

Goat and Adding-Machine Rituals: Cultic Mockery in Modernism

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Mock mockers after that
 That would not lift a hand maybe
 To help good, wise or great
 To bar that foul storm out, for we
 Traffic in mockery.

W. B. Yeats, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'¹

What does it mean to mock others? Mockery directed against groups, belief systems, collective rituals and social groupings is formational to modern culture: we associate it with Nietzsche's subordination of belief to the power of irony and relativity; with Dada; with *Blast* and with Wyndham Lewis's *Tyros*.² Mockery implies a separation of the self from that which is mocked, and also a set of generalizations about that that other. 'Mock' is a word that W. B. Yeats quite often uses to describe a radical doubt applied to collectivities. In the fifth section of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', he writes 'Come let us mock at the great / That had such burdens on the mind', before moving on to mock the wise and the good. In a draft of the fourth stanza he had threatened to 'Mock poets after that' before producing the poem's final, self-referential apocalypse of mockery. Such mockery is hotter than irony, displaying an emotional and intellectual entanglement which can threaten when mockery, as in Yeats's poem, rebounds on the self. For that reason mockery, more than simple scepticism, raises the question of grounding: what can be built on mockery? And who can truly separate herself from others in the manner demanded of Nietzsche's Superman?

The problem of foundations is implicit in David Trotter's comments, in *The Making of the Reader*, on Eliot's concern with 'neurotic ritual' in *The Waste Land*, and Eliot's need to recreate ceremony as symptom. Trotter comments that for Eliot in 1922, at least, 'it was not a world devoid of ceremony, but a world of endlessly parodied ceremony'.³ There is an ambivalence here, since synthetic ceremonies are everywhere in the period of modernism, from the rituals of the Order of the Golden Dawn to the political arabesques of *The Triumph of the Will*. In Trotter's account, which in his early work

focussed on the question of the implied readership of modernist texts and later looked at the construction of authorial authority, one of the problems of the modern is that of creating a constituency and a context for innovative writing. In this essay, I want to explore texts which both evoke and mock group activity (or what for historical reasons I will call cultic activity); and which raise the question of what lies outside the circle of collective life.

Cult and Anti-cult in Modernism

One place we might start is John Henry Newman's novel *Loss and Gain* (1848), written soon after his conversion to Catholicism. In a dryly comic episode near the end his protagonist leaves Oxford for London. Reding's falling from Anglican orthodoxy has become public knowledge, and he is besieged by a sequence of sectarians: two Irvingites; an indecisive young woman (formerly Anglican, then New Connexion, and then a Plymouth Brother) who wishes him to lead a sect, doctrines up to him; a Jewish convert (formerly a deacon); a representative of the Truth Society; a fiery preacher who sells a Spiritual Elixir and denounces the cross as an idol; a Swedenborgian, and finally a friend of his father who warns him that Catholic priests are swindlers. The point of this gentle mockery is to display the baroque individualism and eccentricity of Protestant sects in contrast to the modesty and collectivity of the Catholic church which he visits soon after, in which 'the whole congregation was as though one vast instrument or Panharmonicon, moving all together, and, what was most remarkable, as if self-moved'.⁴ There is, too, the 'Great Presence' of the Blessed Sacrament, before which he falls to the floor. The true sceptic cuts through sectarianism – the self-indulgent collective – to a bedrock of presence which grounds a shared ritual. Modernity itself is problematic, manifested as it is in the intensely-marketed innovations of the sects.

