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THE ENERGETICS OF *TARR*: THE VORTEX-
MACHINE KREISLER

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Michael Wutz

“What, after all, does *Kreisler* mean?
Satisfy my curiosity.”

—*Tarr*

THE FORMULATION OF AN EXPLICIT AESTHETICS OF THE MACHINE is constitutive of the turn-of-the-century European *Zeitgeist* and is generally encapsulated in the activities of Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, the galvanic maestro of the Italian Futurists. His manifestoes and his entourage announced the creed of speed and steel throughout Europe as early as 1910, and their triumphant celebration of airplanes and automobiles had a crucial impact on the artistic reception of technology, the way it was recuperated as an *objet d'art*. To attribute this love of machines to the sole influence of Italian Futurism, however, would be a misrepresentation of the historical situation. Rather, as Renato Poggioli and, more recently, Marjorie Perloff have argued, the vogueish reception and reformulation of the Futurist program corresponded to a strong predisposition within the *avant-garde* to recognize the artistic potential of the machine. The barrage of Futurist pronouncements only awakened the dormant sensibilities of artistic circles that had been forming under the crust of dated aesthetic beliefs (*Avant-Garde* 68-74; *Futurist Moment* xvii-xxi).

Wyndham Lewis, the founder of English Vorticism, contributed his share to this new aesthetic. While Lewis quickly recognized his affinities

with the Futurists, indeed formulated part of the Vorticist platform in the wake of Marinetti (such as the valorization of contemporary technology and motion and speed), he soon spelled out the differences between the Italian and the British version of this modernist sensibility. Chief among his dislikes was what he called the “Futurist gush over machines,” a lack of intellectual detachment that did not allow the Italian Futurists to recognize the machine’s form (*Blast* 1:41). In Lewis’s view, the Futurists were not endowed with “a rational enthusiasm for the possibilities that lie in this new spectacle of machinery; of the technical uses to which it can be put in the arts.” The Vorticists, by contrast, did recognize in the machine “a new pictorial resource” with suggestive formal possibilities and always “sought out machine-forms” (*On Art* 150, 340)¹

This preoccupation with machine-generated form is apparent in Lewis’s early paintings, but emerges with particular clarity in his first novel *Tarr*. Lewis in this novel translates the Vorticist fascination with machinery into the domain of narrative form and dynamic. The figure of Otto Kreisler, the novel’s protagonist and the major character is conceived as a machine, and it is through him that Lewis signifies the momentum and the form of the narrative. Kreisler moves through the novel in a series of vortical gyrations that functions as his principal mode of engagement with others and that generates a force field surrounding him. By discharging the energy of his force field into the novelistic space and by drawing other characters into his orbit, Kreisler produces activity in the novel, and thus energizes the textual event. This event comes to a standstill the moment Kreisler, the rotating vortex-machine, can no longer charge himself, and he begins to run down.

Equally significant, the vortex provided Lewis with a suggestive figure to encode the protofascist misogyny of his protagonist. Kreisler “naturally” gravitates toward voluptuous women that hold the promise of sexual (and financial) gratification, a form of attraction that points to the parasitic nature of his relationships. Beyond the momentary fulfillment of this physical desire, however, lies Kreisler’s meta-physical desire: namely to dominate, and eventually to obliterate, the women of his involvement, and to derive strength from this very obliteration. For while Kreisler will always need women to induce his field of force—their presence helps him to generate the initial spark—he is always intent upon swallowing, that is, subsuming, these women into his widening energy field following its moment of female-male ignition. Kreisler’s fantasy is one of male self-empowerment, the *generation* of his force field becomes his form of *male self-generation*; and the visual suggestiveness of the vortex, with its drilling motion and its conical protrusion, associates Kreisler with a self-sustaining phallus.

Lewis thus encodes in Kreisler’s vortical rotations the myth of male self-sufficiency (and, on the level of national allegory perhaps, Germany’s politics of expansion preceding World War I). At the same time, Lewis

also presents Kreisler as what I would like to call the novel's *narrative engine*, as the text's motor of propulsion that produces its dynamic and gives it form. Each of his field-generating encounters represents a nodal point of activity, a moment of concentrated high energy that is preceded and succeeded by prolonged periods of arrest. This extended stop-and-go structure constitutes the form of *Tarr* and hints at Lewis's punctual or spatial conception of narrative. More importantly, Lewis's construction of Kreisler as a rotating narrative engine or vortex-machine further suggests such a spatialized narrative form. The vortex became the explanatory micromodel of electromagnetic field theory in the second half of the nineteenth century; and Lewis, with his interest in science and technology and the poetic license of the artist, appropriated this model to conceptualize both *Tarr's* narrative engine and the novel as a whole. For not only does Kreisler himself produce and reproduce a force field around himself; Lewis, I submit, conceived of the novel itself as an "electromagnetic" field, as a textual zone or space in which energies are produced, exchanged, and dispersed. Prior to an exploration of Kreisler's performance as narrative engine, a brief look at his conceptual origins and at Lewis's field model of *Tarr* is necessary. Only then can Tarr's question be answered: "What, after all, does *Kreisler* mean?"²

Kreisler's immediate mechanistic (and misogynistic) origins may be located in Vorticism's association with Futurism and thus within the context of modernism's general fascination with machinery. In making Kreisler into the narrative engine of *Tarr*, Lewis may have had in mind the Futurist linkage of man, but not woman, with an engine. Marinetti explicitly demanded the "inevitable identification of man with motor" as part of his aesthetic (*Marinetti* 90), and Lewis may echo this model in the narrative motor of *Tarr*.³

The more distant origins of such a human motor, however, go back to Descartes's distinction between mind and matter, between the noncorporeality of the soul and the materiality of the body that underlies Lewis's theory of the comic. In his essay, "The Meaning of the Wild Body," Lewis observes that, "First to assume the dichotomy of mind and body is necessary here, without arguing it; for it is upon that essential separation that the theory of laughter here proposed is based." But rather than endorsing the Cartesian privileging of the mind, Lewis suggests that the body, and not the mind, is humankind's primary means of engagement with the world. In Lewis's view, the body is a classically Cartesian *bête-machine*, a recalcitrant lump of matter that is possessed with a life of its own and dissociated from, indeed frequently in utter contradistinction to, the directives of the mind. Hence Lewis's theory of laughter: since "[t]he root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person," "all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*" (158).⁴

By thus affirming the materiality of human existence, Lewis effectually reformulates the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* into a *habeo corpus, ergo sum*, and Michael Levenson has, indeed, described Lewis as “an inverted Cartesian” (246).⁵ What is important here is that Lewis’s mechanical conception of the human body does, in part, originate in the beginnings of the Enlightenment, and that Kreisler represents a supreme specimen of such a machine. He is a pure physical presence in *Tarr*, whose “giant body” draws others within its field of gravity. Endowed with an “immoderate physical humanity,” it moves with “an air of certain proprietorship.” As it ploughs through the streets, it is given “the freedom of the city by every other body within sight at once, heroically installed and almost unnaturally solid.” Time and again, as we shall see, Kreisler puts his body into operation or is put into operation by his body. He exists, indeed, as a “large rusty machine of a man” (83).⁶

Aside from this Cartesian physics of physiology and the Vorticist machine aesthetic, the field theories in mid-nineteenth century physics had the greatest influence on Lewis’s conception of Kreisler and provided him with the decisive impetus to think of his text as an energy field. Lewis, as his biographer tells us, spent endless hours of his early career in the British Museum reading widely in “science and mathematics,” so his appropriation of scientific models for literary ends is not surprising, particularly the model of the vortex (Meyers 103).⁷ While Descartes is generally credited with formulating a theory of vortices to explain his conception of planetary motion, the more contemporary usage of the vortex occurred in the hydrodynamic investigations of Johann Ludwig von Helmholtz and, shortly afterwards, in the emergent theories of the field. There, the vortex became a central explanatory micromodel. In 1867, Lord Kelvin advanced a theory of “vortex atoms,” whose rotary motions in a plenum, propagated through the mediation of an ether, provided a basis for his theory of matter and thus for a physical theory of the field. Building on Kelvin’s rotation of molecular vortices, James Clerk Maxwell formulated in mathematical terms the physical nature of what Michael Faraday, the pioneer of field theory, had two decades earlier called magnetic “lines of force.” He supposed that a magnetic field could be represented as an ethereal fluid filled with rotating vortex tubes, whose geometrical arrangement corresponded to these force-lines and in which the vortical velocities corresponded to the intensity of the field (Harman 72-98). It is Maxwell who inaugurates modern field theory, and it is this understanding of the vortex as an energy knot and the field as a grouping of vortices that informs Lewis’s design of *Tarr* and its narrative engine.

