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The relationships between jazz and modernist writing have in recent years increasingly come to interest musico-literary scholars. Much of this interest has centred on the links between modernism, jazz, and the cultures of the Harlem Renaissance, whose music and art, in Patti Capel Swartz's words, extend 'far beyond its geographic boundaries as well as beyond the relational boundaries of time'.¹ As evidence of this trans-national and trans-temporal influence, especially as it applies to Anglo-American cultural economies, such varied writers as T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, and Philip Larkin, among many others, have all been considered in relation to jazz and New York in the 1920s and 1930s.² Studies of this sort have contributed to the growing centrality of African-American traditions within the field of modernist studies, on the one hand, and provided us with an increasingly nuanced picture of the impact of jazz upon modernism in the literary arts (both as creative stimulus and as despised phenomenon) on the other. However, these alternative interpretations of the jazz 'influence' need to be understood as rather more than a simple dichotomy. In Fitzgerald, for instance, we find not only a writer attuned to the prevalence of jazz in twentieth-century modernity, but also a figure whose jazz allusions 'anxiously suggest that beneath the surface of [what he saw as] the music's frivolous gaiety lurks the presence of violence and chaos, which threatens to erupt at any moment'.³ Nonetheless, Fitzgerald's complex representations of jazz music – the fact, in other words, that he wrote about jazz culture so extensively in his fiction and

¹ Patti Capel Swartz, 'Masks and Masquerade: The Iconography of the Harlem Renaissance', *Midwest Quarterly*, 35.1 (Autumn 1993): pp. 49-62, p. 61. See also, among many other studies, Peter Brooker, 'Modernism Deferred: Langston Hughes, Harlem and Jazz Montage', in Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (eds), *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 231-47; Jed Rasula, 'Jazz and American Modernism', in Walter Kalaidjian (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 157-76; David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Anita Patterson, *Race, American Literature, and Transnational Modernisms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 93-129; Rob Wallace, *Improvisation and the Making of American Literary Modernism* (London: Continuum, 2010); Mark Osteen, 'Rhythm Changes: Contrafacts, Copyright, and Jazz Modernism', in Paul K. Saint-Amour (ed.), *Modernism & Copyright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 89-113; and Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). My thanks to David Bradshaw (University of Oxford) for a stimulating conversation – in Oxford in February 2011 – which helped to clarify some of the ideas presented in this article. Thanks also to Alan Munton (University of Exeter) for reading, and commenting on, my work when it was in draft form.

² See, for instance, David Chinitz, 'A Jazz-Banjo, Not a Lute: Eliot and Popular Music before *The Waste Land*', in John Xiros Cooper (ed.), *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-24; Kevin McNeille, 'Culture, Race, Rhythm: *Sweeney Agonistes* and the Live Jazz Break', in Cooper (ed.), *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra*, pp. 25-48; Kristin K. Henson, *Beyond the Sound Barrier: The Jazz Controversy in Twentieth-Century American Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2003); Neil Powell, 'Playing Snooker with Dice: Philip Larkin's Juvenilia and Jazz', *PN Review*, 32.3 [167] (Jan-Feb 2006): pp. 65-72; and Jane Lilienfeld, "'To Have the Reader Work with the Author": The Circulation of Knowledge in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Toni Morrison's *Jazz*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 52.1 (2006): pp. 42-65.

³ Henson, *Beyond the Sound Barrier*, p. 37.

non-fiction in the first place – indicate that he recognized the significance of jazz as a specifically modern observable fact which was crucial to realistic portrayals of inter-war life. In this regard he stands as a figure, among many others, who can tell us a great deal about how literary production in the 1920s and 1930s was shaped by cultural anxieties evolved in reply to the ‘question’ of jazz.

Looking back on the post-First World War period in *The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and Some Personal Memories* (1945), Douglas Goldring noted that during the period in question ‘Negro revues of the “Blackbirds” type’ had an ‘enormous and deserved success in London.’⁴ Here Goldring is talking about the kinds of cabaret shows which featured such African-American artists as Josephine Baker, Florence Mills, and Earl ‘Snakehips’ Tucker, enthusiasm for whom tended to be expressed in vocabularies of atavistic and primitivistic ‘appeal.’⁵ Goldring also noted that the ‘casts of these revues were composed of talented and hard-working Negro actors and actresses, most of whom were happily married and contented’; that he doubted ‘very much if any of them had any particular desire to be taken up by London’s Bright Young People’; and that ‘[w]hen, however, they found themselves invited after the show to what appeared to be the homes of London socialites, they naturally accepted’ and ‘behaved much better than their hosts.’⁶ Brigit Patmore echoed Goldring’s high regard for these figures in her memoir *My Friends When Young* (1968), in which she recalled that such key figures of the Harlem Renaissance as Paul Robeson, Emmanuel Taylor Gordon, and J. Rosamond Johnson impressed most at parties of this sort ‘with their artistry’ rather than with their antics.⁷ Wyndham Lewis wrote in a similarly affirmative idiom about ‘Negro’ culture in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948), in which he maintained that ‘American civilisation as we know it owes more, probably, to the Negro than to anybody’; insisted that ‘out of their outcast state [Black Americans] have made a splendid cultural instrument’; and, referring to a form of domesticity now alien to Western life, maintained that the ‘almost solar power of their warm-heartedness has been a precious influence; their mirth, too, which explodes like a refreshing storm, often making these house-serfs the only sane thing in the White household.’⁸ Lewis’s reference to the ‘splendid cultural instrument’ of African-American groupings stands in stark contrast to his earlier fictional and non-fictional representations of jazz, however, a musical form and cultural matrix to which he began to respond almost as soon as it reached British shores.

Jazz was introduced to London in earnest with the appearance in 1919 of groups like the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, and the Jazz Kings, all of which performed in surprisingly diverse venues including the Philharmonic Hall, the Portman Rooms in Baker Street, the Embassy Club, and even Buckingham Palace.⁹ Taking root via a number of means, jazz – or, at least, the dance music variants of Dixieland or ‘hot’ jazz that became fashionable in Britain during this period – was most robustly cemented in England’s capital by its frequent transmission on BBC radio and by its linkages with the Savoy Hotel, which had by the mid-1920s been established

⁴ Douglas Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and Some Personal Memories* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945), p. 227.

⁵ David Murray, ‘Representation and Cultural Sovereignty: Some Case Studies’, in Gretchen M. Bataille (ed.), *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): pp. 80-97, p. 85.

⁶ Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties*, p. 227.

⁷ Brigit Patmore, *My Friends When Young*, ed. Derek Patmore (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 95.

⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1948), p. 186.

