

Satire Machines: Wyndham Lewis, Samuel Butler, and

Erewhon

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I have often impersonated Samuel Butler. He is distinctly one of my favourite rôles.

(SB 27)

Snooty Baronet (1932) takes a central role in Wyndham Lewis's argument against the collapse of the dualist division between mind and matter, a collapse which he sees as a symptom of the wrong kind of modernism. For Lewis such a collapse threatens both the individuality of the artist and the inviolability of the intellect, principles which he defended throughout his career. *Snooty Baronet* has long been considered a satire on the publishing industry and an extended critique of determinism and mechanization, yet scholarly analysis of these features has yet to connect it with the satire of Samuel Butler – *Erewhon* (1872), *Erewhon Revisited* (1901), *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), and the *Note-Books* (1912) – even though Lewis's grotesque narrator, Snooty, takes delight in impersonating him. This paper attempts to make sense of that impersonation.

Snooty Baronet is peopled by mechanical grotesques representative of hack publishers, society gossip novelists, and imitative pastiche writers of popular fiction. It connects Lewis's valorization of intellect and 'genius' to theories about the relation between human consciousness and the physical matter of the body which were under scrutiny during the period – theories which were under the influence of James, Bergson, and Freud. It tells the tale of 'Snooty', the automaton-like behaviourist narrator whose mechanistic ideas reflect his status as a machine for Lewis's satire. The novel relates Snooty to Lewis's tyro characters, those hollow puppets ruled by terrifying physical impulses, and is concerned with the relationship between materiality and consciousness. Lewis's views on the importance of 'willing consciousness' can be connected with the Platonic tradition, which considers consciousness to be a metaphysical, rather than taxonomic, distinction. Here the mind becomes a reflection of the incorporeal and

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eternal divine, whereas the body is linked to the material realm. Paul Edwards has argued that we should consider that in Lewis's *oeuvre* 'always, in some way or other, the work is about a physical-metaphysical borderland'.¹ Snooty's deterministic belief in the veracity of behaviourism, in Lewis's hands, denies agency to the intellect and destroys the possibility of individual artistic expression. This article adds to previous scholarship on *Snooty Baronet* by drawing out a significant strand across the novel which deals with Butler's idea that machines might evolve consciousness. In so doing I will discuss Lewis's satirical response to Butler and his reaction to the rationalizations of the First World War, and I will look at theories of behaviourism, Bergson's philosophy, and the 'mechanical' aspects of novelistic plot.

Butler was a painter, critic, and novelist. He also wrote for the press. He was a satirist and an outsider to contemporary society. In *Erewhon* Victorian society's religion, educational institutions, and capitalist values, as Butler imagines them, are satirized. He sets out to attack received opinions which were not grounded in first-hand knowledge by creating an Erewhonian university system based upon 'unreason', which is represented by the discipline of 'hypothetics'. One of the Erewhonians' hypotheticists has written a treatise called 'The Book of the Machines', which suggests that machines will evolve consciousness and become superior to humanity, taking over the world after protracted wars. The Erewhonians have thus banned machines for the past four hundred years to prevent this occurrence. Among the many ideologies that Butler sets out to attack is the Erewhonians' vitalism, which causes them to imprison and to punish the sick (for physical imperfection) while treating embezzlement and fraud as illnesses which are embarrassing but curable. The satire is double-edged. It points out the limitations of a system that effectively treats the least fortunate members of society as guilty of moral failings. Butler also satirizes a system which throws someone who steals into jail when a useful citizen may be made of him through therapy. Just like Mr Nosnibor's and Yram's names, everything in Erewhon is backwards.

In 1904 Lewis had written to his mother to request that Butler's *Seven Sonnets and a Psalm of Montreal* (1904) be sent to him in Paris (*L* 16). It was edited and given to him by his friend R. A. Streatfield, who was Butler's literary executor. This was the period of Lewis's own immersion in Parisian life as a protégé of Augustus John – Bergson was in the air, and questions about religion and consciousness haunted the boulevards. By 1927, in *Time and Western Man*, it was systems of thought influenced

by Bergson that Lewis was interested in refuting. By 1932, in *Snooty Baronet*, Butler is one of the objects of Lewis's satire, and the latter's critique hinges on statements made in the former's *Erewhon*. Lewis satirizes Butler as a mechanistic determinist by having his puppet Snooty 'impersonate' him. It is the accusation that 'matter' is constantly superseding 'mind' in modernity that links Bergson's, J. B. Watson's, and ultimately Butler's ideas together in Lewis's analyses.

