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"The Fragile Universe of Self': The Other and Identity in the Writing of Alun Lewis

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"The Fragile Universe of Self": The Other and Identity in the Writing of Alun Lewis

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Summary

This thesis studies the ongoing construction and negotiation of identity in the writing of Welsh poet and short story writer Alun Lewis. Lewis's writing consistently addresses and responds to an other that both helps to define and seems to undermine the self. This "other" variously takes the shape of the community or nation, the army and the soldier-identity, the beloved, India, and death. In making this argument the thesis makes use of published and unpublished fiction, poetry, and letters.

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Introduction

I would like to request the reader's indulgence and begin not in Wales, nor in England, nor even in India, but aboard a twenty-third-century space station with a conversation between two Narns exiled from their colonized planet:

> G'Kar: We are linked, Ta'Lon. Our fate is like an image caught in a mirror. If we deny the other, we deny ourselves, and we will cease to exist.
> Ta'Lon: And who or what is this "other"?
> G'Kar: The universe itself, Ta'Lon.[1]

The danger of alluding blithely to "the other" in literary discourse is that the term can mask a wide range of intellectual laziness, leading the discerning reader to demand to know just "who or what is this 'other.'" As a signifier of every sort of difference, "otherness" can be ascribed to any characteristic felt to be "not self"—as though the border of the self were any easier to demarcate. This very shiftiness and liminal uncertainty, however, represents the great strength of notions of the other: that they are as varied as literature itself.

Alun Lewis's writing consistently addresses and responds to an other that both defines and challenges the self. This "other," I argue, variously takes the shape of the community or nation, the army and the soldier-self, the beloved, India, and death. In supporting this thesis I draw upon several theoretical traditions. From Bakhtin and other proponents of dialogics comes the idea of the mutual construction of the self and the other through language:

> Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other". I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor.[2]

The very act of writing, or indeed of communicating at all, is in other words an act of defining the self in terms of the other. The other has in fact been present in the self from the beginning,

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[1] "Point of No Return," writ. J. Michael Straczynski, dir. Jim Johnston, *Babylon 5*, series 3, aired 26 February 1996, DVD, Warner Home Video, released 10 November 2003.

[2] P. N. Voloshinov, qtd. in *Reading Dialogics*, by Lynne Pearce (London: Edward Arnold, 1994) 43.

or the self could not speak. This formulation is useful to me for two reasons: one, it privileges the complexities of relations constructed *in the text*; two, it disallows easy bifurcations between self and other, refusing to take either as given. As Michael Holquist explains, "Dialogism figures a close relation between bodies and novels because they both militate against monadism, the illusion of closed-off bodies or isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism, and the concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity and truth wherever it may be found."[3] Lewis's writing, indeed, exudes a constant sense of movement and renegotiation. Jeremy Hooker finds Lewis's work to exhibit a "poetic courage" that

> always declares itself in new vision or re-vision or re-creation, as distinct from the expression of familiar assumptions. It is also, often, written in enemy territory, if not literally then in the sense that the poet does not stand securely on the safe ground of what people expect, or want, to hear.[4]

"Safe ground" is hard to come by in this body of work; where Lewis is not writing of chasms or cataclysms, he writes about traversing the land as a stranger. His words, whether they constitute poetry or prose, never pretend to come from a place of complete security. "The Grinder," the prologue to *Raiders' Dawn,* provides a fair statement of Lewis's approach to wordcraft:

> I grind my words like knives on such events
> As I encounter in my peddling round.
> But the worn whetstone's whirling face prevents
> The perfect statement of the truths I found.
>
> I've used my strength in striving for the vision,
> And *with* the vision—like old Jacob's stress;
> And I have worked to outline with precision
> Existence in its native nakedness.[5]

The goals toward which he strives he can never reach. Though the speaker posits the existence of "truths," he acknowledges the insufficiency of his words to convey them. Meanwhile,

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[3] Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002) 90.

[4] Jeremy Hooker, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2001) 89.

[5] Lewis, "Prologue: The Grinder," *Raiders' Dawn and Other Poems* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1942) 11.

however, he has placed himself at the service of apprehending the other; neither he nor "the vision" is inviolable, but in their constant grappling they have become parts of one another. The very process of sharpening his language prevents "The perfect statement," because there is no way to extricate himself from his statement.

I have also employed the lens of postcolonial theory where appropriate, particularly when examining Lewis's writing from India. Conceptions of otherness underlie colonial discourse and postcolonial theory to the point that, as Kirsti Bohata suggests, "the colonial other" is "perhaps the best-known and possibly the most overused concept in postcolonial studies." This concept also encourages a kind of monadism, she argues: "One disadvantage to the concepts of 'the other'—or even 'the Other'—is that such discussion tends inevitably towards the homogenization of *the* other."[6] I would add that a homogenized other leads to a homogenized self, unable to address variation within the community or the individual. Because Lewis does not write a unified self, however, his rendering of the colonial other is as varied as the self's responses to it. His writing from India, in fact, always returns to the self and the landscape of the psyche.

My greatest debt, therefore, is to Freudian psychoanalytic theory. This, too, destroys illusions of self-ownership and control, of solid ground from which to see and speak of others. As Nancy Chodorow explains, "Psychoanalysis radically undermines notions about autonomy, individual choice, will, responsibility, and rationality, showing that we do not control our own lives in the most fundamental sense. It makes it impossible to think about the self in any simple way, to talk blithely about the individual."[7] This complication of the self begins with the very delineation of selfhood:

> On the physical level, the infant comes to be unproblematically aware of its own boundaries and separateness. On the affective level, as the infant defines a self out of the mother–child matrix, the early flux of projections and

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[6] Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2004) 18, 19.

[7] Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 154.

> introjections ensures that some aspects of that self are likely to have originally been perceived or experienced as aspects of the primary other or others, and aspects of the other may have originally been felt as aspects of the self.[8]

Though the infant's perception of its image in the mirror initiates further development of self-identification, this "primordial form" of selfhood "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone."[9] That is, identification is directed toward an external figure "at once somehow part of ourselves—we *identify* with it—and yet not ourselves, something alien."[10] Consequently, simplistic monadism is untenable:

> The development of the psychic structure begins with this basic self-feeling and self-structure, which includes relatedness to and aspects of the other, and it continues through internalizations and splittings-off of internalized self–other representations to create an inner world consisting of different aspects of an "I" in relation to different aspects of the other.[11]

What Chodorow's comments highlight is not simply a dependence on the other for self-definition. They make clear that the self begins in a position of loss, of constantly and disturbingly shifting signification. The other serves as a reminder of the self's precariousness. W. D. Thomas hints at Lewis's awareness of this dilemma when he laments that "It is not easy to make a static and consistent portrait of this restless, eager, questing poetic nature, that wants to be itself but knows it can only be so by losing itself in others."[12]

Lewis's writing of the crisis of the self is certainly a function of its time, historically as well as psychologically motivated. The narrator of "Lance-Jack" reflects,

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[8] Chodorow 157.

[9] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 2.

[10] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 143.

[11] Chodorow 157.

[12] W. D. Thomas, rev. of *Letters from India,* by Alun Lewis, *Welsh Review* 6.1 (1947): 69.

> Millions are facing it in Europe, in a much acuter form than I. I am not hungry, nor ill-clothed and shod. But the Poles, the Balts, the Germans in the Balkans and Russian Poland, and the refugees, they are bewildered by this nightmare of strangeness, of newness, broken homes, useless qualifications, forced labour, distance.[13]

What this awareness of the moment reveals, however, is that the people in question are in fact becoming unhomed in history. Their relationship to their constitutive past has been called into question, and thus they have become strangers to themselves. The process of unhoming in numerous contexts recurs throughout Lewis's work and lends itself to interpretation through Freud's conception of *das Unheimliche,* the uncanny—"that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[14] Lewis writes almost obsessively of subjects uneasy even in their home communities, of people made strange to themselves by the circumstances thrust upon them and the actions required of them. Even as they cling to their old selves, they feel the solidity of these evaporating; they no longer know how to act as themselves. Nicholas Royle explains the relevance of the uncanny to such writing:

> It is impossible to think about the uncanny without this involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one's own experience. But it is also impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self.[15]

It is not simply the other that creates "strangeness"; it is the situation of the self with or in the other, and the discovery of the other in the self. What was comfortable and familiar becomes remote and unfamiliar, and what ought to be strange seems eerily familiar. For all that the subject defines selfhood through the other, the intrusion of too much otherness into conscious life leads the subject to declare that "Sometimes I think I've lost myself."[16]

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[13] Lewis, "Lance-Jack," *Collected Stories,* ed. Cary Archard (Brigend: Seren, 1990) 64.

[14] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955) 220.

[15] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 16.

[16] Lewis, letter, 8 December 1940, *Letters to My Wife,* ed. Gweno Lewis (Brigend: Seren, 1989) 79.

The reader will undoubtedly notice that I take great care to distinguish authorial from narrative action, ruthlessly separating the "Lewis" who writes from the "speaker" who observes and feels. This distinction may seem over-nice, but I have embraced it with the intention of counterbalancing what I perceive to be the almost exclusively biographical bent in existing Lewis criticism. The only published book-length study of Lewis is a biography incorporating critical analysis, and it did not appear until 1984. Many other critics feel they must sacrifice valuable space to biographical information thanks to Lewis's relative obscurity; the writer cannot assume that readers outside Wales will even have heard of him. It is true, too, that Lewis does not seem to have looked far beyond his immediate experience for inspiration, and that some of his work can be particularly obscure when read without the aid of biography. It is hardly unreasonable to read certain characters in Lewis's stories, for example, as avatars of the author. It seems also that Lewis's life story holds an irresistibly romantic appeal for some critics; textual criticism gains a dramatic boost from the recurring image of a melancholy young lover hastening toward his inevitable death by way of the inscrutable Orient. "I like your letters Alun," Lynette Roberts wrote in 1941, "but I should be frightened if you came too near. I might fall in love with you, I might be disillusioned."[17] The temptation to draw too near to "Alun" appears to me at times to have posed a similar challenge to the necessary detachment of his critics.

I have chosen, for reasons both practical and philosophical, to exclude biography as much as possible from my reading of Lewis's writing. First, I feel simply that the biographical approach has been done. It is not clear to me that, barring new revelations, Lewis's personal history can tell us any more about his writing than it already has. Numerous scholars, John Pikoulis in particular, have documented Lewis's life and its textual relevance with a thoroughness for which current and future scholars must be grateful. What has not existed

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[17] Lynette Roberts, letter to Lewis, qtd. in John Pikoulis, "Lynette Roberts and Alun Lewis," *Poetry Wales* 19.2 (1983) 14.

until now is a full-length critical study of Lewis's work. Perhaps more importantly, it seems to me that a zealous search for correspondence between life and art carries the danger of concealing as much as it illuminates if it leads the critic to overlook details of the art. Over-reliance on biography can result in disturbingly teleological readings that place the writing at the service of predetermined historical trajectories.[18] Furthermore, the incautious critic stands in danger not only of interpreting the literature in a manner over-restricted by biography, but of reading the text *primarily* as a vehicle for interpreting the person who wrote it. To treat the author's work as a window into the life of the author denies the writer's agency; the act of writing even the most transparently autobiographical work is not only a process of representation but one of mediation, of intervention. I treat as axiomatic the proposition that all writing is constructed for an audience—even if that audience is largely imaginary, even if the reader cannot identify the author's intended audience—and that therefore all writing is in some sense performative. It is the performance, in short, that interests me. I have not attempted to consider the writing in a complete vacuum, nor certainly do I advocate a return to the textual fetishization of the New Criticism.[19] Nevertheless it is worth recalling Ransom's assertion that

> A good poem, even if it is signed with a full and well-known name, intends as a work of art to lose the identity of the author; that is, it means to represent him not actualized, like an eye-witness testifying in court and held strictly by zealous counsel to the point at issue, but freed from his juridical or prose self and taking an ideal or fictitious personality.[20]

While I have kept biographical and historical context in mind to avoid anachronism and other blunders, I have preferred to focus on the "work of art"—the process and the product of Lewis's labor. Even though the question of the self is on one level very personal, it is also, after all, literary.

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[18] See Pikoulis, "Journeying towards the End," *Planet* 113 (1995); e.g., "his finest (and last) poem, 'The Jungle', which serves as both retrospect and summation of his life" (102).

[19] Eagleton 42.

[20] John Crowe Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous," *The World's Body* (New York: Scribner, 1938) 2.

To the end of drawing conclusions about Lewis's writing, I have employed not only his published poems and stories but a number of unpublished stories and a variety of letters. Lewis's early work in many cases remains unpublished for good reason; nevertheless it is frequently intriguing and instructive, complementing and expanding the focus of his published body of work. Much of it, too, has received almost no critical attention. I have chosen to regard Lewis's letters as literary texts due to both his evident mastery of the form and the sheer scale of his epistolary output. No matter how busy his life became, Lewis maintained an impressive volume and quality of correspondence. Because Lewis poured so much of his imaginative and communicative effort into his letters, it behooves the critic to devote ample attention to them. The textual importance of the letters also hinges on their performative nature, as Pikoulis suggests:

> Lewis's letters to his parents are not where he usually expresses his deepest thoughts. They are couched in terms he believed would appeal to them, less what he wanted to say than what he imagined they wanted to hear. They are written out of his love (and respect) for them and are not without interest but they nonetheless require careful interpretation. Perhaps most people frame their correspondence in this way, adjusting their remarks to suit the known interests and personalities of their recipients.[21]

Lewis himself supports this reading when he muses, "You said write gravely or otherwise but both moods seem unreal and the only true mood is when I'm not communicating with anything or anybody, almost not with myself."[22] If all communication is equally "unreal," the letters provide broadening insight into the continuum of Lewis's authorial choices, offering further variety of syntax and representation. Their directedness highlights again the contingency of selfhood: that identity forms in response to, and is performed for, others.

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[21] Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire," *Welsh Writing in English* 8 (2003): 103.

[22] Lewis, letter to Christopher Cheney, June 1937, National Library of Wales Alun Lewis ms. 23, ff. 47–48.

1. Home Thoughts: The Self in Community

Ned Thomas, in response to Saunders Lewis's portrait of the writer as belonging to and writing for an "organic community," asks: "Are we not all on some cultural border, in some historical interstice, exiles, marginals, members of diasporas, living at some interface, and more so in Wales perhaps than in many places?"[1] It is the central contention of this chapter that Alun Lewis, far from writing from or about any such "organic community," maintains a troubled but fertile creative position in the interstices cited by Thomas. The particular circumstances of his life and philosophy ensured that comparatively little of Lewis's published work engages with Wales or with Welsh characters in their home communities. As a result this chapter will make substantial use of Lewis's unpublished early, often experimental, writing, much of which appears to have been written after Lewis returned to south Wales following university at Aberystwyth and Manchester and began to train his imagination upon the life he observed there. An inescapable motif emerges in Lewis's poems and stories dealing with Welsh life: community is constantly figured as other—at times beguiling, bewildering, attractive, or altogether hostile.

A reading of the best-known of Lewis's Welsh poems will set out many of the tensions explored in this chapter. "The Mountain over Aberdare" underlines the poet's solitude while also demonstrating his intimate familiarity with his community. John Pikoulis calls the poem "a classic of separation."[2] The very first line of the poem places the speaker in an exalted, removed location, albeit one bearing the marks of other hands. "From this high quarried ledge" he observes the village below in detail, in one sentence stretched over twenty-five lines.[3] He introduces the village first as "The place for which the Quakers once / Collected clothes"

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[1] Ned Thomas, "Parallels and Paradigms," *Welsh Writing in English*, ed. M. Wynn Thomas, A Guide to Welsh Literature 7 (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2003) 314.

[2] Pikoulis, "The Poetry of the Second World War," *British Poetry, 1900–50: Aspects of Tradition*, ed. Gary Day and Brian Docherty (New York: St. Martin's, 1995) 200.

[3] Alun Lewis, *Raiders' Dawn and Other Poems* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1942) 87–88. Subsequently cited as *RD*.

and then as "my fathers' home," the order resulting in an immediate defamiliarizing of "home." Indeed, even this use of the genitive avoids establishing the speaker's own relationship to the place, which is finally mentioned in line 4 as "*Our* stubborn bankrupt village" (emphasis added). This tentative approach results in what M. Wynn Thomas calls a "detached sense of attachment."[4]

The scene observed below is not the sort that traditionally inspired poetry. The initial description emphasizes the tired, slatternly properties of the village: "sprawled" in its valley, it boasts "drab streets," "Derelict workings," and "tips of slag." After a few lines showing the effects of human habitation, Lewis introduces the inhabitants themselves. "Gospellers and gamblers" share the tips, while children are now "scrutting" for coal because their fathers are no longer paid to mine it. The collier digs not in the pit, but in the earth of his allotment, "While engines hack the coal within his brain" and remind him mercilessly of his former identity. The speaker-poet's omniscience here reflects his own awareness of the collier's circumstances. The next few lines, however, reassert his alienation from the narrow piety of "Grey Hebron in a rigid cramp" as well as the other focal points of contemporary civic life. Competing houses of worship exist side by side in line 14, in the form of the church and the "White cheap-jack cinema." The church, in contrast to the "Rigid cramp" in which the chapel holds its congregation, lies decadently "Stretched like a sow beside the stream." After this depiction of the village, the presence of "mourners" seems only fitting. The detail of their "Sunday best" and the "tiny funeral" they attend quickly gives way, though, as the speaker's view expands outward again to the sound of the mourners' hymns, following the rising of mist from the fields back to the uplands. He labels both the hymns and the rain "insidious," equally difficult to keep out and, through their familiarity, always trying to pull him back into the life of the village.

As the speaker's gaze shifts upward, the rain itself "rises" impossibly

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[4] M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference: Twentieth-Century Writing in Wales* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1992) 37.

> Till all the upland gorse is drenched
> And all the creaking mountain gates
> Drip brittle tears of crystal peace;

the encompassing rain offers a sad benediction and a fragile peace. Neither appears useful to the women below who "in a curtained parlour . . . hug / Huge grief, and anger against God." In shifting suddenly to an omniscient perspective, seeing beyond the curtains and into the hearts of the women, the speaker demonstrates his intimate knowledge of that parlour world. It is familiar to him, yet he remains on the mountain.

The mood changes almost imperceptibly in the next stanza as "the dusk, more charitable than Quakers, / Veils the cracked cottages with drifting may / And rubs the hard day off the slate." Displaying the scene in a new light (or, more accurately, a new dark), the dusk has changed from "jaded" to "charitable," obscuring the evidence of misery where the Quakers' charity would emphasize it. It is not clear, however, from whom the dusk hides the signs of poverty, or for whose benefit. Is the darkness a kindness to the villagers? To mountainside observers who would prefer not to witness such pain? As dusk "veils" the village, the scene gains symbolic depth. The colliers held "still with tales," momentarily transported from the "ashtip" on which they are "squatting," become the disciples to the "white frock that floats down the dark alley" and "Looks just like Christ." The speaker does not name or describe the wearer of the white frock or mention where she is going, but for a moment, by his words, she is sanctified and imbued with purity. But with "the clink of coins" that "Suggests the thirty pieces of silver," the gamblers quickly betray that glimpse of holiness—and betray also, perhaps, their own potential and that of the community. Further, Jeremy Hooker writes, "A more familiar idea would be that of a community betrayed by the economic and political forces that caused the Depression, but Lewis's imagery suggests rather an inner betrayal, which the poet [. . .] is also conscious of in himself."[5]

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[5] Hooker, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2001) 75.

The speaker returns to the forefront in the closing three lines, which contain observations unmistakably subjective:

> I watch the clouded years
> Rune the rough foreheads of these moody hills,
> This wet evening, in a lost age.

The poet becomes a prophet, transported outside this time as well as place to watch "the clouded years" leave their mark on the hills and the people who will continue to inhabit them. From this vantage point he observes the passage of time on a geological scale, and he senses the full indifference of the earth to the particular sufferings of the 1930s. He stands simultaneously within the village's present, alluding unambiguously to "this wet evening," one of many such evenings in "a lost age." The speaker's observations of the village remain almost unremittingly bleak, and the final identification of his portrait as belonging to "a lost age" does not encourage optimism. It is unclear whether the speaker, standing on the edge of that particular time and place, feels himself to be "lost" as well. The poem's mood is calm, that of a benediction and farewell.

This poem has proved a touchstone for critics eager to describe the place of the Welsh writer in English generally, and Lewis in particular. The spatial relations employed in the poem draw attention not only to the speaker but to the poet as observer. Thomas calls it "very much a place poem, but written by a partly displaced person."[6] For Tony Brown, "It is, clearly, a poem in which Lewis not only considers the village but also measures his own relation to it."[7] Alluding to the poem's title, Pikoulis observes that "the subject of the poem is not the suffering of a Welsh mining valley but the suffering of a poet as observed through the related suffering of a Welsh mining valley."[8] Critics note in particular the solitary nature of

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[6] Thomas, *Internal Difference* 37.

[7] M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown, "Colonial Wales and Fractured Language," *Nations and Relations: Writing across the British Isles*, ed. Tony Brown and Russell Stephens (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2001) 86.

[8] Pikoulis, "'East and East and East': Alun Lewis and the Vocation of Poetry," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 63 (1978): 47.

the speaker-poet's stance and assert its importance while suggesting its cost. "If his position partly signifies his inability to be completely *of* the valley and its people," Thomas writes, "it also indicates his responsibility both to mediate his community to the world beyond and to see it in a wider social context."[9] Unfortunately, "his very activity as an observer carries with it the secret message that he is now a lonely, alienated being."[10] Brown notes in particular how the poem's varied linguistic registers indicate the speaker's belonging to the community but also set him apart; while "cwm" and "scrutting" reflect local usage, "purvey" is "manifestly not a word current in the valleys of south Wales."[11] Hooker's interpretation is particularly insightful; he notes the dearth of sound in the poem and emphasizes the speaker's aural isolation: "The place is dumb; its silence is like distance, a great distance between the place and the poet on the mountain. It is a silence which he fills with his deeply troubled, alienated view. Nothing speaks to him with its own meaning, its value within the community. No voice sounds in the poem except the poet's own."[12]

In the interest of contextualizing that voice, a brief biographical interlude may prove useful. Lewis, from the first, experienced a life very different from that known by his village contemporaries in Cwmaman. His father was a Welsh-speaking Nonconformist from the valleys who had briefly worked in the pit before becoming a teacher.[13] Gwladys Lewis had been a teacher as well, but her history was otherwise distinct; her father was a Unitarian preacher in charge of a progressive English-speaking congregation in Aberdare. According to John Pikoulis, Mrs Lewis "was regarded by her neighbours as an intellectual and a feminist, ahead of her time." She insisted that the children learn to make their own minds, away from the stifling moral climate of the chapel (*Life* 9, 12, 13). Lewis thus grew up already separate from the working-class community and the children with whom he attended school. Winning

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[9] Thomas, *Internal Difference* 51.

[10] Pikoulis, "East": 40.

[11] Thomas and Brown 87; see also Pikoulis, "East": 41.

[12] Hooker 18.

[13] Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991) 11. Subsequently cited as *Life*.

a scholarship to Cowbridge Grammar School in the very year of the General Strike served as, in Wynn Thomas's words, "the drastic fulfilment and finalization of the process of separation from his native society."[14]

Lewis instead made creative incursions into the Welsh working class and village life, this gesture reflecting a fundamental identity crisis resulting from the combination of socialist, egalitarian impulses and a lack of close community to which apply them. The precise degree to which Lewis understood that community appears open to debate. Dai Smith argues,

> The actual detail of what was happening in Aberdare—the victimisation of militant miners, pit closures, an unemployment rate that stuck way into double figures, jazz bands, riots and, more to the point, huge, orderly demonstrations against the Means Test were, except in his sympathetic interest, derived from newspaper stories, outside his experience. Indeed he was developing fictional techniques to explore this material before he knew the life himself.[15]

Similarly, Roland Mathias allows that Lewis absorbed a measure of socialism despite his knowing "very little of Wales except from the edge of the academic and middle-class cocoon his family had provided for him."[16] It is possible, however, that such construals of Lewis's circumstances rely over-much on caricature of the middle class. Harri Webb points out that "The uniform streets of Cwmaman proclaim a one-class community, whatever diversity of standards and occupations they may contain" and that "One pit in particular, the nearest to Alun Lewis's childhood home, had a specially bad record, one fall a week." For this reason,

> Alun Lewis grew up knowing, as a child knows, maimed and crippled men, men drowning in dust, women driven witless by sudden grief, school-fellows without fathers, families without hope, a village living on its nerves, waiting for the hooter. *Ki tant ne set, ne l'ad prod entendut.* One would have to be an absolute swine to grow up in such an environment and not become some sort of rebel.[17]

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[14] Thomas, *Internal Difference* 37.

[15] David Smith, "The Case of Alun Lewis: A Divided Sensibility," *Llafur* 3.2 (Spring 1981): 17.

[16] Roland Mathias, *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales P, 1987) 95.

[17] Harri Webb, "Alun Lewis: The Lost Leader," *Poetry Wales* 10.3 (1975): 119.

The ongoing economic crisis of the coalfield and the internationalist, radical flavor of its politics could not but make some impression; his parents, Pikoulis writes, "were politically conscious and he showed an early interest in education, housing and the poor" (*Life* 16). As the depression deepened, his family would leave for their holidays in Penbryn during the early hours of the morning so as not to draw attention to their comparative prosperity.[18] "Profound social guilt" also made him ashamed to wear his Cowbridge blazer in Cwmaman, where boys his age looked unsuccessfully for work (*Life* 27, 17). It is not, therefore, unreasonable to speculate that Lewis's social history informed his literary engagements with the class system in which he had been implicated by birth and education, or that the tenuous position occupied by many of his speakers and characters with respect to their communities reflects many of Lewis's own anxieties. It is difficult to forget that, in Pikoulis's words,

> It is this ledge on the mountainside so memorably fixed for us by "The Mountain over Aberdare" that is present, metaphorically or otherwise, in Lewis's work thereafter [. . .]. It is as if, knowing himself to be divided, he either could not resolve the decision or was prepared to leave it unresolved, moving from one to the other side as time or the occasion demanded. Whichever it was, he was left to manage a tension that proved to be very fruitful in his work, though at very great cost to himself.[19]

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Where does the self belong? One's home community, however defined, forms a valuable (and perhaps inevitable) identifying context, whether one embraces it or rebels against it. But as the comments above suggest, one can belong and yet not belong, needing and also mistrusting its normative influence. The result can be a signification limbo. Lewis describes this predicament in a letter from Penbryn:

> I was infernally pleased to leave Aberdare and get here again. I stagnate in Aberdare. My chief companions absent and alive only in retrospect, and the dreary, hopeless spirit of a derelict area creeping further and further into my consciousness. And I do nothing but look at it all. If I could get stuck into it

[18] Jacqueline Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," diss., U of London, King's College, 1971, 13.

[19] Pikoulis, "East": 50.

> like Mother, and potter about Unemployed clubs and get little shillings from all sorts of people for the fattening of skinny child-legs and expectant mothers —but I'm miles away from them all. They wouldn't have me hanging around and I'm afraid I feel no overpowering call to hang around.[20]

That mutual dubiety, the awareness of need and concurrent helplessness, the urge to "look at it all"—all these characterize Lewis's writing about the self in the Welsh community. This section examines issues of belonging, including the meeting of class interests within individuals, the crisis of masculinity brought about by feelings of impotence, the seeming unreality of the self's chosen or assigned role, and the double-edged importance of education and respectability in the negotiation of selfhood.

1.1

A common theme in Lewis's early work concerns the uneasy intersections of working-class and middle-class life in South Wales. A number of characters find themselves serving as uncomfortable bridges—socially, economically, even bodily—between conflicting class expectations. Caught as they are in shifting contexts, they lose sight of boundaries of self and other and encounter considerable difficulty performing their class-encoded roles.

The short story "Squibs for the Guy" delineates expected oppositions and power relationships and subsequently destabilizes them. The working-class children Elwyn and David view their landlord, come to demand the rent again, as larger than life: "He rose slowly out of the corner chair and in the dim light he seemed to be getting bigger and bigger until his head went through the ceiling and his arms stretched out through the door and the window."[21] By comparison, the landlord's small son, Daniel, sits "in Granny's chair in the darkest corner, his feet miles from the ground," so insignificant that Elwyn does not at first see him. Elwyn immediately proffers rough hospitality in the form of an invitation to David to help construct the guy the boys are making, but Daniel seems shy and embarrassed, saying

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[20] Lewis, letter to Christopher Cheney, undated [summer 1936], National Library of Wales Alun Lewis ms. 23, ff. 23–24.

[21] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, ed. Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren, 1990) 277. Subsequently cited as *CS*.

nothing. Despite Daniel's relatively secure social position, Elwyn is the one standing on his own turf; Daniel has been wrong-footed precisely because the literal turf belongs to his father. David's question to Daniel, "Our Mam's in the cemet'ry [. . .]. Is yours?" (*CS* 278), further confuses matters, positing deceased mothers as the social norm. Meanwhile, the boys' fathers have been enacting a very different set of power relations: as Mr Gummer enters the back shed where the boys have been working, textual clues make it clear to the reader that the family has been evicted. Unable to help significantly, and called by his father to "come on this instant" (*CS* 278), Daniel utters his only speech of the story. "'Here's for squibs,' he whispered furtively, and ran to join his father" (*CS* 279). Without his father's knowledge, he gives the boys the thrupence they need for squibs, demonstrating that he has been listening carefully all along. In his generosity he differs pointedly from his father, who, though rattling coins in his pocket, gives the boys nothing (*CS* 277). The little Daniel can do for the boys becomes a small act of rebellion against his father and his place in the social hierarchy.

The eponymous heroine of "Edith's Night Out" adds a self-consciously performative element to her bridging of class divides. As she prepares to meet a local doctor's son, working-class Edith's toilette includes meticulous washing, scent of lavender, and a costume consisting of "voile frock," "lizard skin shoes," and "new silk stockings."[22] She seems careful to demonstrate her quality. All the same, "she dreaded being seen" ("Edith" 2): she meets the boy at the bottom of the street, perhaps to prevent him knowing too much about her background, and perhaps even more to avoid awkward questions from her parents. An exchange between Edith and her date reveals the intersecting class and gender issues at stake for her:

> "Shall we walk?" he said tentatively.
> "Alright," she answered. "Only not where there's people."
> "Why? Are you afraid of being seen?"
> "I don't like them looking," she said awkwardly.
> He laughed, a proper man's laugh.
> "You are a funny kid," he said. "I don't care who sees us."

[22] Lewis, "Edith's Night Out," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 2, 1, 9. Subsequently cited as "Edith."

> She went hot. Of course he didn't care. Why should he? His father a doctor and himself going to the Grammar School, he needn't care. They had a chauffeur to drive their car. But people would say "Look at him with that skivvy. What's he after, I wonder?" She wished she hadn't come, she felt so *common*. Of course he didn't care. ("Edith" 3)

The two walk out together in a world that will allow their intercourse only on certain terms; being seen with the well-connected middle-class boy would automatically reflect poorly on Edith's character. The boy himself, and later his aunt, do not seem nearly as conscious of this disparity as the disapproving working-class representatives Edith imagines, including her own aunt. Edith so strictly upholds the class system on their behalf that they hardly need to be.

In a silly but telling moment, he bestows her name upon a street she admires but has never visited, one he has previously taken for granted. The scene formalizes her ability to make him see the world differently (and also humorously reverses the usual convention by which the poor are privileged to boast such posh-sounding addresses as "Prince Consort Street"). It also reveals that, until this point, he has not actually known her name. "Everybody" ("Edith" 6), on the other hand, knows his. The relative visibility of each increases the significance of her desire not to be seen, to remain invisible. Having a face in his company means being associated more strongly than ever with her social role: while his role is to be the doctor's son with the recognizable name, hers is to be "that skivvy."

The boy's difference both enhances his desirability and renders him irrevocably off-limits. As they walk through the park together, she reminisces that "She'd been through the maze with that boy from the greyhounds, last week. Horrid creature he'd been. . . . " ("Edith" 4). While kindness and decency adhere to no class in particular, Edith's revulsion toward "that boy from the greyhounds" may make her particularly susceptible to well-bred solicitude. Responding to her mother's illness, "His voice was so kind she knew she loved him" ("Edith" 6). But when Edith learns that the "big house" they walk past belongs to his uncle, "She felt crushed and ashamed. She had no business to be with him; it was no good" ("Edith" 7). She reaches this conclusion despite some earlier moments of genuine sympathy between them; even during these, the narrative shows them laughing "like naughty children," a simile

indicative of social transgression. Edith knows, or thinks she knows, that their identities are inexorably tied up in their social positions: thus, when he invites her into his uncle's house, she refuses, "terrified." He goes to the house to deliver a letter, leaving her outside:

> If she stretched on her toes she could see over the wall, through the stems of the privet. He was standing in the porch, the yellow hall light framing his dear white face. [. . .]
>
> "Darling," she murmured, pressing her lips against the cold rough stone. Then the lady came into the beam of light, a tall grey-haired person—Mrs Masterman it was, the colliery owner's wife. She had given the prizes away at the Central School sports, the year Edith was there. ("Edith" 8)

The barrier between Edith and the boy has now become literal, and largely by Edith's choosing. Invited to meet the boy's aunt, she runs away, unable to contemplate adjusting her social relationship to the colliery owner's wife. Despite her careful preparations for her night out, Edith lacks confidence in her costume and cannot imagine herself outside her accustomed role.

The difficulty of bridging class divides while maintaining a unified self serves as a central theme of "The Miner's Son." Meirion Edwards, the protagonist to whom the title refers, occupies a position fairly common in Lewis's writings of the pre-war period—that of the young man from a working-class background whose university education has removed him from his community in more ways than one. Divided among conflicting desires, loyalties, and expectations, he faces the task of coming to terms with a hybrid self that will never fall easily into existing categories. Likewise, though to a lesser degree, the Settlement worker Muriel Benson finds that her good intentions and conscious choices will not suffice to afford her an unambiguous place in the poverty-stricken community.

Meirion and Muriel, as well-meaning, educated people who find it difficult to communicate with the miners, share a helplessness in the face of ideologies that seem to exclude their own existence. Muriel finds herself brought up short against the "stone wall" of Mr Edwards's certainty: "There's only two classes, see? We're one and you're the other."[23]

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[23] Lewis, "The Miner's Son," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 10. Subsequently cited as MS.

Whatever her intentions, Muriel is indeed implicated in the capitalist exploitation of people like Mr Edwards; the benefits she has enjoyed—boarding school, Cambridge, hiking holidays in Germany—have come to some degree at the expense of the working class. Meirion precisely underlines their economic relationship as he relates to her his sister's history: "She joined the staff of a very nice, swish hotel—perhaps you've stayed there—and they treated her like a scullion and did her lungs a world of harm" (MS 12). But Mr Edwards's strict dichotomy—"we're one and you're the other"—also leaves out his own son, who is torn between the expectations of each class—or, as his father would have it, is "so broad-minded you might as well not 'ave a mind at all" (MS 10).

Meirion and Muriel take to meeting on the mountain between the Settlement and Meirion's village of Brynbeeg. In this comparatively neutral space, they can share their insecurities and ambivalences. The first occasion comes just after Muriel has met Meirion and his family and experienced Mr Edwards's vision of a bifurcated society. Upon the mountain, Meirion recites some lines of his own poetry, and while he displays some embarrassment in admitting they are his, he clearly intends for Muriel to know him as a poet and lover of nature, as someone set apart from the materialist milieu of his upbringing. His derivative nature poetry, so unconnected to anything else in his life, serves as a form of escapism, even rebellion. In many of his trysts with Muriel, "They talked of plays, and paintings, and flowers and books" (MS 26). When Muriel feels discouraged in her attempts to teach Shakespeare to unemployed miners, she suggests that Meirion would succeed better because he writes poetry: "They try so hard, [. . .] and yet it's all as flat as ditch water. Probably it's my fault that they don't see how beautiful it is" (MS 19). If she also thinks that his shared cultural connection to the men would help him teach them, she refrains from saying so. Later they work together on a Settlement production of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*—a play that highlights the unreliable nature of social roles and identity for those involved. Meirion undoubtedly appreciates having someone with whom to discuss art and beauty, and most likely these serve as welcome topics of conversation because, as Mrs Edwards puts it, "I can't think of much in

Brynbeeg to talk about" (MS 29). They are also relatively safe subjects, mostly avoiding the class tension inherent in social and political discussion. The possibility of conflict is nevertheless always present.

In fact, Meirion's tempestuous relationship with Muriel embodies all the conflicts of their differing constitutive backgrounds, and each tends to reify the other's position: "Sometimes he seemed to identify her with the things that he hated. The unfairness of his attitude drove her to take up a conservative position and defend the prevailing economic system" (MS 41). Each appears to play an unavoidable role; next to him she is inevitably privileged and conservative, whatever connections she may wish to forge, and he is doomed to resent her supremacy. They seem caught up in Mr Edwards's dichotomy. But at other times the dynamic between them plays out differently: "Then she always gave him the comfort he found in her body. She could not withhold herself, despite her resentment at his frequent indifference, for she too needed his body, fanatically" (MS 41). They have found a shared physicality to complement their shared appreciation of poetry, giving the lie to the mind/body duality equated respectively with the middle and working classes and accomplishing instead a marriage of instinct and intellect.

Muriel also, however, acts as Meirion's middle-class patron and interpreter. "She knew that she was no anchor for his sensitive, changeable ways, and she accepted the fact, trusting that her father would get him settled in his new job soon. In Brynbeeg he seemed to have no centre" (MS 42). His self is always in flux, not quite belonging here or there, and always existing in opposition to something else. Muriel cannot be his "anchor" because he is simultaneously attracted to her and repelled by the class interests that meet in her and begin to act in him; he has become involved as much with her class as with the working class into which he was born. Muriel, too, understands the importance of economics for identity: once Meirion has a job, he will know who he is—or, more threateningly, he will know his place. His having a position will help to "settle" him as something she can understand. But other forces remain at work. Near the end of the story he receives his ticket to the middle class in

the form of a job offer arranged by Muriel's father, and he can scarcely take it in: "But £200—that was just a silly mistake. Why, all his family only had £80 a year" (MS 63). His unconscious self automatically refers to his upbringing for validation of this new information.

Complicating matters still further, Meirion has meanwhile developed a closer relationship to Menna, a childhood friend who understands him better than most in the community: "Though she talked little, there was a ripe stillness about her that gave him peace" (MS 30). Menna herself surpasses expectations of the working classes, having a musical taste "finer and more informed" than Meirion's; they enjoy listening to symphony concerts together on the wireless (MS 31). At the same time, he can accompany her to "a sixpenny hop" and, alongside his neighbors, forget his troubles in the pleasure of the dance (MS 46). Meirion clearly appreciates Menna physically as well. Upon her first appearance in the story Meirion "laughed and looked appraisingly at her ripening, graceful body, her firm round breasts pressed against her print frock, her strong thighs tight against her skirt, her fair, fresh cheeks and full lips, her rich, wavy, reddish-brown hair" (MS 31). Menna would seem to be the solution to Meirion's difficulties, neatly bridging his past and his future, but Lewis avoids the simple resolution. Meirion needs Muriel, also, to challenge his views and his very self-absorption. Lewis provides no description of Muriel comparable to that of Menna, either through Meirion's eyes or through the narrator's. Her body establishes itself in the text through verbs and participles: pressing "her face against a row of hollyhocks" (MS 3), flushing in discomfiture (MS 5), "taking his head in her lap, smoothing back his hair" (MS 18), shuddering with passion (MS 27). Muriel exists for Meirion not as a visual object but as an acting subject, the counterpart to his own.

1.2

Particularly notable in many of Lewis's stories of the pre-war period is the feeling of social, even physical, superfluity among those caught between conflicting social expectations. As many of his protagonists are young men coming into adulthood and attempting to forge an

acceptable identity for themselves, this feeling often plays into the characters' negotiations of masculinity in its various embodiments. One of the primary arenas for this struggle, in Lewis's work, is the search for suitable employment and the anxieties surrounding this search within the family and the community. Writing about male unemployment in the 1930s, David H. J. Morgan stresses that

> individuals and authorities were as much concerned with the generational order as with the gender order. Indeed, of course, the full meaning of the term "patriarchal" would indicate an overlap and interaction between the two. [. . .] Men did not want to find themselves, as a result of unemployment, dependent upon the earnings of children or wives and young adults did not wish to continue their dependence on parents.[24]

The young men about whom Lewis writes are searching for ways to "come into their own" independent of, and yet with reference to, their fathers and the patriarchal social order.

Meirion Edwards's difficulties are implicit in the title of his story, "The Miner's Son." For a tale of a young man's efforts to determine who he is, the title seems ironically definite. Meirion appears first through gossip, in the language of his neighbor, who clearly expresses her opinion of his worth in light of community expectations:

> "'E ought to be ashamed, two years idle with a proper B.A. [. . .] Though 'e'd 'ave some reason to crow if 'e could say the same as our Edgar—every week regular this last eight years Edgar 'ave brought 'ome 'is week's wages from the Coop grocery department—two pounds 'e laid on the kitchen table this very day, our Edgar did." (MS 2)

Mass unemployment and hardship mean that a man's worth will be measured in pounds and shillings, and Meirion's B.A. holds little value in that currency. This metric arises again later in the story. As Mr Edwards argues with the other men, the accomplishments of their sons become a point of contention in a public debate over competing masculinities. When Mr Edwards claims, "You've 'ad your knife into me ever since our Meirion licked your Ianto in the County School," Will Evans replies, "if 'e was earning 'alf as much as our Ianto 'e'd 'ave something to be proud of" (MS 47). Meirion's past academic accomplishments do not, in

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[24] David H. J. Morgan, *Discovering Men* (London: Routledge, 1992) 104–05.

themselves, contribute anything tangible to his family or to the community, and those tangible, measurable achievements make the man.

Similar predicaments appear in other stories. In "Strangers," the young man recounts how "I was doing nothing for a year. It's terribly hard, doing nothing, especially with all the whispering about that you should be doing something. People are very neighbourly in the mining valleys."[25] In an untitled story, Morlais accounts for his presence in London with the usual history: "I got fed up with staying at home, applying for jobs month after month." In London, he is "Trying to be independent, that's all, playing at being a man."[26]

Meirion himself admits that "I'm the Socialist's worst enemy—the unproductive member of Society" (MS 17). His repeated "failure" leads him not only to devalue himself but to experience a crisis of identity:

> I've applied for about two hundred jobs of all kinds, but I've hardly received a single acknowledgement of my applications. I suppose I should have taken any old thing—a bookie's clerkship or something—instead of going on like this—trying vainly to write and philosophise and drowning my failure by reading and running off to the mountain to brood and brood and brood. I've fed on my thoughts till I've eaten myself hollow. Sometimes I'm afraid my brain will curdle. It's all such a maze. I used to believe in goodness, in human perfectibility, in socialism, in progress. Now I don't know what I believe. I just don't know. I feel I've lost all my individuality, all my old self, all the little manners and characteristics by which people know me. (MS 16)

His poet's mind may not be pleased about it, but Meirion still defines his self-worth in the material terms of working-class masculinity. Given his material circumstances, he has to. Moreover, he realizes that he had previously derived his "individuality" from the very norms and cultural signifiers that would seem to operate against such self-definition. He complains to Muriel that "the past won't crystallise. It's always changing" (MS 21). Unable to construct a usable past for himself, he flounders in the present, taking on "a different shape, another significance" as easily as the past events he recalls. It falls to Muriel to remind him that "a

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[25] Lewis, "Strangers," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 3. Subsequently cited as "Strangers."

[26] Lewis, "He walked slowly up Fleet Street," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 10. Subsequently cited as "Fleet." Throughout this thesis, sentence-style capitalization is used for untitled works identified by first line.

steady job," prosaic as it sounds, will help him out of much of his difficulty, and "The rest will come in its own time" (MS 22).

Frequently the crisis of masculinity brought on by powerlessness is described in terms of impotence, both of an explicitly sexual variety and in terms of a more general lack of potency and influence. In "The Housekeeper," Myfanwy rebels against being trapped in the depressed valleys and laments that her husband will not leave: "Penry wouldn't stir himself out of it. He didn't fret and nag like Granny; he hadn't got her wicked turn of mind; no, there was just no fire in him" (*CS* 102). The spark dies out completely when the sow, the family's only independent source of income, dies while farrowing, and Myfanwy rebukes her husband with "Don't be such a woman" (*CS* 104). The protagonist of "Strangers" has failed after finally securing a job in a council school: "Very responsible post; they gave me the scholarship class, because I had an M.A. I'm afraid I wasn't equal to the occasion. Only three kids passed. Usually they get thirty into the county school." Because he knows that many of his pupils depended on entrance to the county school to escape the cycle of poverty, his self-loathing and sense of impotence run deep: "I used to say quite viciously I was in the same mess as Dad—being paid by the government for doing nothing" ("Strangers" 4). The problem of impotence is stated most explicitly in Morlais's story. For Morlais, London becomes finally a place where he can face the fears of the past, given expression in an old dream:

> He was peering through the dirty railings of the station yard at home. He was about ten years old, wearing a jersey and shorts, holes in his boots. The train came in, the workmen's train, bringing the colliers back from work. The platform was deserted. No one came out of the train when it stopped. He waited and waited, horror mounting. Then he forced himself to go onto the platform. The driver and the fireman lay crumpled and stiff on the footplate. Every compartment had its regulation twelve colliers, black with dust; red neckerchiefs, a block of wood on each lap, a tea jack and tin food box in each pocket. White teeth. White upturned eyes. Silent. ("Fleet" 24)

The manifold anxieties betrayed by this nightmare would seem to be those of one who fears the total annihilation of his past. Morlais dreads being left alone, helpless, waiting in vain for the familiar to re-establish itself. At the same time, of course, that past itself is part of the

threat; if Morlais returns, will he became part of that waking death? Only after he acknowledges his fears and admits them to be groundless can he prepare "to face himself" ("Fleet" 24). Only by forcing himself to admit aloud that he is "IMPOTENT" ("Fleet" 25) can he recognize his power over his fears and return home to make peace with the past.

Meirion experiences a dual impotence, as his socio-economic powerlessness manifests in sexual terms. When Muriel complains that "If you *did* think of me, truly, then you'd have taken me," he explains that sexual union will not be possible for him "until I feel whole inside myself"; Lewis adds that "There was a high note of disgust, of fear, in his voice" (MS 34). While so uncertain of himself, he finds her desire more intimidating than arousing and quite possibly mistrusts his own desire as well. Later in the story, while walking with Menna and his sister Hetty, he rediscovers a tree he had noted as a landmark years before, observing that "It's strange to remember something you've forgotten" (MS 51). Having at least temporarily regained his personal bearings, as symbolized by the tree, he makes love to Menna that very evening.

Meirion's sense of social impotence is perhaps even more profound. His mood darkens as winter approaches, but not only, he tells Muriel, because of his poetic sensibility: "How can I help it [. . .] when I see all the rickety kids shivering on their way home from school, and their fathers scratching like rats for coal among the slag heaps" (MS 39). The accelerated failure of his mother's health appears to make Meirion more conscious of relevant socio-political developments—the hunger marches and the king's visit to the valleys particularly capture his imagination—and increases his feelings of frustration: "His impotence irked him, and he was for ever railing to [Muriel] against the world's bad conscience" (MS 40).

Meirion continues to be haunted by an awareness of his own and the community's gendered expectations and the ways in which he largely fails to measure up. His father remains central, the figure against whom he measures himself in comparison or contrast. Muriel's initial impression of Meirion differs markedly from Lewis's description of Mr

Edwards: "He was a hard-faced man, stiff and heavy and big-boned. His thick brown moustache was untrimmed and tobacco-stained. A blue weal ran down his left cheek and his hands were knotted and rough with mining" (MS 9). In contrast, Muriel notes that Meirion is "Dark like his race, but not sallow, brown wavy hair and pale cheeks hollowing beneath high cheekbones, full-lipped mouth falling in a bitter slant at one corner." Moreover, she observes him reading with a "soft, contemplative look" (MS 4). In some ways each represents a physical type—Meirion the dreaming Celt, and Mr Edwards the rough and ready physical laborer. In particular, the "nervous fingers" with which Meirion turns the pages of his book (MS 4) set him apart from his father, whose hands bear the marks of his own profession.

When Mr Edwards becomes involved in a fight with three other men, Meirion can only watch helplessly, despite Menna's exhortation to assist his father. He joins in only after a policeman begins kicking his father "viciously" to subdue him (MS 48). The incident unnerves him deeply; as dissatisfied with himself as he has felt, becoming involved in a common street brawl has shaken his principles and his self-perception, and his hesitation has only underlined his marginal state. As he sits listlessly, Menna urges him to "take it like a man" (MS 50), but he cannot take her advice when his ideas of manhood have been undermined. Confusing him further, Mr Edwards has "been warmer towards Meirion since the fight" (MS 54). In addition to simple gratitude for Meirion's defense of him, Mr Edwards may well feel pride in an assertion of manhood both he and his adversaries can understand, a mode of masculinity Meirion thought he had rejected and of which his father feared him incapable. Summoned to court, Meirion imagines the local headline—"Stipendiary rebukes Graduate" (MS 53)—which encapsulates his own expectations for himself as well the community's expectations, that a graduate should be a law-abiding citizen and a productive member of society. He accepts that imaginary verdict, reasoning that "he knew himself for what he was, futile, useless, small-minded, immoral" (MS 53). The headline could as well read "Graduate rebukes himself." His imagination also now adds a public dimension to failings

that have previously been confined to back-garden gossip; his shortcomings become a matter of public record, confirmed for all the world, including himself, to see.

Lewis portrays Meirion's court appearance as somewhat dreamlike, any objective reality eluding Meirion more than usual. Meirion thinks of the crowd in the courtroom as "the audience" (MS 56), contributing to his sense of himself as being on display. Numerous conflicting representations of his actions and his character are on hand. The policemen from the fight talk to reporters, Will Evans, Mr Edwards's antagonist, gives evidence for the crown, and Menna also gives her version of events. Meirion becomes a passive, distanced observer: "He felt his body walk forward, and then he caught up with it and hovered impersonally over his head. He saw his face smile when the clerk charged him with maliciously assaulting an officer in the discharge of his duty" (MS 57). Significantly, he refuses to make a statement on his own behalf, waiving the right of self-representation. The Stipendiary thus concludes that Meirion's involvement in the fight was "a brutal act of sadism" (MS 57). If read as realism, this verdict would seem completely over the top; in effect, however, the Stipendiary delivers the verdict of Meirion's own mind: "I am not surprised that such an ill-controlled, unbalanced person as the defendant has shown himself to be has been unable to secure a responsible post. He has had the opportunity of a University education. Yet here he stands, shamelessly, having told a pack of lies that only make his unpardonable assault worse" (MS 57). In the aftermath, Meirion suffers something of a nervous breakdown.

The way forward for Meirion seems to lie in his antecedents. Meirion is "frightened out of his sickness" when a collier comes to the house with the news of his father's injury in a pit accident. To the direct question "Are you Tom Edwards's son?" he for once manages an unambiguous "Yes," thus returning to the self-identification made explicit by the story's title. Earlier, Muriel has reacted impatiently to Meirion's identity crisis with "you fool, you can't see yourself" (MS 23). Now, says Tom Edwards's fellow miner to Meirion, "He wants to see you all the time" (MS 64). What will he see? Having never known how to "see" his son, does Mr Edwards seek a final recognition (or re-cognition)? Arriving at the pit, however, Meirion

finds that his father's face has been smashed "beyond recognition" (MS 65), and while Mr Edwards attempts to focus his eyes on Meirion before they close again, it is impossible to know whether he succeeds. Meirion's appeal for recognition—"It's me, dad. It's alright, dad, it's me" (MS 65)—leaves ambiguous the central question of who he thinks he is.

1.3

Meirion's predicament finds echoes in other stories. For people caught between identities, the sense of play-acting in all spheres can undermine confidence in accepted realities, resulting in moments of surreal uncertainty. These moments do not confine themselves to class identity but extend to various and, in some cases, previously unexplored loci of selfhood. Lewis frequently depicts the body as the discernible site of identity crisis and uneasy blurrings of self/other boundaries.

"Interruption" shows Annie Mayhew being dared to "Open your legs" when the train passes beneath the railway bridge on which she stands: "She obeyed, and the train rushed through, whew, through her very legs, sucking her entrails out, emptying her, terribly. Her mouth was wide open but no sound came. Her lips quivered and her face was dead white" (*CS* 93). The "dead white" of her face finds its complement in the funeral procession passing by at that moment. For Annie, on the border of childhood and adulthood, the sensation of the train's passing not only echoes sexual awakening but brings into focus the everyday terrors of adult existence. During that exhilarating moment she becomes fully aware of the fear and grief surrounding her.

In "Alexander's Feast," Elizabeth departs from her usual "domestic habit" in going out with a young man who is "so much better than she": "He spoke more nicely and had naturally polite ways when she had to be always thinking how to behave; he was *educated*" (*CS* 364). Indeed, he alone calls her Elizabeth—"At home they called her Lizzie. The girls in the shop used to call her Bet" (*CS* 364)—because she has asked him to, as though she is trying out a new identity. Elizabeth is already acutely aware of her physical imperfections and is likely ill

with tuberculosis, and her interaction with the unnamed boy lends a new dimension to her awareness of her body. She and the young man go to the cinema to hear "Louis Burton, the world-famous organist, direct from his American tour, at the illuminated Mighty Wurlitzer" (*CS* 365). Having already ventured forth from her accustomed sphere she is possibly more receptive to the "power of music" referenced by the story's title:

> Louis Burton was playing again before she realised how—how *ugly* he was. Thin greased-back hair, red dome of a forehead, pointed sweaty face and hanging jowl; and as fat as he was tall. Oh, he was ugly. And he was playing so marvellously. The whole building was passionate with his playing. The deep bass chords burst inside her bowels, and when he chose to be sweet, it was like divine ambrosial honey in her mouth, sweet past bearing. He played Tiger Rag and her heart pulsed with daring, with oblivion to the consequences. He played the St. Louis Blues and the abandoned gutter-walking apathy of the theme melted her into an ecstasy of depraved morbid desires. And he was so ugly. His physical presence was a constant counterpoint to the music, drenching the tones and colours of it as lilac scents drench small gardens. It was revolting and irresistible, a foul fascination which brought the sweat out of her and made her body tense and sticky. And then, just then, as the fat stubby fingers made a single-minded Ophelia of her and compelled her body to lie willingly on the seductive smooth flow of the Blue Danube, just then she felt an arm come around her neck and move slowly, terribly slowly, and inevitably downwards, till the hand pressed over her breast. She closed her eyes, shuddering, and let her head fall sideways against his shoulder. When his finger tilted her head back her lips were waiting for him, half-parted. She thought she would die, so completely was her whole life caught up in that kiss. And inextricably fused with it was the image of that fat black-clothed figure, the padded shoulders moving up and down in obedience to the rhythm, the blue spotlight holding him relentlessly, like a fly pinned to a collector's card. She thought she would die. She *was*—yes, *dying*—she couldn't breathe. Oh God! She broke violently loose from the embrace and sat up, dizzy and sick and limp, lips sucking at the black stifling darkness for life. (*CS* 365–66)

Elizabeth feels herself on the brink of annihilation, no longer able to perceive the borders of her own body or to distinguish between beauty and ugliness, pain and pleasure. Her previously formed sense of self cannot process this degree of sensuous experience. In whatever sense she feels herself "dying," the experience has violated the careful limits she has placed upon her existence.