⁹ Howard Rye, ‘Fearsome Means of Discord: Early Encounters with Black Jazz’, in Paul Oliver (ed.), *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), pp. 45-57, at pp. 48-50.

by the Savoy Orpheans, as well as by the Savoy Dance Orchestra and the Savoy Havana Band, as one of London's premier jazz outlets. An article of March 29th 1924 in *The Times* noted that a 'highly important feature of the modern restaurant is its [...] dance bands', and that it 'look[s] as if dancing were settling down more and more to be an essential part of restaurants such as the Savoy, Claridge's, and the Berkeley'.¹⁰ Hotel restaurants and radio broadcasts enabled access to jazz for an increasing number of people, even if the centrality of the Savoy in the BBC's transmissions had the effect of 'standardizing London's dance music' (which in turn made it more difficult for American jazz troupes to gain a foothold in Britain's cultural landscape).¹¹

It should come as little surprise, then, that during Lord Osmund's Lenten Party in Lewis's satirical novel *The Apes of God* (1930) reference is made to the fact that the 'period-nurse of gigantic tots', Mrs Bosun, cannot enjoy her supper without having 'the Savoy-band' blasting out of her wireless loud-speaker. Geoffrey Beale's assertion later in the text that Mrs Bosun 'can only hear jazz' implies that her eardrums have not been weakened in the manner that the Victorian matriarch Lady Fredigonde Follett's have, but more that dance music has colonized her hearing in much the same way that it 'colonized' the London audiences of the novel's timeframe.¹² R. W. S. Mendl in *The Appeal of Jazz* (1927) noted that during the 1920s the 'really unprejudiced' lover of music's 'objection to jazz music' probably resided in 'fatigue resulting from its over frequent performance', a tiredness caused by the fact that almost wherever such a music lover went, 'in the street, on the river, in the restaurant and the theatre, syncopated dance music [was] hurled at him by singers and players, good, bad and indifferent'.¹³ Likewise in *The Apes of God*, the omnipresence of jazz music is implied not only by Mrs Bosun's listening habits, but by Lady Follett's annoyance at '*Death's daily dancing in the street*' (AG 16) – Lewis's suggestive description of the jazz band which appears in the novel's opening and closing scenes – below her London mansion's windows, and by the presence of a six-man African-American jazz band at the Lenten Party, a group which smokes and regards 'with cold pity the mob beneath [it], which danced to [its] music' like 'masses of white fools' (AG 459). As with John Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924), in which 'by some infernal power' the patrons of a 'sham Chinese' jazz club with a 'nigger band' are 'compelled to move through an everlasting dance of death', in *The Apes of God* the street band's 'death-dance' music 'compel[s] its reluctant spectators 'to listen to its idiot-step' (AG 16), just as in the second half of the narrative the 'sluggish rhythm' of Lord Osmund's hired ensemble 'stir[s] up the dense mass' of his guests into 'an eccentric vortex' (AG 460).¹⁴

As we have seen, the Lewis of the late 1940s was more favourably disposed towards jazz and its African-American composers and performers. But in the 'Jazz Age' – the moment of 'jazz-bred aristocrat[s]', as Lewis put it in his satirical poem *One-Way Song* (1933) – his account of the African-American cultural scene, in London and elsewhere, was deeply ambivalent.¹⁵ *The Apes of God*, Lewis's mammoth satirical account

¹⁰ 'The Savoy Hotel. Improved Trading Profit. 10% Dividend Repeated. Reserves Strengthened. Mr. R. D'Oyly Carte's Speech', *The Times* (29 March 1924): p. 20.

¹¹ Catherine Parsonage, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain, 1880-1935* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 171.

¹² Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God* (1930), ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), pp. 440, 358, and 375. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as AG.

¹³ R. W. S. Mendl, *The Appeal of Jazz* (London: Philip Allan & Co., 1927), pp. 74-75.

¹⁴ John Buchan, *The Three Hostages* (1924), ed. Karl Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 101.

¹⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *One-Way Song* (1933), in *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. Alan Munton (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979): pp. 21-91, p. 77.

of the displacement of genuine artistic productivity in the 1920s by cultural dilettantes and foppish bohemians, goes to the heart of this ambivalence. If the novel subjects to critique ‘counterfeit’ efforts to appropriate black forms of identity, then it also lampoons jazz music as a debased (and debasing) form of culture. However, if Lewis regarded jazz as a ‘Very Bad Thing’, as D. G. Bridson put it, this ‘badness’ was, I think, the point of departure for, rather than the final destination of, Lewis’s commentaries.¹⁶ What Lewis understood as jazz music and 1920s jazz ‘culture’ are targeted in *The Apes of God* as phenomena to be disparaged, but they also provide a platform on which certain narrative experiments are performed. The point to remember here is that Lewis wrote about jazz differently in different contexts. Attending to these differences can tell us about how Lewis often variously incorporated the objects of his satirical attacks into his narrative craft. In a wider sense, though, it can add to our literary-historical grasp of how literary modernism as a category was closely bound up with the musical and popular cultures of its day. Corey M. Taylor, writing about the influence of jazz upon Wallace Stevens, has written that ‘[t]he ostensibly chaotic sounds of jazz have the ability to arrange the chaos of modernity.’¹⁷ Lewis would not have agreed. He would instead have said that jazz was itself a symptom of the chaos of modernity, rather than a means with which that chaos might be remedied. What’s interesting here, though, is that in Lewis’s hands jazz cannot simply be ‘dismissed’ but must itself, *à la* Fitzgerald, be depicted as a presence of fundamental importance to the socio-cultural landscape of twentieth-century modernity.

Lewis’s non-fictional writings of the 1920s and 1930s disclose an eclectic range of concerns about the music of, and cultures associated with, jazz: hostility to the valuing of cultural trends purely on the basis of their newness, rather than on the grounds of their deeper significance; apprehension at the profits seemingly obtained by Jewish composers, arrangers, and producers of ‘Negro’ music; and discomposure at the Americanization of England and Europe, which Lewis fashioned as a proletarianization of social practices and artistic canons. Given the suggestions of *Time and Western Man* (1927), for instance, it is clear that Lewis believed the popularity of jazz in Europe could be attributed to its ‘strangeness’ and ‘*permanent novelty*’ – that is, to an ‘out of key[ness]’ that came from a marketed, and so, to a certain extent, debased, ‘novel and experimental fashion in music’.¹⁸ Lewis’s distrust of the fetishization of jazz music as a ‘new’, and therefore innately high quality, cultural form went hand in hand with his critique of an increasingly submissive Europe whose artistic traditions were in his view being assailed by African-American imports. This viewpoint materialized in *Hitler* (1931), in which Lewis saw the ‘jazz-cult’ as the basis of ‘the american [*sic*] fashion of negro-worship’ as well as a proliferating form of art dependent on Jewish financiers.¹⁹ This line of argument was part of a wider resistance to the inter-war Americanization of European, and especially of English, identities. *Men Without Art* (1934) shows that Lewis lamented the rise of a ‘new American nationalism’ that reduced England’s influence in Anglo-American relations, a point which supported his argument that jazz was a black American ‘gift’ to an England

¹⁶ D. G. Bridson, *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Cassell, 1972), p. 90.

¹⁷ Corey M. Taylor, ‘Blue Order: Wallace Stevens’s Jazz Experiments’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32.2 (Winter 2009): pp. 100-117, p. 114.