The Vorticist definition of the vortex itself and Kreisler’s function as an energy knot in the novel valorize this association. In 1912, Lewis’s collaborator Ezra Pound in a well-known phrase visualized poetic words as electromagnetic vortices, as “great hollow cones of steel of different dullness and acuteness” that are “charged with a force like electricity, or

rather, radiating a force from their apex—some radiating, some sucking in” (“I Gather the Limbs of Osiris” 160). Two years later, with Lewis’s editorial approval, Pound defined the vortex as “the point of maximum energy” (*Blast* 1: 153), and shortly afterward, in his first essay on Vorticism, as a “radiant node or cluster . . . from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing” (“Vorticism” 207).⁸ Similarly, in *Tarr*, as we shall see, Kreisler performs as an energy condenser, as a vortex-machine whose frenzied gyrations magnetically attract others while generating a force field around himself. He is the novel’s radiant node or cluster, the rotating body with the greatest kinetic velocity, the novel’s point of maximum energy concentration. Both the image of the vortex and Kreisler himself clearly derive from the context of electromagnetic field theory.

Equally important, field theory may also have appealed to Lewis’s intense preoccupation with form. He appears to have recognized in the field concept a suggestive model to conceive of *Tarr* as a textual field with divergent energetic distributions. In his second essay on Vorticism in 1915, Pound had observed that “if you clap a strong magnet beneath a plateful of iron filings, the energies of the magnet will proceed to organise form” (“Vorticism” 7); Lewis, it seems, expanded this possibility of electromagnetic formation to conceptualize narrative space, for *Tarr*, in analogy with Maxwell’s field model, operates as an aggregation of vortices. Not only Kreisler, but other characters as well, such as the Russian, Anastasya Vasek, and Kreisler’s fellow German, Bertha Lunken, variously act as vortices with their respective radii of attraction. Just as Kreisler draws them successively into his orbit, so they, reciprocally, exert their quasi-magnetic attraction on Kreisler. While Kreisler pulls Bertha to himself so that she would “like an elastic band” “shoot forward,” Bertha’s own “maelstrom-like” quality has the effect of drawing Kreisler into her own vicinity (140, 68). Similarly, in the presence of Anastasya in the Restaurant Vallet, Kreisler feels “caught in the midst of a cascade,” and upon her departure as if “a tide of magnetism had flowed away, leaving him bare and stranded” (99, 104). Later, during a period of enfeeblement, he is unable to resist Anastasya’s pull that draws him magnetically toward the house of Miss Liepmann, there to receive a recharge: “He made a movement as though to slink down a side street: next moment he was walking on obstinately in the direction of the Liepmann’s house however. His weakness drew him on, back into the vortex” (123-124).

These vortices thus contribute to the energetic potential of the novel’s “electromagnetic” field, just as they contribute to the buildup of Kreisler’s own energy zone. Anastasya and Bertha, in particular, as will become apparent, operate as the neighboring vortices whose presence Kreisler requires for his induction before he can neutralize their energies in his emergent force field. But other character-vortices as well interact with one another to produce energy within the text and thus to corroborate Lewis’s

field concept. The dance at the Bonnington Club, for example, suggests again a rotation of vortices that supplies the textual event with concentrated, activating energy. When the dance is in full swing, the dancers are “circling rapidly past with athletic elation” and the music keeps “this throng of people careering, like the spoon stirring in a saucepan: it stirred and stirred and they jerked and huddled insipidly round and round, in sluggish currents with small eddies here and there” (154). Given this presentation of the dance as a whirlpool of vortices—each of which produces minuscule orbits of attraction in its own right—it almost seems as if Lewis playfully designed this dance as a microcosmic version of the larger textual field. And even though these miniature nodes of energy are only supplementary to the action of the novel, they are still elementary constituents of the narrative energy zone. Not insignificantly, it is within this concentration of vortices, the highest point of collective energy density within the novelistic space, that Kreisler will generate his own force field and “kickstart” his career as narrative engine.


Katherine Hayles has recently observed that the dance is a paradigmatic heuristic model to visualize the concept of the physical field. Among its “distinguishing characteristics” are “its fluid dynamic nature, . . . the absence of detachable parts, and the mutuality of component interactions” (15). The dance in *Tarr*, with its fluidity, interconnectedness, and reciprocity, foregrounds precisely these specifications, just as it draws attention to its affinity with field theory. Hayles has also argued that “the influence of the field concept is pervasive throughout the literature” and that “scientific field models” frequently operate as “literary strategies” in the modern novel (25).⁹ Lewis’s design of *Tarr* is a perfect example of field theory transmuted into literary strategy, of the way in which a scientific model is put to formal use in literature. Now that the origins of the Kreisler-machine and the field conception of *Tarr* have been established, we can proceed to investigate how Kreisler, who is not only part of the textual force field but largely responsible for its very generation, functions himself as a scientific model turned to literary—and political—ends, the novel’s violent narrative engine.

That Kreisler operates as the narrative engine of a novel entitled *Tarr* might initially appear surprising. Named for its presumed protagonist, the narrative promises an elaborate exposure of the philosophical and political positions of what, by Lewis’s own admission, is the authorial spokesman.¹⁰ Tarr does get his share of space in which he advances his theory of art and, in the belligerent and vitriolic style of Lewis, lashes out at the representatives of the Bloomsbury establishment and bourgeois-bohemian artiness. Lewis, however, clearly relegates Tarr to a peripheral role. His major appearances take place on the margins of the novel, that is, in the last and the first part (which Lewis named “overture” in the 1918 version). In view of Lewis’s painterly sensibilities, one could say that Tarr frames or encases the series of pictures which constitute the textual middle, before

most of the action begins and after most of the action has passed. While Tarr is not wholly effaced from the canvas of the narrative—roughly parts II through VI—he is clearly overshadowed by Otto Kreisler. Kreisler's voluminous body fills virtually every nook and cranny of the narrative. He, and not Tarr, is the real protagonist of *Tarr*, and he is also the motor powering the narrative.

In an early prologue to one of the 1918 editions of the novel, Lewis described Kreisler as “an almost perfect type of engine,” and Kreisler, for his part, gives us a taste of the sort of engine he envisions himself to be (1918 *Version* 360).¹¹ As he reflects on his zigzagging stampede through the streets of Paris, Kreisler “compared himself to one of those little nursery locomotives that go straight ahead without stopping; that anyone can take up and send puffing away in the opposite direction” (117). And Kreisler does, indeed, repeatedly bump against characters that redirect his course, roadblocks that manipulate the direction of a machine that has gone autopilot.¹² Lewis, however, conceived of the Kreisler-engine according to a different model, a model that is suggested by the particular kind of motion with which Kreisler shoots through the narrative field. It is through a series of rotary movements that Kreisler hurls his body through the text, almost like a boring drill. The predominance of this principle of rotation suggests that Kreisler functions not as a nursery train but as a different kind of toy: as a whipping top spiraling through the text, bumping against obstacles and obstructions, and in the process generating a force field around himself. At the same time, superimposed on this “scientific” model, Lewis also exploits the visual suggestiveness of the vortex to hint at Kreisler's role as a gigantic phallus, for both the vortex's drilling motion and its conical shape encapsulate Kreisler's primal and primary activity: sexual violence and virility. Thus, reconceived in terms of Lewis's aesthetic, Kreisler performs as both a gyrating sex-machine and a narrative vortex-machine, as a concentration of machine-energy that is embodied in the Vorticist emblem and that Lewis playfully appropriated from electromagnetic field theory.

