

DISTANCING AND DISTRESS IN BRITISH ART OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Alan Munton

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER, EXETER, UK
a.munton@exeter.ac.uk

I

In this discussion I shall argue that in the British war art of the First World War there is a tendency towards the production of images that distance the experience of wartime distress. There arises at the same time the question of how we should interpret the (presumed) states of mind of those represented as standing “at a distance”. Implicated with that, in turn, is the viewer’s relationship with the artwork: this requires a different understanding of distancing and relationship. I am not arguing that all the war art of the period is in some way distanced, or that it all rewards a “psychological” reading of some kind. Far from it: the best-known German art is an art not of distancing, but of fierce engagement. The work of Otto Dix (1891-1969) is a record of trauma at the battlefield. Dix’s *Wounded Man Fleeing: Battle of the Somme 1916*, recovers the wide-eyed anguish and gasping terror of a wartime moment that time cannot erase: it was published in 1924 as part of his series entitled *Der Krieg*, and retains its troubling forcefulness. The British artist Paul Nash (1889-1946) is primarily a landscape painter, and his sense of distanced horror and distress is expansive, not concentrated. When he shows figures at war, as in *Existence of 1917*, two British infantrymen sit awkwardly under cover in a trench, smoking cigarettes. There is human difficulty here, for one man looks both resentful and slightly absurd as well as endangered, and the other is only partly visible: we can see his cigarette, but not his head, which is obscured by a tarpaulin held down by junk. The title of Nash’s expansive “*We Are Making a New World*” (1918) is ironic – the sun rises over a wide and lumpy desolation structured by the strong verticals of destroyed trees – and the invented, or recycled, quotation is directed at those in authority whom Nash held responsible: his work,

he wrote, “will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls” (Nash, 1949: 211).

In Dix, by contrast, there is no irony, but instead a brutal directness. This survives in Dix’s landscapes, even when they are close to Nash’s in content and visual expansiveness: in his *Trenches* of 1917 there is a sense of disturbance in the unhappy jumble of trenches in the foreground, whilst a feeling of anger (no less) is generated by the strong reds in the distance that might be fire, or the rising or setting sun. A work such as Gino Severini’s *Train de blessés* [*Red Cross Train* or *Hospital Train*] of 1915 is in sharp contrast to this: a French railway scene – or the mashup of one – by the Italian Futurist is contrived from the playfully dispersed flags, the nurse-figure, newspapers and locomotive parts. There is no sense of trauma or even seriousness here, for Severini appears to be more interested in speed than he is in suffering.

A work by Dix that is undoubtedly a record of trauma is *The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py* (*Die Irrsinnige von Sainte-Marie-à-Py*: also from the 1924 *Der Krieg* series). The setting is a small French town in the Marne held by German forces from 1914 to 1918. A mother, kneeling and distracted, is so distressed that she is not even aware that her child is dead. That is one possible interpretation. It might be that the child is *not* dead: the girl could be asleep and smiling slightly. The mother grins horribly and her eyes stare into space, unfocused; her hair is both spiked upwards and yet so improbably long that it falls over her shoulder almost down to her waist. (Her visible shoe seems to have a slight high heel on it: this may be an indicator of class, that she is, or was, “respectable”.) The hair, eyes and grimace are recognised indicators of “madness”; but what is striking, and a distressing point of engagement for the observer, is that the woman holds her right nipple as though she intends to breastfeed the child. It now matters very much if the child is alive or not. The mother’s imminent action alters our sense of what her grimace may mean: if it is an indication of intention (rather than a sign of distraction), then that introduces a narrative trace into an image that is already uncertain or ambiguous. At this point we recognize that this image is not a collection of “indicators” of madness, but a story of shock, a brief narrative of trauma.

Finally, the drawings made of injured soldiers’ faces by Henry Tonks require mention. These were made in 1916 and 1917 at the Cambridge Military Hospital, Aldershot, where Tonks prepared “before” and “after” pastels of soldiers who were being treated by the groundbreaking methods of plastic surgery initiated by Harold Gillies. Tonks’s drawings are direct and diffi-

cult to look at, as they show the stabilized but terrible wounds suffered in the trenches, caused either by shrapnel or bullet wounds. Faces are cut away in unexpected and distressing ways, as Tonks himself wrote: “Another I have just finished, with an enormous hole in his cheek through which you can see the tongue working, rather reminds me of Philip IV, as the obstruction to the lymphatics has made the face very blobby” (Hone, 1937: 127). This extraordinary allusion to Velázquez’ portrait *Philip IV of Spain*, in London’s National Gallery, is a reminder that Tonks – who taught drawing at the Slade School of Fine Art from the 1890s until 1930 – was himself an artist who had trained as a surgeon, and that his surgical drawings-of-record for the hospital lay somewhere between art and surgery. The drawings are both involving for the spectator, and detached works that always show a restrained compassion.