¹⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (1927), ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p. 123. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *TWM*.

¹⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *Hitler* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p. 119.

– and a world – in which most ‘White people everywhere ha[d] tumbled over each other to pick [jazz] up’ and where jazz had ‘superseded every other form of activity’.²⁰

Lewis’s interpretations of inter-war jazz tend to appear in the form of bite-sized chunks of cultural critique which emerge in the course of impassioned discussions of other issues. For the most part these readings concentrate on what Lewis saw as the cultural and ideological ‘effects’ of such music, instead of its specifically musical characteristics. Jazz was for Lewis more a symptom of particular habits of modern consciousness than it was a subject which gave him the opportunity to discuss questions of rhythm, harmony, and tonal architecture.²¹ Lewis certainly was knowledgeable about such things (as his discussions of the Baroque and Classical styles of Bach and Beethoven in *Time and Western Man* and other texts, for instance, indicate), but for him jazz portended first and foremost the ‘continued impoverishment of artistic expression’ in a time of what he saw as increasingly herd-like parliamentary democracies.²² Even though John Carey’s views on Lewis are generally to be questioned, his argument that ‘[j]azz, as developed in the West, [was] for Lewis unmistakably degraded and degrading, expressing the mindless energy of the mass’ is apt here.²³ Fitting, too, is Andrzej Gąsiorek’s point that Lewis ‘failed to understand jazz (which he construed as the expression of a despised cult of sensation)’.²⁴ Taken together these views articulate the twin poles of Lewis’s response to jazz music overall: at one end his sense that jazz was not only ‘bad’ in itself but, moreover, an enabler of sense- rather than mind-based artistic creativity; and, at the other, his inability to grasp jazz ‘on its own terms’, rather than through an ideology critique which had to some extent already established in advance the terms through which that music would be dismissed.²⁵

Lewis in his ‘Introduction’ to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *The Apes of God* called the book a satire on the various ‘crazes’ that in his view had afflicted ‘the shell-shaken society of the ’Twenties’.²⁶ This society, ‘a moronic inferno of insipidity and decay’, was the society of the ‘Jazz Age’, that moment so well lampooned not only by Lewis but also by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley, Rose Macaulay, and Evelyn Waugh, among others.²⁷ Jazz itself functions in *The Apes* as a ‘craze’ in the midst of many such obsessions, an ‘approved mass-article’ (AG 404), in the words of the novel’s would-be Virgilian guru, Horace Zagreus, which is performed by African-American, as well as presumably white, musicians, and is consumed by a ‘dense mass’ (AG 460) of metropolitan bohemians. The wailing jazz music of street bands unsettles stately windows and the teeth of Victorian matriarchs alike, as onlookers gaze at these

²⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art* (1934), ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), p. 30; Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface: The Philosophy of the ‘Melting-Pot’* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 65. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *MWA* and *P*, respectively.

²¹ Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen & Co., 1952), p. 34.

²² Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), rev. edn (London: John Calder, 1982), p. 260. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *BB*.

²³ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 194.

²⁴ Andrzej Gąsiorek, ‘War, “Primitivism,” and the Future of “the West”: Reflections on D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis’, in Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (eds), *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007): pp. 91-110, p. 105

²⁵ See also Andrew Causey, ‘The Hero and the Crowd: The Art of Wyndham Lewis in the Twenties’, in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Volcanic Heaven: Essays on Wyndham Lewis’s Painting & Writing* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996): pp. 87-102, pp. 98-99.

²⁶ Wyndham Lewis, ‘Introduction’, *The Apes of God* (London: Arco, 1955), unpaginated.

²⁷ Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography* (1950), ed. Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p. 183.

ensembles with a volatile blend of contempt and fascination. In a phenomenological seepage between cultural spectacle and the human body, one already used by Lewis in 'Will Eccles' (a story published in the first volume of *The Tyro* magazine in 1921), individual characters physically 'jazz' as they attempt vainly to control their spasmodic limbs and juddering feet.²⁸ And in what could be seen as an ironic echo of Lewis's usage of vortex-like forms in his pre-War Vorticist period – as well as, it could be argued, of the 'social vortex' invoked by Captain Grimes in Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928) – in *The Apes of God* mesmerized dancers are propelled in hypnotic whirls by accented jazz rhythms.²⁹

A very different kind of link between Vorticism and jazz was suggested by Violet Hunt in her memoir *The Flurried Years* (1926), in which she claimed that although the kind of art Lewis produced in the pre-war period died between 1914 and 1918, 'being relegated chiefly to the camouflaging of ships', a 'faint echo' of such art was to be seen in 'modern jazz.'³⁰ There is no further explanation of this inter-artistic connection (which suggests that Hunt saw Vorticist art as somehow jazz-like) in Hunt's book, which is concerned mainly with reminiscences about her relationship with Ford Madox Ford. However, the link itself is indicative of a tendency at work not only in Hunt's non-fictional writing but also in Lewis's, in which the richness and complexity of inter-war jazz culture is problematically simplified. Of course, neither Hunt nor Lewis had the benefit of being able to theorize jazz culture and its myriad internal trajectories in response to the retrospective and revisionist work done by such scholars as Ted Gioia, Hilary Moore, Catherine Parsonage, and Gunther Schuller, for example.³¹ Put another way, as participants in the moments about which they were talking, neither Hunt nor Lewis had the advantage of fifty years' worth of hindsight. In Lewis's non-fictional work especially this disadvantage is most apparent when he is trying to be fair, as he sees it, to the positive impacts of African-American cultural forms upon Western, and specifically 'white', civilization. When in *Paleface* (1929), for instance, Lewis writes that the 'nightingale' Roland Hayes and the 'excellent actor' Paul Robeson are 'handsome presents to [Western] civilization' (*P* 67) it is clear that he means these remarks to be taken as compliments. And compliments they are, but in retrospect Lewis's numerous references to 'the Negro' (singular) background from which such artists hail read rather awkwardly – as if Lewis is groping for instances of 'good' artists to cite as the exceptions to the rule of Bad Black Traditions.

Part of the problem here is that Lewis's non-fictional accounts of jazz stand as an attempt to understand the broad *implications* of celebrations of, and capitulations to, African-American culture. *The Apes of God* is often viewed as the novel that encodes this attempt in literary form. And encode it the novel does, even as it explores jazz culture in ways that cannot be grasped merely in terms of literary reflections of sociological analyses. Using an assortment of formal and thematic strategies, Lewis's novel focuses on the 'jazz-organ at the heart of the blood-drab Circus of the bloody peace' (*AG* 148), his phrase for what he perceived as the disquieting centrality of jazz in a post-First World

²⁸ Wyndham Lewis, 'Will Eccles', *The Tyro*, 1 (April 1921): p. 6.

²⁹ Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (1928), ed. David Bradshaw (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 80.

³⁰ Violet Hunt, *The Flurried Years* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1926), p. 215. For Vorticism's link to the 'dazzle camouflage' Hunt mentions in this passage, camouflage developed by Edward Wadsworth in particular rather than by the Vorticists in general, see Jodie Greenwood, 'The Crisis of the System: *Blas'* Reception', in Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, and Nathan Waddell (eds), *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011): pp. 77-93.

