Ideological Text-Worlds in Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939): A Cognitive Approach

Mohsen Gholami
Faculty of Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
Email: gholami.m1357@gmail.com

Abstract

The current paper examines the application of text-world theory to Wyndham Lewis's fascist writings, particularly *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939). In these polemical works, Lewis builds immersive ideological "text-worlds" that mirrors authoritarian and exclusionary viewpoints, portraying his contentious political beliefs of the 1930s. Applying text-world theory as an analytical structure, this study unravels how Lewis's language creates cognitive spaces where readers are placed within a perspective that accentuates order, hierarchy, and social purity. By setting a deictic center that is anchored in authoritarian values, Lewis immerses readers in text-worlds where hierarchical authority is represented as natural and desirable. Key text-world techniques, such as metaphor, epistemic modality, and counterfactuality, are shown to strengthen ideological themes by shaping social barriers and presenting in-groups as morally superior. The paper, then, analyzes Lewis's deictic centering and metaphorical language, which construct social purity and contamination as oppositional forces within the text-world.

Keywords: Cognitive Approach, Text-World Theory, Hierarchy, Social Purity

1. Introduction

Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) was a radical innovator in British modernism whose multifaceted oeuvre continues to provoke scholarly debate. As the leading force behind Vorticism—a movement paralleling Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism—he played a pivotal role in shaping early twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics. Beyond painting, Lewis was also a prolific novelist, poet, essayist, critic, and pamphleteer. However, his complex and often contradictory relationship with fascist ideologies, particularly in the 1930s, has rendered his political legacy deeply controversial. While some critics argue that his reputation has been unfairly tarnished through selective readings, others highlight the explicit fascist sympathies evident in his works. Among his most contentious writings are *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), which engage with authoritarian themes and exclusionary politics. These texts not only reflect Lewis's ideological entanglements but also provide insight into how language constructs immersive ideological narratives.

This study addresses the problem of how Wyndham Lewis's narrative techniques construct ideological spaces that actively shape reader perception and reinforce authoritarian worldviews. While scholars have long debated Lewis's political stance,

less attention has been given to the cognitive mechanisms through which his texts structure political discourse and position readers within it. By applying Text World Theory—developed by Paul Werth and expanded by Peter Stockwell—this study examines how Lewis's linguistic and narrative techniques manipulate both cognitive orientation and ideological alignment. The significance of this analysis lies in its contribution to the fields of cognitive poetics and ideological critique, offering a framework for understanding how literature can construct immersive textual realities that legitimize exclusionary or authoritarian ideologies. In an era marked by increasingly polarized political narratives, algorithm-driven echo chambers, and the resurgence of populist rhetoric, examining how language cognitively embeds readers within particular ideological worldviews is more urgent than ever. This study thus not only deepens our understanding of Lewis's controversial legacy but also contributes to a broader inquiry into how texts—literary or otherwise—shape belief systems and political consciousness through subtle, often unconscious mechanisms of narrative immersion.

The primary objective of this paper is to analyze how Lewis employs text-world techniques—such as deictic centering, metaphor, epistemic modality, and counterfactual scenarios—to build immersive ideological frameworks. Through deictic centering, Lewis's narratives position the reader within an ideological perspective that normalizes authoritarianism, making hierarchical social structures appear inevitable. His use of metaphor reinforces ideological binaries—such as purity versus contamination—establishing cognitive boundaries that delineate in-groups and out-groups. Epistemic modality further strengthens this effect by conveying a sense of certainty, persuading readers to accept Lewis's ideological assertions as indisputable truths. Counterfactual scenarios, in turn, depict alternative realities that suggest social chaos in the absence of authoritarian control, reinforcing the necessity of hierarchical order. Therefore, this study explores the following research question: How do text-world techniques in Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) construct immersive ideological spaces that frame authoritarianism as a natural social order?

2. Literature Review

Literary scholars have been investigating Wyndham Lewis's polemical fascist writings, particularly *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939). Previous studies often concentrated on the political implications of these fascist texts, investigating Lewis's apparent flirtation with fascist ideologies. Fredric Jameson, for instance, places Lewis within the broader context of modernism's entanglement with reactionary politics, pinpointing the dramatic tensions between his avant-garde aesthetics and his political rhetoric, 'as for fascism', Jameson (1979) asserts that 'Lewis was in no sense an official fascist ideologue.' (Jameson, 1979, p. 14). Similarly, Paul Edwards scrutinizes the ideological ambiguities and ambivalent attitudes in Lewis's fascist works, stating that his satirical intentions are often undermined by his rhetorical strategies, which risk strengthening the ideologies they claim to critique (Edwards, 2000).

More recent scholarship has navigated towards analyzing the stylistic/artistic and narrative parameters in these fascist texts. On the one hand, Andrzej Gasiorek explores how Lewis's modernist aesthetics connect with his ideological commitments, stressing the key role of irony and satire in his political texts (Gasiorek, 2004). On the other hand, Jane Garrity inspects the performative aspects of Lewis's prose, offering that his narratives build textual environments that both reflect and distort the socio-political discourses of the interwar period (Garrity, 2011). However, the employment of cognitive frameworks such as the development of text-world theory to Lewis's fascist texts remains underexplored. Scholars like Joanna Gavins and Peter Stockwell have revealed the considerable potential of text-world theory to illuminate how narrative strategies mold reader involvement, but these methods have yet to be systematically adopted to Lewis's contentious texts.