In "Strangers," an unnamed young man meets a university acquaintance in Aberystwyth several years after graduation. In the intervening time she has worked as a midwife in East London. They walk out along the cliffs, and, after he tells her about his long

search for employment in depressed South Wales and his collier father's permanent incapacity, they stop for lunch at a boarding house:

> The maid showed them into the breakfast room, where a white table cloth was laid on a heavy round walnut table, placed in the alcove formed by a bow window, overlooking the garden. While the maid came in and out with cutlery and plates they talked rather self-consciously of theatres and films and London. She told him about the East End, the tenements of Arabs and Chinese and Jews, and the casual way in which the poor breed offspring in the dirt. It all seemed unreal, a Mandeville tale, in the clean old room, quiet and prim, with the gilt mirror and slender bronze vases, the carved mahogany dresser and the dull faded prints of foxcubs and Burne-Jones virgins sleeping on the wall. Hanging from a hook over the door was a riding crop. ("Strangers" 7)

In this setting of carefully respectable artifice, no doubt designed to make their recent histories seem "unreal," the material facts of poverty and dirt are rendered as fantastic as Burne-Jones virgins. The protagonist appears unsure which context suits him better: having already admitted to difficulty settling back into life in the valleys, he seems equally unsure of himself here, uncomfortably aware of his surroundings and worried about the cost of lunch. He feels guilty for enjoying a day away from his home and from the worries that beset him there, not least because this "escape" has caused him to question all his perceptions: "'Well, being here, now,—it's so absolutely different from the kind of existence I've been leading for the last two years,' he said stumblingly. 'So different that it seems phantastic, insincere—Oh hell, I'm talking rot'" ("Strangers" 9). As they return toward town, he muses that soon the existence they have led for a few hours will be "vanished" ("Strangers" 13). He experiences a severe disorientation as a result of bodily removal from his signifying context.

The troubling questions of the self as it shifts from one encoded space to another are most thoroughly raised in the untitled story of Morlais, a collier's son who has come to London to seek his fortune as a reporter. Morlais clearly feels overwhelmed by London, which represents to him a vast uncontrollable other, offering confirmation of the self while also undermining and overwhelming it. He finds it difficult to conceptualize the city spatially in a way that brings it under control for him: "In his dizzy mind the Strand stretched into infinity, parallel lines never meeting, trudging feet swelling and swelling, filling with water." In the

next long paragraph he imagines himself bodily filling the interiors of Fleet Street, becoming one with the street, a controlling power:

> As there wasn't any water his mind fluttered off into wondering whether he *really* wanted to be inside, sitting at a desk, proof-reading, cutting, dictating letters, advising applicants for reporting jobs, interviewing celebrities. Not inside one single building, of course; inside them all, inside the whole street of them at the same time. The idea of it went to his head like air into a balloon. He felt amorphous and potent and immense, a controlling genius whose influence directed every movement and decision in the Street. ("Fleet" 1)

But he quickly rejects this vision, deciding that he—literally—does not fit in: "He didn't want to be inside Fleet Street, he decided; not really; nor outside, either, for the haste and bustle of it bruised and inflamed his fatigue" ("Fleet" 1).

The mood of this story, clearly, leans toward the phantasmagoric. Morlais is a narrator on the edge, unreliable and always questioning ideas of reliability. He walks to Covent Garden, "But when he got to the Opera House it wasn't there. Something had gone wrong; nothing serious, of course; merely the transubstantiation of a row of boarding houses for an Opera House. Well, that was Lichine's affair, and Beecham's. He didn't mind. He was quite as well-suited with the row of boarding houses" ("Fleet" 2). In Morlais's mind, he is not lost; London has got mixed up.

Morlais quickly discovers other ways to lose himself. The idea of the city's promise comes back to him as he sits in a milk bar, "tasting the delicious coldness of the glass with his fingertips and thinking how beautiful and *rich* the brimming glassful was. Rivers of milk in the half-light; another twopence and there'd be honey on the table, too." This reflection is immediately cut short by another fantasy, when the stench of a tramp entering the bar causes Morlais temporarily to lose track of the boundaries of self and to imagine himself consumed by rot: "The stink seemed to come from his innards; like the Sunday services in the school chapel in the old days, when the vicar cried out that there is no health in us and he felt his bowels decomposing into a pitchy slime, black and foul, which stank in his nostrils just like this" ("Fleet" 4). As he tries to drink his milk, "the stench found its way into his most secret parts" ("Fleet" 5). He attempts to contextualize, "to place the broken man. A writer, painter,

sculptor, surgeon, with genius and character and a purpose as devout as fire . . . not all of these; no, no Proteus; one of them only; one mother, one childhood, one career—ONE failure" ("Fleet" 5). He realizes, though, that assessing the man in discrete terms is pointless: "What use saying 'one man'? Man. What oneness is there in one man? A bag of blood. And how much else that is not bounded by the skin." ("Fleet" 6). In some sense, Morlais is the broken man as much as he is himself.

Morlais's past begins to intrude in odd ways on his present location. When a prostitute, Lilah, is kind to him, bringing him into her flat to rest and giving him hot milk, he asks, "Are you Welsh?" ("Fleet" 10). He remarks specifically upon her complexion, but it seems equally important that at the first sign of homeliness he sees Welshness. He explains to Lilah his conundrum of place: "I *had* to break loose somehow, and—oh hell, everything's turned out according to plan. Fleet Street doesn't want me, and I don't want Fleet Street, either" ("Fleet" 11). He goes to a party with her in a place where "There were jewels and silvery faces and laughter and immaculately laundered shirt fronts," where Morlais, rechristened "Andrew," feels "self-conscious": "He clenched his shaking hands together under the spotless white cloth. He thought, they'll all be in bed at home, mam with her night-light not sleeping" ("Fleet" 16, 17). His uncomfortable awareness of self in a strange place raises the spectre of a place he was determined to leave, but which now offers him images of elusive security. Lilah attempts to pass off "Andrew" as an old school friend from Devon, though it remains unclear how well he is "passing." Does he not have a Welsh accent? Are the others too intoxicated to notice? Even the reader remains uncertain of Morlais's position.

Then he begins drinking, and the uncertainties increase: "In two glasses he drowned his usual self, his home, his search for a job, his tweed coat and grey bags that were frayed at the hems" ("Fleet" 18). He sees the faces around him laughing, perhaps at him, as one says of him, "You'd better take Dick Whittington for a dance, Dot" ("Fleet" 18). Again, memories of home intrude in unexpected and somewhat absurd ways, connected with the "unreality" of the London scene:

> He walked behind Dot across the dance floor, making for the swaying corner table, waltzing round the looming dancers. He remembered walking down a green lane at home a month before, following a hedgehog that was running about in search of food. Dot was taller than the hedgehog, but otherwise it was the same—the same holding of breath, the same unreality and expectation.
> ("Fleet" 19)

He realizes in that moment that he feels some form of love for Lilah, but he wills himself not to confess it: "Anything but the truth in this place, in this situation. If we could be by the fire again, the good kind fire that has warmed so many generations of simple people, or in the fields somewhere where nobody else bothers to walk [. . .]" ("Fleet" 20). Morlais associates certain spaces with truth and self-realization, and others with self-censorship.

London, though, will be the place where he faces his own demons. Acknowledging, as we have seen, his impotence and groundless fears, "He thought of other things his imagination had guyed him with and one by one he discarded them on the parapet of Trafalgar Square. He felt his limbs grow strong. He prepared to face himself" ("Fleet" 24). He makes the decision to reject the unreal world of London and to return home, and for the first time in the story, he seems in control of himself, bodily and otherwise: "His body was his servant, and he made it walk." And should that fail, "He had a tongue, anyway, and he knew what to ask for" ("Fleet" 26). Thus the story ends, with Morlais firmly oriented toward home, though still avoiding the question of what he will do when he returns there.

1.4

Two often interrelated sites of tension common in Lewis's work merit special consideration. While education remains a time-honored escape from the cycle of hope and despair intrinsic to working-class life, in Lewis's stories its effect upon the individual also inspires ambivalence. As Meirion Edwards reflects, "what can I say but agree with Dad when he rants about the way they stinted and scraped to see me through College—and all to no purpose?" (MS 17). For the family barely making ends meet on the dole, seeing a son return from university transformed by poetry but still unemployable must call into question the worthiness of the entire

enterprise. The other frequent problem spot concerns the individual's relationship to the whole. The family or community, while often inspiring loyalty, also places constraints on personal development and self-expression.

By Meirion's own account, he was seduced by beauty while at college in Aberystwyth (MS 14–15). That transformation, as much as his degree, sets him apart from his family and makes being trapped in the industrial valleys that much harder to bear. His new sensibility also affected his prospects: "I just lost my balance. I felt so superior to my fellow students, most of whom go through College without realising that such things as culture and education exist at all. But they did better than me when the exam results came out" (MS 16). Meirion is talking about a different sort of education than that imagined by his parents when they sent him to Aberystwyth to read history. In a sense, he affected the preoccupations of the more privileged middle classes; had he been born someone else, he could have taken his Second in gentlemanly fashion and used his connections to procure a suitable career. But the working class, it seems, cannot afford to trouble itself with "culture and education." In his father's words, "can you feed undernourished mothers and anaemic babies on poetry?" (MS 10). Meirion and his family materially suffer for his having lost sight of the goal of upward mobility.[27]

Education appears repeatedly as the great hope, "the knight in shining armour" in Muriel Benson's terms, for desperate families. In "The Housekeeper," Myfanwy watches Jackie reading, prophetically, *David Copperfield*, and muses about his prospects:

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[27] It is worth noting that Settlement teachers in the late 1920s observed that

> the men's minds were keen enough, but were prevented from functioning fully and freely by an obsession derived from the doctrine of economic determinism on which they had been nourished. It was decided that a different form of mental discipline was needed as a training for philosophic studies. Accordingly classes were planned, with this idea in mind, on 'Man's Place in the Universe'—looking at mankind against a biological background rather than a specifically political one; and English Literature was also offered as a subject of study.

Education Yearbook (1935), qtd in Deian Hopkin, "Social Reactions to Economic Change," *Wales between the Wars*, ed. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1988) 83.

> She didn't know what to think about Jackie. He was doing well in County School—fourth in the form last terminals and the Headmaster said on his report "Very promising." But it was another five years before he could go to college, and then another few before he'd be qualified for a job. And all that time he'd have to be kept. (*CS* 99)

Similarly, for Mrs Jenkins in the story "It was very warm and welcome," education offers a chance to realize long-cherished dreams through her son and avoid the dangers of the present: "I don't want none of my boys getting nystagmus and bad chests and never seeing the sunlight. You stay where you are, Morlais bach, and work hard to get out of this—this valley of darkness" (*CS* 337). She entertains hopes of Morlais's becoming a missionary.

On the other hand, education inspires a measure of fear, particularly through its ability to transform and disrupt familial and community relationships. Meirion's neighbor claims that "'e thinks 'imself a cut above us just 'cause 'e's been to College" (MS 2). One of Mr Edwards's acquaintances derisively refers to Meirion as "your scholar" (MS 47), a jibe aimed both at Meirion's apparent uselessness and at the repudiation of Mr Edwards implied by Meirion's efforts to rise in the world. Fathers seem especially threatened by the prospect of sons rejecting their own modes of living. When Morlais innocently claims, "I'd like to be a haulier like you, dad, and give oats to the pit ponies," his father appears to feel vindicated: "'There you are, mam,' Mr. Jenkins said, slamming his huge fist on the table in triumph. 'The boy's all right. A man's job 'e wants, not a lot of tongue-wagging for the women'" (*CS* 338). In "The Housekeeper," Jackie's ability to escape a life of dependency or manual labor depends, ironically, on his physical strength—a precondition seen also in "The Miner's Son" when Hetty's precarious health prevents her from attending Settlement classes (MS 12). Myfanwy worries that the struggle to get on will destroy Jackie, although she see few alternatives. And again, his father appears sceptical:

> You just couldn't tell what would come to him—whether he'd win loose from here and live, really live, somewhere else away from it all, or whether it was asking too much of his little body. You just couldn't tell. Penry said he ought to come out of school and work in the allotment for a bit; it would do him more good. (*CS* 99)

Further, Jackie's love of books already shows signs of distancing him from his family. When Myfanwy touches his shoulder as he reads, he looks up "with a hasty irritated toss of his head" (*CS* 104).

Another frequent ambivalence concerns what Lewis variously referred to as "The People" or "my fathers." While many of Lewis's characters desire to help the people in some way, whether in charity, gratitude, or even self-interest, the masses rarely welcome such efforts and sometimes actively hinder them. Moreover, while the governing norms and values of the local community form a central nexus of the self, they can also prove stifling. Taken together, these themes leave the reader wondering whether "the people" are worth the trouble expended on their behalf.

Those who attempt to improve the welfare of the community can find their road hard going. In "Enid didn't know what to do," the school music teacher, Miss Felton, has taught her students to appreciate Mozart. When Enid's brother comes home and hears her listening to classical music, however, he makes her turn off the wireless and sneers at her for "Pretending you like that snob music" (*CS* 358). Muriel Benson attracts the label of "the duchess from the Settlement" (MS 47) and must endure taunts such as those of Mr Edwards: "And might I ask what's the use of you and your likes trying to make classes for us?" (MS 10). Not only does he call into question the value of the classes themselves, but he specifically questions the usefulness of a person of her background in their community. To complicate matters, she finds herself half-agreeing with him and surrendering cherished ideals: "Everything he said is true. I hadn't realised it till I came to Brynbeeg. I thought ignorance was the great enemy, education the knight in shining armour. I thought food and wages was the economist's affair, rather than mine. Now I feel as if culture is quite a trivial thing" (MS 11). Mr Edwards himself attracts spleen for his efforts to organize the workers. His neighbor, Mrs Williams, "jubilantly" describes his personal failings:

> The both of them keep out of the 'ouse to avoid each other. Meirion up the mountain and 'is father at the Institute or the Black Anchor or one of these old

> political meetings—talking about equality and the brother love of the working classes. Poof! And there 'e is, squabbling by 'is own fireside. (MS 2)

That "brother love" appears rather thin on the ground; on another occasion, Mr Edwards's exhortations end in argument: "'For Christ's sake, don't talk, Tom Edwards,' came a high voice; 'yew gi' me the gutsache—Communism, be damned, and the same for all; and you the meanest b— in Brynbeeg'" (MS 47). Even his wife doubts the usefulness of his involvement, observing that "My 'usband do talk 'imself into fits with it all, [. . .] But it don't seem to get 'im nowhere." She infuriates Meirion by reflecting that "There's always been some people with, and others without" (MS 8). Her complacency is echoed, in the one-act play "The Visit," by Mrs Morgan, who attempts to prune her daughter's budding political interest with the assertion that "There's poor and there's rich and always will be, and it's only in the next life that we'll be rewarded for our sufferings in this world."[28]

If apathy and jealousy do not sufficiently constrain the individual, normative respectability ensures a degree of self-suppression. Modes of conventional respectability repeatedly prove stifling and even harmful to individual identity. "The Lapse" provides perhaps the most flippant example. Henry, having ridden the same commuter train twice each day for five years with the same people, grows mad with the repetition:

> Oh, curse it and curse it. It's always, always the same, daunting you properly. Makes you want to smash the window, pull the communication cord, scream. . . . And instead you swallow the scream; you can hear it struggling inside you, battering at the door of your throat. And you sit still, and look at the old lady's brown hat, and Miss Burge knitting, and *her* reading. (*CS* 89)

Henry escapes the routine momentarily by stepping off the train one stop early, much to the annoyance of the guard and the "astonishment" of the worthy Miss Burge and the district nurse, who stare "at him and at each other" (*CS* 90). Having committed such an outrage against the natural order of things, he sits down again "with quivering hands" and exits at his own stop, slinking "past the guard like a criminal" (*CS* 90).

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[28] Lewis, "The Visit," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 3.

Lewis demonstrates the real harm done by compulsory conformity to developing subjectivity in two other stories through somewhat satirical portrayals of "respectable" behavior. In "Picnic," adolescent Marion is visiting her aunt and uncle while her father is in jail. Auntie Flora, having done her moral duty by Marion in berating her properly for having "had sandy fingers when you buttered the bread" for their beach picnic (*CS* 85), proceeds to congratulate herself publicly—not for the first time, it seems—for her act of charity: "'Of course Marion is only with us for a week or two,' Auntie Flora was saying. 'She's had a thin time lately'—the usual suggestive pause—'and we felt we'd like to help a little—you always *feel* for people in trouble, somehow, don't you?'" (*CS* 86). But while Auntie Flora, wearing "her special smile, like a smear of margarine," largely functions as an object of authorial sport, the narrative also makes clear her very genuine power to hurt Marion: "And then Auntie Flora's words broke through her stockade of thoughts. Her body dissolved in the outflow of her shame" (*CS* 86).

Likewise, in "The Wedding Breakfast" the proud maternal feelings of Mrs Merriman upon the marriage of one daughter lead her to be callous toward the other. Determined to do everything right for the wedding breakfast that must be squeezed in between the ceremony and the couple's departure for London, she berates Martha for crying and reminds her to "Look sharp, gal, with that bre' n' butter," also checking "to make sure that Martha had put seven plates of ham on the table and divided the half bottle of port between the seven glass tumblers" (*CS* 295). Martha's role seems less that of a sister than of a servant, and she is included even in the meal as an afterthought: "You'll 'ave to sit close—there's seven of us—three married couples—an' Martha" (*CS* 296). The newly-wed Menna insists that her parents come to visit her in Slough—with no mention of Martha—and when Martha ventures to speak to her new brother-in-law about the journey, her mother intervenes with "There's rude it is to whisper, Martha" (*CS* 297). When Martha, finally overwhelmed, drops her sister's hat bag and runs away down the lane, an act attributed by her brother-in-law to "nerves," Mrs Merriman bears her desertion with philosophy: "Well, I want 'er 'elp for the washing up,

anyroads [. . .]. There's a pile of dirty dishes" (*CS* 297). In each case, the maternal figure seems determined to force the young woman into an externally defined role, whether that of "criminal's daughter" or "spinster."

2

If individual fathers, families, and communities stimulate the negotiation of selfhood, so too, in Lewis's writings, do "the land of my fathers" and its literary traditions. Lewis's early work frequently describes Welsh scenes and ponders the role of the artist in the midst of such scenes. This early writing also engages in a persistent defamiliarizing, questioning assumptions of reality, rendering recognizable scenes strange, and occasionally focusing on characters who represent an alternative Welshness to that of "the quarry, the pit, the slum street and the bench in front of the Workmen's Hall."[29] Lewis wrote less directly about Wales than did many of his contemporaries, and admitted at times to feeling "depaysé,"[30] but the nation clearly occupied his imagination, as evidenced not only by his poems and stories themselves but by his instigation of the Caseg Broadsheets project.

The initial impulse for the Broadsheets arose from a mixture of socialism and nationalism—art in the service of "the people," and specifically the Welsh people, in time of war. Lewis described the project as "a series of Welsh words from the past and world words for today. It would be a great way of getting at *the people*."[31] Six sheets were produced in all between November 1941 and June 1942, combining Welsh poetry, ancient and modern, with drawings and woodcuts by Brenda Chamberlain and John Petts (*Life* 246). Suggesting the Broadsheets to Chamberlain, Lewis wrote that "From the literary point of view I think it is a real contribution—this demonstration of continuity, almost of identity between Wales 16

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[29] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 21 February 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 1–2.

[30] Lewis, letter to Christopher Cheney, 21 July 1938, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 23, f. 129.

[31] Lewis, letter, 15 April 1941, *Letters to My Wife*, ed. Gweno Lewis (Bridgend: Seren, 1989) 129.

centuries ago and Wales today."[32] For Lewis it was a continuity and identity more easily postulated than maintained.

Lewis stakes a claim to his national heritage with "The Defeated," one of the poems suggested for the Broadsheets but never used. The poem represents a rare attempt by Lewis to mimic the "internal rhyme, assonance and alliteration" of "Early Welsh style."[33] The poem lays claim to the past and the authenticity it appears to confer. The epigraph from Aneirin sets the tone of the poem and signals the poet's awareness of the Welsh bardic tradition, in which the poet speaks not for himself but for, and to, his community: "Sooner will his blood be spent than he go to the wedding feast. No hatred shall there be between thee and me; better will I do to thee, to praise thee in song" (*RD* 29). Furthermore, the title, suggesting the inevitability of failure before the poem has even begun, alludes to the Welsh virtue-in-necessity of celebrating glorious defeats.

The poem begins with the assertion that "Our courage is an old legend." The remainder is divided into seven stanzas: the first four in the past tense, delineating the glorious achievements of the Welsh in history, and the remaining three assessing the value of that "old legend" in the present. Seeking glory in defiance of fate, "We left the fields of our fathers" and "held the world in our fingers." The "proud country" of the past is compared to the ancient civilizations of "Euphrates and Tigris." Now, however, "Bled white are our wounds, / Wounds writhing with worms; / All spilt the quick seed. . . ." The speaker trails off as he considers the festering wounds of the nation and the loss of its creative potential. Recalling Morlais and other young men discussed above, Lewis attributes impotence to the nation as a whole. Ultimately, though, the speaker claims for the Welsh a grim survival in defeat:

> Oh! Dark are we whose greed for life
> Was a green slash in our eyes
> And in our darkness we are wise,

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[32] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 2 June 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 9–11.

[33] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 2 June 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 9–11.

> Forgetting honour, valour, fame,
> In this darkness whence we came.

The people's "greed" led to their downfall and return to darkness, but from that darkness they perceive the folly of seeking "honour, valour, fame" at the risk of their survival. Banerjee observes that

> Lewis adapts Aneirin's theme to the circumstances of 1939, and adds an ironic undertone: in this age men did not simply enjoy plenty and then pay the price for it in battle; but rather, they were discounting the world of ordinary events and seeking experience in war itself—only to find in war's horrors sterile "darkness." Therein lay tragedy which could not be mitigated by the heroic attitude.[34]

"We cannot escape from the past or into it," John Stuart Williams argues. "It co-exists with and lends significance to the present, which in a large measure it controls."[35] Co-existing with their past, the Welsh now go to war again, but no longer are they "blinded in battle" by dreams of glory.

"The Defeated" represents one of Lewis's few attempts to speak directly for Wales as a coherent literary entity. What was a writer to make of the contemporary nation as it emerged from the depths of the Depression to face a potentially ruinous war? Lewis's evocations of literary Wales betray a mixture of impulses, as when he requests that a fellow Pengam teacher send him "some translations of Welsh Poems, of real Welsh life—the peasant, the soldier, the land."[36] Essentialist depictions of "real Welsh life" following the peasant and the land were common enough throughout the twentieth century, from Manteg to Abercuawg, but the inclusion of the soldier as a central feature of Welsh-language poetry harks back to an earlier age. A letter to Renée Hopkin in 1940 alludes wistfully to "Tregurnog, or Dolgellau, or Llanfihangel or Tyhen, or Llanthony—places where Wales still is."[37] Nevertheless he appears willing to extend the benediction of the past to the cities and industrial centers. Lewis

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[34] J. Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," 98–99.

[35] Williams, "The Poetry of Alun Lewis," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 14.33 (Summer 1964): 63.

[36] Lewis, letter to Andrew Davies, 14 June 1941, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, ff. 11–12.

[37] Lewis, 5 December 1940, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, ff. 34–35.

describes his poem "Olwen and Taliessin" as having "A background of medieval Wales with steel and colliery in it, or a movement towards industry."[38] In the poem, Taliessin affirms that

> The princes are hacking coal in Morgannwg's rifled womb;
> But time is on the side of Wales; in Dyfed and in Lleyn
> The honeysuckle nods in silence all along the singing lane.[39]

In Lewis's vision, no less a legend than Taliessin can imagine a Wales that contradicts itself and contains multitudes: prince and collier, Dyfed and Glamorgan, silence and song. Through the vision of Taliessin, Lewis affirms the continuity of Welsh identity into his own day.

In letters to Chamberlain, Lewis claims that "The quarry villages like Llanllechid and Bethesda are no different from the mining villages in the South"[40] while citing the aforementioned "continuity . . . between Wales 16 centuries ago and Wales today." These statements resemble all-too-common evocations of an essential Wales that is apparently not only culturally homogeneous, but temporally so. In practice, though, difference and variety pervade Lewis's Wales. He constructs images of Wales that exhibit a fascinating strangeness and hybridity. His is a Wales not only of unemployed colliers but of Italian shopkeepers, Jewish pawnbrokers, and Romany travelers. Drab everyday scenes also become objects of a defamiliarizing gaze. Lewis documents the effects of poverty and industrialization with the exacting detail and enthusiasm of a tourist. Moreover, the uncanny transformative power of translation into words appears to render the writer's "own" nation always already other.

Returning briefly to "The Mountain over Aberdare," we might consider the double vision of the speaker as he stands above the Welsh village. "From this high quarried ledge I see," he begins, and proceeds to enumerate the details of dereliction and destitution. He overlays this vision, however, with an account of the gathering dusk, which "Veils the cracked cottages with drifting may / And rubs the hard day off the slate." This defamiliarizing gaze wraps the village in a slightly mystical significance, as though the darkness, as much as

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[38] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 2 June 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 9–11.

[39] Lewis, "Olwen and Taliessin," ts., NLW Alun Lewis ms. 6, ff. 84–86.

[40] Lewis, 21 February 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 1–4.

unemployment, threatens to make his home vanish in fact as well as in appearance. Meanwhile the speaker stands alone, outside, his vision increasingly obscured and only a few vague sounds reaching him—namely, "hymns / That drift insidious as the rain" and "The clink of coins" which, along with the ghostlike floating white frock, "suggests" otherworldly scenes to his imagination. The poem's only two uses of the first-person nominative pronoun, then, indicate a divided sensibility: "I see" in the first line sets out a culturally shared view of "home," or at least "my fathers' home"; in the last stanza, "I watch" as spectres both specific and vague enclose that home in "a lost age."

This blurring of the division between homely and uncomfortably strange, between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, captures the ambivalence at the heart of writing Wales in English. As Nicholas Royle argues,

> There has to be an abiding attachment to the familiar, even if it is one that requires ceaseless suspicion. There has to be a grounding in the rational in order to experience its trembling and break-up. There has to be a sense of home and homeliness within and beyond which to think the unhomely.[41]

Lewis's biography suggests, and his writings confirm, that for him the boundary between home and not-home is disturbingly, but productively, blurred. Moreover, the difference represents a tantalizing if uncomfortable space of creative possibility.

The poem "The Rhondda" (*RD* 88–89) overlays grimy realism with the fantastic. "Fat, flabby-breasted wives" who "scrub, make tea, peel the potatoes" continue in a prosaic, unvarying existence "without counting the days." Through their housework they are able to impose only a semblance of homeliness over a world otherwise filthily beyond their control:

> Unwashed colliers by the river
> Gamble for luck the pavements hide.
> Kids float tins down dirty rapids.
> Coal-dust rings the scruffy willows.

By describing the debased landscape in detail, Lewis transforms it into something alien. The natural world has succumbed to the machine, the river's noise drowned by the "Hum of

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[41] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 25.

shaft-wheel, whirr and clamour / Of steel hammers." This mechanization extends to the colliers, who cannot resist the machine's lure:

> Circe is a drab
> She gives men what they know.
> Daily to her pitch-black shaft
> Her whirring wheels suck husbands out of sleep.
> She for her profit takes their hands and eyes.

Circe's "whirring wheels," turning in hypnotic iambs, mechanize the sweet singing of myth. Nevertheless the men, by this account, arrive at Circe's door not only as lost sailors seeking aid but as willing accomplices in their own emasculation. The ability to provide for their families in "a man's job" (*CS* 338) requires submission to the unnatural yonic power of the "pitch-black shaft." Drawn to what they both desire and fear, the colliers trade the threat of castration, represented by the potential loss of hands and eyes, for the pleasure of affirmation in their masculine roles. Even those who do not experience literal maiming are left powerless, unable to see beyond their own dependence, beyond "what they know." This dubious consummation finds its double in the sexualized landscape, as

> Greasy Rhondda
> River throws about the boulders
> Veils of scum to mark the ancient
> Degraded union of stone and water.

The harmony of the natural world has been undermined and its marriages, too, betrayed by Circe's wiles. Adding an extra element of profanity, the river with its "Veils of scum" bears comparison to various bodily fluids while lacking their more creative qualities. The river appears to have gained human characteristics at the same time that humanity has mated with the machine.

This topsy-turvy strangeness occurs repeatedly in Lewis's work, along with a narrative defiance of aesthetic decorum. Consider, for example, this description of another river, from "It's a Long Way to Go":

> Oily black Cynon filthy with coal mines, fringed with scruffy trees. How beautiful it looked, black as ebony in the red and green lights of the railway and the hooded lamp of the bridge.

> He put his arm gently round her waist and said "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" (*CS* 60)

Though the physical characteristics of the scene differ little from those of "The Rhondda," they appear literally in a different light. The railway signals transform the river into "ebony," a substance both exotic and able to be prized by the soldier about to depart for India. In quoting Naaman the Syrian,[42] Lieutenant Greening not only connects the polluted Cynon with ancient civilizations but also invokes notions of both home and exile; in the case of Greening, simultaneously "glad to be going" (*CS* 55) and guilty for that gladness, it remains difficult to differentiate between the two.

For Lewis, like Greening only partially at home in South Wales, familiar sights become unhomelike through narrative transformation, through re-seeing. His characters repeatedly stop and *look* at the world around them, and their observations mingle revulsion with narrative pleasure in a deviant aesthetic—Lewis describes the most squalid scenes with apparent relish. The Welsh working classes, framed by this exoticizing gaze, exist in circumstances every bit as tantalizing to the imagination as those of the missionaries they sponsor. The tactile details of this life provide a fertile alternative to the sanitized respectability aspired to by the middle classes to which Lewis belonged. So while, for example, a fairly sober view of South Wales appears from a train in "The Lapse," Henry's boredom at the scene is belied by the narrator's fascination:

> Henry yawned and gazed indifferently at the row of slatternly back gardens and flapping clothes lines past which the train ran. Twice a day for five years, Bank holidays excepted, those drab hotchpotch backs where the wives riddled yesterday's ashes and the children sat on the steps eating bread and jam. It was so depressing to see those streets every day, always the same, and the people always the same—how many of them knew they had been condemned to serve a lifer? (*CS* 88)

Henry himself, as we have noted, recontextualizes the visual detail of his everyday routine through the "grand, careless" (*CS* 89) act of exiting his train one stop early. The "ash platform" and the particular "yellow advertisement of Duck, Son and Pinker's pianos" (*CS*

[42] 2 Kings 5.12.

90) of this station, viewed from a new outdoor perspective, constitute a real, if somewhat pathetic, escape into the unknown. Much more celebratory than Henry's perspective is the child's-eye view in "Interruption":

> The railway bridge was a good place from which to see. You could see the holes in the roofs where a winter wind blew away a slate or two. You could see the chimneys where the shiny starlings lived, where they croaked and preened. Or the back gardens—cabbage run to seed, ashes and flimsy fences of stolen pit timber and iron bedsteads—or the lavatories at the bottom of the gardens. But of course the real thing you could see was the railway line, passing right underneath the bridge, whew, right underneath. (*CS* 91)

The view from the bridge is, by this account, worth seeing. It is exciting, encompassing variety and motion. That excitement, rather than the obvious details of poverty, drives the narrative and invests otherwise depressing sights with an alternative reality. The landscape of childhood is also recalled in "The Housekeeper" and contrasted with the more alienated adult perspective of Myfanwy:

> The allotment was surrounded by a huge stone wall, two feet thick. When she was small she used to marvel at the thickness of the walls, believing that they must enclose something precious beyond words. The men who went inside seemed to her to be demigods, passing in and out of Eden. There was still something unreal about the thick walls, and about the white hens strutting outside, pecking viciously at the cabbage stumps that littered the ground, and about the intolerant cockerels with their rusty-red neck feathers and pink scalloped combs. Something comic and desultory and feckless.
>
> The sty had been built at odd moments, with odd shillings and wood scavenged from the pit top. It looked like a little tarred ark, hastily constructed after the deluge had begun, with a drain pipe poking out of the roof instead of a chimney. The roof was a sheet of corrugated iron, the walls were covered with a tarred felting; the wood at the base had rotted and a thick yellow ordure oozed out, foul-smelling. (*CS* 103)

What was once alluring now seems altogether grotesque, a different kind of "unreal." The "house-proud" Myfanwy (*CS* 95) resists the pull of dilapidation in the small ways she can manage, such as scrubbing her modest house from top to bottom; for all that the village is her lifelong home, these acts in a sense represent her resistance to "going native," to the compulsion she feels to say "I accept; I have accepted" (*CS* 102).

Myfanwy reacts to the village's squalor with revulsion; the less ensnared Lewis, on the other hand, seems to revel in every detail, from the "warm dirty smell" emanating from the

sow's food to "the drifting coal dust" settling over the village (*CS* 97, 102). Penry's "frayed and dirty grey trousers" appear to particular disadvantage next to the "bright silver shilling" he removes from them (*CS* 95). Granny Geake's "big white wen" fascinates the village children and also, apparently, Lewis, who is able thus to employ a child's stare unmediated by adult discretion. Such sordidness acts, in narrative terms, almost as a binding agent to hold life together: Penry's working coat "had been boiled and worn until it was threadbare, but the blotches of oil and wagon grease that covered it kept the tattered cloth whole," while the family's back garden is "fenced off from the gardens of the next door houses by a hotch-potch barrier of old zinc sheeting, rusted iron bedsteads, and tin advertisements of Colman's Mustard and Brooke Bond's Tea" (*CS* 97, 98). Myfanwy, from the mountain side, observes a man "chopping sticks" and a woman washing dishes—"She had flabby shapeless breasts and her hair blew in long rat tails over her spectacles" (*CS* 101)—and concludes that "they had no choice but to be there, part of the composition of broken-down sheds and barren backs, fulfilling a predestined role" (*CS* 101). The words "composition" and "role" are worth noting, implying as they do a sense of artifice that interferes with Myfanwy's acceptance of her situation as the organic order of things. The nameless man and woman have no choice in their destiny, existing in Myfanwy's apprehension as artistic constructs, part of the tableau she regards. She, standing in the wings, maintains at least an illusion of free will, which seems to set her apart from the people she observes. Later, accompanying her sons to the cinema, she indirectly compares the film with its "grotesque" and distorted images (*CS* 105) to previous observations in the pig sty, again stubbornly questioning the very nature of reality and the perception thereof.

Perception remains important in a very different story, "Private Jones." In the following passage, for example, Siencyn's wife Marged becomes an unlikely object—and subject—of desire:

> So they had a bit of bread and milk for supper, not saying anything at all. Then he fetched the money from under the bed upstairs and counted it out, five pounds thirteen and four, and divided it into two piles, three pounds

> thirteen for her and two pounds for himself. And then he got up and very clumsily and hesitantly smoothed her hair back. She was vexed, and said what a mess she was, all untidy and fat-getting, and she bent her head forward as if she was feeling bad; and she was all white and her eyes were yellow and suffused with watery blood. He was shifting from one foot to the other, uneasy about what to do, and she wouldn't say a thing one way or the other. Dumb she was.
>
> And he was thinking how happy everything and everybody had been when he went round the farms this afternoon, and now Marged spoiling it all. But when she looked up at him, raised her head to him slowly as if there was a millstone round her neck, and then stood up with her arms raised a little, and said that Welsh word to him that she hadn't said since they were courting, then he knew it was a million times better to feel black and torn in pieces like this than to be laughing and drinking tea and saying the Germans wouldn't last long now he was in too. He picked her up, and she wasn't heavy any more; and carried her up the creaking stairs as if she was a young virgin. Only she was better than a virgin, her fine big body which his big shivering hands slowly divested of the red jersey and thick skirt and woollen stocking and flannel vests that she wore on it winter and summer. The moon was out and the river ringing on the stones and the old jollyboy owls crying goodywhoo in the wood, and he knew he'd been waiting for this for a whole year, to say good-bye to Marged like this. And she lay warm and silken and trembling under his huge hands and she heard neither the river nor the owls but only him grunting and breathing in her mouth and in her ears and something gentle at last opening inside her, like a baby begging her to receive it in. (*CS* 30)

While the narration spares the reader few details that could provide comic effect, it is difficult to laugh, except affectionately, at Siencyn and Marged. In a rare moment of connection, these two decidedly uncinematic lovers become as desirable to each other as the Shulamite and Solomon. The narration notes both Marged's initial spoken perception of herself and her transformation through Siencyn's gaze and her own speech. While the reader is privy to a number of intimate details in this passage, the exact nature of "that Welsh word" remains hidden. Welsh thus becomes a language of private passion, shared by neither the narrator nor the reader. The owls outside in the moonlit night serenade the couple in Welsh, "crying goodywhoo." Marged's locution transforms even their costume. Siencyn removes Marged's "flannel vests" and other protective layers with the care usually reserved for imported silk, while Marged's "fine big body" becomes "warm and silken and trembling," delicate almost, in response.

The "Welsh exotic" features in other ways in this story. Siencyn Jones is an unusual character in Lewis's opus—the rural rube for whom "Nobody had a bad word . . . except that

he was idle and fond of his drink and irregular as a christian and not reliable for doing a job or fetching you something from market or being prompt at the chapel concert rehearsals" (*CS* 29). Dan Evans, the anarchist and labor organizer Siencyn meets in the army, seems more familiar, though possessing more apparent self-confidence and less inner conflict than many of Lewis's other South Walian socialists. It is difficult to know how much of this certainty derives from Siencyn's awed view of Dan. Certainly, for Siencyn, his nominal compatriot is an entirely new kind of being: "Well, well, thought Siencyn, this is a different life to mine, and what it all is I don't know" (*CS* 32). He then immediately sets Dan into a familiar framework by comparing him to "the prophet Ezekiel." Stephen Knight notes that this "coupling of two regions of Wales normally separated in fiction is a key sign of the way in which Lewis, like Glyn Jones, seeks to speak of Wales more widely than had been usual."[43] Siencyn himself is something of a curiosity in the army, particularly once he is sent to serve in an English battalion. The army dentist, appalled at the state of Siencyn's teeth, sneers, "Ever used a toothbrush?" Siencyn's mental reply, that of course "he'd used one in the infants' school, but he wasn't a kid any more" (*CS* 33) demonstrates the disparity in their relative experience; even a simple remark carries the potential for broad construal. A brief exchange between Siencyn and his commanding officer illustrates the gulf in their perceptions of the world:

> The captain sent for Siencyn and said "I hear you're a country bumpkin, Jones." And Siencyn said "I live in Penyrheol, Cards, sir." And the Captain said, "I hear you were a poacher, Jones?" And Siencyn said "Trapper, sir." (*CS* 35)

This conversation could be read as a miniature duel over identifying language. Its "And . . . said" tags lend it the character of a contest in which the opponents trade blows. While power belongs to the officer, Siencyn protects his view of himself, his identity, through his very innocence. The captain's pejorative terms mean nothing to him, so he counters with the plain facts as he understands them and maintains an unconscious dignity.

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[43] Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2004) 126.

Lewis also uses multiple voices and shifts in perception to underscore and complicate the diversity of Wales. In "Cardinali Crisis," shopkeeper Antonio Cardinali exists as an uncomfortable bridge, enduring constant jibes about "Il Duce" but acknowledged by the locals to be "as much an institution as the Baptist minister or the postman" (*CS* 301). His welfare is tied to that of his collier patrons, and he belongs sufficiently for his shop to have achieved the status of "taboo" for chapel deacons (*CS* 302). His efforts at integration encounter difficulty, however, when he is temporarily drafted for the Italian war effort. He then returns to the shop, where he clearly belongs, but the attitude of both the customers and the narrator remains ambivalent. The customers evince a certain fondness for Antonio but also a degree of condescension: "'Poor old Tony,' one of them said, chalking his cue and laughing; 'a hell of a lot of use 'e'll be in the front line, polishing 'is bayonet all day'" (*CS* 303). The narrator, repeating the gossip, remains sympathetic in a more sophisticated way but nevertheless compares Antonio to "a child" (*CS* 302). Antonio himself is not allowed a prominent voice. Within the framework of the story he speaks only English, and most of what he says seems rote, as though he merely recites his appointed lines. In some cases he truly does; the customers know that his response to any football pool question will be "I don't know, I don' do nothin' with it" (*CS* 302). At the end of the story, however, he finally speaks and acts for himself as he presents "all his customers with a double Woodbine and a free drink": "Not from Chamberlain nor the Duce nor nobody. Just from me, see" (*CS* 303). Like Siencyn's, this act is an assertion of personal identity in a potentially overwhelming context. But while Antonio appears happy, the customers sit quietly, obviously uncomfortable and uncertain what to make of this new, assertive Antonio. Because conducted through their eyes, the narration will not permit him his unambiguous hurrah.

In "The Wanderers," set in rural Cardiganshire, nearly every character is an outsider, though most could be labelled "native outsiders." The gipsy man, his wife explains, "used to live with the Pembroke tribe" (*CS* 76). Lewis never mentions the man's reasons for leaving—was his departure voluntary? does the tribe still exist? does he expect to return?—but, like

Antonio Cardinali, he can nevertheless be described as doubly exiled, unable to return "home" and occupying a tenuous position in his current life. His Welsh wife, having previously "run off to join the gipsies" from her father's farm, now attempts to escape even the confines of gipsy life by pursuing an itinerant Breton onion seller who lacks even a caravan to call home. She nevertheless describes herself as "Welsh" and her son, Micah, as "half and half" (*CS* 76). What either label means in context remains unclear. Lewis affords the reader a brief glimpse of domesticated Welsh life through the gipsy's eyes: children playing cricket, "ladies in white frocks," and an agriculturally named public house. This idyllic scene differs not only from the gipsy life, of course, but from the life of most Welsh people as well. The Wales of this story offers a stark contrast to the scenes described in Lewis's other stories; it is visually vibrant, with "blue paint," corn "blue and still," and "a slash of poppies" making "a red wound across the field" (*CS* 71–72). Micah becomes "yellow as a bee with rolling in the buttercups," (*CS* 74) while his father costumes himself in a "garish blue smock coat" and "scarlet muffler" (*CS* 73, 74). For all the troubling passions Lewis unearths in "The Wanderers," he portrays gipsy life, too, as something of a pastoral idyll.

It is tempting, then, to view the story as offering an authorial escape. Certainly the setting appears to offer a safe laboratory for exploring, in Lawrentian fashion, primal passions and animal impulses among humans. Lewis mostly permits his readers a safe critical distance. His portrayal of the "shrivelled" Jewish pawnbroker, wheezing and ingratiating, draws upon a host of anti-Semitic stereotypes, emphasizing the Jew's difference not only from the locals but from the gipsy. Despite being allies of a sort in the pursuit of non-conventional income, they regard each other with mutual suspicion, the Jew's smile hardening perceptibly as the gipsy enters his shop (*CS* 73) and the gipsy spitting on the doormat as he exits (*CS* 74). The conflicting responses of other Welsh people to the gipsy emphasize his uncertain place in society. The children gather "fearfully together" as he passes, sure that "Gipsies steal little boys and take them away in their caravans, vanishing mysteriously into the wide other world" (*CS* 73). That wide other world, cited by the children with more than a hint of longing, perhaps

beckons to the farm girl with whom the gipsy enjoys a literal roll in the hay. Even his wife simultaneously fears his passions and responds to them: "She wasn't frightened now. She was mad with him. He had taken another woman after refusing her. If he was going to fight, she was strong, too" (*CS* 83). For all that Lewis portrays him as a complex character, the gipsy, like other alien beings or entities, embodies both the fears and desires of the self, and his presence in rural Wales leaves a vivid mark on the literary landscape.

Under the circumstances, it is perhaps reasonable to ask without much irony, "What would a tiger be doing in a place like this?"[44] Such is the question posed by one gipsy child to another as they play in their camp on a coal tip in the unpublished story "The Bedknob." Other questions of exoticism hold unexpected answers for Peggoty, "who owed her name to a vicar with a taste for Dickens" ("Bedknob" 1). Perhaps nothing illustrates Peggoty's uncertain signification so well as the fact that a vicar was allowed to name her, and to bestow upon the gipsy child the weight of the Western literary canon. Indeed, her friend Lilith confirms that Peggoty's mother is "too delicate, too pretty and weak" to assert herself as a proper gipsy woman ought ("Bedknob" 2). Peggoty overhears an elderly village woman refer to her as "that beautiful child" ("Bedknob" 3) and begins to entertain hopes of conforming to British standards of beauty. Peggoty and Lilith continue on to the stream to swim, and while Lilith dances naked on the bank, Peggoty, absorbing a new awareness of her person,

> sat down on the dewy bank. "It's cold with nothing on." She folded her arms over her flat little chest, hugging herself. Then, still frowning, she lay down on her belly and pulled herself forward until she was peering over the steep edge of the bank. The water lay stilly in a little calm reach, tree roots deflecting the current. Water spiders walked jerkily across the pool. She couldn't quite see.
>
> "Lilith," she said slowly, "am I beautiful?"
>
> "Beautiful?" Lilith laughed like a donkey and picking her up by the ankles, toppled her head first into the stream. . . . ("Bedknob" 3; ellipses in original)

Undeterred, Peggoty returns home and attempts to view her face in a brass bedknob. Lewis comments only on her reaction to her reflection, which is to pick up "the little hand-pick

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[44] Lewis, "The Bedknob," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 2. Subsequently cited as "Bedknob."

from the floor and hit the bedknob as hard as she could." "I'll learn you," she declares ("Bedknob" 4).

Peggoty's story contains suggestive parallels to the Narcissus legend. While she fails to see her reflection in the water, and while she survives her immersion, she fails, like Narcissus, to connect with the image patterned on her own mind. Narcissus destroyed himself in longing after it; Peggoty instead destroys the image, as though its destruction will create new possibilities for the original. Lewis leaves the reader to picture the face Peggoty sees and the face she imagines, perhaps in tacit comment upon the unsatisfactory nature of culturally contingent images.

Peggoty's destruction of the bedknob leads back, however improbably, to Lewis and his position as a Welsh writer constructing Wales in English for an uncertain audience and for himself. The images of Wales reflected by his writing do not necessarily embody what any of his readers, whether marginal or metropolitan, would expect. Instead Lewis's authorial preoccupations lead him to reflect a diverse Wales always searching for itself in opposition to homogenizing discourses.

3

We have seen how Lewis's relationship to the idea of "home" expressed itself in complicated ways from the beginning of his career. As war engulfed Europe and the destruction extended to Wales, Lewis's conceptions of home became simultaneously more urgent and more troubled. For Lewis, personally, there was no escaping the knowledge that life had not changed for him only. Encamped at Longmoor in Hampshire, he reflected that he was safe from the enemy because Jerry was "busy in South Wales. Gweno's school got a bit of a burning and my family sleep with the vacuum cleaner and the mop."[45] He reminded his parents that "it's the civilians who get killed—if I was a school teacher in Swansea you'd have need to worry. As it is, I'm as safe in the infantry as a railway clerk on the line of

[45] Lewis, letter to Andrew Davies, 25 July 1940, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, ff. 5–6.

communication somewhere."[46] Normality and emergency mingled in disconcerting ways. Gweno he thought to be "looking well, considering she's decorated and furnished her new house, spent three nights a week on ARP telephone work and the other four in the basement praying that the bombs will fall somewhere else, while she also did some teaching for a living."[47] Even when not erased altogether, personal landmarks were altered: "Gweno's house got knocked about badly by a heavy bomb a fortnight ago," Lewis wrote to Andrew Davies. "I went home and tidied it up, nailed boards and lino over the windows, etc."[48] But when not faced with the immediate threat to loved ones, Lewis's imagination was capable of a very different turn on this subject:

> Your letter was lovely. The soft ringing showers of frost-leaves and the white peaks in the sky are in my visual memory now as well as yours. Here the country is all in miniature, and evergreen, little wooded rolling hills and sandy green woods with small blue lakes and red houses. It isn't Wales at all at all; it's the civilised comfortable South, bourgeois and vitamin-conscious. When I hunger for the mountains I know it's a long time since I felt the discomfort of wildness and hardness and want. The South will get all that from the Luftwaffe, I expect: it's a pity for the children and the mangling of bodies: but the effect on the mind will be ultimately good.[49]

This astonishing passage is worthy of comment on many points, not least the exile's construction of Wales as larger and more vital than the "comfortable South," but most germane to the present argument is Lewis's assertion that the Blitz, though "a pity," will have a beneficial toughening effect on the bourgeois mind. This attitude reappears, though in muted form, in a few of Lewis's war poems, suggesting a greater ambivalence toward death and destruction than a reader might expect to encounter. Whether for good or for ill, however, the transformation of the familiar is irrevocable. The war proves a further occasion for re-examining and defamiliarizing.

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[46] Lewis, undated, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 20, f. 46.

[47] Lewis, letter to Renée and Bryan Hopkin, undated [probably summer 1940], NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, ff. 32–33.

[48] Lewis, 14 June 1941, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, ff. 11–12.

[49] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 21 February 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 1–2.

The Polish girls Lewis imagines in "Threnody for a Starry Night" sing what could be a transcultural refrain:

> We cannot go back. We dare not meet
> The strangeness of our friendly street
> Whose ruins lack
> The clean porch, the shoe-scraper,
> The Jewboy selling the evening paper,
> The bow-window with the canary,
> The house with a new baby,
> The corner where our sweethearts waited
> While we combed our hair.
> We cannot return there.

Lewis evokes "The strangeness of our friendly street" again and again in his writing of this period. "Raiders' Dawn," describing as it does the destruction wrought by warfare upon capitalized abstractions such as "Beauty," would appear to have little to do specifically with Wales. Its inclusion on the first Caseg Broadsheet, however, places its treatment of broader themes very firmly in a Welsh context. The poem acknowledges individual losses even as the dead are collectively transformed into ghostly, inhuman presences.

The Caseg Broadsheets begin, then, with civilization collapsing upon itself like a house of cards:

> Softly the civilized
> Centuries fall,
> Paper on paper,
> Peter on Paul. (*RD* 15)

The great stabilizing forces, learning and religion, transpire to be even weaker than the edifices they erect, crumbling with the speed and finality of a children's rhyme.[50] A paradox inheres in the poetic role of the lovers—"Eternity's masters, / Slaves of Time"—in that while love is said to transcend the ravages of time, the lovers remain utterly fixed by the historical

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[50] "You once suggested some explanations for the Peter and Paul line in the little poem. My mother used to put bits of paper on her fingers and play a game of hiding the fingers and returning them. 'Two little sparrows sitting on a wall, One named Peter one named Paul. Fly away Peter, fly away Paul. Come back Peter, come back Paul.' That, and the bombing of St Paul's and St Peter's Westminster, are my sources." Lewis, letter to Robert Graves, 1 March 1942, *In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1914–1946*, ed. Paul O'Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1982) 311.

moment. They wake, in fact, "from" the night, not "in" or "to," as though they have been asleep and are only now, in wartime, coming alive—emerging, too, from the sleepy sibilance of the first stanza. As the lovers wake to the destruction, they

> Recognize only
> The drifting white
> Fall of small faces
> in pits of lime.

By grouping "Recognize only" alone together, Lewis emphasizes how little is familiar; the lovers awake to a world transformed. And what they do "recognize" is something unsettlingly strange, recognizable only as the fulfilment of nightmares. Faces once known, perhaps, now drift like snowflakes or ash toward permanently ensnaring calcification.

The theme of "Death and Beauty" that Pikoulis[51] has identified as prominent in Lewis's poetry emerges in the third stanza:

> Blue necklace left
> On a charred chair
> Tells that Beauty
> Was startled there.

The blue necklace stands in uncanny contrast to the "charred chair" on which it rests; apparently it has been left intact, or at least identifiable, in the midst of the devastation. "Beauty," an eternal ideal, has been "startled" but not destroyed. Further, Wynn Thomas points out, "If ordinary, normal beauty has here been startled out of the land of the living, then another, more fearful beauty, has taken its place—the unexpectedly awesome beauty that the bombing 'produced' as it were, and that is manifest in the sensually rich contrast between the blue necklace and the black chair."[52] What is most startling, perhaps, is the discovery of Beauty in such a scene, in the home that is no longer home.

The meaning of home in wartime and before is problematized further by "The Destruction" (*RD* 89–90), which parallels the destruction of love with the damage caused by

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[51] Pikoulis, "The Two Voices in Alun Lewis's Poetry 1940–1942," *Welsh Writing in English* 1 (1995): 48.

[52] Thomas, *Internal Difference* 59.

an air raid. Its first line a complete simple sentence, the poem begins with an unusual and deliberate detachment: "This is the street I inhabit. / Where my bread is earned my body must stay." The speaker appears to choose the word "inhabit" carefully, distinguishing habitation from the more multivalent "living"; he also divorces himself deliberately from his body and its needs. The sense of being trapped increases with the next lines:

> This village sinks drearily deeper
> In its sullen hacked-out valley
> And my soul flies ever more rarely
> To the eyries among the Welsh mountains.

Because the speaker's body must stay in the sinking village, these lines convey a sense of being buried alive. In "The Uncanny," Freud connects the *unheimlich* sensation of premature burial with the more pleasurable associations of life in the womb.[53] Part of what Lewis achieves in this poem, then, is the transformation of the speaker's birthplace from nurturing to disconcerting. If the third and fourth lines are somewhat self-consciously "poetic," this too contributes to a sense of unreality: these flights of fancy, centered on the beauties of nature, stand in cruel contrast to the more sordid details of human life in "these Welsh mountains." Their co-existence in the speaker's world, eyrie and "hacked-out valley," creates a situational irony that calls the nature of reality into question. The speaker's upward gaze, in fact, transports him not to tranquil eyries but to a chthonic scene of horror:

> Massive above the dismantled pitshaft
> The eight-arched viaduct clamps the sky with stone.
> Across the high-flung bridge a goods train rumbles,
> Its clanking wagons make my fixed rails rock,
> And the smoke from its engine blows higher than my desire;
> Its furnace glowers in my vast grey sky.

From the perspective of the forgotten village, the speaker describes these images of industry as almost hyper-real, delimiting his existence in larger-than-life fashion. His allusion to his own "fixed rails" draws attention to the fact that while the train travels overhead, carrying goods

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[53] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 244.

from one unknown location to another, the speaker's village lies immobile and forgotten underneath—again, the motherland has become a locus of premature burial.