II

“Trauma” may refer to both a physical event, and a mental one, each seriously damaging. The word may describe multiple serious physical injuries, which in London today, for example, are treated at four major trauma centres in large hospitals in the city. In a different use, trauma means the mental effects of a disruptive life event: it can be physical harm alone, but may range from the loss of a child or partner, to divorce, to loss of employment. Trauma becomes specific when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is diagnosed. An instance of mental trauma in Britain today would be the condition affecting soldiers who have been sent to Iraq or Afghanistan and suffered there. War has always been a primary cause of traumatic experiences, although during and after the First World War this explanation was often actively scorned, and at best not fully recognized. In an interesting, but contentious, development it has recently been suggested that non-participants living in countries at war could also suffer trauma: in *War Trauma and English Modernism*, Carl Krockel proposes that the non-combatant T.S. Eliot suffered not trauma itself but a version of it that is “anxiously anticipated” (Krockel, 2011: 45) in his writing during the First World War: this is not very persuasive (Worthen, 2014: 7), but there are nevertheless good reasons to accept that trauma can derive from extreme anxiety.

The theories of Freud would not now be considered useful for discussing – let alone treating – this and similar conditions; but for valid historical reasons Freud’s theories remain important for discussions of representations of trauma in the arts and humanities. We can develop this aspect by exploring

it as an area that Thomas Elsaesser describes as deriving from “the peculiar immaterial materiality of the traumatic event” (Elsaesser, 2013: 17). The words “immaterial materiality” define very well what we may mean when we invoke trauma in literature, in cinema or in art, as distinct from its clinical applications.

In the non-medical sense trauma is – or rather, becomes – repetition. In Freud’s conception, trauma is returned to, notably in dreams, as an attempt to deal with the damage caused by the originating event, which is likely to be significant, unexpected and distressing. My particular interest here is in traumatic experiences that do not damage the body, and which are represented in art as distanced; this draws towards a discussion of the question of distancing in war art, and the position of Wyndham Lewis’s *A Battery Shelled* of 1919 as a major event within that structure. Not all cultural practices are commensurate with each other as far as repetition is concerned, however. Repetition as it occurs in literature and cinema differs from how it takes place in art. What kind of representations do we have in each case, and how do they differ?

Not all trauma is a private experience. There is a public or historical trauma with its own materiality, one that requires an interpretation of historical events: it was the knowledge (or consciousness) of the destructiveness of the First World War, whether experienced directly or as loss, and whether narrated, inferred or suspected, that initiated public trauma; collective acts of interpretation gave it substance. In Germany it was that “immaterial” consideration, defeat, and the inference of public humiliation, that led to the destructive materiality of a consequent politics, a large part of which eventuated as Nazism. Within the trauma of the Second World War we may specify the Holocaust, which was “immaterial” as a concept (anti-Semitism), but all too material in its effects, and is still an overwhelming consideration for consciousness, memory, and post-traumatic meaning. The Katyn massacre of 1940, when Poland’s military and other élites were deliberately destroyed, was similarly a concept with a material and purposive outcome. Recent public traumatic events that we might point to include events in Kosovo in 1998-99, apartheid in South Africa, and the visual experience we have today of attempts by refugees and asylum-seekers to escape from northern Africa across the Mediterranean.

We can turn to Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) to identify the twentieth-century work of war art that responds to public trauma: it deals with intense distress by creating images which perform as interpretable alternatives to the unrepre-

resentable reality: such conceptual choices externalize and criticize what has occurred. The viewer, confronted by the bull and the horse, the distressed and dead human figures, the lightbulb and the flames, is persuaded to interpret, not to succumb. With the Freudian conception of trauma in mind, we might say that these works are alternative dreams, but they are dreams under control, so that they cannot again damage those who experience them. It may be more persuasive to describe *Guernica* as an oppositional work of art that performs as an *alternative* to the original traumatic experience. It will be memorable, it may be distressing in what it represents, but it does not, cannot, itself enter any damaging traumatic process of repetition. It may instead be said to intervene in the traumatic process in order to prevent its completion, or indeed to interfere with any desire for repetition: but as a work of art it necessarily does this at a distance from the event itself. The successful critical image introduces stasis into our *understanding* of the process of trauma. It halts repetition by intervening and imposing its own moment, its own specificity. It cannot (rather obviously) overcome the actual experience; but it can be the sign or image of resistance to our knowledge of it, as that knowledge has been diffused in and by the culture. It is the refusal of consequence that is important; the interruption of the repetition intrinsic to trauma is also a means to resist the actual experience itself, and beyond that to negate or resist any justification that a corrupt culture may offer in support of it. This is particularly the case with the Spanish Civil War, notably in the justifications offered at the time and later under Francoism. Picasso's *Guernica* is perhaps the most decisive example of a public oppositional image in recent art.