In recent years, scholarship has increasingly emphasized the role of cognitive-affective structures in narrative persuasion and ideological framing. Studies by Lisa Zunshine (2022) and Karin Kukkonen (2020) have deepened our understanding of how literary texts exploit cognitive patterns to generate belief, affective alignment, and interpretive complicity—insights especially pertinent to politically charged or ethically ambivalent texts like Lewis's. Meanwhile, researchers such as Marco Caracciolo (2021) and Emily Troscianko (2020) have called for more interdisciplinary approaches to narrative engagement, combining cognitive poetics, narratology, and reader-response theory to examine how texts cognitively embed readers in ideologically loaded world-models. Additionally, recent developments in critical narratology—such as those discussed in Narrative Theory Unbound (edited by Warhol and Lanser, 2021)—highlight the ethical stakes of narrative immersion, a concern directly relevant to Lewis's rhetorical strategies.

Additionally, narratological studies such as those by Mieke Bal, Monika Fludernik, and David Herman provide essential frameworks for understanding how narrative perspective, focalization, and time contribute to the ideological construction of text-worlds. The integration of these narratological insights with text-world theory allows for a deeper analysis of how Lewis's texts engage readers in cognitive and ideological positioning. Such an approach is crucial not only for unpacking the subtle rhetorical mechanics of his prose but also for understanding how readers may be drawn into—or distanced from—the ideological worldviews his texts propose. In this way, cognitive stylistics offers a uniquely powerful lens for examining the immersive and persuasive dimensions of Lewis's political modernism.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Text-World Theory (TWT) as a cognitive framework to analyze the ideological structures embedded in Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939). Text-World Theory, originally developed by Paul

Werth and further expanded by Peter Stockwell and Joanna Gavins, offers a systematic approach to understanding how linguistic and narrative structures create immersive mental representations for readers. By focusing on the cognitive mechanisms that govern text processing, this study examines how Lewis's works construct ideological spaces that shape reader perception and engagement with authoritarian themes.

In fact, Text World Theory not only models how readers mentally construct narrative worlds, but also how these constructions can become sites of ideological manipulation. For instance, the structure of sub-worlds—such as embedded beliefs, hypotheticals, or character-internal perspectives—can subtly naturalize ideological stances by framing them as cognitively plausible or emotionally resonant. Similarly, deictic manipulation (shifts in temporal, spatial, or epistemic positioning) can align the reader with specific ideological viewpoints by anchoring them within a narrative perspective that feels immersive or morally persuasive. In this way, TWT offers a powerful framework for analyzing how readers may become ideologically "entrapped" within the layered architecture of the text-world.

Joanna Gavins structures this theory around three levels: the Discourse World, the Text-World, and Sub-Worlds. The discourse-world encompasses the immediate context in which the text is produced and interpreted, including the background knowledge, assumptions, and experiences of both the writer and the reader (Gavins, 2016). The text-world, which is the primary focus of this study, represents the mental model constructed by readers based on linguistic input, forming the fictional world in which the narrative unfolds. The sub-worlds refer to departures from the main text-world, including hypothetical, dreamed, or remembered worlds that exist within the narrative.

The research follows a qualitative approach, utilizing textual analysis to investigate how Lewis's rhetorical and narrative strategies structure reader experience. Traditional studies on Lewis's political writings have predominantly centered on ideological critique (Jameson, 1979; Edwards, 2000), while more recent scholarship has explored the stylistic and narrative techniques employed in his works (Gasiorek, 2004; Garrity, 2011). However, few studies have examined how cognitive frameworks, particularly Text-World Theory, contribute to the immersive quality of his ideological discourse. This research fills this gap by integrating cognitive poetics and discourse analysis, demonstrating how Lewis's language constructs text-worlds that reinforce or subvert authoritarian worldviews.

The theoretical framework is grounded in Text-World Theory, which posits that readers mentally construct multi-layered textual environments based on linguistic cues (Werth, 1999). Within these environments, various cognitive mechanisms shape reader perception and affective response. This study focuses on four key dimensions of TWT in Lewis's works: deictic centering, metaphor, epistemic modality, and counterfactual scenarios. Deictic centering explores how Lewis's narrative positioning subtly draws readers into an ideological framework that normalizes hierarchical social structures, thereby fostering alignment—whether conscious or unconscious—with authoritarian perspectives. Metaphors and conceptual blending serve as cognitive tools that solidify binary oppositions central to fascist rhetoric, such as purity versus contamination or order versus chaos (Stockwell, 2002), potentially encouraging emotional alignment with the text's polarizing moral logic. Epistemic modality, the use of expressions of certainty and probability, plays a persuasive role by presenting ideological claims as epistemically secure, reducing the space for reader skepticism and reinforcing ideological immersion (Gavins, 2007). Finally, counterfactual scenarios—narrative depictions of alternative realities—construct speculative worlds in which social disorder ostensibly follows the absence of authoritarian control. These scenarios generate cognitive dissonance by confronting the reader with emotionally charged outcomes that appear to validate oppressive systems, thus complicating the reader's critical distance and reinforcing ideological legitimacy through narrative simulation.