The speaker then reveals the primary cause of his feeling unhomed—his love has departed, leaving him to fester in a world made strange by her absence and stranger still by his feverish insertion of her presence into indiscriminate scenes:

> Under this viaduct of my soul
> The poisoned river makes its dirty bed,
> Wherein a girl lies dreaming, diffusing attar of roses.

If her image renders the polluted river exotic, so too has her withdrawal rendered his surroundings more than usually savage. The poem concludes with the apocalyptic gesture of the viaduct's destruction in "the throbbing night." The speaker focuses not on this action's impact upon the village, but on the more personal severing of ties between him and the girl, who now in his imagination occupies a space more unreal than ever, and analogous to his:

> And the train that took her roaring towards the dayspring
> Is rocking her through the dawn down empty sidings
> Between dark tenements in the neutral city
> To the street she must inhabit.

The poem's depiction of home has come full circle, from inescapable familiarity to permanent alienation.

Two stories written after Lewis joined the army place the war's defamiliarizing impact on Wales in a broader context, as both stories involve Welsh soldiers stationed in England. In "Acting-Captain," the plight of Taffy Thomas's sick wife ties together the effects of longstanding poverty and the new dangers of war. Earlier motifs resurface: both Taffy and his friend Curly remain largely "impotent" in the face of these challenges (*CS* 118), despite Taffy's declaration that "I'm not going to sit in this dump doing nothing while my missus freezes in the Anderson and coughs 'er guts up every time Jerry drops a load on Swansea" (*CS* 107). It transpires that Taffy's wife is doubly doomed: on the very night Taffy comes home without leave in order to take her to hospital, she dies instead in a bombing raid.

Although Taffy enters the city preoccupied with his own troubles, the narration captures the transformation brought about by the war:

> Taffy reached Swansea on a lorry conveying sheep skins from slaughterhouse to warehouse just as the first Jerries droned eastwards along the Gower coast, droned lazily towards the dark sprawling town and released beautiful leisurely flares into the blackness below. Taffy was hungry and thirsty and broke, not even a fag-end in his field dressing pocket. So he didn't mind a few extra inconveniences such as air raids. Life was like that at present. He wasn't expecting anything much. He hurried past his habitual pubs, past the milk-bar where he had eaten steak and kidney pies on his last leave and been unable to get off the high stool on which he sat, drunk at one in the afternoon and his kid brother just as bad at his side, bloody alright, boy; and as the first bombs screamed and went off with a sickening shuddering zoomph down the docks way, he turned into his own street and kicked the door with his big ammunition boots. (*CS* 127–28)

For Taffy, the war literally comes home on this evening. The familiar scenes, fraught with memory, must be "hurried past." Home becomes unhomelike as he knocks in the style of a jack-booted thug and enters like an intruder, climbing the drainpipe and coming in through a window because his wife is too ill to let him in. She, "ashamed at being such a poor wife" (*CS* 128), will not allow him to remove her from home, and the first moments of his return illustrate the frustration of both. Before the fatal bomb arrives, however, they have sat inside their house in the midst of the raid and reminisced about more normal times, times when life in Swansea meant dances and jealousy and routine. Taffy's wife has to remind him that the routine has been disrupted; when he proposes going outside for coal, she protests that "There's none there [. . .]. The coalman's killed" (*CS* 129).

"They Came" suggests that this disruption has resulted in a fundamental change in normality. Another "Taffy" returns to the South Downs from leave uttering a mechanical reply, repeated several times in only slightly varying form, to the usual banal inquiries: "Yes, thanks [. . .] except for the raids. The first night I was home he raided us for three hours, the sod" (*CS* 167). The nonchalant responses to this news—the most concerned being "It's a sod, everybody's getting it" (*CS* 172)—demonstrate the extent to which the ordinary has been redefined. Everyone appears haunted by an amorphous death-sense; in order to give it enough shape to alarm, Taffy has to state explicitly that his wife has died in the raid.

Taffy's Welsh past becomes a fundamental part of his grieving, all part of the absence produced by the air raid. As he returns to camp, he hears footsteps behind him:

> He couldn't stop himself listening to them, but he refused to look back. He became slowly angry with himself for letting them occupy his mind and possess his attention. After a while they seemed to come trotting out of the past in him, out of the Welsh mining village, the colliers gambling in the quarry, the county school where he learned of sex and of knowledge, and college where he had swotted and slacked in poverty, and boozed, and quarreled in love. They were the footsteps of the heavy-jawed deacon of Zion, with his white grocer's apron and his hairy nostrils sniffing out corruption. (*CS* 166)

The disembodied footsteps signal the ghosts of his past; they are not altogether "natural and English" (*CS* 166) but uncanny and Welsh. The annihilation of one reality appears to threaten the rest existing in his memory, and they all clamor for attention. Later, Taffy remembers "the '26 strike; and going without peas and chips in the chip shop by the town clock in college when a new book must be bought" and immediately reflects, "What survives I don't know" (*CS* 170). Despite his earlier refusals "to look back" (*CS* 166, 169), when describing the horrors he witnessed during the raid Taffy reverts "back to the sing-song rhythms and the broad accent of his home, the back lanes and the back gardens" (*CS* 174). His memory of home encompasses both the bedraggled details of local poverty and the inextricable presence of his wife:

> The soldier was thinking of the day he received his calling up papers, just a year ago. Sitting on the dry-stone wall of his father's back garden with Gwyneth by him; [. . .] his father riddling the ashes and the ramshackle garden falling to bits, broken trellis and tottering fence; his mother washing her husband's flannel vest and drovers in the tub, white and vexed. He had taken Gwyneth's hand, and her hand had said, "In coming and in going you are mine; now, and for a little while longer; and then for ever."
>
> But it was not her footsteps that followed him down the lane from the station. (*CS* 176)

However much the past intrudes, Taffy cannot go home again, because the war has dramatically undermined the meaning of home. As he recounts to a friend, Taffy carries his badly injured wife home through the burning streets, "Only the home was on fire" (*CS* 175).

The old ghosts cannot be resurrected; instead Taffy articulates a commitment to the broader sense of home: "My life belongs to the world [. . .]. I will do what I can" (*CS* 176).

A gentler memory of home appears in "A Welsh Night," probably written later than the previously considered works, possibly while Lewis was aboard a troop ship bound for India. The ease with which the speaker's gaze shifts from the mountaintops to interior scenes suggests a certain intimacy as well as the fluid workings of memory. The specificity of the poem's title, too, reinforces a sense of place. The home recalled here is a village given a feeling of permanence by its proximity to "the coal-tipped misty slopes / Of old Garth mountain who tonight / Lies grey as a sermon of patience."[54] By stating the local significance of the seemingly impersonal mountain, the speaker establishes himself as one with ears to hear the "sermon of patience" the "threadbare congregations of the anxious" have known all their lives.

Despite existing "huddled in black-out rows," the domestic scene displays signs of continuity. The "soap-scrubbed table" around which families gather embodies the ongoing maintenance of home. The inhabitants have learned to "Hoard the hand-pressed human warmth" that lends the comfort of physical contact. Disregarding "chilblained fingers," mothers touch their children with accustomed tenderness. Young women sit knitting, schoolboys work sums, and women nurse babies. Life appears to go on as usual. "But no man in the house to clean the grate / Or bolt the outside door or share the night"; a crucial element is missing. Men continue their public duties, but these duties leave notable absences in the private sphere. Other alterations impress themselves on the observer: the young women who spend their evenings knitting are "Clicking bone needles over khaki scarves," and they do so "with yellow hands" after spending their days as "Munition girls." Not only have their roles changed, but all aspects of their daily lives are touched by the inescapable presence of death.

> Yet everywhere through cracks of light
> Faint strokes of thoughtfulness feel out

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[54] Lewis, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1945) 16. Subsequently cited as *HHT*.

Into the throbbing night's malevolence,
And turn its hurt to gentler ways.

Like lamplight through blackout curtains, home warmth escapes its wartime constraints as neighbors set caring defiantly against the destruction of an air raid. The speaker appears to regard the anonymous village and its cherished inhabitants as a talisman against the threat of annihilation. In this trope Lewis is not alone; Hywel Teifi Edwards describes how J. M. Edwards's poem "Pentrefi Cymru" identified "the villages of Wales as impregnable strongholds of simplicity standing on the shores of a turbulent sea. Facing the Nazi beast within the security of their timeless defences, the memory of them acted both as balm and bidding for their children scattered far afield."[55] In "Welsh Night," however, the *Heimliche* triumphs only uneasily:

Hearing the clock strike midnight by the river
This village buried deeper than the corn
Bows its blind head beneath the angelic planes,
And cherishing all known and suffered harm
It wears the darkness like a shroud or shawl.

Nearly every line in this stanza suggests multiple meanings. The clock's striking midnight is a familiar sound, but also faintly ominous. The image of the village "buried deeper than the corn" suggests the destruction feared during nighttime raids as well as the potential of a germinating seed. Likewise the bowing of its "blind head" indicates the obscuring of a familiar poetic image, that of windows resembling eyes, while also reinforcing the helplessness of a nameless village in the midst of total war. In "cherishing all known and suffered harm," the villagers appear not only to celebrate sacred memory, but to refuse to overcome grief. The significance of darkness, in particular, is left deliberately ambiguous: worn like "a shroud or shawl," it brings the inescapable possibility of death, but it also provides safety and the reassurance of human contact. The complete portrait allows the familiar pride of place but

[55] Edwards, "'Y Pentre Gwyn' and 'Manteg': From Blessed Plot to Hotspot," *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Contexts*, ed. Alyce von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2004) 8.

dwells amply on the threat posed to that comfortable association, culminating in an uncertain conclusion.

Uncertain conclusions may indeed be the only kind possible in the face of such ambiguity. It would appear nearly impossible to state home truths with "home" under such literal and conceptual threat. Freud mused in preliminary fashion that the uncanny, the *Unheimliche*, the unhomelike, "would always, as it were, be something one does not know one's way about in."[56] Lewis writes of the alienation of the self in the place that ought to be home. His characters make themselves strange to their families or communities, or they find their homes transformed by time and distance. They cannot be at home anymore. Lewis moreover depicts "Wales" as both home and exotic, employing an interpretive gaze at once intimate and detached. Finally, he shows war to forcibly defamiliarize even what class tensions and authorial technique leave untouched. The familiar route grows new branches; one's firm footfalls along the road seem echoed by ghosts; death isn't what it used to be. Lewis suggests that the "friendly street," wherever it lies, will become the "empty street," inhabited only by ghosts. No one, it seems, can go home again.

[56] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 221.

2. "The Landless Soldier Lost in War": The Army and Self-Exile

In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Freud writes that "The individual who is not a combatant—and so a cog in the gigantic machine of war—feels bewildered in his orientation, and inhibited in his powers and activities."[1] Lewis's portrayal of the life of the soldier suggests that orientation is not necessarily more discernible for the cog. As Kathleen Devine argues, "Centrally present in the war-time writing of Alun Lewis is an almost obsessive concern with the danger of losing what, in 'War-Wedding', he calls 'The fragile universe of self' through the destructive experiences of war."[2] Lewis enlisted with the Royal Engineers in May 1940, bringing to a close one period of deliberation (*Life* 74–76). He was to be a soldier now, "And we all dress the same, queue up for the same food, and go to sleep at the same time. Yah!"[3] Lewis found it difficult, however, to play the role with quite the ease he attributed to his fellow soldiers, about whom he wrote, "I don't think they realise the immense revolution that's taking place, the vast lapse of the world as it loses its balance under the thirst of Hitler's robots."[4] As he wrote to Llewelyn Wyn Griffith,

> The last six months—during which I have been commissioned—have so undermined my *self* that I value with the half-apathetic half-desperate mind of a sick person the professions of faith that come my way. I find it hardest to identify 2/Lt A Lewis with Alun Lewis: and I believe it's not confined to me, but is a general symptom of the *Now* through which Britain is passing.[5]

Noting Freud's ambivalence about the impact of war on civilization, Jacqueline Rose observes that war "mimics or participates in the fundamental ambivalence of civilization itself."[6] That ambivalence of the "*Now*" came to occupy Lewis's imagination in a number of ways. He

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[1] Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *Standard Edition,* vol. 14 (1955) 275.

[2] Kathleen Devine, "The Way Back: Alun Lewis and Remarque," *Anglia* 103.3–4 (1985): 320.

[3] Lewis, letter, 21 May 1940, *Letters to My Wife* 30.

[4] Lewis, letter, 24 May 1940, *Letters to My Wife* 31.

[5] Lewis, letter, 22 March 1942, reproduced in Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study."

[6] Jacqueline Rose, *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 16.

continued to write about the fragmented, uncertain self in relation to a negating other comprising various conceptions of the army and of the war itself. The army extends the process of being "unhomed," whereby any person, institution, place, or object that cannot be incorporated into a notion of "home" must be considered other—sometimes threatening, sometimes alluring, and not infrequently some combination of the two.

1

On a mundane level, the class tensions pervasive in Lewis's pre-war work manifest themselves in new ways once he joins the army. While Lewis disdained promotion for its own sake, after a restless year with the Royal Engineers he was ready to accept a commission out of sheer boredom (*Life* 95–96). His writing frequently mocks the absurdity of the rigid class distinctions observed within the army, distinctions he shows to be misleading measures of identity. He also depicts the difficulty of self-definition through army camaraderie and notes particularly the isolation and self-consciousness attending those who uneasily play the role of officer.

1.1

In his writing, the army hierarchy and its supporters represent a fairly broad target at which to aim in frustration at a sapper's or a subaltern's inability to make any difference in a world gone mad. This tension frequently finds expression in his letters; for example, he observes that "the boys all marched 4 miles for a bath at the airport yesterday, and I went to see they used the nailbrush, while the Japs were bombing Luzon and the great empires sway and fall."[7] Misplaced priorities were not the only problem. Lewis also found himself confronting a social structure determined to preserve itself even as all else fell. Before enlisting Lewis garnered some idea of what to expect; he records registering for service—requesting non-combatant work—and being examined by a doctor who

[7] Lewis, letter, December 1941, *Letters to My Wife* 185.

> talked to me as if I were the son of one of his best clients, the youngest son of many. He said "What sort of a job shall we find for you? Commission? Or Intelligence work? You were in the O.T.C. in college? No? Silly boy. You want to go into the R.A.M.C.? I shouldn't. Get on, boy. R.A.M.C. isn't anything. I'm sure you will do very well if you only try."[8]

Lewis addresses the idea of officer status as social advancement more thoroughly in his satirical "The Creation of a Class," published anonymously in 1941. With "the objective eye of impotence," the persona adopted by Lewis for the occasion reports that "At Octu it is each for himself, and within a week all the sergeants and corporals and privates have come out in their true colours—men who mean to get on in the world. Men who are lucky enough because of the war to miss out the sending their son to a good school stage. Men who can do it themselves."[9] Time and again, Lewis observes those around him regarding the war as opportunity while paying scant regard to its human cost. Such folly affords him substantial scope for satire despite persistent feelings of powerlessness.

"The Last Inspection," which Lewis half-expected to earn him "a courtmartial [. . .] if anybody in the War Office reads Horizon,"[10] presents a view of the war as a garden party for incompetent officers. As the old brigadier, a man of important inconsequence, retires—again—he invites a company of "colonels and captains" and "women in sables and astrakhan with little veils on their hats and silk stockings" (*CS* 20) to inspect the work that has gone forward on the camp railway line during his tenure. The entire party boards "the two posh carriages that had been waiting for fifteen years in the carriage sheds for this supreme occasion" (*CS* 20), pulled by a steam engine "touched up" for its unaccustomed service. The most careful attention is paid to appearances. The R.S.M., a repository for management jargon, warns the driver to "Get cracking. Waken your ideas up" and directs formidable discipline toward the objective of not breaking any of the china on board for the day's festivities (*CS* 20). The brigadier, trusting in appearances, is determined "to see everything

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[8] Lewis, "Last Leaves of a Civilian's Journal," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 67 (1980): 38.

[9] Lewis, "The Creation of a Class," *Horizon* Sept. 1941: 167.

[10] Lewis, letter, 20 January 1941, *Letters to My Wife* 99.

today, for himself" (*CS* 19), and, the narrator reports in an innocently credulous voice, "There were a lot of things to inspect" (*CS* 20). The inspection includes barracks, construction yards, stores depots, and other such sites of great strategic urgency, all requiring an honor guard standing on the cinders next to the track. At every stop, the entire party climbs out of and back into the train so that the brigadier can ignore the barracks and instead inspect the guards' buttons (*CS* 21). When, after lunch, the remainder of the inspection is cancelled due to rain and time constraints, one sergeant is sorry not to have had the opportunity to fool the brigadier into thinking the men well-equipped (*CS* 22).

The story emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the officers, particularly the brigadier. The non-commissioned officers come off no better, arguing not about war strategy but about hunting with beagles: "There were a lot of sergeants in the shed. Nobody knew what half of them were doing" (*CS* 19). Now that he is retiring and unable to effect any changes, the brigadier wants to know "whether any work has been done [. . .] how things have been getting along, sort of thing" (*CS* 19). Having emerged from retirement at the start of the war, he had wanted to complete the railway line to "show he realised the gravity of the situation":

> During the last twenty years they had been trying to make the two ends of the railway meet by constructing a loop at each end which was to meet in the middle at a point among the gorse and scrub which was marked X on the big chart in the Brigadier's office. But one thing and another had prevented the completion of the task during peace time. There was no real urgency in peace time. Now things were different. National emergency, supreme effort. (*CS* 21)

The line that the brigadier inspects upon retirement, however, remains incomplete despite his frequent petitions to the War Office. The military line that he feels to be "*his* line, his monument" (*CS* 21) in fact "wound about like an undecided snake" (*CS* 20–21). The brigadier, of course, seems not to realize what an impotent stab he has made at immortality or how little he has actually grasped "the gravity of the situation." His interest remains not in the work or in the inspecting of it, but in demonstrating his own importance.

"The Last Inspection" takes place on the last day of 1940, a temporal interstice emphasizing the shift from phoney war to the very real horror of the blitz. Thus Lewis

satirizes not just the absurdity of the self-important but their willingness to drink scotch while the East End burns. Several small details highlight the unreality of the situation, the confusion as to what is real or important. Conversation between Fred, the train's driver, and Mogg, the fireman, reveals that, unlike their families at home, soldiers are well-supplied with cigarettes and long underwear (*CS* 20). The work gangs attempting to complete the railway line "did what they could" with no materials, in part because in the winter "they couldn't keep warm without working" (*CS* 21). Fred and Mogg eat their bully beef sandwiches while sitting "on a lump of coal each" outside the dining car. Shortly thereafter, the inspection of the strategic new line is cancelled, "With regret," due to rain and the importance of savouring good wine and old scotch (*CS* 21); Fred and Mogg regret the cancellation because it means no scotch or good food for them, and Mogg listens to the after-lunch speeches "in a hungry sort of way" (*CS* 22). The men's commentary provides a subversive gloss on the proceedings:

> Mogg strolled back to the footplate where Freddy was dozing by the fire. "The war's nearly over, Fred," said Mogg, grinning sulkily. We've dug for Victory and saved for Victory. And now they're drinking for it."
> "D'you think there'll be any left for us?" Fred said. (*CS* 22)

Fred ostensibly refers to the scotch, but his question also seems to ask what "Victory" will mean for the working class. The banter between the two as they toast the brigadier's successor—"Let's hope he knows there's a war on"—demonstrates their superior grasp of the war and its domestic implications. Nevertheless some part of the meaning of war eludes even them until the last moments of the story. Just as they return to the loco shed and Fred congratulates himself on obeying the order not to break any china, a telegram arrives for him:

> "Oh Christ," said Fred, turning grey at the thought of his wife and kids in Shoreditch. "Oh Christ. Oh Christ."
> Mogg took his arm, gently. (*CS* 22)

This sudden turn of mood brings the reality of the war to the forefront for the first and only time. There the story ends, the telegram having abruptly dismissed the officers' charade.

The more ambitious "Acting-Captain" likewise satirizes the army's endless pursuit of appearances. The story immediately strikes a sardonic tone as it lays the scene: "The

detachment was a very small one, a single platoon sent from the battalion to guard the dock gates and perimeter, but they had a bugle" (*CS* 106). Taffy Thomas walks about the camp picking up litter with a sharpened stick, suggested ironically by Curly Norris because "it gave the camp a better tone, made it more like a royal park. Curly also wanted to indent for a couple of fallow deer" (*CS* 109). Acting-Captain Cochrane, the detachment commander, is careful to maintain "the image of a forceful disciplined soldier" and worries that his isolated posting provides him with insufficient opportunity to project that image (*CS* 108). In the absence of military conflict, he must devise a "tactical plan" for an evening of dinner and dancing (*CS* 123). The colonel who arrives to inspect the camp is annoyed that the fireplace bricks in the Nissen huts have not been whitewashed as per orders: "Christ. What are you here for?" (*CS* 123). What, indeed?

While skewering this over-reliance on appearances, Lewis underlines more serious problems. An old soldier's allusion to life in the trenches of the previous war contrasts vividly with Taffy's duties as Cochrane's batman, which include boiling shaving water and making tea "with a spoon infuser" (*CS* 108). And just as the captain's spoon-infused tea contrasts with Taffy's own "greased tea" and his shaving ritual differs markedly from Rosendale shaving in the stores shed with 'a splinter of glass an inch long stuck into a packing case" (*CS* 111), so the real illness of Taffy's wife stands in cruel contrast to the captain's self-induced hangover and spleen, which leaves him particularly lacking in empathy for Taffy. Having been a regular officer until shortly before the war began, he exercises the privileges of his position whenever possible; the narrator explains that "The O.C. always enjoyed a little adjudication. It gave him strength" (*CS* 115). Relishing his power after giving Taffy and Rosendale a "dressing down," he taps his swagger cane carelessly "against the brown boots Taffy had brought to a nice shine" (*CS* 116). He defends the class system without understanding it, claiming to be "a Socialist at heart, but it's not a bit of good trying to help the people. They don't want to be helped" (*CS* 116). Cochrane is quite willing to help himself, and his ambitions appear most tangibly when the colonel's daughter visits his office. He intends to use her to raise his

prospects, but she also reinforces his native social position: "She swept through in a swirl of fur and silk and interesting perfumes. He closed the door after her, humbly" (*CS* 118). And for all the importance he attaches to the appearance of discipline, he is unable to resist endangering his designs on the colonel's daughter by using his current status to form a liaison with a local dressmaker, Eva, who startles him with the news that she is pregnant.

Here, as in "The Last Inspection," Lewis shows an officer more interested in self-promotion than in protecting the nation. The narration links Taffy and Cochrane through the action of the Luftwaffe and also highlights their differences thus. Taffy, after his wife is killed in an air raid, is "just walking around, trying to keep himself from freezing and crying and lying down in a doorway"; meanwhile, Cochrane has "also suffered some emotional disturbance" born entirely of his own irresponsibility and has become excited by the sight of the enemy plane in the searchlights, "trembling to sink his teeth into it, to draw blood" (*CS* 129–30). The air war which has killed Taffy's wife is to him a "Damn good show" (*CS* 130). After spending twenty-four hours dealing with the fallout from the war and from his own actions, the captain "yawned and put his feet up for a few minutes, and thought, well, that was that" (*CS* 131). "That" neatly draws a line under Taffy's bereavement, Eva's pregnancy, and the war itself, and he is free now to consider his "prospects."

1.2

Certainly critiques of the officer class became more complicated once Lewis found himself a part of it. But even before receiving his commission, Lewis found camaraderie within the ranks difficult to negotiate. His letters from Longmoor contain telling imagery: "Most of them here are happy as pigs. They grouse as pigs grunt, whole heartedly."[11] Lewis, it seems, found it difficult to fall into the army life so "whole heartedly," nor did he particularly desire to be a

[11] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, undated, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 20, ff. 15–16.

pig. Around the same time he wrote that "There are three very nice lads here—they speak my language—books and that."[12]

Finding a shared language, a shared fund of experience and temperament, proved a continual problem for the soldier-poet speaking in a number of Lewis's poems and stories from this time. The soldier in "Ballerina" explains to the young woman who has made him supper that "I'm not like the rest of them up there [. . .]. They like beer and dances and women and jokes, but I like being by myself. I like sad things [. . .] the stars and music you can't hear" (*CS* 140). The conversation between the two seems awkward, disjointed, but they communicate more fully as she dances to his singing. "Lance-Jack" attempts to celebrate the presence in the army of "plenty of friends" and "democracy" in the sense of social leveling, but later the poet's musings upon dragonflies are interrupted by a vulgar comment from a fellow soldier (*CS* 69). In "To Edward Thomas," in which the speaker announces himself as a successor in the uneasy role of soldier-poet, he describes coming upon a memorial stone at Steep. The stone itself rests in a high, removed location, forever setting apart "Edward Thomas, Poet." In his approach to that location the speaker imagines himself experiencing the same sensations:

> Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew
> My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift
> Much less, my hope
> No more than yours.
> And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,
> Lonely and exalted by the friendship of the wind
> And the placid afternoon enfolding
> The dangerous future and the smile. (*RD* 22)

To some extent the speaker's claim of feeling "sensitive and somehow apart" feels like a boast; at the very least, the desire to perceive "The dangerous future and the smile" offers a strong temptation. The speaker entertains some urge to be "exalted" no matter what the human price.

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[12] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, undated, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 20, ff. 18–19.

In "The Soldier," the speaker describes with anguish the conflicting impulses marking his life as a soldier and then turns his gaze to those around him: "But leisurely my fellow soldiers stroll among the trees. / The cheapest dance-song utters all they feel" (*RD* 17). The speaker remains in isolation from his "fellow soldiers," who feel at home "among the trees," not noticing that "summer" has departed. "All they feel" can be contained, he assumes, by popular song lyrics, a far cry from experiencing "the dark cancer" he feels growing in himself. Again, these lines reflect a mixture of envy and perceived superiority; the speaker does not enjoy his mental turmoil, and yet he would not wish to become like his comrades. Crucially, the text provides no indication as to the accuracy of his assessment; from his isolated and self-obsessed vantage point, he is not in a position to judge his fellow soldiers except in strict comparison to his own anxieties. "After Dunkirk" appears to acknowledge as much, citing "the odd / Sardonic scorn of desolate self-pity, / The pathetic contempt of the lonely for the crowd" (*RD* 32). The isolated soldier paints his loneliness as choice rather than fear, but to be part of "the crowd" would involve transforming, even losing himself in

> The subterfuges of democracy, the stench
> Of breath in crowded tents, the grousing queues,
> And bawdy songs incessantly resung
> And dull relaxing in the dirty bar[.]

Thus his "pathetic contempt" reflects what John Davies calls "the fragility of the border-line between contempt for others and preservation of Self."[13] In the end, regardless of his choice, he becomes not only detached from the others, but self-detached. The process renders him "Less home-sick, fearful, proud, / But less a man."

The quality of camaraderie comes in for examination in "The Farewell Binge." Dick, about to ship off to the East, complains to his friend Tony that "the Army's no place. You're only a number here; you've got no pals in the Army; a pal is someone you go with wherever you are, someone you can *be* with" (*CS* 50). Dick seeks someone to affirm his selfhood

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[13] John Alun Davies, "The Poetry of Darkness: Alun Lewis's Indian Experience," diss., U of Wales, 1969, 9.

through dialogic exchange, someone who can confirm that he is more than a number. A "pal" would contribute a sense of place to an existence that is otherwise notable as a space devoid of meaning. Indeed, many of the peripheral figures in the bar where the story takes place seem desperate to form some sort of connection, however temporary or superficial. It is important to Dick that Tony remembers the morning they spent peeling potatoes together and exchanging personal information; the memory affirms that the experience meant something. But Tony is not going east with him, so Dick decides to test Mack, another comrade-in-arms who has introduced Dick that night in the bar as "my pal." As members of the same company he and Dick have shared experience on a superficial level: "Route marches, squad drill, fatigues, church parades, manoeuvres, dances, innumerable cups of tea in the Naffy, countless gossipings on the worn grass outside the tent—all this they had shared. But not much more" (*CS* 48). Dick demands that Mack buy drinks for Tony and him; Mack laughs off the request and returns to schmoozing with the A.T.S. girls he has been plying with gin (at Dick's expense) all evening. Tony observes from the next table:

> He could see now. In the middle of all this fug and booze Dick was doing something genuine, something vital to himself. He was testing the quality of a friend. He could see now just exactly what Dick wanted, what he sought, what he valued most, the thing by which he lived. It was his touchstone, his guide through the maze and the chance. (*CS* 51)

As he prepares to head into the unknown, Dick remains in search of someone he "can *be* with." The story ends with his self-preservation through friendship in the ranks a matter of grave doubt.

Additional difficulties face officers who attempt to interact with the men on some level of equality, particularly when those officers have to work through many of the same ambivalences discussed above. As the narrator of "Flick" describes his first encounter with the title character, he immediately sets himself at a disadvantage: "I was a soft-foot subaltern fresh from O.C.T.U. with no experience of actual fighting. He came to my platoon. I remember looking at his dirty book, then at his strong travel-tired face and square body loaded with equipment" (*CS* 23). Despite commenting, "rather fatuously," on Flick's name, the narrator is

not as much of a fool as he makes himself out to be. Despite—and it is despite—his training, he warms to Flick immediately, the text providing various clues that the officer mentality so recently inculcated in him exists in opposition to the "natural" warmth between comrades. The narrator, like a good officer, looks at Flick's "dirty book" before looking at his face. On the other hand, he has to remind himself after the fact that "Call me Flick, sir" is "an unusual way for a private to address an officer," or even "strictly—shall I say?—improper." At the time, however, Flick's comment feels "so natural I scarcely noticed" (*CS* 23). The interjected "shall I say?" highlights the hesitation with which the narrator uses officer language and the values it expresses.

The narrator frankly expresses "awed respect" for Flick's heroism (or adventurism). He seems to find in Flick the person he would like to be and the relationship to the army he wishes he could form:

> I got to see his way of looking at things after a time. It was so simple that it baffled me for a month or two. In such men you look for cross motives. His impulse was basically direct. He didn't want rank; swagger cane and Sam Browne didn't concern him. Similarly, before the war, he didn't want to be top of the form in school, or a know-all in College. His old man wasted a lot of money on him by the time he reached Greats at Oxford. [. . .] You wouldn't ask a man what he wanted to become; you only ask children that, and you feel an old fool even with children. I never asked Flick what he had in his mind; I knew he was serious though. (*CS* 24)

The narrator idealizes Flick, and if he cannot be like him, he at least has the good sense to value him. Flick is in some sense an invention of the narrator's anxieties—the soldier who can casually pull off acts of heroism, refuse a commission, and be happy "kipping down in dirty blankets, eating off boards, drinking in any old boozer, knocking off for a smoke during a day's digging or wiring, yarning quietly with the colliers and labourers who were his mates" (*CS* 24). Flick, unlike the narrator's self-image, is close to nature, comfortable with the common people, strong, and self-confident:

> He was worth a lot on route marches or the dull hours of the big invasion exercises. He'd get a rabbit or a pheasant for supper; he'd find and chat with the wise and eccentric old people of farms and pubs; he carried the anti-tank rifle on his strong shoulders when the march got over-long for the rest—he

> called it his next-of-kin; and he never let the hypnosis of footslogging and subservience subdue him. (*CS* 25)

It is difficult not to read Flick as a projection of the narrator's insecurities, as a figure actively living the narrator's bookish socialism. Flick is able, unlike the narrator, to escape the artifice and do something real: annoyed by the pettiness of home front officers, "What he wanted to do was get out of it. He wasn't a peace-time soldier, he said, and as soon as it became clear that the Battalion was not going overseas he put in for a transfer to Commando" (*CS* 25). Flick in fact discomfits the O.C.—"he felt uneasy with him" (*CS* 25)—because Flick, despite his "experience and 'social qualifications,'" is able to refuse the advancement that the O.C. has made central to his own identity. For him, Flick is like a mirror that exaggerates and mocks.

Another newly minted officer appears in "It's a Long Way to Go," again uncertain of his place relative to enlisted men, non-coms, or other officers. Lieutenant Greening feels much more at ease with his communist batman than with most others in the company; their comparative intimacy is explained with the shorthand "They were both from the same mining village in South Wales" (*CS* 54). When Greening says, "Pass me my braces, Howells. Never mind about the war" (*CS* 54), they are both able to treat this linguistic slip into officer mentality—form over function—as a joke. Greening is a man impelled by "An inverted class-consciousness" to "travel third despite his first-class travel voucher" (*CS* 59). On guard duty, he notices the cold and its effect on the men, "shivering and stamping their numb feet" (*CS* 56). Greening's interaction with the men is easy on some levels, and certainly more comfortable than his conversation with the other officers and NCOs—the men know they are "permitted to take liberties" (*CS* 56). But the parenthetical text indicating Greening's unspoken thoughts marks the boundaries of that ease. Ginger Morgan reports his wife's rumoured infidelity while grinning "amiably, ingenuously," and Greening replies with outward assurance but inward doubt: "'Gossip, that's all that is, Morgan.' (God, say it's only gossip; but why does he grin so placidly, God alive?)" (*CS* 57). At some level, Greening cannot understand Morgan and is not even sure that he wants to. Nevertheless, as Greening takes

leave of the men, he defines himself through their eyes: "He knew they were watching him from the Martello, but he didn't look back. He didn't want to wave, and be sentimental, like a schoolboy leaving school after the headmaster's sententious farewell" (*CS* 58). Tellingly, an earlier draft of this story casts his leave-taking differently:

> He was intensely conscious of leaving them; it was like leaving school after the Headmaster's sententious farewell in the old days. He resisted the temptation to think sentimentally of his going—comradeship, rough living together, a laugh in the dregs of fatigue, self-revelation in the middle of midday bread and cheese, as they shivered behind the earth they had thrown up from their trenches. He would remember them that way.[14]

Here, Greening emphasizes shared experience and comradeship, and his consciousness is of his own action, not of being watched in its execution. Likewise, he treats the affairs of Ginger Morgan's wife as something known and accepted among his mates, who understand Morgan's character all too well: "The only time his cheerfulness failed him was when he had a boil or a bad tooth. He was an old woman then." Lewis apparently revised the story to increase its ambivalence and to add uncomfortable distance between Greening and men he allows "to take liberties."

If camaraderie with the men proves problematic, feeling at home in the officers' mess is even more difficult. Lewis presents several versions of this problem in his letters. He wrote to his parents of a rejection of homelike scenes in the name of duty:

> As I return the sky is flushed and the light broadening over the road and the bare house where my Welsh boys are cheery and patient withal. I wish I was in with them sometimes; yet I believe I did the right thing in taking a commission. It's early to say whether it's worth it; I don't know what sort of an officer I'll make. But it's important to try one's hardest, these frightful days.[15]

Writing perhaps with less reserve from the same location, he describes to his sister a combination of solidarity with and isolation from the men, as well as scorn for the role he finds himself expected to play:

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[14] "The Last Day" (fragment), ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 5.

[15] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, undated, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 20, f. 86.

> You might like to know about my batman. Well, I haven't got one. In the first company I was in, 59 Jones, known as Henry, "did" for me, for 2/6 a week. He did practically nothing, but we got on well together. He was a window cleaner in Swansea before the blitz! Now, in this new company, I can't get a batman because the men are all tough colliers with dirty oaths, who wouldn't "touch" the job for a pension. I don't blame them, either. So I have no coal, no fire, no water—the batman's job is to *steal* all these things, you see. Officers can't steal.
>
> Being an officer is a nasty experience, which I regret going in for. You're on a false dignity all day, and the "mess" (army term) at meals and nights isn't my idea of the congenial or the worth-while.[16]

Here Lewis foregrounds the performative aspect of life as an officer. Not only is his job a matter of "false dignity" and appearances; the necessities that allow an officer to achieve the expected appearance are to be obtained through subterfuge, without breaking role. To Gweno he emphasizes the audience, presenting his role as one he fears he cannot play convincingly. Moreover, failure will have very real psychological consequences:

> I feel as if I'd joined a monastery and taken all the vows and in my heart hated it, hated it. All the saluting and forms are like coils of barbed wire round me—and I don't know how to get out. [. . .] The Colonel told me I wasn't much use, the Adjutant looked through me, the Company Commander is a rotter, and the mess is full of petty etiquette and chatter."[17]

> For I see now what made the army tolerable was the way one could retire from the world, and be anonymous and do simply what one is told and not think or partake in it at all. But now there is no anonymity, no physical toil to soothe the mind, no quietness in the evenings when the captains dominate the mess with dirty stories and I hide myself in a selfconscious silence, no privacy now. And all the army jargon that I don't understand and all the routine I don't know, which nobody seems to bother to tell me. And new weapons and mines and flamethrowers I've not seen before; and wearing my battledress for dinner tonight and being cut and snubbed because I should have worn my service dress. And so I find my puny self trying hard to keep face and courage, trying to answer the questions and give the proper orders, with all my fine ideas of improving the army vanished, all my power of criticism flooded by the inferiority these regular majors and colonels breed in those under them, uncertain of my knowledge [. . .][18]

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[16] Lewis, letter to Mair Lewis, 1 February 1942, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 22, ff. 2–3.

[17] Lewis, letter, December 1941, *Letters to My Wife* 180.

[18] Lewis, letter, December 1941, *Letters to My Wife* 180–81.

Lewis describes the experience of being both invisible and all too visible, both of which render him "selfconscious" as an object and unable to function as an acting subject. Others see, and speak; he does neither.

Lewis makes the self-doubt of officer candidates the focus of "Almost a Gentleman" (*CS* 43–46), in which a soldier at O.C.T.U. succumbs to the conviction that the military machine is bent on defeating him. The army is a distinct threat to self, here, although Burton's own otherness undoubtedly plays a role in his failure: not only is knowledge of his Jewishness used against him; he uses it against himself. The anti-Semitic stereotypes Lewis employs in this story are, as in "The Wanderers," such as make a contemporary reader distinctly uncomfortable; nevertheless the story reveals a number of instabilities in the relationships between soldier and army and between soldiers.

The alter ego Lewis employs in "The Creation of a Class" suggests of the O.C.T.U. that "They don't want brains or individuality in an officer. They want keenness and heartiness, 'Yes, sir! No, sir!', doing something smartly wrong rather than with consideration and thought."[19] "Almost a Gentleman," or at least its officer candidate narrator, seems to take the view that, at some level, the officer mentality does require individuality and independence—but keenness at least is crucial. Burton lacks decision, trying to be all things to all people and naturally pleasing none of them. He clearly feels no respect for "the pamphlet mentality of the army" (*CS* 45), yet he panders to it anyway.

> He selected the cadets who were important in any way—Grenadier Guardsmen, Military Medallists, M.A.'s—and cultivated conversation with them. He analysed the instructors and officers to the same end, deciding which were straight, which were snobs, which were bluffers or bookworms; and he knew what each one wanted to see. He altered his mode for each instructor.
> (*CS* 44)

Burton cannot straightforwardly express an opinion, having "an oblique way of making his cracks, an ambiguous irony, as though he were always covering himself against a possible accusation of being Red" (*CS* 43). He even asks his fellow cadets, "beseechingly," whether

[19] "Creation": 168.

they think he is indecisive (*CS* 45). After being warned to improve in leadership, Burton develops "a persecution mania" (*CS* 45), and his eventual failure seems inevitable, especially to himself: "I knew they were determined to get me" (*CS* 46).

The narrator's ambivalent response to Burton highlights his own self-doubts in relation to the army. Though asserting that "we liked him quite a lot" (*CS* 44), the narrator ultimately regards Burton's fate dispassionately: "I felt they'd made a good soldier into a bad one in five minutes; still, that was their pigeon" (*CS* 46). Despite being uncomfortable laughing at Burton, and not completely able to prevent himself wondering why Burton might have "assumed the mantle of persecution with such a quiet fatalism, as if it were his customary wear" (*CS* 46), the narrator seems to accept Burton's failure as natural. This resignation to the decisions of superiors is perhaps part of what makes the narrator desirable as an officer, but it also suggests a desire not to rock the boat, to keep his head down and get on. Though "feeling rotten about it all," while saying goodbye to Burton, he is also "acutely embarrassed" (*CS* 46) as though he would prefer to avoid such scenes of ungentlemanlike vulnerability and unpleasantness. "What perplexes me," he muses, "is how they found him out. He was so plausible in public" (*CS* 46). Here, then, lies the root of new officers' neuroses: the fear of being found out. "For they are on their guard. They may have slipped up after all. *This*, not *that*, may be the real way of doing it."[20] The cadet or the new subaltern may well prefer to blush unseen, unlike Burton's "mute inglorious Dreyfus" (*CS* 46), but will "they" eventually discover that underneath his public plausibility he is "not *quite*—"?[21]

The fear of being found out also affects Lieutenant Greening in "It's a Long Way to Go," though he maintains enough sense of self not to manifest this fear in obsequiousness. As the story begins, the C.S.M., with "a sneer" and a "gleam of contempt" in his eyes, offers to help "write out the charge sheet" he knows Greening would probably avoid otherwise. The C.S.M. knows perfectly well that Greening is not a proper officer in the way the C.S.M.

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[20] "Creation": 170.

[21] "Creation": 166.

understands; likewise Cowan, the company clerk, "enjoyed his submissive authority," the power trip that comes from keeping others organized, and Greening is convinced that "he's sneering at me, too" (*CS* 52). He misplaces his swagger cane, which he knows to be a useless symbol of his rank, yet he also knows that his carelessness of appearance will lower him in the clerk's eyes. Cowan is able to manipulate the army as an instrument for self-advancement, and Greening seems both to despise and to envy this ability (*CS* 53).

The first section of the story is titled "Change for Dinner," an ironic choice given that the section establishes above all else that Greening cannot change sufficiently for dinner with the other officers. He complains of "this normality in an abnormal life, letting things slide, lacking conversation in the Mess, knowing no dirty jokes, excusing himself from beer-crawls, never reading Jane in the *Mirror* or his horoscope on Sundays" (*CS* 53). Even the Mess is abnormal, something he does not know his way about in, and he would prefer to embrace an other more recognizably foreign in the form of battlefield action. As it is, when Greening arrives late to dinner and apologizes, the O.C. replies, "Nothing unusual for a civilian" (*CS* 54); he does not recognize Greening as an infantry officer. Nor is Greening a friend or comrade: the O.C. breaks the news about Greening's imminent embarkation for India in an almost cartoonishly heartless manner: "'You're going on draft leave tomorrow. Get your tropical kit on the way home.' He took another helping of cheese" (*CS* 54). His further words to working-class Greening are primarily concerned with the quality of servants in India—"next best to the Chinese"—but he surmises that the movement for independence has spoiled the Indians as domestics (*CS* 55). The earlier draft of section two adds another mess encounter that further emphasizes Greening's difference from the other officers. The second-in-command offers Greening advice purely of the self-advancement variety and takes for granted that Greening shares his own ambitions: "keep your nose clean. Always wash it in soft soap." The captain, concerned above all with the proper mixing of the cocoa for the bread pudding, reflects that however the war ends, either Bolshevism or peace is likely to reduce the

creature comforts he enjoys as an officer. When Greening asks for news of the pilot shot down off the coast that morning, the captain responds, "Don't be so bloody cheerful."[22]

2

A broad theme that emerges in Lewis's writing about the army is the difficulty of finding or maintaining any integrity of self as a soldier. Anticipating this difficulty before enlisting, Lewis described the predicament thus:

> I'd thought about it all the winter. The perversions of Hitler had affected me less profoundly than my own destructive impulses; my longing for fulfilment shrank from the death that would probably be my contribution to the national effort; my desire to be first of all sure of myself restrained me from joining any political party, even when the left unfurled its thrilling red banner before me and my loneliness, my incompleteness longed to enter into the brotherhood of man. I preserved my integrity then by standing aside and continuing to fight my self-hatred. Then I realised that events had caught up with me, that I must decide. I saw again and again white bodies writhing under the whip and the smashed milkteeth of children. Alternately I saw the commander sign his name, the N.C.O. bark a command, the withering fire and the men falling, each with his own agony or oblivion. And I saw how impossible it was for me to enter the shambles indifferently, in khaki, with a number and a scar on my left knee and no other sign of identity. The world reverberated destruction and I could see no personal salvation in it, nor could I dedicate myself to civilisation except when the war faded into an unreal sublime anguish, a world-catharsis in which I was only a nerve to be squeezed. And he who lost himself once shrinks from losing himself again.[23]

Once again, the appeal of camaraderie is also its threat. One is tempted to seek completion through "the brotherhood of man," but one also holds fast to the "incompleteness" that is also one's own. Will that self survive the military experience? Will the "integrity" so important to the would-be soldier achieve anything but one more death, "his own" in an oblivion which makes no such distinctions? Will he be, finally, anything more than another body in khaki, belonging nowhere, another "landless soldier lost in war" (*HHT* 44)? Greening, in "It's a Long Way to Go," feels himself something of a self-in-transit. Waking to find his possessions packed and ready for embarkation, "he had a queer desolate feeling of being nobody,

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[22] "The Last Day," 8.

[23] "Last Leaves": 35.

nowhere, an unknown man in the steerage or the railway waiting room, nameless" (*CS* 55). The army, as we have seen, appears to be "no place," and its effect upon the individual soldier is to render him "nobody," unhomed even from himself.

2.1

One manifestation of this anxiety for the integrated self is something of a crisis of masculinity. Lewis's army writing sees continued efforts to define meaningful masculinities simultaneously in keeping with and in contrast to normative army manhood. Voices in "On Embarkation" ask

> whether the fortunate few will still attain
> The sudden flexible grasp of a dangerous problem
> And feel their failures broaden into manhood,
> Or take the Bren's straightforward road
> And grow voluptuous at the sight of blood? (*HHT* 28)

The only options appear to be eventual arrival at a new masculinity through repeated failure, or surrender to animal instinct and killing machinery. This project is not for the faint of heart, and the resulting crisis manifests itself in several ways. Urges "to remould the world" (*HHT* 70) require re-examination in light of the soldier's new place in the hierarchy of men. The role of the lover frequently also needs constant renegotiation after enlistment, as in "The Departure," when a man standing on the edge of a temptation to "lose himself" dreams of his lover weaving nettles "into a garment / To turn her white-winged lover back to man" (*HHT* 26–27). Perhaps most striking are the pervasive images of and allusions to impotence, even when paired with feelings and illusions of heightened power. When Lewis complains of the army's determination "To fashion men for a transient purpose who will be useless or dangerous when the goal is reached," of "A vast deadweight class" of officers as useless as "the old broad-gauge railway" for the greater good,[24] he writes from the same lexicon of uselessness and impotence he employs in his fiction and poetry.

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[24] "Creation": 171.

One struggle for masculinity involves the good intentions an officer may have brought into his position, and the ways those intentions seem to mock him with his own impotence. As discussed above, Lewis tends to portray the army hierarchy as a collection of ineffectual bunglers; the army is not a place to overcome feelings of impotence, either to change the army or to change the world. The ideal of *noblesse oblige* seems unattainable and yet remains a constant temptation. Julian Maclaren-Ross records Lewis's confession that "I'm not certain I shouldn't have stayed in the ranks [. . .]. I thought that as an officer I'd be able to do something for the men. But one's more helpless than ever."[25] "Prelude and Fugue" describes a dream of "the preacher unheeded and pitiful on the hillside, / And the poor no different for all his anguish."[26] "The Crucifixion," which uses a Christ allegory in rather sardonic fashion, alludes to "this surrender of self to a greater statement," one "desired by many more humble than he" (*HHT* 22). The everyman messiah dreams of "a time when the body and all its injunctions / And *life* and *people* and all their persistent demands / Would desist," when he can find a solitary climax in "supremest consummate passion / Passively passionate, suffering suffering only." His death will serve a grand purpose and will release him from everyday worries about fools and plans and hunger. But the event transpires to be somehow less dignified and less sanctified than he had imagined; worse, he realizes too late that

> more hung on the presence
> Of all the natural preoccupations,
> Duties, emotions, daily obligations
> Affections and responses than he'd guessed.

As death arrives, "Breaking his Self up," the Christ-substitute gains a belated understanding of what constituted that self. The poem suggests that responsible masculinity is not merely a matter of great deeds: the manner of humanitarian action matters as well, patience and helpfulness on a small, everyday scale being ultimately more useful than the "greater statement."

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[25] J. Maclaren-Ross, "Second Lieutenant Lewis: A Memoir," *The Funny Bone* (London: Elek, 1956) 181.

[26] Lewis, "Prelude and Fugue," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 63 (1978): 64.

Lewis further elaborates this idea with the story "Dusty Hermitage," in which a woman opens the neighboring cottage of a "great man" (understood to be T. E. Lawrence) to visitors on the anniversary of his death. Lawrence, in his incarnation as "Lawrence of Arabia," provides the epitome of the performative hero, a star to which important visitors are eager to hitch their wagons: "How hungrily they looked round for the Visitors' Book, [. . .] as though they particularly wanted *him* to know they *had* called" (*CS* 153). The woman explains to visitors that "He was different with different people" (*CS* 155), as though he played to his audience's expectations. Other visitors have constructed him as "an inflated public figure, a national hero, a great man, a human paradox, a Jekyll and Hyde, a mixture of a glamorous desert sheikh out of *Desert Song* and a boorish solitary playing pseudonymous games" (*CS* 152). She herself preserves her own memory of him as a neighbor and the owner of the cottage, which she maintains just as he left it. A young soldier who comes to visit that day credits her with maintaining a "living presence" and seems to perceive Lawrence as she understood him (*CS* 156)—not as a public figure, but as a complex individual uncertain of his role and unable to make "a positive choice" (*CS* 155). As the soldier leaves she remembers one of Lawrence's last letters: "As for fame after death, it's a thing to spit at; the only minds worth winning are the warm ones about us. If we miss those we are failures." She remembers, too, "how some evenings he watered her flowers" (*CS* 157). Lewis's construction of Lawrence suggests the futility of the grand gesture; the woman whose flowers he watered is the one who remembers him without ulterior motives.

A strong expression of perceived futility occurs in "It's a Long Way to Go." Greening feels as though he is losing control of himself, his circumstances, and his identity: "I'm losing my grip, he repeated in his mind for the hundredth time that day, and every day." Worse, he is "losing everything, he thought, everything. Oh Christ!" (*CS* 52). His wife's photograph in the midst of piles of unfinished work emphasizes his perceived failure as a man, and he mentally apologizes: "(Darling, I'm so sorry. I'm so useless, so worthless)" (*CS* 53). He reviews his list of tasks, exclaiming, "Actually three things done!" and acknowledges that he

bullies himself. He feels that "If only he could get into action," he could reassert the manhood leached away by endless waiting and pointless routine; "eating more meat meals than his wife" and "doing less work than his collier-father" have also inspired guilt and clearly hurt his pride. His next parenthetical address to his wife makes explicit the crisis in masculinity: "I wish I was more of a husband to you, more of a man." He reflects, too, on a time and context in which, at least in retrospect, he did know how to be a man, in teaching at the Settlement and thus fighting the effects of the class system rather than becoming part of it (*CS* 53). Later, when one of the men thanks Greening for teaching him to read and write, Greening replies, "don't bother about thanks. Perhaps I'm more thankful than you" (*CS* 58)—thankful, that is, for the reminder that he can still be useful. The figurative language attributed to Greening is telling in this context. He looks forward to India as "a new field, a field in ferment," while the home forces represent only "Withered boughs." There he can try again to send up new shoots and redefine himself, "like a worm climbing upwards in new earth" (*CS* 55). These are curious images for Greening to be using at a time when he is about to become a father, but, as we will see, he has largely dissociated his soldier identity from his home identity.

The problematic development of masculinity asserts itself as well in the uneasy integration of soldier and lover. The soldier conflates his beloved and the war or regards them as oppositional others, unable to be reconciled in his mind. Military duty itself evokes an orgasmic response, an all too fatal fascination:

> I heard the daylight wind its horn,
> I saw the cloudy horsemen ride.
> But my beloved lacked the strength
> To keep me by her side
> And I went forth in pride.
>
> I clasped the burning sun all day,
> The cold moon bled me white;
> Then all things ended suddenly.
> I saw the world take flight
> And glitter in the starry night. ("Song," *HHT* 19–20)

The masculinity of machismo leaves no room for more tender expressions of manhood. The "sheets of softest linen" in which the soldier lies with his beloved and the "snowwhite cloak"

in which his lover wraps him become harbingers of the shroud he will gain in exchange for her embrace. The soldier in "The Departure" recalls his lover bidding him farewell, "Knowing more deeply than he the threat of his voyage, / With all a living woman's fear of death" (*HHT* 27). One manifestation of that threat appears to be his tendency to imagine the troopship in sexualized terms: "He felt the curved grey bows enclose him, / The voyage beginning, the oceans giving way / To the thrust of steel" (*HHT* 26). Waking "unrested from his longing," he sets to work, sending cargo "Deep into the unrefusing ship" (*HHT* 27). The conflict between the roles of soldier and lover is inherent in the title of "War Wedding." The beloved, alone, mourns her lover's transformation into a soldier:

> They wanted only to break your gesture.
> But all your gentle seed they took
> And all your manly symmetry,
> The soft ways of your speech
> And all your laughter. (*RD* 56)

The qualities forming him as a man and as an object of her love have, she fears, disappeared. Later, in the section titled "The Marriage Bed," the soldier notes that "My heavy boots stand sentinel against / This hired bedroom underneath the eaves" (*RD* 58). His military garb banished, the marriage can achieve consummation. The boots wait to be put on again, however, and their night of peace is possible only because others "stand sentinel" against harm. Outside, the world at war is unkind to lovers, and "Where Love surrenders in that brawl / Their names are scrawled in blood along the wall" (*RD* 61).

