscient narration. It is precisely this management of the narrator's detachment that determines the genre in which vorticist literature is allowed to put into practice the movement's programme. Satire is the only genre in which the use of strong irony, sarcasm, parody, exaggeration, analogy and double meaning are accepted by the audience; its apparently humoristic unambitious purposes allow the narrator to introduce alternative layers of interpretation for socially-banned topics that would not be dealt otherwise. Its capacity to elude censorship and reach the less educated audience while protecting the narrator's reliability turn this genre into a most effective literary means of communication. Examples of satirical expressions can be traced back to the most ancient civilisations, from ancient Egypt papyri to mediaeval stories (Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*) and twentieth-century modern filming (Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, 1940), to name but a few. Lewis himself was well aware of the potentialities of such a

genre and seriously bet on it. Lewis' detailed explanation of his theory of laughter in *The Wild Body* responds to the need to help the reader to transition from the traditional *sentimental* observer to the vorticist one. The author devotes two entire chapters to account for his understanding of satire —in “Inferior Religions”— and his proposed “theory of laughter” —in “The Meaning of the Wild Body”— which have previously been addressed in this study.

The character-backgrounding mechanism of the vorticist observer is yet pushed to the limit in the literary field. The opposing forces of centre and perimeter from the vorticist imaginary are here represented by the dissolution of body and mind. In “Bestre” this disconnection is shown through the powerful image of Kerr-Orr not realising that it was his own face that was mirrored on Bestre’s window while he was attempting to peer into it.

[...] as I bent over my work, an odiously grinning face peered in at my window. The impression of an intrusion was so strong, that I did not even realize at first that it was I who was the intruder. That the window was not my window, and that the face was not peering in but out: that, in fact, it was I myself who was guilty of peering into somebody else’s window: this was hidden from me in the first moment of consciousness about the odious brown person of Bestre. (76)

The result of such dissolution is that of an unreliable narrator, a necessary step for the achievement of a greater goal in which the reader is compelled to question the role of the narrator and occupy the position of the observer. Such literary artifice, however, is only attainable for the attentive reader which explains why Lewis should decide to make all necessary clarifications for the common reader so as to prevent his protagonist from falling into the realms of absurdity. The revised version of 1927 incorporates a foreword in which Lewis himself states: “(...) 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" (1). Part 1 in "A Soldier of Humour" experienced major changes with the addition of several paragraphs accounting for the nature of the protagonist's explanations, his relationship with humour, his family origins, and the rationale behind Kerr-Orr's journey. The aim of the author is straightforwardly explained, he wants to prepare the reader for the unexpected satirical tone of the text.

[...] what I would insist upon is that at the bottom of the chemistry of my sense of humour is some philosopher's stone. A primitive unity is there, to which, with my laughter, I am appealing. Freud explains everything by sex: I explain everything by laughter. So in these accounts of my adventures there is no sex interest at all: only over and over again what is perhaps the natural enemy of sex: so I must apologize. '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. (7)

This excerpt, added in the 1927 revised version, contains all necessary arguments so as to prevent the reader from casting an absurdist approach. There is a search for knowledge —the philosopher's stone—, the will of explaining reality (by laughter) and the autonomy of the eye, which sparkles at its will. It is only when such a warning is made that the reader can start-off their adventure.

Kerr-Orr —as a bearer of vorticism and its controversial programme— can also be identified with the figure of the antihero. The ambiguity of his moral values and difficulties to empathise with the rest of the characters might lead the common reader to label him under the already arising absurdist paradigm initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960) put forth a likewise controversial character in his memorable novel *L'Étrangère* (1942). Its protagonist, Meursault, shows a total lack of emotional involvement towards highly traumatic events such as the loss of his mother and an eventual murder. In order to

avoid the dangerous temptation one might have to label Wyndham Lewis as an absurdist it is of paramount importance to articulate the following: whereas Meursault's first-person narration centers the discourse on a single event —a murder— Kerr-Orr does offer a multiplicity of events distributed throughout the whole narration. In other words, Mersault's narration is a *consequence* of his social alienation whereas Kerr-Orr's is the *cause* of the disciplined and conscious application of a specific perspective on a narrational target. Kerr-Orr's response to the absurdity of national passions in "A Soldier of Humour" is likewise addressed. The verbal conflict between the protagonist and Monsieur de Valmore is skilfully turned into a war, utterly controlled, and manipulated at the character's will. So, the labelling of Kerr-Orr as an antihero should again be addressed under the implicit antiheroicity of the vorticist positioning and not his individualistic interest.