Ultimately, the data collection and analysis process involves a close reading of Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) to identify key deictic shifts, metaphorical constructions, modal expressions, and counterfactual projections. This study incorporates insights from narratology (Bal, 1997; Fludernik, 1996; Herman, 2002) and cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2002) to examine how deictic centering, metaphor, epistemic modality, and counterfactual scenarios shape ideological positioning.

4. Discussion

This study's application of Text World Theory to Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) reveals the sophistication—and often the unsettling nature—of the textual landscapes Lewis constructs to engage with the ideological debates of his time. By examining how these texts build layered and dynamic text-worlds, the analysis uncovers how Lewis employs narrative strategies—particularly irony, deictic shifts, and modal ambiguities—to manipulate reader alignment and ideological positioning. The use of irony destabilizes authorial authority, often blurring the line between critique and complicity, while shifts in deictic centre and perspective recalibrate the reader's spatial, temporal, and epistemic orientation within the narrative. Such techniques foster a sense of immersion that is cognitively and ideologically charged, drawing readers into textual environments that echo real-world political anxieties yet resist straightforward moral or ideological resolution.

In both texts, Lewis creates sub-worlds—hypothetical, counterfactual, or belief-based spaces—that function not only as rhetorical maneuvers but as cognitive traps. These embedded spaces often present controversial ideological stances, including fascist sympathies and antisemitic assumptions, through narrative voices that challenge the reader's ethical judgment and interpretive stability. Text World Theory allows us to trace how these sub-worlds operate beneath the surface of the discourse, shaping the reader's mental representation of the text in subtle and sometimes troubling ways. By doing so, it becomes possible to analyze how ideological immersion is not simply a thematic concern in Lewis's work, but a formal and cognitive strategy—

one that implicates the reader in the very ideological structures the texts appear to critique. This cognitive-narratological approach thus sheds new light on the rhetorical mechanics of Lewis's fascist texts and provides a more nuanced understanding of how narrative form participates in the construction and dissemination of political meaning.

4.1. Applying Text-World Theory to Ideological Discourse in Wyndham Lewis's Fascist Texts

4.1.1. Text-World Construction in *Hitler* (1931)

The function of text-world theory to Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) underscores the intricate patterns in which narrative structures, rhetorical devices, and linguistic strategies build an ideologically charged textual atmosphere. Lewis's portrayal of Adolf Hitler is highly ambiguous, reflecting both a critique of totalitarian power and a flirtation with its rhetorical and psychological allure. This research, to greater extent, uncovers how Lewis's employment of text-world techniques—particularly his manipulation of deictic markers, modal structures, and narrative perspective—designs a text-world that challenges the reader's interpretative framework while disclosing the contradictions in Lewis's involvement with fascist ideology. Thus, Lewis claims,

> But there is one enormous difference between National Socialist theory and its first cousin 'Credit-crankery,' upon the one side, and Communist theory upon the other. And that psychologically is I think of the greatest importance. The Weltanschauung of the Hitlerist or his near-relation (the egregious 'Credit crank') is laughing and gay compared to that of his opponent, the Communist. The Communist world-picture is painted in crude blood-red, coal-black, colors. But if what the 'cranky' Hitlerist believes is true, a veritable Golden Age is in store for the World, if only the incubus of Das Leihkapital could be removed. The so-called 'idealism' of the National Socialist consists in believing that this nightmare can ever be driven out—not surely in the pleasantness of life once it were. (Lewis, 1931, p. 183-4)

In *Hitler* (1931), Lewis conceives a text-world that vacillates between apparent adulation for Hitler's leadership qualities and underlying critiques of authoritarianism. By applying ambiguous deictic markers, Lewis destabilizes the narrative perspective, persuading readers to question the reliability of his depictions. For instance, phrases that ostensibly admire Hitler are juxtaposed with sardonic undertones, creating a layered political discourse that resists straightforward interpretation. As Lewis asserts,

> In the following articles it is as an exponent—not as critic nor yet as advocate —of German National Socialism, or Hitlerism, that I come forward. It seems to me very important that an unprejudiced and fairly detailed account of this great and novel factor in world affairs should be at the disposal of the intelligent Anglo-Saxon. The Anglo-Saxon reader will violently dissent from many of the views and attitudes of the Hitlerite. The latter's economic policy will appear at first sight mad, his attitude to the Jewish people almost incomprehensible. But I shall not present the National Socialist standpoint in general in an unreal manner calculated to appeal to and mislead the Englishman or the American. (Lewis, 1931, p. 4)

The results will attempt to demonstrate that this textual ambiguity serves two main purposes. First, it reflects the broader cultural fascination with authoritarian figures during the 1930s, portraying how political/Nazi propaganda molded public perceptions. Second, it demonstrates Lewis's own ideological ambivalence, as he wrestles with the socio-political tension between his modernist critique of mass conformity and his sporadic endorsements of strong, centralized leadership. This duality complicates Lewis's political stance, positioning *Hitler* (1931) as both a critique of and an inadvertent participant in the rhetoric of fascism.