In "Private Jones," the army's demands upon the masculine self play out differently. Dafis the post reminds Siencyn to take his identity card when he reports for duty, but he cannot remember where it is; it turns out to be in his wife's safe keeping, and she muses that "You'll have to find somewhere else to keep your things from now on, Siencyn bach" (*CS* 28). This interchange might seem to signify a transferral of loyalties from Marged to the military, but Siencyn confounds easy symbolism. To him, the army is just another place "to keep your things," even if one of those things is your official record of identity. Inasmuch as Siencyn

knows who he is, his identity is not contained on a government-issue card. Mostly he records amazement at the effect his new identity seems to have on others: "he was doing pretty well out of it; same as last night everybody was giving him things—mug, knife, fork, spoon, blankets, bag for straw, khaki suit, leggings, boots, cap, and lots of straps that he didn't know what for. And then a rifle and a bayonet. You didn't take long to become a soldier, for a fact" (*CS* 31). Lewis uses Siencyn's ingenuousness for comic effect, certainly, but through it he also decenters the official versions of reality that the army tries to impose upon Siencyn. The military nearly succeeds, though perhaps not in expected ways. The first day in the army proves so overwhelming that Siencyn finds he cannot exist in two places at once: "As for Marged and all them at home, they didn't exist any more. It was all up with them, there was no doubt" (*CS* 31). Likewise, when he returns home on embarkation leave, Marged looks at him "like he was a ghost" (*CS* 40). In the interim, Siencyn has neglected to correspond with his wife and has even forgotten the news of her pregnancy "owing to being knocked daft by a German plane" (*CS* 40). In other ways, Siencyn the lover and Siencyn the soldier are more easily integrated than as with many men, in part because Siencyn is so little touched by the army. His new army-issue false teeth and battledress and polished boots impress Marged rather than alienate her. When singing "Jerusalem" at the chapel Eisteddfod, he reflects that

> It was fine to be standing there in the whitewashed old chapel with Marged sitting in the pew where he'd carved his initials fifteen years ago [. . .]. And he'd sung it so often in the back of a lorry on exercises in the Army, and in the latrines, and peeling potatoes on jankers, that it came now with all the intimacy and rejoicing of all that had happened to him and not harmed or beaten him. And when he'd finished there was a great silence on them all, and then the men wiped the sweat from under their celluloid collars, and the women sniffed at their hankies and wouldn't look up. And Siencyn walked down and sat by Marged. (*CS* 41)

Clearly Siencyn has not been transformed by becoming a soldier so much as clarified. He may well have justified his neighbors' hopes that "the army would make a man of him before it got him killed" (*CS* 29). It is worth noting, however, that Siencyn remains something of a novelty in Lewis's oeuvre, one of the few characters maintaining a reasonably clear sense of who he is

and where he belongs. His resolution of the various claims upon self may be more enviable than achievable for Lewis's other characters.

Lieutenant Greening of "It's a Long Way to Go" finds himself torn between modes of masculinity. He laments that his wife "would have her baby without him," thus depriving him of the opportunity to prove himself as husband and father, head of the family. This role may exert a stronger hold over him than he realizes: his batman from the same village, having been refused leave upon the birth of his son, has rejected his superiors and sought a transfer to another unit, claiming that "I only serve *men*" (*CS* 54). Howells's conception of manhood clearly includes a strong appreciation of the male domestic role, and it is likely that Greening's resembles his batman's. At the same time, Greening admits repeatedly that "he was glad to be going" abroad, feeling that his departure is "a chance" (*CS* 55)—a chance, perhaps, to accomplish something worthwhile and feel like a man again. Greening finally confronts the two impulses at once when he breaks the news to his wife:

> "You weren't due for leave for another three weeks," she said. "Please tell me," she said, stopping at the edge of the bridge, putting her palms on his chest, leaning to him.
> "I can't talk with all this kit on me," he said.
> "Where are you going?" she asked, holding his eyes in her insistent gaze.
> "India," he said. It was a little word, wasn't it? Five letters.
> "Darling," she said, resting against him, bowing her head on his trench coat between the shiny buttons. (*CS* 60).

The image of Greening's wife resting her head between his well-polished buttons forms a succinct illustration of the soldier-persona's intervention in personal relationships. She prepares their tea in a setting redolent of domestic tranquillity: kitten, hearth, cottage pie, "clean snow-white towel in the scullery." As Greening listens to the wireless he reflects that "The news was normal, too. The last imperial troops had crossed the Johore causeway from the mainland. One of our fighters shot down off the East coast, but the pilot was safe" (*CS* 60). Once again, the war has redefined "normal"; Greening has moreover brought his soldier-normality home with him, having watched the same pilot bail out that very morning. His conflicting responses to his home and his wife are developed further at the end of the story:

> When he had come on leave at other times they had acted like strangers, not understanding each other somehow. It was terrible, the coldness that wouldn't melt for days sometimes, and which they never mentioned, although they knew it was there. In his sleep he would give fire orders and tell men to take cover. And she lay awake, listening, holding a stranger in her arms, as if in charity.
>
> This time there was no strangeness. It was good fortune. She had touched the life in him in that little pause on the bridge. And she was content if he were wholly hers, just for this little while. (*CS* 61–62)

Greening's ill-fitting role in the army has made him equally uncomfortable in his domestic role, unable always to perform the self he had previously enacted for his wife. Their ordeal illustrates in more concrete fashion the musings put forth in the story "Grenadier," that "when you've been knocked about in the Army for nine months without seeing your woman at all, you can't understand her straight away when you do at last meet her. You're a stranger to her, to her idea of you also, and it needs time to put it right."[27] For "this little while," at least, Greening succeeds in embodying his wife's idea of him, and she has learned not to expect more.

For other men the temptation to leave behind lovers and embrace fully the consummation offered by war becomes almost too great. The title character in "Ballerina" discloses that "My husband is in Libya flying a plane [. . .]. He doesn't love me now. He is only flying" (*CS* 141). In "Acting-Captain," Eva muses about the husband who died in "his pet tank" (*CS* 130) and whom she now can barely remember: "He liked tanks and so he liked the war. I don't think he bothered about dying, or being away from me" (*CS* 126). She understands from experience the antithesis of soldier and lover and applies it pathetically to the blustering Cochrane, who leaves her bed suddenly during an air raid: "Of course he had to go; a soldier like him" (*CS* 130).

This tension is explored most fully in "Cold Spell," which follows the deepening relationship between an unnamed flight sergeant and Gracie, a Naffy girl. The two meet in the aerodrome, so their relationship is from the beginning colored by the war and "the special

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[27] Lewis, "Grenadier," *Bugle Blast: An Anthology from the Services*, ed. Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore, 2nd series (London: Allen and Unwin, 1944) 173.

problems facing lovers in war-time—the practical difficulty of finding a place to meet, the pressure of being in constant danger."[28] Gracie finds that she cannot fully surrender her self to the progress of love: "Somewhere in the part of a person that melts and flows and overwhelms there was a lump of ice in her that wouldn't melt" (*CS* 143). The "lump of ice" in her chest both protects and inhibits her; she is willing to be only so vulnerable. While her reserve would be understandable in any new romance, it seems particularly inevitable when the object of her affection risks death every night. His job is the "other complication" in their relationship, his death a spectral presence, "blowing their hair a little even in the quietest hours" (*CS* 143). When that haunting gets "on his nerves," Gracie finds that he is prone to greater uncertainty of identity: "he might be a lot of things then. He might be indifferent to her, or restless, wanting to get drunk, or peevish and sarcastic about love and settling down and that, or cynical" (*CS* 143). Under the circumstances, each finds it difficult to be sure of the other.

Even though their relationship progresses to the point of sexual intimacy, much is left unsaid. "He had never said a word about the future. Marriage wasn't in his mind. And how could it be when he didn't expect to live?" (*CS* 147). The problem is not that the flight sergeant fails to think about himself relative to Gracie, but that he cannot even imagine himself in relation to life itself. He is, like the ballerina's husband, "only flying." Gracie cannot help feeling superfluous: "He belonged to his kite, and was part of its crew. He talked of her engines and controls and guns with the intimate quietness of a lover. [. . .] She meant more to him than Gracie did" (*CS* 147–48). Gracie cannot be part of that all-consuming part of his life and feels like "a raven at the feast" (*CS* 148). While she does not resent his priorities, she resents the possibility of their continuing indefinitely, "Hating the war more than the danger, the continuance of the risk more than its ending" (*CS* 148).

The crisis finally arrives after one of his crewmates dies during a mission. The shock forces him into a different relationship with life, one in which Gracie plays a central role. Earlier in the story he has described to Gracie "how the south coast looked in the moonlight

[28] J. Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," 347.

when you were coming home" (*CS* 144), and at the time it is unclear what "coming home" means to him. During the dénouement, as he explains the revelation he has experienced following Micky's death, Gracie receives

> a queer impression that he was in the plane, a speck in the clouds over the world trying to bring her back to the landing field, the sleeping bunk, the breakfast and bath, Gracie's window—to the solid fixed point on the earth where the odd clues made a human reality and he was able to be something familiar and simple. He wanted to make the airport, and find it not the scientific centrifugal force that sent planes out like shuttles on a loom, but *home, his* home. (*CS* 150)

Crucially, she has become part of his conception of home. Inasmuch as he has up till now found a kind of home in his kite, he has now been unhomed by "the stink of blood, and the clots of black flesh" in Micky's cabin. He has finally spotted the ghost in the room with them, what he has been "dragging in the muck" behind him (*CS* 151). The story ends with her accepting his marriage proposal as a brace of swans land on the lake next to them: "'Perfect landing!' he said. 'Wasn't it? Couldn't have done better myself'" (*CS* 151). The obvious symbolism of the pair coming in safely together is undercut slightly by the reminder that, even at such a moment, the flight sergeant's mind cannot stray far from his job.

The struggle to reconcile conflicting modes of masculinity results in a number of suggestive, even cataclysmic images of both awesome power and humiliating impotence. The soldiers of "From a Play" chorus, "We are the little men grown huge with death" (*RD* 33). Having participated in unimaginable slaughter for the sake of "the honour of the regiment," they remember their humanity too late and perceive their "lonely destiny," their inability to return home to "Our faint familiar homeland haloed / In a rainbow of disease." Beset by doubts and regrets, "we guarded our littleness with rifles" (*RD* 34). The men exhibiting almost unlimited killing potential bear this power in contrast to, and perhaps in compensation for, the "littleness" they feel impressed upon them. As an extension of this contradiction, Lewis's work contains several allusions to outright castration, and even more to its Freudian substitution, blindness.

Freud spends a good deal of time in "The Uncanny" elucidating the connection between castration and blindness, particularly in relation to E. T. A. Hoffman's "The Sandman":

> A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*. We may try on rationalistic grounds to deny that fears about the eye are derived from the fear of castration, and may argue that it is very natural that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a proportionate dread. Indeed, we might go further and say that the fear of castration itself contains no other significance and no deeper secret than a justifiable dread of this rational kind. But this view does not account adequately for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies; nor can it dispel the impression that the threat of being castrated in especial excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring. All further doubts are removed when we learn the details of their "castration complex" from the analysis of neurotic patients, and realize its immense importance in their mental life.[29]

Royle, writing about Freud's essay, comments that

> Its ocularcentrism is perhaps nowhere more marked than in its *focus* on castration and the fear of blindness. Sexual identity (having or not having a penis) is a matter of visual revelation and perception. No doubt uncanny feelings are very often generated by strange sights, unveilings, revelations, by what should have remained out of sight.[30]

Bearing this connection in mind, the reader must be struck by the importance of vision, or the lack of it, in Lewis's work. Allusions to blindness occur regularly, as do visions which ultimately cheat the understanding. The viewer can no longer trust his own eyesight, his power to discern and to judge, and thus he is forced into passivity and, indeed, impotence.

Lewis explores the "limits" of vision in the third section of "To Edward Thomas," which represents an exercise in the poet's craft and gaze, an attempt to encompass "Life" through observation. Nevertheless the speaker understands that the vision is only temporary, and that Life always offers something supplementary beyond the eye's ability to comprehend,

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[29] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 231.

[30] Royle, *The Uncanny* 45; emphasis in original.

in all senses of the word. He observes the progress of the sunlight until it reaches the point "Where sight surrenders" (*RD* 22) and "can no longer reassure"[31]; the mind is left alone to try to find its way. In this poem the speaker appears to accept that uncertainty: "And for that moment Life appeared / As gentle as the view I gazed upon."

In other poems, however, the curtailment of the power of vision occurs in nihilist or even violent fashion. Its limits threaten even self-perception, rendering the soldiers of "On Embarkation" into premature wraiths: "Each of us is invisible to himself, / Our eyes grow neutral in the long Unseen" (*HHT* 28). The visions of "The Madman," in a pre-war poem, belie the totalizing power of sight; the "wonder in his eyes" comprehends so much as to leave "his mind dissolved in vastness" (*RD* 85–86). "Threnody for a Starry Night" refers to "The blind unnerving harmonies of fate" (*RD* 37), suggesting that destiny itself is not only incapable of foresight (and, perhaps, discrimination) but, once apprehended through the ear, already inescapably in the process of coming to pass.[32] And fate is indeed at work in the poem: "Where sweet eyes were / Now are hollow craters." These ambiguous lines suggest not only the forcible removal of the power of sight, but the impotence of the soldier to protect what is now "Love's torn head." Lovers observe "dark conflicting shadows lengthening out / Like evening on the turbid centuries" (*RD* 38), obscuring their power of vision even as they employ it. Too late they perceive that "We were the daylight but we could not see" (*RD* 39), impotent to stop the darkness. Sight is not the only sense connected with power here. As David Shayer points out, "The ultimate darkness is also associated for Lewis with silence; the darkness is itself silent and enigmatic, and the men who confront it fall silent themselves."[33] The goddess Isis "Has taken the frozen soldiers into her silence," further rendering them unmanned. The poem's final section describes the ultimate triumph of blindness:

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[31] Ian Hamilton, introduction, *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Ian Hamilton (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966) 24.

[32] Cf. Royle 46.

[33] David Shayer, "The Poetry of Alun Lewis," *Triskel Two: Essays on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Literature* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1973) 142.

> The white brain crossing
> The frontiers of darkness
> To darkness and always
> Darkness pursuing,
> Finds asylum in a dreamless
> Traumatic anguish where the planets
> Stay at the stations where they gathered
> In darkness of Creation;
> [. . . . . .]
>
> And in the dark the sensitive blind hands
> Fashion the burning pitch of night
> In lovely images of dawn.
>
> The soldiers' frozen sightless eyes
> End the mad feud. The worm is love. (*RD* 39)

The inescapable darkness verges on madness, a "Traumatic anguish" representing "asylum" in yet another darkness. Within the darkness, "sensitive blind hands" mould the unnaturally illuminated night into "images of dawn" they cannot see. This "mad feud," between darkness and dawn, blindness and image, ends with "The soldiers' frozen sightless eyes," forever disempowered.

The strength of "Night," as evoked in "The Sentry," is so great as to prevent dreams and "breathless images of sleep" from reaching the mind's eye. With "bat's-eyes," the speaker watches "sleeplessly" "within Sleep's province" (*RD* 20). One of the more unsettling aspects of this poem, of course, is that bat eyes are commonly understood to be blind. When "the guns' implacable silence" (*RD* 21) registers in addition to the impenetrable blackness, the sensory claustrophobia becomes extreme, the knowledge that "there is no escape / From Night" unavoidable (though not entirely unwelcome, as I will discuss in a later chapter). In such an environment the self appears a very brief candle indeed. In a similar if milder fashion, the speaker of "Encirclement," wrapped in "Everyman's darkness" and struggling with "shrivelled roots" (*HHT* 20), tries to "strive with the heart's blind strength" to escape the darkness and envision a "lamplit," "sanctified" image of a beloved face. "War Wedding" makes more explicit the connection between blindness and impotence/castration. Fearful his lover will not come to him, the soldier imagines that "Into the gutters of darkness I bleed and bleed. / The moon has placed white pennies on my eyes" (*RD* 55). Sexual frustration seems to leach away

potency and inspire the uncanny image of the unseeing corpse bearing glinting coins where eyes should be. Even when she arrives, "She will not touch the blindness from my eyes / Nor stroke the hair of silence on my loins / Nor bare her wistful breasts" (*RD* 56–57).

Some poems do allude specifically to the soldier's fear of castration, a fear particularly linked to mental and verbal acuity. "The Soldier" claims to

> Feel the dark cancer in my vitals
> Of impotent impatience grope its way
> Through daze and dream to throat and fingers
> To find its climax of disaster. (*RD* 17)

These are not Lewis's most controlled lines of poetry—Patrick Crotty refers to them as "one of the most inept stanzas he ever published"[34]—but the troubled speaking subject inspires interest precisely because he threatens self-immolation at every phrase. He appears nearly inarticulate with the fear that impotence, the alien threat within his own body, will lead to disaster; it is as though he verbally strangles himself. That alienation from the sexual organs finds echoes elsewhere—notably in "Threnody for a Starry Night," which alludes to "grey affliction that shall spill / Out of our private parts like sawdust / From broken dolls" (*RD* 37). The second stanza of "The Soldier," too, is difficult to decipher, though again its style seems vaguely fitting as an evocation of the "madness" of war, which the soldier's mind cannot encompass. Trapped (even rhetorically) in a "Hall of Mirrors," the soldier struggles with the endlessly elusive and supplementary nature of representation, particularly self-representation. From "green reflective woods" to "peaks of madness," the old reliable images appear to have been shattered into glittering fragments, recalling the "shattered crystal" of the madman's mind in "the madness of his helplessness" (*RD* 85). The speaker of "Odi et Amo" thinks back wonderingly to his civilian life, to "the loins in passion," and observes dispassionately that now, as he has become a new kind of man, "my loins are flat and closed like a child's" (*RD* 24–25). But then this preternatural calm gives way to a feverish third section in which he

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[34] Patrick Crotty, "The Broken Voice of Alun Lewis," *Welsh Writing in English* 2 (1996): 171. Shayer, on the other hand, credits Lewis with "deliberately using a wild exaggerated style to reflect the state of the soldier's mind" ("The Poetry of Alun Lewis" 137).

observes everything about him being "corrupted," a "blood-soaked forest of disease." In this environment, "none can hear / The love songs of Ophelia / And the laughter of Lear"; even if he cannot discern it, the soldier knows madness to lie potentially behind every tree.

2.2

Perhaps the most troubling and pervasive difficulty Lewis describes with respect to the integration of self into the army is a persistent feeling of self-division. "The soldier" remains an entity separate from one's self. It is a performance, a mask, even a doppelgänger, possessed of uncanny attributes and calling "reality" into question. We have noted Lewis's comment that "I find it hardest to identify 2/Lt A Lewis with Alun Lewis"; Maclaren-Ross recalls walking outside with Lewis only to have the latter "rush back in for his Sam Browne: 'I'm always forgetting the damn thing.'"[35] Likewise, Lieutenant Greening emerges from reflections on self and home into a moment during which "He stood up, suddenly realising he was an infantry officer" (*CS* 53). The narrator of "Grenadier" reflects,

> I have noticed [. . .] that soldiers tell the next man, be it on guard or in the line, on fatigues or in the canteen, the most intimate confessional secrets of their lives with what seems utter indifference. There is no air of confidence or reticence about it; they might be talking about some one else, despite the use of the first person; and indeed they are, I believe, talking about their *lost* selves, the selves they signed away.[36]

In "After Dunkirk," Lewis describes army discipline as "a test of self; one learns to bear / Insult as quietly as if it were / A physical deformity" (*RD* 32). Illustrating Freud's formulation of an "urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that [threatening] material outward as something foreign to itself,"[37] humiliation becomes externalized, attributed to the soldier-body so that the self remains intact.

"Finale" describes an officer who lives in a series of "poses" (*RD* 28). Continually concerned with others' view of him, he regards his surroundings as a series of scenes for such

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[35] Maclaren-Ross 181.

[36] "Grenadier" 163.

[37] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 236.

poses: "By the palm-tree in the foyer, / At the saloon bar and the banker's counter, / Crossing the dance floor after the rumba." In a curious reflective vision, he sees himself "glorified in the minds of others," very consciously defining himself in relation to others in the hope that in producing a certain image through this complicated mirror system, he can become that image. He attempts to act out a certain mode of masculinity, one displaying "the flashy epaulettes of tradition": "fascinating to the young ladies, / Male, seductive, sardonic for the occasion." And yet he is "ever restless" in this charade, suspecting that he is a fake and "Locked in uneasy conflict with the unwinking / Inscrutable demon of self-knowledge." The demon sees him clearly, without distortion, and being "inscrutable" cannot be subjected to the same gaze in turn. He must face himself as two parts of the same whole. In his "final gesture" he unites signifier and signified, becoming the "heroic" image he has ever attempted to project, lying "in a pose more rigid" than any he expediently adopted in life. The speaker observes that the man "seems content / That Life's confused dishonesty / Should find this last simplicity." How the speaker makes this interpolation remains unclear; apparently he seeks a moral or resolution in the officer's death, one in which "simplicity," however "rigid," is preferable to the "confused dishonesty" of military identity. Richard Poole argues that "death, in purging him, has restored him to his authentic self,"[38] an interpretation which, if taken to its logical conclusion, would seem to suggest that the only "authentic" self is a dead self. And yet even the dead soldier's rigor mortis is described by Lewis as a "pose."

"Lance-Jack," less a short story than a creative essay, plays even more upon uncertainty of identity. "I," "we," "you" all appear in the piece with no clear antecedents, and it seems likely that the speaker has little explanation to offer. He analyzes at length the character of "the soldier," which is by definition distinguishable from the individual occupying that role: "A soldier is always impersonal" (*CS* 63). Additionally, "The soldier is non-political," continuing the impersonality of army life into "a refusal to think insistently of

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[38] Richard Poole, "Impersonality and the Soldier-Poet: Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas," *The Welsh Connection*, ed. William Tydeman (Llandysul: Gomer, 1986) 147.

the war as a conflict between powers that define themselves in ideological terms."[39] The process of becoming impersonal involves the reinvention of the self against new circumstances, and appears both threatening and attractive: "In the Army you begin again. All you were seems to have vanished" (*CS* 64). Uprooting mingles with a redefining of the social order, which is compared to the experience of continental refugees. The individual goes from teaching school to cleaning latrines, from office clerk to NCO: "Conventions go, respectability, narrowness, the suburban train and the Sunday best" (*CS* 64). On the other hand, the self is left "feeling uprooted, unreal, dull" in the "nightmare of strangeness, of newness, broken homes, useless qualifications, forced labour, distance" (*CS* 64). As Ian Hamilton writes, "It is not, of course, just a matter of humiliation and petty inconvenience; it is 'unreal', the first stage in the process by which the personal identity is to be lost."[40]

The soldier has been unhomed, become "a migrant" (*CS* 64). In "Grenadier," Lewis describes the soldier Daniel as being "at home wherever he dropped his kitbag, but it was a home without tradition or future, continuity or warmth. If anything went wrong, he was immediately lost, apathetic or desperate, without inner counsel."[41] "Lance-Jack" expands upon this idea. At home on leave, the speaker claims, "I feel vaguely 'out of it'" (*CS* 65). He describes the soldier's creed as "Life is a series of meetings with strangers. We are all strange, to ourselves as well." This philosophy he acknowledges to be both tempting and dangerous; if the soldier becomes sufficiently impersonal, the human interaction he enjoyed as a civilian will itself begin to seem other, threatening, "a noisy, slightly indecent congress." Strangeness, homelessness, become necessary evils for men—"Christ had no home" (*CS* 65)—and yet soldiers lately returned from Dunkirk reassure themselves with the evidence of homeliness: "It's marvellous, seeing the houses all standing, and the milkman coming down the lane there" (*CS* 64). The soldier needs that connection, but it seems doomed to disintegrate. The

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[39] Poole 130.

[40] Hamilton 22.

[41] "Grenadier" 167.

speaker feels he has nowhere to sleep, being at home neither with "my sweetheart" nor in "lodgings"; he lives betwixt and between, sleeping "among the rank grasses and the dripping nettles of the common" (*CS* 66) like a tramp or a gypsy (both of whom have figured in earlier stories). An Australian soldier recalls his wife's parting words: "I don't care about anything but that you'll come home again the same as you went," a request nearly impossible to honor. Having left them behind, he says, "I felt I'd left my wife and kids for good, as if I'd got no line on them no more" (*CS* 68). Further, adds the speaker, "I have lost myself" (*CS* 67).

Perhaps conflating the army and God, whom he feels to be "cold and sullen, gloomy, unhuman" (*CS* 67), the speaker feels that some power is remaking the men in an image which makes it "easier for us to slay each other without cant, without feeling very much at all." This, perhaps, is the final goal of impersonality. They wear smiles "fixed and difficult to acquire," separate from events or even from their own bodies. The speaker indirectly compares the soldiers to Dante's portraits of the damned: some beg for help to "get back, get home"; some fear to give expression to hope; and some are "exiles" (*CS* 67). The exile forgets in company, but must go alone "to the place of remembering" (*CS* 68).

A provisional finding of self occurs in part three. The natural mere, unlike the "hall of mirrors" of "The Soldier," serves as "a mirror of rest, a breast for the dark and silent visitant" (*CS* 70). Alone, unconcerned with the impressions of others, "We regard our faces in the mirror and examine the colour of our eyes, and touch the downy hair on our arms, ruffling it. [. . .] I half forget my khaki." But while forgetting his soldier-self for a while, he instead imagines himself "Hywel Harris perhaps, or Thomas Charles, crossing the mountains to the waiting hearth. Or a lover in a Hardy novel, fifty years ago, on this same path, Tess lonely and hurt, Jude instinctively seeking loneliness" (*CS* 70). When not a soldier, he remains a solitary outsider.

One of the clearest statements of the separation of self and soldier appears in "Odi et Amo," in which portraits of past self and present self appear one after the other. The first and second sections of the poem are intimately connected; the "limbs and lineaments of love"

outlined in the first part have already felt the intrusion of war and rumor of war. The speaker's question,

> Did the fingers of the hand
> Touch the sweetest music on
> The limbs and lineaments of love
> Whose chords resolved in stillness, in the
> Stillness of the heart in the white breast? (*RD* 24)

would seem to pose a serene if conventional portrait. But the "Stillness of the heart in the white breast" is not merely an image of peace; taken literally, it indicates death. Anxiety and pain accompany stillness. Likewise "the anxious eyes of pain / Bravely bear" the vision of what is and is to come, though "the loins in passion" momentarily concentrate "eternity" into a single moment. Together, "hands and eyes and loins" are "to endure / With all the stubborn faith of man" the coming cataclysm. All the observations in this part of the poem are posed as questions, reflecting with doubt on past actions and vows.

The second section shifts to the present as the speaker again inventories his body and its present employment. He hesitates to recognize his own body in the context of remembered and present function:

> My body does not seem my own
> Now. These hands are not my own
> That touch the hair-spring trigger, nor my eyes
> Fixed on a human target, nor my cheek
> Stroking the rifle butt; my loins
> Are flat and closed like a child's. (*RD* 24–25)

The soldier-body seems alien, not "my own." It is as though he has woken from his reflections to find himself trapped inside a simulacrum of himself, one designed for purposes not his own. Christopher Meredith writes that "the soldier persona is unassimilated, strange, sexless."[42] And yet enough resemblances to past personas remain to achieve a disturbing effect. Despite his loins being "flat and closed," the soldier portrays himself in somewhat sensual fashion: the hands that touch "the hair-spring trigger" must perforce be as gentle as

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[42] Meredith, "Dai Greatcoat, Insectman, and Alun Lewis," *Poetry Wales* 22.4 (1987): 61.

those that caressed the lover; the "cheek / Stroking the rifle butt" suggests, in perverted fashion, lovers dancing cheek-to-cheek. The speaker seems to watch, fascinated, as his body performs in a manner beyond his control.

What might be called "the nihilist persistence of the rain" achieves a similar trance effect upon the men described in "All Day It Has Rained . . ." (*RD* 15–17). The subject of the first stanza is almost uniformly plural, as though the individual soldiers have lost themselves in a regimental "we." The only exception—"I saw a fox / And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home"—establishes the speaker as different from the other men only in that he writes, and perhaps perceives more. The concept of "home," too, is one that he holds separate from his communal military existence. Otherwise, in company with the others, he thinks "indifferently" of self and home, appearing to succumb to what Vernon Scannell calls "the boredom and discomfort, the slow, remorseless strangling of individuality."[43] The "skirmishing fine rain," so phrased, itself appears a threat, particularly as the self becomes swallowed, "possessed," by "the twilight and the rain." When the first person singular reappears in the second stanza, it is again to mark the speaker as a writer. If he has hoped to protect the boundaries of self in so doing, however, he undermines his efforts in connecting himself to the doomed Edward Thomas.

The first stanza in particular exhibits a ghostly feel, from the "first grey wakening," to all the recorded absent presences, to the soldiers' indifferent twilight existence. In Tony Conran's succinct formulation, "Everything seems unreal."[44] Curiously, though, the most spectral verbs—"remember," "watched," "followed," "brooded," "stopped"—appear in the second stanza, which seems on first reading comparatively banal with its firm rooting in the present. In truth the second stanza is all about haunting. The mind betrays itself, the slack references to "the schoolyard's merry play" and "the shaggy patient dog" leading to the

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[43] Scannell, *Not without Glory: Poets of the Second World War* (London: Woburn, 1976) 58.

[44] Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982) 59.

brooding ghost of Edward Thomas, spectre of death for the soldier-poet. And these recollections follow after the statement that "now it is the rain / Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain." If the poet speaks truth here, the second stanza would seem to come from a mind "possessed" by this liminal moment.

It was perhaps inevitable that Lewis should write "The Unknown Soldier" (*HHT* 61–62), the culminating dissociation of soldier and self. Bearing no name, the time, place, and manner of his death unknown, the unknown soldier is the ideal figure of military impersonality. Wearing a "flaccid mask," he might as well be a Velasquez hanging in a museum.[45] The soldier's death-mask formalizes an ongoing process of "brittle scattering": "The mean humiliating self no more / Has access to him." Not only has he achieved release from a self that was never what it ought to have been, from its doubts and imperfections, but the pronoun "him" now permanently refers to the "unknown soldier" divided from self. "He has abandoned everything," claims the speaker, suggesting that the soldier felt relief at leaving behind "the mean humiliating self."

This poem may serve also as an introduction to another aspect of the divided soldier-self—namely, the feeling of *déjà vu*, that one acts not through the self's own impulses but through a compulsion to repeat, a "repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations."[46] We have seen how Lewis invokes the spectre of Edward Thomas as a guide for the soldier-poet doomed to die in the repeated war. Christ figures illustrate this phenomenon particularly neatly, as in "The Unknown Soldier." Lying at the center of a web of symbolic abstractions, the dying soldier expends his last energy asking, Christ-like, for a sip of water. The poem's second invocation of Velasquez completes a portrait with the closing of "those

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[45] It is possible that Lewis alludes to a particular painting, *Cristo Crucificado* (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, Museo del Prado, Madrid), which depicts a newly dead Christ against complete darkness. Viewed next to Velasquez's *Cristo en la Cruz*, in which the suffering Christ appears before a detailed background, the effect is startling and lends extra weight to the line "He has outlasted everything."

[46] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 234.

doglike dolorous eyes"; "dolorous" hints at the Via Dolorosa and other inexorable pathways. The solemn statement that "All days are heaped in wrath upon today" not only suggests the Dies Irae but implies the inevitability of the soldier's ending.

The sense of *déjà vu* is particularly strong in "Lance-Jack." Supporting the old maxim that an army always fights the previous war, the soldiers grouse that "field manoeuvres which might do very well for the Roaring Forties and the Covered Wagon, even for the last two years of the Boer War, even for the Chinese *franc-tireurs* in Japanese-occupied territory," have no place in "a vast army in training for an encounter with Germany's tanks and air-supported infantry" (*CS* 63). In the soldier's imagining, silent "white faces" go to die haunted by history, "premonitions of the past" (*CS* 67) linking past and future in a cycle of endless repetitions. Nature itself takes the long view: "The starlings and sparrows, and all animals are frightened at this *new* manifestation of hostility. But they also quickly forget" (*CS* 67, emphasis added).

Several poems allude to the predestination of the soldier. A whole generation seems to speak in "Lines on a Tudor Mansion" (*RD* 25–26), knowing that it is destined to become part of "the commemorated generations" but also under no illusions about the meaning of this fate:

> *We* know
> Violence terrible and degrading,
> Beauty disfigured,
> And the coward cruel brute
> Shaping us in his image.

"Odi et Amo" likewise laments "the livid / Weal of history bleeding in us again," alluding to

> The terrible anguish of the birth
> That could not be prevented and the death
> That must die, and the peace
> That was dreamed of in the beginning (*RD* 24).

These lines are particularly notable for their sense of imperative; events could not possibly have transpired otherwise. And this sense occurs elsewhere. From the dirt of Judea to "the dust of ditches and trenches" of the previous war, "To a Comrade in Arms" suggests the possibility of "endlessly faring" in perpetual struggle. The "comrade" in question actively

seeks heroic purpose, but the speaker implies the futility of such purpose through allusions to past heroes whose deeds have not prevented the sorry state of the present: Christ, welcomed with palm leaves and executed like a criminal within the week; Samson, bringing forth sweetness from strength but ultimately succumbing ignominiously to his one weakness. The present, the poem claims, is even "more cruel / Than the ancient God of the Hebrews" (*RD* 27); why should the soldier seek to change the cycle of history? The endlessly posing officer of "Finale" is seen to have "had no choice in this," his "final gesture, / Arms akimbo against the sky, / Crucified on a cross of fire / With all the heroic age magnificent in him" (*RD* 28). The second section of "Threnody for a Starry Night" shows a boy unable to escape his destiny:

> Sobbing in the street he fled
> Familiar things. His body
> Suffers in khaki.
> He disapproved Christ's chastity,
> Chose warmth
> Of loins, afraid to burn
> Obedient martyr to a rigid creed;
> Yet found
> Christ crucified bequeathed
> His agony to us. (*RD* 36)

Once again we see a soldier unhomed, having fled the familiar, and pained by the division of self and khaki-clad body. Despite running from the concept of duty preached at home, he discovers that there is no escape. Elsewhere in the poem, the soldiers go about "A mass rearming for mass-martyrdom" (*RD* 37). The "unnerving harmonies of fate" sing again, and a generation finds itself caught acting out "Shakespearean tragedy," where, "always," "The foils are poisoned that the good may die" (*RD* 37).

The separation of soldier from self finds its most complete iteration in the vision of the enemy soldier as one's own double. Freud writes that this phenomenon of the double "is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a

doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self."[47] This process, Rose explains, is to be expected during wartime:

> We project on to the alien, or other, the destructiveness we fear in the most intimate relations or parts of ourself. Instead of trying to repair it at home, we send it abroad. War makes the other accountable for a horror we can then wipe out with impunity, precisely because we have located it so firmly in the other's place. This saves us the effort of ambivalence, the hard work of recognizing that we love where we hate, that, in our hearts and minds at least, we kill those to whom we are most closely and intimately attached.[48]

It is perhaps not surprising that Lewis and other war writers, possessed of critical faculties unable to let this process occur undocumented, imaginatively project the other back onto themselves, reifying "an attachment which suffocates, grasps, and attacks."[49] Moreover, the moral imperatives arising from this state of affairs contradict each other and undermine any sort of self-assurance. Freud speculates that prohibitions against killing arose from a recognition of the self in the other, from "the conflict of feeling at the death of loved yet alien and hated persons"; that recognition having taken place, primitive humans began to mourn even their enemies.[50] Citing Clausewitz, Rose argues that such moral considerations complicate attempts to theorize or rationalize war: "the moral becomes the very image of complication, partiality, or dissemination, indicating what cannot—either for the theory or for war itself—be held to its proper place."[51] Such language suggests that war itself is uncanny, and that the enemy, the soldier's opposite number, as it were, cannot be imaginatively contained in his "proper place."

Some of Lewis's literary antecedents and contemporaries observed a similar phenomenon, and it is worth documenting a few examples for the sake of comparison before examining Lewis's own work. Poets in both world wars would have been familiar with

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[47] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 234.

[48] Rose 18–19.

[49] Rose 19.

[50] Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" 293, 295; see also Rose 20–21.

[51] Rose 22.

Hardy's "The Man He Killed,"[52] in which the narrator's assertion that "my foe of course he was; / That's clear enough" seems anything but clear as the narrator begins to ascribe his own circumstances and motivations to his counterpart. The signifier "foe" loses any meaning outside the narrow context in which

> ranged as infantry,
> And staring face to face,
> I shot at him as he at me,
> And killed him in his place.

The enemy dies "in his place," but his spectre refuses to remain there. Wilfred Owen takes up the voice of that ghost in "Strange Meeting," [53] in which the man killed by the speaker affirms that "Whatever hope is yours, / Was my life also." Both address the other as "friend," and each recognizes in the face of the other some crucial point of reference. "By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell," states the speaker, while the shade of the other soldier stands "With piteous recognition in fixed eyes" and says

> I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
> I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
> Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.

The "enemy" concludes, simply, "Let us sleep now. . . ."—the soldiers' fates are now identical, all opposition or distinction of selves rendered pointless.

Lewis's work tends less to question the distinction between soldier self and enemy other than to obscure it altogether. In "The Children," the machinery of war and the presence of death contribute to an observation both "impersonal" and extrapersonal: "Gripping his rifle, he became aware of its impersonality, its mechanism, its impartial judgments, its refusal to discriminate between one man and another. How strange that death should be so impersonal; *his* death" (*CS* 135). The rifle, no longer an uncomfortable extension of the self, instead poses a double threat to the self both through its capacity to kill and its refusal to

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[52] Thomas Hardy, "The Man He Killed," *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Samuel Hynes, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 344–45.

[53] *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963) 35–36.

discriminate between self and other. Death, "*his* death," appears both impersonal and intimately shared; because the gun makes no distinctions, his death is everyone's death.

That death marks another important difference between Lewis's soldiers and those surveyed above. The other poets address an enemy their soldier-selves or comrades have killed; therein, in part, lies the fascination with the other. But Lewis's soldiers invoke their enemy counterparts in connection with their own deaths. They do not expect to survive the encounter. In the third section of "War Wedding," the soldier connects his death with the other in intimate terms:

> But she is wise and waits until I sleep.
> She will not touch the blindness from my eyes
> Nor stroke the hair of silence on my loins
> Nor bare her wistful breasts.
> For first I must encounter
> My dreaming German soldier.
> And when my body falls away
> Will come my useless saviour. (*RD* 56–57)

The soldier's beloved comes to him in the night, as he sleeps, but consummation—including the removal of his "blindness"—is delayed until he finds a different consummation in the encounter with "my dreaming German soldier." He refers to his counterpart possessively, as though they already enjoy a connection from one dreaming soldier to another. Meeting his opposite will spell death, but he nevertheless cannot complete the realization of self until he meets the other.

The boundaries between soldier and enemy become further obscured in the second section of "Lance-Jack." At the beginning of this section, the narrator takes some pains to establish that the imaginings which follow are "fragmentary, not all of me." This assertion recalls the Author's Note to *Raiders' Dawn*, in which Lewis claims that his poems "are not . . . a completed statement; but a soldier sees with his own eyes and nobody else's; and they are, therefore, a personal statement" (*RD* 9). "Lance-Jack" undermines this integrity of perception; the soldier's eyes and ears are not entirely his own. He begins by divorcing the soldier from himself:

> When I am walking back at night through the wet streets and the darkness I hear the tramp of heavy boots. The tramp of heavy boots drowns the sound of all other footsteps.
>
> I wonder whose footsteps they are. I listen carefully.

The "tramp of heavy boots" is at first both alien and all-encompassing. But just as the soldier recognizes himself he begins to lose himself:

> I discover with surprise and a growing excitement that they are mine. I grow slowly more and more pleased with the sound of my hobnailed boots, drowning the bare and bleeding footfalls of the beggars and the refugees who slink down the side streets as I approach. Heil Hitler.
>
> But now I am scared, now I am frightened, and now terrified of the sound of my heavy boots. They silence all other sounds. I am terrified they will start running.
>
> Gott, Oh Gott. (*CS* 66)

He becomes both intoxicated by his newfound sense of power and frightened by the way his soldier-identity, represented by the boots, operates apparently outside his volition. More importantly, he has so far lost himself that he cannot remember which army issued his boots. He still does not know "whose footsteps they are." As John Pikoulis argues, "The soldier's indifference, regrettable as it is, has helped him uncover what was always latent within, the dark, inhumane other personified by the Nazi soldier, 'My dreaming German soldier', as Lewis calls him in his poetry, a Wilfred-Owen-like apparition who is both his alter ego and the enemy he must steel himself to face."[54]

Writing of the Second World War, Jon Glover argues that "The war *involved* the individual and yet it was often an alienating, looking-glass world."[55] Lewis's writing supports this hypothesis; as we have seen, the individual who found himself clad in khaki and expected to perform the role of the soldier could no longer be sure where or whether he belonged, or even whose reflection he saw in the mirror. In a military class hierarchy simultaneously more fluid and more rigid than that extant in civilian life, he found it difficult to know his place. Nor, in

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[54] Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and Edward Thomas," *Critical Quarterly* 23.4 (1981): 35.

[55] Jon Glover, "Person and Politics: Commitment in the Forties," *Poetry Nation* 3 (1974): 69.

a role that required both unquestioning obedience and (for officers) quick-thinking decision, both renunciation of power and the exercise of brute strength, could he easily settle into a useful mode of masculinity. If he attempted to perform dual roles, maintaining his previous manifestation of self while exploring the otherness offered by the army, he soon discovered that he could no longer distinguish between them, and that even the most basic self/other boundaries were becoming troubled. Rose writes that "The distinction between fantasy and reality cannot withstand, or is revealed in its most difficult relation under, the impact of war. We can never finally be sure whether we are projecting or not, if what we legitimately fear may be in part the effect of our own projection."[56] In the looking-glass world of Lewis's army writing, one's own footsteps become the most uncanny sound of all.

[56] Rose 29.

3. Of Love and of the Beloved

When, in India, Lewis found himself in love with Freda Aykroyd, he discovered the full extent of the otherness of love and its transformative power:

> Gweno, Freda. And love that cannot and will not submit to any of us. How I scorn my weakness: and pity it also. And the weakness is that I know fear. Fear of two great wonders uniting in a third which is not me but infinitely more than me.[1]

In this formulation, none of the individuals involved are quite themselves; Lewis sees himself becoming "infinitely more" while also mistrusting the resultant metamorphosis of self. Interwoven with his sense of "wonder" in love is a "fear" that he will lose himself. The beloved as other is more obviously alluring and represents less of an immediate threat to self than those we have observed thus far; the presence or promise of the beloved offers the opportunity of overall, if not unalloyed, benefit. In practice, however, the relation to the beloved in Lewis's work is fraught with fear and frustration.

The figure of the beloved—that is, the loved person as imagined and constructed by the desires and anxieties of the self—tends to exist at or beyond the understood borders of self, so that even when that figure seems to be within reach, it is continually distanced by the subject's sense of impending loss (of self *or* of other). Alternatively, that figure appears a little too close for comfort. What certainly must strike the reader of Lewis's writings on love is the proportion of first person pronouns; the beloved seems to inspire poetry primarily for her impact upon the self. Freud's description of this phenomenon is illuminating: "We possess, as it seems, a certain amount of capacity for love—what we call libido—which in the earliest stages of development is directed towards our own ego. Later, though still at a very early time, this libido is diverted from the ego on to objects, which are thus in a sense taken into our ego."[2] Lewis's oeuvre contains some memorable images of the beloved being enveloped while still definable: in "Post-Script: For Gweno," for instance, she becomes "A singing rib within

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[1] Lewis, letter to Freda Aykroyd, qtd. in "An Exchange of Love Poems," *New Welsh Review* 4.1 (Summer 1991): 17.

[2] Freud, "On Transience," *Standard Edition,* vol. 14 (1955) 306.

my dreaming side" (*RD* 45), while in "War Wedding" "She lies within my sleep" (*RD* 57). At other times, the joining of lover and beloved threatens to result in the negation of one or both and the relational nexuses through which they define themselves. The self, usually represented as male, seeks in the beloved an affirmation of self and a return to or manifestation of the *Heimliche*, but frequently what he encounters instead is a reminder of his own vulnerability and a disturbingly uncanny turn toward the repressed. The beloved is neither quite as close or as distant—as *other*, in fact—as he might desire her to be.

It is important to stress that this concept will be explored as much as possible in isolation from Lewis's biography. While the curious reader, faced with a love poem, will naturally wonder to whom the poem was addressed, a desire for unproblematic correspondences between life and literature can lead critics into simplistic readings. Lewis wrote to his wife on one occasion that "you have the power of love and of the beloved over me"[3]—implying that "the beloved" was an entity associated with Gweno but also considered separately from her. He frequently depersonalizes his most intensely personal writing. Even "War Wedding," written in response to the eponymous occasion in Lewis's life, reflects unexpected influences. Compare its opening lines—

> The vulture stabs his beak into the sun.
> The light falls bleeding from those beating wings.
> The heat is taken in that ruthless heart.
> The withered moon intones *She will not come.* (*RD* 55)

—to these, from Lynette Roberts's "The Circle of C":

> But what of my love I cried
> As a curlew stabbed the sand.
>
> 'And we cut for the answer. They said
> He would come not as he said he would come
> But later with sailing ice, war-glass and lame
> Grieve not, it is better so.'[4]

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[3] Lewis, letter, November 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 275.

[4] Roberts, "The Circle of C," *Modern Welsh Poetry*, ed. Keidrych Rhys (London: Faber, 1944) 118.

Lewis had read and admired these lines by Roberts; having read several of her manuscript poems, he responded, "The Circle of C again. I like it easily most. And the two lines in the middle [those involving the curlew] are perfect, *real.*"[5] It seems clear that even when composing poems about the most intimate occasions of his life, Lewis cast his imagination wide and drew inspiration from many sources, thus complicating and enriching the ostensible sources of his art.

Moreover, shifts in the historical record can leave the critic floundering. John Pikoulis argues that "Interpretation [. . .] has been hampered by the veil of secrecy that, until recently, was drawn over what happened to him in India, in particular his love for Freda Aykroyd [. . .] and his suicide in Burma in March 1944. Without knowledge of these, it has been impossible to understand the poems he wrote to Freda, in particular 'The Way Back.'"[6] Curiously, though, interpretation of "The Way Back" prior to Lewis's affair becoming public knowledge provides very little cause for the pertinent critics to blush. Apart from A. Banerjee's pairing of the poem with "Home Thoughts from Abroad" as "nostalgic reveries"[7]—a bizarre reading of both poems in any context—early criticism of "The Way Back" seems rather to illustrate the advantages of keeping an open interpretive mind during close reading. Pikoulis has earlier written, for example, that "The 'you' of the poem is a reverbrating [sic] and generalising vessel for his energies,"[8] and Kathleen Devine has further suggested that "That 'you' is on one level India, her natural features revivified by the rain" and that the "you" of "The Way Back" bears a close resemblance to the "quiet voice" heard in "The Journey."[9] These readings are no less valuable or accurate for lack of an additional gloss, and indeed their nuances might well have been missed had biographical considerations pushed them aside. Likewise, though

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[5] Lewis, letter to Roberts, 24 March 1941, "A Sheaf of Letters from Alun Lewis, 1941–43—First Selection," *Wales* 7.28 (1948): 412.

[6] Pikoulis, "The Poetry of the Second World War" 201–02.

[7] A. Banerjee, *Spirit above Wars: A Study of the English Poetry of the Two World Wars* (London: MacMillan, 1976) 163.

[8] Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis: The Way Back," *Critical Quarterly* 14.2 (1972): 151.

[9] Devine, "The Way Back: 328.

Devine assumes "A Fragment" to have been addressed to Gweno Lewis, her reading dwells on the textual treatment of the beloved and thus escapes invalidation.[10]

This chapter's exploration of the beloved also makes use of Roland Mathias's earlier examination of similar ideas about love in Lewis's work. Mathias's essay attempts to define the concept of "Love" as employed by Lewis throughout his writing, postulating that Lewis aims for an integrated

> vision of Love [which] contains that kind of caring and suffering for mankind, individually and *in toto*, which Christian love attempts: it contains the full human affection which two persons, man and woman, may feel for each other: it contains eroticism and lust: and it contains, if less commonly, comradeship and sentiments of home.[11]

The strength of this formulation lies in its recognition that Lewis's writing cannot be reduced to single-threaded or unquestioningly biographical interpretations. This "Love," too, is both depersonalized and in perpetual danger of fragmentation. "The beloved" exists in close relation to this idea of Love, with certain key differences. The beloved is normally given female traits and often charged with a distinctly erotic character. Moreover, a connection to an idea of "home" is often both present and problematic; home is as likely to disappear as to be reinforced. In this and in other ways, the beloved is rarely entirely benign.

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Frequently the beloved is conspicuous by its absence. In Lewis's earlier work, particularly, the beloved can be maddeningly elusive or frustratingly separated from the self by time and distance. Lack of the beloved can precipitate crises of self-identity. Love always carries the risk

> Of the withering obsession
> That lovers grow to fear
> When the last note is written
> And at last and alone

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[10] Devine, "Alun Lewis's 'A Fragment,'" *Poetry Wales* 19.1 (1983): 39ff.

[11] Mathias, "'The Black Spot in the Focus': A Study of the Poetry of Alun Lewis," *A Ride through the Wood* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1985) 127.

> One of them wakes in terror
> And the other is gone. (*HHT* 67)

As these lines suggest, the integrity of the self depends on the co-existence of a designated other—in this case, the lover. To be left "alone" is to experience primal "terror"; in fact, the mere anticipation of such an event has a "withering" propensity. The self may experience or imagine the missing beloved almost as a phantom limb, uncannily present and absent simultaneously, that undercuts self-assurance. The beloved is both conceived in terms of self and necessary to the conception of self. The loved object, taken into the self, has the power both to reinforce and to undermine, and the resulting tension informs Lewis's writing. Most of the poems contained in the "Poems in Love" section of *Raiders' Dawn,* for example, document the ambivalence of the feverish, frustrated wait for the beloved's arrival or acquiescence. Indeed, on the whole they might be better labelled "poems in lust," reflecting not a straightforward desire for the beloved but a neurotic obsession with the self and its desires. More generally in Lewis's writing, failure to reach the beloved leaves the (usually male) subject little against which to define himself or leaves him to the mercy of other identities. Concomitantly, though this aspect will be considered separately for the sake of clarity, the haunting absence of the beloved subverts self-constitutive notions of home and the *Heimliche.*

1.1

Lewis demonstrates in his correspondence his alertness to the close interplay of self and other and to the havoc wrought upon self-identity by removal from that accepted interplay:

> And it might do you some little good to know how I am grappling and clinging a long way from the safe and fructifying life Gweno made about me and I made about her. Dick Mills says my mind is tentative in everything, and being tentative is a heavy disability in the Army. It can either be the pliant grasp or the stammer and falter, depending on the climate of your soul and thro' the soul, the nerves; And on the pressure of circumstances and of others. Others—a strange word for those who have entry into one, live in one's thoughts and being,—yet "others" is right in part, for much of the most

> powerful things within us happen *alone* in us. I've lived in vacuo too long and I want no more of it.[12]

Textual proximity connects Lewis's distance from "the safe and fructifying life" he associates with Gweno to a state of mind he labels "tentative." Further, though he finds himself somewhat at the mercy of "others" and seems to guard the solitude through which he experiences "powerful things," he expresses greater distress at the effects of living "in vacuo." Here, as in several poems and stories this section will consider, Lewis asserts that maintaining identity without the beloved-other is a matter of "grappling and clinging."

Lewis's early "The Madman" (*RD* 85–86) most comprehensively articulates the perilous elusiveness of the other. Within "the shattered crystal of his mind," the universe itself is the madman's beloved, known and yet frustratingly separate.

> He knows life is a beautiful girl who loves no one
> Yet makes the mirrors glitter and men mad.
> And he has lived a lifetime with a virgin,
> Peacefully, like Joseph of Nazareth.

Like Narcissus he is driven mad by the desirable reflection he perceives, in love with life yet never quite a part of it. He has even come to see something holy in his restraint, but he has sacrificed a well-ordered mind in the process: "His weeping has the sound of laughter." In the fourth section the madman achieves a moment of unity with his beloved as "Exultantly he drives his screaming pinnace / Through the clashing ocean of love." He seems not only to make love to the entire universe but to be indistinguishable from it:

> Yet all the storm is but a lover's gesture,
> The glittering constellations are his seed,
> His mast, a rose tree softly lapped in leaf,
> Sucks up the salt sap of his timeless grief.

Such imaginative solipsism earns its inevitable reward, however, as in the next section the man is left again alone with "the fiendish accusing fingers of his dreams." Nowhere can he find sympathy or even coherence. His mind and perhaps his very existence represents "an

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[12] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 7 February 1944, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 49–50.

inarticulated question" to which the universe "evolves its slow and painful answer." He perceives "The incantations of silence, God's terrible silence" and experiences visions of "dreamed angelic faces" that are similarly implacable in their "maddening ultimate beauty." As something "ultimate," this beauty exists outside the human realm of the transient, so while the madman can perceive this ideal he cannot entertain any hope of attaining it. The beloved, for the madman, is this ideal of beauty, a universal answer to the question of self, but in the absence of such certainty his identity becomes "dissolved in vastness."

Some works convey a sense of destructive distance between lovers who are physically near, a failure to connect revealing the full vulnerability of the self. The short story "Attitude" symbolizes this breach as literally fatal, though death comes as the logical conclusion to months of despair. Lewis here makes a rare attempt to address the beloved from a woman's perspective. As her husband, Peter, lies ill in their cottage, Frieda remembers how she first experienced him as "calm poised certainty" amidst the "whirlpool" of London life (*CS* 268). She recalls that he knew exactly how to classify himself: "'I,' he said, 'am a specialist on Byzantine History,' and he spat beautifully into the river. 'What are you?'" (*CS* 269). Her reply, "I don't exactly know," reveals the appeal for her of taking refuge from the whirlpool "on Peter's little island" (*CS* 269). The language of certainty and confusion continues as the story progresses. Later she realizes that even Peter is no "rock," and that "Nothing in her life had permanence" (*CS* 270). She recognizes too late his misogyny, even misanthropy, and his mistrust of anything that cannot be classified and contained "analytically, rationally, discounting intuitions, discarding beliefs and conviction," from poor children to Frieda's "temperament" (*CS* 271). Peter's intuition cannot even extend to his wife, and their failure to connect has tragic repercussions. Frieda dwells particularly on the memory of a night during which the experience of intimacy without desire left them both "hurt and disgusted" (*CS* 271), thrown back upon their own individual failings and vulnerabilities instead of joining in "intensest Life" (*CS* 270). Frieda has gradually lost the ability to write poetry, a process whose description illuminates her unmooring:

> There was the restless preparing, the search for lucidity, the long vigil before the purification. And then the exquisite, pure mood of knowing, when the vision was pellucid and Truth naked to see. But so swiftly on its heels would come the muddling of the water, the silting, the gradual obscuring, the loss of balance, the grotesque fall from the eagle poise into the dull, earthworm mood. Into despair. There was no peace about it, no certainty. And when the vision was gone, it left no assurance. (*CS* 270)

Although "In the first happiness with Peter she had seemed to be living the ecstatic creative mood every day" (*CS* 270), now the failure to perceive "the vision" corresponds to the certainty that has slipped away with her confidence in the beloved. Now, she reflects, "There was nothing to grasp" (*CS* 271).