As Newman's novel suggests, Protestantism gives rise to factionalism, to a variety of religious movements with origins as far back as the sixteenth-century, whether mainstream like the Lutherans or obscure like, say, the Hutterites. The great age of the religious cult is the nineteenth century, which sees both a new evangelism, from the parades of the Salvation Army to the Peculiar People of Essex, one of many Methodist offshoots, and a variety of newer and more syncretic spiritual and bodily reform movements. Christian Science, with Mrs Eddy its charismatic and controlling founder, became the most insurgent sect in America and attracted the sceptical and often jealous attention of Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Sigmund Freud, and (in a satirical story by Louis Golding) even God himself.⁵ The influence of Theosophy and related movements like that of Gurdjieff on modernism is well documented.⁶ As the new century dawned, there was a huge variety of smaller movements dedicated to reformed living, whether religious, spiritual, or focussed on health and well-being. One of the largest groupings, with its origins in the efforts of the American Phineas Quimby (who also influenced Eddy), was New Thought – including one of my personal favourites, the Radiant Living movement founded by the British doctor Herbert Sutcliffe, first in the USA, then the

UK, Canada and Australia, before finding a home in New Zealand in the 1930s.⁷ Edmund Hillary was a Radiant Living youth worker, learning to aspire to higher things, and Radiant Hall in Christchurch was one of the key sites of the vibrant culture that Peter Simpson labels 'Bloomsbury South'.⁸

It goes without saying that many of these movements were to some extent cultic, driven by charismatic leaders, enforced doctrines and 'shunning' of apostates. And indeed, modernist movements in the tradition from Futurism to Surrealism and even later inherit the energies of the religious and social avant-garde, and often themselves have cultic overtones: in their opposition to mainstream culture and rejection of tradition; in their insider/outsider dynamics, expulsions and splits; in their enthusiasm for charismatic leaders; in their guarding of occult truths. The secret 'Doctrine of the Image' is one example: it was offered up by Flint (or rather Pound writing as Flint) as part of the Imagist programme, but was not 'committed to writing' and 'did not concern' the public – though its partially-occult contents are in fact visible in the 'ghosts patched with histories' of the three ur-Cantos.⁹

Modernism as a cult? The term is often deployed by detractors of modernist movements; from within, it is a matter of community and shared aims. (Interestingly, *Google ngram* indicates a spike in the use of the word 'cult' after 1930, perhaps related to the increasing analytic use of the term in anthropology and the post-Weberian sociology of Howard Becker.)¹⁰ The grouping centred on Laura Riding, for example, is often defined (albeit with tinges of misogyny) in these terms. Her friend Len Lye later commented 'If I hadn't come across such a person I would have wondered what all those bloody Californian movements were about. They're all about somebody like Laura . . . Dictating health and happiness . . . and hypnotising everyone'.¹¹ Riding herself wrote an essay on 'The Cult of Failure', as well as being the inspiration of the cult-analysis of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*.¹² Or to take another example, when the authors of the Ern Malley hoax in Australia accounted for their aims, they characterized modernism in terms of Fascist political cults – without, it must be said, much expansion of the comparison:

Such a literary movement is the one we aimed at debunking – it began with the *Dadaist* movement in France during the last war, which gave birth to the *Surrealist* movement, which was followed in England by the *New Apocalypse* school, whose Australian counterparts are the *Angry Penguins* – this cultism resembles, on a small scale, the progress of certain European political parties.¹³

From the conservative James McAuley and Harold Stewart, this seems a gloss on Yeats: 'the worst / Are full of passionate intensity'.

As these examples suggest, an anti-cultic energy can inform later forms of modernism, with the accusation of cult-formation a byword for the stultification, mystification, or

inwardness of earlier movements, or for the compromised status of their leaders and aesthetic totems. In what follows, I will examine a number of texts which make use of cultic mockery before reflecting on some of the paradoxes of cult and anti-cult.

As my evocation of Quimby suggests, America – and especially California, in the eyes of many observers – was always particularly susceptible to cult-life. The term ‘goat and adding machine ritual’ in my title comes from Nathanael West’s 1933 novella *Miss Lonelyhearts*, with its hysterical take on the (male) newspaper agony aunt. In a section of the novella peppered with allusions to *The Waste Land*, Shrike, the Mephistopheles of the editorial room, unfolds a clipping about an execution – quite bizzarely, this is an actual Associated Press article:

DENVER, COLO., Feb. 2 (A.P.) Frank H. Rice, Supreme Pontiff of the Liberal Church of America has announced he will carry out his plan for a ‘goat and adding machine’ ritual for William Moya, condemned slayer, despite objection to his program by a Cardinal of the sect ... Prayers for the condemned man’s soul will be offered on an adding machine. Numbers, he explained, constitute the only universal language.¹⁴

Shrike’s deadpan comment is ‘America has her own religions’.¹⁵ He oversees Miss Lonelyhearts’ work as secular prophet; as the constructed site of a mass cult in which personal lives are expressed in the public sphere – Shrike later labels him ‘a still more swollen Mussolini of the soul’ (133). Implicit in the satire of the passage is the fact that, as West is no doubt aware, Tragedy is in terms of its etymology ‘goat-song’, perhaps because a sacrificial goat, *tragos*, was the prize for the Athens play-competition, or because of the goat’s association with Dionysus via the figure of the satyr.¹⁶

What is the quality of mockery in West’s text and in others in which cult-life is alluded to? The figure of the ‘Goat and adding machine ritual’ was used by George Trow in his essay ‘Collapsing Dominant’, the 1997 foreword to the reissue of his fairly dyspeptic Jeremiad *Within the Context of No Context* (1981), describing the new television culture.¹⁷ Trow’s lively if somewhat patrician essay describes a version of what Norbert Elias had referred to as the birth of kitsch after the decline of court style at the end of the eighteenth-century; a loss of agreed social and aesthetic standards, and a resulting fall into the grotesque and localized.¹⁸ But there is more to it than that. The combination of rationality and the absurd in the ‘goat and adding machine’ figure exemplifies Adorno’s comments on modern belief systems like astrology. In a world that seems to be more of a ‘system’ than ever before, Adorno writes, believers

suspect that this closed and systematic organization of society does not really serve their wants and needs, but has a fetishistic, self-perpetuating ‘irrational’ quality, strangely alienated from the life that is thus being structured. Thus people even of supposedly ‘normal’ mind are prepared to accept systems of delusion for

the simple reason that it is too difficult to distinguish such systems from the equally inexorable and equally opaque one under which they actually have to live out their lives.¹⁹

This is to identify the cult in culture as a displaced form of its overall logic; both a recognition and misrecognition of system. In Adorno's dialectic of enchantment, the goat is happy animality, but also sexual voraciousness (with a glance at the American quack endocrine doctor 'Goat-gland' Brinkley); the adding machine is instrumental rationality but also paranoia and a fetishized control, as in Elmer Rice's 1923 play *The Adding Machine*. One might say that West's borrowed ritual aims to emblemize American culture with some precision.

But for all that this mockery characterizes the surface mess that is the novella, West's male agony aunt's combination of cliché and heartfelt nostrum itself has the flavour of cultic discourse (moderated by Shrike, with an eye to circulation numbers). This reflects the failure – typical in West's work – of art and morality to detach itself from the kitsch materials of mass culture. In the section entitled 'Miss Lonelyhearts Returns' he sees that 'Crowds of people moved through the street with a dream-like violence' (115), but all that the sight of them can do is prompt him to 'generalize' (that is, preach) impotently on the 'Christ-dream' in evidently clichéd terms. We move towards the neurosis and violence which West saw as fundamental to American life.²⁰ For West violence is generated as part of the process by which a collectivity is constituted. If we take the most influential account of the religious cult in modernism to be *The Golden Bough*, it is worth remembering that Fraser's book begins and ends, ten volumes later, with the Cult of Diana at Nemi, near Rome, and with the priest-king who must be killed by his successor, using as weapon a bough from the sacred tree – with an original act of cultic violence and renewal.²¹ Miss Lonelyhearts has been messing around with a reader, Mrs Doyle; the novel ends with him rolling down the stairs with the scorned and crippled Mr Doyle and his discharging gun. West's text thus ends with the possible sacrifice of its would-be cult leader; with violence and falling bodies; but also with a comic and potentially fatal collapse of distance.

