Contingency and Avatarization in the Narrative Worlds of Wyndham Lewis and Will Self

Contingence et avatarisation dans les univers narratifs de Wyndham Lewis et de Will Self

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The English novelist Will Self has argued that under the pressure of the growing influence of digital media, reading the literary novel will soon become a rare, specialised activity. Referencing Marshall McLuhan, he even suggests that ‘the advent of digital media is not simply destructive of the codex, but of the Gutenberg mind itself’ (Self 2014b). This seemingly flippant acceptance of the supposed impending death of the concentrated reader of rich narrative forms, and of the novel’s disappearance from general public debate, comes with the acknowledgement of its replacement as the predominant narrative format by computer games (Self 2012). Self nonetheless continues to write demanding literary novels. In his recent fiction, he has, however, adopted an approach that demonstrates his engagement with the difficulties and possibilities brought to the fore by this new narrative medium. 2010’s Walking to Hollywood: Memories of Before the Fall can be seen as a transitional work that places a proxy Self character inside the text in a way that encourages reflection upon the issues raised by the technologies of both film and gaming.

The field of computer game narrative has been extensively theorised in recent years. One significant difference between narrative fiction and the fictional worlds of gaming is that where “[n]arrative representation looks backward—[present]ing again—and ascribing meaning to events from the perspective of their outcome” (Ryan 2004, 333), adventure games look forward and engage in the performative mode: their aim is to have you play, not explain what happened. This mode is particularly associated by games narrative theorists with the quest narrative, a form of game that is ‘an attempt at bridge-building between the open structure of games and the closed structure of stories’ (Juul 17),
drawing as it does on traditional novelistic structures and their determined status, and
the malleability of the events that occur while playing a game. Operating within this
mode makes contingency—taken here to mean a realistic-seeming form of apparent
randomness—more significant in gaming than it would traditionally be in narrative
fiction. Where traditional fictional narratives tell what has happened—about which there
can be little doubt—the world of gaming often supplies a narrative outline and
encourages the player to complete a mission by navigating through a contingent world.

Walking to Hollywood

appears to operate to a certain extent in this performative mode, in
ways we shall be examining, thereby bringing the text closer to the world of gaming.

We will also be considering the work of the Modernist novelist, critic and painter
Wyndham Lewis as a precursor of Self’s work with regard to the creation of fictional
worlds, the role of the subject, and the relationship between the narrator and the reader.
Over eighty years before Self’s publication of Walking to Hollywood, Lewis’s 1928 novel
The Childermass

reconfigured the role of the character as it progressed through a world
situated halfway between a realistic landscape and an overtly fabricated one. The two
main characters of the novel’s opening section are faced with a mission that itself hints at
a performative mode of fiction: the use of the present tense, the mysterious environment
and the sense of a quest to find or create meaning work within criteria that are to be
found—much later—in quest-game narratives. Significantly, the characters need both to
reach their destination and to understand the rules that govern the formation of this
fictional world itself. A pervasive sense of randomness and indecipherability also make
the reading of the novel a hermeneutic challenge, and the placing of the reader and the
protagonists before the same need to interpret a world as it is being developed can be
seen as a prefiguring of certain aspects of gaming narratology: the player/reader
discovers a world while learning the rules that define successful movement within it
(Juul 63). Lewis’s novel can also be considered a forerunner of Self’s later examination of the
potential of the performative mode in a fictional narrative context. There are other
similarities that are relevant to our discussion here: Self’s announced turn towards a form
of writing influenced by Modernism, and a less satirical tone (Porée 196) leads him to
produce many instances of the fragmentation of language and equally of the concept of
the self. Much early criticism of The Childermass focussed on its philosophical and social
aspects, as Lewis satirised the manipulation of modern man by radio technology. Self’s
adoption of Modernist themes and styles further reinforces the affinity between the two
writers at a turning point in Self’s career, where he may nonetheless be writing the last of
his explicitly satirical works.²