Nevertheless, there is a problem here, as between what visual art achieves and what other forms of representation may do. In literary fiction, there can always be repetition: the author can ensure that the narrative returns to the traumatic moment, or to an account of the trauma that it induced. An example within literary modernism would be Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), where Septimus Warren Smith suffers from repeated hallucinations as a result of his war experience. In cinema we can say that the narrative of a trauma, as in Holocaust fiction, is established by repetition: Thomas Elsaesser writes that "Trauma is what takes hold of the subject, rather than the other way round", so that, in the words of Cathy Caruth quoted by him, it is experienced "in its *repeated* [my emphasis] possession of the one who experiences it" (Elsaesser, 18). The problem, or difference, is that a work of visual art does not repeat, because it is one thing, one moment, one object. (Though a work of video

art can be said to repeat, as cinema does.) It cannot, therefore, enter into any artistic process that reproduces traumatic experience: the visual artwork initiates stasis.

I have asked a number of art critics if they can think of ways in which a painting or drawing might enter into a process of repetition, and the only viable possibility appears to be that of repeated *viewings*: we can then ask if these might be built into an experience of trauma. To look repeatedly at a work representing a traumatic experience, particularly if it was always in the room with the viewer, might cause it to “possess” (Elsaesser, 18) a subject; though this seems hardly likely. A picture remains the same, however many times you look at it: it might imply a story, or be read in different ways; but it cannot itself become a narrative.

I shall now slightly contradict what I’ve just said, by pointing to two instances of repetition in art arising from the First World War. The first example is the “dazzle ships” that were painted in dramatic abstract shapes that made the ships’ exact position in the water seem uncertain to any potential attacker looking into gunsights or through a submarine’s periscope. The marine artist Norman Wilkinson originated the idea and wrote that the purpose was to paint a ship “in such a way as to break up her form and thus confuse a submarine officer as to the course on which she [the boat] was heading” (Black, 2005: 29). The painter Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949), who was part of the Vorticist group in London immediately before the First World War, became a supervising dock officer in Liverpool, and during 1918 went on to oversee the “dazzle” painting of over 2000 ships. After the war, he produced his own images of this work, notably the 1919 painting *Dazzle Ships in Drydock at Liverpool* (Black, plate 80).

The “repetition” occurred in 2014, when a ship built in 1918 was repainted in dazzle style to mark the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. *HMS President* was launched in 1918, and painted as a dazzle ship at that time; for its reappearance it was repainted by the German artist Tobias Rehberger, and moored on the River Thames near the city of London (Howarth, 2014: 1). This is not, of course, a straightforward instance of repetition, but an example of copying-and-changing various originals that differed among themselves. The new dazzle design is itself a work of creative re-imagination that is unlikely to depend directly on any likely original: the forms are those of recent technology. This re-working of an earlier idea required considerable public funding, and is an instance of the state creating public art for a proj-

ect of which it approves. It brings to contemporary recognition a significant moment when radical design and war came together in an attempt to save lives and *matériel*.

I have said that trauma is the experience of repetition; but because artworks cannot repeat themselves they do not participate in the traumatic process, and may instead halt or resist it. They may be looked at repeatedly or repetitively, but that does not generate the experience of trauma. The dazzle ship recreated for 2014 is an instance of creative *copying*, not of repetition. To repeat by copying does not necessarily add meaning or significance. Copying is pleasing but trivial; repetition may be significant.