³¹ See Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Hilary Moore, *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation, and Class* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); and Parsonage, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain*.

War society weakened by global conflict. Whereas a significant number of Lewis's contemporaries were drawn to the creative amalgam of African and European source materials that jazz music symbolized, for Lewis himself the 'musicality' of jazz lay in its signalling of a particular kind of discord: the 'disguised expression of guilt in the white race's infatuation with "primitive" experience', in Mark Perrino's words.³² We have already seen that in text after text Lewis dissected this obsession and attacked its enthusiasts. But while Lewis's philosophical and socio-cultural impressions of the 'meaning' of jazz music and culture are familiar, his creative and specifically *literary* engagement with jazz is less recognized.

The society anatomized in *The Apes of God* is one supposedly 'purified by bloodshed and war debts' (*AG* 137) but in reality weakened by a post-war intemperance through which its citizens have lapsed into a childish, gluttonous mind-set. In this quite specific sense the preoccupations of Lewis the novelist and Lewis the philosopher interconnect, as the diagnoses of inter-war life offered by *The Apes of God* correspond to the almost identical verdicts advanced in such texts as *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), *Time and Western Man* (1927), *Paleface* (1929), and *Doom of Youth* (1932). It is interesting, then, that Lewis opted in the second of these polemics to term his contemporary 'millionaire-outcast, all-caste, star-cast world' (*TWM* 30) a 'musical' (*TWM* 33) grouping, a pattern of time-obsessed 'individuals' defined by 'the politics of hypnotism, enregimentation, [and] the sleep of the dance' (*TWM* 26). For if Lewis understood the conditions of industrial capitalism as fostering a 'musical' enslavement to the tunes of its ideological pied pipers, then in *The Apes of God* jazz – an 'approved mass-article', as I have already indicated – provides the melodies by which London's childlike inhabitants are brought into line in accordance with an ideological system that has 'official[ly] stamp[ed]' (*AG* 404) jazz as a desirable cultural form. Beethoven, 'the Jupiter of music' (*AG* 283), holds only a temporary appeal for these nurslings, who, in Zagreus's words, continually betray their 'slum-peasant, machine-minder' selves by disclosing an imposed taste for jazz, 'the heart-cry of the city-serf' (*AG* 404). A succession of simultaneously loathed and esteemed 'jazz-organ[ists]' manoeuvre within this 'blood-drab Circus' (*AG* 148), grinding out the tunes that keep its babyish simulants in the limited roles of what Lewis writes, in another context in the novel, as '*objects* pure and simple' (*AG* 440), while their society discordantly heads towards the General Strike of 1926.

Such details at the very least indicate Lewis's ideas about how jazz intersected with the socio-political textures of his era. However, they also, in some cases, point towards more specific interactions with the reception of jazz and black musicians in 1920s England. For instance, Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, as David Bradshaw has argued, most likely included a 'mixed-race relationship' between a black man and a white woman because Waugh had seen John B. Souter's painting *The Breakdown* displayed at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition in 1926.³³ This image, which was judged to be in bad taste by conservative art critics and government departments, depicts a clean-cut, black saxophonist sitting on top of a shattered statue of what could be Minerva, the Roman goddess of art and wisdom, as an entranced, naked white lady dances to his music, her head thrown back with abandon. To the most unsympathetic of Souter's contemporaries his painting appeared to suggest that the civilized principles of the classical past had in the Roaring Twenties been undone by the influence of supposedly 'primitive' African-American jazz culture, whose ambassadors adopted 'advanced' Western trappings – suits and top hats, as in Souter's painting – as their audiences ditched them in deference to the

³² Mark Perrino, *The Poetics of Mockery: Wyndham Lewis's 'The Apes of God' and the Popularization of Modernism* (Leeds: W. S. Maney & Son, 1995), p. 97.

³³ See Bradshaw's 'Introduction' to Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, pp. xxi-xxiii.

aboriginal seductiveness of a new cultural form. It seems safe to say that Lewis, no stranger to the Royal Academy, would have been aware of Souter's painting and of the controversy it caused, not least because *The Apes of God* dramatizes numerous tensions brought about in British society by African-American jazz musicians. When at Lord Osmund's Lenten Party Colonel Ponto is encouraged to 'kill a few of those Jazz-band Zulus' he briefly becomes a focal point for the concerns of the social élite who abhor the band's purportedly 'diabolical noise' (AG 522). Moreover, when the British national anthem 'God Save the King' is 'hummed' by the jazz ensemble a few chapters later, the 'mock-respect' paid by the accumulated guests could well be due to the uneasy collocation of the Crown and a 'negro band' (AG 549), rather than because of the party's carnivalesque atmosphere.³⁴

The connotations of Souter's image are apparently echoed in *The Apes of God* at that moment when Julius Ratner, the 'Split-Man', stands like a 'Praxiteles' statue of ill-luck' at the top of a flight of stairs, while below him a crowd struts 'to a music of drums' typified by 'studied mass-energy', 'gross proletarian nigger-bumps', and 'swanee-squeals shot through with caustic cat-calls from [its] instrumentalists' who are playing 'contralto and counterbass saxophones' (AG 442-43).³⁵ Souter's Minerva is 'fragmented' just as Lewis's Praxitelean statue is 'split' through association with Ratner (the 'split-man'), while the 'idiot mass-sound' of the 'marxistic' jazz music, and the hypnotic gesticulations of those enthralled by it, run against the stateliness of Ratner looking at 'the far-fetched prismatic lustres of the great saloon [...] crowded with people who were strutting in a dance' (AG 442). But if in *The Breakdown* the classical past, as I will argue in a moment, is of unclear status, in *The Apes* that past is complicated by linking Ratner – who is unfavourably described at an earlier moment in the novel as a kind of reptilian statue with a 'half-bald lizard's stony head' and 'saurian skin' (AG 165) – with the classicism many of Souter's adverse critics saw him as defending. Using a strategy similar to that implemented in Lewis's *Praxitella* (1920-21) – an exquisite painting which, as Paul Edwards has argued, overwrites the plainness of Praxitelean naturalism by rendering its subject (Iris Barry) through 'a series of quasi-mechanical lines and textures' – *The Apes of God* problematizes the lure of classical antiquity by subverting its potential as a sustainable alternative to modern traditions.³⁶ Both cases disallow Graeco-Roman naturalism as a preordained source of value: *Praxitella* by rejecting naturalist forms as a representational system; *The Apes* by equating such forms with Ratner, the 'fractured' creature whose saurian cold-bloodedness denies any comfortable veneration of the 'greek museum-model' (AG 165) classicism personified, in turn, in his acquaintance, Siegfried Victor.³⁷

Despite these suggestive subtexts, it's hard to know for sure whether or not Lewis in *The Apes of God* engaged with the Black artists represented in such paintings as Souter's *The Breakdown*. Nevertheless, the probable field of relations between these

³⁴ Robin W. Winks notes that the 'Negro nightclubs' of 1920s Canada 'began to resound to jazz music at eleven o'clock six nights a week' and ended 'at five A.M. with a rousing "God Save the King"' (*The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 334).