One of the most prominent attributes of *Hitler* (1931) is Lewis's deliberate ambiguity in introducing his subject. Applying deictic shifts—such as temporal and spatial markers—Lewis builds a narrative perspective that vacillates between proximity to and renounce his pro-Fascist commitment and retracted his advocacy and allegiance to fascism and Hitler's ideology. For example, Lewis describes Hitler's ascent to power in terms that are both critical of the cult of personality and revering of his capability to harness mass appeal. These transition processes in narrative positioning destabilize/undermine the reader's ability to discern Lewis's own ideological stance, aligning with Paul Werth's assertion that text-worlds approach often operate on multiple levels of reality and interpretation (Werth, 1999). As Johnson-Laird puts,

> We . . . organise our experience in terms of temporal and spatial locations, within frameworks of what is possible and permissible, and within a nexus of causes and intentions. The semantic operators provide Precisely the framework . . . around which we organise the general know ledge underlying the plausibility of discourse. Semantic fields provide us with our conception of the furniture of the world - of what exists and the semantic operators provide us with our concept of the various relations that may inhere between these objects. Time and space are primitives that are merely simulated in mental models. Plausibility and permissibility depend on our capacity to construct models of situations that are alternatives to reality and to evaluate them with respect to our knowledge. of the 'laws' of nature or morality. (Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 144)

This ambiguity is further strengthened by Lewis's use of modal structures to amplify his descriptions. Statements about Hitler's leadership often use hedging phrases, such as "it might be argued" or "some believe," creating a discursive space where conflicting perspectives coexist. As Joanna Gavins notes, such modal constructions embrace readers to actively involve with the text-world theory (whose primary foundations are cognitive and experientialist assumptions) by filling in interpretative gaps, making them complicit in the ideological tensions the text connotes (Gavins, 2007). In *Hitler* (1931), this strategy not only represents Lewis's modernist aesthetics but also portrays the broader uncertainties of interwar political discourse. As Lewis lamented the fact that,

Street-violence, it could be argued, suits the book of the republican caucus, so at least it would seem. The political opponents of the present republican regime (the most powerful of which are the Nazis or National Socialists) can only be held in check by constant police violence. The Communist needs that too. But the Communist helps the police to beat and shoot the Nazis. (Lewis, 1931, p. 16)

This passage exemplifies how Lewis's modal constructions introduce multiple interpretative layers, allowing for ideological ambiguity to persist. The phrase "it could be argued" immediately distances the author from the assertion, shifting responsibility onto an unnamed hypothetical viewpoint. By framing political violence as something that "suits the book" of various factions rather than taking a definitive stance, Lewis constructs a text-world in which ideological tensions remain unresolved. This aligns with Peter Stockwell's assertion that modal structures in narrative discourse can serve as cognitive invitations, drawing readers into the negotiation of meaning rather than presenting fixed ideological positions.

Additionally, the repetition of "needs" in reference to both the police and the Communists suggests a deterministic vision of political struggle, implying that violence is an inevitable force within Weimar Germany's collapsing democracy. This deterministic framing, combined with the modal hedge "it could be argued," creates a paradox: while Lewis presents himself as a detached observer, the text subtly legitimizes authoritarian narratives by portraying them as structurally necessary responses to disorder. As Fredric Jameson argues, modernist texts often employ ambiguity as a means of deflecting responsibility, making it difficult to ascertain whether they critique or reinforce reactionary ideologies.

Moreover, the opposition between Nazis and Communists in Lewis's description reflects a broader interwar anxiety about political extremism. By presenting both groups as agents of violence, Lewis avoids an explicit endorsement of either, yet the implicit suggestion that the Nazi movement is a necessary counterforce to Communist aggression introduces a problematic ideological slant. This echoes Paul Edwards's critique that Lewis's rhetorical strategies often undermine his purported satirical intentions, allowing authoritarian ideologies to gain traction under the guise of impartial analysis (Edwards, 2000).

Ultimately, Lewis's modal constructions in *Hitler* (1931) serve as a crucial mechanism within his ideological text-worlds, drawing readers into a cognitive space where uncertainty and determinism coexist. This study argues that such techniques not only exemplify Lewis's modernist engagement with unstable perspectives but also highlight the dangers of narrative structures that blur the boundary between critique and complicity.

4.1.2. Satire and Irony as Ideological Framing Mechanisms in Text-Worlds

Viewed through the lens of Text-World Theory, Lewis's use of satire and irony in *Hitler* (1931) serves not as mere stylistic embellishments but as mechanisms that shape the ideological framing of the text. While Lewis maintained that the book was intended as a critical examination of Hitler's appeal rather than an endorsement, his rhetorical choices complicate this assertion. The text frequently employs a hyperbolic tone to depict Hitler's persona, juxtaposing grandiose descriptions with subtle ironic undercutting. This interplay constructs a dual-layered ideological text-world, where the surface narrative appears to acknowledge Hitler's charisma, while the deeper narrative critiques the mechanisms of propaganda and mass manipulation. A striking example of this irony emerges in Lewis's description of Hitler as a *"Man of Peace"*:

So in Adolf Hitler, The German Man, we have, I assert, a 'Man of Peace.' He is certainly not 'a pacifist,' of the order of the regulation pacifist best-seller Remarque. But Hitler is as it were the typical German soldier (the Frontkämpfer as they a little grandiloquently call it). The Iron Cross, conspicuous upon his bosom, signifies that he is a brave soldier, not that he is a bravo or a pugilist. (Lewis, 1931, p. 32)

The passage exhibits an ironic dissonance, as Lewis's ostensibly neutral analysis of Hitler's military credentials is framed in language that subtly mocks the grandiosity of Nazi self-mythologization. However, the lack of explicit authorial disavowal leaves the passage open to multiple interpretations. From a cognitive perspective, this creates an unstable text-world in which readers must actively negotiate their stance, leading to interpretative ambiguity.