Kreisler's very name signals his double function as phallus and narrative vortex-machine. *Kreisel* is the German word for whipping top, with which the German-speaking Lewis (who spent a year in Munich) was certainly familiar. It derives from the German *Kreis*, which means circle; *kreisen*, the corresponding verb, means to circulate and to revolve at a slow and constant speed (the way birds would circle over their prey), whereas *kreiseln*, the verb more closely related to the motion of the whipping top, suggests the rotation around a fixed center and at different speeds, with the implication of an eventual spinning out. Thus, when Lewis bestows the name *Kreisler* upon the protagonist of *Tarr*, he shows both a highly developed sense of linguistic differentiation and a sensitivity for the function his narrative engine must perform. For in calling his engine *Kreisler*, Lewis not only anthropomorphizes the principle of rotation, but he also injects

a sense of kinetic energy into an otherwise static and poised noun. *Kreiser* or *Einkreiser*, the alternative, l-less word that would have presented itself to Lewis—the word derived from *Kreis* which means the one who encircles—would not convey the dynamism or the acceleration and deceleration so necessary to the narrative engine of *Tarr*. Only *Kreisler* codifies the rotary motion with which he zooms through the narrative and the momentum which he produces within the text-zone. It suggests that *Kreisler* functions only when he “*kreisels*,” when he generates momentum and commits violence in the moment of rotation. It is certainly not a coincidence that the diagram of Vorticism in *Blast*, , resembles a phallus and a gyrating whipping top. It is also not a coincidence that *Kreisler*, in a peculiar twist of Lewisian humor, owns a “whip” with which he could propel himself (244), and that he quotes Nietzsche, Europe’s most famous misogynist, to describe his attitude toward women: ““When you go to take a woman you should be careful not to forget your *whip*”” (229, Lewis’s emphasis). And *Kreisler* learns in conversation that “a name is a man’s soul” and that, in the opinion of a novelist, “the majority of people were killed by their names” (113). This is Lewis’s most direct indication of the significance of *Kreisler*’s name, even suggesting that it encodes *Kreisler*’s real death—a death through spinning out. Thus *Kreisler*, the name of the novel’s protagonist, clearly signifies his function as a phallus and as the novel’s narrative engine: a mechanized whipping top propelling the narrative *Tarr* until it idles to a standstill.¹³

Upon his entry into the narrative, *Kreisler* is in a state of enfeeblement. In order to induce his force field he must, quite literally, get in touch with another vortex, and that vortex is Anastasya. *Kreisler* distinguishes between Anastasya as a physical “Reality” and Anastasya as an “image” in his imagination. As a concrete presence, *Kreisler* senses in Anastasya a rival vortex to his own vortex, afraid that her physical voluminousness could overshadow his own. During the dance at the Bonnington Club, for example, her flamboyant garments draw attention away from *Kreisler*, who appears in a ripped and besmirched outfit with the express purpose of drawing attention to himself—of acting, in other words, as a vortex. But Anastasya, as it turns out, “was much more outrageous than *Kreisler* could ever hope to be” (133).

By contrast, *Kreisler* is never specific about the “image” of Anastasya in his imagination. Given *Kreisler*’s fear of disempowerment through women, however, particularly his possible *vasectomy* by Miss *Vasek* (at one point, he feels indeed “unmanned” by her [135]), the harboring of such an image in his mind may provide him with a convenient way of etherealizing Anastasya’s body and of diminishing her physical threat, a fantasizing through which he can deprive her of her body: of dematerializing it, of making it intangible, and of bringing it under his control. Thus, while the image functions as an imagistic appropriation, it also functions as a physical expropriation, as a way of disengaging Anastasya

from her body. It is significant that this image “in the wear and tear of his recent conflicts had become somewhat used and inanimate,” and that, when Anastasya materializes as a physical presence in the Café Berne, Kreisler experiences a sudden draining of his energies:

Now a reality under his nose, Anastasya had, in coming to life, drawn out all his energy, like a distinct being nourished by him: whereas the image intact in his mind, had returned him more or less the vigour spent. Her listlessness seemed a complement of the weakness he now felt: energy was ebbing away from both. (123)

Apparently if Kreisler could preserve Anastasya’s disembodied image in his mind, he could maintain his energy reserves without ever suffering a depletion. Anastasya’s physical appearance, however, disrupts that vision, and Kreisler feels a sudden erosion of his *élan vital*. He envisions himself as a human ephemeron “made of cheap perishable stuff, who could only live for a day and then die of use.” And once Anastasya leaves the café, Kreisler registers “a sensation of being left high and dry—of the withdrawal of a fluid medium.” (This sentence is not in the 1918 version of *Tarr*.) Clearly, Kreisler recognizes in Anastasya an essential source of energy from which he could, in the manner of a parasite, replenish his stock. Indeed, visibly enfeebled, he decides later that evening, almost against his will, to recharge himself on Anastasya, when he is “drawn back into [her] vortex” (123-124).

Kreisler’s situation is a delicate one. While Anastasya is the catalyst for his energetic recharge, her disruption of his imaginary vision of her, with its attendant feeling of eroding control, has made him angry. He wants to retaliate by humiliating the woman who, paradoxically, functions as his *sine qua non*: “He wished to shame her: if he did not directly insult her he would at least insult her by thrusting himself upon her” (125). Thus, when Kreisler meets Anastasya at the Liepmann house, he is tempted to seek immediate revenge. Her unexpected kindness, however, causes him to change his strategy. He must wait for a better moment to implement his plan. As in their previous meeting that day, the “reality” and the image” of Anastasya alternate in his mind. Enfolded by the “balmy atmosphere” of Anastasya’s friendliness, and despite a sense of disillusionment, Kreisler restores the etherealizing, and thus self-empowering, image of Anastasya: “‘Now I must mark time—one two!’ said he to himself; ‘her attitude to me must be held in suspense until a better moment. I must leave her where she is just so’” (135). With his supply of energy replenished, Kreisler turns away from Anastasya, ready to gyrate through the narrative.

The dance at the Bonnington Club presents itself for Kreisler as the first opportunity to perform as a whipping top. It is here, appropriately during an activity that is in itself reminiscent of rotary motion, that Kreisler can unroll his spins. As a prelude to his dizzying acrobatics, Kreisler

speaks to his hostess in “heavy circumlocutions,” in “a dialect calculated to bewilder the most acute philologist” (148). Then, moving from verbal circumlocution to physical circulation, he takes his dance partner, Mrs. Bevelage, for a vortical spin: “He took her twice with ever-increasing velocity, round the large hall, and at the third round, at breakneck speed, spun with her in the direction of the front door.” Their speedy gyrations would have carried them into the street, like “a disturbing meteor, whizzing out of sight,” had they not been intercepted by a large English family rushing in through the door. Blocking Kreisler’s spinning frenzy, “they received this violent couple in their midst” and carried them back into the middle of the room, where they “began a second mad, but this time merely circular, career” (149-150).

Kreisler’s first performance as a whipping top begins to energize the narrative present. His wild gyrations inject motion and action into the narrative event; they dynamize the narrative zone—precisely what neither the titular hero nor anybody else does—while exercising control over a woman, in effect depriving her of independent movement. His rotations subjugate Mrs. Bevelage to the dictates of his own massive physicality. Yet, equally significant, the narrative engine can, at this point, subject only one particular individual to his energies. Only Mrs. Bevelage “felt deliciously rapt in the midst of a simoon,” having come “somewhat under the sudden fascination of Kreisler’s mood” (150). The force field induced by his rotary motion can, as yet, draw only one person into its orbit. Kreisler’s energy buildup is not yet sufficient to extend his zone of influence to all of the major characters in the novel. On the contrary, the Kreisler-vortex is, at this moment, still hemmed in by a kind of containment field, the British family neutralizing Kreisler’s centrifugal, outward-directed spin. In order for Kreisler to stretch his zone of influence over the whole text, a quantum leap of his energy that will intensify his force field is necessary.