Whether the portrait of Peter that emerges from the above passages represents him accurately is impossible to judge and scarcely relevant; what does become clear is that Frieda has projected both her desires and her frustrations onto Peter. She finds him comfortingly solid at first but later regards him as *too* rigid, antithetical to the imaginative life she craves. As she contemplates the gulf between them she stands, appropriately, on a bridge, "a wooden, rotted thing perched precariously over the river" (*CS* 270). But while the bridge appears to symbolize her predicament she also contributes actively to its decay by "tearing the pulpy wood with her polished nails" and stamping her foot so that "The rotten plank cracked and powdered wood fell into the stream" (*CS* 270, 271). This destructive behavior also colors her assessment of her marriage. Frieda attributes Peter's illness to a "cold inability to understand her" or the natural world around him. Because the self is constituted through a relationship with others, she considers the crux of the problem to be Peter's sarcastic question, "What the hell has a plover got to do with me?" (*CS* 272). Without this wider understanding, Frieda reflects, the result can only be a kind of cannibalization of identity: "They had been terribly wrong to neglect these things and to concentrate instead on their own selves. They mustn't feed on each other any more." The only "realities" exist in these relational excursions beyond the beloved (*CS* 274). Frieda's solution to the problem, in other words, nearly overlooks Peter altogether. And the extent of her demands upon him over the course of their acquaintance remains unknown, though she (perhaps unwittingly) acknowledges the difficulty he has

found communicating his own needs to her: "He should have told her that he needed nothing from her that night" (*CS* 271); "he didn't realise what she had given him, willingly, ungrudgingly. She had given him bread. But in the giving, somehow—who knows how?—it had become a stone" (*CS* 273). Somewhat telling is her admission that their friend Anne relieves Peter's distress in ways Frieda cannot: "Funny how people react on each other, spontaneously" (*CS* 273). Pikoulis hypothesizes the full extent of her ambivalence toward Peter:

> "[W]hen she returns to the cottage, Peter is dead, a victim to his own failings, no doubt, but also of her suppressed wishes [. . .]. Indeed, we might say that Peter has always been at Frieda's mercy, as when she breaks off the last flower of the aptly-titled Love lies bleeding outside the cottage door with her nails as a (poisoned?) gift for him."[13]

While Pikoulis perhaps makes too much of Frieda's "harpy-like activity,"[14] he draws valuable attention to the text's subtle promptings toward her complicity in Peter's illness. Similarly her musings upon "his gradual decomposition" (*CS* 272) can be read in the light of Frieda's inability to write. His "decomposition" has corresponded to her failure to compose, a correlation illuminating both her responsibility toward him and the extent to which she has mediated and allowed (or disallowed) his presence in the text. Everything she has said to him he has heard as "just words [. . .] without meaning" (*CS* 272); she has not entertained the possibility, until her musings upon the bridge, that she has given him nothing he can use. Lewis, while remaining sympathetic to Frieda, also allows glimpses of subconscious uneasiness and even aggression.

In other work, too, the act or possibility of coming together can ultimately divide lovers and lead even to self-dissociation. "The Desperate" argues for the need to "Fling wide the sluice, / Release the seed," but it also acknowledges the price paid by ideals in the alleviation of immediate frustration:

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[13] Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and Edward Thomas": 39.

[14] Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and the Imagination," *Poetry Wales* 10.3 (1975): 41.

> And Love, poor Love
> Must bear the ache
> Of lust grown holy
> For the soul's sweet sake. (*RD* 50)

The satisfaction of physical desire, the poem suggests, actively precludes the realization of love as a higher aim of the self. The "soul," the "mind," and the "grey brain" all appear as "mad" or feverish entities with agendas quite separate from that of their possessor, and the greyness of the brain in particular hints at the mixing of formerly uncontested categories such as black and white, "virgin" and "polluted lips." The narrator of "Lance-Jack," like Frieda in "Attitude," finds the giving and taking of love to have unintended consequences:

> My sweetheart does not love me; if she did she would come and discover me, and lie beside me, warming my nostrils with her breath, like new hay that steams a little in the sun.
>
> My sweetheart has refused what I offered her. Yet I have lost what I offered her, somewhere. I have lost myself. (*CS* 66–67)

In the context of war and soldiering the possibility of losing oneself in "a series of meetings with strangers" (*CS* 65) is already, as we have seen, a distinct possibility. The beloved seems to offer a potential harbor in this context, a "rightful place in which to sleep." Instead, in the face of her refusal, the narrator feels as unable to return to his own bed as to continue on to hers, opting uneasily to place himself betwixt and between, "midway between my sweetheart's and my lodgings" (*CS* 66). In place of a quickening of life and identity through her presence, he experiences a loss of purpose.

The poem "Fever" (*RD* 49–50), a largely autoerotic rhapsody, expresses at once loneliness and a profound distrust of the self's vulnerability through desire. In the absence of his beloved the speaker becomes detached from even his own body. He claims to have "felt the universe with my fingers"; that universe, however, appears suspiciously phallic, being "compounded of bone and sinew, like the naked loins of Theseus, the slayer, the young hero" as well as "softness" and "blood, like the roar of a torrent." Further lines apparently signify masturbation and release:

> I took its stem and plucked the rain-swollen toadstool; and ate it, tasting its bitterness in my mouth.
>
> Convulsed, I saw the stars reeling outside my window, the Sword flashing and the Plough wrecked in the branches;
> And through the barred grating I clamoured for relief; for sunlight wrapped in an envelope, for a day's dole;
> And I signed my name on God's register with quivering fingers.

Through these lines the speaker remains narrowly focused on his own physical needs, which his rhetoric elevates to universal importance. Only after his convulsion does he finally express himself in the second person, addressing a "you" whose chimerical "nearness" leaves him more desperate than before:

> Oh my love! Why did I dream this dream in my bed; feeling your nearness
> And the panting of your belly and the gentle murmuring of your breath,
>
> Only to wake to the loneliness of the deserted and the agony of silence
> And the mockery of my desire's trembling mirage?
> Oh my love!
> who like the sunlight
> Can strike and blind and parch.

In contrast to the speaker's burgeoning desire, the beloved is registered only through her lack—her desertion and the "silence" that seems to mock his fantasies. We learn nothing about any woman from these lines, but only about the "loneliness" of the speaker. It is not even clear whether his ejaculations of "Oh my love!" refer to a person or to the desire that seems to hold him in thrall, as able to "strike and blind and parch" as to provide comfort and security. In either case, he seems to regard this "love" as other, offering "mockery" and a "mirage" that will undermine his grasp of reality.

"A Separation" (*RD* 54) most fully recognizes the threat to self posed by submission to the beloved and subsequent alienation. A man and a woman separately express their sorrow over their loss of each other and of themselves. She recalls, "I died into his eyes / His hands refashioned me / His lips reshaped my lips." The traditional double meaning of "died" carries extra weight in these lines, as the experience of physical pleasure has led to her annihilation in his eyes. Now,

The dead moon calls the sea
But the waves fall and break;
Their fall and break is a gesture
Of faith and of failure.

It is not entirely clear who calls and who attempts to answer, but the result is the same: despite keeping faith, the "dead moon" and the futile waves cannot reach each other. The man reflects that his heart "lies on its side / And aches unbearably," its inaction notable in contrast to the waves' effort. Even though "The heart is a burden to the hands," contributing to their physical memory, he knows that "Hands can forget." Their handiwork, however, remains: she has changed forever in his sight, and the heart continues "Seeking in the hollows of Night / What the hands have slain." Mathias's summary is that "*She* becomes what *He* wishes. [. . .] But *He* lusts after her as she was before she was changed and, not finding her, directs his desire to a new mark."[15] He lays the blame for the situation firmly at the feet of the man and finds the poem to do the same. It is a reasonable beginning, but questions linger. How could his "hands" alone wreak such a change without his heart's consent? Did the heart betray itself, not knowing what it desired? More importantly, where is her agency? He takes responsibility for making her into something other than what he expected her to be. He does not consider the possibility that she became what she wanted to become. While her lines speak of "his eyes," "his hands," his lines focus on his own pain. In their separation, her burden is the futile "gesture" toward the beloved, while his is a hyper-awareness of self, cognizant of the beloved again only in its absence.

1.2

One crucial aspect of the undermining of self occasioned by the absence of the beloved concerns the newfound inability of the subject to feel "at home." Not only does the removal of the beloved precipitate a loss of comfort and security, but it throws into question the value of the past and the associations of memory. The beloved's disappearance, when it results from

[15] Mathias, "The Black Spot" 137–38.

disillusionment and not physical distance, can disturb homeliness even more by calling into question the very foundations of "home."

One thread running through "Attitude," as Frieda contemplates her uneasy marriage, concerns a desire to recover what is *heimlich*, or "real." The story establishes almost immediately that Peter, and her connection to him, are not real: as Peter himself says, "Je ne suis qu'un réve" (*CS* 266, accent as printed). Reflecting on her life in London before meeting Peter, she remembers a whirl of tourist activities and deadening research and concludes that "You could never tell, in London, whether you were being real or not" (*CS* 268). Peter appeared, then, to represent certainty and security, but that security has abandoned her and left her more bewildered than ever: "It had been, and she remembered it, but she could not bring it to life. Its deadness disturbed her. She had grown to believe that only what the heart feels is real, that intellectual perceptions are remote things. But what use is reality, if it is so transient?" (*CS* 270). The undermining of her faith in "reality" contributes to a general process of unhoming. Signifiers shift with unsettling rapidity. Frieda remembers first coming with Peter to their cottage in her native valley in Wales and attempting to convey to him her delight in its surroundings:

> And as the briars on each side of the gate stretched their lithe green fingers to meeting, and knitted and burst together into leaf and red bud, she had felt a new, precious security, as though the binding together of the briars was a love knot holding Peter to her. And always after that, throughout the long London winter, and each night, when the lamp was lit and the green curtains drawn, she knew that outside the cottage window, in the dark, the briars were bound together over the gate, and the flowers were biding their time in the rich earth. It was breath to her, the certainty of this knowledge. (*CS* 274)

Though the significance she attributes to the briars conveys to her a "precious security," they simultaneously posit the possibility of insecurity. Further, these parts of her home that she once loved "for their very selves" (*CS* 274) become associated, in her subsequent rueful reflections, with her alienation. The briar finally serves as the source of the "last one flower" she plucks in an uncanny evocation of Peter's death. Home itself has changed for Frieda as well. Having brought Peter to her home, "the environment of all her intuitions, the image

behind all her poetry, the mould in which her thoughts shaped themselves" (*CS* 271), she discovers that she has imported her insecurity into its "changeless welcome." Despite her attempts to model her life and marriage after the example of the valley—"Land and sea lay together, still and continuous, bound up into one crystalline suspense" (*CS* 273)—she now finds that "even the valley was distinct from her, irrelevant to her" (*CS* 272). One unhoming contributes to another. She realizes that Peter "could no more understand her than she could now understand the proffered comfort of the valley" (*CS* 272); as she has lost the sense of "home" in the valley, so she and Peter have failed to find home in each other.

The *Unheimliche* also asserts itself in the war poem "Easter at Christmas" (*RD* 44), which observes plainly enough that "Lovers cannot reach each other." It is not simply that the circumstances of wartime make meeting impossible, however; the parting of lovers leads to the perception of a "dark and terrible shadow" and the emergence of what perhaps ought to have remained obscure. Even the "dwellings" of the "Lord of Hosts" become *unheimlich* as the "choir-boys in white" become the outward and visible manifestation of the "pale frustrated ghosts" of longing that haunt the church at Christmas. Similarly, their carols become "ghostly vespers of desire." The frustrated desire of the congregants seems to reveal the uncomfortable truths at the foundations of this place of seeming security. While outside apocalyptic war scenes continue unabated, the choir-boys sing of the birth of one whom the shadow exposes as "An agitator." The poem twice poses the question, insistently, "*What dark and terrible shadow is swaying in the wind?*"; it suggests that the shadow is the presence of desire at the heart of seemingly self-less love, lawlessness at the beginning of order, death from the beginning of life. In the absence of the beloved, nothing is what it appeared.

A particularly literal depiction of unhoming occurs in "Valediction" (*RD* 53–54), for all that the poem is determinedly obscure and difficult to interpret. The first stanza recalls "The Madman" in its elaborate rendering of the sunset:

> Through the trembling blue the golden porpoise plunged,
> The white steeds whinnied and the wheels spun round;

> Stars leaped from hoof and rim and burned to ash,
> The madman's silver falchion clove the dusk.

The same speaker then observes calmly as

> The peasant penned his bullock in the croft
> And hung its tackle on the wooden peg
> And yawned and went indoors. The safe latch shut.

As Mathias claims, the poem "pictures the ego shut out by desire not merely from the normality of life but from the glories of the vision open to 'The Madman.'"[16] Unlike the peasant he watches, who puts everything neatly into its place and then goes indoors behind "The safe latch," the speaker simply waits, committing himself to no home and thus tacitly choosing exile:

> But I, who waited for the moon to break
> Clear from the clutch of the thing I dreaded most,
> Lay terrified amid the brooding gorse
> And waited—till my young face wrinkled up,
> My hands grew fungus fingers, and my legs
> Became two lopped logs rotting in the moss.
> My heart ceased pulsing and my earth-stopped mouth
> Slavered no more for Love or Food or Fear
> Or You for whom my heart once paid too dear.

Afraid to lose himself in love, he loses himself all the same, his "earth-stopped mouth" signalling a very different communion with the other. His disillusionment with the ideal of the beloved has left him at home neither in flights of imagination nor in the comfortingly mundane, and he is forced, "terrified," to be at home—at one—with nature in death.

Two poems particularly from "Poems in Love" associate the beloved with homeliness and as explicitly correlate the loss of the beloved with the *Unheimliche.* "Mid-Winter" (*RD* 51–53) portrays both the potential of the beloved to "rekindle" the self and the drawbacks to this dependence. Lewis brings the subconscious to light by placing the poem in a sexualized internal landscape featuring "frost-bound mountains, tuned like tightened strings" and a "disused quarry"; for all its particularity, however, the poem's unworldly setting also

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[16] Mathias, "The Black Spot" 136.

contributes to a depersonalisation, even mythologizing, of very personal troubles. Similarly, as the poem begins, the landscape is seen to be familiar and yet altered by the cold: Old Dafydd comments to the speaker that "'The waves freeze as they fall. It is indeed / 'Funny to hear that silence, 'tis indeed!'"[17] To hear silence is to register absence; the sound of the falling waves and what it signifies are integral to the *heimlich* associations of this place. The speaker recalls, "I took the path to the sea along the ruts / Whose crystals cracked and crunched beneath my boots." Recalling as it does the "shattered crystal" in the mind of "The Madman," this sentence indicates a state of some mental distress as well as a feeling of having worn out the old paths. Renewal is crucial, but "The briars' vernal thrust" writhes "vainly in the icewomb of the soil." Finally the speaker cites "the ice of your absence" as the source of his trouble and reaches "For the sun in the sunken night, / For a proof of your escape, / For your coming home." "Home," in this place that is no place, seems to indicate the presence of the beloved, sexual fulfilment, an end to wintry frustration. Their separation has left them unhomed. The speaker's longing for his "Cytherea" continues to be expressed as a longing for an ideal far exceeding desire for an individual female. He feels her presence at the shore, a liminal space in which two entities can endlessly meet and negotiate. Male wave answers female "moontug" in an orgasmic response, and the frozen wave finally breaks upon the shore. Their meeting is portrayed as that of the earth and "the longed-for, long awaited / Blessing of the rain." He is so strongly attuned to this blessing that heralds as unobtrusive as "The bending of grass, the dripping from moss and leaf" call forth a bodily reaction to her presence. At her "home-returning," his own winter exile ends and her breath restores warmth to his "charred and broken hearth."

His invitation to "warm your aching hands / At my soul's reviving flame" connotes mutual warmth and comfort, but all is not well. His Cytherea has become Ophelia, his home, disordered. She is troubled and has endured much in her time away, and now suffers "a

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[17] Dafydd also warns the speaker not to loiter "in this cold spell," a suggestive linguistic connection to a Lewis story ("Cold Spell," *CS* 142–51) that addresses similar themes.

madness too intense for word / Or kiss or loving pity to dispel." This madness has now been brought to the hearth, into the center of the home. Their homecoming is both temporary and superficial, an attempt to "forget / In the warmth of the flesh the dry and hidden bone, / In the curve of the wave its shattering on the stone." The suggestion of uneasiness at the heart of things continues as he takes the "troubled" other into himself: "sleep within my breathing, sweetheart, sleep." While her breath rekindles life in him, the rhythmic regularity and sibilance of his utterance seeks to lull the beast within the beloved as his ideal reasserts itself "And the river runs again with gladness to the sea."

"War Wedding" also fluctuates between presence and absence, the *Heimliche* and the *Unheimliche*. In the first section, the speaker fears his beloved will not come to him and indulges his fears through a series of disturbing images:

> Into the gutters of darkness I bleed and bleed.
> The moon has placed white pennies on my eyes.
> [. . . . . .]
>
> And here the hiatus falls, the stammer,
> The black-lipped wound that mouths oblivion;
> Here children scream and blood is shed in vain
> In a dark eclipse where the shadowy mistral blinds
> Our daunted eyes and touches us to dust.
>
> Here, on this chasm where the stars
> Are splashed in powder in the reeling depths,
> I tremble in nightmares of silence, calling your name. (*RD* 55–56)

Despite his repeated invocation and description of "Here," the speaker does not appear to know where "here" is. The "hiatus," the "chasm," the "black-lipped wound," and the "reeling depths" compound into a strong sense of the ground withdrawing from under the speaker's feet. The spaces and silences of the beloved's absence unnerve him, and he feels compelled to fill them. Moreover, the several allusions to blindness and the obscuring of eyes suggest castration. He is unmanned by lack of the beloved; he needs her to restore to him a potent sense of self. When she finally does arrive, in the third section, his restoration begins in the same illimitable space in which he felt himself dissolved:

> Ah! but I feel her gesture shiver
> As she beckons in infinite space;
> In the void of heaven and hell
> She starts the shrivelled heart
> Of the panting moon awake. (*RD* 57)

Her "gesture" is at first uncertain, nearly overwhelmed by the "void." A sense of place begins to re-establish itself, however, as he rises "from the restless armies" and the wounds of lost identity begin to heal. They create a secure space for each other as "She lies within my sleep" and "Her golden hair is freed / About me." The section ends "As we sail softly homing," pointed reassuringly toward the *Heimliche.*

Their coming together creates a new feeling of "home" but also, as the later sections show, begins the inevitable process of decay in that home. Section five, "The Marriage Bed," posits the highest degree of personal security with the beloved, and yet the overall mood is one of transient respite:

> Draw a green cedar over the peeping sky,
> Latch the grey sash across the glancing sea,
> Close the dark door and lie within the rose,
> Beloved, lie with me.
>
> My heavy boots stand sentinel against
> This hired bedroom underneath the eaves,
> Where Beauty slips the green leash of her Spring
> And flowers blossom from a ring of leaves. (*RD* 58)

These stanzas describe a space from which they have shut out the external forces that operate against their union, and yet they have inevitably brought these with them. The very "Spring" of their youthful love must pass, and the flowers fade. The speaker's "heavy boots" both guard against intrusion and serve as reminders that he must transform again into a soldier and march away. The place itself is a "hired bedroom," however homelike it has become, and only temporarily their domain. The section's closing stanza acknowledges the fleetingness of time:

> Black cedar, hide the peeping day;
> Sun, lie awhile beneath the sea;
> And rose, within your velvet heart
> Keep her, and me. (*RD* 59)

The rose in whose "velvet heart" they lie is fragile, though he seems to appeal to it to extend its symbolic protection beyond this one night. Perhaps the *Heimliche* can be carried with them. Meanwhile the speaker elaborates upon the nature of that homeliness. Through union with the beloved "The fragile universe of self" acquires new virility and regains "lost divinity," but these lines also inherently acknowledge that self's vulnerability. In fact, this space they have created is one in which the self can for the moment be safely vulnerable, in which "if to-night it chance we weep, / None shall know of our distress" (*RD* 59). But separation is inevitable, as she acknowledges in section six when she wakes early and views "the four white towers gliding down-river" (*RD* 60). As the morning comes near, she begins to reflect again upon their mutual deterioration. Neither approaches the other with wholeness: he brings "bitter joy" and "wounded hands" to their union, while she nearly suffers a broken heart and requires such "blessing" as his wounded hands can give her. Her reflections would seem in themselves to suggest the impossibility of wholeness through consummation; in "the callous light / That calls him from me into battle," she muses that her primary role at present is to absorb "all his trouble" (*RD* 59–60). She is to be "home" for him, guarding "the pastures of his fond desire / While War sets all her golden fields afire" (*RD* 61).

2

While Lewis's writing establishes the threat to self posed by distance from the beloved, her nearness, too, can trouble identity. Her presence emphasizes the self's vulnerability. She knows him too well, resembles him too closely, as Shoshana Felman writes:

> Masculinity is not a substance, nor is femininity its empty complement, a *heimlich* womb. Femininity is neither a metonymy, a snug container of masculinity, nor is it a metaphor—its specular reflection. Femininity *inhabits* masculinity, inhabits is [sic] as otherness, as its own *disruption.*[18]

This section considers the disruption wrought by the beloved's proximity, a disruption brought about by complementary or imaginative association.

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[18] Shoshana Felman, "Rereading Femininity," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 42.

2.1

As the subject celebrates the beloved's closeness he can become aware, affirmatively or ruefully, of his utter dependence on her presence. Consider again the letter to Gweno Lewis cited earlier: "you have the power of love and of the beloved over me." This power is often depicted as a capacity to rekindle life and creativity. Lewis expresses something more of this idea in a letter to Gweno from India:

> My mind has gone into such frozen, desolate wastes that I've been appalled; and the pain has been the taut enduring pain of being frozen by the whiteness and blankness of the scene and the failure to find any relief or hope or any familiar sign. I've pulled myself back again, now I'm up and about, and made myself work along simpler and warmer directions—talking, swotting, reading, strolling in the flower garden, and occupying myself with something human all the time. And it's brought me back to your nearness: your reality and all the gaiety and freshness that you can dispense, all of which I'd lost, lost, lost.[19]

In this passage he does not actually credit her with returning him to "something human." Nonetheless, she becomes a focal point for "reality" in an unreal world, "gaiety and freshness" in an emotional landscape inclined to be "frozen." David Shayer highlights the importance of the breath of the beloved in Lewis's poetry, from "Mid-Winter," in which her breath "rekindles" the self, to the line of "Corfe Castle" in which the speaker exhorts her to "Quicken the dying island with your breath," to the restorative "meadows of her breath" in "Compassion."[20] In these instances, she literally "inspires" him. Shayer particularly draws attention to the beloved's importance to the creative act itself:

> The poems are dependent on the woman in that they come from and are directed back to her; they are, many of them, in all their intensity, fragments of vicarious love-making; it is the girl who brings the jagged, discrete parts together in "War Wedding", "Mid Winter", "Corfe Castle" or "Compassion" and it is no coincidence that the only beautiful landscape tract in the poem which introduces us to India, 'By the Gateway', is her body, but the pattern falls apart the moment she withdraws, and the fire goes to the building, not of a white radiant eternity, but of isolated, dogged fragments of light that lie over

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[19] Lewis, letter, 1 February 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 301.

[20] Shayer, "The Poetry of Alun Lewis" 146.

> the surface of a dark and still terrifying present that floods in to suffocate the poet the moment he forgets her.[21]

Shayer's assessment provides some idea of what is at stake should the indispensable beloved disappear. Lewis regularly presents the beloved as the source of fertility, energy, or purpose. She functions as muse, as life force, as "daily bread," [22] and her approach elicits both gratitude for her presence and fear lest she withdraw again.

"Sonnet (aboard a troopship)"[23] highlights the dual threads of inspiration and vitality running through the self's dependence on the beloved. The poem maintains a fierce optimism in the face of its "harsh moment" in history, largely thanks to the strength emanating from its representation of the loved other. Despite being separated from his beloved, the speaker begins by declaring that "A new occasion like a star has risen." The troubles they face offer the "whispered promise of a new repose," and his temporarily "landless mind" finds ease because "you are there, beloved, at my side." She not only comforts him but quickens his perception:

> Opening the narrow doors of history,
> Moulding each failure to a newer grace,
> Interpreting the broken mystery
> Of each unguarded malleable face.

In this stanza the speaker places her at the vanguard of all his efforts. The idea of her makes possible perspective, resilience, and art. She, "who feared not love," sets the example for bravery as he goes "Where knives give bitter blow on counter-blow."

In two poems particularly Lewis casts the beloved in the role of the source of creativity. The images employed in "Post-Script: For Gweno" (*RD* 45) indicate the muse with particular effectiveness. The poem relies heavily upon biblical and mythic symbolism, so that despite the dedication in the title, the addressed "Beloved" clearly embodies more than the sum of one woman. The description of the beloved as "A singing rib within my dreaming side" evokes Adam and Eve, of course. Its participial differences from the Genesis version

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[21] Shayer, "Alun Lewis—The Poet as Combatant," *Poetry Wales* 10.3 (1975): 82.

[22] Lewis, letter, 1 March 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 195.

[23] *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* 138.

draw attention to the fact that in this poem, it is she who does the active things with words—singing and naming while he dreams. She has the authority to say "He has forgotten me." Against the power of this statement he asserts their inseparability with assurances that "you abide" and "You always stay." Even these apparently unambiguous statements, however, seem also to reinforce their separation: he goes away, and she stays. He elevates his rhetoric further with a description of the trials that await their union

> in the mad tormented valley
> Where blood and hunger rally
> And Death the wild beast is uncaught, untamed[.]

These lines continue to draw upon older sources, suggesting both the valley of the shadow of death and various beasts of myth,[24] and he professes to belong there with her. "Our soul," he claims, remains unified despite "the terror" and finds a sort of permanence "Among the glittering stars your voices named." Again recalling Eve, she has adopted Adam's role and named the stars about which he writes.[25] This connection, he hopes, will supply enough "quiet honour" for the duration.

The self's dependence on the beloved for inspiration is emphasized even more in "Peasant Song" (*HHT* 62–63). Among several possible readings of this poem is that of a proposed bargain with the muse, who provides inspiration to the poet, life to the lover, and fertility to the farmer. The speaker warns that "The seed is costly" and the effort of realizing its potential almost overwhelming: "I have only this small plough / To turn the mighty earth." Thus he finds a possible union seductive:

> And will you kiss me now
> And with mysterious birth
> Bless this hut of rod and reed
> And I will turn the mighty earth
> And you will hold the seed?

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[24] E.g., Twrch Trwyth from the tale "Culhwch ac Olwen," *The Mabinogion,* trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London: Dent, 1949) 95–136.

[25] This act of naming figures also in an unpublished story: "The night is starry, and there are the stars she named for me. I recognise the old deities of love." "Prelude," ts., Alun Lewis Collection, U of Glamorgan, 12.

Despite not fully comprehending the "mysterious" processes involved, he proposes to work to some purpose with the help of the beloved muse. And, "if sun and rain are kind," "The young green crops will grow / More abundant than my mind." The allusion to his mind lends weight to an interpretation of these "green crops" as the offshoots of intellectual or artistic endeavor, though certainly these remain closely tied to other blessings of fecundity. His reliance on her inspiration extends even beyond the grave:

> But if I should go
> And you be left behind
> Among the tall red ant hills and the maize
> Would you hear my plough still singing
> And, bearing endless days,
> Somehow give praise?

Acknowledging his own mortality, he invests her with omniscience and timelessness and entrusts to her his own immortality. The very fact of her, as a force defying the ravages of time, is the reassurance that his effort will not have been in vain.

More often, the self invests the beloved with the ability to rekindle life in him. In Lewis's representations she frequently displays a healing touch or speaks with a healing voice (although we seldom hear what she says). The second of "Two Legends: For Greece," for example, posits that Theseus, as he battled the minotaur, forgot "Beauty" and became "indifferent" to human concerns:

> And did some ignorant young girl
> Unlatch the sandals off his feet
> And with sweet oil anoint his pain
> And lead him back to life again? (*RD* 41)

Lewis's poetry expresses some ambivalence about this revitalization. "Ways" (*HHT* 47–48) laments that "It had been easier, not loving." The speaker recalls how he "had grown harder than the trees," but now he has become dependent on the beloved, like "The tall blue slender saplings leaning / Each on each." In his new vulnerability he has become susceptible to "the touch of wind or bird," and the loving touch of her hands is a "guerdon" that he finds to be

"gravel in the wound." "The Way Back" (*HHT* 40–41) also emphasizes the danger posed by the beloved's nearness to the soldier's impersonality:

> Soldiers quickened by your breath
> Feel the sudden spur and rush
> Of the life they put away
> Lest the war should break and crush
> Beauties more profound than death.

As elsewhere in Lewis's poetry, her "Breath" restores selfhood, though here it is a gift of dubious value, bringing pain and vulnerability where had existed only numbness. The speaker, despite his outward "cloaking" of calm, feels the beloved and his re-awakened self "Burning in the stubborn bone." She has, in this symbolic formulation, gotten under his skin. Now, having known "exquisite case" and "arabesques of joy" in her company, he attempts to return to the duty of war among "laconic disciplined men." He finds nevertheless that

> in the hardness of this world
> And in the brilliance of this pain
> I exult with such a passion
> To be squandered, to be hurled,
> To be joined to you again.

Not only does his suppressed identity respond to her, longing to throw off the self-abnegating discipline required of him, but he is willing for his self to be "squandered" in a single orgiastic moment if it means consummation with the beloved. Thus the poem suggests the subject's suspicion that in finding himself through the beloved he may also lose himself.

The stories "The Children" and "They Came" express the self's dependence on the conception of the beloved to give vitality and form to its identity, as well as the vulnerability inherent in this arrangement. As a boy the protagonist of "The Children" leads his future wife into the forest, "where there was no sun or sound, but only strange furry sounds, disturbing the cruel sleeping eagles of the silence," and he grasps an opportunity to be strong in response to her fright: "He saw his greatness in her, and gladly went into the forest, into the dangerous unknown" (*CS* 134). He sees other reflections of himself in her as well; earlier, when apologizing to her he feels "ugly and clumsy" (*CS* 133). But it seems clear that there can be no

greatness for him without her or, more precisely, without the idea of her. Indeed, in the narrative shift to their adult lives, the reader does not see the girl grown up but sees her only in memory and ideal. During his deployment he dreams of "her loved face," but "it had no features, her features were sponged out, drawn over; and she was trying passionately to reach him, to be visible to him." The effort to see her face clearly, though, is a struggle to give *his* mind "wholeness and form" (*CS* 135). He defines his own shape in relation to hers. He also remembers having "lain in her soft voice, believing against himself that her words were true because *she* spoke them. Her voice was the only thing he still knew in his immense unbearable agony" (*CS* 136). In the moments before his death, he reflects that "he could see her face alright now, and hear her voice" (*CS* 137), and for the first time he notices the wet earth he lies on and his hunger and the whispering of the other soldiers. Her face and voice call him to this awareness, and at the same time they allow him to dismiss his discomfort and danger as "a dream," because "His spirit was awake and glad" (*CS* 137).

"They Came" posits the shaping and inspirational power of the beloved from beyond the grave. The death of his wife in an air raid causes Taffy, a soldier, to reassess his place in the world. As noted in chapter 1, her loss destabilizes his connection to his geographical home and the significations he has attached to it. As he returns to camp he appears to walk out of scenes from his Welsh past and into his present army routine. In this world everyone has a designated rank and place, indicated by petty power games and a parlour set aside "for the soldiers to booze in" (*CS* 167). A local dog, his comrades, and the hotel barmaid all recognize Taffy, or think they do; one remarks carelessly, "I 'xpect you're same as me, Taff" (*CS* 168). But this projected identity, one that bypasses even his given name, is hardly real to him: "None of us are ourselves now, the Welsh boy sat thinking: neither what we were, nor what we will be" (*CS* 169). He is relieved to meet his friend Nobby on guard duty because "He hadn't to pretend with Nobby" (*CS* 173). Nobby helps restore Taffy's identity by acknowledging the reality of his loss; further, he shows Taffy how to join past and future in the beloved with his reassurance that "I reckon you belong to each other for keeps, now" (*CS*

175). Left alone, Taffy remembers "Sitting on the dry-stone wall of his father's back garden with Gwyneth by him" (*CS* 176) on the day he received his calling-up papers and thus began a transition of identity:

> He had taken Gwyneth's hand, and her hand had said, "In coming and in going you are mine; now, and for a little while longer; and then for ever."
>
> But it was not her footsteps that followed him down the lane from the station. (*CS* 176)

Her remembered presence at one liminal moment in his life augurs her continued importance to him in such moments. Moreover, the conjunction between Taffy's memory of Gwyneth and his recognition that the "pimping feet" (*CS* 166) were not hers seems to acknowledge the need to move forward, not haunted by the past but rather secure in the identity it confers upon him.

Taffy also reimagines her somewhat in the role of muse. Lewis provides an early indication of disruption to Taffy's life through the conspicuous avoidance of writing: "Last time he returned from leave, four months back, he had sat down on his bed and written to his wife. [. . .] This time he didn't ferret in his kitbag for notepaper and pencil. He went straight out" (*CS* 167). Her death becomes for him a locus of silence and accompanying doubt; what seems to trouble him most is that she "Never said anything to me" when "you want a word somehow. You want it to keep" (*CS* 175). And yet this doubt seems paired by reassurance, just as the falling star Taffy observes shares the night sky with the more permanent Plough, "like something imperishable in man" (*CS* 171). Even through her death she revivifies him, identifies him. Remembering the night she died, he recounts, "She couldn't speak, but I knew she knew it was me" (*CS* 174). Their mutual sympathy, lying beyond words, allows him to put into words a refashioned relationship with the world: "'My life belongs to the world,' he said. 'I will do what I can'" (*CS* 176). The visceral horror of her death becomes transformed. Though the bombs took away her voice and her hands, he becomes both voice and hands as he reshapes himself in her image.

The locating of life and identity in the beloved extends into an unknown future, and possibly beyond death, in the final two poems of *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*. Pikoulis describes "A Fragment" and "Midnight in India" as

> poems of farewell, the first to Freda, the second to Gweno [. . .]. The man achieves life in one woman, remembers his achievement with the other and bequeaths his body to her. It is the witching hour: moonlight lies in pools, pain soothes dry lips that seek quenching; the loved one bears a "calm white face". Everything bespeaks the presence of the Goddess. (*Life* 226)

The text of each poem certainly conveys a sense of leave-taking, at least for the present. In both poems the speaker finds in the beloved a measure of certainty and self-renewal, and thus he "achieves life." In both, too, he looks ahead to a dangerous future and places himself in her hands for safekeeping. He seeks protective peace in his construction of her.

The title of "A Fragment" hints that the speaker is himself a fragment in search of completion, and in fact the poem begins with "aloneness" and ends with a solitary line declaring the continuance of self in the other:

> Where aloneness fiercely
> Trumpets the unsounded night
> And the silence surges higher
> Than hands or seas or mountains' height
>
> I the deep shaft sinking
> Through the quivering Unknown
> Feel your anguish beat its answer
> As you grow round me, flesh and bone.
>
> The wild beast in the cave
> Is all our pride; and will not be
> Again until the world's blind travail
> Breaks in crimson flower from the tree
>
> I am, in Thee. (*HHT* 73)

The transcendent presence of the beloved gives the speaker self-definition within "the quivering Unknown." She provides affirmative response in "the unsounded night" where silence swallows attempts to express the solitary self. Through unambiguously sexual imagery he appeals to her physical reality as well as to their mutual sympathy and shared experience. He clearly entrusts his continuation to the beloved; insofar as he is, he is in her. As they face a

period of "blind travail," he considers her his only protection against the silence, the Unknown, and the obscurity of death.

"Midnight in India" (*HHT* 74–75) likewise invests the beloved with supernatural powers of protection and renewal. The speaker reviews the past and credits the addressed other with alleviating "the dark compression in my head":

> Oh I have set the earth aflame
> And brought the high dominions down,
> And soiled each simple act with shame
> And had no feelings of my own.
>
> I sank in drumming tides of grief
> And in the sea-king's sandy bed
> Submerged in gulfs of disbelief
> Lay with the redtoothed daughters of the dead.
>
> Until you woke me with a sigh
> And eased the dark compression in my head,
> And sang and did not cease when I
> Broke your heart like holy bread.

Such elevated rhetoric serves among other things to emphasize the contrast between his perceived profanity and the holiness of his idealized beloved. The assertion that, prior to the beloved's advent, the speaker "had no feelings of my own" makes particular use of this tendency. The "shame" and "grief" into which he "sank" at this time he experienced in depersonalized fashion, as a collective and literary experience. Only in relation to another did he succeed in defining himself again. The beloved thus functions as a fixed point of reference and a homing beacon. This poem, like "A Fragment," hints also at the beloved's power to confer immortality or unearthly protection. Where in the past he "Lay with the redtoothed daughters of the dead," now she has helped him "cast away the bitter death" that infuses mortality with nihilism and morbidity. Though again the turmoil of the world envelops him, it ceases when he sees her "calm white face," which Lewis ties to "the moon's annunciation" and the gathering moonlight. Hers is a goddess's power, and the speaker invokes it as self-protection against the coming storm: "I lie within your hands, within your peace, / And watch this last effulgent world arise."

A particularly curious similarity in the two poems concerns the presence of a "beast" that seems to occupy a caged, distant, or sleeping existence with at best deferred potential for deliverance. This beast seems more akin to the striving "wounded beast beneath my lids" of "War Wedding" than to "Death the wild beast" in "Post-Script: For Gweno"; it is a beast with whom the speaker identifies and upon whom he displaces emotional turmoil. In both poems the speaker alludes to the beast and then places himself in the hands of the beloved for safe-keeping:

> The wild beast in the cave
> Is all our pride; and will not be
> Again until the world's blind travail
> Breaks in crimson flower from the tree
> I am, in Thee. ("A Fragment")

> Mysterious tremors stir the beast,
> In unknown worlds he dies;
> I lie within your hands, within your peace,
> And watch this last effulgent world arise. ("Midnight in India")

Though it seems clear that the beast functions more as a talisman than as a danger, the significance of this beast remains largely obscure. Yet the very obscurity of this symbol helps to illuminate the nature of the beloved. The speaker plainly expects his addressee in each instance to understand his allusion; their shared language indicates intimacy. But if, as Pikoulis suggests, the poems are addressed to two different women, then the employment of the same intimate symbol in both would seem to argue for an abstracted, depersonalized construction of the beloved. The figure of the beloved calls forth that of the beast, "a force coming into, and passing out of, being, in existences beyond his comprehension."[26] Lewis's literary beloved operates on a plane far removed from his attachment to any mortal woman.

2.2

Ambivalence toward the beloved is especially pronounced when, as so often in Lewis's work, she occupies a metonymical proximity to death. The connection occupies a time-honored

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[26] Poole 155.

place in literary tradition, according to Elisabeth Bronfen: "both 'death' and 'woman' function as Western culture's privileged tropes for the enigmatic and for alterity."[27] Freud argues that the imagination "rebelled against the recognition of the truth embodied in the myth of the Moerae, and constructed instead the myth derived from it, in which the Goddess of Death was replaced by the Goddess of Love and by what was equivalent to her in human shape." This transformation leaves literary evidence, he maintains: "the original myth is not so thoroughly distorted that traces of it do not show through and betray its presence."[28] Lewis's rendering of this trope involves a loved figure whose presence alerts the self to the germ of its own ending that it always carries within. In her most elusive form, she can also entice the receptive subject to surrender itself altogether. The beloved provides both intimations of mortality and temptations toward the fulfilment of that mortality.

"The Children" portrays the beloved as a revivifying force that has nevertheless become inextricably associated with death. Lewis's depiction of a man lying in a trench and dreaming of an amalgam of his mother and the mother of his child fits neatly into Freud's treatment of the literary trope involving a choice between three women:

> We might argue that what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman—the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or that they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more.[29]

The boy and girl who become man and woman in this story are never named, though Lewis connects them to the Hansel and Gretel tale. They stand for every child, every man and woman. In the hours before his death in war, the man recalls their childhood together, their courtship, their marriage. He remembers the night when "she slept in his arms at last and he became the possessor of truth":

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[27] Elisabeth Bronfen, "Death Drive (Freud)," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary,* ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 53.

[28] Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," *Standard Edition,* vol. 12 (1958) 299–300.

[29] Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" 301.

> The truth that all the attempts that are made to convince us that the flesh, the network of sense and nerve and appetite, is the dominant motif, had failed. The spirit took on itself the knowledge and power of flesh, its power to move and act and be. [. . .] How he loved his mother when he thought of her, those few years he grew up with her before she died, sitting by the fire in the clean-swept kitchen, darning the worn-out darns in his socks, patching the frayed patches of his trousers, neatly concealing the poverty of the garment with deft patient fingers; her tired bony hands had a soft life, a pride, a self-reliance that was also in her yellowing wasted face and grey dying hair, a grace. But she had worked, understanding the necessity for work. It was the manifest of her spirit, her achievement [. . .]. (*CS* 136)

The young man has sensed a generational continuity that reassures but also suggests inescapable repetition. Recalling this moment while lying in the trench, he connects that continuity to his wife, "Thinking of the child in her, the child in her eyes, in her womb" (*CS* 137). She has helped him re-establish the sense of home that he lost when his mother died. As children, he and the girl dared to make "a new house" together in a frightening place, defying his mother's warning; now, in death, he asserts the permanence of that structure and includes both his wife and his mother within it. But the immortality, the continuity, of the beloved is closely connected to mortality, as the end of these reflections demonstrates forcibly: "When the grenade lobbed over the parapet and got him, the darkness was pure light, pure power. Her face, her presence" (*CS* 137). In the final instant, he imagines her bringing death to him.

Several poems also construct the beloved in terms betraying her conceptual proximity to Freud's "Goddess of Death." "Song" (*HHT* 21) prefaces every vision of marital happiness with the grief that follows:

> Oh journeyman, Oh journeyman,
> Before this endless belt began
> Its cruel revolutions, you and she
> Naked in Eden shook the apple tree.
>
> Oh soldier lad, Oh soldier lad,
> Before the soul of things turned bad,
> She offered you so modestly
> A shining apple from the tree.
>
> Oh lonely wife, Oh lonely wife,
> Before your lover left this life
> He took you in his gentle arms.
> How trivial then were Life's alarms.

Though the poem asserts that "what's transfigured will live on / Long after Death has come and gone," the previous lines effect a *dis*figurement of the "Eden" enjoyed in innocence; love is always already haunted by the pain of death. That haunting extends to the soldier of "In Hospital: Poona (1)" (*HHT* 52–53), who imaginatively places his beloved in a valley "Whose slopes are scratched with streets and sprawling graves." In envisaging himself near her, he also must encounter the graves among which she "lay waiting." This poem ends with an avowal similar to that of "Song," that "Time upon the heart can break / But love survives the venom of the snake," a pronouncement made necessary by the snake's continual presence.

Likewise the evocation of "Eternity" in "Goodbye" (*HHT* 24–25) is as double-sided as the poem's varied rhetoric. Every "end" in these lines appears both temporary and permanent, every assertion of love's timelessness haunted by "nameless fears." The acknowledgment that the soldier and his beloved must "go, as lovers go, for ever" recognizes the hyperbole belonging to such occasions while also admitting a very real possibility. Lewis also contrasts abstract hyperbole with the quietly concrete in the final stanzas:

> We made the universe to be our home,
> Our nostrils took the wind to be our breath,
> Our hearts are massive towers of delight,
> We stride across the seven seas of death.
>
> Yet when all's done you'll keep the emerald
> I placed upon your finger in the street;
> And I will keep the patches that you sewed
> On my old battledress tonight, my sweet.

Despite the talismanic powers ascribed to simple tokens of concern against "the seven seas of death," other syntactical choices reflect less optimism. The first two lines are in the past tense, suggesting that the speaker is saying "Goodbye" to the beloved as his "breath" and his "home" in the universe. And the future "when all's done" is of ambiguous character; it is uncertain whether they will ever again enjoy more of each other than emblematic reminders. The woman herself becomes subtly associated with death over the course of the poem. He puts "a final shilling in the gas" as he watches her undress, linguistically connecting her image to the finite. As he awaits her, the comb through her hair sounds to him like "the autumn in the

trees," a reminder of transience reinforced by the rented room itself and her gift of "dry flowers" to the next occupant. His suggestive inertia, too, places her by relation into the position of goddess of death: he hears her "rustling comb" because he lies "so still," while forming memories "Lay mummy-cloths of silence round my head." Only she speaks, and while she remains "afraid to speak / The big word, that Eternity is ours," unwilling to make an irrevocable pronouncement, she predicts his fate all the same as, he observes, "Your kisses close my eyes."

In a few poems, the indelible idea of the beloved leads directly into despair and decay. The title figure of "On a Bereaved Girl" (*RD* 41–42) experiences this "grey / Negation of her life" when her lover dies before their marriage. She "can find no way" to an eternal union now, though "the fled-away is eternal within her"; that absence is the only constant presence. His "silence" leads her "Into the final grim delirium / Of the act of Death-on-Earth," in which she surrenders all care of self. "Song (On seeing dead bodies floating off the Cape)" (*HHT* 34–35) also follows "The gradual self-effacement of the dead" as practiced by one who ostensibly still lives. Her lover having sailed away, she begins with harbingers of disaster:

> The first month of his absence
> I was numb and sick
> And where he'd left his promise
> Life did not turn or kick.
> The seed, the seed of love was sick.

She experiences the ghost of a pregnancy, sickness without life, and realizes that something has gone wrong with his "promise" of perpetuity. The second stanza, documenting the second month of his absence, is redolent of death. The speaker herself becomes corpselike—"my eyes were sunk / In the darkness of despair"—and "his ghost" joins her in her bed "like a grave." When finally he is "lost," "helpless," an imaginative communion between them brings his words to her as though on the wind, but she too is powerless. Despite his final injunction, "Beloved, do not think of me," she cannot do otherwise; she imagines his watery grave in a place where the crests are "bewildered" and "The seagulls have no nests," a place thoroughly

unhomelike. She also promises that "I'll not stir, so he sleeps well"—a promise, it seems, of a morbid sympathy in death. The coral reef "Builds an eternity of grief" around both:

> But oh! the drag and dullness of my Self;
> The turning seasons wither in my head;
> All this slowness, all this hardness,
> The nearness that is waiting in my bed,
> The gradual self-effacement of the dead.

The capitalized Self, momentarily regarded, does not succeed without the beloved. It becomes "slow" and "hard." The speaker experiences the outside world without distinction, as all seasons "wither" alike. The "nearness" named, the ghost again occupying her bed, is both the presence and the absence of the other, his "effacement" as real as his memory. The face of the beloved has become the face of death.

And thus desire for the beloved can lead the subject into self-effacement, into the temptation of annihilation. Love for the beloved begins to closely resemble love of death itself. The soldier who lies grievously wounded in "The Earth Is a Syllable" equates his wife with an imagined figure who draws him ever closer to death. The dust storm that covers him "like an embalming" (*CS* 193) acts as a harbinger of death and, curiously, introduces the memory of his wife. The dust and hairs he sees on his blanket now, as he lies close to death, recall the hairs his wife was loath to brush off his pillows after he embarked; it seems she feared to discard him along with the physical evidence of his reality, and now the re-emergence of these shed hairs reminds him of his tenuous hold on existence. In his embalmed state he clings to his selective memory: "But she was so beautiful and fresh always and the house always so clean and simple, with the sun or the snow always lighting it. She wouldn't like this dust" (*CS* 194). He remembers less a woman than a goddess, existing in an "always" outside of time. He imagines her as a constant to which he can cling. Moreover, she is "always" clean and fresh and illuminated—everything he is not as he lies in the night, covered in dust. The matter-of-fact conclusion that "she wouldn't like this dust" betrays an anxiety that in his present state, his goddess will reject him.

After his ambulance driver retires for the night, the wounded soldier is "left alone" to contemplate his existence. Lewis emphasizes the soldier's solitude, as well as the darkness: "He didn't want the dark to come any nearer. He could see exactly where it started, just this side of his feet" (*CS* 195). The dark, clearly delineated as an entity inimical to himself, threatens to envelop him as he lies alone. He then, however, perceives another presence: "There was a translucent golden influence at the core of his being. He could see his wife" (*CS* 195). In an echo of the singing rib within the dreaming side, the soldier perceives an other-within-self that he welcomes as protector of the self. Indeed, this vision of the beloved could be labeled entirely self-ish. In this form she exists as his complement and as the immortal manifestation of him; he reflects that he is glad they have had no child, because "There was only her left, besides himself." As his world becomes increasingly circumscribed by the gathering darkness, as less and less remains of him, "there was still her little house. That was all" (*CS* 195). Nothing exists in the soldier's contracting cosmos except the ideal of home.

This ideal tempts him, finally, to surrender his fear of dying a soldier, in Burma, and to recognize only the darkness and the illuminating presence of his wife. Ian Hamilton writes, in reference to "Dusty Hermitage,"

> It is the crucial conflict, and it is there in Lawrence's statement; the death-wish colliding oddly with the belief in 'minds worth winning'. Lewis could never finally accept that these pursuits need be distinct, or that a choice must be made between them, but he was often consumed by that failure of energy which can arise from their antagonism, and often enticed by thoughts of a death in which they might be absolutely reconciled.[30]

Christopher Meredith, too, identifies this paradox as "what so typifies his work—its attempts to swallow and hold down apparently irreconcilable forces, chiefly the affirmation of love and a fascination with death contained in the personae of lover and soldier."[31] Lewis's soldier indeed seeks impossibly to reconcile his vision of the living beloved with the call of death. Now unafraid to venture beyond the circumference of lamplight, "He wanted to get up and

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[30] Hamilton 39.

[31] Meredith, "Dai Greatcoat": 61.

enter the darkness and enter the silent village under the hill and enter it with his wife alone" (*CS* 196). In this final consummation with the beloved the soldier welcomes the foreclosure of his senses in darkness and silence. He goes both with her *and* alone, and both her perceived presence and her absence prey on his fevered mind. On one level he retains intimate awareness of his body and its pain, and he reflects that "he hated the dirt and hair on his blanket, and being hot in bed" (*CS* 196). But the idea of his wife he has constructed, as the antithesis of the things he hates, calls him out of his bodily existence altogether. Earlier he excluded himself from the beloved by being filthy, and now his ideal sings to him out of the darkness he previously feared, lending him a sense of invincibility. He loses himself in the darkness, so confident in his love for the beloved "that he knew he could throw the darkness over the hill" (*CS* 196). The vision he has created as a safe haven for himself in fact pulls him away from his weakening body and welcomes him into death.

As love brings deeper involvement in life, so too does it increase vulnerability. As this chapter has demonstrated, Lewis represents the beloved as a multifaceted projection of the self's many anxieties in the realm of love. As an other necessary to complete definition of the self, the distant or unattainable beloved threatens the subject's ability to be "at home" in the world. The subject becomes more self-fixated than ever before without the benefit of actual self-knowledge. For these reasons, however, the other's nearness serves to emphasize the self's vulnerability. Depending on the beloved for completion or for self-awareness, the self becomes aware too of the possibility of loss: loss of other, loss of self. The subject even comes to regard the face of the beloved as the face of death, a reminder of or temptation toward the final loss of self.

4. The Subaltern Speaks: Lewis in India

In December 1942 Lewis arrived with his battalion in Bombay and departed immediately for Nira, near Poona (*Life* 145–46). Over the next several months he was to experience India in a variety of contexts, from bivouac to hospital, from mountain lake to arid plain. Always, of course, his perspective was that of a white soldier, rueful, fascinated, bewildered:

> It really is a most spectacular and amazing land, but something seems to have gone wrong at the root of it. Perhaps it's just the climate; but every body must be dysenteric subjects for they relieve themselves anywhere or everywhere and the whole place was filthy with human dirt. Again and again I realise that we just can't cope with things out here. It's alright if the white man can afford to live in Darjeeling or Simla or the Taj Mahal in Bombay. But he's only got to potter into the villages to realise what an unknown world he has put his crown upon.[1]

This passage encapsulates reactions to the other through the lenses of several identities. The poet must acknowledge, almost petulantly, the persistence of "human dirt" across the face of the "spectacular and amazing." The humanist perceives a persistent and fundamental "wrong"-ness beyond the ability of the British to "cope with," let alone reverse. And the armed representative of the British crown recognizes that while money can cocoon the white settler and allow him to live out a certain exotic fantasy, the imposition of his "crown" will not suffice to translate the other into ordered knowledge. These concerns meet in Lewis's writing from India, in which the shifting constituent identities of self increasingly struggle to find purchase.

The mutually defining preoccupation of self with other, having mediated literary negotiations with community, the army, and the beloved, would seem to find its fullest and most natural expression as these pre-existing concerns travel to India. India represents, as it were, the other *squared*—a web of tentative significations that cannot even be defamiliarized because they have never been familiar. Employing a central self/other binarism to a reading of Lewis's Indian work poses certain dangers, however, as Sara Suleri explains:

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[1] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, 14 May 1943, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 21, ff. 32–33.

> the intimacy of the colonial setting requires reiteration. For the reader of postcolonial discourse provides scant service to its conceptualization when she posits the issue of an intransigent otherness as both the first and the final solution to the political and aesthetic problems raised by the mutual transcriptions that colonialism has engendered in the Indian subcontinent. Diverse ironies of empire are too compelling to be explained away by the simple pieties that the idiom of alterity frequently cloaks.[2]

Such a critical fetishizing of alterity, she warns, serves to reinforce rather than problematize the binaries of colonialism.[3] Suleri's point is well taken. This chapter will seek to avoid such pitfalls through multiple strategies. The first will be, in effect, to trust Lewis to speak for himself and to pay close critical attention to what his text *does*. It ought to be clear by now that Lewis does not accept easy answers or "simple pieties" in favor of more complex reactions. Also, a great deal of his quarrel is with the self and its necessarily dynamic relationship to the other. In the interest of theorizing his literary responses, it may be useful to assign Lewis provisionally to "that neither/nor territory of white settler-colonial writing which Alan Lawson has called the 'Second World.'"[4] In Stephen Slemon's formulation,

> the *illusion* of a stable self/other, here/there binary division has *never* been available to Second-World writers, and [. . .] as a result the sites of figural contestation between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, have been taken *inward* and *internalized* in Second-World post-colonial textual practice. By this I mean that the *ambivalence* of literary resistance itself is the 'always already' condition of Second-World settler and post-colonial literary writing, for [. . .] anti-colonialist resistance has *never* been directed at an object or a discursive structure which can be seen purely external to the self.[5]

Though Lewis was not a settler, precisely, he wrote from an involuntary but privileged role in the power structures of empire. He arrived in the country having internalized the ambivalence of which Slemon writes, and his literary output from India embodies what Abdulrazak Gurnah identifies as two senses of "settler": "the ambivalent imperial icon and the figure of

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[2] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 9.

[3] Suleri 11.

[4] Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 104.

[5] Slemon 109–10.

imperial shame."[6] His position slightly outside the Anglo-Indian community in fact adds another dimension to his Second-World status. Most importantly, his discursive reaction to India would seem to fit precisely into this no man's land of internalized ambivalence.