Andrzej Gasiorek argues that Lewis's use of irony is central to his modernist project, allowing him to engage with controversial topics without fully committing to a specific ideological position. However, this study finds that in *Hitler* (1931), irony and satire often blur the line between critique and complicity, creating an ideological space that can be read both as a condemnation of Hitler's rise and as an implicit validation of his political methods. The absence of clear rhetorical markers signaling disapproval makes the text susceptible to misreading, particularly by readers sympathetic to fascist ideology. As Gasiorek observes,

Perhaps the greatest and most tragic irony about Lewis is that he has been categorised as an artist of frozen views and monolithic invention, almost completely lacking in subtlety and alteration, yet his career was long, his output prolific, and the development of his views unceasing. (Gasiorek, 2015, p.124)

This contradiction is particularly evident in Lewis's engagement with fascist discourse, where his rhetorical ambiguity and shifting political positions complicate any definitive categorization of his ideological stance. While some scholars Jameson and Edwards argue that Lewis's irony functions as a distancing device that separates him from the ideologies he portrays, others, including Gasiorek, suggest that his use of satire and irony actually undermines this critical distance. The very mechanisms intended to subvert fascist rhetoric instead contribute to an immersive ideological text-world that allows for multiple and often conflicting readings (Gasiorek, 2004).

4.1.3. Reader Engagement and Ethical Implications

The text-world of *Hitler* (1931) actively involves readers by immersing them in the ideological and political debates of the time. By presenting Adolf Hitler as a figure who embodies both the aspirations and the anxieties of interwar Europe, Lewis constructs a narrative corpus that forces readers to wrestle with their own responses/reactions to authoritarianism and mass

politics. This involvement closely aligns with Fredric Jameson's observation that Lewis's fascist texts often function as "fables of aggression," dramatizing the tensions between individualism and collectivism, tradition and modernity, in ways that portray the fractured consciousness of the modernist era.

However, this research also underlines the ethical risks inherent in Lewis's pragmatic approach. While his text-world techniques/parameters effectively seize the allure and threats of fascist rhetoric, they also jeopardize normalizing or aestheticizing these political ideologies by embedding them within a framework of literary experimentation. The absence of a clear ethical stance in *Hitler* (1931) overemphasizes the restrictions of modernist ambiguity when addressing politically charged subjects, raising questions about the responsibilities of art and literature in times of ideological crisis.

Nonetheless, the detailed analysis of *Hitler* (1931) through text-world theory/approach divulges the sophisticated narrative strategies Lewis employs to involve with the socio-political upheavals of his time. By building a complex and ambiguous text-world in order to process and understand the language, Lewis both critiques the cultural dynamics of fascism and exposes the tensions and contradictions within his own ideological and artistic framework. While these basic techniques exemplify the innovative potential of modernist aesthetics, they also highlight the ethical ambiguities of applying literary form to wrestle with extremist ideologies.

4.2. Text-World Techniques in The Jews, Are They Human? (1939)

Wyndham Lewis's The Jews, Are They Human? (1939) denotes a sophisticated interplay of satirical narrative, ideological critique, and rhetorical ambiguity that challenges conventional assumptions. The application of text-world theory to this debatable work presents critical insights into how Lewis constructs textual ambience that simultaneously critique and involve with anti-Semitic discourses of the interwar period (or interbellum). Through the analysis of narrative techniques, such as deictic markers, modal constructions, and ironic undertones, this study stresses the ideological and ethical tensions embedded within the text-world of The Jews, Are They Human? (1939).

In the broadest and most schematic sense, Lewis, in his provocative and contentious work, The Jews, Are They Human? (1939), ostensibly satirizes anti-Semitic discourses, but his application of parody and hyperbole often blurs the line between critique and complicity. Text-world discourse illustrates how Lewis builds a grotesque and exaggerated narrative space that simultaneously mocks and replicates anti-Semitic rhetoric. For example, his over-the-top descriptions and ironic questioning embrace readers to involve critically with the absurdity of such ideas, but the absence of clear narrative disavowal jeopardizes strengthening the prejudices and discrimination he claims to condemn. As Lewis asserts,

> "Jews are news." It is not an enviable kind of limelight that beats upon the chosen people…This is because Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Czech-Slovakia, and other countries are freezing out their Jewish minorities by means of what has been described as "cold pogrom" …The government of those foreign countries regard their Jewish citizens "undesirables". It is the intention of the Hitler government, for instance, to have made Germany *Judenrein*[1] in two years' time. (Lewis, 1939, p. 7)

The research finds that this element of deliberate ambiguity sets a morally and ideologically fraught text-world landscape, representing the various conceptual layers, based on deixis and related systems, (Werth, 1999), where readers must seek to compete discourses without clear guidance/recommendation from the authorial tone of voice. This text-world technique and the world-building (deictic) information mirror Lewis's modernist aesthetic, portrayed by its resistance to fixed meanings and its involvement with the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural and political certainties. However, it also underlines the ethical hazards of such an approach, as Lewis's rhetorical strategies may inadvertently lend political credibility to the very ideologies he seeks to critique.