This opportunity arises when Kreisler decides to seek revenge on his rival vortex, Anastasya, and takes place in the spatial center of the novel, when the dance at the club has reached fever pitch, the novel’s highest point of collective motion and energetic density. Amidst an aggregate of vortices, Kreisler wishes his revenge to take the form of action or violence or friction, a form of physical contact: “contact was the essential thing,” he reflects at one point (153); or, as he puts it tersely earlier: “for there must be *activity* and its stimulus between him and her” (134, Lewis’s emphasis). At the same time, Kreisler wants to widen his circle of retaliation to include the people surrounding him. Aside from humiliating Anastasya, “Society at the same time must be taught to suffer, he had paid for that.” The whipping top wants to bump against virtually everyone. Thus as a prelude to the impending friction, Kreisler on his way to the dance “rubbed his shoulders against

a piece of whitewashed wall,” figuratively charging himself with static electricity (125).

At first, Kreisler’s rival vortex is nowhere to be seen. But when he finally enters the “central room” of the club, Anastasya and her dancing partner spiral into his field of vision. “Paralysed by her appearance,” Kreisler is incapacitated: “the part she had played in present events gave her a prestige in his image-life: when in the flesh she burst into his dream she still was able to disturb everything for a moment.” Nevertheless, Kreisler seems to be able to stabilize momentarily his imaginary vision of Anastasya in an attempt to rally his energies and act violently. He grabs her partner “roughly by the arms, pushing him against her, hustling him” (154). Then, following a brief pause, a moment of curious suspension amidst the turmoil, Anastasya bursts out laughing, thus disrupting Kreisler’s vision and, it is implied, sapping his energies completely. “When Anastasya had laughed Kreisler’s inner life had for a moment been violently disturbed. He could not respond, or retaliate” (155); and Kreisler later reflects that “Anastasya laughing had disorganized ‘imaginary life’ at a promising juncture” (158). Instead of further action, the disarmed Kreisler disappears into the refreshment room to gather himself.

Nevertheless, while apparently failing on his personal mission, Lewis indicates that Kreisler’s brief encounter with Anastasya meets, in a curious fashion, precisely his objectives: He gets the “contact” he desires, and he establishes an “*activity* and its stimulus between him and her.” Even though Kreisler does not, in actuality, physically touch Anastasya—he collides with her through shoving her partner—this indirect contact has the effect of beginning to generate a tremendous force field around Kreisler so powerful that even now, during its initial moment, Anastasya feels immediately drawn into it. She is completely at the mercy of Kreisler, drawn irrevocably into his all-engulfing orbit:

They had clashed. . . . The *contact* had been brought about. He was still as surprised at his action as she was. Anastasya felt, too, in what way this had been *contact*: she felt his hand on her arm as though it had been she he had seized. Something difficult to understand and which should have been alarming, the sensation of the first tugs of the maelstrom he was producing and conducting all by himself which required her for its heart she had experienced: and then laughed, necessarily; once one was in that atmosphere, like laughing gas with its gusty tickling, it could not be helped. (155)

In clear analogy to field theory, where bodies with electromagnetic properties produce a magnetic effect on neighboring bodies without contact—and which Kelvin and Maxwell visualized as an arrangement of vortices—Kreisler exerts a powerful magnetic attraction on Anastasya without actually touching her. While he has hitherto been unable to attract Anastasya, the female vortex necessary for his own energetic induction, the roles are now reversed. The woman who has played such

a pivotal role in his recent life is now momentarily reduced to the status of a supplementary vortex, no longer capable of attracting him. More importantly, in a process of what one could call “unconscious parasitic induction,” Kreisler seems to draw the energy of his former rival vortex into himself to begin to generate a force field of awesome proportions. So powerful, in fact, is Otto’s zone of force that he no longer seems to require the presence of another vortex, following its initial momentum. “Producing and conducting” this field “all by himself,” Otto’s induction, Lewis gives us to understand in another twist on Kreisler’s name, is truly an *auto*-induction. De facto funneling off Anastasya’s vortex, Kreisler begins to evolve as a concentrated supervortex, as a “maelstrom” with a wide-reaching radius of attraction.

What is the significance of this beginning energy expansion of Kreisler? On the level of sexual politics, Lewis through this male absorption of female energy displays Kreisler’s logic of virility. For while Lewis describes Kreisler’s energetic recharge in essentially parasitic terms, thus already hinting at a first level of Kreisler’s misogyny, he foregrounds what may easily have been Kreisler’s primal fantasy all along: the possibility of male self-empowerment divorced from female assistance. Beyond the female-male induction of the first spark, the generation of the force field becomes Kreisler’s moment of self-generation—Otto’s auto-induction—and his symbolic retaliation against what he had earlier called, generically and dramatically, “‘Das Weib’” (121). On the level of national allegory, especially given the virtually complete assembly of European national types promenading in the ball room, the energetic explosion of the German may suggest the radical destabilization of power relationships within the European theater and thus, following the period of postcolonialist *détente*, signal the pan-European *malaise* of the *fin de siècle* that saw its ultimate “resolution” in new territorial disputes, new hegemonic impulses, and eventually the Great War. In the words of Fredric Jameson, “the allegorical signified” of international novels like *Tarr* is, “ultimately always World War I, or Apocalypse: not in any punctual prediction or reflection of this conflict as a chronological event, but rather as the ultimate conflictual ‘truth’ of the sheer, mobile, shifting relationality of national types and of the older nation-states which are their content” (91).¹⁴ The initial breakaway of Kreisler from the dance floor—a choreography of European steps in which he performs already as a *persona non grata*—is, in fact, prevented only by the English representatives, whose quasidiplomatic intervention manages to uphold, if only momentarily, the balance of powers on the dance floor.

Furthermore, on the level of narrative energetics, Lewis through Kreisler’s expansion signals that the narrative engine of *Tarr* that has been activating the novel before is now capable of generating a force field sufficient to involve eventually all of the novel’s characters. He

suggests that Kreisler is now equipped to achieve what he set out to do, namely to draw in all of "Society" by dispersing his energies, spinning fashion, through the zone of the text. And further, Lewis signals through Kreisler's energetic explosion that Kreisler always requires *some form* of "contact" to produce his zone of energy. At the beginning, as in the case of Anastasya, when Kreisler has some residual energy left (stemming from his mental "image" of her), indirect contact or magnetic induction is in itself sufficient to produce his tremendous field of force, whereas later, as we shall see, paralleling Kreisler's increasing exhaustion, he will require a moment of direct contact in order for the spark to jump over. But regardless of how Kreisler energizes himself, it is always through friction resulting from immediate contact that this engine will "rub off" its energies and eventually come to a standstill.

In the scene immediately following the debacle with Anastasya, Lewis describes Kreisler's depletion as proportionate to the discharge of his energies into his immediate environment. "Encircling" his former partner Mrs. Bevelage, Kreisler involves himself in yet another dance. But rather than zooming into a spinning frenzy, as he did during their first encounter, Kreisler now steers for a calculated collision course. On repeated occasions and during a series of now subdued accelerations, Kreisler directs his partner so that she touches bottoms with Mrs. Liepmann: "Thud went the massive buffers of the two ladies"—moments of physical impact that clearly suggest the transmission of energy. At the same time, Lewis maneuvers Kreisler into a situation that suggests, in Lewis's pictorial idiom, the indirect, non-contact dispersion of his energies initiated by a moment of direct contact. Dancing around the room a last time, Kreisler suddenly leans his weight upon his partner, eventually causing her to lose her footing and finally tumble to the ground, a fall which has a ripple effect on all of the gyrating couples: "They caused a circular undulating commotion throughout the neighbouring dancers, like a stone falling in a pond" (157).