³⁵ The use of 'contralto and counterbass saxophones' suggests a degree of ignorance on Lewis's part, as these instruments would more likely have been a soprano sax and contrabass. I owe this insight to Alan Munton.

³⁶ Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 269.

³⁷ In his 'Afterword' to this edition of *The Apes of God* Paul Edwards includes a list of character names suggesting that Siegfried Victor might be Douglas Garman, co-editor of *The Calendar of Modern Letters* (see AG 635).

contexts and materials extends in the course of *The Apes of God* in other ways to those already outlined. One of these is a similarly oblique engagement with black artists as stylists in the form of the ‘american negro-designer’ responsible for the mock ‘pantheon of Verrio’, which garnishes the ‘sumptuous staircase to the upper apartments’ of Lord Osmund’s country house. Like some low-cost replica of the stately home ceiling designs of Antonio Verrio, the seventeenth-century Italian decorator ridiculed in a poem by one of Lewis’s satiric precursors – Alexander Pope, author of *Epistle to Burlington* (1731) – Lord Osmund’s stairway vaulting has been cheaply beautified ‘with a jazz-agility’ (*AG* 484) by a black artist. From the context in which it appears this particular usage of ‘jazz’ is damning enough, but when read against comparable uses of the word in *Time and Western Man* the usage becomes severer still. For Lewis, ‘an Einstein or a de Sitter’, two of the twentieth century’s greatest physicists, ‘cannot be compared, or forced into the same frame, without absurdity, with a jazz poetess or a circus or cinema clown’. In talking about another scientist, ‘one of the best-known american [*sic*] champions of the gland-theory’ in the 1920s, Dr. Louis Berman, ‘jazz’ functions for Lewis as a way of satirizing his penchant for ‘physiological poetry’ (*TWM* 206), which Lewis mocks by describing the delivery of a baby as occurring alongside a ‘semi-chaldean staff of Hollywood priestesses’ (*TWM* 332) performing ‘a dance of ecstatic abandon’ (*TWM* 333) as the ‘Venusberg’ – presumably the Venusberg Bacchanale from Richard Wagner’s opera *Tannhäuser* – is ‘jazzed by [an] organist’ (*TWM* 334). These links make stronger what is already in *The Apes of God* a pejorative combination of jazz culture with counterfeit design. Perhaps more unflatteringly, the cost of the painted ceiling above Lord Osmund’s stairwell is said to have been ‘very cheap *because* [its decorator] was black’ (*AG* 484, my emphasis), a clause that not only signals Osmund’s exploitative temperament but also Lewis’s understanding of the socio-economic status of black individuals in 1920s England.

Lewis was particularly unsympathetic to social inequalities founded on racial prejudices, a point which explains his antipathy in *Paleface* to the political edifices (of which imperialism was an important instance) which enabled black people in the early twentieth century to be refused equality in social relations.³⁸ This point of view surfaces obliquely in *The Apes of God* in those instances of white characters parodying black bodies, as in the case of the socialite at Lord Osmund’s party smeared in ‘black grease paint, counterfeiting the negritic hue’ who is dressed ‘in the costume of an african [*sic*] rajah’ (*AG* 445). Although this episode brings to mind the ‘blackface’ minstrelsy tradition of the period in which Lewis was writing, it also serves as an illustration of the racial arrogance exhibited by certain specimens of the epoch’s smart set (in particular the Bright Young People) for whom black subjectivity was something merely to be impersonated or forged. Lewis’s appreciation of black people and black culture was more nuanced than this, but nonetheless behind his antipathy to what he understood as jazz was a reasoned conviction that its music represented ‘an aesthetic medium of a sort of frantic proletarian sub-conscious, which is the very negation of those far greater arts [...] of other more celebrated “Coloured” races, such as the Chinese or the Hindu’. *Paleface* clearly indicates Lewis’s admiration of certain black artists – among them, as already noted, the novelist Nella Larsen, the ‘nightingale’ Roland Hayes and the ‘excellent actor’ Paul Robeson, as well as the ‘negro intellectual’ (*P* 63) Alain Locke – but still it bears out his (in this instance, perhaps ironic) resistance to jazz as an ‘*inferior* Black art’ next to

³⁸ This is not to deny that racial prejudice appears in Lewis’s work during this period. See Anne Quéma, *The Agon of Modernism: Wyndham Lewis’s Allegories, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), p. 184.

those 'White arts' from which 'the Paleface ha[d] turned away' (P 65) in order to cultivate a Western facsimile of 'the "dark" world' (P 55).

All of which makes it extremely unlikely that in writing *The Apes of God* Lewis would have allowed any linguistic 'contagion' of his text by the very tradition that his works of socio-cultural analysis, in addition to the novel itself, openly rebuff. But this possibility, unlikely or not, was entertained by one of the first readers of *The Apes of God*, Osbert Burdett, whose review of the novel Lewis included in *Satire & Fiction* (1930), which included reproductions of various newspaper reviews of *The Apes* as well as defences of it written by Lewis and Roy Campbell. 'One notices that the vigour, the restlessness, [and] the dazzling qualities of [the novel's] style', Burdett wrote, 'with its trick of double adjectives that stab the mind as the eyes are stabbed by the flickers of white in many films, and by the staccato movements of the limbs of film-actors, seem to be an infection from many of the jazz elements that Mr. Lewis appears to detest'.³⁹ The statement is odd insofar as it imagines a paradoxical tension between the novel's form and content, one that assumes Lewis to have been insufficiently in control of his prose and so to have written a 'jazzified' text whose linguistic resourcefulness was for Burdett a structural embodiment of the phenomenon that *The Apes of God* derides several times. Arguably the Lewis who observed in *Time and Western Man* that a 'piece of prose or poetry is not music' (TWM 178) would have been irritated by Burdett's remarks. But the idea that Lewis was unable to create a coherent work of art is no less questionable, given that the evidence points so drastically in the opposite direction – towards a master craftsman, as Naomi Mitchison memorably put it, flinging 'his adjectives and adverbs' in a 'flash of almost molecular bombardment' (quoted in SF 33).