While aware of the difficulties and limitations inherent in this project, by using the term
‘avatarization’ we suggest there has been a shift in the perception of narrative fictional
characterhood towards the type of figure used in certain types of computer games to
represent players, and that this shift, despite still being only partially executed and still
in its early stages, was nonetheless, in some respects, anticipated by the work of Lewis in
the 1920s. An analysis of the contingent nature of the fictional space in the two works will
show how a rejection of a realist presentation of space evokes the notion of a game-like
quest for meaning. Then we shall see how instability in the concept of the self creates an
ambiguity in the relationship between reader and character. Lastly we will argue that the
avatarization of the central character can dynamise reader involvement in tricky,
unstable narrative worlds.
The instability of the setting in which characters move and act is in both works of key importance. The contingency that characterises the depiction of space in *The Childermass* is both thematically significant and hermeneutically problematic: the protagonists of the novel, two old school friends called Pullman and Satterstwaite, killed in WWI and now seeking a form of redemption in the Magnetic City, progress through an after-world that is mysteriously controlled by a distant authority figure, The Bailiff, through his influence on the world’s radio system. An establishing shot of the landscape at the beginning of the novel immediately emphasises the importance of the visual aspect of the environment: ‘The city lies in a plain, ornamented with mountains. These appear as a fringe of crystals to the heavenly north. One minute bronze cone has a black plume of smoke’ (Lewis 1928, 12). The use of the definite article to introduce the city, the very first element in this fiction, suggests it is in some way a given element of the background, which might therefore appear stable, even eternal. Its isolated positioning in the middle of the canvas-like plain encourages a reading that highlights its artificiality, however, and the ‘ornamentation’ provided by the mountains reinforces the impression that what is being perceived is there by design. Thus the first line of text establishes a shared point of view between the narrator, his characters and the reader that provides a mythical yet unstable referent, and the use of the present tense throughout the novel reinforces the filmic immediacy with which Lewis engages the reader in a direct apprehension of the world, alongside the protagonists. This immediacy reinforces the destabilising effect that occurs when the landscape later reveals itself to be a more clearly artificial construct that contains unconvincing details and even design faults: ‘Look at that hedge! Do you see its perspective? It’s built in a diminishing perspective! I believe the whole place is meant to be looked at from behind there, where we have just come from’ (Lewis 1928, 123). This discrepancy is not merely a curious form of parallax: the characters are in fact not subject to the same physical laws as their environment: a leaf shrinks as it is carried around with them, while they remain ostensibly the same size (Lewis 1928, 126); a distant town turns out to be a miniature one populated by automata that appear to be working, but whose actions accomplish nothing (Lewis 1928, 126-127); the period costume worn by these puppet-like extras is chronologically incoherent. It becomes clear that the way in which the characters perceive their environment depends on their physical position within it, suggesting it has been created for them, and perhaps for them to explore and understand through this exploration. Movement becomes a means of discovery, progress and comprehension—or at least interrogation—of the surroundings. The characters’ mission appears to consist in the very act of going beyond surface appearances.

This plainly contrived setting thus shares certain characteristics with modern gaming worlds. Satters and Pullman continue to investigate, or ‘play’, once they have noticed their environment is fake. “‘Time is giving up its secrets; we’re behind the scenes!’ Pullman next remarks impressively’ (Lewis 1928, 115). A realist environment tends to be more prized in traditional fictional narrative than it is in computer games, Juul points out that ‘[b]y game conventions, the player is aware that it is optional to imagine the fictional world of the game’ (Juul 141), and therefore not to notice disparities and inaccuracies. *The Childermass* resembles a games environment in that the world and its disparities play the role not merely of a support for actions essentially disconnected from it, but as a set of tools enabling progress towards a goal: that of comprehension. In games, an appreciation of the world’s technical complexity, beauty or fidelity to a real or imagined reality often has less importance than gameplay, i.e. the (pleasurable) progress involved in playing and...
progressing towards the goal, so long as the lack of realism does not hinder this play. Learning to read the rules that govern Lewis’s world is in fact like learning to play a game, which means adapting to previously unknown ‘rules of irrelevance’—i.e. ‘specification of what aspects of the game [...] are relevant’ (Juul 63), and which are not, i.e. what aspects of the environment can be held to be significant. Thus, the contingency, or contrived randomness of Lewis’s space is significant in a similar way to gameworld environments: needing to be accepted as contrived, and encouraging objective-led investigation. Successfully discerning the artificiality of the ‘gamespace’ situates the characters halfway between belief and disbelief, creating a narrative tension that is similar to that of a game-play situation.