4.2.1. Implications for Modernist Criticism

The contemporary discourses resonate with the themes of modernism, politics aspects and representation ethics. This study aims to show how Lewis's effectiveness in text-world creation is consistent with Modernist attributes of history which include: ambiguity, satire and irony, and reader engagement, by considering his fascist works as a part of modernist ordering. In other words, it emphasizes the contradictions that arise with the politically ideologized works of art where the politics of aesthetics and the ethics of representation must converge. Results to the extent that Lewis's fascist texts provide an exemplification of the contradictory recasting of the modernist aesthetic. He also creates narrative spaces with thought-provoking aspects through his application of text-world techniques/approaches, yet the application of ambiguity and irony that he applies to ideologies of fascism and anti-Semitism poses the ethical dangers of such engagement.

More broadly, Fredric Jameson states that the modernist stress on irony and ambiguity often leaves narratives open to misinterpretation and misjudgment, particularly in contexts where ideological stakes are high. In the case of *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), Lewis's dependence on these text-world techniques portrays both the strengths and weakness of his approach, emphasizing the challenges of using literary form and device to address extremist ideologies. As Jameson claims,

> Lewis himself produced a striking example of this curious form in his late autobiographical novel, Self-Condemned, surely the most desolate of all his works, in which the history professor, René Harding, exiled by choice from what he considers to be the establishment radicalism of British university life, enters the glacial void of provincial Canada and knows, at the end, a virtual living death. The ambiguity of this fate is essentially a structural one: it is never altogether clear what in this combative and opinionated work is in the long run being censured. (Jameson, 1979, p. 138)

This structural ambiguity, as Jameson describes, is not limited to *Self-Condemned* but is a recurring feature in Lewis's broader literary output, particularly in his politically charged writings. In *The Jews, Are They Human?*, the lack of a firm

ideological position—whether as critique or endorsement—mirrors the "glacial void" Jameson attributes to Lewis's later work, in which meaning remains elusive and interpretive certainty is denied. This study argues that Lewis's reliance on irony, satire, and textual layering results in a destabilized ideological position that leaves his text susceptible to appropriation by extremist thought. While some scholars, such as Edwards and Gasiorek, have emphasized Lewis's satirical intentions, the ambiguity that permeates his writing, much like in *Self-Condemned*, renders it difficult to ascertain whether he is ultimately critiquing or reinforcing the ideological structures he engages with.

4.2.2. Ambiguity in the Text-World's Ethical Framework

One of the distinguishing characteristics of *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) is its deliberate ambiguity in addressing anti-Semitic rhetoric, as Lewis presents, this book is "a work not of love, but of reason" (Lewis, 1939). In fact, Lewis builds a grotesque and greatly exaggerated text-world where stereotypes and prejudices are strengthened to absurd proportions. This hyperbolic representation acts as a satirical critique of anti-Semitism, yet the lack of clear narrative disavowal makes the ethical framework of the text worse. As Lewis confesses,

> This is not the first book written upon the present phase of the Jewish Problem. It is one amongst many. But it is unlike any of the rest, I think I can say that for it. The Jewish question is, in one form or another, a very well-worn topic. Most of the books about the present plight of the Jews are propagandist and partisans. In those books about the Jews lots of things are left out. They take the form of a polished, or more often an impassioned, advocacy. (Lewis, 1939, p. 10)

In fact, through deictic markers, Lewis places readers within a narrative atmosphere that varies from ironic detachment to unsettling complicity. For example, his use of inclusive pronouns like "we" and "us" creates a shared narrative perspective, dragging readers into the discourse while simultaneously questioning their alignment with the text's ideological positions. As Joanna Gavins states, such deictic strategies are central to text-world construction, molding how readers mentally direct and interpret the narrative space. As Lewis mentions,

> But we who belong to the master-race cannot but reflect, as we peruse these bitter, ironical pages, written by an intelligent Jew, reciting the long tale of affronts of torture, and of violent death up to as late as the Eighties of the last century, that we have a lot to answer for. Even, we cannot help asking ourselves whether a people who have suffered so much at our hands will ever be able to forgive us; and whether, should we ever fall into their hands, it would be an entirely pleasant experience. (Lewis, 1939, p. 11)

This passage exemplifies how Lewis's deictic choices construct an immersive ideological space, implicating readers within a collective historical narrative. By employing the first-person plural pronouns "we" and "us," Lewis forces an identification with the so-called "master-race," thereby establishing an ideological in-group that appears to acknowledge the historical injustices suffered by Jewish communities. However, the underlying irony and ambiguity in the passage destabilize this perspective, making it difficult to discern whether the statement is intended as a genuine critique of racial supremacy or as a rhetorical strategy that subtly reinforces it.

Such deictic manipulation aligns with Joanna Gavins' argument that text-world construction is not merely about representation but about positioning the reader within a framework of belief and perception. Through the careful use of deixis, Lewis engineers a reading experience that oscillates between empathy and estrangement, compelling readers to question their ideological bearings. Furthermore, his rhetorical shift from reflective guilt to speculative fear ("should we ever fall into their hands") introduces a counterfactual scenario—another key technique in text-world theory—where the inversion of power dynamics destabilizes the moral clarity of the passage.