The critique of Butler in *Snooty Baronet* may initially be surprising if we take Lewis as a mechanophile, a label frequently applied to him by such scholars as Hal Foster and Jessica Burstein.² These critics see Lewis's works from the Vorticist period, *The Caliph's Design* (1919), and *Snooty Baronet* as aligned with the technological utopias imagined by Futurism.³ Marinetti, unlike Lewis, was inspired by the voices of engines, by the fantastical speed of the motorcar and the aeroplane. As the differing opinions of Michael Levenson and Andrzej Gąsiorek demonstrate, Vorticism's (and Lewis's) account of mechanization and technologization were significantly more complex than many critical overviews have implied. Levenson notes the disdain for the technological that is exhibited by Vorticists, and the tension between Futurist and Impressionist influences around 1914. He argues that 'Futurism [...] became an important polemical adversary, and much of English modernist doctrine was defined in opposition to its principles'.⁴ It was rather more interested in 'the primacy of individual perception' than in machine aesthetics.⁵ Gąsiorek, however, opines that although 'Vorticism is figured as an English corrective to the Futurist idealization of modernity', it has a distinct relation to the technologized modern world: 'Lewis wasn't asking the artist to mirror technological reality but insisting that the avant-garde painter's perceptual apparatus had been decisively altered by an industrialized world and that this in fact necessarily led to a new conception of art'.⁶ Gąsiorek concludes, *contra* Levenson, that 'despite its desire to distance itself from Futurism, *BLAST* is pervaded by it'.⁷ It is from this perspective of scepticism about mechanization and its effects that Lewis approaches Butler's ideas about the evolution of machines, but it is the issue of technological consciousness which leads to his most strident attack upon Butler. This attack must be understood within the context of Lewis's ongoing critique of modernity.

Lewis's disastrous experiences in the First World War have often been related to the dulling of the Vorticist impetus after 1915. The rationalizations and mechanizations of the war are linked by some

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scholars to its brutality and to its effects on modernist artistic practice.⁸ In *Snooty Baronet* these brutal technological effects are reflected in the physical damage done to Snooty (a war veteran) and are visibly signified by his prosthetic leg and the metal plate in his head. More disturbingly, they are psychically signified by his mechanistic attitude. Snooty's 'impersonation' of Butler and his 'Butler laugh' hint at Lewis's double satirical sweep – as Lewis satirizes deterministic versions of consciousness through the automaton-like Snooty he also has his machine play Butler and, in doing so, makes a satire of the latter's notion of mechanical consciousness. Snooty as a 'conscious' machine demonstrates that human consciousness is impossible for the machine. He is obtuse and a 'bonehead'; quite literally 'it's [his] head that gives [him] trouble' (*SB* 134). Snooty is an embodiment of Edwards's argument that 'wherever, in Lewis's work, a failure of consciousness is depicted, we have satire'.⁹

Snooty's position as a rationalized individual is intimately connected to the post-War context of Lewis's thought. Snooty is an ex-soldier who was part of the war machine, who is *part* machine (his prosthetic leg). In this sense he embodies the coming together of machine and the flesh, and the intellectual climate of Europe that was decisively altered by the technological rationalizations of the War. Lewis treats contemporary modernity after the First World War as a dystopic society, reserving particular scorn for Bloomsbury and the publishing industry, those 'coteries' from which Lewis considered himself to be in permanent exile. It is from this point onwards that he tries to revivify the modernist project through the means of guerrilla warfare. The 'Enemy' positioning that Lewis adopts in the twenties is an example of this outsider relationship. The 'Enemy' moniker – alongside the frequent attempts at political intervention in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), *Paleface* (1929), the *Enemy* magazines (1927-1928), *Hitler* (1931), and *Men Without Art* (1934) – can be seen as attempts to intervene in the political field and to question the direction of modernist art, literature, culture, and politics. The central questions animating discussion in much of Lewis's work are about society, politics, art, and war, and might be helpfully summarized into two main strands: how do we 'fix' modernity and the arts (inspiring a revivification of the individualism of Vorticism before the War), and how do we stop the advance to a catastrophic endgame (a mechanized Second World War)? These are also, significantly, the questions that animate many utopian and dystopian

fictions. Such questions bring us to Lewis's engagement with utopian travelogues.