7 Self’s world is similarly founded upon at most a notional form of realistic representation, and is even more fragmentary than Lewis’s, as the authorial eye zooms in and out, inserts filmic scenes, toys with perspective, multiplies the effects of mobile point of view and draws attention to superimposition, along with many other visual distortions. The effect is one of a deranged playfulness that recycles tropes and places, mixing them with details from a range of media: ‘It helped to think of myself as a one-man Bennet sisters, clopping through a prelapsarian Hertfordshire—its elms, beeches and lime avenues superimposed on the concrete chicane of Sunset, in the same way that a 120-foot high Jennifer Aniston was plastered across the façade of the Hyatt’ (Self 2010, 248). Self’s fragmented, multi-genre text keeps the reader on the back foot: constantly needing to re-interpret the data (s)he is discovering as mise en abyme follows mise en abyme. The fragmentation and bricolage of Self’s environment are his own means of investigating it with the intention of finding significance, however disturbing this might be. As we shall see, the relationship between the character and its world will have important repercussions in both texts on how the reader engages with it.

8 In these two fictional worlds with clearly foregrounded fictionality, the character—the representative of the human—has a lack of coherence and solidity. Lewis’s characters are unstable and porous, and interrogate the notion of a unified selfhood, to which notion Self introduces a significant twist: character contingency in his work applies not only to characters in third-person narratives, but also to the first-person narrator, whose ontological instability is a key, recurrent motif. This instability reinforces the connections found between literary and gaming forms of narrative, as gaming identities are subject to multiple, rapid and varied mutations that are rarely present in narrative fiction. Self’s manipulations of the first person operate a fragmentation of the notion of the self more radically than does Lewis’s treatment of his characters, while providing a potentially innovative form of reader involvement in a hybrid world inhabited by hybrid beings, that are presented as and understood to be half-real and, surprisingly, nonetheless engaging, as they permit ‘fictional and vicarious embodiment’ (Klevjer 9). The reader/narrator relationship is thus placed at the centre of the debate. Both texts examine the nature and role of the character in its artificially constructed world. The human character in the early sections of The Childermass is puppet-like, resembling an automaton, and subordinated to a sinister technological control system. Lewis explains that ‘[t]he contemporary European or American is a part of a broadcasting set, a necessary part of its machinery [...] at the pressing of a button, all these hallucinated automata with their technician-trained minds and bodies, can be released against each other’ (Lewis 1926, 126). The automaton indeed plays an important role in much of Lewis’s early satirical work, and although Lewis provides Pullman and Satters with some
characteristics that tend to reinforce their solidity *qua* characters, such as names, physical characteristics, a social and historical context, a past, as well as physical and verbal mannerisms (Jouve 29-30), they are undoubtedly constructs. Their contingency very rapidly manifests itself through verbal, physical and psychological fragmentation and instability. They grow in size, change gender, merge with, and then separate from each other. ‘One would say one was hollow’ (Lewis 1928, 90) remarks Satters early on. ‘On the physical side we are, at present, memories of ourselves […]. We are in fragments’ (Lewis 1928, 90-91).