Lewis was not the only modernist accused of succumbing to the beat. For instance, the 'tense, syncopated movements' and 'staccato impulsiveness' of Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922) were viewed by W. L. Courtney as signs of 'the influence of Jazz', just as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) was for Clive Bell, writing in *The New Republic*, the apotheosis of a 'ragtime literature which flouts traditional rhythms and sequences and grammar and logic'.⁴⁰ This method of reading modernist literature had the curious effect of grouping together individual writers, who in so many ways were unlike, as 'jazz stylists' whose accomplishment, for better or for worse, lay in blurring the boundaries between music and written language. From this view, such writers did not, as Babette Deutsch said of T. S. Eliot, slip from 'sixteenth-century air[s] to the cadences of common speech and thence to a bit of jazz'.⁴¹ On the contrary, their writing was understood by some means to have personified the formal procedures of jazz music, even as such an 'achievement' was decried by critics deeply unsympathetic to syncopation and swing. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) was another frequent target in this respect. Hence Edmund Wilson, Jr. in *The Dial* of December 1922 lamenting Eliot's sudden and shocking turns 'into the jazz of the music halls', a criticism reiterated in the *Freeman* of January 17th 1923 by Louis Untermeyer, who mauled Eliot's 'jumble and narratives, nursery-rhymes, criticism, jazz-rhythms, *Dictionary of Favourite Phrases* and a few lyrical moments' as the 'mingling[s] of willful obscurity and weak vaudeville'. In a similar vein, a 'J. M.' of the *Double Dealer* of May 5th 1923 panned Eliot's suggestive linguistic play as 'the agonized

³⁹ Osbert Burdett, quoted in Wyndham Lewis, *Satire & Fiction* (1930) (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1976), p. 37. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as SF.

⁴⁰ W. L. Courtney, in Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (eds), *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 105; Clive Bell, in Karl Koenig (ed.), *Jazz in Print (1856-1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), p. 156.

⁴¹ Babette Deutsch, *This Modern Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 125.

outcry of a sensitive romanticist drowning in a sea of jazz'.⁴² Whereas Eliot's detractors saw the 'jazz-like' structures of *The Waste Land* as a capitulation to a suspiciously new musical culture, the poet himself clearly found in jazz a musical stimulus to his literary imagination at a moment when that still nascent music was being censured by some for nothing less than the breakdown of all Western laws and customs.

This was for Eliot as much a matter of form as of theme. His quoting in *The Waste Land* of lines from Ariel's song to Prince Ferdinand in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-11) – 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' – in the same breath as domestic talk and accented ragtime – "'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" / But / O O O O that Shakespearian Rag' – suggests that Eliot wasn't merely concerned with creating a poetic style defined by unexpected cultural juxtapositions, but that he wanted to participate in a conversation about what it meant to be modern in an epoch of increased permeability between canonical and emergent forms of creativity.⁴³ Eliot's attitude towards *The Waste Land* at first was that of an excited innovator eager to build on its modernism in support of 'a new form and style'.⁴⁴ It was an attitude shared by Lewis, Eliot's friend and occasional antagonist, who while beginning *The Apes of God* in September 1923 advised Eliot 'to be busy with a new structure' of the sort that had been made possible by *The Waste Land*'s allusive strategies.⁴⁵ But if Lewis later echoed Eliot's early reviewers in seeing 'the atmosphere of *pompes funèbres* of [*The Waste Land*] as a variant of Mario Praz's 'romantic agony' (*MWA* 149), Lewis nowhere made reference, unsympathetically or otherwise, to the 'jazzy' structures of Eliot's poem in the early 1920s. Arguably this changed with the appearance in 1930 of *The Apes of God* itself, in which the same lines from *The Tempest* quoted by Eliot in 'A Game of Chess' are intertextually reiterated in the novel's opening chapter as lyrics sung by a 'muttering' voice with a 'Haarlem [*sic*]' accent, presumably a singer in the jazz street band playing outside the Follett mansion whose 'perpetual music' is the accompaniment to the 'savage jazzing hoofs' (*AG* 39) of the petulant, spasmodic Dick Whittingdon.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot's use of Gene Buck's and Herman Ruby's Ziegfield Follies hit 'That Shakespearian Rag' allows him implicitly to query the links between early twentieth- and early seventeenth-century culture; to remind his readers that, in Charles Ferrall's words, 'the frivolity of the Jazz Age' could not outpace the Shakespearean past it tried to 'forget or dismiss'.⁴⁶ *The Apes of God* reiterates this criticism in the passage quoted above, implying that 1920s jazz music, everywhere proclaimed to be 'new' by its frolicsome devotees, might in some ways only be a re-stitching of more noteworthy precursors. In a more general sense, however, Lewis's allusion to this Eliotic context resonates with the views of Pierpoint, the shadowy, god-like figure lurking behind the apes' trivialities, who contends in his 'Encyclical' that the 'masses of Gossip-mad, vulgar, pseudo-artist, *good-timers*' (*AG* 121) which comprise the apes of the novel's title are little more than '*prosperous mountebanks who alternately imitate and mock at and traduce those figures they at once admire and hate*' (*AG* 123). This description is in the first instance an explanation of the apes' antagonism towards those authentic artist-figures whose legitimacy is at once a condition to be mimicked and an awkward reminder of an emptiness that cannot be

⁴² These three quotations from Jewel Spears Brooker (ed.), *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 84, 94, and 105.

⁴³ T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 65.

⁴⁴ T. S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot – Volume 1: 1898-1922*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 596.

⁴⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. W. K. Rose (London: Methuen & Co., 1963), p. 135.

⁴⁶ Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 87.

filled. But it is also a judgement on the cultural tastes of these deceivers who are drawn to a jazz culture originated by black musicians, whose strangeness is at once the source of their appeal to, and the cause of their oppression by, a duplicitous white civilization.

In an apparent echo of such judgements in *Paleface* Lewis paraphrases Locke's argument that 'the White Man cannot dance every night to negro music [...] and continue to be haughty where the Negro is concerned' (P 64). *The Apes of God* continually plays with this insight by exploring situations in which 'white' forms of behaviour are shown as dependent on, and thus necessarily undergirded by, the cultural achievements of the black individuals marginalized at this historical moment by Western society. At this time Lewis was consistent in his opposition to the widespread acceptance of an Afro-American music that facilitated a problematic 'swapping' of values, whereby the 'Coloured Races' were increasingly approximating 'the White world-standard' (P 57), and vice-versa. Lewis feared that the white fetishization of jazz culture threatened a standardizing of nationhood in which such towns as 'New York or Johannesburg' would have dance-halls in which waltzes, mazurkas, and minuets would be danced 'by stately Negroes', on the one hand, and a 'Paleface quarter' featuring dance venues 'with nothing but jazz' (P 57-58), on the other. Again, such arguments make it more than questionable that Lewis would have allowed the formal strategies of *The Apes of God* somehow to indicate an acceptance of the jazz cultures about which he had so many doubts.