This study argues that Lewis's use of deictic strategies in *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) exemplifies how fascist rhetoric can be subtly reinforced through cognitive framing. While he appears to acknowledge historical atrocities, the speculative turn at the end of the passage presents a future scenario that reasserts a defensive and self-preserving stance, playing into the very fears that authoritarian ideologies exploit. As Peter Stockwell notes, text-worlds are not passive reflections of reality but active cognitive constructs that guide reader interpretation. Lewis's manipulation of deictic centering thus serves as a potent example of how literature can structure ideological space, making controversial ideas appear as naturalized, immersive realities.

4.2.3. The Role of Satire and Irony

Satire and irony play a crucial role in Wyndham Lewis's construction of ideological text-worlds, serving as mechanisms through which he simultaneously critiques and engages with fascist ideologies. While Lewis often claimed that his writings were intended to expose the absurdities of extremist politics, the structural ambiguities inherent in his use of irony complicate the reader's interpretative process. This study, employing a cognitive approach rooted in Text-World Theory, explores how Lewis's satirical techniques shape the reader's engagement with his politically charged narratives, often blurring the lines between critique and complicity.

In Lewis's political writings, satire functions not only as a means of ridicule but also as a rhetorical strategy that complicates ideological readings. In *Hitler* (1931), Lewis ostensibly adopts a satirical stance towards the Nazi movement, presenting Hitler as a grotesque yet enigmatic figure whose rise to power reflects the failings of the Weimar Republic. However, Gasiorek argues that Lewis's satirical approach lacks a clear authorial disavowal, thereby leaving its ideological positioning open to interpretation. This ambiguity is further complicated by Lewis's own political ambivalence during the 1930s, as he oscillated between admiration for aspects of fascism and later renunciation of its totalitarian impulses (Gasiorek, 2004).

Moreover, Lewis's satire in *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) exemplifies the paradoxical nature of his ideological engagement. The book purports to challenge anti-Semitic discourse, yet its reliance on exaggerated stereotypes and ironic detachment risks reinforcing the very prejudices it seeks to critique. As Paul Edwards notes, Lewis's satirical strategies often misfire because his rhetorical techniques—such as overstatement and parody—are too subtly intertwined with the discourses they aim to dismantle (Edwards, 2000). Consequently, readers may struggle to distinguish between sincere critique and veiled endorsement, an interpretative dilemma that aligns with the cognitive complexities of Text-World Theory.

Irony in Lewis's political texts generates an interpretative gap between surface meaning and deeper ideological implications. In Lewis's political writings, irony manifests through shifts in tone, conflicting narrative perspectives, and the strategic use of deictic markers. As Joanna Gavins explains, such linguistic techniques play a fundamental role in constructing text-worlds, directing readers to navigate multiple layers of meaning. Lewis frequently employs ironic inversion, particularly in his discussions of racial and political ideologies, leading to a destabilization of narrative authority (Gavins, 2007). For instance, in *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), Lewis writes:

> But we who belong to the master-race cannot but reflect, as we peruse these bitter, ironical pages, written by an intelligent Jew, reciting the long tale of affronts of torture, and of violent death up to as late as the Eighties of the last century, that we have a lot to answer for. Even, we cannot help asking ourselves whether a people who have suffered so much at our hands will ever be able to forgive us; and whether, should we ever fall into their hands, it would be an entirely pleasant experience. (Lewis, 1939, p. 11)

Here, Lewis employs an exaggeratedly formal tone and first-person plural pronouns ("we," "our hands"), drawing readers into a collective perspective that simultaneously acknowledges historical injustices while subtly questioning the potential reversal of power dynamics. This ironic framing generates cognitive dissonance, as it leaves open multiple interpretations: is Lewis sincerely advocating for a reconsideration of anti-Semitic attitudes, or is he perpetuating anxieties about Jewish revenge? As Fredric Jameson argues, modernist irony often functions as a form of ideological camouflage, making it difficult to pinpoint an author's true political position (Jameson, 1979).

From a cognitive perspective, the interplay of satire and irony in Lewis's political texts constructs text-worlds that challenge conventional reader responses. Text-World Theory posits that readers mentally construct immersive environments based on linguistic cues, drawing on prior knowledge and experiential assumptions to interpret narratives (Gavins, 2007). Lewis's rhetorical strategies, however, disrupt this process by creating ideological dissonance, forcing readers to reconstruct ideological positions within the text-world, constantly reassessing their interpretative stance.

4.2.4. Modal Ambiguities and Reader Engagement

Viewed through the lens of modality and desire (as one of the primary functions of linguistic communication, to establish and maintain social relationships between human beings (Gavins, 2007, p. 91).), modal constructions, such as conditional statements and speculative language, further complicate the text-world of The Jews, Are They Human? (1939). Lewis frequently uses modal verbs like "might," "could," and "perhaps" to shed further light to guarantee/make his assertions, providing a sense of uncertainty and open-endedness. These modal ambiguities embrace readers to involve critically with the text, as they are compelled to steer its ideological tensions and interpret its underlying messages. As it is clearly evident that,

> There is perhaps a third position where we could be half-savages. But we want to be savages at all? All that would be as bad for us as it would for those at whose expense we went *berserk* if we should ever be induced to do that. We have to live with our Jewish fellow-mortals. Our traditions will compel us to act in a certain way, as other peoples impose on them a certain behaviour. We could not lock a lot of people up in a corner of our cities and feed them on catsmeat. The Anglo-Saxon could not do that (Lewis, 1939, p. 13-14).