Contrary to Mersault, Kerr-Orr is constantly searching for subjects worth studying and introduces a non-linear 360° vision. The character is physically moving around in space —as the many changes in location suggest— in search of material. Movement is only stopped when a process of observation is initiated. In "Bestre" after discovering the existing conflict between the eponymous character and the community, Kerr-Orr finally decides to stay: "Before attempting to discover the significance of Bestre's proceedings when I clattered into the silken zone of his hostilities, I settled down in his house" (79). Had not it been for him, Kerr-Orr's journey would have continued until a similar finding had taken place. In addition, the protagonist shows an interest in keeping record of his findings and does not hesitate to come back to previous lodgings. In "Beau Séjour", for instance, he revisits the place a year after but after not being able to make any interesting finding the story is left to finish in a couple of pages.

The opposite occurs in “Brotcotnaz” where it is a return to the Brotcotnaz that precisely initiates the story.

The apparently simple management of time and space in *The Wild Body* actually hides another key aspect of the so-called vortex manoeuvre. Both time and space deictic forces are placed in the background and deprived of any substantial meaning making it irrelevant whether the protagonist reaches a particular place or makes it at a specific time for the focus of the story is on the factual *now* and the observational powers that Kerr-Orr puts in action. The packing up of the stories and its presentation as a unit might mislead the reader into believing that time-space referentials are simply irrelevant and its inconsistencies mere textual dysfunctions. However, the importance of time and space in Lewis’ production is the fact that they are treated unconventionally thus making it inaccessible from traditional approaches. These two essential narrational references are deeply rooted in the heart of the vorticist movement; its manifesto is structured according to a most strict spatial delineation —Britain and France— that leaves no room for border-crossing. Time is similarly addressed and defines art from a more general perspective, “(...) we believe that an Art must be organic with its Time”<sup>8</sup>. The arts are expected to shift and change according to its time, art is conceived as another dynamic form. It comes not as a surprise that the very second sentence of the first issue of *Blast* —which can somehow be understood as the movement’s second most important statement— is fully devoted to this idea and grasps the essence of vorticism in this extreme: “We stand for the Reality of the Present -not for the sentimental Future, or the sacrifant<sup>9</sup> Past”<sup>10</sup>. This reality of the present is what places the reader in the already mentioned ‘factual now’, a time that claims its relevance by

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, “Vorticist Manifesto”, *Blast*, 1914. p24.

<sup>9</sup> Rascal, villain (French origin). The term is used to portray the unreliability and misleading nature of the past (Morató, 177).

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, “Long Life the Vortex!”, *Blast*, 1914. p7.

forcing the emergence of a background time much more *organic* —to use the vorticist terminology— with the narrative. In “Beau Séjour” the narrational gap between the protagonist’s departure and his reappearance is literally obliterated: “The next morning I left at then. A year later I went to the Pardon at Rot” (68), in this way the story can reach its end without the need to pay attention to anywhere else. In the case of “The Death of the Ankou” time references are even less precise: “Later that summer (...)” (117). The ambiguity and lack of consistency in its sequences give evidence of a background liminality that permeates the whole text and, once more, urges the reader to reconsider the meaning of both time and space in the stories. Both are staged as dynamic forms and both lack precision in their display and are purposefully ambiguous in their references. Kerr-Orr’s journey can only be defined as such by means of the traditional approaches to time duration and geographical mobility, ideas that might initially seem contradictory to the principles of vorticism.

The overt lack of adherence to any specific time is one of the first narrational inconsistencies that calls the reader’s attention (and inevitably that of the scholar). A first piece of information on time can be found in the collection’s foreword: the stories “represent my entire literary output prior to the war” (1) which offers the reader a much more detailed time referential in what could be labelled as authorial time. A complete social context is provided by simply mentioning the fatal conflict of World War One, which also functions as a time referential. Europe is on the verge of collapse and its political field is completely dominated by the disruptive forces of militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalisms, some of them also nurturing the conflicts in which Kerr-Orr also finds himself in. The very first story “A Soldier of Humor” deals precisely with nationalism and the passions it arises although the text rejects any explicit connection with the *real* war as such. There is a second type of time worth

mentioning because of its alarming absence in the collection: the narrator-plot time. Unconventionally linear at first sight, the narration of events is ambiguously knitted with time referentials such as “a year later” (68) or “later that summer” (117). Notwithstanding, the time-space sequence becomes all of a sudden unexpectedly reversed when the protagonist mentions “my Spanish adventure (...) was separated by two years from Bestre” (79). The notion of time, from a vorticist perspective, is irrelevant and in the text this is shown by the collapse it suffers when the protagonist initially states that he hadn’t realised “that the american adventure was the progenitor of other adventures” (25).