The critique of Victorian society that forms the premise of *Erewhon* chimed with Lewis's satirical critique of his Bloomsbury contemporaries in *The Apes of God* (1930). However, the deterministic bent of Butler's theory of consciousness is a threat to the notions of genius and intellect which Lewis prized. This inspires the satiric treatment of Butler in *Snooty Baronet*. In 1934 Lewis had listed Butler alongside Swift and Edward Lane – translator of *The Arabian Nights* (1840) – in a letter to Naomi Mitchison concerning what the young should read (L 216). *Erewhon*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *The Arabian Nights* are all satirical travel tales in the style of imagined journeys. *The Arabian Nights* is set in Persia and provides anthropological notes on Persian customs which are a source for parts of Snooty's travels around Persia. Peter Mudford has argued that in *Erewhon* Butler 'combines Utopianism with a satire upon the Erewhonians themselves which reflects human humbug and lack of logic'.¹⁰ Butler's accusation of 'unreason' criticizes the Erewhonians' willingness to ban machines without testing the principles upon which they ban them. Yet the ideas put forward in 'The Book of the Machines' represent Butler's own views about Darwinian evolution and aren't subject to critique themselves. The view of consciousness Butler outlines in *Erewhon's* 'The Book of the Machines' argues that machines will eventually become conscious and espouses a version of consciousness rather similar to Watson's behaviourism. It suggests an ultimately deterministic notion of the human mind that sees consciousness as a result of very sophisticated mechanical processes (no divine and magical genius here). *Snooty Baronet* enters into an intertextual dialogue with *Erewhon* about the form of the ideal society. Lewis's ideal of artistic meritocratic individualism (developed throughout his prodigious output) is contrasted with the determinism that Butler espouses in 'The Book of the Machines', and picks up the theoretical attacks made upon Bergsonian and Watsonian time philosophies in *Time and Western Man*. This is explored most fully in an episode of the novel in which Lewis's grotesque mechanical protagonist showcases his 'Samuel Butler laugh'. The connection can also be traced through some of the formal constructions of the novel which play with the paradigms of utopian fiction.

Patrick Parrinder's description of *Erewhon* as a 'satirical Utopia' chimes with Lewis's inclusion of Butler alongside Swift and Lane.

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Parrinder argues that the ‘visitor’ and the ‘tour guide’ are classic utopian tropes:

[t]he late-nineteenth century saw a remarkable last flowering of the dystopian romance, in which the narrative standpoint is external to dystopia and the plot is that of a travelogue or adventure tale. The protagonist visits a supposedly utopian society, falls in love there – these stories are both exotic and sexual romances – and, in most cases, narrowly escapes to tell the tale [...]. The nature of the utopian/dystopian society comes as a distinct shock to him; at first it is merely strange and eccentric, but the more his understanding develops, the more it seems threatening and horrifying. The inhabitants are happily unconscious of their own servitude [...].¹¹

Snooty Baronet clearly works with the traditional forms of utopian fiction which Parrinder outlines above. In *Erewhon* Higgs narrates the story of his journey into a strange land without knowing its language or its customs. He is jailed at one point for possessing a watch (a machine), and, imprisoned, he falls in love with his jailer’s daughter, Yram. Later he meets and marries Arowhena, casting aside Yram, and takes Arowhena back with him to the ‘real world’ when he escapes. In the case of *Snooty Baronet*, at one further remove, we as readers initially seem external to its dystopia; we function as travellers in a strange world – Snooty is our mechanistic guide, and the world is initially strange precisely because of his warped understanding of it. The plot is that of a travelogue / adventure tale, too, in which Snooty travels to Persia, where he falls in love with a prostitute named Lily and a Persian girl (also named Lily), shoots his publisher, and narrowly escapes to tell the tale. The choice of Persia only further emphasizes the links to travelogue satires, recalling Lane’s *Arabian Nights*. Snooty’s behaviourist observations, which are mistaken for a ‘novel’ by his readers (titled ‘People Behaving’), are a riff upon the theme of hack publishing. Snooty’s publisher Humph has specifically suggested that the adventure format will boost sales (this is why Snooty travels to Persia for an arranged kidnapping, which he will ‘observe’ and narrate.) At a metaphorical level this repetition of the elements of the travelogue is mechanical, and itself becomes part of a debate about mechanicity as the plot grinds itself out: *Snooty Baronet* is thus a satire on mechanistic artistic

practices which is itself a pastiche of narrative repetition and genre writing.

Snooty's prosthetic leg signifies his mechanical status. His increasingly warped perspective infects the novel; at times it is so inhumane, callous, and unfeeling that the reader appreciates the vast gap between Snooty's impaired version of subjectivity and a 'normal' worldview. The message is that the horrors of war, and a deterministic understanding of subjectivity, will lead to a society that is like a factory churning out Snootys – Butler's future in 'The Book of the Machines'. Lewis's vision of the future sees a society perched on the edge of war and in danger of succumbing to a repetition of the same state-sanctioned human mechanization. At one point, after a violent fight, Snooty explains that he doesn't 'feel'. His incapacity to feel and his behaviourism are directly linked to war:

I experienced practically no trace of [...] human sympathy [...]. The War accustomed me to death too much – that may be it. [...] I had seen too many bodies lying in that strange and rather irritating repose, mutilated but peaceful – the debris of attacks. Or I was too brutally indifferent *to myself*. [...] Of course I understood that [McPhail] was dangerously injured. But he was *the same* dangerously injured and lying at death's door perhaps, on his back (to all intents and purposes an absentee) as he was up and about, conscious and functioning. (SB 180)

Snooty's behaviourism renders him incapable of considering humans as anything but machines. Consciousness and interiority don't truly exist for the behaviourist, who believes that every human thought or impulse is merely a response to stimuli. In Lewis's novel, consciousness has become deterministic, and, to use Parrinder's formulation, the shock is, this time, it really is contemporary society that is the object of critique. Lewis has displaced the veiled utopian location and instead presented a world that we are expected to find disorienting and disconcerting, one which we are not initially expected to identify as our own. This is done through Snooty's first-person narration. The warped nature of his outlook is something of which Snooty is blissfully unconscious. While Lewis is here 'impersonating' the style of Butler's utopian travelogue, Snooty's character also 'impersonates' Butler's position on consciousness in his role as a self-confessed behaviourist. Sue Zemka

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has argued persuasively that *Erewhon* is a novel about precisely this kind of determinism:

In the aftermath of the Erewhonian critique of humanism, the credibility of Western cultural and ethical knowledge lies in partial waste. They begin to be supplanted in the novel by a thoroughgoing scientific materialism, a materialism that denies any qualitative difference between the biological mechanisms of living systems and the cognitive and cultural activities of human beings.¹²

This seems to be the aspect of Erewhonian determinism that Lewis detects, and which is satirized along with Watson's behaviourism and the other 'time philosophies' in *Snooty Baronet*.

In Butler's novel the Erewhonian elite are educated at the Colleges of Unreason (Oxbridge). Here they learn the art of 'hypothetics'. One of their most eminent philosophers is the author of a hypothetical treatise on the evolution of machines to consciousness, which results in their ascendancy over humanity. Butler's satire is directed at a system based not on experimentation and observation but on conjecture. After glimpsing the evolutionary potential of machines, the Erewhonians banned their use to forestall the ascendancy of mechanical over organic life. Butler outlines his own theories of mechanical evolution through the voice of the author of 'The Book of the Machines'. The 'Book' itself is not satirical and is based very closely on papers that Butler had written between 1862 and 1865 in support of Darwinian evolution.¹³ Butler's method is to combine these longer treatises from previous works using the satirical travelogue as a framework for them. This enables him to satirize the elements of Victorian thought he finds hypocritical, but it also provides a setting for the exposition of his own ideas on evolution. Butler's 'The Book of the Machines', and the texts from which it emerged, support the idea of the survival of the fittest, arguing that machines are able to reproduce through human intervention and the agency of other machines (a number of machines make parts, these are combined by a human or another machine, and thus create a new machine). Through this process machines not only keep humans at their beck and call, but they also refine themselves. Butler argues that this process results in the evolution of consciousness in machines. Darwin's theory of evolution demonstrates that humans evolved from lower life forms, which we

would not consider to be fully conscious (his example is the mollusc). He argues that even though machines do not currently seem to possess consciousness (in 1872) that does not mean that they will not evolve it in future.¹⁴

Butler's ideas relate precisely to the division between mind and matter which Lewis held so dear:

“If it be urged that the action of the potato is chemical and mechanical only, and that it is due to the chemical and mechanical effects of light and heat, the answer would seem to lie in an inquiry whether every sensation is not chemical and mechanical in its operation? Whether those things which we deem most purely spiritual are anything but disturbances of equilibrium in an infinite series of levers, beginning with those that are too small for microscopic detection, and going up to the human arm and the appliances which it makes use of? Whether there be not a molecular action of thought, whence a dynamical theory of the passions shall be deducible? Whether strictly speaking we should not ask what kind of levers a man is made of rather than what is his temperament?” (*Erewhon* 201)

Here Butler presents a version of mind as pure mechanism, as levers, pulleys, and chemical reactions which result in thought. In this account, consciousness is purely a result of physical and chemical reactions, and bears no relation to a sense of will or to a notion of human intelligence as transcendent or divine. These are ideas which Lewis held sacred, but which the religiously non-conformist Butler had no qualms about subverting. Butler also links mechanical ascendancy to war, which is seen as providing the environmental stimulus for mechanical evolution: ‘they [the machines] have preyed upon man’s grovelling preference for the material over his spiritual interests, and have betrayed him into supplying that element of struggle and warfare without which no race can advance’ (*Erewhon* 207).¹⁵