Using the direct model of contact as the central mode of transmission, Lewis suggests both the release and the diminishment of Kreisler's energies through a moment of collision. The undulating waves certainly represent Kreisler's magnetic, non-contact, energies gradually tapering off in proportion to the distance from the vortical center, the micromodel of electromagnetic theory, and they thus further corroborate Lewis's field concept of the text. The immediate context of the passage, however, also suggests that the concentric spread of the diminishing waves is indicative of the gradual ebbing of Kreisler's energies (just as, of course, it is indicative of his desire to dislocate and subjugate women). Even as he dances, the friction of the collisions, the moments of direct physical impact, take their immediate effect on him. In contrast to his first dance with Mrs. Bevelage, when he was gyrating with "ever-increasing ve-

locity” and “at breakneck speed” (then already charged through Anastasya’s mental “image” but not yet supercharged through magnetic induction), Kreisler can now only increase “her speed sensibly” (157). Then, following the dance, when Kreisler has released his energy, he is seized by a sudden spell of fatigue: “He was tired as though he had been dancing the whole evening,” and shortly afterwards reflects that “he was much more worried and tired than at the beginning of the evening” (158). Instead of a whirlwind of interminable motion, Kreisler heads straight into the “refreshment room” to recuperate (159).

It is, however, not until Kreisler’s rape of Bertha, his second encounter with another vortex and the second pivot of action in the novel, that Kreisler finds a fortuitous moment to recharge himself. Following the drainage of his physical energies at the dance, Kreisler’s exhaustion is now compounded by his father’s refusal to keep paying for his idle life. He drifts through the streets of Paris in a state of enfeeblement, “depressed” and “fatigued” and under “the spell of some meaningless duty” (186). That is why the moment of contact necessary for the generation of his force field must be a physical one, unlike during his initial ignition. Kreisler is too weak to “make the sparks fly” without direct contact. And Lewis, as in the case of Kreisler’s encounter with Anastasya, is very specific about both the mechanics and the misogyny of this induction.

In a scene specifically rewritten for the 1928 version of *Tarr*, Lewis emphasizes Kreisler’s frictional ignition on Bertha’s body, posing for him with breasts, shoulders, and arms exposed: “before she quite knew what was happening he had caught hold of both her arms above the elbow, chafing them violently up and down.” Kreisler comments on this friction only by remarking, “ ‘You have needles and pins, Fräulein,’ ” while Bertha, sensing the danger, wants to dress because she feels “ ‘a little cold. It’s fresh.’ ” Kreisler, for his part, “knew that it was not fresh, as she was perspiring.” Heat and electricity, generated by friction, have clearly charged the atmosphere as they have charged Kreisler himself. Desirous to rub himself into a frenzy, he urges, “ ‘Let me chafe your arm! I like doing it,’ ” before “shooting up a hand to finger one” of Bertha’s breasts (192). Bertha keeps protesting, but the spark has already jumped over. Kreisler is already electrified and evolves from a formerly inert hunk of matter into a regenerated sexual cyclone, a vortex. Bertha is engulfed and obliterated by this vortex, whose field of force, it is implied, has been gradually building up:

With the fury of a person violently awakened to some insult he had flung himself upon her: her tardy panting expostulation, defensive prowess, disappeared in the whirlpool towards which they had both, with a strange deliberateness yet aimlessness, been steering. (193)

Kreisler’s desire to paint Bertha, his effort to reduce her voluptuousness to a flat two-dimensionality, indicates in itself again the degree

of his misogyny and of his fear of the female body. By representing Bertha's physical definition as an image without materiality, he can (as with his imagistic disembodiment of Anastasya) contain and control the female threat—at least within the realm of art. And in the ensuing rape, Kreisler carries this objectification to another level, extending the pictorial violence done to Bertha's body on canvas to the physical violence on her body itself, while coopting it for the gratification of his desire and the generation of his force field.

Yet, equally significant, while the coerced friction in this scene does magnify Kreisler's lust and magnetic radius, it also suggests the postcoital depletion of his energies. Following the momentary high of his sexual assault, he plummets to a new energetic low. Kreisler stands quivering at the window, a vortex in the process of idling out, still reeling from the aftermath of an action that has drained him of his energies: "His conscious controls and the entire body were still spinning and stunned: his muscles teemed with actions not finished, sharp, when the action finished" (191). And once Bertha is released from the receding force field, she similarly suggests this drop in energy when she compares Kreisler to a "switchback, rising slowly, in a steady innocent way, to the top of an incline, and then plunging suddenly down the other side with a catastrophic rush" (194). For the moment, Kreisler is, again, unable to power the narrative action forward, unable to inject motion into the events and to engage further targets. Following his energetic surcharge, the narrative engine, the mechanistic whipping top, has again unspun.

Nevertheless, Kreisler's rotations (decelerating as they do), as well as Bertha's perception of the "metallic glittering waves" of the clock striking in the room, suggest the further dispersal of his energies as well as Lewis's field model of *Tarr*. Analogous to the undular commotion during the dance, these waves imply the concentric—that is, vortical—reverberation of Kreisler's energies and actions to implicate the other major players in the textual field. Already, Bertha finds herself bound to Kreisler in more senses than one. Isolated from the Liepmann circle in her union with Kreisler, she dimly wonders whether "*Kreisler by doing this had made an absolute finishing with Kreisler perhaps impossible?*," culminating in her disillusioning insight that "She was a sort of Kreisler now" (196, Lewis's emphasis). Unbeknownst to her, she is also pregnant, thus ensuring not only the propagation of Kreisler's lineage, but also carrying the link that will draw Tarr into the orbit of Kreisler. But while Tarr steps into the role of Bertha's protector, he does not function as the "starter" of the Kreisler-machine, the object of contact to induce its field of force. Instead, Kreisler reprojects his violent energies onto the man whom he has long identified as his archenemy, Louis Soltyk.

Soltyk has been a target for the raging Kreisler ever since his arrival in Paris. Soltyk's cosmopolitan polish, "his self-possession, his ready

social accomplishment," have always been a thorn in Kreisler's side, since "he felt they were what he had always lacked" (151). Thus, if read in national-allegorical terms, Soltyk may remind the German dilettante of his cultural inferiority, "not merely before the more sophisticated culture of the West, but even in the face of the Frenchified and Westernized cultures of subject Poland as well" (Jameson 92). But more importantly, and perhaps on the no less allegorical level of national fiscal solvency, Soltyk represents, like no other figure in the novel, a threat to Kreisler's precarious resources of energy—resources which Lewis describes in economic terms. Together with his imagination, with which he loads himself metaphorically, money is the more literal means of Kreisler's empowerment, the medium that ensures him a continuous supply of food and thus the maintenance of his *élan vital*. After the last remittance by his father, Kreisler pawns off his possessions to keep himself running, and he attempts perpetually to draw funds from old and new lenders, were it not for Soltyk's interventions. For once, Kreisler can no longer expect any financial support from his "friend" and long-time lender Ernst Vokt, because this "host" has been occupied by Soltyk. "Of Soltyk," Kreisler observes, "Vokt saw more than of anybody: in fact it was he who had superseded Kreisler in the position of influence as regards Vokt's purse" (89). More importantly, Soltyk also acts as Kreisler's rival to the wealthy Anastasya. After the desertion of Vokt, Kreisler sees in Anastasya a virtual godsend that could recharge him (analogously to his mental "image" of her). Mulling over the financial void left by Vokt, he observes that now "a gold crown, regal person, had fallen upon the hollow" (106). But then Soltyk intervenes again, when he associates with Anastasya and siphons off her money. (Soltyk later, indeed, comes to the duel in a new "four-seater bought with the commission derived from a sale of jewels, family heirlooms, belonging to Miss Vasek" [276].) Hence, Kreisler feels deprived of a vital financial resource and of his ever-elusive sense of control over his chosen woman, and thus his fantasy of self-empowerment. Therefore not surprisingly, Kreisler sees in Soltyk a concerted assault on his energies.