Narrational sequence in <i>The Wild Body</i>
SPAIN (“A Soldier of Humour”) ⇔ BRITTANY (rest of the stories)
Chronological sequence
BRITTANY ⇔ 2-year gap in PARIS ⇔ SPAIN ⇔ PARIS ⇔ BUDAPEST

Interestingly, the fact that the telling of the stories contradicts the actual development of the action in the *real* time does not come at the cost of the reliability of the text. It turns out to be useless to apply conventional approaches to time in *The Wild Body* because the text strongly rejects such subjugation in the same way vorticism rejects the burdens of traditional conceptions. Thus, it also becomes irrelevant whether the passages in Spain actually take place before or after the passages in Brittany because what matters is how the events are approached rather than where they actually occur. The timelessness and lack of detailed social analysis is what allows the possibility to establish the ideal vorticist position of detachment (Head 159) away from the interferences of the ordinary world; wherever reality can be most efficiently interpreted.

Space raises similar contradictions in the text. The lack of consistency in the naming of Kerr-Orr's stoppages goes hand in hand with the mixture of both fictional and non-fictional locations. Again, this creates another liminality, this time between the real and the fictional, somehow plagiarising the same narrative device employed in the treatment of time. The narrator makes sure the reader acknowledges that the action takes places in a particular country by referring to places such as Argoat —the terminology by which the inland part of Brittany is popularly known— Brasparts, Rumengol or Roznoen in the case of Brittany (France) and Venta de Baños, San Sebastian or Leon in the case of Spain. However, these real-name places are constantly mixed with fictional ones such as Pardon at Rot, Kermenac, Pontaisandra or Burgaleza.

In conclusion, the conventional reader finds himself unable to rely on the canonical treatment of time and space as well as compelled to experience the liminality of the vorticist standing. These two most daring textual coordinates are placed backwards to grant prominence to a factual *now* that organises the narrative. A plausible interpretation for such an approach is to be found in the vorticist principles and the fierce determination on the part of the artist to thoroughly apply such principles to the narrative structure of the stories. Following this interpretation, consistency in the use of real and fictional references would only come at the cost of the efficiency of the vortex manoeuvre for the traditional readership would very likely remain within the limited and constrained positionings of non-vorticist attitudes.

#### 4. Flâneurism

So far, the analysis of the text and the targeting of a potential genuine vorticist literary device accounts for a fairly ‘new’ short story, to use the avant-garde terminology. It is not the aim of this study to claim such an argument to be a categorical truth nor flawless reasoning. An academic reader will not ignore the fact that, despite the narrational peculiarities of *The Wild Body* shown up to now, its protagonist suspiciously resembles those of some contemporary texts, as well as not so contemporary.

Charles Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869) unfolds this list of suspiciously resembling titles. This publication consists of a list of 50 poems in which the persona experiences different strolls around the city of Paris. What is interesting to us is the strategies used by the narrative *eye* —also used as a motif in the book—to guide the reader around the poorest areas of the city. This is what Roger Caillois coined as “the myth of the great city” (Sartre 44). The persona in the poem “Crowds” describes the nature of his strolling and hints at his psychological traits. The act of consciously and actively strolling searching for things to observe—in Baudelaire’s words the “passion to see and feel” (Sartre 145)—is “not given to every man” (Baudelaire, E-book) and is raised to the category of art. The poem excels at describing the way in which the stroller has his attention called: “(...) he [the poet] enters at will the personality of every man. For him alone, every place is vacant; and if certain places seem to be closed against him, that is because in his eyes they are not worth the trouble of visiting.” (Baudelaire, E-book). In “The Old Mountebank” a street fair offers the persona the chance to display once more his flâneuristic abilities. The persona can’t help “inspect[ing] all the booths that flaunt themselves in these solemn epochæ” (Baudelaire, E-book); the striking

contrast in richness that one of the parades displays totally captures the character's interest, "obsessed by the sight" (Baudelaire, E-book). Baudelaire's work was coeval with his composition "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863). In this essay, written before *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire captures the very essence of what later theorists such as Walter Benjamin or Louis Hart would term *flâneur*. Baudelaire delves into the physical appearance of these early flâneurs and, most importantly, accounts for the social conditions and physical spaces that allowed the emergence of this new social/literary figure. The description of his psychological features —and here, as usual, gender is anything but accidental— is of particular interest to our analysis as it lists the qualities of the flâneur by means of a self-taught artist named M.G. This character is endowed with an inherent attitude that makes him particularly successful in identifying *interesting targets*. The essay states that "to begin to understand M. G., the first thing to note is that curiosity may be considered the starting point of his genius" (Baudelaire, E-book); and the same goes for Kerr-Orr, if one is to seize the nature of his trip it is necessary to previously analyse the nature of his character.