We can consider a related American moment. In Bryher's semi-autobiographical novel *West* (1925), Nancy (a version of Bryher) and the American-born Helga (a version of H.D.) are escaping a Europe that still 'reeks of war'. Visiting California and staying among over-clubbable Americans at Carmel, they watch, with some wonderment, the crowds watching movies being filmed on the shore.²² Throughout the novel Nancy's sharply satirical view of America is contrasted with Helga's tendency to silence. At the point where they descend to breakfast at their resort, they encounter an American collectivity in the form of advertisements on packets on every table: 'To Keep Regular Eat Kellogg's Krumbled Korn'. J. H. Kellogg's digestive empire had its own philosophy and its own resort at Battle Creek, Michigan, with links to Bernarr Mcfadden and other

health reformers, and to the Seventh Day Adventist church.²³ If Nancy objects to in-your-face constipation cures at breakfast; Helga objects to the topic altogether:

‘Do you not think this advertisement of a common misfortune a little unseemly?’ Nancy suggested, pointing to the nearest packet. ‘Especially as Anne writes that they have had the *Little Review* up again for printing another chapter of *Ulysses*? ‘Oh, Nancy, must you always comment on the national customs. And at breakfast too.’

‘It suggests so much the model nursery ... But can’t people look after themselves quietly and decently as a matter of course. Why the advertisements? And in such large letters?’ (93)

Advertising becomes a commercially constructed form of cult-life like that even more sharply delineated in the films. Nancy goes on to suggest some ‘amusing’ (and presumably obscene) epigrams from the Greek anthology might be frescoed around the dining hall ‘as a challenge to the Krumbled Korn’. But Helga’s eventual reply to this banter, which aligns Modernism with a healthy crowd-taunting, is this:

‘To you this is just an amusing joke. But suppose you had been brought up amongst these people. Without the Anthology. Without Joyce. Without any of the current English jokes. It would seem merely indecent. You would want to shut your eyes or go away – anything to get out of the sight of it.’ (94-95).

This is to say that to be a mocking outsider is easier from the secure standpoint of another group; to fall away from a collective from within as a kind of apostate is the more radical action, with silence and darkness possible outcomes – though in Bryher’s idealized version of H.D., this is a kind of balanced detachment.

West depicts a double falling-away. Nancy abandons the ‘immense waste unconscious of one’s thoughts’ which is America and returns to Europe’s more rooted life (136-37). But her journey across the continent in a train, described near the end, teaches her to see Europe more sharply, and as she observes young Americans, she sees a modernity which involves heightening of tension between young and old, innovation and tradition. There is no longer a collective life free of such perspectivism. There is also, implicitly, a heightened awareness of the personal difficulty of Helga’s exile. A discussion between Nancy and the American Magnus late in the novel, in Greenwich Village just prior to the women’s return to Europe, suggests that America is the place of disentanglement: “‘Civilization has become too oppressive,’ Magnus said, pushing his chair back. “‘All one can do is try to prevent it stifling one too much. One must leave everyone to their own personal tangles.’” Nancy replies: “‘But there are environments out of which it is impossible to break alone. Though that applies more to England....’” (186). Californian mockery, at this point, has been replaced by admiration for the American self-reliance

incarnated in Magnus and Anne Trollope (the latter a version of Marianne Moore), for the ability to live apart from others.

We can return, with Bryher, to the UK. My third, admittedly even more minor-key cultic moment is from Huxley's country-house comedy and parody of the Garsington circle, *Crome Yellow* (1921). Here is Mrs Wimbush, the lady of the house:

'I have the Stars . . .' She picked up the sheet of paper that was lying on the blotting-pad. 'Inman's horoscope,' she explained. '(I thought I'd like to have a little fling on the billiards championship this autumn.) I have the Infinite to keep in tune with,' she waved her hand. 'And then there's the next world and all the spirits, and one's Aura, and Mrs. Eddy and saying you're not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs. Besant. It's all splendid. One's never dull for a moment.'²⁴