Following the dance and the rape, Kreisler's duel with Soltyk represents the third center of action around which the narrative revolves, the most violent locus of combat and contact. It also represents the third occasion for Kreisler to re-energize both himself and the narrative zone, the moment for which he has already been rubbing himself up. Months earlier, during the dance, Kreisler had already reflected "How it would satisfy him to dig his fingers into [Soltyk's] flesh, and tear it like thick cloth" (151). And when he finally met Soltyk in the presence of Anastasya, he "smacked [him] smartly first upon one cheek and then upon the other," only to repeat this physical contact—vortex-fashion—later that day, when "the party of young men" encircling Soltyk in a café were "in a blur of violent commotion: Kreisler was in among them,

working on something in their midst. There were two blows—smack—smack” (257, 252). This time, however, Kreisler is already too exhausted to recharge himself through friction on *somebody* else. Instead, in a curious reversal of roles, it is again Solytk who comes to occupy Kreisler’s position. Solytk is at one point described as bearing, “distantly and with polish, a resemblance to Kreisler,” and as the man who appears “as though he had been compelled to imitate Kreisler all his life.” More handsome and more elegant than Kreisler, Solytk was in some ways his “efficient and more accomplished counterpart” (89). Already, Solytk has with great efficiency and accomplishment taken over Kreisler’s function as the chief parasite of the novel. Now, in an act of even more accomplished imitation, Solytk dismantles and dislodges Kreisler from his function as the novel’s narrative engine, and thus corroborates what has all along been Kreisler’s existential *angst*: a complete drainage of his, already residual, energies by his *doppelgänger*.

During their meeting, Kreisler at first seems to maintain his role and control. While Solytk is virtually paralyzed by the possibility of death, Kreisler (as yet partially charged through the friction from the previous day) radiates jumpy energy. Through “his rapid action,” which “immobilized everybody” participating in the preliminaries of the duel, Lewis indicates that Kreisler’s energies are as yet operative. More importantly, Lewis in this scene also introduces a new dimension to the sexual politics of his vortex-machine, when Kreisler, on impulse, decides to seek “satisfaction” from Solytk not through an exchange of bullets, but through an exchange of kisses. Over the protestations of a second that “Men do not kiss men,” Kreisler quickly positions himself close to his antagonist and whispers his peculiar peace offering, laden with further sexual innuendoes, into the latter’s ear, before “thrust[ing] his mouth forward amorously” (280). Thus, in conjunction with his earlier encounters with women, Kreisler reveals himself not only as a militant misogynist, but also as a latent homosexual—in Lewis’s estimation a kind of double perversion or a magnetic vortex with reversible polarities.¹⁵

And indeed, as Kreisler’s sexual advances begin to work on Solytk, Lewis seems to foreground precisely this “negative polarity” of Kreisler, that is, the dispersive, as opposed to the accumulative, side of his magnetic vortex. For while it is always women that serve Kreisler as vital energy donors, as the “spark plugs” necessary for his energetic buildup, Solytk does not function that way at all. On the contrary, as Kreisler’s insult transforms his catatonic opponent into a mechanistic cyclone, Solytk effectively drains Kreisler of his energies and displaces him as the narrative engine of *Tarr*. Proportionate to his own energetic depletion, Solytk charges himself through prolonged physical contact with him and substitutes as the new machine of the novel:

[Solytk’s] hands were electrified: will was at last dashed all over him, an arctic douche and the hands become claws flew at Kreisler’s throat. His nails made

six holes in the flesh and cut into the tendons beneath: his enemy was hurled about to left and right, he was pumped backwards and forwards. Otto's hands grabbed a mass of hair, as a man slipping on a precipice seizes a plant: then they gripped along the coat sleeves, connecting him with the engine he had just overcharged with fuel: his face sallow white, he became puffed and exhausted. (280)

That Solyk here enacts Kreisler's most pressing desire—namely “to dig his fingers into [Solyk's] flesh, and tear it like thick cloth” (151)—through a reversal of their subject positions, already hints at the reversal of their positions as narrative engines. Lewis, however, signifies the dwindling of Kreisler's energies and his abdication as the narrative motor also through the malfunctioning of his body. By lacerating Kreisler's torso, Solyk deactivates Kreisler's prime instrument of violence, the machine with which he has hitherto been able to energize the textual field. The wounds of Kreisler's body suggest leaks through which “blood trickled down his chest,” just as they function as the points of contact through which Solyk can drain and transfer Kreisler's energies onto himself. Correlative to Solyk's refueling, Kreisler loses fuel not only through transmission but also through the leaks in his body, the tank, as it were, of his bodily machine. While the new narrative engine becomes overcharged with fuel, the old narrative engine is running out of it. While the new narrative engine is starting up, the old narrative engine is being stalled:

“Acha—acha—” a noise, the beginning of a word, came from his mouth. He sank down on his knees . . . Tchun—tchun—tchun—tchun—tchun—tchun his blood “chugged”—he collapsed upon his back and the convulsive arms came with him. The strangling sensation at his neck intensified. (281)

But if a tired and exhausted Kreisler is dislocated from his position as the narrative motor, the “jump start” of Solyk's engine contains the proposition of infinite narrative prolongation. Already, each instance in which Kreisler sufficiently charged himself energized the text zone and drove the narrative forward. As long as Kreisler could have repeated the induction of his force field, the narrative engine would have provoked new narrative events and propelled the novel—theoretically *ad infinitum*. With the stalling of the old and the starting of the new engine, Lewis introduces this possibility again. But in that Lewis allows Kreisler, in his final assertion as a defunct machine, to eliminate his more accomplished counterpart (with an *automatic revolver* supplementing the incapacitated *revolving automaton*), he symbolically reassigns Kreisler to his former role and thus prepares the way for his own and the narrative's exhausted idling out.

The murder, in fact, represents the last significant action of a reinstated, but not reenergized, narrative engine, just as it represents the last significant action in the novel proper. It signifies the closure of

narrative activity, the point of transition that ushers into the novel's prolonged denouement and into the complete idling out of the narrative engine through the entropy of suicide. Part seven, the formal closure of *Tarr*, does not contain any essential action.¹⁶ Instead, the remaining portion brings into focus the centrifugal, postmortem dispersal of Kreisler's energies. The receding undular tremors—a kind of narrative aftershock—register in all of the major characters, for whom Kreisler becomes a subject of infinite discussion. It is, however, primarily in the person of Tarr, who has already been drawn repeatedly into Kreisler's orbit and who has wondered whether he “would never be free of Herr Kreisler?,” that the lasting influence of Kreisler makes itself felt (235). Early in the narrative, Tarr proclaimed that, unlike with most people, in whom “all the finer part of their vitality goes into their sex,” the artist is “he in whom his emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment. Its first creation is *the Artist himself*” (20). Tarr understands himself as a virtual incarnation of this principle, while Kreisler is presented as just the opposite: a figuration of the unconscious. And yet, the fact that Tarr believes in the creation of the male artist *ex nihilo* suggests that he, too, participates in a version of Kreisler's fantasy of male self-generation and autonomy; ultimately, he is no less misogynistic, if less militantly so, than Kreisler (and he thus approximates Lewis's own antifeminist aesthetic).¹⁷ When Lewis, therefore, lets Tarr redirect his detached emotionality from art into sex at the end of the novel, he suggests that Tarr violates not only his own, already phallogocentric, artistic credo, but at the same time follows in the footsteps of the phallic Kreisler. He indicates in a massive textual gesture the propagation of Kreisler's misogyny *on the level of Kreisler* (that is, on the level of sex, as opposed to art) and hence the centrifugality of his energies that have permeated the textual field and in particular “rubbed off” on the person that seems to have been least susceptible to his influence.