French chemist Antoine Lavoisier proclaimed in 1774 his most celebrated statement "nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed". This scientific formulation helps us here better understand that reading *The Wild Body* is certainly also reading in accordance with such a premise. Intertextuality plays a fundamental role in the text and Kerr-Orr —despite casting a new perspective on his travel memoirs— also nurtures himself from the experiences of previous travellers and raconteurs. The following texts will prove to what extent there exists an underlying dialogue between Kerr-Orr and several of these contemporary publications which, as shall be seen, are to be considered forms of proto-flâneuristic references. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the*

*Crowd* (1840) is a key publication when tracing the steps of the emerging flâneur<sup>11</sup> despite the fact that the word as such curiously does not appear in the whole text. Its opening quotation from Jean de la Bruyère<sup>12</sup> is most revealing: “This great misfortune, of not being able to be alone” (Poe 1467). The story sets out with its protagonist in a coffee shop and a passer-by whose garments and physical appearance call the protagonist’s attention. His decision to follow the passer-by takes him to discover the darkest and poorest areas of London. The striking feature of the story is not so much the fact that the protagonist decides to shadow an unknown person but the grounds on which that person is chosen: his “absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression” (Poe 1475). The personal traits of the people encountered is what centres the traveller’s attention. Sometimes a look, a particular appearance or a specific scene or conversation between two people is what activates the obsessive mechanism of the emerging flâneur. In Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) Mr. Yorick, the main character, also displays similar travelling strategies which condition his social experiences and downgrades the geographical exploration of his journey. The backgrounding of the local discovery and the subsequent foregrounding of the social experience is at the heart of the flâneur experience and can be traced back to the eighteenth-century novel.

“(...) people that leave their native country, and go abroad for some reason or reasons which may be derived from one of these general causes:—

Infirmity of body,

Imbecility of mind, or

Inevitable necessity.

(...) There is a fourth class, but their number is so small that they would not deserve a distinction, were it not necessary in a work of this nature to observe the greatest precision and nicety, to avoid a confusion of character.

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<sup>11</sup> The term was first used in 1854 (*Harper’s Magazine*) but it was not until the 1870’s that it entered the literary scene and was used by the 18<sup>th</sup> Premier of Tasmania Sir Edward Braddon’s memoirs *Life in India* (1872). English novelist Maria Louise Ramé (aka Ouida) in *In a Winter City* (1876) and Laura Troubridge’s family diary *Life amongst Troubridges* (1876). OED.

<sup>12</sup> Seventeenth-century French philosopher and moralist.

(...) And last of all (if you please) The Sentimental Traveller, (meaning thereby myself) who have travell'd, and of which I am now sitting down to give an account,—as much out of *Necessity*, and the *besoin de Voyager*, as any one in the class.

(...) As an Englishman does not travel to see Englishmen.” (Sterne 7-10)

It is the subject's attitude what actually allows Mr. Yorick to establish such a detailed classification; in it, two main kinds of travellers can be identified: those who consciously initiate their journey —regardless of its length— in search of a potential personal experience, a self-rewarding event, and those who approach their journey as means to achieve or complete a more ordinary task or need. Here is where the difference between the *traveller* and the *stroller* lies. Mr. Yorick dissects the anatomy of the traveller and puts forth an interesting taxonomy of travellers according to their true interests, thus placing the focus of attention on the traveller as an individual rather than the traveller as a geographically moving subject. Mr. Yorick's journey is driven by the natural impulses he feels along the way; on his way back home after having attended Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Paris he recollects the character of Polonius and his refusal to let his son Laertes travel; Mr. Yorick abruptly resolves to visit a nearby library and buy the author's complete works. Once there, he realises the collection is unavailable but there he meets a girl whom he decides to accompany. The decision is determined by an emotional impulse and the character smoothly bends to his own fate by following his emotions and intuition. The *where* is substituted by the *why*.

The literary figure of the *flâneur* was later theorised by literary critics such as Walter Benjamin. In his essay *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (Benjamin 103-148) he shapes the figure of the flâneur as an opposition to the homogenisation of the individual in the urban crowd. In *The Return of the Flâneur* (1929) Benjamin relates it to the

action of travelling and distinguishes between the act of ‘visiting’ and actually ‘knowing’ a place (Leport).

Just as every tried-and-true experience also includes its opposite, so here the perfected art of the flâneur includes a knowledge of ‘dwelling.’ The primal image of ‘dwelling’, however, is the matrix or shell—that is, the thing which enables us to read off the exact figure of whatever lives inside it. Now, if we recollect that not only people and animals but also spirits and above all images can inhabit a place, then we have a tangible idea of what concerns the flâneur and of what he looks for. Namely, images, wherever they lodge. The flâneur is the priest of the *genius loci*. (Leport)

The grounds on which the nature of the flâneur is based are clearly displayed. The flâneur is interested in the people, not so much the place. Walter Benjamin coined the term in his unfinished work entitled *The Arcades Project*, in reference to the emerging shopping areas in cities such as Paris. These arcades represent the very cradle and habitat of the flâneur and circumscribe the figure to the Parisian space. This social and economic background allows us to draw the conclusion that the flâneur could effectively emerge in the nineteenth century because there had already taken place significant improvements on social conditions which triggered the emergence of new social classes and a new city organisation. At the same time, such social conditions could not have taken place without the earlier transformations in the productive system promoted by the industrial revolution, a fact that allows us to better understand why the flâneur was so intimately linked and restricted to the space of the city, the brand-new habitat for social coexistence and mass-scale production. The figure of the flâneur is also connected to a previous one, that of the Romantic wanderer, an observer who centres his activity on self-reflection and the contemplation of life. German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) captured the essence of this proto-flâneuristic figure in his paintings *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (ca. 1825-30).