This is akin to what Weber called the 'routinization of charisma', the flaccid language of the newspaper assimilating the sacred texts of Christian Science and Theosophy.²⁵ Like 'The Waste Land', *Crome Hall* does all the cults at once, from horoscopes and free love to Lawrentian vitalism. The empty nostrums and automatic writing of the secular prophet Mr Barbecue-Smith, whom Mrs Wimbush has invited to *Crome*, represent the Subconscious Taylorized in a manner akin to Kellogg's alimentary efficiency. As he tells Denis: 'I canalise it. I bring it down through pipes to work the turbines of my conscious mind.' (34) 'You understand me now when I advise you to cultivate your Inspiration. Let your Subconscious work for you; turn on the Niagara of the Infinite' (35). Denis is right to be concerned at the outcome – dicta like 'The Mountain Road may be steep, but the air is pure up there, and it is from the Summit that one gets the view' – but cliché is something like the point, a mode of discourse which locates meaning in collective voice. Even modernism is sucked into this semantic vacuum, as the relentlessly on-trend Mary witlessly attacks the artist Gombauld (a version of Mark Gertler) for his lapse from abstraction into the figurative.

Crome Yellow is a novel in which nothing significant happens, in which the individual subsists within the mechanical comings and goings of a slack collective. The novel has no real equivalent to West's climactic collapse, but nevertheless as Denis leaves the house at the end of the novel, disappointed at his impact there, the barometer drops in bathetic sympathy:

Mechanically he tapped the barometer that hung in the porch; the needle stirred perceptibly to the left. A sudden smile lighted up his lugubrious face.

'It sinks, and I am ready to depart,' he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse. (173-74)

This merely mechanical punning is anything but exquisite or apt, a parody of the hauteur of Landor's 'dying philosopher', literalized in the taxi-as-hearse.

My fourth moment is in John Rodker's largely autobiographical *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (1932). The second section, which was written earlier than the others and a version published separately in French, describes the experiences of a Conscientious Objector at a labour camp on Dartmoor. Rodker is concerned with collective activity conceived under the sign of mimesis – this is ultimately the war itself – and the individual's fall into dissidence first as a C.O. and then as a deserter. In the wake of the death of an inmate at the camp, puncturing its ennui, a rumour of the world's end sweeps different groupings:

The Plymouth Brethren with their thirty sub-sections, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Sandemanians, Middletonians, Swedenborgians, British Israelites, Sanctified Sons of the Savior and other churches met for prayer in cells; howled, quaked, spoke with the gift of tongues ... The I.B.S.A. [later the Jehovah's Witnesses] alone was cool, for had not Pastor Russell proved that there could be no millennium till 1925?²⁶

In disgust the narrator walks away from the scene of cultic fragmentation: 'I saw there was no movement' (191). Later, hiding out in London, he reflects on the collective death-drive embodied in the war, and his detachment from others:

I am puzzled and rather ashamed of how little I thought of the front, of how untouched I was by the fate of so many of my own generation. I felt nothing but a determination not to be involved. The word 'Mess' resumed all my ideas on the subject, a passion of fear, terror of being involved, and anger with it. (193)

'Mess' indeed, as he imagines 'the gaping abdomens that spill out their intestines, the bloody waste of limbs, all the destruction' (195). The book provides an example of 'cooking with mud', in that its parts lie scattered and it could barely be said to even approach a coherent plot, while putting its disorder to work as a response to war.²⁷ One of the oddest things in this very odd text is the way in which the narrator's struggle for custody of his daughter in the later sections of the book, set a decade later, is expressed in terms of an obsessive preoccupation with constipation, with elaborate and repeated descriptions of twisted entrails, of costiveness and medicines, and of his almost-adolescent daughter on her 'pot'. When he seems for a period to win the custody battle her is waging with his wife, there is a climactic bowel movement in which the colonic blockage falls from him. The grotesque body and physiological preoccupations are characteristic of Rodker, but my more immediate point is that the 'movement' here represents a voiding of involvement with, anger at, and dependence on others.