Having absorbed only a fraction of Kreisler's energies, Tarr cannot, of course, boast Kreisler's daunting record of fertility, the father of seventeen children in Munich alone who, in the 1928 version of the novel, is called “an antediluvian puppet of fecundity” (93). But Tarr, who argued that “the conditions of creation and of life disgust me—the birth of a work of art is as dirty as that of a baby,” nevertheless produces three children with one of his many lovers (240). More importantly, by marrying Bertha, the carrier of Kreisler's issue, for form's sake, Tarr signals his ratification of bourgeois conventions (that have always been anathema to him and that he always associated with the dueling and frac-wearing Kreisler), just as his substitution as father figure for Kreisler's son—the prime signifier of Kreisler's energies—is a symbolic acknowledgment that these energies have devolved upon him. Appropriately, this child “bore some resemblance to Tarr” (334). Tarr is clearly im-

plicated in the dispersal of Kreisler's energies. Partly through his own mediation, as he himself remarks, "Kreisleriana" has finally filled out the narrative zone: the energetic reverberations of the narrative engine (326).

Thus the closing segment of *Tarr* does not develop any new dramatic action, but instead puts into relief the final dispersal of Kreisler's misogynism and his energies. In terms of the narrative dynamic, this last section contains no thrust at all, but merely represents the final running down of a narrative that lost steam the moment it lost its narrative engine. The centrifugal refraction of the German Element in this last segment is legible as Lewis's final analogical reflection on the Historical Situation of *the fin de siècle* and may prefigure the mutually infective belligerence within the European theater preceding the Great War. The energetic deconstruction of Kreisler is also legible as Lewis's final demystification of the model of autonomous selfhood privileged by the humanist and mainstream modernist tradition. Kreisler himself announces that "I am a hundred different things. I am as many people as I have lived amongst," and his characterological multiplicity is already inscribed in the accumulative projection of his gyrations (258). Through Kreisler's repeated de-centering in the very attempt of centering himself, and his eventual energetic atomization, Lewis in fact foregrounds the mythology of a centered self, while pointing to the poststructuralist aesthetic in the postmodern future. Most importantly, complementing this rupture on the level of character, Lewis also breaks with his modernist rivals on the level of narrative form. For instead of adhering to the model of temporal linearity—with its attendant phenomenology of perception à la Joyce or Proust—Lewis through *Tarr* advances his own version of narrative along a generalized model of spatial contiguity. Kreisler's three field-producing encounters—the dance, the rape and the duel—represent the nodal points of energy concentration in *Tarr*, and delineate a trajectory that follows a pattern of intermittence, with sudden bursts of energy rupturing prolonged periods of arrest. And such a punctual design, with knots of highly concentrated action invading extensive stretches of inaction, virtually enacts Lewis's spatial conception of narrative—what was to become his famous privileging of space over time in *Time and Western Man*—and is ultimately ratified by his conception of Kreisler as an "electromagnetic" vortex and of *Tarr* as an "electromagnetic" energy field.

Thus, Lewis's use of electromagnetic theory as a literary-political strategy shows his ability to bring the sciences and the arts into a productive dialogue. In *Time and Western Man*, he indeed observed that the "different worlds of physics, philosophy, politics, and art" are no longer "rigidly separated," so that the artist must become an informed participant in the modern world if he is to maintain his creative edge. At the same time, however, as he went on to say, "the creative artist

is not merely to be a medium for ideas supplied to him wholesale from elsewhere, which he incarnates automatically in a technique It is equally his business to know enough of the sources of his ideas . . . to keep these ideas out, except such as he may require for his work.” Hence a novelist can embody “scientific notions . . . in his characters” only if he has a sufficient grasp of the science surrounding him (140). Thus, while Lewis acknowledges scientific knowledge as a prerequisite for such an interdisciplinary dialogic, he also emphasizes the poetic license of the artist, the creative latitude that allows the imaginative, as opposed to the precise, translation of a scientific model into literary form and theme. It would be naive to assume that Lewis was striving to recreate “accurately” a field model in *Tarr*. Rather, as his seriocomic conception of a narrative whipping top indicates, he recognized in electromagnetic theory a suggestive model that could be borrowed for literary and political ends. The engineering of *Tarr* is evidence of how productive such an interdisciplinary experiment can be.

NOTES

¹This is, of course, not to deny the formative contribution of Cubism to Vorticism. Richard Cork’s assessment of Vorticism as an aesthetic that “would temper Futurist melodramatics with Cubist sobriety, Italian movement with French monumentality” puts the matter succinctly (1:246). Reed Way Dasenbrock has recently described this particular synthesis of form and flux, of dynamism and design, as “dynamic formism” (36).

²*Tarr*, 1928 edition, 231. Further references are to this edition and will appear in the text. This essay is not the place to engage in a study of the novel’s textual variants. At various points in this essay, however, I will suggest that Lewis self-consciously reworked the 1928 version of *Tarr* in order to emphasize both Kreisler’s energetic fluctuations and his field-theoretical origins.

³In drawing attention to this possible Futurist “origin” of Kreisler, I am not suggesting that Lewis was a fascist ideologue in the manner of Marinetti (or Pound), celebrating the *duce*. To be sure, owing to his permanent poverty, Lewis felt drawn to Mussolini’s program in support of the arts, and both his intellectual elitism and his misogyny align him with fascist thought. But Lewis’s *Hüller* (1931) is, despite a sympathetic portrayal of the *Führer*, historically distant in tone: “It is as an exponent—not as critic nor yet as advocate—of German National-socialism or Hitlerism, that I come forward” (4). Following his own participation in the Great War (and losing his friends T.E. Hulme and Gaudier-Breszka on the battlefield), Lewis also changed his mind about war as, in Marinetti’s phrase, “the world’s only hygiene.” At best, Lewis’s view could, in Fredric Jameson’s phrase, be called “protofascist” (15).

On the other hand, I am suggesting that Lewis may well have modeled Kreisler’s general mindset on that of Marinetti. In terms of his artistic sensibilities, Kreisler’s vitalist pronouncements on Gauguin could indicate his affinities with Futurism, which similarly dwelt on a psychological-empathic identification with the object of representation, as opposed to Vorticism’s ostensible attitude of complete detachment (88-89). And even though Kreisler is German, he has for the past years been living in Rome, which may indicate another level of his Italian connection and, as a transnational allegory, prefigure the military alliance between Germany and Italy in the near future (81).

⁴In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis signals more clearly his indebtedness to the French thinker: “Descartes called animals *machines*: they had not the rational spark. But men use their rational spark so unequally, [that they] are so much machines too” (312).

⁵Distinguishing further between Lewis and Descartes, Levenson suggests that while Descartes attempted “to prove that the human essence is an immaterial soul only accidentally linked to an embodied form, Lewis sees humanity as essentially (and comically) bound to the body” (246). On the other hand, Geoffrey Wagner has observed that “Lewis’s lineal affinities” lie perhaps with La Mettrie “rather than with Descartes” (228-229). The author of *L’Homme Machine* (1747), La Mettrie carried the Cartesian *bête-machine* to its logical extreme, arguing that the concept of “soul” or “mind” (spiritual by definition) is as substantive as the body itself. He thus assumed a radical equalization of matter and mind while, not unlike Lewis, emphasizing the mechanical self-sufficiency and materiality of the body.

⁶In Kreisler are thus united the two distinct models of the human in Lewis’s fiction that John Holloway has fruitfully distinguished: “One the one hand, there is that of the engine: active producer of the mechanical. On the other, that of the puppet, mere product of the subservience of Kreisler’s mind to the mechanical inertia of his body make him into an automaton, the energy produced by bringing this body in motion lends him a unique momentum in and for the narrative.

⁷Meyers also points out that Lewis “seemed to like physicists and was knowledgeable about science in his books and conversation” (322).

⁸Ian Bell has shown that Pound understood himself as a scientific critic whose discourse was “explicitly informed by electromagnetic theory. “ He concludes that while the concept of the vortex echoes back to Greek theories of creation and to Descartes, its “most immediate context was contemporary physics,” because Pound recognized in “the patterning potential of electromagnetic energy” an “analogy for the wider potential of energy in general” (146, 155-156). Bell also points out that in 1914, the year of Vorticism, Pound repeatedly signed his essays with “von Helmholtz”—one of his pseudonyms—as if to signal his indebtedness to the man who brought the notion of vortical motion into the arena of modern physics (159).