Those thinkers and theories Lewis believed were threats to the intellect included Henri Bergson’s theory of *durée*, Virginia Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness, Gertrude Stein’s ideas about time and composition, A. N. Whitehead’s use of Einstein’s theory of relativity, and J. B. Watson’s behaviourism. Lewis’s key objection to these approaches was that they effectively reduced the mind to a receptor that registered, rather than acted upon, the operations of the outside world:

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the intellect as recording apparatus rather than the artist as thinker-creator. In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) Lewis discusses posthumously published Butler's *Note-Books* (1912) in a chapter titled 'Samuel Butler's "Love," and the *Romance of Destruction* of the Man of Science'. He argues that:

Bergson has a lot of one side of Butler in him (perhaps he consumed a good deal of him at one time of his life): his *creative evolution*, like Nietzsche's *will to power* and glorification of carnage and the sentiment aroused by acts of destruction, is of course (like Butler) under the shadow of Darwin. (*ABR* 227)

Here Lewis relates Bergsonian 'flux' to Darwinian evolution, which Butler uses to justify the fluidity and flux of technological advance, as one machine is repeatedly replaced by another, 'better' model. Any position denying the agency of the individual mind or intellect was anathema to Lewis. He specifically attacks Watson in *Time and Western Man*, describing how his brand of behaviourism

substitutes the body for the 'mind.' There is not, for it, so much as a pin's point of the 'psychic' left anywhere in the field of observation [...]. The human personality is a 'reaction-mass': it is a very complex edifice of reflexes. An observer, at its periphery, noting the stimulus going into this 'mass,' can confidently await [...] the response. (*TWM* 325)

The view of consciousness exposed in the 'The Book of the Machines' echoes behaviourist theories in its description of humanity reduced to the level of a sophisticated machine:

A man is the resultant and exponent of all the forces that have been brought to bear upon him, whether before his birth or afterwards. [...] Some of these will counteract each other; but as he is by nature, and as he has been acted on, and is now acted on from without, so will he do, as certainly and regularly as though he were a machine. We do not generally admit this, because we do not know the whole nature of any one, nor the whole of the forces that act upon him. (*Erewhon* 215-16)

Snooty believes that he is a scientist, a behaviourist. He writes observations of behaviour which have been received as gossip novels by the reading public – hence his popularity. The descriptions of Watson’s behaviourist theory and Butler’s evolutionary ideas (as described above) directly correlate to Snooty’s notion of trying to ‘catch the soul on the hop’:

In all but purely mechanical things, of an external order (that is my strong suit) I am a profoundly dense person, I cannot help it. Mine is anything but a quick mind. – This may be why I am a *behaviourist* [*sic*]. If there is such a thing as a ‘soul,’ I at all events have never been able to catch it on the hop. (But I doubt it.) (SB 134)

As Edwards argues: ‘Snooty is a preposterous creation, a wonderful monster of egotism’.¹⁶ He is a mechanical monster with a mechanistic mindset to match – a warning against the loss of intellect, his mechanical status is deeply troubling. The similarity between Snooty, Humph (his hack publisher), and Samuel Butler, who are presented as tyros in the novel, is key to unlocking its satire on rationalization.

Both Snooty’s and Humph’s physiologies relate strongly to Lewis’s model of the tyro, which

is a new type of human animal like Harlequin or Punchinello – a new and sufficiently elastic form or “mould” into which one can translate the satirical observations that are ... awakened by one’s race ... The Tyro ... is raw and undeveloped; his vitality is immense, but purposeless, and hence sometimes malignant. His keynote, however, is vacuity; he is an animated, but artificial puppet, a “novice” to real life.¹⁷

Snooty’s self-description links him to Humph and to these tyro figures, who are characterized by their laughter and prominent teeth: ‘My life-long I have suffered on account of it. My teeth are so substantial, that is the fact, that the chin to go with them has to be of a solid make. But I am not in Humph’s class’ (SB 59). Lewis’s ‘Note on Tyros’ (1921) adds to the description:

These immense novices brandish their appetites in their faces, lay bare their teeth in a valedictory, inviting, or merely substantial

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laugh. A laugh, like a sneeze, exposes the nature of the individual with an unexpectedness that is perhaps a little unreal [...].

But most of them are, by the skill of the artist, seen basking [...] in the sunshine of their own abominable nature.

[...] The action of the Tyro is necessarily very restricted; about that of a puppet worked with deft fingers, with a screaming voice underneath. (*CWB* 354)

The tyro defends himself from the world via his armour-like teeth and his shocking laugh, but there is nothing inside, nothing conscious to protect. Snooty, who is Lewis's preposterous behaviourist automaton, is intended to debunk Watson's position on consciousness, but his physiological similarity to the tyro, and his 'impersonation' of Butler, are metaphors for the linkages between Butler's and Watson's claims that consciousness results from purely material causes.