My brief final example is from perhaps the best-known of all modernist attacks on cult-life, Ralph Ellison's complex depiction of a displaced version of the American Communist Party in *Invisible Man* (1950). Ellison's novel relates to his own 1930s radical experience as revisited in a Cold War context, but also attacks the earlier cult of Booker T. Washington, and indeed various versions of cultural paranoia, most centrally the system of race itself and the cult of white supremacy – though within a text in which paranoia is a narrative mode, in its deployment of a narrator who is in the body of the text constantly influenced and written by others, kept running, and who, having become aware of his entanglement, seeks to re-wire America's power system in his underground hideaway. The narrator's identification of himself as a 'tinkerer' and the meta-narrative's sucking in of the range of African American history suggests this desire to connect and relay, to both reveal power and flee from it.²⁸

I would single out two tropes which dominate Ellison's analysis: firstly, that of seeing around corners – a metaphor repeatedly invoked in the text – contrasted with the Cyclopean and monocular vision of the historical materialist Brother Jack, with his sacrificial glass eye in the glass of water and the Invisible Man's question: 'Which eye is really the blind one?'²⁹ The moment where the Invisible Man in his underground hole aligns two scraps of writing and sees that the Jack who signs his membership card and the person who denounces him are the same represents a climax of the stereoscopic. Secondly, the metaphor of falling – falling into the underground; falling dead on the ground, as Brother Tod does; falling out of history at Reinhardt and the Invisible Man eventually do. Varieties of fall or falling-away dominate the endings of Ellison's episodes; and falling repeatedly signals a deviation from the straight path of an imposed cultural narrative, into a kind of pregnant nothingness, a space of attentive waiting and listening from which an awakening is anticipated, but never seen in the text, except of course in its own achieved shape. Since sound *can* be heard coherently around corners, unlike light, the two metaphors come together at the point of reception – the novel repeatedly figures itself in sonic terms – as we listen to the echoes of historical struggle from a wired-up cellar in which the Invisible Man may illuminate himself, but cannot be seen by others in the world he inhabits.

'Imitative Machinery'

In all these texts, modern cult-life is indeed depicted as neurosis; it is mocked and repudiated but there is little sense of a firmer grounding outside the fragmentation of culture into cult. In order to take that line of thought a little further I want to turn to the modernist text in which the term 'cult' is most often deployed, Wyndham Lewis's polemic against the machinery of influence in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) – a text which questions all social categorizations. Lewis often uses the word 'cult' as a point of attack, here and elsewhere: the cult of cleanliness; of the amateur; of the child; of the artist; the time-cult – and later, or course, the Hitler cult. 'We are all the patients of a great cult' he says near the end of *the book*.³⁰ In the "Natures' and 'Puppets'" section Lewis focuses

on the paradoxes of individuation and self-expression channelled through group activity or 'type-life', typified by the sarcastically-named (and presumably German) '*Rhythm-army of naked male life*' or '*Naked Men's Club of Sun-pals*'.³¹ He continues:

There is really less choice every day: the number of group-personalities available, of course, diminishes just as the number of newspapers decreases. And it seems impossible to dispute that, as regards this side of life, and leaving aside the threat of unemployment and fresh wars, people have never been so happy. The Not-Self (and *not* the self at all) is the goal of human ambition. And not 'freedom,' or the eccentric play of the 'personality,' but submission to a group-rhythm, is what men desire. (149)

What for Adorno is the arbitrary and empty nature of mass-cultural identifications is for Lewis a fall into the automatism of 'obedient, hard-working machines' (151), and thus into non-being. It is also a fall into the empty time of fashion, which for Lewis is the realm of the domestic rendered public: a temporal suspension in which there is no real action, only mimesis. The drive to non-being is implicit in the cult as it attempts to answer the question 'How should I live?' in a world where the ties of community have become a series of consumer choices.