The protagonists encounter secondary characters even less real than themselves as they progress: ‘peons’, purely artificial, almost totally abstracted beings with virtually no capacity for interaction, that are hardly to be distinguished from elements of the scenery, who ‘metamorphose from black disquieting figures […] into transparent angelical presences, which fade slowly in the material of the milky wall’ (Lewis 1928, 40). If the two main protagonists are manipulable figures on a quest, the peons are abstracted much like secondary computer game characters; entities that exist in passing, almost as very features of the landscape that one would not, and in some early cases, cannot investigate beyond a certain point, as they are prone to disappear, freeze or malfunction. The two protagonists stand out against the background of these peons, as they appear to have slightly more reality and agency than the former, and this of course encourages a degree of reader identification with them, without which (s)he would entirely lack interest in the mission. However, their instability creates a tension that Lewis exploits to pursue his investigation of self and world, the two of which are by now linked by their doubtful ontological status.

Will Self’s proxy character in *Walking to Hollywood*, ‘Will Self’, similarly fragments physically and psychologically, and in fact projects a psychotic instability onto his environment and the other beings in it: via a fractured text he attempts to come to terms with an unstable perception of space that is inhabited by beings that share their unreality with Lewis’s peons: ‘motos’, previously featured in *The Book of Dave* (2006). They are semi-human entities that act as emotional buffers between ‘Will Self’ and the world, shielding him from reality and/or realism. The author introduces these beings into *Walking to Hollywood* three times, undermining the relatively high level of realism present in his narration at the point where they crop up: ‘I fixated on the exposed coils of an electricity substation humming in the nettles, and so was quite unprepared for the moto enclosure that lay beyond this […] cursing myself for the ridiculousness of engaging in conversation with a creature that couldn’t possibly understand’ (Self 2010, 377). Encountering such unreal beings creates a handy buffer-zone between ‘Will Self’ and the fictional world, whose fictionality it is important for him to be able to perceive while nonetheless acting within its confines.

The same can often be said of the fully human characters he encounters. Many of the people ‘Will Self’ meets are being played by famous Hollywood actors: Morgan Freeman plays a tramp, Orson Welles plays his therapist—with panache—etc., and they can also be read as figures parallel to Lewis’s peons: they represent facelessness and interchangeability. In a typical supplementary turn of the screw Self places himself at the centre of the interchangeability of personhood: the role of ‘Will Self’ is played alternately by two actors: the admirable young version of David Thewliss, and the—for ‘Will Self’—disappointing choice of the older, less stylish Peter Postlethwaite. This running joke acts as a structuring device that underpins the ‘fragmented self’ motif. ‘Will Self’ experiences...
psychotic fugues that resemble the physical and psychological fragmentation of the protagonists of The Childermass and whose frequency renders character coherence less significant than action: all characters—and perhaps all people—suffer from a lack of authentic identity, and as such become virtually interchangeable, while nonetheless continuing to be actors in the world.¹

Unpredictability and an unstable representation of place and character thus make the experience of reading both The Childermass and Walking to Hollywood game-like. Both texts provide an enticing impression of infinite possibility: anything might happen in Lewis’s post-death apocalyptic dream-world with half-real characters surrounded by shades, or a fortiori in Self’s meta-fictional exploration of psychotic events. Both authors force a trade-off between traditional realism and investment in the illusion of apparently spontaneous and unlimited world-exploration. This is facilitated by the seemingly paradoxical renewed engagement with character that is realised through the creation of an illusion of agency in the form of ‘avatarized’ characters.

The concept of ‘avatarization’ we are proposing signifies the suggestion of a controllable, manipulable aspect to the character within a partly unpredictable world (or gamespace) whose rules need to be defined in order to achieve the mission’s goal. In gaming, the avatar is ‘an instrument or mechanism that defines for the participant a fictional body and mediates fictional agency’ (Klevjer 87). This proxy being engages readerly interest in Lewis and Self in a novel way. Providing the reader with actual ‘control’ over characters is of course not realizable in the traditional narrative form,² but incorporating aspects of the avatar figure into fiction allows a renewed approach to readers’ engagement with character. An ‘avatarized’ character in a novel will have no psychological depth, engage in episodic, often non-linear progression and create a paradoxical illusion: that of manipulable agency, whereby the reader aligns him/herself with the character and is implicated in its seemingly spontaneous reactions to its world. Lewis’s creation of peon-puppets in the place of characters suggests a prefiguring of Self’s more conscious and more extravagantly foregrounded approach to the problematic place of the character in modern texts. Both authors nonetheless help establish a relationship to character that is at once based on this mixture of manipulability and seeming independent agency, and convincing enough to maintain reader interest in the quest.