Another approach to self and other in Lewis's Indian writing is suggested by Edward Said in his lecture "Freud and the Non-European." Said presents a reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* that stresses the presence of the other at the foundation of the self. In the figure of Moses, the Egyptian founder of Judaism, Said locates

> Freud's implicit refusal, in the end, to erect an insurmountable barrier between non-European primitives and European civilization; on the contrary, the severity of Freud's argument, as I read it, is that what may have been left behind historically catches up with us in such universal behaviours as the prohibition against incest, or—as he characterizes it in *Moses and Monotheism*—the return of the repressed.[7]

Again, the critic must tread carefully when melding postcolonial and Freudian readings in order to avoid adding ego/id to the list of imperial binarisms. That such a binarism was at work in imperial discourse is no secret: "the Victorian desire to legitimise hegemony," writes Gurnah, "could only be fulfilled by diminishing the humanity of the subjected other, which paradoxically provoked cynicism and pessimism about the self, to whom the other was a kind of pre-psyche. The howling savage was European man's true self, as Conrad demonstrates with such dreary assurance in *Heart of Darkness.*"[8] Said, though, is suggesting an approach both more subtle and more profound: "in excavating the archaeology of Jewish identity, Freud insisted that *it did not begin with itself* but, rather, with other identities[.]"[9] In a similar vein, Rey Chow posits a need to pay attention to "the processes of identification-construction that take place in language, psychic processes and institutions, so that the 'other' is no longer

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[6] Abdulrazak Gurnah, "Settler Writing in Kenya: 'Nomenclature Is an Uncertain Science in These Wild Parts,'" *Modernism and Empire,* ed. Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 277.

[7] Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003) 19–20.

[8] Gurnah 277.

[9] Said 44; emphasis added.

simply regarded as a Manichean opposite to the self, but always already a part of it."[10] This chapter will explore to some degree the extent to which Lewis makes use of the non-European as a reminder of repressed cultural and personal insecurities and experiences the other as "a fissure or wound at the heart of collective identity."[11]

What then of the intimate encounters to which Suleri alludes? Lewis's descriptions of such interactions run the gamut from condescension to wistfulness, from warmth to despair. In an article in which he also laments the inability of British rule to "alter the emaciation of Bombay's aged and deformed beggars," he emphasizes difference and suspicion:

> We have little commerce with the Indians, except servants and shop assistants. I have only met the little *durzis* and *moochis* who walk into the ward and ask Sahib if they shall make him a shirt or a shoe. They say smallpox very bad, prices much high, rice and wheat too costly. Being mostly Moslems they defame the Hindu traders; *banias* very greedy, charge too much. There is a current of mistrust.[12]

This passage does show Lewis aware that the Indian other is not unified, but marked by internal difference and stratification. But by emphasizing gulfs in social position and by mimicking the peddlers' non-standard English, Lewis also keeps Indian at arm's length from British officer. But other representations of Indian/European interaction, while giving alterity its due, also decenter the colonizer. Here he writes from a position of hybrid "uneasiness" at the Bombay Cricket Club:

> It's a large cricket ground with huge concrete stands all round like a football ground—and this is a sort of enclosure with tea rooms and club rooms. The Indians own it and allow the whites to patronise it. The whites sit and drink tea stolidly. The Indians all play cards and talk. The whites are all men, the Indians have their women with them. The mixture of dress is odd—some in European clothes, some in saris. They're a funny lot, as if they're sitting on the hedge, conscious of both the East and the West. They look a bit nervous, we a bit bored. They've got a sort of dubious overconfidence, we the stolid uneasiness of soldiers of occupation.[13]

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[10] Rey Chow, "Race/Imperialism," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Wright, 363.

[11] Jacqueline Rose, "Response to Edward Said," *Freud and the Non-European* 68.

[12] Lewis, "Stones for Bread," *The New Statesman and Nation* 1 May 1943: 287.

[13] Lewis, letter, 9 May 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 341.

This representation recalls, perhaps consciously, the "bridge party" of *A Passage to India,* though without its emphasis on the grotesque. The relative positions of "the East and the West" are rendered complex and lacking assurance. Lewis writes from a space owned by Indians but dedicated to a game imported from England. To "drink tea stolidly" seems a quintessentially English act, as performative of English identity as any could be, yet the tea is probably produced in India. No one involved seems certain how to behave, aware on the one hand of the possible repercussions of "overconfidence," and on the other of undesired authority and foreignness. While the Indians are said to be "nervous," their performances on the whole seem more natural and less self-conscious than those of their guests. The Indians are "sitting on the hedge," a conspicuously British image and also one emphasizing both hybridity and tentativeness. Displacement and role-switching do not always result in uneasiness, however, as demonstrated by the following letter:

> I had a delightful day at Lahore—I visited the family of my Indian friend on the voyage out here—Lieut. Khuller. [. . .] They loaded me with fruit from their orchard and made a real welcome of the day. One of their sons is in England now. I don't know whether you'd like to meet him—but never be surprised if you get letters from either Indians or British saying they're calling to see you, for I've told several people that you'd be glad to see them and show them a little of Wales and glean some news of the country all your sons are in. One rather fine Indian boy, an Air Force pilot, who is going to England for a year, says he'd love to visit you. [. . .] He's got an OBE for bravery in Burma and has had a rich life. He began as a Congress student, was jailed, then decided there was no chance of India becoming free by just yelling political slogans. So he joined the Air Force, and has done very well.[14]

Perhaps it is not surprising that Lewis should feel most comfortable with Indians engaged in his own military profession, and one cannot but note the ease and even approbation with which he encounters Indians who have risen through British-defined ranks. But a more profound identification appears to be taking place here. Lewis portrays the Indian pilot as a young man of strong political ideals who joined the Air Force out of a need to take concrete action, circumstances Lewis surely orders so as to garner the approval of his family and stress

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[14] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, 24 September 1943, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 21, f. 62.

the young man's resemblances to himself. Further, it seems that after months of observing Indian peasants and gipsies from afar, or interacting on patently unequal terms, Lewis has the "delightful" experience of encountering welcoming Indians with whom he can feel *at home*—so much so, in fact, that he imaginatively places the young Indian men in his own home in Aberdare and anticipates an equal welcome from his mother.

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The sundering seas between "home" and "away" are fraught with more perils than those represented by storms and U-boats. Lewis rarely loses an opportunity in his writing from abroad to trouble the clear waters protecting self and a talismanic "home" (or, indeed, "England" or "Wales"). From India or Burma, viewed through the lens of transformative experience, "home" becomes unreal or even intimidating. Likewise, in his work anticipating embarkation, Lewis acknowledges the many significations of "India."

As Mack in "The Farewell Binge" prepares for "going East," he considers the unknown:

> Houris, dates, topees, deserts, and Wops running away. And a vague feeling of great danger that he wouldn't summon into the light and analyse; instead he let it brood in him, and darken the brilliant colours of his idea of the East—a sunburnt land on a classroom wall-map [. . .]. (*CS* 48)

Like that of Beale in "The Orange Grove," Mack's "idea of the East" relies somewhat on cartography infused with schoolboy fantasies. Despite his facile attempts to list the key features of this "East," his "vague feeling" reflects his uneasiness at facing something uncivilized and uncontrollable, an impulse that ought to remain hidden but that his conscious mind cannot quite deny. His companion Dick, also on the eve of departure, feels his mind beginning to loosen its grip on familiar ideas: "conventions whirled past his mind's eye like telegraph poles outside an express carriage window, all slants and angles, falling, falling" (*CS* 49). His drunkenness makes him unusually receptive to the lines his friend quotes from *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám,* but the doorways of its "battered caravanserai" also

complement Dick's liminal state and invoke the oriental mystery toward which he feels himself bound.

"It's a Long Way to Go" shows Lieutenant Greening adjusting to the idea of his impending embarkation: "'India,' he said. It was a little word, wasn't it? Five letters" (*CS* 60). He struggles, however, to build a satisfactory conceptual framework for this little word. To some extent, India signifies escape from the pressures of army life in Britain. Greening reflects twice that "It was a relief to get away" and considers with equanimity the opportunity he expects his new environment to offer: "Even if India was as caste-ridden and 'regular' as the home forces, he was glad to go. It was a new field, a field in ferment" (*CS* 55). The India he imagines here would seem to be an amalgam of native societies and army hierarchy, with the uneasy relationship between the two offering fertile possibilities for some sort of productive upheaval. Having been flummoxed by the complications of identity at home, Greening looks to India, of all places, to provide solid ground under his feet. After learning of a pilot who has bailed out into the ocean, Greening returns immediately to his own preoccupation: "India was as vast as the sea; but it was land. One could walk on it, run, breathe, think. Not be sucked down, choked, filled, emptied, annihilated" (*CS* 57). India at the very least represents an opportunity to focus upon the concrete as contrasted with his journey home on leave, which he considers "so unreal": "Reading the *New Statesman,* thinking in big filmy ideas of the economic wastage and Indian nationalism and British Imperialism, of British capitalism and Russian Socialism, of second fronts and khaki fascism [. . .]" (*CS* 59). Greening finds he cannot attach these "big filmy ideas" to the five-letter word that signifies his future; nor, conversely, can he focus his thoughts upon "India" with any meaningful result. As he and his wife lie in bed that night, "They were both thinking of India in the darkness. He could only think of clichés, meaningless, unevocative. 'Teeming millions,' he murmured" (*CS* 61). Despite placing his hope in the metaphorical fecundity of India, Greening rejects that fertility as a cliché devoid of useful signification. His is unlikely to be an easy journey.

The soldier's view of home from India is scarcely less complex. We have seen in Lewis's work the uneasy relationship between self and other where "other" is the self's formative community and family context; we have also seen the further complication of that relationship when the self takes on the uncomfortable mantle of the "soldier" identity. It is therefore hardly surprising that the soldier with any degree of self-knowledge should continue in a troubled conception of "home" when placed in a foreign environment, one which emphasizes his own strangeness. As Lewis wrote from Poona hospital,

> I can believe the English nurses are real, but not the expensive and odorous ladies with their pukka Oxford accents. I find the English out here very, very English, particularly those who've been here a long time. [. . .] The colonists think far more of England than the English stay-at-homes think of the colonists, or of themselves.[15]

The speaker in "The Jungle" evokes "the little home / Semi-detached, suburban, transient" (*HHT* 68) in contrast to his present vision of "the villages, the paddy fields / Where boys sit timelessly to scare the crows" (*HHT* 70). Home has ceased to have any reassuring permanence for him. Lewis writes after meeting his brother in Poona that "It was nice to see him, in a ghostly way,"[16] suggesting, however playfully, that relationships struggle to exist outside their accustomed context. The soldier readying for battle in "The Run-In" reflects, "even at home you were haunted—but once there was always a home."[17] When the idea of home becomes spectral, where can the self find purchase, except among ghosts?

The soldier's semi-voluntary exile begins immediately, with the act of departure. Having left home en route to the unknown, the speaker of "Sonnet (Aboard a Troopship)" is able to declare that "A new occasion like a star has risen" and to wave a cheerful farewell to "all that we knew and valued."[18] Home now sinks "Below the unattainable horizon / Whose cornfields swish in every landless mind." The familiar places haunt minds and become

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[15] Lewis, letter, 1 February 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 300.

[16] Lewis, letter, 15 December 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 410.

[17] Lewis, "The Run-In," *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* 134.

[18] Lewis, "Sonnet (Aboard a Troopship)," *Selected Poetry and Prose* 138.

unsuitable, foreign, to the significations they previously offered. In "On Embarkation," Lewis cites "the temptation [. . .] to forget / Such villages as linger in the mind" (*HHT* 27). That temptation is balanced by a blurring of the realities of place, as one man

> sees the 'tween-decks turn
> To fields of home, each tree with its rustling shadow
> Slipped like a young girl's dress down to its ankles;
> Where lovers lay in chestnut shadows,
> And horses came there from the burning meadows. (*HHT* 28)

A similar moment occurs in "The River Temple: Wai,"[19] in which the feverish soldier, "squatting like a peasant," sees in "the sterile fires" of India

> English pastures rank and pleasant,
> The primrose woods all cupped with snow,
> A girl in an hotel bedroom—

These reminiscences have in common a selective privileging of idealized pastoral images in combination with memories of young love. The overall picture of sanctified fertility contrasts with the sterility found aboard ship or in India—and it is worth noting the reversal of Lieutenant Greening's comparison of the "withered boughs" of home to India's "field in ferment." On the other hand, the girl in the second extract above seems a mischievous presence intruding on the soldier's holy reverie. Mention of her is hastily interrupted by a suggestive dash, as though the memory of his time with her does not fit into the framework of pastoral purity by which he would prefer to remember "England."

Selective and complicated memory also feature in "In Hospital: Poona (1)" (*HHT* 52–53). Somewhat surprisingly, the poem employs the trope of darkness to aid the speaker in his vision of home:

> Last night I did not fight for sleep
> But lay awake from midnight while the world
> Turned its slow features to the moving deep
> Of darkness, till I knew that you were furled,
> Beloved, in the same dark watch as I.

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[19] Lewis, "The River Temple: Wai," *Selected Poetry and Prose* 131.

Wales and India are imaginatively enclosed in the same darkness. That darkness, far from posing a threat, appears as a familiar realm in which aspects of the self can be explored. The emblems he calls out of memory—the "green tide" at Cardigan, his lover's "red yacht riding like a legend there"—emphasize the talismanic importance of that memory to the self but also suggest the fragmented nature of such selfhood. Insofar as he belongs in Wales, it is as a bit of green here, a dash of red there. Further, in his evocations of home he distances himself even as he seeks to approach. The Welsh mountains, named with multisyllabic solemnity, appear to give him more solid purchase on identity. He seems to labor, however, under the misapprehension that Eryri is a single peak, an error signalling his limited familiarity with the region and its language. Moreover, the "small nameless mining valley" described in such familiar detail is surely not nameless at all outside his poetic license; he chooses to render it anonymous. Returning to subverted light/dark imagery, the "ten thousand miles of daylight" appearing at the end of the poem signify the literal and metaphorical distance between Wales and India, and they hasten the speaker's re-emergent awareness of India's difference as he hears "the wild daws crake / In India's starving throat."

"Ward 'O' 3 (b)" features several officers in hospital, all considering their relationship to a newly urgent spectre of "home" as their medical boards approach. The physical heart of the story is the "lily-pond garden," an outpost of Englishness in India, doubly enclosed by two rings of buildings. Here, non-native flowers such as roses and sweet peas are kept watered and weeded with scant regard to India's seasons (*CS* 197). The narrator warns, however, that "between [the patients] and the encircling mysteries there is only the spotlight of their obsessions holding the small backcloth of ward and garden before them" (*CS* 205). It is a place, in other words, where the soldier's tenuous hold on a unitary self must be policed, inspected, at every turn. Nevertheless certain lines blur: all visitors, from native peddlers to members of the Anglo-Indian community to "brother officers" appear as "travellers from an unknown land" (*CS* 205). Further instability suggests itself in "The Sikh fortune tellers who offered them promotion and a fortune and England" (*CS* 205), as the soldiers find

reassurance of their place at home through those who cannot "offer" them anything of the sort.

Very English tensions persist in the ward, also: though both apparently belong firmly to the officer class, Captain Brownlow-Grace distrusts Lieutenant Moncrieff's university education and knowledge of opera and other niceties, as well as his indulgence in moods and his vanity. He also finds himself "unable to stomach" Moncrieff's polio-induced deformity (*CS* 198). Brownlow-Grace, a career officer, represents the stiff-upper-lip type, but the loss of an arm in combat has drastically altered his habitual outlook:

> He doesn't know how he stands with her; he used to find women easy before Burma, he knew his slim and elegant figure could wear his numerous and expensive uniforms perfectly and he never had to exert himself in a dance or reception [. . .]. But now he wasn't so sure; he wasn't sure whether his face had sagged and aged, his hair thinned, his decapitated arm in bad taste. He had sent an airgraph to his parents and his fiancée in Shropshire telling them he'd had his arm off. Peggy sounded as if she were thrilled by it in her reply. Maybe she was being kind. He didn't care so much nowadays what she happened to be feeling. (*CS* 199)

Brownlow-Grace has not yet adjusted the relationships by which he defined himself. His later claim that "I don't want to go back 'home'" (*CS* 201) makes plain that the word has lost its meaning for him following his army camaraderie, his battle experiences, and his (real and feared) physical transformation. His comment to Lieutenant Weston—"I suppose you want to go home, haven't been away long, have you?" (*CS* 206)—reflects his recognition that the desire for home is stronger in those who have had less opportunity to be transformed in its absence. After his medical board, Brownlow-Grace appears utterly lost; he has to be reminded of the date and the month (*CS* 210). Asked of the result, "he stood up, took his cane and peaked service cap, and brushed a speck of down off his long and well-fitting trousers" (*CS* 211). Only after he has reassured himself of these emblems of his officer identity can he say aloud that he has been discharged. The campaign in Burma has now effectively overturned most of his touchstones. That evening he seeks solace with the widow of a friend who "was killed in Burma, too" (*CS* 211). The pregnant "too" betrays Brownlow-Grace's suspicion that

his own life ended when he lost his arm and thereby his vocation. Whatever waits at home has no connection to what remains.

Moncrieff does not seem to know what he wants, or where he wants to be. Though married, he sends photographs of himself in service dress to "a network of young ladies" around the world (*CS* 198). He asserts his fear of being kept in India: "It's so lonely out here. I couldn't stay here any longer. I just couldn't" (*CS* 204), repeating the sentiment a few paragraphs later. But later in the conversation, he responds to Weston's "*I don't want to see England*" with "Neither do I, very much" (*CS* 205). His nonchalance is somewhat affected, perhaps, but it does seem that despite his horror of loneliness in India, he regards "home" with scarcely more affection. He recommends that Weston, injured in training, pass himself off as a Burma casualty when he returns home because "That's all they deserve" (*CS* 204). Moncrieff, on learning that he will be kept longer in India despite his injuries and illness, complains that he wants to go home because "Nobody cares about you out here" (*CS* 212); India, as he has said, embodies loneliness. When he declares that "I shall never go home. I know it" (*CS* 212), it is as though he wants to be reassured that "home" is indeed possible. For him, home is still an abstract ideal, a place where perhaps someone will care about him.

Lieut.-Quartermaster "Dad" Withers has been even further unhomed than Brownlow-Grace. Of his twenty-eight years in the army, "He had spent all but two years abroad; he had been home five times and had five children. He was suffering from chronic malaria, sciatica and rheumatism" (*CS* 198). Having successfully avoided making a home with his family during his physical peak, Withers now faces returning as a broken specimen, aged beyond his forty-four years. He speaks of England as though it were a foreign land, citing astounding facts he has learned from the *Bombay Times*—for example, "they even give you money to bury yourself with there now. Suits me" (*CS* 201). It is perhaps telling that Withers's first reflection about returning to England is not how he will live, but how he will die. He begins to wonder in his way whether having "stuck it out" in India amid the most obvious "other" for

twenty years, cheating the death that has claimed "most of the boys," has after all allowed him to avoid facing himself:

> Maybe he wasn't going home the way he'd figured it out after all. Maybe there was something else, something he hadn't counted in. This tiredness, this emptiness, this grey blank wall of mist, this not caring. What would it be like in the small Council house with five youngsters and his missus? She'd changed a lot, the last photo she sent she was like his mother, spectacles and fat legs, full of plainness. Maybe the kids would play with him, though, the young ones? (*CS* 210)

Who will he be, in a place and with a family he barely knows? How can he define himself in relation to them? Faced with the everyday reality of home, Withers encounters a supplementary unreality, a "something else" he had not anticipated.

It is worth mentioning in passing that the soldiers' responses to and embodiments of the idea of "home" or "England" do not always dovetail with those required by the imperial project. The Indian boy encountered in the eponymous "Manuel" boasts of his European heritage and dreams of his eventual "voyage" to Portugal. He speaks carefully modulated "High School English" in response to a soldier from Bethnal Green who greets him with "Wotcher, mate!" (We learn that Manuel also speaks Mahratti and reads Latin, so he functions in the text not only as a model of hybridity but as an ironic foil to the comparatively uneducated English soldier.) Manuel is surprised to learn from the soldier of the existence of beggars in London, "where Buckingham Palace is," because "From his geography book he had learned that London was the largest and richest city in the world."[20]

The themes and sentiments of Lewis's "Home Thoughts from Abroad" (*HHT* 51–52) are about as far removed from those of Robert Browning's eponymous poem as it is possible to be. The "blossomed pear-tree in the hedge"[21] gives way to "death among the orange trees," and Browning's sentimental and selective memories of England are lost in the contemplation of how the West has transformed "the troubled continents" and alienated its own children.

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[20] Lewis, "Manuel," *Lilliput* Sept. 1943: 201.

[21] Robert Browning, "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad," *Selected Poems,* ed. Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1989) 44.

Lewis complicates easy Manichean symbolism by linking the Indian "darkness" closely to the imperial project. The soldier's isolation appears in the opening stanza:

> The trumpet's warm and selfish lusts
> Occlude this breathless Indian night.
> The trumpeter stands alone.

By giving breath to his instrument, the trumpeter manages to "occlude" the "breathless Indian night," blacking out the oriental darkness with sultry Western sounds. The occident encourages decadence, and its agent stands isolated, no longer belonging straightforwardly anywhere. The trumpet blues bridge into the next stanza, in which the speaker addresses Western civilization directly: "Oh West, your blue nostalgic moods / Confuse the troubled continents." This nostalgia—for the unrecoverable past, for Browning-like notions of "home"—is linked in the following lines to the poisoned fruits of imperialism. These two lines thus seem to suggest, provocatively, that imperialism represents in part an attempt to re-create a security of identity that never existed, but is perceived to have been lost. In this attempt, whole continents have been disrupted by fickle political "moods" and "selfish lusts." Lewis documents the result with images of oppression, blight, and death:

> The shaven-headed prisoners moan
> And girls with serpents at their breasts
> And boys with dead hands on their knees
> Lie stricken in your scattered tents.

The "girls with serpents" evoke with one image the death of Cleopatra (and thus quasi native rule), the temptation of Eve, and disruption of the life cycle. Girls and boys are being destroyed young. All lie within the "scattered tents" of Western hegemony; Lewis here portrays imperialism as a dispersed and destructive collection of temporary outposts, a far cry from the grand and cohesive empire upon which the sun never sets. In a time of widespread warfare, the West destroys its own youth as well.

These appear in greater relief in the third and fourth stanzas. The soldiers abroad "feel the darkness twitch / With death among the orange trees" (Lewis here invests the orange

grove with a much darker symbolism than he employs elsewhere in his writing, as we shall see), and

> Seek, and not in vain, your hills
> Whose bridle paths all end in dark
> And find love in the gap of centuries
> Although the swart brown heather bears no mark
> Of boy and girl and all they planned.

As they give in to their "blue nostalgic moods," the soldiers discover that in their imaginations the byways of home, too, lead to occluding darkness. Though they remember love, they can find no familiar signs or lingering traces of particular relationships; the soldiers exist no more solidly at home than in the shadows of the Indian night. The future, "all they planned," retreats from the realm of the imagination, obscured by the reality of possible death and the unreality of their task in India. The soldiers' own desires no longer matter:

> We surely were not hard to please
> And yet you cast us out. And in this land
> We bear the dark inherited disease
> Bred in the itching warmness of your hand.

The simple lives they planned in youth have given way to fighting for vested interests, while they themselves have been "cast out," disinherited. Although, or perhaps because, they bear the sins of the fathers—the white man's burden transformed into the white man's guilt—the fathers have rejected them. While darkness is most often ascribed to India and the other, here as in the previous stanza it is closely linked to the self and the colonizing culture. Indeed, its origins lie there: the soldiers in India carry "the dark [. . .] disease" as their inheritance from the West. Lewis follows Conrad in representing "both modern imperial centres and their colonial outposts as pathogenic environments."[22] The soldiers inherit the "itching" palms of imperial greed, and their doom is to disseminate the disease and the darkness with no hope of redemption.

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[22] Rod Edmond, "Home and Away: Degeneration in Imperialist and Modernist Discourse," *Modernism and Empire,* ed. Booth and Rigby, 45.

2

The soldier in India is already, then, largely unhomed—unable to respond in accustomed ways to his community or nation of origin, and equally separate from his surroundings in India. While a civilian in the colonial context might well experience similar dissociation, the part of the soldier led to particular difficulties. As John Davies writes of Lewis, "his attitude to soldiering was influenced strongly by his position in India, and his response to India was conditioned largely by his role there as a soldier."[23] This section will examine the response of the soldier to his position and activities in India.

2.1

The army's faith in rules and procedure, already well satirized by Lewis, takes on a new dimension of absurdity when applied to reality on the ground in India. Its hierarchy and internal class divisions likewise appear to greater comic relief against the background of the Raj. When two brothers, one a captain and one a private soldier, meet in "The Reunion," the private recalls traveling to India as a "Third Class Passenger" aboard a troop ship on which the officers enjoyed "a smashing dining saloon, menus in French; I saw them because we used to have Urdu classes in the saloon" (*CS* 227). While the officers enjoy "petits pois Navarre" and "potage Henri Quatre," the private soldiers may enter the saloon to learn skills actually useful to soldiering in India. The army erects such selectively permeable barriers on many occasions in Lewis's Indian work only to see them sidestepped or simply washed away by the inconvenient particularities of India.

Two stories in particular show class divisions between officers and ranks to be at times pointless or arbitrary. In "The Orange Grove," Staff-Captain Beale does not know his driver's name even after ten days together on a reconnaissance mission. Despite the rudimentary amenities on their journey—bivouacs and bully beef—the driver cooks dinner and makes

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[23] John Davies, "The Poetry of Darkness: Alun Lewis's Indian Experience," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 19.43 (1970): 178.

Beale's bed. It is only after the driver dies that Beale feels responsibility for him; as Wynn Thomas puts it, "As Beale heaves the body on to his shoulder, he literally shoulders an officer's responsibility for the lower ranks."[24] But Beale's response to the corpse in the back of the truck deepens the further he drives into the unknown: "Respect he knew; but this was more than respect; obedience and necessity he knew, but this was more than either of these. It was somehow an admission of the integrity of the man, a new interest in what he was and what he had left behind" (*CS* 222). Isolation and disorientation in the middle of India are largely responsible for this elision of difference, a wearing away of boundaries so great that Beale momentarily forgets he is not the driver, taking on the late driver's preoccupations with his unfaithful wife: "She'd bitched it all. He could just see her. And she still didn't know a thing about him, not the first thing. Yes, he hated her all right, the voluptuous bitch" (*CS* 222). At the same time, Beale is reluctant to consider his own role in the driver's death, which occurs when the driver wanders outside in search of eggs and is stabbed by an unknown assailant. Beale experiences niggling guilt over the death, "But why? If he'd told the man to go for eggs it would be different. He was bound to be all right as long as he had his facts right" (*CS* 220). Beale's report on the "accident," if he ever has the opportunity to make one, will state that the "deceased stated his desire to get some eggs. I warned him that disturbances of a political character had occurred in the area" (*CS* 221). This version of events is true as far as it goes, but Beale is perhaps troubled by the mostly suppressed knowledge that he first raised the possibility: "Can't we get some eggs or something? Ten days with bully twice a day is plenty" (*CS* 216). What Beale cannot face is that his carelessly invoked officer privilege may have had disastrous consequences in an environment where the chain of command is not respected.

In "The Raid," Selden's insecure position within his own culture and the army hierarchy mirrors the insecure position of the imperial army in India and the absurdity of its conventions for its environment. Selden attained his commission after having been "a bank clerk in Civvy Street" (*CS* 187), and Lewis establishes his dubious position within the officer

[24] Thomas and Brown 75.

class on several levels. Selden's instinctive response to a summons from his superior officer is "self-defence" followed by "self-suspicion" (*CS* 185); he certainly does not overflow with confidence or betray any sense of entitlement. His interest in "Current Affairs" is purely a matter of "how long the war is going to last" (*CS* 185); he takes no interest in Indian politics. But his observation that "As for politics, as far as they're concerned I don't exist, I'm never in" (*CS* 185) reveals that indifference goes two ways—political reality does not care about him, either. His C.O.'s opinion of him rests largely on his being a "Bloody good shot with a point 22 [. . .]. Shot six mallard with me last Sunday" (*CS* 186). This comment at once demonstrates the shallowness of the commanding officer's assessment criteria and betrays that he, like one confidently belonging to the officer class, regards Selden's impending mission primarily as good sport. Selden is perfectly aware that the C.O. holds him in high esteem because he shot "those six mallard" (*CS* 187), but he feels "pretty pleased" with his status all the same. It is possible that because of his precarious social position he cannot afford to complain as long as he is allowed into the club. Along similar lines, he quashes one soldier's questioning as "Red stuff" (*CS* 187); he participates in the officer's horror of things "Bolshie," but from a position of particular sensitivity at the bottom of the bourgeois ladder. Selden must protect such status as he has attained.

Selden particularly betrays his insecurity through his diction, as Tony Brown has established by analyzing the heterogeneous linguistic registers Selden employs throughout the story. Brown gives several examples of Selden's indiscriminate mixing of patrician and plebian, from "cautionary peep" (*CS* 185) to Selden's assessment that "there'd be a hell of a shemozzle" (*CS* 189), which Brown identifies as an "un-officer-class colloquialism."[25] He also sees self-conscious use of "the tones of the officer class" in Selden's statement that "I took a pretty poor view of a traitor" (*CS* 189), a reading supported by Lewis's ironic use of similar language in a letter: "I took a poor view, as the officer class says, of the Adjutant telling me I must 'account for myself' during the day by appearing on parade with my troop in the

[25] Thomas and Brown 83.

morning."[26] Selden forbids the men to take cigarettes and matches on their mission "for disciplinary purposes" (*CS* 187)—a syntactical motif repeated at several points in the story. Later the men must maintain an hour's silence "for disciplinary reasons" (*CS* 188), and Selden hopes to avoid alerting a village to the platoon's presence "For political reasons. And for reasons of health, I thought" (*CS* 189). Selden could justify any of these decisions on perfectly rational grounds of stealth, and he comes close in the last example. But these repeated phrases suggest both that Selden feels more comfortable following protocol than following his own initiative, and that in narrating his story he feels a need to justify himself to an invisible superior.

Lewis also shows the extent to which the army neglects, often in ridiculous fashion, to adapt its regulations and routines to specific circumstances, resulting in the further dislocation of the soldiers enacting them. The C.O.'s instructions to Selden display to full effect the imposition of Western military administration over an alien geography (*CS* 185). Selden's "objective" is to take a platoon to capture a single man, while his assigned "route" includes a riverbed and a canal as well as a tense section without any markings at all. The C.O. instructs him to use his compass and protractor to work out that portion of the march, exemplifying the Westerner's faith in measuring instruments against the danger of becoming unmoored in an uncivilized expanse. Other bearings include a group of huts labelled "247568," assuredly not the local name. The timing of the raid reflects an odd mix of instrumental precision and natural guess-work: Selden is to leave camp precisely at 19:30 and meet the government agent at 06:00 hours, arriving at his objective "an hour before first light" (*CS* 186). All of these details apparently weigh more on the C.O.'s mind than the identity or guilt of the wanted man, "what's-his-name" (*CS* 186). Selden dutifully asks what the men should wear for the occasion, as though the Indian villagers will note any signifiers beyond "white" and "armed." Indeed his dress instructions contain some very specific notes on weaponry, highlighting the serious issues underlying this farce: the British army is tolerated in

[26] Lewis, letter, November 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 262.

India because of its weapons, and they represent most of its security there. Lewis makes this point explicitly by showing Selden dispelling internal doubts about the success of his mission: "I loaded my Colt and felt better" (*CS* 189). Though Selden takes his mission with admirable seriousness, even he registers the breaking of tension when the "huge thing" looming at him in the darkness of the suspect's hut turns out to be a cow: "Honestly. A sleepy fawn cow with a soft mild face like somebody's dream woman" (*CS* 190). His rifleman comically states the obvious, adding, "She never frew no bomb." Their military training has not adequately prepared them for missions involving livestock. As Selden exchanges words with the man he has come to arrest, what Wynn Thomas calls "an ironic parallelism of language"[27] emerges:

> "You know you are taking me to my death?" he said. "No doubt?"
> "I'm taking you to Poona," I said. "You killed three of our men."
> The smile sort of congealed on his face. Like a trick. His head nodded like an old doll. "Did I?" he said. "Three men died? Did I?"
> "Come on," I said. "It's daylight."
> "It's dreadful," he said. (*CS* 190–91)

While the man's fragility causes Selden to admit that "I felt sorry for him" (*CS* 191), in this exchange he hides behind military language, refusing to consider the implications of his orders. Moreover, the presence of daylight matters only to Selden, who has a schedule to keep. Pikoulis emphasizes the dialogue's "sincerity," arguing that "the speakers avoid the 'distorting discourses of colonialism.'"[28] But while Selden identifies the humanity in the other, while his counterpart certainly appeals to Selden's, this dialogue seems nonetheless a perfect example of distorting discourse. Despite their grammatical parallelism, their words register on utterly different planes reflecting the personal investment of each man in the conversation's outcome, which is never, after all, in doubt. Though Pikoulis maintains that Selden's "understanding has grown during his mission," it is difficult to agree that his impressions will be either accurate or lasting, at least as regards the other.

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[27] Thomas and Brown 74.

[28] John Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire," *Welsh Writing in English* 8 (2003): 110.

The precedence of regulation over reality is seen to even greater tragicomic effect in "The Orange Grove," which focuses on "the gradual stripping away of the rational categories, the Western military procedures and constructs by which Beale, the army officer, controls his environment, and defines who and what he is."[29] The story begins with a signpost that clearly delineates who should go where: "*Indians Only*" in one direction; "*Dak Bungalow*" in another (*CS* 213). By the end of the story, Beale has become more or less content to wander with gipsies even if they are not going "anywhere much" (*CS* 225). Lewis takes pains to establish Beale's efficiency as an officer. No sooner have they settled into the dak bungalow than he attends to his notes for headquarters and his correspondence (*CS* 214); the reader is told directly that "Beale was by nature and by his job as a staff officer" someone whose "*Pending* basket was always empty" (*CS* 216). Later, with the driver dead, he struggles with a "guilt complex" arising not so much from the actual death as from a fear that he may not have followed the appropriate protocol for the event or filed the correct form "in duplicate"—this despite the fact that his notebook is "too wet to take his hard pencil" and he has lost track of the date (*CS* 221). His urge to make everything tidy, "buttoned up," is continually thwarted in such ways by the material reality of India. After driving all night he decides that he will feel more himself after a shave, better able to play the officer and make decisions, even though the smartness of his appearance will be limited by the necessity of shaving with "muddy rain-water" (*CS* 221). Beale becomes lost but drives blindly on in search of "someone to whom he could make a report. It would be an immense relief" (*CS* 223). He has been trained to believe that the unreported life is not worth living; it is possible he doubts the likelihood of his continued existence, at least in recognizable form, without supporting documentation.

Beale also derives a great deal of existential safety from measurements. A storm hits after the driver goes outside looking for eggs, and Beale "waited without moving until the violence of the storm was spent. Then he looked at his watch. It was, as he thought. The driver had been gone an hour and twenty minutes. He knew he must go and look for him" (*CS* 218).

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[29] Thomas and Brown 79.

Though he knows the driver has been away for some time through a violent storm, he requires his watch to confirm that it is time to search for him. Going outside, Beale reflects that "It was easy to get lost. It would be difficult to find anything to-night, unless it was plumb in the main road" (*CS* 218). This assessment, while perfectly reasonable on a dark and stormy night, also happens to reflect the colonial mindset in which space is unnegotiable unless it has been mapped and traversed by roads. Their reconnaissance journey has for Beale been marked by nothing except the reliable measurements of various gauges: "each day had been nothing but speed and distance hollow in the head, the mileometer ticking up the daily two hundred, the dust of a hundred villages justifying their weariness with its ashes, and to-morrow only speed and distance and the steadiness of the six cylinders" (*CS* 218). After relying on these in his escape from the dak bungalow, however, Beale finds himself surrounded by "a vast plain of paddy-fields" featuring no recognizable markers. In the middle of this semiotic vacuum, he realizes too that he has lost his map and that his watch has stopped: "Something caved inside him" (*CS* 221). He moves on simply to create distance, which he can still measure. The phrasing suggests, though, that he now entertains doubts even on this front: "The mileometer still measured something?" He panics without his measurements, reflecting that "he scarcely knew more than the man in the back of the truck" (*CS* 21). Without numerical reassurance, in other words, he might as well be dead. When at last his road ends at a river, he watches the gipsies fording it "to gauge the depth" (*CS* 223), and their bodies become his instruments. And when he joins the gipsies and finds himself thinking back to school lessons that captured his imagination, his mind latches onto the fact that he was in sixth form in 1939, one date at least he can remember. In reflecting that "Once Life had been nothing worth recording beyond the movements of people like these" (*CS* 224), he consoles himself with the reasoning that this, too, is the stuff that reports are made of.

The use of "justifying" in the above paragraph—"the dust of a hundred villages justifying their weariness with its ashes"—is notable. Beale relies on these instruments of Western rationality to justify his daily pursuits to himself and others; after the driver's death,

Beale's increasingly frantic attempts at self-justification will mark his weakening grip on himself and on self/other boundaries. Feeling guilty for "having slept at his post," he reasons, "What did they expect him to do?" (*CS* 220). His journey instils in him a growing susceptibility to a "grovelling debased mood" (*CS* 222), a breaking down of his officer's confidence without its replacement by any other sure identity. Lewis also registers a growing defiance in Beale. After abandoning the truck he concludes that "If they wanted an accident report they could wait. If they thought he was puddled they could sack him when they liked" (*CS* 224). This vague "they" represents his only remaining touchstone as a British officer, but he is no longer very certain of its importance: "What was it all about, anyway?" (*CS* 224). Beale's defensive report-making protects him in his mind not only against charges of failing to do his duty but also against suspicions of his own otherness. As he drives away from the bungalow, Beale follows two trains of thought:

> Beale wondered whether he should say anything of his suspicions regarding the old man when he made his report. Unfortunately there was no evidence. [. . .] He had this extra sense, of which he was proud, of being able to feel the imminence of danger as others feel a change in the weather. [. . .] He knew tonight all right. The moment he saw that dull red lever of storm raised over his head, and the old caretaker had shrugged his shoulders after his warning had been laughed off. You had to bluff them; only sometimes bluff wasn't enough and then you had to get away, face or no face. (*CS* 219–20)

While thinking in terms of reports and evidence, Beale is simultaneously congratulating himself on the effectiveness of his sixth sense. This extra-rational discernment certainly does not conform to the imperial fiction of Western rationality, and Beale knows he must save "face" while conversing with the bungalow's Indian caretaker. Nor is attention to omens likely to be thought becoming in an officer. Beale's hypothetical report states that he warned the driver of political disturbances; it does not mention his admission to the driver that he finds "the hot creeping prescience of the monsoon" to be "eerie" (*CS* 213), nor his warning that "the storm will get you" (*CS* 216).

2.2

A theme carried over from earlier writing is the frustration of good intentions. Writing of the Depression-era valleys, Lewis expresses the impotence of the young idealist: "If you lived here long enough I dare say you'd turn fatalist, too [. . .]. They haven't even enough food to eat, some of them. Not enough bread and dripping, even. Do you know that? Can you feel it? It's horrible, horrible. Oh God—" (MS 17–18). The army, as we have seen, offers few opportunities to "do something for the men."[30] The poverty and inequalities of Indian life threaten to overwhelm the conscience altogether. Lewis laments, "I feel this problem is too vast for us. I wish I had come here as a doctor, teacher, social worker: anything but a soldier. It's not nice being a soldier in India."[31]

The humanist in India does not simply find the scope of the social problems he encounters "too vast"; unable to comprehend the scope of the need, he is thrown back upon himself and finds himself both helpless and culpable. The speaker of "Indian Day" (*HHT* 55–56) observes the obscene contrasts between "the famines and fortunes of the century" but confesses in the end that "The kindness of the heart lies mute / Caught in the impotence of dreams." That impotence hovers in the wings throughout "The Jungle" and makes its entrance in part three. The soldiers are forced to confront

> The vagueness of the child, the lover's deep
> And inarticulate bewilderment,
> The willingness to please that made a wound,
> The kneeling darkness and the hungry prayer;
> Cargoes of anguish in the holds of joy,
> The smooth deceitful stranger in the heart,
> The tangled wrack of motives drifting down
> An oceanic tide of Wrong.
> And though the state has enemies we know
> The greater enmity within ourselves. (*HHT* 69)

These lines reflect deep-seated feelings of impotence from childhood on; while the child self understandably lacked definition, it is not at all clear that age has brought greater awareness.

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[30] Maclaren-Ross 181.

[31] Lewis, letter, 21 September 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 394.

The development of selfhood as viewed from the jungle includes bewilderment, inability to communicate, clumsy and hurtful attempts to help, base needs interrupting higher essays. Even outward, acknowledged joy contains hidden disquiet. The soldiers acknowledge the uncanny recognition of aspects of the self they would prefer to keep hidden—"The smooth deceitful stranger in the heart." The individual self becomes a "tangled wrack of motives" inexorably bound to do harm; this self is then turned in the last two lines from the closely personal to the cultural, the collective self, with its own tangle of motives. For soldiers who have taken the king's shilling there can be little differentiation; their self-deceit embodies that of the collective enterprise. In the poem's final section, "aloneness" briefly inspires repaired visions of glory and power as "The dream exalts the bowed and golden head / And time is swept with a great turbulence" (*HHT* 70). But the speaker recognizes this vision as "The old temptation to remould the world," a familiar story with depressingly familiar results. The white man's burden is recast as a temptation, a sin that calls to the well meaning but results only in "turbulence."

2.3

As the soldier recognizes "The smooth deceitful stranger in the heart," he inevitably begins to question any previously held assumptions concerning symmetrical warfare for recognizable goals. Assignment to India during the Second World War means, for many soldiers, a hasty revision of their conception of just who or what the "enemy" entails and what their relationship to that enemy might be. The soldier is no longer to encounter "my dreaming German soldier,"[32] that romantic and comfortably European alter ego. Instead he faces the disorienting prospect of the Japanese sniper in the jungle, the Indian knife in the back, or nebulous threats even more sinister.

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[32] "War Wedding," *RD* 57; the phrase appears again in the final line of "The Patrol," written in India, in which a soldier appears to envy the "intuition" of the natural world about him and bids farewell to "a dying culture": "Sleep then for ever, my dreaming German soldier" (*Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* 135).

The switch from German to Japanese adversaries does not necessarily happen automatically. The idea of the German haunts collective memory as well as the present. As two brothers meet in Poona in "The Reunion," one muses to himself, "I wonder what his wound looks like. [. . .] I used to hate Daddy's wound, the sucked-in holes cratering his thigh. Now he's got it" (*CS* 228). While they dress for dinner, they dance around the present with this legacy firmly in mind:

> "Your wound is a nicer one than Daddy's."
> "His was a German one. This is Japanese. They're both pretty nasty. The mark of the beast." (*CS* 229)

The wound is a legacy from one generation to another, and the particular giver of it hardly seems to matter. Lieutenant Weston frets in "Ward 'O' 3 (b)" that "I'll never see a Valentine lift her belly over a bund and go grunting like a wild boar at—well, whoever happens to be there. I got used to the idea of the Germans. I suppose the Japs will do." To this Brownlow-Grace reflects, "You're like me; no enemy" (*CS* 206). For Brownlow-Grace the action is personally defining, not the object of it. He has no personal stake in the political conflict; what interests him is that "They hacked my arm off, those bastards," and he regrets the loss of it because "I could kill some more." Weston's motivations are more complicated. He joined the army in an effort to protect the French woman he loved, and he "got used to the idea of the Germans" on her behalf. His Valentine fantasy is connected to his self-worth as a man in a protective role. On her explicit instructions, however, he prepares to fight a war that is not personal.

Another difficulty is that, while the figure of the German soldier suggests itself as a double, the British soldier's relationship with his Japanese counterpart nearly always appears asymmetrical in Lewis's work. "The lynx-eyed Jap" (*HHT* 58) sees but is not seen, hidden in the jungle making owl-like calls. The captain in "The Reunion" muses of the man who gave him his wound, "He could have shot me, but he didn't. All the time I was crossing the clearing he could have got me with his pistol. But he didn't. He waited until I was right by

him, till he could make his magnificent thrust. Then he leapt out of the brake and his sword was raised above his head" (*CS* 232). He seems still to be uneasy about the idea of playing mouse to the Japanese soldier's cat; what troubles him more than the wound is the notion of being watched, toyed with, without his knowledge or consent. The Japanese are also invisible but ever-present in "The Earth Is a Syllable." As the officer lies gravely wounded, he looks out at the jungle around his ambulance:

> He could see the darkness of the jungle encircling them. It was dark and soft like a mass of congealed blood. If you put your hand in it, it would give like a sponge. If the Japs were there they'd be sleeping. They had to sleep. Or a snake or a tiger would get them, they weren't all that clever. Any case you could hear them if they were there, calling each other like owls, because they were lonely, maybe. And the jungle was utterly silent, dark and shimmering with darkness like ebony, and malevolent. (*CS* 193)

The officer received his wounds fighting the Japanese in Burma, but the text does not connect them directly to his present condition. He blames "Burma" instead: he recalls having sought battle unsuccessfully for some time, in France or Egypt, "But he'd never liked the idea of Burma. He'd always known he'd die if he caught up with it in Burma" (*CS* 192). Toward the Japanese themselves he feels an idle curiosity—perhaps they are lonely. While their invisible presence in the dark jungle helps to lend it a sinister air, as he attempts to reassure himself that even the Japanese must sleep and break their invisible vigil, he nevertheless regards them as separate from the "malevolent" power of the jungle. The jungle's animals threaten them also, and its silence overrides their signals. The "darkness" penetrates deeper than any Japanese sword.

This, then, is the true enemy faced by soldiers in India: the sense of "Some evil presence" (*HHT* 57) they cannot quite pin down to politics or troop movements. After observing the jungle, the wounded officer reflects that "He'd been more nervous in India than he was here. It was lonely in India, no friendship there, nor any active hostility to brace you. Just loneliness and strangeness. It wasn't dangerous there: just nerves, that's all" (*CS* 193). In "The Orange Grove," Beale observes the "fulgurous inflammation" of the sky and admits that

he has lost track of the date, adding, "This journey's getting on my nerves" (*CS* 213). Without some activity or recognizable enemy against which to "brace" themselves, Lewis's soldiers regularly fall prey to some variation on "nerves."

"Bivouac" (*HHT* 66–67) again shows soldiers experiencing uncanny dread while camped alone in the Indian night. "There was no trace of Heaven / That night," the speaker begins, establishing that he and his companion(s) have entered a dimension offering no such reassurances, but only hints of death. They lie "On the ploughed-up clay" that, for all its agricultural potential, also suggests a grave. The natural world seems preternaturally inhospitable to them; the speaker remembers perceiving only cactus and a rat,

> And the dry disturbing whispers
> Of the agitated wood,
> With its leathery vendetta,
> Mantillas dark with blood.
>
> And the darkness drenched with Evil
> Haunting as a country song,
> Ignoring the protesting cry
> Of Right and of Wrong.

The darkness, as in "The Earth Is a Syllable," puts them in mind of blood, possibly their own. They can call it "Evil," but they perceive the hostility around them only in terms of "whispers" and "Haunting," nothing they can face directly. There are no tidy oppositions such as Right and Wrong; this uncanny "Evil" exists apart from both, "Ignoring" them and undermining the assurance they provide. When morning banishes the darkness, discovering "milk-white oxen" "docile at the yoke"—an image of comforting gentleness and banality after the night's "vendetta"—the soldiers' routine motions mask their uneasiness. The night has left them "bewildered" and acutely aware of their interdependence, expressed as

> the withering obsession
> That lovers grow to fear
> When the last note is written
> And at last and alone
> One of them wakes in terror
> And the other is gone.

The soldiers require each other for mutual reinforcement in an environment in which self lives in "terror" of other, set on edge by troubling whispers.

Nerves also play a key role in "The Raid," as Selden and his men march through the night to reach their objective at dawn. Selden find the scene on arrival distinctly unnerving: "I never want to see that village again. It was so still and fragile in the reluctant grey light. [. . .] Once I travelled overnight from Dieppe to Paris and the countryside looked just as ghostly that morning. But this time it was dangerous" (*CS* 189). A mild irony lies in the fact that, at the time of the story, the European journey would likely be a great deal more dangerous than his present actions, but he clings to those places as tokens of existential safety. Here, not only the village and the "chowkey bloke" are like ghosts, but Selden and his men as well. This ghostly morning comes after an equally unsettling night journey. Setting out, Selden observes that "The night was breathless and stuffy" (*CS* 188), establishing the brooding atmosphere. Moreover, "the perpetual buzzing of the crickets got on my nerves like a motor horn when the points jam and all the pedestrians laugh." Selden's choice of simile disrupts the mood he is trying to establish, but it is also telling as a point of reference. "Nerves" are invoked not just in reference to the noise of a car horn, but to the pedestrians laughing. It would seem that Selden is above all afraid of being laughed at, drawn attention to, exposed, and his insecurities in his native society inform those he experiences in another environment. That feeling of exposure increases:

> It was a damn fine view from that crest. A broad valley a thousand feet below with clusters of fires in the villages and round a hill temple on the other side. Either a festival or a funeral, obviously. I could hear the drums beating there, too; it was very clear and echoing, made my flesh creep. You feel so out of it in India somehow. You just slink around in the wilds and you feel very white and different. I don't know . . . You know, I'd have said that valley *hated* us that night, on those rocky crests. Queer. (*CS* 188)

Selden now occupies the position of the philosopher-king, the poet on the mountaintop, from which he is supposed to subordinate all he sees to his gaze. But while he may arrogantly conflate festival and funeral (would it not be useful, for his mission, to know what is

happening in the area?), he has less success in other respects. Instead of feeling exalted or even anonymous in his all-seeing position, he mostly feels exposed, "very white and different." Selden's hesitation suggests that he is attempting to put words to a feeling he suspects he should not admit to, one he has not had many opportunities to express. Here, even more noticeably than in the army and in civilian life, he does not know his place. In feeling the strangeness of the valley, he faces his own. It is left to the appropriately named Chalky White to restore confidence through ironic refamiliarization, "saying next stop Hammersmiff Bridge." As they sneak between the villages, though, "the drums beat themselves into a frenzy that had something personal about it" (*CS* 188). Selden and his men know that the British army's presence in India does inspire resentment, and their awareness of this fact helps them project their uneasiness onto the drumming. But again it seems a fear of being singled out leads Selden to the rather solipsistic "something personal" interpretation. The drums identify him as "white and different." Selden does not even attribute the drumming to human actors; the drums "beat themselves" through an inhuman force.

The experience of "nerves," then, leads to a hyper-awareness of self and the realization that "though the state has enemies we know / The greater enmity within ourselves" (*HHT* 69). The older brother in "The Reunion," having survived battle in Burma, brings some of this awareness to their meeting. His brother has brought him a "pure white seashell" from home, transported carefully through all his travels, which the older brother crushes absently almost immediately after receiving it. He seems relieved when his brother falls asleep, reasoning that in this state "my thoughts do not harm him" (*CS* 231). His memories of killing in Burma recall the seashell, and he recoils from "this coldness in me, this lurking" (*CS* 231). He listens as the participants in a rowdy stag party in the next room throw out the hotel manager, "calling his skin black, aware of their whiteness, making me worse, worse, worse" (*CS* 232). The metaphor of the seashell is writ large when his violent attempts to quiet the men lead to his sleeping brother's being attacked.

3

Inevitably the self encounters the other incompletely and inconsistently. To posit as much is not to privilege tropes of alterity above all others but simply to acknowledge both power differentials and, in the case of the writer, imaginative and linguistic mediation. Lewis as a writer chooses to interpret India in certain ways. Sometimes he works in received modes; more often still these combine with preoccupations he brings to the subcontinent. The process of representation is largely though not exclusively visual, relying on light, symbolic identification, and visual desire, among other factors. This section will explore perception and interpretation in Lewis's work, examining in particular his representations of nature and spiritual experience.

3.1

Lewis's Indian poetry has occasionally attracted the label of "reportage." It has also, and sometimes simultaneously, been praised for its "objectivity" or "detachment." A. Banerjee, for example, labels some of the poems "interesting, but since they are generally only sensitive descriptions they demand, under the weight of 'reportage,' no complex responses."[33] In a similar vein, W. D. Thomas classifies some of the poems as "documentary."[34] Jacqueline Banerjee goes so far as to defend Lewis against the charge of "reportage" by ascribing that style to "greater and more detailed objectivity"[35] without fundamentally challenging (or indeed defining) either term. While it would hardly be productive to employ many words abusing the critical practice of yesteryear, it is worth drawing attention to the assumptions underlying such claims. Some of these are made clear by Jacqueline Banerjee's discussion of Rilke's influence. Though Lewis inherited from Rilke a philosophy of "taking in and making

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[33] A. Banerjee, *Spirit above Wars* 162.

[34] W. D. Thomas, rev. of *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets,* by Alun Lewis, *Welsh Review* 4.4 (1945): 293.

[35] Jacqueline Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," 149.

fruitful all experience," Banerjee posits that in India, "he was almost overwhelmed by a continent too alien and vast for him to assimilate it fully as a part of his experience." She also ascribes to Lewis a search for "universal truth" in India, again modelled on Rilke.[36] But Rilke, unlike Lewis, lived in an age when "universal truth" could still be considered attainable, and Banerjee writes the above at the tail end of an era in which critics can use such expressions without irony. The contemporary critic must be struck instead by the perceived imperative to "assimilate" the alien and translate it into universally consumable forms. In other words, the labels of "reportage" and "objectivity" assume at once a fruitful distancing of self from other and a failure to digest the other for a European audience. A comment from Lewis sets these expectations neatly into an imperial framework: "India is an object lesson to the reforming spirit; oh immalleable universe! I'm glad I can't write about it too easily. If I ever succeed in translating it—what a dream. Makes me go all [indecipherable] and British at the thought."[37] Lewis acknowledges the appeal of the "dream" of translating the other into familiar terms even as he ironically distances himself from this desire.

At stake are Enlightenment notions of seeing that privilege vision as an act of distancing, selecting, and imposing meaningful form. These are, in turn, inextricably bound up with the ideal of light itself as the moral and ordered opposite of threatening, chaotic darkness. The imperial implications of enlightened vision have been well canvassed; as Barbara Bolt writes, "Colonization took place through light, and vision was its logical collaborator."[38] Bolt uses her frustrating experience as a landscape painter in Western Australia to demonstrate the limitations of the Enlightenment idea that form and meaning can be fixed through the observation of the eye of the (Western) mind. The act of seeing, in this logic, imparts form onto hitherto shapeless matter. "The photological tenets of western

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[36] Jacqueline Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," 138, 74, 83.

[37] Lewis, letter to Gwyn Jones, 22 December 1943, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 24, f. 43.

[38] Barbara Bolt, "Shedding Light for the Matter," *Hypatia* 15.2 (2000): 202.

philosophy also underpin western forms of visual representation," she writes, and they emerge in a Manichean nexus:

> LIGHT=FORM=KNOWLEDGE=SUBJECT
> DARK=MATTER=UNKNOWN=OTHER.