The tyro theme's relation to Butler is most clearly articulated in the following scene between Val (Snooty's girlfriend, who is a gossip novel authoress) and Snooty. While dining with Val, Snooty indulges in a Samuel Butler fantasy:

I have often impersonated Samuel Butler. He is distinctly one of my favourite rôles. I can pick him up quite easily, though in physique we must be as different as chalk from cheese [...]. If you knew me you would be familiar with a particular smile which often visits, but does not belong upon, my face. That is my *Butler smile!* Old Val has remarked it over and over again. She has not the least suspicion of its origin, but she dislikes it extremely [...]. I often do Butler when I visit Val. I even have a Butler laugh. It goes with the smile. (*SB* 27-28)

The laugh and the smile clearly relate Butler to the tyros, as does Val's discomfort at this shocking impersonation. Bergson argued in *Laughter* (1913) that '[w]e laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing'.¹⁸ Lewis uses this in his theory of satire, arguing that:

Men are sometimes so palpably machines, their machination is so transparent, that they are *comic*, as we say. [...] [I]f one of us exposes too much his 'works,' and we start seeing him as a *thing*, then – in subconsciously referring this back to ourselves – we are

astonished and shocked, and we bark at him – we *laugh* - in order to relieve our emotion. (*MWA* 95)

However, the meaning of the ‘Butler smile’, placed upon the face of an unconscious machine like Snooty doesn’t make Val laugh; it makes her grimace. Seeing a machine pretending to be a mechanistic person evidently has the reverse effect – it creates not jollity but fear. The Butler laugh thus comes to represent the menacing threat of a machine dressed up as a person, and so palpably acting like a person that we might believe in its ‘subconscious’ and ultimately in its ability to laugh at seeing the human within each machine (just as Butler does).

It is interesting that Butler also uses the term ‘tyro’ in the chapter of *Erewhon* which describes the ‘Colleges of Unreason’. Here Higgs discovers that most of the students and lecturers display characteristics that may remind us of Lewis’s tyro characters:

After a few years atrophy of the opinions invariably supervened, and the sufferer became stone dead to everything except the more superficial aspects of those material objects with which he came most in contact. The expression on the faces of these people was repellent; they did not, however, seem particularly unhappy, for they none of them had the faintest idea that they were in reality more dead than alive. (*Erewhon* 195)

This description sounds rather like a description of Snooty, and it is tantalizing to think that Butler’s work just may have been one of the sources for Lewis’s notion of the tyro. Earlier in the same passage Higgs describes the Erewhonian method for argumentation, and Butler uses the word ‘tyro’ in doing so:

Even when, wriggle as they may, they find themselves pinned down to some expression of definite opinion, as often as not they will argue in support of what they perfectly well know to be untrue. [...] So well is this understood, that a man must be a mere tyro in the arts of Erewhonian polite society, unless he instinctively suspects a hidden “yea” in every “nay” that meets him. (*Erewhon* 194-95)

If Butler is indeed a source for Lewis’s tyros, then Lewis’s satire of Butler turns the accusation of unreason upon him in his depiction as a

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tyro with a repellent laugh who is more dead than alive, more machine than man. The accusation that Lewis makes seems to be that Butler, like Snooty, is arguing in support of something *Lewis* knows perfectly well to be untrue – the notion that consciousness can be reduced to mechanism. Snooty operates as a hidden ‘nay’ because his support of behaviourism is intended to disprove its validity as a theory of consciousness.

In 1925 Lewis completed a drawing titled *Dawn in Erenthon* (also known as *Hero’s Dream* and *Dream of Hamilca* [M 615]).¹⁹ Here he depicts the standing stones which Higgs, the narrator of *Erenthon*, encounters at the border of the country:

One was raging furiously, as in pain, and a great despair; [...] cruel and idiotic, but with the silliest simper that can be conceived – this one had fallen, and looked exquisitely ludicrous in his fall – the mouths of all were more or less open, and as I looked at them from behind, I saw that their heads had been hollowed. [...] The inhuman beings [...] had made their heads into a sort of organ-pipe, so that their mouths should catch the wind and sound with its blowing. (*Erenthon* 66-67)