We can now return to the actual artworks of the First World War, and ask what their relationship to trauma may be, particularly when we argue that these works are not repetitions of a subjective experience, but representations of moments that may embody trauma. Most of the works I have mentioned so far (Dix, Nash, Tonks, Lewis) represent trauma or its aftermath: the faces and the heads that we have discussed show it most directly, and these embody the experience of the individual subject. Bodies are represented as living in conditions specific to war, such as camps or gun placements. Landscapes usually display the aftermath of destruction, and may lead to an understanding of the trauma experienced by a community, a society, a country: one where collective distress is predominant, with consequences for a society's self-definition and for its subsequent politics: I have already proposed that the humiliation involved in the defeat of Germany led to the consequent assertion of the "values", or needs, or self-definitions, that prompted the rise of Nazism. The art of Otto Dix is largely an art of the suffering subject. Paul Nash's landscape art is less intense but intends more: for it attempts the second of the possibilities I have just mentioned, the trauma of a country, in this case France.

III

We come now to Wyndham Lewis, whose art is that of a participant in war: he was a gunner with the Royal Garrison Artillery in France between late May and late October 1917, and took part in the Third Battle of Ypres, usually known as Passchendaele, and undoubtedly one of the worst battles of the war. He became an official war artist at the end of December 1917. He was appointed to both the Canadian War Memorials scheme (he was by origin Canadian), and to the British War Memorials Committee. The many drawings and small

paintings he made in 1917 and 1918 were exhibited in London as *Guns* in 1919, his first successful solo exhibition.

Officers and Signallers (1918)¹ was one of these works, and refers to Lewis's own experience: he worked as an observer, watching where shells fell and reporting back by telephone to improve the gunners' aim. In the autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering* Lewis describes a journey to an observation post or "O. Pip" as it was known: "Upon a duckboard track as we tramped forward, we came upon two Scottish privates; one was beheaded, and the leg of another lay near him, and this one's arm was gone as well. [...] But a moment later when a shell passed over us, to burst a fairish distance away, my party bowed itself, as it advanced, as if to avoid a blow" (Lewis, 1967 [1937]: 155). This experience is close to the drawing. Five men are making their way across an open space, there is an explosion beyond them, and they have moved away from the duckboards visible to the left. The two figures towards the back of the group are certainly disturbed by the shell – ducking "as if to avoid a blow" – and one of them looks back, his head tilted in open-mouthed alarm; the three at the front are scarcely troubled at all, for there is nothing to be done about an explosion – you are hit, or not. The significance of this drawing for my argument is that if we keep in mind (a little arbitrarily but not unreasonably) Lewis's account of the men's experience of the dead Scotsmen then it is a site of trauma in which the experience is divided between distancing and distress. The alarmed man's shock is well short of the massive distress of Dix's *Wounded Man Fleeing* (mentioned above), though it is part of the same range of feeling. The three figures who plod on can be coded as distanced from events within the work, whilst the five men as a group are together represented with a noticeable degree of detachment. Repetition is implied by the men's weariness. They will repeat this kind of journey (as Lewis himself did), and they will survive, or not. The spectator may infer that trauma will arise from the consequences of the event. The survivors will suffer later on.

In *Battery Position in a Wood*, another drawing from 1918, Lewis is again distancing the viewer: these are men at work, but the work is not insistent, as it is in *A Canadian Gun Pit*. At the left the mens' washing hangs on a line: a domestic touch that almost denies stress. One man carries a shovel and bucket, two smoke together, two others laze in a dugout entrance. Yet the trees are blasted

1 All war art by Lewis mentioned here can be found as excellent colour reproductions in Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Art and War* (1992).

away – there is no “wood” – and the landscape is rounded and hilly, rather as if the lumps of Nash’s “*We Are Making a New World*” had been dried out and diminished. In the distance two large guns take aim. Destruction is achieved or imminent, not actual. This moment of release can be read as an attempt to *resist* the brutality of war.^[2]

Lewis made two very large war paintings, *A Canadian Gun Pit* in 1918, and *A Battery Shelled* in 1919; each interprets his experience as a gunner. The former shows shells being prepared for battle, whilst the latter takes place in a lull, or interruption, in the fighting. The men visible in *A Canadian Gun Pit* are varied and variously human, yet there is an air of boredom: they have done this many times before, so that purposive activity is also a repetitive experience. One is arguably *inhuman*, as Paul Edwards has pointed out: the gunner inserting fuses into the rows of shells “is suggestive of a skull with metallic sinews” (Edwards 1992, 35); but the black Canadian handling a shell in the foreground is thoughtful, almost gentle. These men are all subject to the dangerous machine that they operate, and to its brutal requirements. This work shows the gunpit *before* firing begins: the gun is being “laid”, or aimed. We can see in the distance the destruction that has already occurred, and there will be more very soon. For the viewer this is not a moment of trauma, but rather of *contemplation*.