This relationship between light and totalizing vision relies on a European experience of light, however: in other parts of the world, "the 'glare' of the sun fractures the nexus between light, form, knowledge, and subjectivity."[39] Bolt found that in Kalgoorlie "there was nothing to grasp hold of, no-thing to pin down," and that "The 'rules' of perspective didn't work either." Under the sun's glare, as opposed to the friendly light of civilization, there is "no point of access for the classifying eye."[40] The glare, instead of fixing meaning, fosters dispersion of meaning. These competing textures of light underlie much of Lewis's Indian poetry. On the one hand, the vision which fixes matter into form renders that form timeless rather than actively in process, and Lewis on many occasions depicts peasant and landscape as timeless and cyclical. At the same time he comes under the glare himself, and when the conscious and subconscious desires of the Westerner are brought to light, as it were, they too are subjected to "the nihilist persistence of the sun" (*HHT* 71).

The power of the gaze to impart meaning forms the basis of "The Island" (*HHT* 64–65). The poem's speaker watches a young man leave an island in his houseboat, heading for the mainland, and speculates upon his upbringing and ambitions. The verbs attached to the speaking subject, when he inserts himself into the poem, tell a succinct tale of visual appropriation: "I watched"; "I discerned"; "I knew." The speaker witnesses only the departure from the island and the boat's arrival at the mainland:

> I watched your houseboat, young patrician,
> Cast off the island and attempt the bay,
> I knew it was no routine trip to purchase
> The island's meat and bread for one more day.

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[39] Bolt 204.

[40] Bolt 206, 208.

> Garlanded, you paid away like rope
> The island's mastery, only achieved
> The moment you forsook it; I discerned
> A woman standing dull as the bereaved.

This is all the speaker knows—indeed, after much speculation he admits, "I only watched you landing and I know not"—but he confidently makes of the young man a symbol. He places him into the pre-existing narrative of a young man going into the world to seek his fortune, putting his teaching and talents to the test and leaving a woman behind to grieve. The speaker also seeks to place the young man into an all-too-familiar dichotomy: "Do you step off fastidious as a virgin, / Or with the mute complaisance of a whore?" Other traditional narratives suggest themselves. Warning the young man not to "change the island that holds nothing, / For these rich mines of silver and of lead / And these pale girls whose hearts are with the dead[,]" the speaker effectively warns him not to trade his birthright for a mess of pottage. His imagination necessarily limits his canvassing of possible motives and futures, but he seems to desire as well to project his own personal and cultural preoccupations onto this native blank slate.

The narrative choices seen in "The Island" speak to the limited power of vision to apprehend the other, and also the limited capacity of language in such situations. Lewis acknowledges the instability of his interpretive options when he writes, "They want Vergil's imperial gaze these days, but not for me, because I don't see the splendour at close quarters, I see something much more bitingly real and distressing and inescapable. And that's all I'm concerned with saying, just *that,* the way it is and will be."[41] Neither the "imperial gaze" nor its corresponding narratives dovetail with his own visual experience, and he perceives a need to develop a different verbal practice. Despite his dedication to the "bitingly real," however, Lewis expresses to his wife a desire to substitute the comprehensiveness of one imperial gaze for the timelessness of another. As he writes about Indian peasants and the landscape in which he places them, Lewis struggles with spatial and temporal perspective.

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[41] Lewis, letter, 8 July 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 380.

The gaze works on multiple levels in "The Peasants" (*HHT* 56–57), in which an omniscient observer watches the peasants who in turn watch the soldiers. All—the barefoot dwarf, the soldiers, the "scorched hills" themselves—fall under the harsh glare of the sun. The dwarf appears "dazed with sunlight, half awake," the light fostering not enlightenment but bedazzlement. The soldiers "straggle by," apparently devoid of purpose or military rigor. Also observed are

> The women breaking stones upon the highway,
> Walking erect with burdens on their heads,
> One body growing in another body,
> Creation touching verminous straw beds.

This stanza conveys a strong sense of the cyclical, ahistorical nature of the peasants' existence. It suggests their animality through an emphasis on natural life cycles and the entry of "Creation" into their beds in multiple forms. As this stanza observes them, the women are individually indistinguishable, and will be through generations. Having established the dehistoricizing colonial gaze, however, the poem then complicates it. Wynn Thomas observes how the poem's verbs tell the story: "After the timeless present participles of the first stanzas comes the short-lived-present tense of the last verse. The present participle is the tense of 'Creation' itself, an open-ended, seamlessly continuous state of existence; the present tense is, in sharp contrast, the tense of the transient 'History' of European presumption."[42] When the soldiers enter the picture, the presumed timelessness of the peasants becomes an ironic statement on the pretensions of Western civilization:

> Across scorched hills and trampled crops
> The soldiers straggle by.
> History staggers in their wake.
> The peasants watch them die.

No judgment is offered except the gaze. The soldiers possess none of the bodily assurance in the landscape seen in the barefoot dwarf or the women "Walking erect"; anyone can perceive their foreignness. The peasants simply watch as these would-be makers of history are

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[42] M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference* 66.

destroyed by it. This is the peasants' function, it seems, not to see actively but to be seen seeing with changeless eyes. The cyclical nature of life for the peasants in fact fits into a narrative Lewis has used to describe the poor in south Wales. In "The Housekeeper," Myfanwy reflects that "now the children were repeating her own first days. It was like being caught in a winding belt in the colliery, going round and round, never getting loose" (*CS* 100–01). Likewise Lieutenant Weston in "Ward 'O' 3 (b)" regards the pit wheel as an emblem of intergenerational despair: "I just missed the wheel sucking me down the shaft" (*CS* 207). Considerable differences remain, of course, not the least of which concerns the function of such cycles within the works. Myfanwy struggles to escape the wheel; Weston has escaped, physically. The Indian peasants, on the other hand, are fixed by narrative desire into their endlessly reproduced simplicity. As John Stuart Williams argues, "Lewis's Indian peasant is half-brother to Wordsworth's Cumberland shepherd."[43] Additionally, despite his narrative ambivalence toward the Welsh working class, Lewis possesses a reasonably confident vocabulary and store of images with which to describe the cycle of poverty in his home area. He can also write from the point of view of the Welsh poor; but despite the considerable light shed on the Indian peasants by the sun's glare, they remain unnervingly opaque, their conscious existence hidden behind their otherness.

At times the seeing eye regards the peasant or the gipsy as part of the landscape, almost indistinguishable from trees and livestock. The speaker of "The Journey" recalls that "The jungle let us through with compass and machetes. / And there were men like fauns, with drenched eyes, / Avoiding us, bearing arrows" (*HHT* 46). Though the men's arrows mark them as the logical counterparts to the soldiers with their machetes, the speaker also describes the jungle in sentient terms and the men in animal simile, suggesting a general confusion of perception. In "The Orange Grove," Beale encounters a similar conflation: "he did not miss seeing the shy jungle wanderers moving through the bush with their bows, tall lithe men like

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[43] John Stuart Williams, "The Poetry of Alun Lewis," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 14.33 (1964): 65.

fauns with black hair over their eyes that were like grapes. They would stand a moment under a tree, and glide away back into the bush" (*CS* 223). The peasants' ties to the landscape become the subject of social commentary in "The Mahratta Ghats" (*HHT* 43–44). Lewis anthropomorphizes the landscape itself:

> The valleys crack and burn, the exhausted plains
> Sink their black teeth into the horny veins
> Straggling the hills' red thighs, the bleating goats
> —Dry bents and bitter thistles in their throats—
> Thread the loose rocks by immemorial tracks.
> Dark peasants drag the sun upon their backs.

The plains themselves suffer exhaustion, attempting with their rotten teeth to suck blood from "the hills' red thighs." The livestock serves as an extension of the drought-stricken landscape, and the peasants experience the sun only as an oppressive burden. The poem alludes to another everywoman peasant as "she who burns and withers on the plain," conflating her with her crop. The beating sun oppresses those who depend upon it; the peasants must "drag the sun upon their backs" even while knowing that its heat is as likely to wither as to give life. This stanza's sense of cyclical futility carries over into the next stanza's attempt to see hope in the "new turned soil" of the ghat, which "lies like gold within each horny hand." The high ground embodies the possibility of change, as "Siva has spilt his seed upon this land." Siva, though often called the destroyer, introduces chaos and thus possibility. The speaker speculates as to whether the peasant woman will

> Leave, ere too late, her scraggy herds of pain,
> The cow-dung fire and the trembling beasts,
> The little wicked gods, the grinning priests,
> And climb, before a thousand years have fled,
> High as the eagle to her mountain bed
> Whose soil is fine as flour and blood-red?

A move into the hills would offer upward mobility toward rest ("bed"), alleviation of hunger ("flour"), and health ("blood-red"). But, continues the speaker, "She cannot move," because "Each arid patch / Owns the lean folk who plough and scythe and thatch / Its grudging yield and scratch its stubborn stones." Even a thousand years might not suffice to gather the

necessary initiative to step outside the "immemorial tracks." In this vision, the every-peasant is not merely rooted and unchanging through millennia, but owned by the land—an image reminiscent of the stanza of "Indian Day" in which the sun is seen to be "Ploughing the peasant under with his crop" (*HHT* 56). The very passage of years traps them further, as "The small gods suck the marrow from their bones," aided by their priests. Only the beggar and the priest, neither belonging, can *traverse* the landscape. The beggar, "bumming his dark load" in negative correspondence to the sun-dragging peasants, can attain "the summit of the road" because, owning nothing, he is not owned. "Only the landless soldier lost in war" sees the falling star, perhaps because only the soldier looks upward; the peasants instead trace grooves in the ground, the sun upon their backs. Only the soldier and perhaps the beggar escape the tyranny of the sun by traveling at night. The final couplet—"And did a thousand years go by in vain? / And does another thousand start again?"—stresses the futility of attempts to extract the peasant from the land's "black teeth," given the cyclical nature of life and the length of those cycles. It also, ironically, echoes the syntax of the lines of Blake's "Milton" popularized as the hymn "Jerusalem":

> And did those feet in ancient time.
> Walk upon Englands mountains green:
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On Englands pleasant pastures seen![44]

Not only does the resemblance signal another instance of reliance on existing literary models to describe the other, but Blake's imperative of never resting "Till we have built Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land" only heightens the sense of oriental inertia pervading a land that is anything but green. This phrasing occurs also in "By the Gateway of India, Bombay" (*HHT* 39–40), in which the "Bow of burning gold" and "Arrows of desire" of Blake's text become "The storm's cold javelins" and "the biting arrows of the rain." Recalling the pilgrims who walked where he now stands, the speaker wonders, "And in the darkness did

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[44] William Blake, "Milton," *William Blake: The Complete Poems,* ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 1977) 514.

they see / The darker terrors of the brain?" Again, the ghost of "Jerusalem" imbues the lines, perhaps counterintuitively, with a heightened sense of otherness.

Lewis's syntactical choices, however, repeatedly demonstrate the limited power of standard British English to "assimilate" the particularities of India. Writing of a visit with his friend Dick Mills, Lewis describes "his little Indian batman from the Himalayas lying on the floor like a beautiful sort of Gelert."[45] It is possible that his reunion with his friend from Dolgellau suggested such a comparison, but it is hard to overlook the fact that his eagerness to grasp at a Welsh allusion leads Lewis to equate the Indian soldier with a loyal dog. Faced with a scene in which even "The thorns are bleached and brittle" and "the empty folds decay," the speaker of "Observation Post: Forward Area" experiences "inarticulate dismay" (*HHT* 57). The speaker of "Peasant Song" appears to acknowledge the limitations of language more generally when he admits, "I have only this small plough / To turn the mighty earth" (*HHT* 62); likewise the swaying saplings of "Wood Song" "Whisper more than can be said" (*HHT* 63). More particularly, placing familiar labels on the unfamiliar helps to reassure. In "The Raid," the nervous Selden approaches his objective while noting that "The bushes were in flower, sort of wisteria" (*CS* 190); in this he echoes a letter in which Lewis writes, "I'm sharing a tent with Tony Lewis and we've planted a sort of yellow broom in front of it and we'd love to invite you to tea."[46] Horticultural identification extends to "The Orange Grove" as well, when Beale, unmoored somewhere in central India, notes that "Hills showed blue as lavender" (*CS* 223). The narrator also notes the dawn's "grey fingers" (*CS* 222) in an Indian-landscape appropriation of Homer. Familiar terms can also fail spectacularly to reassure:

> During our exercise on Tuesday we crossed a barren range of hills and went through the most awful buried city I'd ever seen. All great buildings fallen into dust, great pillars sticking jagged from the rubble, a mighty temple as massive as Cardiff Castle, and all these decayed, dead streets where people moved in the permanent dust of a foreign religion.[47]

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[45] Lewis, letter, 12 January 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 295.

[46] Lewis, letter, 26 December 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 290.

[47] Lewis, letter, 17 January 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 296.

The introduction of Cardiff Castle into "the most awful buried city," particularly so soon after German incendiaries had in fact threatened to reduce Cardiff to "rubble," reveals an uneasiness that threatens to envelop the familiar as well as the "foreign."

3.2

Having explored many of Lewis's visual-syntactical practices, we can turn now to a particular examination of his portrayal of nature in India. The poem "Pastorals," written in the autumn of 1943 (*Life* 205), can serve as an introduction to the inadequacy of Western models of perspective and of the role of humans in the natural world. The poem comprises two mostly discrete sections. The first employs conventional fertility images:

> Had I ever a young field
> In July tenderly thrusting
> Rain-filled, strong in yield,
> Bearded millet rustling,
> In September swaying
> Like ponies newly foaled
>
> Not before sowing sold
> To usurer and clerk—
> Copper for that gold—
>
> Then sons would come in season
> Sturdy as the apple tree
> Inheriting my land,
> And love and pride have reason.[48]

These lines portray the life cycle as gentle but robust, with an emphasis on birth and growth. They also discuss the pastoral scene in terms of ownership: the speaker dreams of owning fertile land and bequeathing it to the sons he imagines almost as products of that land, enriching no others. The landscape is, potentially, his to be tamed and governed. By contrast, the second section emphasizes wildness:

> Oh in a slim spaced forest
> In a gladed darkness deep
> With long rough grasses touching
> The night aware and yielding

[48] Lewis, "Pastorals," *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis,* ed. Jeremy Hooker and Gweno Lewis (London: Unwin, 1981) 92.

Behold the tawny-eyed
Wild elements conjoin
In the endlessly longed-for mutation
Of decay and generation.

The forest with its "long rough grasses" offers no hope of control and continuity of the sort imagined in the first section. Here the relationships exist between the elements themselves as they "conjoin," and birth and death are indistinguishable and indifferent parts of the same cycle. Between the two sections lies the realization of the futility of ownership and husbandry:

But I stand here instead
With dry earth in my hand,
And death in my head,
Crying Treason! Treason!

When all is dry and withered, the speaker perceives the betrayal of the pastoral promise and all the images in which he was encouraged to find meaning. No more will he invest his surroundings with hope for the future; he will accept their indifference and perhaps achieve "the endlessly longed-for mutation / Of decay and generation" through the "death in my head." This conclusion mirrors Lewis's treatment of nature in India in other poems and stories; nature, far from reassuring, offers indifference and potential oblivion.

Writing about Lewis's reaction to India, Gordon Symes recalls being himself "continually baffled by the *bigness* of everything in India," and he reflects of Lewis that "It is almost as if that poet's eye opened to the Indian landscape only at rare moments of waking from a sleepwalking obsessed with the problems and prototypes of a personal cosmology."[49] By Lewis's own admission, however, the personal cosmology is inevitably undermined by an external landscape that refuses to play along. At home, he writes, "the inclination isn't continually oppressed by the cosmic disinclination, the individual isn't so ruthlessly and permanently subject to the *laissez faire* of the sun and the sterility."[50]

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[49] Gordon Symes, "Muse in India," *English* 6.34 (1947): 193, 194.

[50] Lewis, letter to Robert Graves, 23 January 1944, qtd. in Graves, foreword, *HHT* 11.

Particularly noteworthy, in fact, are Lewis's contrasting uses of sun and moon—the former terrifying in its hard indifference, the latter recalling self to its forgotten preoccupations. This dichotomy begins with the first exposure to the tropical sun aboard ship; in "Chanson Triste" (*HHT* 33–34), the sun which "Stared imperturbably" all day is a "Pitiless conqueror," but "the moon in her gentleness / Softly companions us." The night sky reflects the "personal cosmology" of those viewing it: "With all that is human / The tall stars decline," and under its influence the speaker experiences a fierce longing for those left behind. Analogously, in "A Troopship in the Tropics," "Welsh songs surge softly in the circling darkness; / Thoughts sail back like swans to the English winter" (*HHT* 33). The night, it seems, is when soldiers abroad remember who they were. Lewis writes in a letter, "The loveliness of India as far as I can see it, is in the night. The sky is perfect when there's a slight moon; the stars so precise and homely." This "precise" evocation of home stands in contrast to the generalized "exhaustion and glare" of the daylight, which evokes for Lewis the spectre of banished Hagar of Genesis: "Hagar might be any of the thin blackened women we see trudging across the burning fields round camp."[51] The sun blackens equally, obscuring particularity. The soldier lying awake in "In Hospital: Poona (1)" employs two images from above as "like to swan or moon the whole of Wales / Glided within the parish of my care" (*HHT* 52), while his reverie ends when "ten thousand miles of daylight grew / Between us" (*HHT* 53); the sun breaks the connection to his past. And the speaker of "In Hospital: Poona (2)" (*HHT* 53–54) observes that "The sun has sucked and beat the encircling hills / Into gaunt skeletons," presaging a similar fate for any humans who venture under its glare. Again, the moon counters the sun's baleful effects:

> Yet in the garden of the hospital
> The moonlight spills and sings in a stone pool,
> Allowing those who loiter to recall
> That which the whiplash sun drove out of bounds—
> The heart's calm voice that stills the baying hounds.

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[51] Lewis, letter, 20 January 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 298.

The evocation of "the whiplash sun" in particular emphasizes the collision of self with immovable other and its rebound into itself until called forth by the irresistible moonlight. The speaker of "Motifs" (*HHT* 65) admits, "knowing there is little but this sunlight / These desultory palms, this tepid sea, / I bid Love ask no further proof of me." Despite a longing to surrender the past in the face of these few present realities, he cannot quite succeed. Sun and moon work "In high conjunction" upon the "helpless" mind, and the speaker concludes ambivalently that he "would forget you, if I could, my dear." In "The Raid" (*HHT* 72–73), no moon appears to offer restoration or even ambivalence. The entire scene, from "The estuary silted up" to the "complex expedition" to "the needed devotion / Of terrified boys" and their individual histories, falls under "the merciless sun"

> That beats on the silted up river,
> The rusty dredger, the pier,
> The indolent red beaches,
> The confusion, the fear.

The sun's "merciless" indifference reduces a complex tableau to four lines, the particularities of the humans enveloped in a few broad brushstrokes. In answer, perhaps, "Midnight in India" (*HHT* 74–75) represents a reflection under moonlight. "The moon's annunciation" inspires the speaker to recall his past and to claim, for a moment, that "time stands still upon the east" as he finds peace in the memory of his beloved. He welcomes even pain as a restorative of self: "The moonlight lies in pools and human pain / Soothes the dry lips on which it lies / And I behold your calm white face again." Both pain and peace are made possible, in this formulation, by the soothing presence of the moonlight.

The insistence of human meaning and the indifference of nature underlie one possible reading of "The Assault Convoy" (*HHT* 71–72). At first the soldiers wait impatiently in the "inhospitable bay" for their opportunity to impose the "wild and breathless act" of death upon the shore. But "The nihilist persistence of the sun" combines with the throbbing engines and the whiteness of the salt and dust to produce a headache-like sensory existence to which no meaning attaches through thought or inscription. The penultimate stanza expresses, in

suitably modulated terms, the Romantic desire to find the inner landscape reflected in the outer:

> Perhaps the ultimate configuration
> Of island and peninsula and reef
> Will have the same shapes, tortuous and crannied
> And the same meaning as our dark belief,
> The solid contours of our native grief.

The speaker expresses the idea only hypothetically—*perhaps* they will successfully impose their "native grief" on the scene. Perhaps their internal darkness will emerge in the shape of the other. The speaker appears to take little interest. He admits that "The real always fades into the meaning," and that a "grave perception" hurries him toward "vast fulfilments." The quality of his perception appears to be that which made Mercutio a "grave man": in the "solid contours" of internal and external being he sees, indiscriminately, extinction. All "meaning" ends in "the holocaust of shells and knives" and "The supersession of a million lives." Anything left falls to the indifferent appreciation of the hawk and the field mouse, whose lives proceed as they always have.

Attempts to impose meaning on the landscape through physical form meet with similar indifference. Beale finds to his cost that monsoon flooding ignores the army's need for reliable roads through low-lying areas. We have seen how the moon proves amenable to human desires in "Midnight in India"; in this it proves a powerful exception to the argument of the poem's first stanza:

> Here is no mined and cratered deep
> As in the fenced-off landscapes of the West
> Within this Eastern wilderness
> The human war is lost.

The East, compared to the West, bears few of the markings symbolizing possession and defining territorial wars. The third and fourth lines suggest two possible interpretations, neither flattering any human illusions about the ability to define the landscape in human terms. One stresses the word "human," implying that the wilderness is inimical to humanity in all its struggles. The other turns on an interpretation of "lost" other than that usually

employed when considering war. Within the wilderness, this war waged by humans becomes lost, unable to find its way out again into an environment comfortably "mined and cratered." Both readings taken together emphasize that, cut off from a humanly inscribed landscape, the soldier will lose his connection to the "human." Lewis's syntax in the fourth section of "The Jungle" suggests in fact that the lack of markers encourages the dissociation of act and meaning, self and constituent associations:

> A trackless wilderness divides
> Joy from its cause, the motive from the act:
> The killing arm uncurls, strokes the soft moss;
> The distant world is an obituary,
> We do not hear the tappings of its dread.
> The act sustains; there is no consequence. (*HHT* 70)

The indivisible wilderness creates division; it not only resists but prevents signification. Without paths to mandate direction, without official recognition of death through newspapers and telegraph "tappings," "there is no consequence." The arm of the soldier becomes curiously disembodied, devoid of originating purpose.

3.3

The desire to apprehend the other also manifests itself in Lewis's attempts to "translate" the religious and mystic in India. The poems register a pull toward religious experiences far removed from familiar expressions and practices. They also in some cases articulate a "refusal," a self-imposed limitation on understanding or surrender. As with other acts of sensory appropriation, attempts to express such acts through received modes prove insufficient but revealing.

Two poems in particular reflect a sensual attraction to metaphysical experiences available in India. "Holi" (*HHT* 44–45), describing a rural celebration of the spring holiday, emphasizes the renewal of fertility and an overwhelming, voluptuous physicality. To the beat of the "sweating drumsticks," young men and women lose themselves in an orgy of dancing and self-sacrifice in order to "obey / The wild God's uttermost intent." This accomplished,

they disappear, ashamed, from the observer's view. Lewis emphasizes the traits of wildness and sexuality, painting the Hindu peasants with much the same brush as Conrad's African natives. These peasants act on what the speaker presents as outside compulsion, urges normally foreign to "The bankrupt peasant," who suddenly "feels the wheat / Spring green within his stony loins." What seems to attract the observer is the "crescendo" of drumming building toward ecstatic climax as sexual license is countenanced, even mandated, by "the God"; it seems the Western observer, too, feels the pull of this painful ecstasy that ends in "dust and darkness." The resulting vexation and the "shame" he imparts to the "young girls" taking part in their yearly ritual possibly originates in the observer, embarrassed by his pleasure in the scene. A similar qualified desire attends "Village Funeral: Maharashtra" (*HHT* 48–49). Here, as in the previous poem, "The drum denies identity," though in this instance it accompanies the destruction by fire of the dead man's body. The speaker observes the proceedings with some ironic detachment, observable in his rhymes of "reposes"/"decomposes" and "elephantine force"/"poor corpse," but he also seems to be moved by the occasion and to find something attractive in the idea of immolation through the conjoined burning "elements" of body, cowdung, flowers, and night. He is clearly fascinated by the prospect of "Not being and then being," though his imagination is daunted by the uncertainty of the gap between: "How shall the peasant fare between / One birth and another birth?" What replaces surrendered identity? When "This dead man is no more," an almost corporeal "Silence" replaces him and "fills the throbbing drum, / Dries the sweat on every face, / Mutely bids the dayspring come." The speaker acknowledges the sway of this silence over the gathering and lends dignity to the occasion by invoking various gods in connection with the deceased.

Two other poems acknowledge and explore the Westerner's failure to connect fully with the other through religious encounters. In "Karanje Village" (*HHT* 41–43) the speaker achieves one connection only partially but it still leads him to renounce other ties, leaving him in danger of becoming unmoored altogether. The poem begins with a sweeper's assertion that

"Karanje had a temple / A roof of gold in the gaon," and follows with the immediate juxtaposition of expectation and contrasting perception. The rhythm of this poem is unusually uneven for Lewis, contributing to a sense of clumsiness. The speaker's "I saw only" introduces a litany of images he finds distressing, particularly in such a setting, and he is unable to see more. Expecting a gold-roofed temple, he finds "burial cairns" and further suggestions of death and decay. He finds the "sacred monkeys" to be "obscene" in their "stare" and their "grey down-hanging" from the trees. They trouble the speaker to such a degree that he repeats the charge of obscenity, insistently—it seems they confound his expectations of the sacred, and through them the gods appear to be "mocking" all human effort. "The young girls in purple" supply the only appealing element of this montage, but they avoid the soldiers, leaving the latter to the ministrations of the monkeys. When a new stanza suddenly places the speaker at the statue of Vishnu, however, he encounters silence and an absence of living creatures other than himself:

> And alone by a heap of stones in the lonely salt plain
> A little Vishnu of stone,
> Silently and eternally simply Being,
> Bidding me come alone,
>
> And never entirely turning me away,
> But warning me still of the flesh
> That catches and limes the singing birds of the soul
> And holds their wings in mesh.

The speaker feels a compulsion to "come alone" to the realm of "simply Being," escaping the busier, noisier participles that have come before. But while he feels Vishnu call him, "never entirely turning me away," he also feels the god maintain distance by making the speaker aware of his dangerous corporeality. He holds himself in a state of perpetual invitation but incomplete approach. Lewis compounds the sense of isolation by having the speaker then reflect on "the people," who are "hard and hungry," made "alien" to each other by want. For their sake, "the Gods must wait." "And Love must wait," he continues; the posited moment "when my sweetheart calls me" pulls him in the opposite direction from Vishnu's summons, toward the flesh, but he will answer hers, too, only incompletely: "And when my sweetheart

calls me shall I tell her / That I am seeking less and less of world? / And will she understand?" The appeal of "simply Being," while incompletely understood, makes him less responsive to the beloved's call and to the moorings of his former self. "In Hospital: Poona (2)" shows the self approaching the brink of otherness even more precipitously before turning away. From hospital, the sick men watch the Parsis carry a corpse to their high tower so it can be consumed by the elements. The patients then experience a similarly Zoroastrian internal process, feeling their skeletal selves to be picked clean:

> And from the polished ward where men lie ill
> Thought rubs clean through the frayed cloth of the will,
> Piercing the slow estrangement of disease,
> And breaks into a state of blinding light
> Where Now is a salt pillar, still and white,
> And there are no familiar words or features
> Nor blood nor tears no joy nor living creatures,
> A void where Pain demands no cheap release
> But white and rigid freezes into peace,
> And mind lies coiled within green icebound streams
> And sheds the stippled scales of ancient dreams. (*HHT* 54)

Though the speaker denies the presence of "familiar words or features," the significance of the "salt pillar" derives from their familiar heritage—an ironic presence given its warning not to look back. The sick men experience "peace" in the frozen void, troubled no longer by "blood nor tears no joy nor living creatures." The "stippled scales" of ambivalent existence give way to pure whiteness. But then, "by that Arctic silence overawed / The mind crawls wounded from the lidless God." The self chooses, after all, to continue amid pain, finding the frozen peace of the vision too appealingly terrible. Perhaps it cannot face the prospect of blankness: the mind "crawls" from the absolutes of death back to "the polished ward," where the presence of death can be comfortingly concealed by disinfectant.

Salt pillars are not the only anachronistic and dislocated biblical images making their way into Lewis's writing about India, despite his tendency to welcome transcendent experience. Sometimes his linguistic choices clearly demonstrate his inability or unwillingness to comprehend: "I've also climbed up to the Parsi cemetery on the hill where they put the corpses in a circular tower like a rubbish destructor and leave them for the vultures to pick

clean."[52] His simile here reveals his distaste for this particular local practice. But on other occasions Lewis's language makes plain the attraction of what he perceives, even as he struggles to find a language equal to the experience. Of an encounter similar to that described in "Karanje Village," he writes,

> I didn't detect an "experience"; I don't even know whether I had one. I did ask a question, and know a primary failure though; You can't pray the first time you try; nor can a fussy officer sahib expect to "understand the East" at the point of a pistol, as it were. But standing by the small shrine, in the desolation of hill and plain, by the loose stones and the small granite relief, the sun beating on my neck round which I'd slung my bathing trunks, *I felt the refusal.* A wall of darkness, hard, resistant, smooth-surfaced. In reaction to this utter failure I became several degrees more aware of myself, my physical self, as though the stone figure has indicated the cause of my rebuff. I wanted to scratch inside my nostril, and did so. My stomach rumbled and slid a little; I tasted my egg for breakfast; I wanted to fart and did so. For about half a minute and the only time during the week I've been here, I was aware of physical desire; a local itch, entirely local and thereby quite definite, in the sensitive inch or two of flesh that always has represented the simple physics of love. I went again and *I forgot all those intimations of being a human being* once they had stated themselves. What happened then? It's hard to say, now especially when it has already veiled itself in time and recollection and the pre-occupations of this life. [. . .] And the whole mood was one of humility without submission, of being accepted without any conscious offer, without any of the vows which priests are asked to take and princes of old swear solemnly in story. It was a service of perfect freedom, a sense of infinite space to *be* in, just to be in.[53]

In this remarkable and much-quoted passage, Lewis, having "felt the refusal," experiences heightened awareness of his physical self and its vulnerability in its surroundings. He then finds himself able, temporarily, to forego self-consciousness in the presence of the other—an accomplishment rarely to be repeated in his writing. But as he attempts to describe the encounter after the fact, he realizes "It's hard to say" what happened. His language becomes negative, hinting at occurrences "without" the features familiar "in story." Further, he describe the moment with the statue of Buddha in the language of the Church of England, as "a service of perfect freedom."[54] Later, he offers a similarly ecumenical interpretation of his

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[52] Lewis, letter, 20 February 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 308.

[53] Lewis, from unpublished journal, qtd. in Hamilton 46–47.

[54] *The Book of Common Prayer for Use in The Church in Wales: The Order for Morning and Evening Prayer* (Church in Wales Publications, 1984) 399.

intrusion into a village celebration: "At the end they offered the little black elephant god half a coconut and cut the other half into small pieces, eating one each themselves, and then, to our delight, coming out and giving us one each. So we also celebrated holy communion before Gunpati, the god of good fortune!"[55] The half-serious "communion" gloss allows him both to distance himself from the Indians and to offer comment upon the less apparently spontaneous and inclusive practices of Christianity, committing himself to neither. But when writing to his wife of the same incident, Lewis stresses the desire to throw off the fetters of inherited traditions: "I wished to be away among them and of them, for in the hypercivilised world you and I belong to I've never been able to accept or discover a religion as simple and natural as I need. Last night it seemed that in that rhythm and clangour and steady chant, here was a rhythm of many universes and real truths."[56] His language betrays a desire to escape into what he perceives to be the "simple and natural" and to "be away" from the "hypercivilised world" of his past.

4

Probably the greatest challenge Lewis finds in India is the temptation to abandon self for other and "go native." Kirsti Bohata, comparing Lewis's "The Orange Grove" to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* explains that in the latter text Kurtz has "gone native" in the sense that "he loses the trappings of European civilization and enters into the daily lives and rites of the 'savage' Africans who inhabit the area." She suggests that "in both stories, antithetical as they may appear, 'going native' is firmly associated with the primitive and the main difference is that between seeing the noble or the barbarous savage."[57] For Lewis, too, "going native"

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[55] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, 9 January 1944, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 21, f. 81.

[56] Lewis, letter, 9 January 1944, *Letters to My Wife* 419.

[57] Kirsti Bohata, "Beyond Authenticity? Hybridity and Assimilation in Welsh Writing in English," *Nations and Relations* 105, 107.

appears to involve less embracing new modes of selfhood than simply letting go of the old. As he writes after nearly ten months in India,

> I find my memory in my 29th year, is taking a new and definite shape to itself. It's discarding everything it doesn't need to write and dream upon. It retains the bare necessities of soldiering: otherwise it forgets. All the stuff I learnt at College and Pengam has gone by the board, and it tunes itself more and more to the simple human material of life and of itself. It won't even acquire the economic statistics of the Beveridge report, the newspaper articles, or Oxford pamphlets. It's going native, quite definitely, and all its reasoning is done from a human standpoint.[58]

Thus in the rest of his writing from India, Lewis shows the mind "discarding" details and procedures as they seem to become extraneous. Lewis experienced the imaginative pull of such a theme long before arriving in India; it appears, for example, in "The Madman," who "takes the breeze in all his towering canvas / And sails sublimely on without a compass" (*RD* 86). Given the literary colonial antecedents, from Conrad to Lewis's hero T. E. Lawrence, it is not surprising that the idea would hold much stronger sway over his writing from India. The prospect of completely giving up the self while surviving the experience is only ever hypothetical, of course; Lewis's madman is after all insane, "his mind dissolved in vastness," and the self proves tenacious in the face of renunciation. Further, as this section will explore, the obverse of Lewis's fascination with going native is his occasional horror of degeneration and cultural miscegenation.

The speaker of "The Journey" (*HHT* 45–47) recalls a reconnaissance expedition on which "We were the fore-runners of an army, / Going among strangers without sadness, / Danger being as natural as strangeness." Already, "danger" and "strangeness" are paralleled and also felt to be integral parts of life. The men leave their friends and their routines behind, having "no other urge" but "motion and mileage" in the exploration of a strange world of enticing antiquity. They encounter bare-breasted women and "men like fauns," "bearing arrows." They witness "caravanserais of gipsies" "Following the ancient routes of the vast migrations / When history was the flight of a million birds / And poverty had splendid

[58] Lewis, letter, 11 October 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 399–400.

divagations." The speaker attributes historical continuity and animal affinity to these migrations, moreover finding even the poverty accompanying them to have a "splendid" character not attributable to contemporary poverty. Insofar as he is called to "go native," he emphasizes the movement of that process, entering an imaginary realm defined not by time but by "distance spun for ever in the mind." He leaves behind the reality of both Life and Death:

> There was also the memory of Death
> And the recurrent irritation of our selves.
> But the wind so wound its ways about us,
> Beyond this living and this loving,
> This calculation and provision, this fearing,
> That neither of us heard the quiet voice calling us,
> Remorse like rain softening and rotting the ground,
> We felt no sorrow in the singing bird,
> Forgot the sadness we had left behind.

The "quiet voice" is that of "Life," unheard "among the camels, the donkeys and the waterfalls." The animals and gipsies exist outside the domain of capitalized (in both senses) Life, where remorse and sorrow contribute to the "recurrent irritation" that is the self. The comparison of remorse to "rain softening and rotting the ground" harks back to the more temperate climate of home and emphasizes both the advantages and the perceived risks of a grounded selfhood. In escaping their attachment to home and its significations, they also escape "sorrow" and "sadness." The self gone native is imagined to be blithely ahistorical, attaching nowhere but moving always "Beyond"—beyond any of the concerns that constitute day-to-day identity.

In "The Orange Grove," the central metonym for going native is contained in the "orange groves" of Palestine. For the driver, whose voice introduces the groves, they represent an existence to escape into, an opportunity to be other than what he is:

> "They were good places, those farms?" Beale asked.
> "Aye, they were," the driver said, steadying his childish gaze. "They didn't have money, they didn't buy and sell. They shared what they had and the doctor and the school teacher the same as the labourer or the children, all the same, all living together. Orange groves they lived in, and I would like to go back there."

For the driver, the dream of kibbutz communalism counterweights his confessed possessiveness over his mother's pub and his barmaid wife—"It was my pub by rights, *mine*. She was *my* barmaid" (*CS* 215)—and the trust he cannot place in either his mother or his wife. The vision exerts a powerful fascination for both the driver and Beale. Despite mostly observing their differences in rank in their interactions, they share a desire for the orange grove, a theoretical space where those barriers would not be present. The idea of the orange grove is for Beale part of returning to "certainties." He muses for some time on the subject, attempting to identify "the quiet categories of the possible" which one can lose track of among the loud distractions of impossible shapeless desires (*CS* 217). If one realizes that one "must not generalize," if one focuses on the particular, then perhaps the orange grove is attainable. So Beale surmises, not considering the full political and narrative contingency of the groves.

Wynn Thomas correctly observes that though the orange groves are "Dreamt of [. . .] as realms of freedom, as zones free from sexual and colonial politics, they turn out, on examination, to be in fact nothing of the sort."[59] Lewis does not gloss over the imperial nature of this vision; the driver has told Beale that he served in Palestine "against the Arabs" (*CS* 215). Indeed, it is important to note the text framing the ideal of the orange grove: the driver's observations are the fruit of his "childish gaze," and his speech is haunted by "enormous shadows" presumably symbolizing his past (*CS* 216). The framing text speaks even more strongly when Lewis puts the orange groves into a letter:

> he gave the loveliest talk I've ever heard, in his singsong illiterate unaspirated Welsh voice, about the Jewish collective farms of Palestine which he'd seen when he was shooting Arabs out there. "No one grows for money, they breeds beautiful 'orses and they got lovely orange groves an' the doctor don't ask for money for 'is services but you pays 'im with food or clothing or whatever you do make. An' I never seen a 'appier people in my life an' by God I wished I could 'a stayed with them". I felt the loveliest feelings while he spoke as if a

[59] Thomas and Brown 77.

> little child were telling me some quaint and innocent story rich in human goodness and all the richer because it was so artless and unconscious.[60]

However Lewis feels about British involvement in Palestine, he writes about it with a certain ironic detachment. Describing the soldier's assignment as "shooting Arabs" would seem to indicate a lack of illusions about the nature of colonial intervention. Moreover, Lewis appears confident in applying condescending epithets such as "innocent" and "artless" despite the speaker's greater military experience. Though Lewis acknowledges the power of such a vision to conjure up "the loveliest feelings," this text makes clear that the metonymic orange grove is a fairy tale for children; innocence, not experience, is talking.

What then of Beale's own metaphorical orange grove, which Wynn Thomas calls "an Indian version of the familiar Romantic dream of running away to join the gipsies"?[61] Bohata has pointed out that Beale's view of "the nomads as representative of some kind of ideal, essential primitive man" is disrupted by their willingness to cooperate in exchange for a five-rupee note.[62] Further, Beale carries his revolver as he prepares to join them (*CS* 224); he has not abandoned two of the more powerful languages of colonial exchange. Nevertheless he gradually loses his "stiff self-consciousness" (*CS* 224) as he begins to reconsider self/other boundaries. He remembers a history lesson "About the barbarian migrations in pre-history; the Celts and Iberians, Goths and Vandals and Huns" (*CS* 224) and draws parallels to the group of gipsies he has accidentally joined. Thomas is right enough that Beale feels himself to be reverting to "romantic primitivism," "the pre-history of progress and of civilization."[63] His situation holds interest and excitement for him partly because he senses himself to be stepping into an exotic and timeless existence he could only imagine as a schoolboy. Bracketing the teleological discourses of progress, though, it is worth returning to Said's argument about "the return of the repressed" and emphasizing that Beale's barbarian hordes

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[60] Lewis, letter, November 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 272.

[61] Thomas and Brown 77.

[62] Bohata, "Beyond Authenticity?" 107.

[63] Thomas and Brown 78.

are pre-Europeans, quite possibly his ancestors. The appeal of joining the gipsies, for Beale, lies partly in the discovery of the other always already inside himself, the "fissure or wound at the heart of collective identity."

Behind the romantic exoticism of going native lies a darker discourse, one in which Lewis also participated on occasion. The surrender of self mirrors a broader fear for the collective self as expressed in literary evocations of cultural degeneration and extinction:

> The idea took on new force as various forms of degeneration—biological, physical, cultural, historical—were postulated and described. The spread of European empires during the nineteenth century was central to this process. One of the most vivid and repeated expressions of the fear of degeneration in colonial settings was the phenomenon of 'going native', of the European becoming decivilised in savage surroundings.[64]

The fear of degeneration in Victorian and Modernist discourse was underpinned by racial theory that "implied the inevitability of decline as races and cultures mixed and reproduced."[65] Lewis can be seen echoing these anxieties in his correspondence. Here, for instance, he emphasizes the slow decay of genetic stock in colonial settlers:

> This part of the coast is inhabited by descendants of the Portuguese explorers of the fifteenth century. The villages have Portuguese names and crosses and priests and the black women wear frocks and handbags and umbrellas. They're a very decadent breed by now, unrecognizable from the Indian peasant and their villages are equally squalid, tumbledown and odorous![66]

The "decadence" observed in this passage seems to incorporate both the decay of Portuguese settlements to a level of squalor on a par with Indian villages and the wearing of Western clothing by dark-skinned women. Through insufficient diligence on behalf of their "breed," the Portuguese settlers have lost the characteristics that differentiated them from the Indians, and Lewis observes their retained European trappings in a manner which suggests that while the customs do not belong here, the people do. It is the "decadent" label, the emphasis on

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[64] Edmond 43.

[65] Edmond 40.

[66] Lewis, letter to Tom and Gwladys Lewis, 14 May 1943, NLW Alun Lewis ms. 21, ff. 32–33.

breeding and inheritance, that separates this passage from Lewis's descriptions of similarly "squalid" conditions in Wales. In his story about these Portuguese Indians, "Manuel," Lewis describes how

> The aridity and heat of the baked crumbling earth and the limp palms with their clusters of unripe gourds had induced a torpor in the men. They seemed to be pinned eternally among these bankrupt villages with their bamboo and reed hovels, the harbours with drying platforms for the nets, stinking of putrefying fish they had failed to sell; the dark Hindu temples with their erotic statuary, and the sallow Portuguese who could not afford to go home, but must be dragged down to the hunger level of the native Mahrattis.[67]

This passage identifies the danger that the British soldiers, like the Portuguese before them, will be "pinned eternally" by native "torpor" and become indistinguishable from the other, unable to claim European identity and "go home."

"The Orange Grove," as well, hints at a distrust of the degenerative aspects of going native. Beale's increased consideration for the driver after his death and his growing assumption of the man's preoccupations corresponds with his realization that he does not know where he is or how he will find an outpost where they belong. He is left with something of Robinson Crusoe's fear of sliding alone into savagery without "civilised companionship" to reinforce his identity.[68] Thus he continues to make a companion of the driver, taking an interest in "what he was and what he had left behind" (*CS* 222). But the symbolic importance of the driver works two ways: as Beale walks along with the gipsies, he notices that the body "was beginning to corrupt. There was a faint whiff of badness about him" (*CS* 224). Given the heat and humidity of the monsoon environment, it seems unlikely that a corpse would require more than forty hours to emit a "faint whiff."[69] What does seem possible is that the

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[67] Lewis, "Manuel": 202.

[68] Edmond 43.

[69] Andrew R. W. Jackson and Julie M. Jackson, *Forensic Science* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson, 2004). Even in temperate climes, after about forty-two hours "the process of decomposition is well established" (327). Humidity such as the monsoons would produce would speed the process, as would a knife wound and the body's partial submersion in mud and dirty water before Beale's discovery of it. In a tropical environment, a corpse left to decay may become fully skeletonized in a matter of weeks (331).

driver's corpse acts as a metaphor for the health of Western civilization in the midst of the other, with the end result being putrefaction and decay.

Lewis's writing also betrays a distrust of cultural miscegenation, particularly as it interferes with romantic notions of otherness:

> I have a feeling that India will wake up to find far more Western things pouring into its flat and featureless philosophical voids than have done so yet, and it will play havoc with the balance of their lives, too. For instance, we passed an American construction company building a road out in the wilds and we halted nearby. The little beggar urchins came up singing, 'Oh Johnnie, Oh Johnnie, how can you lerve.' It's like influenza, this tinpot civilization that is so easy to export by radio and gramophone and film. And it's so demoralising too: it devalues everything, from true true music to true love, doesn't it? It makes everything cheap and easy and immediate.[70]

Besides demonstrating Lewis's distaste for jazz music, itself a by-blow of a violent but productive cultural hybridity, this letter betrays a desire for an ideal inimical to Lewis's colonial role though closely related to it. India, it seems, is asleep, unable to prevent the trappings of "tinpot civilization" from being foisted upon it. Those who embrace aspects of Western culture are children and unable to discern their best interests. Lewis laments the passing of India's "flat and featureless philosophical voids," the hypothesized existence of which allows the existence of "true" experience. The spread of pathological influences between cultures threatens the very elusiveness of these Indian voids, offering to make them "cheap" and "immediate." This anxiety too carries into "The Orange Grove," where the natives who capture Beale's imagination are those who have left the least trace of themselves in the landscape and are the least inscribable. The story takes place during a time of unrest, when Indian nationalists in the nearby town have attacked telegraph lines, oil tanks, and the courthouse and struck fear into the heart of the district magistrate (*CS* 214)—that is, they are resisting British rule on British terms, systematically disrupting the apparatuses of colonial administration. Aside from reasonable concerns about his safety, Beale takes little interest in these Indians. Neither does he dwell on his location in "this remote part of Central India

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[70] Lewis, letter, 17 February 1944, *Letters to My Wife* 422–23.

where the native princes ruled from their crumbling Mogol forts through their garrisons of smiling crop-headed little Ghurkas" (*CS* 214); these enclaves, well practiced in hybridity of history and culture, hold for him only the workaday interest of practical knowledge. He exhibits a familiar and generalizing contempt for the typical caretaker of a dak bungalow, "some old khansama or chowkey, usually a slippered and silent old Moslem." The tubercular caretaker he encounters the evening the story begins he regards with "the faint overtone of disgust which the young and healthy feel for all incurable diseases" (*CS* 213). Indians who cooperate in some fashion with the colonial government, then, have lost their essential mystery and possibly become carriers of pathological degeneration. The Indians who appeal to his newly enlarged imagination are the nomads of whom he captures repeated fleeting glimpses, "mixing their own ways with no other's" (*CS* 220), timeless and pure and existing in no history books. Even among these gipsies Beale avoids "the labouring old women" who remind him of process and decay, "preferring the tall girls who walked under the primitive smooth heads of the camels" (*CS* 224). The ideal other may be, in the end, that which offers no uncomfortable reminders of the self.

"India! What a test of a man!" Lewis concludes his assessment of his Indian experience for Robert Graves.[71] We have seen in this chapter the numerous challenges to selfhood posed by what seems at times to be the overwhelming otherness of India. This otherness exposes and exacerbates cracks in the integrity of self, so that any illusions of a stable or coherent identity crumble. Not only is the meaning of the word *India* difficult to pin down, but shifting significations and relationships make it equally difficult for the expatriate to assign a solid meaning to *home*. Lewis focuses on the experience of the soldier in India. The local conditions throw into relief the absurdity of army hierarchy and protocol in contexts which cannot be similarly regimented. Despite his position of relative political and physical power, the soldier arriving with good intentions addresses no problem as intractable as his own impotence. He

[71] Lewis, letter to Robert Graves, *HHT* 11.

cannot even be sure what enemy he faces, or who he needs to be to defeat that enemy. Lewis's writing from India also illuminates the difficulty of perceiving and interpreting the other. Received practices of vision and language prove inadequate for assigning meaning to the unfamiliar. This problem appears particularly when Lewis's soldiers attempt to make themselves at home in nature, or when they attempt to come to terms with the often simultaneous attraction and repulsion they experience in response to local religious practices. The challenge of finding meaning in the object reinforces the tenuous nature of subjectivity. Finally the self begins to seem altogether too much of a burden, and the temptation arises to "go native," to subsume the self in the other. Lewis shows that this proposition, however appealing, is only ever a child's dream, and he hints at its less idealistic implications. The desire to surrender the self completely leads naturally to only one conclusion, which will provide the focus of the final chapter.

5. "Grave Perception": Writing from Death and Burial

> The sabre-toothed shaggy hunter galloped down,
> Drunk with the blood of she-goats from the hills.
> His drumming hooves excited primal terror,
> Regret and fascination: he was Death.
> ("Parable," *RD* 30)

"The aim of all life is death,"[1] Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* identifying at last the "beyond" factor that has troubled his theorizing. And thus with this study: we arrive, finally, at the presence haunting any discussion of Alun Lewis and his work. The subject has on some level left home behind. He has brushed aside the army as ludicrously irrelevant, or recognized "the killing arm" (*HHT* 70) and represented it as curiously separate from the self. He has bid the beloved an ambiguous farewell with the acknowledgment that he "would forget you, if I could, my dear" (*HHT* 65), or he has incorporated her into his conception of death—"I am, in Thee" (*HHT* 73). India, despite both attracting and undermining the self in various ways, has remained intransigently other to him, and he has acknowledged his inability to comprehend and translate it. Through this gradual eroding of personal and cultural signifiers, however, death has remained. It is both promise and threat, repellent and fascinating—though in Lewis's writing the fascination tends to predominate. Death is moreover constitutive, "a hankering in the blood, / A dark relation that disturbs his joke" (*HHT* 28). Soldiers describe themselves as "the little men grown huge with death" (*RD* 33). "Death was a comforting dark thought in me," Lewis confesses—"something inside me."[2] He not only lives and writes in opposition to death; he lives and writes in its shadow.

It is impossible to think about Lewis and death without being haunted, as it were, by the circumstances of Lewis's own death and by his well-documented experiences of "death in life, the black water."[3] That Lewis experienced some variety of clinical depression seems likely,

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[1] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition,* vol. 18 (1955) 38.

[2] Lewis, letter, 11 January 1941, *Letters to My Wife* 92.

[3] Lewis, letter, 6 December 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 410.

though a full diagnosis must ultimately fall to those qualified to attempt it. Of more immediate concern is the correspondence, in Lewis's writing, between "living Mr Death"[4] and physical death. It is tempting to draw upon Lewis's own end to underscore the connection between "the black periods when I am negative, null, void, done for, discarded"[5] and the fact of death. But one would still be left with the writing and its various representations of self-negation. Herein lies the difficulty of enforcing any clear distinction between death and depression in Lewis's writing: he describes depression as "death in life" and death as "this ending / Of the heart and its ache" (*HHT* 50). What emerges through either depiction is the attraction of surrendering the burden of self, in which both are intimately entwined.

Freud explains the death drive (or the "death drift," as Royle[6] appealingly translates Freud's *Todestriebe*) as the desire of the unconscious to return to, to repeat, its originary state of nullity. To the death instincts he opposes the "life instincts,"[7] the sexual urges to which he goes to some length to ascribe a successful bid for "immortality" at the cellular level. It is possible he protests too much; Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that even these life instincts exhibit something of a death urge through the endless repetition of the process of cell division: "For the sexual drives preserve life in the form of destruction and division, that is, by rupturing existing unions, disturbing the life-threatening short-circuit of stasis and creating new entities by virtue of transformation." This reproductive repetition, she argues, "posits an expression of death in the form of dismemberment" and "informs all moments of 'doubleness.'"[8] In a similar vein, Royle points out that the goddess Atropos, far from embracing the dying mortal, "is supposed to castrate, cut a fellow down, sever the thread of life."[9] This chapter identifies two primary directions of death discourse in Lewis's writing. The first echoes Bronfen's

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[4] Lewis, letter, 18 April 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 206.

[5] Lewis, letter to Dick Mills, 14 August 1943, NLW ms. /ex2161.

[6] Royle 84.

[7] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 40.

[8] Bronfen 55–56.

[9] Royle 143.

locating of death in doubling and fragmentation. It is the writing of death as uncanny, as the realm of ghosts. The second thrust of Lewis's writing on death more closely follows Freud's conscious arguments in regarding death as the completion of the self, a desired *end* to fragmentation.

1

Alun Lewis's writing is haunted by death. More precisely, it is haunted by specific deaths, particular losses, uniquely shaped holes. Lewis finds occasion to mourn those who have died and those who will die, including himself; it is not uncommon for his speakers and characters to encounter their own ghosts. Death is, in other words, an occasion for stepping outside the self. It offers an opportunity to consider mortality as an antithetical force anxiously carried inside every being. Lewis's mentor Rilke rues at length in several letters this tendency to make death "into something external":

> Nature, however, knew nothing of this banishment which we have somehow managed to accomplish—when a tree blossoms, death blooms in it as well as life; every field is full of Death, who reaps a rich harvest of expression from its prone countenance, and the animals pass patiently from one to the other; all round us Death is at home, he peers out at us from the cracks of things, and the rusty nail that sticks up out of a plank does nothing but rejoice over him day and night.[10]

Rilke argues that "Death is at home," *heimlich,* though we may wish to hide it imperfectly from sight and banish it into the realm of the *Unheimliche.* Nevertheless his portrayal of death as an entity who "peers out at us from the cracks of things," his assurance that death lurks inside every living being, compelling its progression through life on an instinctual level—these would suffice to send many readers scurrying back to Freud and his ironically reassuring discussions of *unheimlich* death. In the literary domain, something queer *is* going

[10] Letter to L. H., 8 November 1915, *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1902–1926,* trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Macmillan, 1946) 265, 266. Rilke's long-standing influence on Lewis's writing appears not only in Lewis's poem "To Rilke" (*HHT* 37–38) but as far back as "The Miner's Son," in which *Letters to a Young Poet* teach Meirion "to endure the empty years without losing hope" (MS 26).

on. On one level death of course embodies a threat, carrying the promise of personal annihilation and the abrupt cessation of mortal ties and endeavors. More subtly, it disturbs illusions. It puts one on the wrong foot. As D. H. Lawrence writes, its presence and its implications are inescapable:

> We have wanted to envelop the world in a vast unison of death, to let nothing escape. We have been filled with a frenzy of compulsion; our insistent will has co-ordinated into a monstrous engine of compulsion and death.
>
> So now our fundamental being has come out. True, our banner is ostensible peace. But let us not degrade ourselves with lying. We were filled with the might of death. And this has been gathering in us for a hundred years. Our strength of death-passion has accumulated from our fathers; it has grown stronger and stronger from generation to generation. And in us it is confessed.[11]

In writing is confession. This section argues that Lewis observes this "fundamental being" in a manner that augers both detachment and entrapment. Death and loss occur unavoidably; one's own death, too, must be confronted, observed, as though it were one of many detachable parts of the self. The annihilation of others, the act of mourning, the consideration or rejection of the death inside one—all involve a process of self-division and projection.

1.1

Several texts address the death of another—a comrade, perhaps, or a lover. Here death is most clearly identified as a site of loss. In mourning or fearing the death of another, the individual surrenders a degree of security and self-assurance. Though the death of another can be experienced as a nearly mundane occurrence—something to be expected, especially during war-time—death in this guise can also inspire uncanny apprehensions, as ghosts continue to haunt and confuse the demarcating lines between life and death.