However, Benjamin's restrictive interpretation did not match the idea of the flâneur launched by previous authors. Louis Huart, for instance, did not geographically constrain the figure in *Physiologie du Flâneur* (1841).

Le véritable flâneur ne s'ennuie jamais, il se suffit à lui-même et trouve dans tout ce qu'il rencontre un aliment à son intelligence. [...] son esprit abandonne l'étalage du marchand, remonte au producteur, se rapporte aux moyens de la fabrication, passe en revue les débouchés de la fabrique et suit le manufacturier sur les places de Leipzig, de Londres et de Saint-Pétersbourg (...) (Huart 124)

Huart is not the only theorist who rejects the idea of geographically limiting the figure of the flâneur to the metropolis of Paris, and the French tradition. Other scholars pointed out the fact that there were similar figures in English literature and many other nineteenth-century novels and essays which had flâneur-like characters and flâneurism as main narrative concerns (Hollington 75). Huart's booklet includes several visuals that help describe the physical appearance and attires of the canonical flâneur which, as has already been alluded to, offer a rather dandyish image very much in consonance with the artistic circles of the time<sup>13</sup>. The booklet includes tips on how the figure of the flâneur is to be conceived and it also addresses interesting questions such as whether anyone can actually perform flâneurism, the identification of fake flâneurs, the ways in which flâneurs can display their virtuosity or the establishment of an official cannon. The first of these questions is soon answered: "si de notre définition de l'homme, donnée dans notre chapitre précédent, on concluait que tous les hommes sont appelés à flâner, on se tromperait étrangement." (Huart 10). There are both physical and psychological requirements that limit the possibilities for anyone to become a flâneur. The second interrogation is likewise answered: "dans toutes les classes de la société on trouve une foule de gens qui, pleins d'une folle présomption (...) s'intitulent flâneurs

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<sup>13</sup> See Paul Gavarni's *Le Flâneur* (1842)

sans connaître les premiers éléments de cet art” (Huart 16). The imposing of specific requirements consequently turns intrusiveness into one of the major threats to flâneurism. The text addresses a very specific audience with whom it shares one main logical feature: social class. The following excerpt reveals the mandatory requirements for the flourishing of the flâneur.

Du moment que notre flâneur ne songe à rien, comme vous venez de le reconnaître vous- même, — il ne songe pas à mal, et par conséquent dans ce brave, dans cet excellent homme qui s'avance vers vous les mains dans ses poches, et le nez au vent, vous pouvez être certain de ne pas rencontrer un atroce gueux qui médite le rapt de votre tabatière, ou la soustraction frauduleuse de votre foulard. (Huart 25)

The virtuosity of the flâneur is intimately linked to the cleanliness of his criminal record and his ability to get fascinated by whatever captures his attention. The text concludes that these requirements are the reason why flâneurs never pity thieves and offenders. A clear-cut definition of the perfect flâneur is delivered: “bonnes jambes , bonnes oreilles, et bons yeux, tels sont les principaux avantages physiques dont doit jouir tout Français véritablement digne de faire partie du club des flâneurs” (Huart 53). To conclude, the label of flâneur is therefore not available for everybody but quite the opposite; it is a role which is restricted in many ways including social class, meaning also economic power, cultural background, personal abilities and finally physical requirements. The character’s social background is of significant importance as he does not need to care about the ordinary preoccupations of ordinary people. Kerr-Orr specifically states that he lives on his mother’s income and can afford to travel without restrictions because of the advantageous marriage her mother holds with a Hungarian physician (6).

The figure of the flâneur has been likewise questioned and defined by many other authors throughout the twenty-first century and recent revisions of the concept

have revealed the need to distinguish between the figure of the flâneur and that of the contemporary tourist. Essayist Edmund White states that the main obstacles the ordinary individual faces when pretending to practice flâneurism are the constant search for self-improvement, the overwhelming load of work in western societies and the imposing of rigid agendas and itineraries when travelling abroad (White 23). Taking into account entrepreneur Blake Miner's approach the reader will find much easier to establish the striking similarities that such a proposal shares with Lewis' character. Miner labels himself as a social-scientist traveller and states that the pastimes of the flâneur are the following: walking, observing, documenting, creating, writing, philosophising and exploring (Miner). Less usual —yet certainly thought-provoking— are the actions of documenting and writing that Miner refers to. One of the narrative purposes of *The Wild Body* is in fact Kerr-Orr's need to write down his experiences to later on share them with a much more real travel colleague: the readership. This emphasis on the need to produce written texts was also pointed out by previous theorists like Benjamin (Tester 82) who included travelling and writing among the most prominent functions of the flâneur. The striking level of correspondence between Miner's requirements to the figure of the flâneur and Lewis' hero does not more than confirm the need to direct this study towards the following hypothesis: can Kerr-Orr be approached as a twentieth-century flâneur? If so, what implications would that have on the abiding of Vorticism to its strict rejection of former literary standards?