In the passage cited, the opposition is of type-life to "freedom," or the eccentric play of personality', which is itself often a kind of manufactured and shifting emptiness for Lewis, despite his celebration elsewhere of personality as individual and artistic self-presence. As Heather Arvidson puts it, 'Lewis differentiates the kind of personality that Persons have from "personality" as popularly endorsed by the mass-aculturated crowd.'³² Only the 'free intelligences in the world' escape such conditioning, Lewis suggests, and he goes so far as to speculate that an incipient speciation is at work: 'a new duality of human life ... issuing in a biologic transformation' (364). But that Darwinian speculation, very near the end of the book, is atypical; there is in fact very little sense of anything other than cheerful negation in Lewis's compendious exposures of cultic folly, as he works his way through fashion, gender, homosexuality, art, science, interiority and so on. Lewis insists that words are his weapons, but faced with parading rhythm-armies of naked men the not-self threatens to overwhelm his text, rendering his stance sterile and solipsistic.

I'll conclude with a few thoughts on what seems to me to underlie this problematic. As I suggested, modernist movements themselves often contain cultic elements, albeit relatively lightly enforced, mobile and often ironically framed, like the ritual of *The Waste Land*. Unsurprisingly then, one of the cults that Lewis attacks most strongly is that of modernism itself, in its guise as time-cult, the vehicle of the 'revolutionary simpleton', the 'creature of fashion' who is 'frightened and scandalized by the apparition of anybody who opposes any group or collectivity whatever'.³³ Lewis's own destructive progress is itself illustrative of the trajectory of cultic mockery: from cult-leader of the 'Men of 1914', blasting all outsiders, to the solitary post-war stance of the 'Enemy', attacking all

insiders and repudiating Pound, Joyce and Eliot, but also deferring any positive statement of belief ('To specify further or even to outline the particular beliefs that are explicit in my criticism would require another book. That I propose soon to publish').³⁴

What Lewis called 'group-rhythm' can be mapped onto Weber's notion of 'clan [or group] charisma', first articulated around 1920 in his study of Hindu casts. For Weber, within the cult's self-admiration and reinforcement of collective norms lingers – in an inherently conservative fashion - the magical inheritance of an original charismatic group-leader.³⁵ In Norbert Elias's more secular development of Weber's thought a 1964 centenary essay 'Group Charisma and Group Disgrace', the denigration and shaming of outsiders through mechanisms such as gossip (rather than a magically-derived charisma) is what maintains a group's integrity, as well as individual self-image.³⁶ To fall from the group – to reject all cult-life – is to risk exclusion, and to struggle as Lewis did with the difficulty of self-definition, and with the minutiae of the aesthetic-rendered-social. At the same time, Weber implies that to remain within the group is to succumb to conservatism and routinization.

In all the examples I examined, what Rodker called 'the terror of being involved' leads to a fall away from cult-life, often expressed in terms of violence and its aftermath. But the outcome is not a positive self-affirmation or renewal freed from the constraints of an external method or set of rules. Rather we fall into bathos, nothingness, or at best a temporally suspended state. That might be said to be true of other mid-century texts of cult-analysis like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and – remembering Newman – an expulsion from the collective into a void is also present in novels about Catholic education like Antonia White's *Frost in May* and Olive Moore's *Celestial Seraglio*; or even in texts like Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, which has at its centre an extended dialogue between a Freemason and a Jesuit, before Hans Castorp breaks free and falls from his mountain into the fog of war.

As Trotter has suggested, Modernism often seems to offer the reader the authority of the expert or charismatic possessor of arcane knowledge, though that offering lurks close to a paranoia in which meaning must be forced on the world. Cultic mockery is something like the complement of that paranoia, I would suggest. The mocker of collective enthusiasms seems to sense that to stand, rather than to fall away, would be to risk the loss of identity. But at the same time, just as modernist cultism thrives on self-revelation, cultic laughter seems to propose that the only real alternative to the ludicrousness of the cultic world is the risk of bathos or, at best, a deferred sense of an authentic self. In that sense, Groucho Marx may seem the perfect modernist: who would want to belong to a club that wanted you as a member?³⁷

Notes

¹ W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, Volume I, *The Poems*, rev. 2nd edn., ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996), 210.