Chapter 2 looked at several poems involving the death of another soldier. It will not be necessary to say more here, except to reiterate that "To a Comrade in Arms," "Finale," and "The Unknown Soldier" all address or observe the fallen soldier in a way that emphasizes

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[11] D. H. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace," *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence,* ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936) 674.

identification and, to varying extents, projection. "What vow shall we vow who love you / For the self you did not value?" (*RD* 27) asks the speaker of "To a Comrade in Arms," a rhetorical gesture indicating a consciousness of and responsibility to that self beyond the grave. Men die but do not die. The narrator of "Flick," learning of his friend's death, orders a pint and leaves it at the bar for him—an act that at once acknowledges and refuses to acknowledges Flick's demise (*CS* 26). It is a "sloppy" tribute to an individual ghost in a time when soldiers' lives are held cheap. In "Lance-Jack," Lewis makes explicit the difference between official and personal perspectives. A soldier who at one moment appears before the O.C. for pointless brawling is the next moment dead of shrapnel wounds. "Such an infinitesimal gain for the enemy, such a terrible, absolute loss for his wife" (*CS* 68), the narrator observes, bearing witness to the insufficiency of numerical tallies. The death of a fellow soldier serves as a reminder of vulnerability on multiple levels. In "Bivouac" (*HHT* 66–67), the "withering obsession" cited is not the fear of death itself, but the death of the lover or comrade that leaves the self isolated. The soldiers fear being left alone and helpless against the "leathery vendetta" of the strange jungle; even if not killed they will find themselves without any reassuring or reinforcing presence. A comrade's death serves also as a harbinger of one's own death, of course, and this anxiety is paramount in a letter from India:

> We're still by the sea, but this bit of coast is very open and dangerous, and one of our boys was drowned here two days ago. Poor kid, we're all scared of dying, and it's happened to him just like that. The funeral details have been a horrible mixture of the macabre and of red tape—getting a coffin and a coroner's certificate, a gun carriage, a padre, a sexton, a truck to take him to Bombay mortuary—and the body horribly horribly decomposed. His brother happened to be at a nearby camp and came to see him, but we wouldn't let him. One could write such a short story—only I don't want to. Not about *that*.[12]

The death of "one of our boys" has served as a reminder of mortality, and in the least glamorous way possible—a "mixture of the macabre and of red tape." The decomposition of the body allows for some distancing but also undermines romantic ideas about death. It is

[12] Lewis, letter, 21 May 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 350.

repellent, not seductive. Lewis does not compare this corpse to a Velasquez[13]; he admits rather that he cannot bring himself to write any more about it.

The death of a lover or family member gives rise to the competing impulses to banish the ghost and to compel it to remain. Dealings with the dead help to preserve a sense of self, of one's origins and past, but they also threaten to interfere with life and cut one off from the future. The young boy who narrates "Birthday" admits, "I didn't like to ask daddy what 'dead' is, for I'm sure it's one of the words I ought to know."[14] Celebrating his birthday in solitary fashion on the day of his mother's burial, he enjoys a heightened sense of his own pleasures: "It was clever of daddy to think of letting me eat my dinner in the woods. I expect it's his birthday present to me" (2). He cannot, nevertheless, quite ignore the disturbance to his existential security; he is startled by the sudden movements of animals in the woods, and he tellingly reasons that he should not turn over stones "because I might find a worm underneath" (2). Having covertly followed the funeral procession, he confesses that he "*was* frightened. I thought they'd chased mummy and put her in the box and were going to hide her in the earth" (3). Following Freud's suggestion that the "terrifying phantasy" of live burial "is only a transformation of another phantasy [. . .] of intra-uterine existence,"[15] it seems reasonable to suppose that the small boy's reaction to the scene neatly inverts the security he has taken for granted during his brief existence. He buries this thought, however, and contents himself with speculation about the birthday present his mother is sure to bring him before he sleeps. Thus is his mother imperfectly and disturbingly doubled--not simply alive or dead, but irretrievably buried alive on the one hand, and reassuringly present but distressingly tardy on the other. Despite his desire to keep her alive, misgiving slips under the "primary narcissism"[16] that helps him maintain his comforting fictions.

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[13] Cf. "The Unknown Soldier," *HHT* 61–62.

[14] Lewis, "Birthday" (radio version), photocopied ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 4. Subsequently cited parenthetically.

[15] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 244.

[16] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 235.

For mourners less innocent, the death of a lover likewise inspires varied and sometimes contradictory feelings. "They Came" documents Taffy's guilt at having survived the air raid that killed his wife and, as we have seen, follows his efforts to turn the following footsteps of his past to beneficial use. His wife's death recalls him to his past with her while simultaneously setting him adrift from it. She has been dismembered, moreover, an apt image of the dissociative fear Taffy feels upon the occasion—the fear that her death will divide him from himself and his constitutive past as represented by the memory of "Sitting on the dry-stone wall of his father's back garden with Gwyneth by him" (*CS* 176). The young war widow in "Acting-Captain" remarks that her husband "wouldn't have a baby" and admits, "I've forgotten nearly everything about him" (*CS* 126). She is left to discuss him in an "unreal mood," having no tangible evidence of his place in her life except a photograph. Instead she finds herself pregnant by a man she has known six weeks and whose photograph sits beside that of her husband. The immature Captain Cochrane is reluctant to fill her husband's place, however, and when Curly Norris visits her flat, he perceives a need "to restore her self to her" (*CS* 126).

In "The Motherland," the dead are also perceived to entrap the living who mourn them. A woman invests a ghost with the qualities she disassociates from herself:

> First they came in a black van on a hot afternoon when the sloes were white with dust, and they took away her daughter-in-law who had been screaming upstairs in labour. And her son went with them. Her son came back the next day; but his straightness was left behind with his dainty wife and there was no vigour in him at all. She muttered that he should never have married a town girl who was too delicate to turn the beds or the hay or fetch the cattle in during the rains. She told him the walls needed a coat of whitewash but he didn't heed her and she lay awake at night praying that the dead woman would give him his spirit back. But she clung to it as though it were hers, the dead woman did, whom she'd never liked. She never thought that girl had the power to give her a grandson.[17]

The daughter-in-law, apparently possessing far more power than she had in life, stands in the way of the woman's complete possession of her son. The confusion of pronouns in the second

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[17] Lewis, "The Motherland," *Modern Reading* 6 (1943): 16. Subsequently cited parenthetically.

half of this paragraph seems deliberate, "the dead woman did" acting as a carefully calibrated acknowledgment of ambiguity. The two women merge in their common interest; over the course of the story, as the son leaves for war and the old woman becomes a recluse and neglects her body's needs, the woman becomes barely distinguishable from the spirits with whom she wrestles. Her differentiation from them becomes a matter of protest: "And a wild scorn seized her, scorn for the dead, the defeated who had given way to the ache in them and pulled a blanket of earth over their anguish. She went back to the kitchen, refusing their help" (18). Her longing for her son carries her into the spirit realm and yet prevents her capitulation to death.

The narrator of "Echoes" also feels compelled to protest his vitality in the face of a persistent ghost and the uncanny effects it produces in him. As he reacts to the news of an old love's death, he experiences both desire and fear, silence and a hypnotic verbosity. He experiences loneliness as a presence in itself: "it's right behind my chair, and humming in my ears, unbearably silent, oppressing my breathing."[18] He experiences his self-isolation as the presence of an unwelcome stranger, his solitude as a silence that hums. Perhaps silence, like *heimlich*, "is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite."[19] It echoes. It is a silence, an absence, full of possibility:

> I hate other sounds. This silence is better than other people's sounds—this silence of ash faggots crumbling and growing grey.
> In this silence she might return. (6)

But silence suggests other eventualities as well. While asserting that "she loved me enough" to come to him in death, he describes a more eerie, telepathic connection between them. The night before learning of her death,

> I dreamed I was passing her house, passing swiftly on a strange steed. I craned my neck to see over the garden privet—strained, in intensest agony—glimpsed

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[18] Lewis, "Echoes," ts., Alun Lewis collection, U of Glamorgan, 3. Subsequently cited parenthetically.

[19] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 226.

> her—her thick black hair and her pale face and her demure body. Striving to call her, I was dumb. And then it was too late, and I fought vainly to go back. (6)

Though she displays something of the pallor of death and remains caught in a transpired scene, it is he who strives, he who attempts speech but is mute. Freud writes of a similar episode:

> More than ten years ago a highly intelligent man told me a dream which he wanted to use as evidence of the telepathic nature of dreams. In it he saw an absent friend from whom he had received no news for a very long time, and reproached him energetically for his silence. The friend made no reply. It afterwards turned out that he had met his death by suicide at about the time of the dream. Let us leave the problem of telepathy on one side: there seems, however, not to be any doubt that here the dumbness in the dream represented death.[20]

If the dumbness in Lewis's story represents death, the question remains: whose? In what direction does the narrator's "strange steed" carry him? He concludes in fact that he cannot "go all that way back" toward the memory of their shared past, nor can he move forward with the anticipation of meeting her. Though he desires her return, he rejects the silent promise she seems to offer and the implications of his dream: "I am flesh. Let her know that, and all that I mean" (7). Despite the qualities of silence in this story, Lewis simultaneously conveys the impression that death is not silent at all. While the text mutes speech, it magnifies writing. The opening paragraphs are interspersed with fragments of the young woman's obituary, about which the narrator concludes, "Probably old Penny wrote it. He generally covers funerals. He's got a formula for them" (1). The act of writing in the face of death continues as a trope through the story, from Plato to "Herrick and his fastidious daffodils" (2) to the loneliness of Ozymandias (6). The "bundle of her letters upstairs" (5) haunts him, the act of her having written manifesting a living presence as much as the words themselves, which he has largely forgotten. And while he maintains that "Art can only create a simulacrum" (3), he apparently cannot resist the temptation to try his hand at creating one: "If she came she

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[20] Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" 295.

would sit in the other chair, and I would put the bellows to the fire. She would watch me. I think she would look most beautiful. Her eyes couldn't be more hazel than in Life, nor her touch gentler. Her rich curling hair might be heavy for her now" (7). Through his art, their doubles enact a reassuring domestic scene. Though he has repeatedly invoked silence and insisted to himself that "she is dead" (7), he momentarily employs his words to combat death.

"Ivy Charm," an unusual story from Lewis's early oeuvre, is fraught with omens, ghosts, and doubling. A young couple, Russel and Jancis, bring a close to a day of rambling by putting to the test a legend that "if you close your eyes at sunset and hide your face in the ivy you can escape from the world for five hours."[21] As they stand by the ivy, they hear "a beating of wings" which Jancis takes for an angel, Russel for "a one-for-sorrow crow" (1). They then take shelter in a farmhouse where, just as Jancis predicts, "a rosy cheeked lady with her hair done up in a bun was making pancakes for them" (2). They appear to have entered a magical dimension in which their predictions come true, lending weight to such omens as the crow. Russel confesses himself to feel like "two different people" (3)—one who imagines a contented future with Jancis and one for whom the future is obscure and futile. He muses, "I wish I could leave you here watching the dwarf in the fire for ever" (4). Unforeseen consequences emerge from all this hypothetical fragmentation, as his desire to shield her from the "relentless, careless wilderness" of life and leave her in "Heaven" is brought to its logical conclusion. As Jancis sleeps, Russel enters a dream-like sequence in which "the lady with the bun" re-appears, suddenly shrunken and elderly (5), followed by a portly old man whom Russel gradually realizes to be his future self. From this aged doppelgänger he learns that Jancis will die shortly and that he will in consequence spend his life wandering alone. Russel experiences both "revulsion" and "a cold helpless dread" in response to this apparition, a sense of "a loathsome evil coming upon him which he could not avert" (9). More than straightforward danger, it is a glimpse of a future which ought to have remained hidden, a

[21] Lewis, "Ivy Charm," ts., U Glam Alun Lewis collection, 1. Subsequently cited parenthetically.

doubling that presages nullity. He sees not only his own double, but Jancis's ghost. Thus the entrance of Russel's older self fulfils several of the functions Freud ascribes to the double: "From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death." Also "incorporated in the idea of a double" are "the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will."[22] Russel's double presents an assurance of his continued existence, but it also figures as a harbinger of death, one which, moreover, calls into question his "unfulfilled but possible futures." So great is his agitation, in fact, that he threatens to kill his other self. Perhaps more interestingly, in making this threat "his voice spoke, as if independently of his own volition" (9). Freud suggests that "when people unfamiliar with analysis feel an obscure fear—a dread of rousing something that, so they feel, is better left sleeping—what they are afraid of at bottom is the emergence of this compulsion with its hint of possession by some 'daemonic' power."[23] Russel feels an internal compulsion to destroy his double, this reflection of himself become monstrous. But he does not merely dread his double and its message; his reaction to it is in itself unnerving, further undermining his illusions of control.

1.2

Further fragmentation occurs when one sees one's own death from outside. Notable in Lewis's writing is how quickly the narrative identifies with a third vantage-point, with a bid for at least a partial immortality. As Freud writes, "It is true that the statement 'All men are mortal' is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a general proposition; but no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality."[24] Lewis's dying soldier in "The Earth Is a Syllable" exemplifies this

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[22] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 235, 236.

[23] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 36.

[24] Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" 242.

statement, admitting that "He'd never thought of dying in those days, though, it didn't seem a physical fact at all. Just something you wrote and theorized about. Not like this" (*CS* 194). Theorizing provides one avenue for segregating the fact of death from personal mortality, but others persist as well. The unconscious so little grasps the idea of mortality, it seems, that it leads consciousness to sequester itself from the mortal body, seeks to place remnants of the self in writing and memory, and even divides the body itself.

Two poems in particular emphasize the breaking up of the self in death. The final stanza of "Peasant Song" constitutes a bid for posthumous existence:

> But if I should go
> And you be left behind
> Among the tall red ant hills and the maize
> Would you hear my plough still singing
> And, bearing endless days,
> Somehow give praise? (*HHT* 63)

The manner of this bid is, however, somewhat curious. The speaker seems to remain separate both from his hypothetically postulated death and from the still-singing "plough," the remnant of him that remains in song and memory. He seems to expect a measure of immortality through self-division. It is worth recalling Freud's discussion of the workings of life instincts in "germ-cells":

> Under favourable conditions, they begin to develop—that is, to repeat the performance to which they owe their existence; and in the end once again one portion of their substance pursues its development to a finish, while another portion harks back once again as a fresh residual germ to the beginning of the process of development. These germ-cells, therefore, work against the death of the living substance and succeed in winning for it what we can only regard as potential immortality, though that may mean no more than a lengthening of the road to death.[25]

The effort of these reproductive cells seeking to perpetuate life through the continual fragmentation of themselves serves as a useful metaphor for the way in which the speaker of "Peasant Song" seeks to avoid complete death by the division of self into mortal and less mortal parts. Something far stranger and altogether less optimistic takes place in "Threnody

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[25] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 40.

for a Starry Night." The poem's very structure, in nine loosely connected short sections, contributes to a sense of fragmentation. Death is repeatedly seen and reported from outside, as when "The Babylonian planets tell / The unromantic death of Keats" (*RD* 35), yet the perspective regularly shifts to a first person "we" representing soldiers who expect to die. The poem conveys a constant sense of participating in death while standing outside it, as illustrated by Keats, both laureate of death and premature victim thereof, or "sister Ophelia," who "Sings willow, green willow" as "Love's torn head in lassitude / Lies on the pillow" (*RD* 37). An emphasis on such individual body parts leads to a heightened sense of dismemberment—of the body as well as consciousness. The stars seem "Glow-worms in the frozen hair / Of dead soldiers" (*RD* 35). Toward morning, "sensitive blind hands" emerge, curiously disembodied, to provide the dawn and shed light upon "The soldiers' frozen sightless eyes" (*RD* 39). Elsewhere refugees evoke "the mutilated smile" and "milk teeth smashed" as emblems of the "grey affliction that shall spill / Out of our private parts like sawdust / From broken dolls" (*RD* 36–37). Even the comfort of "communal anguish" bears traces of an uncanny amputation, as "Indifferent profiles have become / Beautiful tormented faces" (*RD* 39). "The woman from the Egyptian rock-tomb / With the hawk's head and the chaste body" (*RD* 35) who welcomes the dead soldiers into her realm embodies the permanent division of self. The speaker appears to cite not only interpersonal relationships but individual integrity when he muses, "All sons, all lovers / Death divides for ever, ever. . . ."

In the story "And at My Departing," the narrator's death likewise divides her from her devoted sister while also occasioning a sense of a doubling of self. While on holiday in St. Malo, the elderly Miss Brook is privileged to view her impending death from a variety of angles. The various portents exercise a pull on her, but she also appreciates the worry they cause her sister, Sophie. As a result, these uncanny harbingers of death exist, with slightly comic effect, on a plane alongside the redoubtably mundane. While eating lunch, she sees "a cockle moving in the bowl. They were *alive*" (*CS* 317). The incident preys on her, but she also admits, "I wish I could stop being 'queer.' It's so tiresome" (*CS* 317). She tells of a disturbing

dream in which she walks along a beach and encounters "a tiny little boy, buried up to his neck in the wet sand" who calls her by name and urges her to hurry in fetching help because "The tide comes in so quickly" (*CS* 318). Sophie counters with the purchase of Ovaltine at twice the English price. Though Sophie removes the books from her bedroom—"Mary Rose, Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland"—to stop her getting ideas, Miss Brook nevertheless exists for several days in a doubled world. The dream and its voices recur,

> And then I heard weeping—it seemed to be coming from a bedroom. But I couldn't see. I strained my senses until I thought I could see—Sophie—bending over a bed and weeping. But that wasn't part of the dream, for Sophie was actually bending over me, asking me how I'd slept. (*CS* 318–19)

Miss Brook views one possible scene from an unspecified vantage-point while taking part in another. She continues to hear the dream-voices—"'We are waiting,' they whispered, 'but come soon, soon'"—while also listening to her sister's fears that "the weeds would be getting the upper hand during our absence" (*CS* 319). When the imperative summons finally arrives, the two sides of her existence cooperate:

> Then I felt so weak and tired that I kissed her goodnight and went back to bed. Once I thought of calling to her, but it would only have kept her awake for the rest of the night. So I just lay still and waited. And then I heard the siren of the English night boat sounding, down by the Quai de Southampton. I knew then. (*CS* 319)

To involve her sister in her death would, for this well-bred Englishwoman, be putting her to too much trouble, so she slips quietly out alone, following the directive of habit and breeding in arriving punctually for the ferry. All seems perfectly familiar, from "The Algerian peddlers on the quayside" to the "silly Englishmen" "shouting 'Voici un pourboire,' and smiling in a lordly way" (*CS* 319). The last struggle comes when she finds the boat on open water and tries to cling once more to the physical reality of life: "I tried to think of other things—Sophie's lace collars, the roses we had grafted in June [. . .]. But the dark icy waves broke over my thoughts, drowning them; I was frightened. Frightened that I wouldn't get back before Sophie came into my bedroom in the morning" (*CS* 319–20). While the night connects her to her

habitual dreaming/waking nexus, the need to spare her sister still obtains. Emerging on the other side of night, however, she yields to a final and permanent division of self:

> There was no sound, except the ship's engines and the gulls' crying. All the waste of water. And no voice. Only weeping; and loneliness, far, far behind, in a bedroom, sea miles away; which I could not reach, nor desire to reach, having cast off the shroud of night, having been discovered by the dawn. (*CS* 320)

This is death with exceptions. Perfect silence, except engine noise and bird calls. No voice, but distant weeping. In death, Miss Brook has neither cast off her mundane life completely nor wholly reconciled her disparate concerns. Rather, the former has ceased to have meaning. Body, affections, and cares have been abandoned along with a remnant of perception that views the distant bedroom scene with perfect dispassion.

"Lance-Jack" employs a useful metaphor for the paradoxical attraction and repulsion of death, and the conflicting urges it inspires.

> In the middle of the city the Emperor had a great cemetery planned, in the shape of a circle, with a circular paved road running round it. At night, in the drizzle, I walk round and round the cemetery, along the circular road, and I do not know when to stop walking round and round the silent and eternal cemetery. I envy the dogs barking and frisking and sleeping among the graves, rooting up shinbones, gnawing contentedly and ignorant of all implications. (*CS* 66)

The cemetery represents the ineluctable truth at the heart of individual life, of cities, and of civilizations. The narrator feels a compulsion "to walk round and round" this "silent and eternal" fact, never escaping it but likewise never penetrating it. The dogs who make death such an integrated part of their lives give it no thought, lacking such distressing self-consciousness; they need not segregate death or build monuments to it. They seem, in canine fashion, to have realized Lawrence's goal:

> Either we can and will understand the other thing that we are, the flux of darkness and lively decomposition, and so become free and whole, or we fight shy of this half of ourselves, as man has always fought shy of it, and gone under the burden of secret shame and self-abhorence.[26]

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[26] Lawrence 676.

Lewis's fabular emperor would seem, in planning a cemetery at the heart of the city, to have paid the centrality of death its due. But its monuments to fame beyond death and its fixed circumference counteract this acknowledgment. Death has been given pride of place, but still it must know its place. Certainly Lewis's soldier, caught between attraction and resistance, labors with "the burden of secret shame and self-abhorence." In denying the other he has made of death, the endlessly walking soldier loses his sense of self as well. In these circumstances, as he complains, "There is nothing left of me save my indestructibility, a small hard thing in my head, a stone the size of my fist" (*CS* 67). The possibility of becoming "free and whole" appears remote.

2

Various approaches to wholeness do, nevertheless, enter Lewis's discourse. To return to Rilke, the older poet saw as his "paramount task" that of using "the deepest joys and splendours of life to strengthen our trust in Death, and again to make him, who was a never a stranger, more known and felt as the silent sharer in all life's processes."[27] Lewis echoes this vision of death as the silent double, "A dark relation that disturbs his joke / And will not be abandoned with a shrug" (*HHT* 28). As he confesses to Freda Aykroyd, "I *do* think of death a great deal, and I think life and human relationships have grown more and more precious and warm and urgent to me because of this thought at the back of everything."[28] On another, less optimistic, occasion he writes that "even the serious thought of life and people is melodramatic in so far as death prompts it and dramatizes life—that is, puts it on a stage and spotlights it."[29] In "Threnody for a Starry Night" we see "dark conflicting shadows lengthening out" from the search for "The vast immortal Love of Other" (*RD* 38). In these instances Lewis seems to

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[27] Rilke, letter to the Countess Stauffenberg, 23 January 1919, *Selected Letters* 285.

[28] Lewis, letter, qtd. in Freda Aykroyd, "Some Letters of Alun Lewis," *Modern Reading* 22 (1952): 25.

[29] Lewis, letter to Richard Mills, 17 October 1943, NLW Alun Lewis ms. ex 2161.

participate in Rilke's task of making death "more known and felt," but one cannot help but wonder whether his zeal for this task exceeds Rilke's directive. Rilke explains his position at greater length in another letter:

> *Death is the side of life that is turned away from, and unillumined by, us:* we must try to achieve the greatest possible consciousness of our being, which is at home in *both* these immeasurable realms and is nourished inexhaustibly by both. The true pattern of life extends through both domains, the blood with the greatest circuit runs through both: there is neither a This-side nor a That-side, but a single great unity in which the beings who transcend us, the angels, have their habitation.[30]

Perhaps Lewis, heavily influenced by Rilke, means to convey a sense of death as an inseparable side of life, and of the need to be "at home" in both realms, but what he actually achieves is something rather different. As we shall see, the "choice" put forward in hedging terms in "Dusty Hermitage" and more explicitly in "The Earth Is a Syllable" is not one in which one can embrace death and still live. Rather, in much of the poetry, death must be resisted *because* it is so strongly a part of the self and because it poses such an attractive alternative to self-awareness. Rejection or "banishment" of death is certainly not at issue in Lewis's writing; instead, he seems to posit a different kind of unity, one more in line with Freud's views on death and the instincts. This section concerns itself with the death drive, what Freud calls "the first instinct [. . .]: the instinct to return to the inanimate state."[31] In Lewis's writing this drive, or "drift," takes three primary forms: that toward an escape from self, that toward a lover-like figure, and that of the only remaining certainty in a world stripped of signification.

2.1

"Release me from the debased social body, O death, release me at last; let me be by myself, let me be myself."[32] So Lawrence writes, arguing that it is better to embrace death than to be

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[30] Rilke, letter to Witold von Hulewicz, 13 November 1925, *Selected Letters* 393. Italics in original.

[31] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 38.

[32] Lawrence 687, 683, 684.

caught between life and death in the "living death" of "abominable nullity." Lewis describes an internal "rhythm" of "Periods of spiritual death, periods of neutrality, periods of a sickening normality and insane indifference to the real implications of the present."[33] Such fluctuation gives rise to a desire for resolution in the form of crisis:

> I wanted to fuse finite and infinite, in action. I want to go East and East and East, *faire le tour*; there is a consummation somewhere. After it is over, then I can be particular and exact; meanwhile I learn to fire a revolver with either hand and try to suppress the natural apprehensions of the flesh at a thing so long delayed and postponed and promised and threatened.[34]

The "thing so long delayed" is ostensibly battle, but it is difficult not to read the language of this letter as expressing a longing to surrender the "particular and exact" through the fusion of "finite and infinite." The need for "consummation" wars with "the natural apprehensions of the flesh" and their self-preservative instincts, which Lewis expresses a conscious urge to suppress. Through this consummation comes an opportunity to let go of the burdensome weight of self and its responsibilities, to "let the world fall softly from my hand" (*HHT* 65).

The possibility of a "choice" between life and death arises in two stories. In "Dusty Hermitage," the terms of the choice are not stated thus, but the spectre of T. E. Lawrence's death on the day of its anniversary looms large. Conversation between the caretaker of his cottage and a visiting soldier establishes that Lawrence "never liked his own work. He said it was never *innocent.*" The soldier muses that Lawrence was "an artist who couldn't commit himself to his choice" of "pursuing the good" in that dimension. He brought no "vigour" to the decision and "couldn't make a positive choice" (*CS* 155). The Lawrence who emerges from this discussion is a figure who feels that his life work is always already tainted by his experience of life. Another key is provided by the vulgar couple who come to view the cottage and who assess his death in characteristic terms:

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[33] Lewis, letter to Robert Graves, 23 January 1944, qtd. in Graves, introduction, *HHT* 9–10.

[34] Ibid., 10.

> "What a marvellous face," the woman said, fanning herself. "Isn't it a *shame* he had to die like that. You'd think he'd have been more careful, wouldn't you? And he'd have been so useful to us in *this* war, too."
> "They say he didn't care," her husband replied. "He was cheezed off with things. He was a miserable sort of chap." (*CS* 155)

This exchange combines with the quoted letter in which Lawrence writes, "I find myself wishing all the time that my own curtain would fall. . . . There is something broken . . . my will, I think" (*CS* 157). The choice, for the story's "great man," became one not between competing life options but between an active pursuit of life and an insouciance to it that bordered on flirtation with death. Life, when not pursued with vigour, became a burden. The possibility of opting out which appears cryptically in "Shadows"—"He chooses best who does not choose / Time and all its lies" (*HHT* 51)—is considered also by the dying officer in "The Earth Is a Syllable":

> No. The terrible struggles had been quieter and less obvious than voyages and armoured regiments. They were just something inside you—simply whether to say Yes or No to a thing—to chastity or pity or love or drink with another man's wife. Maybe if you could avoid saying Yes or No to Life, and yet be free, you'd be stronger, better? Would you? How did the dust columns form? What did the Upanishads say? The Earth is a syllable. (*CS* 195)

Again, the state of transcending choice, of being free from conflicting impulses and the burden of decisive speech acts, suggests death itself. According to Jacqueline Banerjee, the "syllable" in question is that uttered by Brahma to bring together the disparate elements of creation. Banerjee argues, "it emerges from the Upanishads that we may remain detached both from the choice and its consequences, in which case we may after all 'yet be free'. And by our disinterestedness, we would be able to rise above the demands of the self and dedicate ourselves to the good of others ('be stronger, better')."[35] This is certainly a legitimate reading, and one usefully informed by texts Lewis had read. All the same, a tension between transcendence and prosaic materiality persists to the very end of the story, in which the officer "knew he was all right" as he feels himself travelling across the dark plain, but "The driver

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[35] J. Banerjee, "Seeking and Still Seeking: Alun Lewis in India," *Poetry Wales* 10.3 (1975): 112.

found him five yards away from the truck" (*CS* 196). The "demands of the self," in the case of the wounded officer, are highly circumscribed by the demands of the body. Perhaps the rejection of *Yes* or *No* in favor of *Bhuh* involves a different sort of freedom. Freud cites another Upanishad in which the unitary being divides itself into man and woman; he thereby connects sexual desire to the death drive through "*a need to restore an earlier state of things.*"[36] The joining of complementary elements into a complete whole (a complete hole?) thus takes on an aspect of cancellation.

Death is not always approached passively; the attraction to death can involve a very active desire. In the final section of "To Edward Thomas," the speaker claims an intimate knowledge of and identification with the older poet, telepathically "Divining" his buried concerns. Alluding to "the voice that called" the earlier poet toward "that hinted land," he describes what he perceives as Thomas's "weary / Circle of failure" and a "striving" and "groping" to perceive other voices. The poem invokes other concerns centering on the self—"This war and yours," "love that ailing in itself cried out" in impotence—that now produce the "shadows slouching round your buried head," an image suggesting smothering by life's frustrations as well as further divining on the part of the speaker. Thomas's depression has also undermined the *Heimliche*:

> And in the lonely house there was no ease
> For you, or Helen, or those small perplexed
> Children of yours who only wanted to please. (*RD* 23)

The "lonely house" offers no ease, no homeliness. The voice, instead, offers a resolution to the persistent feeling of division and doubling and of unreality:

> I knew the voice that called you
> Was soft and neutral as the sky
> Breathing on the grey horizon, stronger
> Than night's immediate grasp, the limbs of mercy
> Oblivious as the blood; and growing clearer,
> More urgent as all else dissolved away,
> —Projected books, half-thoughts, the children's birthdays,

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[36] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 58n1, 57.

> And wedding anniversaries as cold
> As dates in history—the dream
> Emerging from the fact that folds a dream,
> The endless rides of stormy-branchèd dark
> Whose fibres are a thread within the hand—
>
> Till suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land.

Everyday cares and persistent anxieties are "dissolved" as the "dream," the "thread within the hand," emerges from the existence of "fact." The dream exists already within the self, as constitutive as the blood, but it can be "possessed" only through death. Edward Thomas met his end at Arras; the speaker seems to envy his occupation of the "hinted land" and yearns himself for a "soft and neutral" end to the self-fragmentation that projects him into the mind of a dead man.

In other writing, water replaces or merges with the voice. In an oft-quoted letter, Lewis describes the act of experiencing the water: "I've swum in all the cold lakes, Ogwen, Idwal, Llanberis—that's when I'm nearest to complete *being* with the universe—for swimming is like a starry sky as well as the groins of rocks—naked swimming, that is, in naked water, green water, salt or simple."[37] This consummation and surrender of self achieves permanence in an untitled, unpublished story which documents the torments of a young English man working for the summer on the Welsh coast. Eric Davidson, scarred by failures in love and friendship, considers himself "Unclean" to the extent that he can hardly bear to think of himself—and yet his obsession with his sins becomes a sort of masochistic narcissism.[38] Like a reverse Narcissus, he loses himself only in the water: "Life seemed so simple, so true and clear and perfect, swimming thus. Doubt, uncertainty, the questions that ran through his mind, which he could never answer, disillusion, hope—all vanished. Instead was just this unity, where thought was dissolved in a beauty that was self sufficing."[39] That "unity" is characterized by the absence of his preoccupations, or indeed of himself. His self-

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[37] Lewis, letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 14 April 1941, NLW ms. 20798c, ff. 5–7.

[38] Cf. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 53–54.

[39] Lewis, "He leapt down from the rocks," ms., U Glam Alun Lewis collection, 2. Subsequently cited parenthetically.

loathing returns on land, however, as the sounds and sights of the natural world remind him of the burdens he cannot face. He meets a man of the "wise native" type digging culm on the beach; the man's literal connection to the soil stands in marked contrast to Eric's inability to find purchase in the ground beneath his feet. At last he abandons the attempt:

> He plunged into the sea and swam out. Out beyond the surf, out beyond the rocks, out into the mysterious dark waste, where the sea rolled uneasily, like a great animal turning in its lair. [. . .] Out and out, where only Vincent and Janet were with him. He wondered which of them would swim furthest with him. The cold of the sea crept into his legs, through his fingers, along his arms. Vincent had gone now. Janet was with him, black eyes smiling, white teeth smiling her curly hair soft on his cheek. He was glad Janet was still with him. Out . . . out . . . much too far out to reach the shore.
>
> At last he was alone, and he laughed, happily. He swam on a little further, shivering, laughing as he swallowed the sea water. His laugh broke off abruptly as he sank beneath the surface, and the sea turned over again, like an animal. (14–15)

The last sentence's unfortunate simile emphasizes the compulsion to return to an earlier, less self-conscious state. The act of swimming, "Out and out," gradually divests Eric of the presences that enable such unsatisfactory reflections upon himself. Alone in the elements, he can forget himself and laugh.

Finally, water and voice meld into a single desire in "Water Music" (*HHT* 49–50):

> Deep in the heart of the lake
> Where the last light is clinging
> A strange foreboding voice
> Is patiently singing.

The "heart of the lake" represents a liminal space on the verge of darkness, the threshold that waits "patiently" because all must cross it eventually. It dismisses the preoccupations that have defined selfhood:

> Do not fear to venture
> Where the last light trembles
> Because you were in love.
> Love never dissembles.
>
> Fear no more the boast, the bully,
> The lies, the vain labour.
> Make no show for death
> As for a rich neighbour.

What stays of the great religions?
An old priest, an old birth.
What stays of the great battles?
Dust on the earth.

Cold is the lake water
And dark as history.
Hurry not and fear not
This oldest mystery.

The voice bids the listener, "Do not fear," promising instead an end to self-conscious fears. It presents itself not as the antithesis of love, but as its natural and honest conclusion. By instructing the listener to "Make no show for death," it offers a close to the exhausting performance of selfhood. The "great religions" and the "great battles" are left desiccated, "Dust on the earth," as indistinguishable as the words declaimed in Forster's Marabar Caves. In the face of "This oldest mystery," all the events of human history become equally "dark" and indeterminate. Lewis writes elsewhere, a few months later, "Death is a great mystery, who can ignore him? But I don't *seek* him, oh no—only I would like to 'place' him. I think he is another instance of the contrary twist we always meet sooner or later in our fascinations."[40] Fascination meets place in the lake's heart, which waits with its promise, entrancing the listener with its hypnotic voice:

This strange voice singing,
This slow deep drag of the lake,
This yearning, yearning, this ending
Of the heart and its ache.

2.2

Lewis does not quite identify the singing voice from the lake as that of a woman, but the mythological overtones are ever-present. In other writing, he more explicitly connects the desire for death with that for a lover. Death in these instances is alluring, sensual. Freud anticipates this connection with the hypothesis that "living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite

[40] Lewis, letter, 26 May 1943, *Letters to My Wife* 354.

through the sexual instincts."[41] Or, in Bronfen's formulation on the death drive, "The subject's imaginary desire is most pronouncedly expressed in fantasies of wholeness and security gained by an appropriation of the beloved, modelled along the lines of the infant-mother dyad."[42] This yearning for wholeness, in other words, has its basis in the compulsion to repeat the earlier inanimate state. The desire for the other barely differentiates between love and death. Furthermore, "it is in vain that an old man yearns for the love of woman as he had it first from his mother; the third of the Fates alone, the silent Goddess of Death, will take him into her arms."[43] As in chapter 3 we considered the death-related aspects of the beloved in Lewis's work, here we identify the lover-like qualities of death.

"The Sentry," which begins with the declaration "I have begun to die," marks the first step in the path toward embracing death. Despite Roland Mathias's lament that "it has been facilely assumed that *Night* in this poem means *Death,*" a clue to their connection appears in his argument that the speaker must "face the night of meaning or meaningless alone." The beginning of death is the awareness that the self may find its "last / Cold shore" by surrendering meaning. When Lewis represents this nihilism as a tangible presence through the "youth and age" of the body, it is difficult not to draw parallels with death. Certainly he emphasizes the night's inevitability. Having renounced his other attachments, the speaker sits alone in his "black interim," knowing that finally "there is no escape / From Night":

> I have left
> The lovely bodies of the boy and girl
> Deep in each other's placid arms;
> And I have left
> The beautiful lanes of sleep
> That barefoot lovers follow to this last
> Cold shore of thought I guard. (*RD* 21)

Alone in the night, he resists "any dream / Nor breathless images of sleep" as "sleeplessly / I watch within Sleep's province." But soon, it is clear, he must fully transfer his identification

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[41] *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 58.

[42] Bronfen 52.

[43] Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" 301.

from "the lovely bodies of the boy and girl" and fall fully under the exotic and soporific influence of "the flower of fury, the folded poppy, / Night."

The influence of Edward Thomas's "Lights Out"[44] on "The Sentry" is readily perceptible, and illuminating. Thomas's speaker announces, "I have come to the borders of sleep," a line to which Lewis almost certainly pays homage. A crucial difference between the two poems draws attention to Lewis's preoccupation with the crisis of selfhood. While Thomas focuses on "The unfathomable deep / Forest where all must lose / Their way," Lewis includes at least one first-person pronoun in every sentence. The "implacable silence" Lewis's speaker hears does not yet call him, as in "Lights Out," to "hear and obey / That I may lose my way / And myself." In keeping with his hyper-awareness of self, Lewis's speaker invests death with sensual properties through his "breathless images" of "barefoot lovers"; as Richard Poole observes, "he seems to caress covetingly their outworn epithets."[45] Instead of declaring that "Here love ends," he seems to treat his rendezvous with the night as the displaced consummation of his desires.

"The Earth Is a Syllable" shows a man closer to embracing death. The dying officer recalls his service before Burma and reflects, "it was just nerves in India. Riding back to camp after the pictures in a trotting tonga with bells tinkling on the skinny mare's neck, it was so dark it was like riding to your death. Just nerves. Here he was quite peaceful" (*CS* 193). In India, he found the suggestion of death disturbing, the noisy bells undoubtedly contributing to his sense of vulnerability. Here, truly on the brink of death, he finds the darkness peaceful. The change seems explicable as the difference between being haunted by an isolating death and welcoming it as self-completion: while in India the darkness made him self-conscious, uncomfortably aware of his difference, in Burma it bears him company and seems a complementary extension of himself. Chapter 3 addressed at some length the officer's

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[44] Edward Thomas, "Lights Out," *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas,* ed. R. George Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 367.

[45] Poole 143.

imagining of his wife in the moments before his death. It is worth revisiting a passage at the end of the story to add another gloss: "Now he was left alone and whatever he had he was alone with it" (*CS* 195). That "whatever he had" can surely be read as his death, his dark double. Indeed the darkness begins "just this side of his feet," like a shadow. That double, as he lies alone, is suddenly transformed: "There was a translucent golden influence at the core of his being. He could see his wife. [. . .] There was only her left, besides himself" (*CS* 195). When he imagines himself entering the darkness, it is "with his wife alone" (*CS* 196). He identifies death with the presence for which he most longs, and greets it as a lover.

A different eventuality accompanies the fullest portrayal of siren-like death in "Burma Casualty" (*HHT* 58–61). Repeated comparisons between life and death, as perceived by the wounded soldier, suggest very little in favor of life. When the bullets hit him, "Great velour cloaks of darkness floated up. / But he refused, refused the encircling dark, / A lump of bitter gristle that refused." Death seems not only more comfortable but more sensuous than life. The darkness has "played the enchantress" and "offered to release / The Beast that breathed with pain and ran with pus / Among the jumping fibres of the flesh." Life occurs in the vernacular, in conversations less naturally suited to iambic pentameter than the stately language used to describe death:

> "Your leg must go. Okay?" the surgeon said
> "Take it" he said. "I hate the bloody thing."
> Yet he was terrified—not of the knives
> Nor loosing that green leg (he'd often wished
> He'd had a gun to shoot the damned thing off)
> But of the darkness that he knew would come
> And bid him enter its deep gates alone.

Something of the difference in register appears also as the soldier ponders the efficacy of "a rubber tube" against "all that darkness." Knives and guns and the loss of a limb exist within the realm of life, but he feels "terrified" by the prospect of facing the compelling darkness armed with only the prosaic.

This casualty employs the image of his wife to more affirmative effect than does the soldier of "The Earth Is a Syllable." While "lying still upon his back," helpless, before the surgery, he considers the accumulated light from the windows and the whitewashed walls:

> Here was the light, the promise hard and pure,
> His wife's sweet body and her wilful eyes.
> Her timeless love stooped down to raise him up.

Despite the poem's assurances that "he went alone," he possibly resists the siren pull of the darkness because he attaches life, also, to the presence of a woman. Nevertheless he acknowledges the temptation the darkness offers, and while affirming that "a man may walk / Into and through it, and return alive," he understands why "his friends all stayed there." His consideration of their respective fates leads to the final comparison:

> The dark is a beautiful singing sexless angel
> Her hands so soft you scarcely feel her touch
> Gentle, eternally gentle, round your heart.
> She flatters and unsexes every man.
>
> And Life is only a crude, pigheaded churl
> Frowsy and starving, daring to suffer alone.

Again the soldier, despite having laid claim to life, admits that death possesses the greater allure. Life is valued for its own sake by the "pigheaded," who concomitantly embrace ugliness, emptiness, and loneliness and "suffer" for their choice. This portrait of the darkness is, however, perhaps intentionally contradictory. As a "beautiful singing sexless angel" with a barely perceptible "gentle" touch, death embodies childlike innocence. But in these lines the soldier unambiguously identifies the dark as female, and, moreover, as an object of desire; the choice for wounded soldiers involves resisting that desire. Further, the suggestion that "She flatters and unsexes every man" implies that she is neither innocent nor "sexless." One might also recall the anatomical suggestiveness of the "deep gates" that she "bid him enter [. . .] alone." She is indeed something of a castrating figure as she undermines the defences of "every man" by flattery and subsequently "unsexes" him, leading him to abandon all else. But another side of his desire remains. One aspect of the dark at which the poem barely hints

concerns the darkness in the "lungs and heart" and the hands "eternally" placed "round your heart": namely, that this "angel" exists internally, "a potentiality inside oneself,"[46] not only the object but the product of desire. The contradictions in her portrait are those inherent in the self's own desire for death. These soldiers desire the pacifying love of the mother for the infant, the embrace of the lover, and the final gesture of Atropos. When the self manages to reject this siren, then, it is left more "alone" than ever.

2.3

A final crisis arrives when neither the sexual nor the self-preservation instincts can any longer offer a compelling reason to resist one's own death. We have seen Lewis's tormented young man swim out to sea, stripping away every possibility but the reality of death. A similar recognition occurs in "The Jungle" (*HHT* 67–71), in which "death paradoxically removes conflict and relieves alienation, taking man from the arms of the killer into its own sexless embrace."[47] Here, Lewis's soldiers gradually realize death to be the only certainty remaining to them.

"The Jungle" elucidates many constitutive aspects of self that have ceased to have meaning. The speaker admits to experiencing, in the world, "The slow poison of a meaning lost." The assurances of religion have failed, as seen in the simile "Autumn rotting like an unfrocked priest" and the memory of "The weekly bribe we paid the man in black." Similarly the formative memories of "anxiety and want," "The patient queues, headlines and slogans flung / Across a frightened continent," have receded into "the distant world." The poem considers "the humming cultures of the West" collectively, as though from a distance that makes their particularity immaterial, and reference to "the banal rectitude of states" underlines the speaker's political disillusionment. Painful memories of personal

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[46] John Davies, "The Poetry of Darkness: Alun Lewis's Indian Experience," *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 19.43 (1970): 180.

[47] Linda M. Shires, *British Poetry of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 99.

weakness—"The vagueness of the child, the lover's deep / And inarticulate bewilderment, / The willingness to please that made a wound"—appear as motives for self-renunciation. Finally one's own name and identity no longer resonate. Having seen his image "drowned," obscure, the speaker observes the forest monkeys and reflects, "We are like them anonymous, unknown." The contents of "our selves," which the soldiers must "quench," are catalogued in the first section,

> Where sleep exudes a sinister content
> As though all strength of mind and limb must pass
> And all fidelities and doubts dissolve,
> The weighted world a bubble in each head,
> The warm pacts of the flesh betrayed
> By the nonchalance of a laugh,
> The green indifference of this sleep.

The double inflection of "content" hints that the speaker welcomes the "nonchalance" that bids farewell to his preoccupations and replaces them with a "green indifference." Nothing else remains.

Lewis's use of colors in "The Jungle" helps to illustrate the progress of the "slow poison," particularly when considered in the context of his earlier poems. In "Port of Call: Brazil" (*HHT* 36), for example, the recently embarked soldiers also must face shifts in meaning that call into question who they think they are. Lewis repeatedly signals these shifts with color. While the soldiers "watch the heavy-odoured beast / Of darkness crouch along the water-front," they also observe that "The lights entice the paramours to hunt." Immediately the poem makes clear that light, despite its traditional associations, no longer necessarily indicates the absence of vice. The soldiers also find the oppositional significations of black and white undermined: "White sails on bamboo masts disturb the night, / The troopship turns and drags upon her stay, / The portholes cast a soft, subjective light." Whiteness disturbs darkness; anchors lose their virtue of security. In the "subjective light," the soldiers begin to lose confidence and become unmoored, feeling

the lights prick us with a grey distaste
As though we had some guilty thing to hide—
We, who thought the negroes were debased

This morning when they scrambled on the quay
For what we threw[.]

"Grey," the uncomfortable mixing of black and white, becomes code for the overthrow of imperial dichotomies. The "white-faced tourist" finds himself compelled to move "Beyond the European's measured hate" and to reconsider his relationship to other races and his assumed place in the cosmos. Also noteworthy is Lewis's use of blue in "The illusion of this blue mulatto sleep." Blueness here is soporific, content with illusions; where greyness blends oppositions, blueness is altogether indifferent to meaning. Lewis further shades darkness and light in "Shadows" (*HHT* 50–51), which posits that the old ideals "will survive / These grey malignant hours." Greyness poses a threat to "love and beauty," but the poem quickly abandons these ideals and suggests that the wise man in fact chooses grey "indifference" and becomes like the earth and moon, which "go voyaging / Through dark, through light."

Lewis brings these color significations to "The Jungle," whose opening lines suggest the end of all vibrancy and all voyaging:

In mole-blue indolence the sun
Plays idly on the stagnant pool
In whose grey bed black swollen leaf
Holds Autumn rotting like an unfrocked priest.

Even the crocodile, seeking sustenance, takes part in this decay as it "slides from the ochre sand" in pursuit of "the great translucent fish." The plural subjects[48] similarly slide away into "The green indifference of this sleep." Very few colors exist now with any vibrancy; "The dew-bright diamonds on a viper's back" provide one of two markers of "instinctive rightness" to those experiencing "the slow poison of a meaning lost." But the next section introduces "The black spot in the focus," a continuation of the metaphoric blackness that distanced the scorned Negroes in "Port of Call: Brazil"; it "grows and grows" to encompass even the most

[48] The poem's first person, like that of "Port of Call: Brazil," is expressed entirely as "we," as though the soldiers had collectively appointed an omniscient spokesperson.

cherished identifiers of self and to turn them to confusion until the focus is the heart of darkness, "The greater enmity within ourselves." The final section begins with the "ignorant and wise" gibberish of "Grey monkeys." Again, greyness undermines any larger ideals or attachments. Ignorance and wisdom co-exist, equally meaningless. The monkeys are "the denizens" here; the men, only "ghosts."

Such motion as takes place in "The Jungle" moves quietly away from life into ghostliness. The men find themselves "Avoiding what is human, near, / Skirting the villages, the paddy fields." Far from "paths" and "sidestreets," they speak from a "trackless wilderness." Some movement is instinctual: the men observe "the instinctive rightness of the poised / Pied kingfisher deep darting for a fish" and apply some of the same animal instincts to themselves:

> Some things we cleaned like knives in earth,
> Kept from the dew and rust of Time
> Instinctive truths and elemental love,
> Knowing the force that brings the teal and quail
> From Turkestan across the Himalayan snows
> To Kashmir and the South alone can guide
> That winging wildness home again.

Lewis has previously connected the life of soldiers to the instinctive life of birds, as in "Lines on a Tudor Mansion" in which soldiers declare their allegiance to a "Life" that is

> Teeming and musical
> Perfect and instant
> As the soft silk flash of the swifts
> Which do not care for the houses of the wealthy,
> But have instead their own instinctive life,
> The flight and rhythm of the blood. (*RD* 26)

That "flight and rhythm" appeals again to the soldiers of "The Jungle," but much more in isolation. The birds are more exotic, cultural touchstones far more remote. The "houses of the wealthy" are too irrelevant even to react against; rather, "The distant world is an obituary." The speaker seems to suggest that the life instincts could still act to counteract the men's present condition and guide them back to "home" and all it represents. But other instincts remain in movement, unimpeded by any act of will. "The tangled wrack of motives drifting

down / An oceanic tide of Wrong" echoes the drift toward a death at which, at the stagnant pool, they seem to have arrived. Here they come "To quench more than our thirst—our selves—" in a pool from which there seems to be no removal. Active motion, for the speaker, lies almost solely in the past: "Wandering and fortuitous the paths / We followed to this rendezvous today." The adjectives imply both the working of fate and an apparent avoidance of design. The accidental inevitability of the speaker's arrival at his "rendezvous" (with death?) recalls Freud's discussion of the living substance's being forced "to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death."[49] Freud explains "These circuitous paths to death" in terms of complementary instincts:

> Seen in this light [that of the death drive], the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.[50]

Read in this light, indeed, "the smooth deceitful stranger in the heart" and the self-preservation instincts admired but not emulated lead inevitably from the activity of involvement in the world to the ghastly stillness of its renunciation:

> Oh you who want us for ourselves,
> Whose love can start the snow-rush in the woods
> And melt the glacier in the dark coulisse,
> Forgive this strange inconstancy of soul,
> The face distorted in a jungle pool
> That drowns its image in a mort of leaves.

As Jacqueline Banerjee feels compelled to state in response to other readings of the poem, "There is nothing positive here."[51] The "strange inconstancy of soul" ultimately rejects the

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[49] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 38–39.

[50] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 39.

[51] J. Banerjee, "Alun Lewis: A Study," 228.

recognition and vital energy of love in favor of a death-driven narcissism. No longer recognizing its "distorted" face, the self destroys its own image.

Death is ever-present in Lewis's writing, whether it threatens to fragment the self or seems to offer an otherwise-elusive consummation. Both possibilities underline the fragility of the self, the laborious nature of identity. The final stanza of "The Jungle" seems to pose the central dilemma of Lewis's writing about death: will death sunder or unify?

> The bamboos creak like an uneasy house;
> The night is shrill with crickets, cold with space.
> And if the mute pads on the sand should lift
> Annihilating paws and strike us down
> Then would some unimportant death resound
> With the imprisoned music of the soul?
> And we become the world we could not change?
> Or does the will's long struggle end
> With the last kindness of a foe or friend?

Afterword

> In the end, we see the lonely courage,
> the mocked romantic rightness
> of his quest, no matter that his dream
> broke, or that too much pity
> could only scream for the revolver's solution.[1]

One possible function of a conclusion is to attempt to determine a writer's place relative to various established canons. The irony attaching to this task as it concerns Alun Lewis will not escape the attentive reader of Lewis's work. If Lewis establishes any single thought through his writing, it is the difficulty of knowing one's place. It is a dilemma reflected as much in his variable style as in his themes and contemplations. Indeed, James A. Davies cites as one of Lewis's primary weaknesses "his failure, at times, to reconcile disparate styles." He argues that Lewis "was never at ease in his community and his brief literary career mirrors his life in being a struggle to establish a personal voice, a coherent literary identity."[2] This struggle is hardly surprising in a writer espousing the Romantic while sharing in the personal and cultural identity crises of Modernism; nor should the tensions of Lewis's position as a middle-class, English-speaking Welshman of vaguely socialist impulses ever be forgotten. His ambivalent place within the British empire has come under scrutiny in recent years, particularly as regards "the tensions and conflicts that can result from a writer's so feeling partly British and partly Welsh that he can feel neither fully British nor fully Welsh."[3] Indeed, recent debate suggests that efforts to position Welsh writing in the context of empire allow for very little coherence.[4] Lewis's status as a war writer, a chronicler of "the rootless life of soldiers having

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[1] John Tripp, "A Quest for Light," *Collected Poems 1958–78* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1978) 121.

[2] James A. Davies, "Dylan Thomas and His Welsh Contemporaries," *Welsh Writing in English,* ed. M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2003) 158, 162.

[3] Thomas and Brown 71. See also Pikoulis, "Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire," and Tony Brown and M. Wynn Thomas, "Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire: Two Replies," *Welsh Writing in English* 8 (2003).

[4] Cf. Dai Smith, "Psycho-Colonialism," *New Welsh Review* 66 (Winter 2004): 22–29 and subsequent letters and articles.

no enemy,"[5] formed another facet of his literary identity and helped him to become part of a generation of Welsh writers published in the metropolis. Had he not been able to claim the role of soldier-poet it is possible that the London literary establishment would never have found it profitable to publish him. Whatever charges of anachronism it may be fair to level at his style, he was also a writer altogether of the moment, that moment comprising the Depression, the war, and the twilight of imperialism. A "coherent literary identity" at such a time is perhaps too much to ask of an honest man. As Christopher Meredith reflects, "Perhaps Lewis's failure, as I see it, to strike either an heroic or an anti-heroic pose is the best but subtlest warning we can hope for against the messy dead-ends humanity can slide into."[6]

Alun Lewis portrays a subjectivity that both finds and loses itself in relation to the other. It is not always certain whether the self or the other is more elusive, or whether the attributed intransigence of each does not in the end stem from their interdependence. This intransigence persists through the various encounters of life until its end. To meet death is finally to lose oneself in the other, though to desire it or experience "living Mr Death"[7] also involves a self-distancing or renunciation. No matter where Lewis's subjects go, they seek themselves in a retreating mirror image.

Nonetheless the self still seeks a consummation somewhere: in a community and a nation at once formative and foreign, home and *unheimlich*; in the reconciliation of self with the soldier that history has imposed upon his being, a role that both repels and attracts him; in the experience and embodiment of love, as the subject becomes a lover whose self-definition waxes and wanes with the beloved; in the looking-glass plains and reverberate hills of India, for whose people and landscape he struggles to find language; and in death, which poses the problem and solution of self-immolation. Through this final gesture, "The fragile universe of self" asserts at the last "its fine integrity" (*RD* 59).

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[5] Lewis, author's note, *The Last Inspection* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1942) 5.

[6] Meredith, "Dai Greatcoat": 65.

[7] Lewis, letter, 19 April 1942, *Letters to My Wife* 206.

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