⁹Peter Brooks has defined text from a psychoanalytical point of view, as a “system of internal energies and tensions” (xiv, *passim*). This textual conception is close to Lewis’s “electromagnetic” field model. Freud’s model of the human psyche as a zone with fluctuating energetic distributions, in fact, which largely informs Brooks’s understanding of text as a space for the exchange of energies, is one more indication of just how deeply the field concept has entered cultural discourse, in this case psychoanalysis.

Brooks’s interest in the dynamics of textual deployment also parallels the focus of this essay, even though Brooks is primarily concerned with narrative desire, not narrative form, narrative engines, and the politics of sexual violence. Yet, interestingly, his reading of the machines in the work of Emile Zola is fully apposite to my argument on Lewis. Zola’s engines, he observes, “represent the dynamics of the narrative, furnish the motor power by which the plot moves forward. . . . [They] are a *mise en abyme* of the novel’s narrative motor, an explicit statement of the inclusion within the novel of the principle of its movement” (45).

¹⁰In the Preface (written in 1915) for the 1918 version of *Tarr*, Lewis observed: “I associate myself with all [Tarr] says on the subject of humour. In fact I put him up to it. He is one of my showmen” (15). This position has been generally accepted by the critical community.

¹¹Lewis was also clear on the centrality of Kreisler, the title *Tarr* notwithstanding. As he put it in *Rude Assignment* (1950), “the book should have been called ‘Otto Kreisler’, rather than ‘Tarr’, who is a secondary figure” (165). *Tarr*, it appears, was a misnomer—a misnomer by an aspiring painter and novelist who identified too closely with his textual mouthpiece.

¹²Narratologically, preventing Kreisler from running out of steam before its due course has significant implications for the novel itself, for the presence of Kreisler’s obstacles functions as the text’s very condition of possibility. *Tarr* would not exist were it not for the existence of the narrative engine with its attendant stumbling blocks. Structuralism

has long pointed out that a narrative could be seen as a large grammatical unit, as a long Sentence whose final predication is suspended through temporary blockages and suspensions (see, for example, Roland Barthes's *S/Z*). *Tarr* constitutes a paradigm of this narrative model, since the obstacles in Kreisler's path function precisely as such blockages prolonging the textual event. Only through these moments of retardation does the narrative avoid immediate closure, so that narration can come into being. Only Kreisler's dislocations from his linear track make *Tarr* happen.

¹³The significance Lewis ascribed to the top, as well as his association of the top with a machine, is also evident in his war memoir, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937). Looking back to 1914, the year of Vorticism and the year Lewis entered the army, Lewis compares himself to a mechanistic whipping top. As he is called to order, he observes, "I instantly wheeled with the precision of a well-constructed top; and with the tread of an irresistible automaton I bore swiftly and steadily upon the adjutant" (22). This vorticist imagery is all the more important here, because Lewis has to defend himself against the adjutant's charges of being a Futurist, obviously a red flag for Lewis. The difference between Lewis's own characterization as a mechanized top and that of Kreisler is that Lewis's spin is controlled, unlike Kreisler's frenzied gyrations.

¹⁴Jameson's reading of Lewis is suggestive, particularly within the framework of Lyotard's notion of the "libidinal apparatus" that allows him to invert the traditional priorities of psychobiographical speculation—locating narrative themes in the private fantasy-structure of the individual—by suggesting that "the objective preconditions of the narrative structures that inform Lewis' imagination . . . are . . . to be sought . . . in the objective configurations of the political history of pre-1914 Europe" (11). Nevertheless, I find many of Jameson's readings not allegorical as much as hyper-allegorical. Certainly, *Tarr* is "one of the most characteristic monuments to the aristocratic-bohemian cosmopolitan and multi-lingual European culture of [the] period." But then to go on to argue that, by virtue of this international focus, Lewis "projects an essentially allegorical mode of representation, in which individual characters figure those more abstract national characteristics which are read as their inner essence," is a reductive abstraction that the text does not bear out with the symmetry posited by such a logic. To see in Lewis's psychopathology of Kreisler "a figuration of that complex of German feelings which served as the ideological justification for the War," is farfetched, to say the least (90-92).

¹⁵Kreisler's homosexuality, of course, must be seen in the context of Lewis's well-known hatred of homosexuality. In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), for example, Lewis observed that "a revolution in favour of standards unfriendly to the intellect, and friendly to all that had been formerly subordinated to it, is the first and most evident result of sex-transformation" (216). Thus Lewis associated what he called the "'homo'" with bourgeois snobbery, artistic dilettantism, and intellectual degeneration—qualities which are virtually incarnated in Kreisler (218). Lewis also saw in homosexuality a symptom of the general disintegration of "culture" and attacked many of his prominent literary contemporaries for their sexual orientation. In *The Apes of God* (1930), Lewis draws transparent caricatures of André Gide, Jean Cocteau, and Stephen Spender; and in *Time and Western Man*, he faults Gertrude Stein and Marcel Proust for their wrongheaded preoccupation with Bergsonian *durée*, which he surreptitiously associates with their sexual persuasion (and their ethnic origins—both were Jewish), while never directly referring to either.

¹⁶Timothy Materer has correctly observed that "The novel's dramatic excitement dies" with Kreisler (61). Conversely, the novel's dramatic excitement does not begin until the appearance of Kreisler in Part II, while Part I is characterized by Tarr's utter stasis and inactivity. As Robert T. Chapman put it: "The novel opens with Tarr meeting Hobson and talking; meeting Butcher and talking; seeking out Lowndes and talking" (72).

¹⁷Lewis certainly takes issue with the violent and mindless misogyny of Kreisler, a caricature of a particularly militant brand of the German *Weltschmerz* with little authorial approval. Interestingly, Lewis once also suggested that Tarr "may be seen as a caricatural self-portrait, of sorts," even though, he hastened to add, "not of course in his character

or behavior" (*Rude Assignment* 165). And while Lewis certainly distances himself from the Kreisler-like Tarr in the final section, he still performs as Lewis's self-acknowledged mouthpiece (see endnote 10). Hence, when Tarr articulates his version of misogyny, he clearly speaks for Lewis himself, who similarly believed in what one could call an aesthetic of male self-creation without female intrusion.

Lewis's misogyny has, of course, long been recognized. His biographer observes that Lewis "enjoyed manly intellectual *camaraderie* as an antidote to what he felt were degrading yet necessary relations with women, whom he considered less intelligent than men and resented for their power to awaken and exploit his passions." Yet, at the same time, Lewis's art seems to have been "stimulated by his physical relationships," which may account for Tarr's intellectualized (as opposed to Kreisler's instinctual) promiscuity (Meyers 70, 57). Lewis had numerous affairs and, not unlike Kreisler and Tarr, numerous illegitimate children; his wife, Froanna, whom he refused to marry for many years, was known to many only by her disembodied hands appearing through the serving hatch of their kitchen. In the early essay, "The Code of a Herdsman" (1917), in which he leans heavily on Nietzsche, he argued that, "As to women: wherever you can, substitute the society of men. = Treat them kindly, for they suffer from the herd . . . Women, and the processes for which they exist, are the arch conjuring trick: and they have the cheap mystery and a good deal of the slipperiness, of the conjuror" (6). In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), he associated decadence with the "feminization of culture" (*passim*), a decadence which he saw embodied in Virginia Woolf. In *Men Without Art* (1934), for example, he describes her narrative skill as, in many ways, "a sort of undergraduate imitation" of Joyce (138), and in *The Roaring Queen* (1936, posthumously published in 1973), he satirizes Woolf in misogynistic and antisemitic overtones as "Rhonda Hyman," a "lanky and sickly lady in Victorian muslins," and as the "most egregious of bogus Jane Austens" (80, 96).

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