What's more, Lewis's evident lack of sympathy for 'musical' readings of literary texts speaks against Burdett's claim that Lewis had in *The Apes of God* contradicted himself by pandering to an African-American musical style. What Lewis could not have known is that in denying any equivalence between music and literary language he was anticipating several critics – among them Alan Munton, one of Lewis's key modern-day commentators – for whom such responses have next to no interpretative purchase. When Munton rightly points out that 'to establish a relationship between music and prose fiction would be difficult under any circumstances', or, more defiantly, that 'the confused and implausible constructs' of those determined to see overtly 'rhythmic' writing as jazz 'on the page' originate in 'the assumption of a relationship where no relation can exist', he is among other things echoing Lewis.⁴⁷ *The Apes of God* is first and foremost a satire, and what Lewis took to be jazz music, as well as the 'jazz age' culture of the decade in which it was written and is set, comprise two of the novel's key targets. It seems perverse to argue, then, that the novel somehow 'personifies' jazz in light of the novel's thematic antipathy to musical performance, as well as Lewis's broader ridiculing of musico-literary identities. Lewis's flippant comments on Gertrude Stein's fugue-like 'prose-song' (*TWM* 59; see also *TWM* 48) – the characteristic riffs and repetitions which typify her fiction – ought to serve as ample evidence of his suspicion of the kind of argument made by Burdett, even if the 'detestation' of jazz Burdett identified in *The Apes* is in a broad sense entirely appropriate.

However, parts of Lewis's output suggest that the dislike of musico-literary correspondences revealed in *Time and Western Man* was not comprehensive. The first edition of Lewis's novel *Tarr* (1918), for instance, opens with a section titled 'Overture', a prelude which sets up the contours of Frederick Tarr's misanthropy and establishes the tone of the novel to follow. In the novel's 1928 revision Lewis chose to remove this musico-literary heading, but, as Scott W. Klein has shown, the novel nonetheless retained a comedic plot with all 'the makings of a [dark] Viennese operetta', an 'alarming dance of art and sexuality closer to the *fin de siècle* of Arthur Schnitzler or Egon Schiele than to the

⁴⁷ Alan Munton, 'Misreading Morrison, Mishearing Jazz: A Response to Toni Morrison's Jazz Critics', *Journal of American Studies*, 31.2 (1997): pp. 235-51, at p. 235 and p. 250.

confections of Strauss'.⁴⁸ In *Satire & Fiction*, moreover, Lewis described the first twenty pages of *The Apes of God* as 'a slow-movement prelude' (SF 47) to the extended satiric demolitions of the novel as a whole, a text whose literariness was directed against such narrative aesthetics as those adopted by Henry James, James Joyce, and Stein, the latter of whom, in Lewis's view, wrote 'teutonic music, jazzed' with a 'german musical soul leering at itself in a mirror' (SF 52). Lewis's description of the opening of *The Apes of God* suggests that to a degree he saw the novel as evoking a 'musical' structure, even if the comparison is not one seemingly explored in the text, or in Lewis's commentaries on his own literary practice, in any detail.

As *The Apes of God* reaches its climax it becomes clear that the prominence of jazz in the text shifts considerably. Whereas in the novel's opening 'Prologue' the jazz musicians playing in the street outside Lady Follett's mansion represent an irritating and exterior band of 'wind-and-percussion street-drummers, jazzing in the gutter, rattling their boxes for coppers' (AG 16), by its end the 'gutter-thunder' of the musicians playing in the same spot has become a much more intrusive presence not only in the body of the text but in the *bodies* of the text – namely Lady Follett and Zagreus, whose embrace in the novel's final paragraphs is disrupted as the 'mechanistic rattle' of jazz 'penetrate[s] to the inmost recesses' (AG 624) of their fondling. So if jazz can to some extent in the novel's opening be dismissed as a marginal presence, by the novel's end it is clear that jazz is part of the novel's representation of human subjectivities as much as it is part of the novel's portrayed cultural landscape. In this sense, Lady Follett's reporting of Zagreus's view that 'the jazz is fate' (AG 16) is significant, because even at the beginning of *The Apes of God* Lewis is suggesting what at its end he clearly invites the reader to appreciate: that, for all the various criticisms of jazz put forward in the text, many of which reproduce Lewis's own, jazz will endure, accepted by some and disdained by others, as a 'constant[,] tapping' (AG 624) accompaniment to a society in the process of breakdown. While the General Strike gets underway and the 'whole townland of London [is] up in arms and as silent as the grave', and as in the north of England crowds sack 'the better quarters', flood mines, incinerate mills, and get fired at 'with machine-guns' (all AG 618) by government troops, jazz simply goes on, the thunderous orchestration of the 'stoppage' of Britain.

Souter's *The Breakdown* once again is relevant here. Karl Eric Toepfer has argued that the work evokes a collapse of racial barriers and a necessary toppling of the classical past, a collapse supportive of 'a new order of symmetry' in which 'the music of black maleness achieves cool equilibrium with the dance of white femaleness'.⁴⁹ At the same time, Parsonage has suggested that the painting clearly implies the 'corrupting influence of jazz as a black music' by drawing attention to the broken figure of what seems to be Minerva, 'a goddess associated with virginity, wisdom and the arts, traditional values with which the figures in the painting are apparently in disregard'.⁵⁰ Contemporary responses to *The Breakdown* differed no less widely. *The Times*, reviewing the Royal Academy show in which Souter's painting was first exhibited, described the image as a capitulation 'to the less admirable journalism' of its period and as imagining an erroneous succumbing of modern civilization to the saxophone.⁵¹ But Llewelyn C. Lloyd, writing in *The Monthly Musical Record*, noted that although *The Breakdown* seemed to 'protest against the

⁴⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (1928), ed. Scott W. Klein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xii.

⁴⁹ Karl Eric Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 364.

⁵⁰ Parsonage, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain*, p. 188.

⁵¹ 'Royal Academy. Some Successful Portraits. An Elderly Show', *The Times* (1 May 1926): pp. 15-16, p. 16.

widespread influence in Western countries of primitive rhythms in music and dancing, which [was] broadly designate[d] jazz’, black music had ‘gripped the minds of what are usually called the civilized peoples of the world’ and was there ‘to stay’.⁵² Similarly Lewis, although he was demonstrably unsympathetic to its impact upon modernity, saw jazz as a cultural presence that could not be ignored. For him, jazz, especially in the hands of such composers of ‘fiery accomplishment’ (*TWM* 39) as George Antheil, seemed to presage a new future for musical creativity. *The Apes of God* dramatizes this ‘presence’ by positioning jazz as its bookends, by suggesting that, for all the antipathy to its music and accompanying communities explored in its pages, jazz is perhaps the most hard-wearing thing in its fictional reality.

Moreover, the end of *The Apes of God* invites such a reading because it presents jazz music as having gained a ‘voice’ in comparison to the initially lyric-less and murmurous presentations of jazz at its outset. The final paragraphs of *The Apes* can be seen as parodying such modernist texts as Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* through intertextual allusion.⁵³ But these final paragraphs can also be viewed as leading to a more declarative account of jazz that is accomplished by a switching from jazz as merely ‘background music’ to jazz as a music whose lyrics have now had the affront to infiltrate Lewisian letters:

Then came the first soft crash of the attendant cymbal – it was the prelude of the thunder. And in the gutter the crazy instruments at last struck up their sentimental jazzing one-time stutter – gutter-thunder.