Self’s initial postulate is that Hollywood has quite clearly been assassinated and that his character is to embark on a mission to find out who killed it. Cinema is no longer the dominant form of story-telling; it has been toppled from its reign as the pre-eminent narrative medium of the age (Self 2010). It is suggested that nobody but a lunatic would now willingly suspend their disbelief long enough to authentically engage in a Hollywood story. New forms of narrative are needed to replace movies and narrative fiction. Both authors use cinematic techniques to comment on the mechanisation of the human (and Lewis famously scorned Chaplin and cinema in general for this very mechanisation), but both also re-construe the character through technological metaphors.

Ryan argues that ‘[t]he task of the writer, in the digital age, is to design a narrative experience that grants agency to users’ (Ryan 2004, 332). Self’s narrative is told in the first person, making the double act of creating contingency and engaging the reader all the more troublesome: how and why can a reader continue to take ‘Will Self’’s self, and his quest seriously if he is so clearly a fragmented and artificial construct? As we have pointed out, these artificial beings and fragmented worlds prove to be highly compelling despite—or perhaps because of—the stylised relationship between world and character.
Highly artificial scenes of conflict bring to mind filmic and games-based fights: set pieces of dramatic action. *The Childermass* prefigures a later generation’s ‘beat-em-up’ games, as Lewis describes crises that are analogous to fight scenes not just in the cinema of his time, but in many present-day gaming scenarios: ‘Satters as Keystone giant receives the crack exactly in the right spot, he sags forward in obedient overthrow [...] and crashes to the earth as expected [...] the correct classical Keystone corpse of Jack-the-Giantkiller comedy’ (Lewis 1928, 142). These clichéd slapstick scenes call for an almost physical identification with the avatar-characters, and a recognition of the motifs that make puppets of them. Referential punning and breathlessly long phrasing galvanise the description, while rendering its visualisation generic—where dynamic movement is construed as a pre-defined construct and is performed in reference to popular cinematic tropes and contexts. The intense, violent action of these scenes confirms the instability of the protagonists and their capacity for mechanical (and, updating the medium, digital) disassembly and malfunction. Satters’s pseudo-Steinian, glitchy, ungrammatical, language suggests a computer malfunction to today’s reader: “Y-y-y-y-y-y-you howwid blag-blag-blag-blag-blag- blag-blag-blag-blag-blag—!” A stein-stammer that can never reach the guard of blackguard hammers without stopping blag’ (Lewis 1928, 75).

It also confirms the oscillation between a desire to act and submission to external command. Self’s out-of-control avatar figure engages in similar clichéd combat scenes based on principles that are little different from Lewis’s but in which physical limits no longer constrain him, thanks to improved special effects. One such scene, initially established as a CGI-spectacular pastiche (he references ‘the purely filmic grammar’ of the action [Self 2010, 169]), can equally be read as a gaming analogy thanks to the first-person voice that situates the protagonist at the centre of the action. Lewis’s characters are constantly in the ‘gameplay’ tense of the present. Self’s narrative is generally in the simple past, for genre-based reasons (on one level the text is a travelogue), but the tense occasionally shifts from the past to the present as the narrative moves into what therefore appears to be another mode. These shifts are preceded and announced by Self’s character drinking an energy drink called ‘Powerade’, thus conforming to a super-hero or video game convention of metamorphosis through ingestion. Self satirises identification with action heroes through burlesque exaggeration of tone and action, as he describes himself morphing into one: ‘I raise my arm to the vertical, then flip the bus backwards over my head’ (Self 2010, 170). His use of the present tense places the reader inside the action alongside him, satirising identification with such heroes. Yet the satire does not put the reader off. It involves an embedding of clichéd Hollywood tropes in a narrative that reinforces the reading of the scenes as game-like, given the recycling of such cinematic tropes in action games themselves. Self gives himself the freedom to roam around the different genres in an exploration of their satirical and pastiche-worthy connections. His transformation is at once a symptom of his seemingly psychotic state, a commentary on Hollywood cliché, an exploration of trans-genre motifs and an ironic means of drawing the reader into the action alongside him as (s)he recognises these connections and laughs at his audacity in making so many of them.