It has been already argued that the practice of flâneurism beyond the city of Paris was a feasible possibility. The geographical exploration in *The Wild Body* still hides another interesting yet subtle link with the capital of France. Despite the fact that the whole narrative takes place in non-cosmopolitan environments —namely Spain and Brittany— Kerr-orr is known to have his residence in Paris. Actually, the journey sets

out from there, “I had started from Paris” (9), and ends there too, “myself continuing (...) back to France, and eventually to Paris” (43).

The relationship between the flâneur and the crowds also needs to be clarified. Despite remaining always aloof, the flâneur prefers to travel alone (Tester 27). In fact, social contact is his true and unique raw material and Kerr-Orr does acknowledge this fact very well. The balance between this social contact and individual aloofness is well explained in the limitation this figure imposes on whoever dares to get acquainted with him. Even though Kerr-Orr encounters several potential travellers along his way there is not a single hint that any of those could possibly become a travel mate. The character of Francis in “Franciscan Adventures” is the only character who could potentially join Kerr-Orr in his errand was it not for the insurmountable attitudinal gap existing between them two. The title of this short story hides a pun between the actual name of the character, who is referred in the story as “Father Francis”, and the contradictions he holds with his supposed religious origins, for he is depicted as a heavy drinker. The reasons behind their wanderings are completely opposite to the extent that Francis can be interpreted as an anti-flâneur. He totally lacks the ability to capture the essence of his everyday life and his inability to go beyond the sentimentality of the songs of Republican France, to use Kerr-Orr’s own words, exemplifies his limitations as a potential flâneur. Francis displays a valuable cultural background which allows him to nurture an interesting conversation with Kerr-Orr with various literary references alluded to (125-129) but he also proves to be utterly unable to control his own impulses and dominate the scene around him. In a sudden rapture he starts ranting and shouting at an imaginary entity no-one else in the place can see(126). Such a lack of reliable perspective is what prevents this genius-like character to ever reach a position of dominance and control such as the one consistently displayed by Kerr-Orr.

Little does the reader know about the reasons behind Kerr-Orr's journey and no further explanation for it is given in the text beyond the already mentioned arguments provided in the first section of "A Soldier of Humour". Lewis made sure the unconventionality of the character was first introduced to the reader, most probably, to avoid possible misreadings of the journey to be disclosed and the first part of the text pretends to make all that clear. Most of the opening sentences in the stories slightly frame the text within the genre of travel literature: "Spain is an overflow of somberness..." (5), "On arrival at Beau Séjour, a country between..." (44) yet the reader soon becomes aware that these initial prompts do not match with the canonical premises of the genre. The statement in "Beau Séjour" continues: "I was taken by the proprietress, Mademoiselle Peronette, for a Pole" (44). The factual reasons behind the trip are obliterated and appear tangentially in the text, instead social contact and unexpected meetings are presented as the reason for the journey. The reader only knows that the protagonist has left Paris at some point and that he is heading for Spain where he has the encounter with Monsieur de Valmore, a key character who *forces* him to extend his stay. It is not until he symbolically defeats his opponent that this part of the trip is ended. At some point the reader knows about a letter Kerr-Orr was supposed to be waiting for but of which nothing is said until the last part of the story, the only reference to it is that this letter said "he was required in Budapest" (43). The text does not illustrate the protagonist's motivation to engage in such an adventure beyond the impulses explained in the first part of the collection in which he states that he "converts everything into burlesque patterns" (6) and that the stories are merely a "prolonged little comedy" (5) which reinforces the idea that the text is not about discovering places or fulfilling a delineated plan as the common reader would expect from a book of travels—but rather about discovering *patterns*, to use Kerr-Orr's own terminology. One of the

most interesting parallels between Kerr-Orr and his flâneurism is the observational attitude he constantly displays and his overt predisposition to experience unexpected events which makes him unable to abide by any planification whatsoever. The character conceives strolling as a means of territorial exploration and personal contentment. This attitude is precisely what defines Kerr-Orr as a rare traveller; his idiosyncrasy derives from the mid-twentieth-century concept of ‘psychogeography’<sup>14</sup>, an idea that conceives strolling as a means of territorial exploration (Elkin 18). Every one of the narratives included in the collection with no exception do show this observational attitude and lack of planification. The events are always presented as a sort of bewilderment for both the reader and the main character. The text is thoroughly sprinkled with expressions such as “I was cast by fate” (5), “I found myself suddenly” (9), “I was sitting [...] when I saw a figure approaching” (68), “Turning my head, I found” (75) or “I found him” (118). These expressions are endowed with specific deictic meaning that define not so much the physical location of the persona —as the linguistic term usually refers to— but rather the narrator’s perspective.