These stones are ludicrous, and abominable, with open mouths and smirking smiles. They have hollow heads (empty like those of the tyro). Their open mouths turn air – nothingness – into the fearsome bellowing sound of the organ. These qualities are the characteristics of the tyro, of Snooty and of Humph. In *Dawn in Erenthon* the humanoid forms are stark; they appear grouped as an imposing mass against an emptied out snowscape, which echoes the scenery Higgs encounters in *Erenthon*. The visual language of the bottom ‘toppled figure’ links to the totemic abstract compositions of the twenties and early thirties, with their long rectilinear orientation and interest in interlinking patterns, emergent faces, and limbs (see *Figure Composition* [1921] [M 456], *Roman Actors* [1934] [M 846], and *Manhattan* also known as *New York Mystic* [1927] [M 637]). These drawings echo the totemic qualities of *The Cept* (1921 M 451) from the cover of the *Tyro*. Butler’s description of these stones in *Erenthon* as ‘fallen’ and as ‘six or seven times larger than life’ echoes this totemic nature, as well as the tyro-like status of the stones: they are fallen from full humanity and grotesquely magnified. Their wailing noises are frightening, but also empty of meaning; they laugh (or scream) at their own abominable nature. Their hollow-headedness, in

Butler's description, is a metaphor for the idiotic and abominable nature of the Erewhonians who constructed them. At one further remove, through Lewis's representation of Butler as a tyro, and Snooty as a behaviourist, they represent the hollow-headedness of behaviourist theories and those who believe in them.

Peter Mudford, the editor of the Penguin edition of *Erewhon*, argues that Butler's satirical technique is exasperating because we are forced to watch him 'outwit himself' as he attempts in his satire to reject all forms of received wisdom and as he ends up not only 'send[ing] up received attitudes by standing them on their heads, [but] then send[ing] them up standing on their heads too', all of which becomes incoherent to the reader (*Erewhon* 12). This satirical technique is modified in Snooty's impersonation of Butler's 'laugh', which we might interpret as a metaphor for the novel's satirical style. We should see the novel as standing behaviourist ideas on their heads when Snooty shoots Humph:

I cannot tell you upon what impulse I acted, but lifting my rifle I brought it down [...] and fired. [...] I saw Humph pitch forward upon his pony, he was hit. Then I fired a second shot, and you may believe me or not, but of all the shots I have ever fired [...] I don't believe that any shot ever gave me so much pleasure as that second one, at old Humph's shammy-leathered, gusseted stern, before he rolled off his pony and bit the dust. (The first was not great fun – it was almost automatic. I scarcely knew I was doing it. But I knew all about the second.) (*SB* 235)

Snooty Baronet undermines the truth of the doctrine of behaviourism because Snooty is ultimately unable to maintain the position that behaviourism can predict human actions. The satire is deadly. As a behaviourist, he should believe that all actions are reactions to impulses, yet he cannot tell us which impulse he reacted to in taking his first shot. But he apparently knows all about the second – another impossibility according to behaviourism. Moreover, Snooty proves that the theory of behaviourism is flawed, as he *writes* an introspective account that seeks to explain why he shot Humph. Behaviourist doctrine argues that all actions are the response to stimuli, but it denies a psychological notion of consciousness. We are not conscious, we simply react, and we cannot be aware of our own motivation. Consciousness for the behaviourist is the capacity to react, but not to introspect. Snooty should not be able to write the novel he has just written, but equally if he were really a

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behaviourist he would not be able to account introspectively for the second shot that he states he 'knew all about'. Snooty has to all extents and purposes managed to outwit himself here without even understanding why. His position – 'I am *conscious* of my actions. In a word, I am a Behaviorist' (SB 155) – is an impossibility according to behaviourism. Edwards summarizes: 'For behaviourism, a third-person account is necessarily superior to a first-person one; it regards the subjective dimension as akin to an optical illusion. Little reliable can be learnt about real motivation from a first-person account'.²⁰ This means that Val's account (which Snooty writes his book to reject) will always have more value than Snooty's own. According to Snooty: 'What Mrs Valerie Ritter says is that I never shot Humph at all, but have invented that [...]. The bandits got out of hand (according to her) and one of their bullets, by design or accident, laid Humph low' (SB 251).

Lewis's point is that we should not trust the behaviourist's account of behaviour or consciousness any more than we should Snooty. Machines cannot be conscious. However, the matter is not put to rest there, as, 'impersonating' Butler's satirical technique of standing conventions on their heads, Lewis has Snooty meet with a machine he believes is conscious in the chapter titled 'the Hatter's Automaton'. Lewis's grotesque 'unconscious' automaton of a narrator thinks he identifies the 'character' of the machine in the window from its actions (in true behaviourist style). As he watches the automaton Snooty is busy slowly removing and replacing his own hat (SB 137). Both are equally alive according to behaviourism, and both might become conscious according to Butler's 'The Book of the Machines'. These ideas open up the possibility that humans are nothing more than sophisticated machines, and that consciousness is not willing intellect but automatic response. Yet Snooty has chosen a very unsophisticated machine in which to perceive sparks of consciousness, the 'something obstruse and unfathomable' which might be a soul. In doing so, he has discovered that his theories render him a machine:

There was something abstruse and unfathomable in this automaton. [...] Was not perhaps this fellow who had come up beside me a puppet too? [...] I thought to myself [...] *certainly he is a puppet too!* Of course he was, but dogging that was the brother-thought, *but equally so am I!* (SB 135-6)

This lacuna in the text draws us back to Bergson's theory of laughter and to Lewis's reading of it. Snooty thinks he has found the humanity at the heart of the machine, the one machine which behaves like a person. But he has also undermined his own theories of behaviourism to such an extent that his moment of revelation appears ridiculous rather than transcendent. Snooty proves that he is thoroughly mechanized rather than that the automaton is a little human.