Where Lewis establishes conflictual dialogue between his protagonists, Self indulges in what appears to be a deranged mental state to provide him with multiple points of view. This complex narrative framing is part of Self’s engagement with his conception of the exigencies of the Modernist project (Self 2012b). Here Self takes the notion of the fragmented subject and runs with it, creating an ever-more meta-referential text as he...
multiplies the strata of mediation between himself, the reader and the world. It might be supposed that this mediation would make reader identification with his proxy self all but impossible, but in fact this ‘avatarized’, manipulated version of the narrator actually engages the reader in a way that extends Lewis’s techniques. The distance created is always a paradoxical one that reinvigorates the process of the willing suspension of disbelief by bringing this narrative closer to games, rather than to films. The way Self asks the reader to join him in observing him from without evokes games-based viewpoints by fracturing standard vision: ‘My POV was not from behind my eyes but disembodied’ (Self 2010, 126). He invites the reader part of the way into the creative process, as it is mixed with a complex form of observation: Self observes himself being played by a character in his text (‘Will Self’) who is being played by another character—‘the man playing me’—in the shape of an actor. The more frames the better, to mediate the message. Significantly, ‘Will Self’’s pathological memory and perception problems are manifested in technological terms; as he observes himself being played by Thewlis, the gaps in his memory ‘edit’ the scene and make it another technological bug: ‘such are the vagaries of my memory that what may have been silk ruffles have been replaced by the small squares of opacity used to obscure the faces of covertly filmed criminal suspects’ (Self 2010, 130).

What prevents Self’s alter-ego from perceiving ‘reality’ is his own mind’s limitations as they operate via a technological metaphor. His fugues are psychotic episodes revealed as such by a therapist who films him and shows him the footage. The spoils of his personality malfunction both in and through technology, and this multiple mediation creates both distance and a feeling of involvement in the bricolage of the contingent world before him, alongside the narrator-as-patient. Self is not saying ‘I am a camera’, but ‘we are a camera watching me, aren’t we?’. Our distance from ‘Will Self’ is great, but so is Self’s, rendering the game of identification amusing and dynamic while making emotional engagement apply, if at all, to an only partly real-seeming being. As ‘Will Self’ remarks, ‘I couldn’t fault me on my mannerisms’ (Self 2010, 128), where the paradoxical use of the object pronoun, rather than the reflexive one, reinforces the impression of a doubled relationship to the ‘Will Self’ figure: he is both acting and being acted upon. Thus, as the formal complexities of his text are multiplied, and the genre of the book becomes ever less clearly defined, the reader is drawn in through the loops of irony that are created. In this way Self’s conjectures about media, the self and narration implicate the reader by complimenting him/her on his/her ability to navigate the multiple layers of references and media-savvy play. Lewis, working in a far less media-saturated cultural context, anticipated and explored a good number of the themes at stake in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His own technique for encouraging reader implication is, in fact similar to Self’s for the reasons we have discussed.