The narrative layout of the stories —in other words, how Kerr-Orr decides to transform his experiences into words— does resemble Baudelaire’s flâneuristic poems in *Le Spleen de Paris*. This idea leads us to draw the conclusion that Wyndham Lewis himself was well aware of the Baudelarian literary tradition for both texts allow the reader to read the stories/poems randomly, thus making the experiential content prevail over the narrative development of events. Time correspondence —as explained in section 3— remains almost irrelevant.

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<sup>14</sup> Term coined by the self-appointed group of the Situationists. Their psychological branch claims that an individual’s behaviour is mainly conditioned by external factors and not so much by personal traits.

So, to what extent does the avant-gardist ‘Make it New’ nurture the construction of our hero? Presenting the similarities stated so far as a self-sufficient argument would be presumptuous —if not academically unwise, to say the least— because there are also variations between the two figures that cannot be ignored and need to be addressed. Contrary to the traditional figure of the flâneur who knows every detail of the areas he so often wanders in, Kerr-Orr displays a total lack of territorial familiarity (Tester 31). Kerr-Orr’s journey deprives himself of the comforts that traditional flâneurs usually enjoy. For instance, Kerr-Orr needs to ask locals for advice and recommendations before choosing a place to stay, something no one would expect from a traditional flâneur. Kerr-Orr’s physical appearance is likewise interesting because the reader is provided with barely any information in this respect. Part 1 from “A Soldier of Humour” is devoted to introducing the character and offers scarce details of Kerr-Orr’s appearance with only a single reference to it, “I am a large blond clown, ever so vaguely reminiscent (in person) of William Blake, and some great american boxer whose name I forget” (5). This lack of accuracy in the description of his physical appearance contrasts with the amount of information given to approach his psychological dimension, thus stressing the importance of the latter over the former in direct opposition to Louis’ Huart’s dandy-like cannon. It is in this psychological sphere that the most relevant differences are to be found. The character states: “I am never serious about anything. I simply cannot help converting everything into burlesque patterns. And I admit that I am disposed to forget that people are real that they are, that is, not subjective patterns belonging specifically to me” (6).

The character’s attitude towards the experience of his journey centres the most interesting part of this analysis for it is in his ‘ways’ where his ‘newness’ originates. Kerr-Orr’s interaction with locals goes beyond the contact of the common traveller; his

manners, actions and decisions have a direct consequence in the development of his journey with usually a significantly disruptive outcome. In “A Soldier of Humour” (Part 3) the character becomes obsessed with Monsieur de Valmore, a Frenchman who fakes being an American and whom Kerr-Orr detests because of his artificial manners and obsession with nationalism. Kerr-Orr does not limit himself to observe and produce a personal judgement but instead he puts the journey at a standstill and turns this apparently unimportant event into a war. He resolves to gather his own army —some old acquaintances he meets along his way—and devotes the rest of the story to account for a victory based on humiliation and mockery, “he [Monsieur de Valmore] felt that he was only a Frenchman from the Midi hardly as near an American, in point of fact, as is even a poor god-forsaken Britisher” (42). This event deeply modifies and determines Kerr-Orr’s journey, “During the next two days I on several occasions visited the battlefield, but Monsieur de Valmore had vanished. His disappearance alone would have been sufficient to tell me that my visit to Spain was terminated” (43).

Contrary to what one would expect from a flâneur who bases his existence in observing, Kerr-Orr goes beyond, he modifies the experience of the people he encounters and changes their plans; he acts as a disruptive visitor and a heavy plot modifier. In “Beau Séjour” Kerr-Orr follows the guests’ mood and also engages in having sex with one of the bonnes —Antoinette— causing her to quarrel with pension-owner Mademoiselle Péronette. The character never gets to limit himself to observance, he becomes an active part in the stories. In “Franciscan Adventures” the character of Francis becomes Kerr-Orr’s subject of analysis; he wants to go to the police to report a theft but Kerr-Orr —in order to share some time with him and allow himself time enough to better inspect him— resolves to give him a franc to make him change his mind. Kerr-Orr’s interaction, however, comes sometimes in a more subtle way

which offers interesting —as well as controversial— readings. In “Brotcotnaz”, for instance, the character approaches the figure of an abuser and his victim without any significant personal involvement and ends up toasting with them two for the recovery of the abused woman. That toast is by no means to be read as a mere end to Kerr-Orr’s visit to the Brotcotnaz’s, it is the ultimate manifestation of the character’s self-contentment and personal non-involvement for Kerr-Orr’s personal drives are always conscious and accurate in their targets as shown in the examples given. The debate in relation to the ways in which some topics are observed —to use the flâneuristic terminology— is here left aside and removed from the main narrative stream.