Whoddle ah *doo*.
 Wen *yoo*
 Are *far*
 Away
 An *I*
 am *bluu*
 Whoddle ah *doo*
 Whoddlah DOOOO! (*AG* 624)

This passage, as Tyrus Miller suggests, might be taken as implicitly caricaturing that moment in *Mrs Dalloway* when Peter Walsh hears ‘a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning’ into ‘ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo—’.⁵⁴ But *The Apes of God* does more here than parodically mimic ‘the typographical rendering of the wordless song’ in *Mrs Dalloway*, as Miller puts it.⁵⁵ The novel quite specifically invokes a particular song that Lewis associated with early jazz music, Irving Berlin’s ‘What’ll I Do’ (1923), and thus both historicizes Lewis’s caricature while adding substance to the novel’s cyclical view of the music upon which that caricature is based.⁵⁶

⁵² Koenig (ed.), *Jazz in Print (1856-1929)*, p. 490.

⁵³ Scott W. Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 151; Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 71.

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 68-69.

⁵⁵ Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ The facts that Lewis tended to imagine jazz in the ‘watered-down’ forms associated with such composers as Irving Berlin, as well as in response to the music that was available on the radio in the late 1920s and early 1930s, are insights I owe to Alan Munton (private correspondence).

What seems to happen at the end of *The Apes of God*, then, is a return to jazz that proceeds in much the same way as the meaning of a thematic musical subject develops in those sets of theme and variations (e.g. J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*) which re-state that subject as a closing reprise. It's important to note that Lewis himself never positioned *The Apes of God* in this way. However, the novel's cyclical structure invites the comparison, I think, because the structure of *The Apes* and the general, theme-and-variations form are related inasmuch as they follow a complex 'ABA' architecture, wherein some idea or subject (the A) is followed by an extended central section of multiple adaptations (the B) that comes before the A's return, which reappears necessarily inflected by the B section that precedes it. *The Apes of God* is most evidently a satire, of course, but it is also a complex amalgam of different literary styles in which an opening premise – apishness – is put through various structural iterations and adaptations. The letter sent by Zagreus to Dan Boleyn in the novel's fourth chapter ('Be Not Too Finical') promises as much, just as the narrative in its entirety bears witness to numerous variations on the ideas of apishness laid out in Pierpoint's 'Encyclical'. *The Apes of God* could be said to follow a musically 'variational' structure in its establishing of an opening 'Prologue' in which the core themes of the novel, jazz included, are presented, its subsequent journeying through a long sequence of adaptations of these ideas with different characters in different situations, and its concluding return to the core features of its beginning: Lady Follett, oppressive Victorian locality, and jazz. I make such a comparison while fully in agreement with Eric Prieto's point that 'there is no criterion of musicality that would allow us to account for a literary text in musical terms without sacrificing the specificity of both arts'.⁵⁷ That said, the idea of 'inflection' has some relevance to understanding how *The Apes of God* develops its portrayal of the jazz cultures of the 1920s, because when we as readers arrive at the novel's final pages we do so necessarily having experienced the full range of variations on its initial premise that have come before them. It is this transformed viewpoint that gives the concluding perspective on jazz in *The Apes of God* much of its logic, for we come to that moment fully appreciative of the tenacity of jazz in an age peopled by those as dedicated to such music's legitimation as to its overthrow.

Lewis was firmly on the side of the 'overthrowing' of jazz, as we have seen, insofar as he was throughout his career committed to the idea that '[t]here are no more Bachs or Beethovens just as there were no more Leonardos and Michelangelos after the Renaissance, only hasty reminders of what artists once excelled in doing, or despairing jokes, or jazzed-up echoes of perfection' (BB 261). And yet *The Apes of God* complicates this position by showing that Lewis was knowledgeable about the music whose influence he deplored, and by presenting jazz not as a phenomenon that can easily be dismissed but as an accepted part of modern culture whose influence on its audiences has advanced too far to be simply jettisoned. As Ford Madox Ford put it in 1927, 'we have assimilated jazz – jazz-dancing and jazz music'.⁵⁸ In this regard *The Apes of God* forces us to reconsider the jazz commentaries Lewis offered in his non-fictional writing, in which he comes close to such figures as Aldous Huxley, for whom jazz was 'no more than the mechanical parody of life, a galvanic twitching'.⁵⁹ Jazz's role in *The Apes of God* is very much more than a 'musical backdrop', to quote Andrea Freud Lowenstein, in which African-Americans appear as 'primitive and childlike emblems, imbued with stereotypical

⁵⁷ Eric Prieto, *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 18.

⁵⁸ Ford Madox Ford, *New York is Not America: Being a Mirror to the States* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), p. 291.

⁵⁹ Aldous Huxley, 'Vulgarity' (1927), in Huxley, *Complete Essays – Volume II: 1926-1929*, eds Robert S. Baker and James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000): pp. 15-19, p. 18.

masculine virility'.⁶⁰ On the contrary, *The Apes of God* is a richly conceived focal point of various anxieties through which Lewis takes pains to present the cultural embeddedness of jazz in his contemporary cultural landscape in believable imaginative terms. This attention to detail formed a core part of his efforts to understand the 'purpose' betrayed in the emergence of jazz in the inter-war period, a development at which in Lewis's eyes the 'average man' marvelled and could only explain by recourse to the *zeitgeist*, 'if he ha[d] no other answer' (*TWM* xiii). Lewis's answers, by contrast, were typically contrarian, the outspoken criticisms of an intellectual at war with the 'jazz neuros[es]' of his time.⁶¹

Lewis's engagement with jazz and jazz culture in *The Apes of God* went beyond mere carping and criticizing. It was, as I have shown, a deeply imaginative *interaction* with that culture from which his cultural critique cannot be separated, but which, all the same, goes beyond that critique in compelling ways. To read Lewis's satire in this way is to claim it as much more than the 'imitative', anti-Joycean or anti-Woolfian epic it is sometimes figured to be. *The Apes of God* is anti-Joycean and anti-Woolfian, in its way, but its 'imitative' lineaments are not merely the imitations of one satirist poking fun at another. On the contrary, the novel's imitations are of a historically believable and socially specific series of cultural contexts in which jazz is positioned at once as an 'empty' form to criticize and as a richly-textured musical 'world' to investigate. 'Musicality', then, might be understood as having formed not only an object of ridicule for Lewis but an object of *inspiration* through which he elaborated a variety of narrative innovations in formal and thematic terms. While Lewis often played down his musical knowledge, the musical 'inscriptions' of such texts as *The Apes of God* indicate that such modesty was in some respects a rhetorical manoeuvre designed to conceal, or at least to make light of, certain musical borrowings. For Lewis, jazz may have been a 'novel and experimental fashion in music', as I have already quoted from *Time and Western Man*, but it was a fashion of which he made use in experimenting with the novel form itself, an exploitation – in the most positive of senses – to which *The Apes of God* stands as testament.

⁶⁰ Andrea Freud Lowenstein, *Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women: Metaphors of Projection in the Work of Wyndham Lewis, Charles Williams, and Graham Greene* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 174.

⁶¹ Wyndham Lewis, 'In Praise of Outsiders' (1934), in Lewis, *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989): pp. 200-2, p. 202.