The avatar-character ultimately exists as a half-real investigator of the code that creates the rules in these given fictive spaces. By positing characters that are aware of their ontological instability or indeed their non-existence, Lewis and Self insert inverted commas around their protagonists throughout their narrative, engaging the reader in a paradoxical situation: (s)he has a heightened awareness of fictional instabilities, but must actively interpret a world and what (s)he reads and is paradoxically immersed in a world that confronts its artificiality. This active, interpretative role brings to mind Juul when he observes that ‘Games as activities and rules-games are not just representations of events, they are events’ (Juul 158): in the case of the works we have studied, the galvanised modes
of narration go some way to enabling an event-like approach to reading. If reading literature is to be a means of enabling a continuing dialogue with alternative formats, it may pursue this performative direction. Character ‘avatarization’, in creating the eventfulness and perceived randomness or unpredictability of games becomes the means by which the reader can be immersed in a field of interpretation/action while simultaneously engaging but only partially identifying with the characters. The Death of Affect is the means of bringing the event to life and supplying fictional narrative with a dynamism that reasserts its adaptability.

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NOTES

1. See Nichols for the origin of this term in documentary film-making which has been reprised by Ryan in the gaming context.

2. Distinct similarities between Lewis and Tom McCarthy’s C (2010) can also be found: Lewis’s interest in the external surface of the character is echoed in Serge’s insect-like carapace of self-definition, protection or, absenting (Davies).

3. Will Self’s Shark contains a similar image: the imagined ghosts of the victims of the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima; ‘skin angels’, who flit in and out of the minds of the characters: ‘He was forsaken on the London train, and . . . the skin angels drew closer and closer, their flapping translucency blocking his view […]. He stumbled from the compartment, and, since this was a Pullman service, made his way to the restaurant’ (Self 2014, 126). Is the Pullman reference a coincidence?

4. Lewis satirises the herd mentality while Self, placing his own avatar in the crowd renders a purely satire-based reading more problematic.

5. With the limited exception of ‘You are the Hero’-type fantasy fiction, which gives readers options about how to proceed through a story to a potential victory.

6. And a page of gender-bending porn cliché.

7. Many modern games permit a choice from multiple points of view, as well as slow-motion replay of scenes.

8. This theme is further investigated in Umbrella.
ABSTRACTS

Wyndham Lewis's 1928 novel *The Childermass* stages an apocalyptic voyage through an overtly fake landscape inhabited by animated simulacra and constructs a problematic narrative investigating the world-space the characters inhabit. Its questioning of suspension of disbelief is echoed in Will Self's generically unstable *Walking to Hollywood*, as it interrogates the viability of narrative and representation. Both texts also contain a challenging approach towards selfhood that suggests complementary reactions to the modern technologies of the time. Lewis requires his reader to question the self's viability, and Self engages in a burlesque reworking of Hollywood tropes whose starting point is the fracturing of this self/SELF. *Walking to Hollywood* returns to many of Lewis's preoccupations with multiple levels of irony and yet engages readerly interest, suggesting Lewis's automata characters in *The Childermass* are open to a renewed interpretation in the context of new media forms.

Le roman *The Childermass* de Wyndham Lewis met en scène un voyage apocalyptique à travers un paysage ouvertement factice peuplé de personnages simulacres et déploie une narration problématique d'investigation de cet espace-monde. La remise en question de la suspension volontaire de la crédulité trouve écho dans *Walking to Hollywood* de Will Self: une œuvre de genre instable qui interroge la narration et la représentation. Les deux textes opèrent une remise en cause de la notion du sujet et laisse penser que leurs réactions aux technologies coïncident en partie. Lewis exige de son lecteur qu’il questionne la viabilité du sujet, et l’utilisation burlesque de tropes hollywoodiens par Self prend la fracture du sujet comme point de départ. *Walking to Hollywood* revisite plusieurs préoccupations Lewisiennes, avec en supplément plusieurs couches d’ironie. Pourtant ce texte intrigue, les automates de Lewis se prêtant à des interprétations toujours renouvelées.

INDEX

**Keywords:** avatar, avatarization, gaming, narrative, new media, realism, satire, selfhood, spatial representation, technoself

**Mots-clés:** avatar, avatarisation, jeux vidéo, narration, nouveaux medias, réalisme, représentation spatiale, satir, technoself

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