² One vein of aggressive mockery is discussed in Jonathan Greenberg's *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), which considers a number of the authors discussed below.

³ David Trotter, *The Making of the Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 27.

⁴ John Henry Newman, *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* (London: James Burns, 1848), 381.

⁵ Louis Golding, 'Luigi of Catanzaro', *The New Coterie* 4 (Autumn 1926), 56-57. This much-reprinted story, which mocks anti-Semitism, first appeared in Henry Hurwitz's *The Menorah Journal* 11:6 (December 1925).

⁶ See e.g. Alex, Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Leigh Wilson, *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013);

⁷ Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Herbert Sutcliffe and Radiant Living: Self-Help and New Thought in New Zealand', *Utopian Studies* 23:1 (2012), 2-27

⁸ Peter Simpson, *Bloomsbury South: The Arts in Christchurch 1933–1953* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016).

⁹ 'F. S. Flint, 'Imagisme', *Poetry* 1 (March 1913), 199. In *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 31-32, James Longenbach suggests that the occult doctrine underlying Imagism was revealed in Pound's short piece 'Ikon', published in the only issue of *The Cerebralist*, Dec. 1913.

¹⁰ See Geoffrey K. Nelson, 'The Concept of Cult', *The Sociological Review* 16:3 (1968), 351–62.

¹¹ Interview quoted in Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), 109.

¹² Laura Riding [as 'Madelaine Vara'], 'The Cult of Failure', *Epilogue* 1 (1935), 60-86.

¹³ Michael Heywood, *The Ern Malley Affair* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), 174.

¹⁴ Nathanael West, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, in *Novels and Other Writings*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (New York: Library of America, 1997), 65. Shrike's cutting is based on a 1930 A.P. release which appeared in a number of local newspapers.

¹⁵ On Shrike's 'deadpan' and mediatized satire, see the attentive reading in Justus Nieland's *Feeling Modern: The Eccentricities of Public Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 195-218.

¹⁶ See Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 74.

¹⁷ George W. S. Trow, *Within the Context of No Context* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), 14-15.

¹⁸ Norbert Elias, 'The Kitsch Style and the Age of Kitsch', *The Norbert Elias Reader*, ed. Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 26-35.

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- ¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. and intro. Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1994), 115.
- ²⁰ Nathanael West, 'Some Notes on Violence', *Novels and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1997), **
- ²¹ See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd, edition (London: Macmillan, 1906-15), 12 vols., vol. 1, 1-23 and vol 11,304-09.
- ²² Bryher, West (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), pp.35, 75-91. Subsequent references in text.
- ²³ See Brian C. Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).
- ²⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Penguin, 1937), 11. Subsequent references in text.
- ²⁵ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. A. M. Henderson & Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), 363ff.
- ²⁶ John Rodker, *Memoirs of other Fronts* (London: Putnam, 1932), 171.
- ²⁷ David Trotter, *Cooking With Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ²⁸ Compare the role of expertise and systematicity discussed in David Trotter's *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- ²⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin, 2001), 459.
- ³⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrook (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), 344. Subsequent references in text.
- ³¹ Lewis seems to reference Hans Surén's bestseller *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (1924), in later editions a Nazi favourite.
- ³² Heather Arvidson, 'Personality, Impersonality, and the Personified Detachment of Wyndham Lewis,' *Modernism/modernity*, 25:4 (2018), 791-814 (795 cited).
- ³³ Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), 44-45.
- ³⁴ Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 481 (concluding paragraph). It is not at all clear which book in his 1920s series this might refer to.
- ³⁵ See Weber's analysis of cast in *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), 49-54. The German edition was published in 1916.
- ³⁶ Norbert Elias, 'Group Charisma and Group Disgrace', *The Norbert Elias Reader*, 104-112.
- ³⁷ Marx's quip is usually traced to his letter of resignation from the Friar's Club: for sources and variants see <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/04/18/groucho-resigns/#note-2224-2>.