## Conclusions

The analysis of Whyndam Lewis' *The Wild Body* in this dissertation has focused on two main aspects, being the latter an actual consequence of a striking similarity found in the former part of the study. Here I will summarise the major findings and contributions made so far.

According to scholar Dominic Head, this short story collection represents an “accurate application of the vorticist programme” in the genre (Head, 1992: 140). Despite him offering a broader and more comprehensive approach to this fact—including an analysis of satire—it is in this dissertation that further analysis of the stories contained in the collection can be found, being the will of this dissertation to supplement this former scholarship. This study has provided evidence on how the age of the manifesto—as a specific form of expression—has influenced the collection as well as the way in which many of the principles stated in the vorticist manifesto are in the collection ‘accurately applied’, to use Head’s wording. The importance of location and its direct link with the pursuit of the *primitive*—both heavily stressed in the vorticist manifesto—has led us to scrutinise the Celtic culture and discover a Breton angle permeating the whole literary journey.

Secondly, this study has offered a detailed analysis of the vorticist imagery present in the text including numerous quotations on the use of vortices, shells, wrecking balls, angles and corners, all of these recurrent illustrations in the publication of *Blast*, the official movement’s magazine.

Third, it has been put forth the term ‘vortex manoeuvre’, an attempt to pack up all the techniques and literary resources that shape the perspective of the vorticist artist embodied in the character of Kerr-Orr. The interesting link established between the

image of the *eye* and the *I* of the narrator along with the analysis of time and space liminalities in the text are just a couple of the ideas that back up the ideas around the detachment of the vorticist artist that centre the ongoing academic debate around Vorticism.

Finally, this study has explored the similarities that the vorticist observer shares with the nineteenth century French figure of the flâneur and its potential inconsistency with the fierce determination of Vorticism to break with all past traditions and its obsession to rebuild all cultural standards. This study has attempted to show that the striking similarities between these two figures actually correspond not to a reliance on a past figure but actually embody another ‘accurate application’ of vorticist principles that reinterprets the figure and turns it into what Wyndham Lewis coined *Wild Body*. Its reinterpretation according to the vorticist imaginary makes the traditional flâneur depose their passive attitude and become an active and disruptive part in the story.

The above mentioned findings can help the reader better understand the difficulties in approaching the literary face of Vorticism as well as trace the origins of the literary figures used in Lewis’ short story collection. It is also the will of this humble dissertation to make many of the characters that Wyndham Lewis created for his narrations more accessible to the general reader and provide him with further areas of interest. The comparative study carried out in section 4 (Flâneurism) opens a new line of investigation for none of the scholars here referenced had conducted a similar analysis and had shown a tendency to analyse Lewis’ characters according to the author’s own interpretation.

## Further research

The author of this study is aware of the indisputable limitations triggered in the study of a single core text, particularly when the scope of such an analysis aims at the better understanding of a wider whole cultural movement and Lewis' production as a whole. It has already been stated that Vorticism was not particularly productive in the literary field and this is precisely one of the most urgent needs within the exploration of vorticist literature. There have been numerous neglected figures —particularly that of women— such as Jessica Dismorr who apart from becoming a formal signatant of the vorticist manifesto also contributed with written production in the second number of *Blast*, issued in 1915. Artists such as Rebecca West, who published the short story "Indissoluble Matrimony" in the first issue of *Blast*, or Edward Wadsworth still have their vorticist interests widely unexplored.

The proposal of a new term —the vortex manoeuvre— requires further investigation and findings in other neglected Lewisian texts such as his almost impossible-to-interpret plays such as *The Enemy of the Stars* (published in the first issue of *Blast*) and his poetry. The theory proposed here is expected to find some application and correspondence in these other less known vorticist literary manifestations.

Finally I would advocate for a more comprehensive approach to the analysis of gender and sexual portrayal in the vorticist movement. There is a gap within the analysis of its visuals and its written production, for instance. Despite the fact that misogyny and homophobic attitudes are quite overtly displayed in the literary outcome —to name only some of the most controversial issues— it is of high interest to delve into the more subtle anti-democratic messages that undermine the unquestionable cultural advances that Vorticism offered to Modernism. Such an analysis, though,

should refrain from falling into non-cultural argumentations and be able to draw a strong wall between the *personal* and the *professional*. I acknowledge that such a perspective might nowadays be hard to take, a fact that interestingly might be a warning about the need to —maybe— go back to the vorticist perspective in this essay displayed which grounds its validity away from the muddy, changeable and unstable terrain of the personal and politically correct.

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