Lewis's response to Butler is clearly divided between a reaction to elements of determinism and mechanization in his work, and a respect for his work as a satirist. Lewis's ideas are always deeply entwined with their context in his writings and in relation to contemporary theories and events. By the time Lewis wrote *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) he had returned to Butler's *Erewhon*, but this time in order to take up its satire of vitalism and capitalism. His focus has shifted from an indictment of mechanization to an interest in America as a new type of state, which might serve as a model for a Europe divided, and endangered, by national wars. He argues: 'My remarks have had for their object the provision of a philosophic background for my running panegyric of that "rootless Elysium" of the American city: irresponsible, dirty, corrupt, a little crazy; a scene where the values obtaining are reminiscent of Butler's *Erewhon*, one of the most entertaining Utopias' (*ACM* 217). Lewis is now less concerned with how we ought to deal with the assault on the mind made by materialism, and more alarmed at accelerated nuclear war. He continues to question how the intellectual and the artist will survive, and find the time and space to be creative, in this new world order. He again returns to the issue of the 'intellectual' and Butler in a letter to David Kahma discussing the 'stultifying effect of money' on American art (*L* 497). But now the focus is upon Butler's *rentier* status, not upon his theories of mechanism. The reasons why Butler is interesting for Lewis may change between 1904 and 1948, but he retains his position as one of the many thinkers upon whom Lewis repeatedly drew in his attempts to make sense of the modern world.

Notes

¹ Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5.

² See Jessica Burstein, 'Waspish Segments: Lewis, Prosthesis, Fascism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 4. 2 (1997): 139-64, and Hal Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods',

Modernism/Modernity, 4. 2 (1997): 5-38, or *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). For a detailed discussion of these aspects of technophilic Futurism see Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003). For a detailed rebuttal of such criticism see Alan Munton, "Imputing Noxiousness": Aggression and Mutilation in Recent Lewis Criticism', *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, IV (1997): 5-20, 7.

³ See F. T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), in Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, trans. Robert Brain *et al* (1973) (London: Tate Publishing, 2009): 19-24.

⁴ Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Andrzej Gąsiorek, 'The "Little Magazine" as Weapon: *BLAST* (1914-1915)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines – Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland, 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 290-313, 299 and 303.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸ See, for example, Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 68-69; Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 199 and 438; Levenson, *Genealogy of Modernism*, chapter 8; and Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), chapters 3 and 5.

⁹ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 413.

¹⁰ 'Introduction', in Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (1872/1901), ed. Peter Mudford (London: Penguin, 1970), 10.

¹¹ Patrick Parrinder, 'Entering Dystopia, Entering Erewhon', *Critical Survey* 17. 1 (2005): 6-21, 17.

¹² Sue Zemka, 'Erewhon and the End of Utopian Humanism', *English Literary History*, 69. 2 (Summer, 2002): 439-72, 442.

¹³ 'Darwin Among the Machines' (1863) and 'The Mechanical Creation' (1865). The articles which Butler based these chapters upon were written in the 1860s for the New Zealand-based newspaper *The Press*. Butler later wrote against Darwinian notions in favour of Lamarck's earlier theories of creative evolution, inspiring the support of George Bernard Shaw who wrote a book of the same title.

¹⁴ Butler, *Erewhon*, 198-99. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *Erewhon*.

¹⁵ Butler had later critiqued Darwin in the 1880s (preferring a Lamarckian theory of creative evolution), but the parts of *Erewhon* which deal with 'The Book of the Machines' survive from the earlier texts of the 1860s which Butler had written in support of Darwin. Even the Lamarckian notion of creative evolution tends to place matter at the centre of the equation, as the

frequent use of a body part is seen to modify it and strengthen it (a giraffe's neck reaching for high leaves becomes extended due to use, and these characteristics are passed to its young.)

¹⁶ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 435.

¹⁷ Lewis, quoted in Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 229 – ellipses O'Keeffe's.

¹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudsley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1913), 57.

¹⁹ My thanks to Paul Edwards for bringing this drawing to my attention.

²⁰ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 436.