Finally, we come to Lewis’s greatest achievement in war art, *A Battery Shelled*. On the right, purposively extended across two-thirds of the canvas, is the event, which is the immediate aftermath of being fired upon. All these figures are significantly abstracted, and show continuity with pre-war art shaped by Picasso, Braque and a Futurism that has been frozen into near-stasis. At centre right a wounded man is being carried away, and this is being done gently, although that is at first difficult to see. Other men struggle in the channels of mud, whilst above “swags of leaden smoke hang in scalloped plumes across the sky” (Edwards, 2000: 212). At the centre-left three or four men may be doing something to a gun; and in the foreground, two men are watching, one perhaps exclaiming at what he sees. Shelling is going on all around, but none is going out: shells in rows wait by the guns, but there are no men to load them. The “scalloped plumes” in the sky derive from the stylized but

² It is worth remarking how strong a hold on our imaginations the images of destroyed trees in Paul Nash, Lewis and others have achieved as indicators for destruction in war more generally. In the film *Mr Holmes* (dir. Bill Condon, 2015), an ageing Sherlock Holmes visits a destroyed Hiroshima in 1947. The set shows surviving trees exactly resembling images from Nash’s paintings.

actively varied representation of the sea and sky in *Waves at Matsushima* by Ogata Kōrin (Japan, 1658-1716), which Lewis knew and described with sensitivity and drama as showing “the symmetrical gushing of water, in waves like huge vegetable insects” (Lewis, 1982 [1917]: 319). Three sets of rocks make knotty, complex islands, and the position of each is mimicked in Lewis’s painting, where significant events occur in dense areas at left, mid-left and right. What does this structure tell us?



A BATTERY SHELLED, WYNDHAM LEWIS, 1919

By permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

At the left of the picture, within a kind of panel, stands the antithesis to action. Here we encounter the most difficult puzzle to be found anywhere in Lewis’s visual work: the three spectators, all military men and gunners, respond differently and distinctively to what they see below them. One man looks at the event, his face lit by it; another regards his pipe; and the third looks away, out of the picture. Each is apparently detached from what is going on below them. These men are not officers, it must be emphasized; we are not observing the disdain, or detachment, of the more powerful. They are the first “island” of significance. What, then, is the relationship between the three men and what they observe?

There is a double detachment here: the three gunners are shown as being, themselves, detached from the action they observe; and Lewis's painterly style throughout is one of observation, not engagement: these austere forms demand to be thought about. The clouds derived from Kōrin gather above one of the pressure-points taken from his *Waves at Matsushima*: the gunners at mid-left are working to save a gun that has apparently been hit. The third pressure-point is at the right, and takes in the verticals of the shattered trees in the foreground, the rising smoke further back, and the weight of the body being carried away by soldiers under the command of an only-just-visible officer. No "authority" is present in this work, except the authority conferred by reference to already-existing works of art. One that must be mentioned is Piero della Francesca's *Allegory with the Flagellation* (1455-1460). Here, as is well known, the act against Christ takes place at a distance, in a reduced space (a kind of panel, perhaps) that is smaller than that occupied by the three figures at the front right whose enigmatic presence is so difficult to interpret. Whether it was intended by Lewis or not, these two works are unavoidably related. If we keep both Piero and Kōrin in mind as we look at the Lewis, *A Battery Shelled* becomes at once more complex: a representation of violence is brought into a relationship with two works whose power partly derives from their being understated, even enigmatic, in conception and execution. Once known, their presence makes a reading of this work by a viewer into an act that is essentially *contemplative*.

"Contemplation" applies particularly to the left-hand figure in Lewis's work, and the middle figure to the right in Piero's: each looks out of the picture, and each ignores their companions. Can we take this parallel any further? Every one of the many interpretations of Piero's *Allegory* is contested, but each establishes some significant meaning, whether we accept one, or none. In the Piero, calm prevails in the presence of violence, and Lewis repeats this structure: the observers of a violent act (flagellation or incoming shell fire) are themselves apparently unmoved. In both, we are entitled to interpret. Can we then say that *A Battery Shelled* goes beyond contemplation and into the area already defined by this discussion: that it is a representation of trauma?

Certainly the wide span at the right shows actions that may, or must, traumatize the participants. If mental suffering is the predictable, or indeed inevitable, outcome of such experience, then how does one represent it? Not, in Lewis's case, by showing figures in an actual state of distress, as Otto Dix or Henry Tonks did. Rather, the distress of the three watchers is internalized: its

outward appearance is contemplation, but what is contemplated is immediate suffering. The consequent mental disturbance of those who survive can be inferred. For the figure looking out of the picture, it is a question of “not looking”, of being unable to address what is so appalling. This painting should, then, be understood as a resistance to trauma, at the same time as it registers that. We may agree that these figures show the detachment necessary to mental survival under stress; as subjects, they resist trauma. But matters go further. As viewers we are ourselves necessarily detached from the work; in its turn, this painting does not encourage engagement: the relationship Lewis sets up neither seeks nor causes reactions of disgust, or fear, or concern, as occurs with Dix or Tonks. This work encourages contemplation *in us*. The question then is: can this have anything to do with trauma? (Lewis’s gunpit was twice hit directly when he was away from it, and many of his men died, to his intense distress.) So we may come to a somewhat complex conclusion. The three figures contemplate the event, the war event; none of them can tolerate it, and for them it is trauma. One figure turns away: he cannot look, but there is a sense that he understands. *What* he understands is trauma, or rather he understands that there is damage here that he must confront, whether it is straightforward destruction, or shellshock (as trauma would have been called at the time, if it was named at all), or wider damage to the culture of Europe.

It is often said of Lewis’s work that his war experience shaped much of his later writing, as well as his art, and particularly that between the two world wars. Vorticism, the art movement that Lewis developed with a number of others between 1913 and 1915, stood somewhere between representation and abstraction. For the later war art there is undoubtedly an “anxious relationship to Vorticism” (Wragg, 2005: 194). The war art differs as it moves towards forms of representation that are still mindful of abstraction. Paul Edwards’s proposal that “the *whole* [my emphasis] of Lewis’s career after the First World War is an attempt to accommodate somehow a trauma that was for him unassimilable” (Gąsiorek, Reeve-Tucker & Waddell, 2011: 227) is very persuasive, though it is unlikely to apply to everything that Lewis conceived across the years. Nevertheless, I want to develop that suggestion by reading *A Battery Shelled* as a work looking forward, mindful that it has often been read as a problematic break with Vorticism.

The major theoretical postwar move occurs in a dense and complex essay entitled “Physics of the Not-Self”, published first in 1925 and in revised form in 1932. Its central concept derives from Lewis’s reading in Buddhism. The

Not-Self refers to all that is not the observing intelligence: other people, the objects in the external world and the forces that animate them. But the Not-Self is also (and above all) a critical process of the mind; it is the capacity for internalization, contemplation and re-expression, which for Lewis is something that the artist particularly does: it can be conceived as a self within the self that is detached but critically active.

If we interpret *A Battery Shelled* with this in mind it becomes possible to put the two parts of it – the three observers at the left and the destruction on the right – into a powerful relationship. If the three gunners are understood as a *collective* representation of consciousness, as a merging of uncomprehending interest (the man lit by the action), indifference (the man with the pipe) and the inexpressible understanding of the man looking away, then in their varied responses they amount to a collective representation of trauma. In this structure the right-hand part of the work is what they contemplate, and that stands as a representation of all that is not the self. The painting turns out to be proleptic of the structure of Lewis's written work of the 1920s and 1930s, which was an alternation of modernist satirical fiction with non-fiction books analyzing the cultural crisis he had identified. In *A Battery Shelled* traumatized selves observe (or turn away, having observed) the not-self that demands interpretation.

Now we are in a position to ask the difficult questions: what is it that makes instruments of men? What is it that reduces them from a full and complex humanity to adjuncts of the machine? What is the impact of war upon lived subjectivity? From this position, Lewis's painting suggests that men should be able to choose not to suffer in such wars as this (or in any war). Out of that, a state of mind is envisaged in which people can grasp the actual forces that operate upon them: questions of power and ideology arise. From this knowledge a world might be created in which such absurdities and evils no longer occur, and the human subject be wholly restored. Though it may not appear so at first sight, this painting is an act of resistance. To simplify my argument: this work of "war art" represents the event of war that causes trauma in the three men looking on, and this trauma – also represented as forms of contemplation – must be recognized by us as a protest against war. It is perhaps utopian, as we know so much resistance to war can be; but in that case there develops a remarkable link between trauma, resistance and utopia.^[3] Rather unexpect-

3 "I do not want to discount the idea that Lewis's aesthetic ordering of his materials contains a Utopian moment" (Wragg, 2005: 194).

edly, trauma has potential value as an instigator of redemption. By distancing the distress and turning it into a representation of troubled contemplation, Lewis has achieved something remarkable: he has recognized trauma, and at the same time made a significant move towards overcoming it.

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