In fact, Paul Werth's concept of "world-switches" is particularly relevant here, as Lewis's text frequently shifts between different narrative perspectives and ideological concepts. These switches disrupt the coherence of the text-world, making readers question their assumptions/presumptions and re-assess their interpretations or judgment. In this fashion, Lewis's use of modal ambiguity matches with his broader modernist project of destabilizing fixed meanings and challenging conventional thought (Werth, 1999).

More abstractly, the close analysis of *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) through text-world theory/notation indicates the intricate patterns in which Lewis builds an ideologically and ethically sophisticated narrative domain. By applying techniques such as deictic shifts, modal ambiguities, and satirical exaggeration, Lewis devises a text-world that involves readers in a critical interrogation of anti-Semitic discourses. However, the ethical risks inherent in his approach underscore the requirement for greater clarity in navigating the tensions between aesthetic innovation and ideological critique. This study leads to ongoing negotiations about the responsibilities of modernist literature in politically volatile contexts, providing new insights into the intersections of narrative technique, ideology, and ethics.

4.3. Narratology and Ideological Text-Worlds

Narratology provides a crucial framework for understanding how texts construct meaning through structural and cognitive mechanisms. Mieke Bal defines narratology as the systematic study of narrative structure, focusing on how events are ordered, how perspectives are framed, and how temporal and spatial elements shape interpretation. These elements play a crucial role in the ideological positioning of a text, as the way a story is narrated influences reader perception. In Wyndham Lewis's Hitler (1931) and The Jews, Are They Human? (1939), the narrative perspective is deliberately ambiguous, complicating the ideological function of the text. Bal's work helps illuminate how focalization—who sees and how events are framed—creates

interpretative uncertainty in Lewis's political writings. By shifting between different levels of focalization, Lewis constructs a narrative where irony and satire make it difficult to pinpoint an authoritative ideological stance (Bal, 1997).

Monika Fludernik expands upon traditional narratology by introducing a cognitive perspective, arguing that narratives do not merely represent reality but actively construct cognitive experiences for readers. This aligns closely with Paul Werth's text-world theory, as both emphasize how linguistic structures create immersive mental models. Fludernik's approach highlights how readers rely on pre-existing cognitive frameworks to interpret narratives, meaning that ideological text-worlds are shaped not just by the text itself but also by the reader's engagement with it (Fludernik, 1996). Similarly, David Herman explores how narrative structures influence meaning-making, particularly through the use of unreliable narration and fragmented perspectives. In Lewis's works, these narrative strategies contribute to an ideological text-world where the boundaries between critique and complicity are blurred, forcing readers into an active role in constructing meaning. By integrating narratology with text-world theory, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how Lewis's texts function as cognitive and ideological constructs (Herman, 2002).

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed at analyzing Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), employing sophisticated text-world techniques and parameters to build ideologically complex narratives. By using text-world theory to these fascist works, the analysis illustrates how Lewis's rhetorical strategies both involve with and critique the socio-political discourses of interwar Europe. However, the ethical ambiguities of these controversial texts mark the restrictions of modernist aesthetics when applied to the representation of extremist ideologies, suggesting a cautionary insight into the responsibilities of art and literature in politically volatile contexts. Considering the results and discussion, the following conclusions can be highlighted:

On the one hand, in *Hitler* (1931), Lewis's text-world techniques account for deictic shifts, modal constructions, and layered narrative perspectives, which function to both humanize and critique the German enigmatic leader Adolf Hitler and his movement the Hitler *Bewegung*[2] (National Socialism). This duality portrays Lewis's brief flirtation with strong leadership as a counterpoint to what he witnessed as the fragmentation of modern society. However, this study finds how these text-world techniques and parameters also blur the line between critique and admiration, complicating Lewis's ideological viewpoint. The constructed text-world reflects the wider cultural and political ambivalence of the interwar period, involving readers in a critical but ethically ambiguous interpretative process. On the other hand, in *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), Lewis utilizes hyperbole, irony, and grotesque exaggeration to satirize anti-Semitic discourse. Yet, the lack of explicit disavowal jeopardizes strengthening the very ideologies it ostensibly critiques. The text-world here lays the proving ground for ideological tension, forcing readers to steer the ethical ambiguities of representation and rhetoric. These findings match with Paul Werth's assertion that text-worlds operate on multiple interpretative levels, demanding active reader involvement to resolve ambiguities (Werth, 1999).

References

Bal, M. (1997). *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.

Caracciolo, M. (2021). *Narrating the mesh: Form and story in the Anthropocene*. University of Virginia Press.

Edwards, P. (2000). *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*. Yale University Press.

Fludernik, M. (1996). *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. Routledge.

Garrity, J. (2011). Performing Modernism: Wyndham Lewis and Fascism. *Modernism/Modernity*, *18*(3), 567-590.

Gasiorek, A., and Isobel A. (2004). *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism*. Liverpool University Press.

Gasiorek, A. & Nathan W. (2015). *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*. Edinburgh University Press.

Gavins, J., & Ernestine, L. (2016). *World building: Discourse in the mind*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gavins, J. (2007). *Text world theory: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Herman, D. (2002). *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. University of Nebraska Press.

Jameson, F. (1979). *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*. University of California Press.

Johnson-Laird, P. (1983) *Mental Model*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kukkonen, K. (2020). *Probability designs: Literature and the design of the world*. Oxford University Press.

Lewis, W. (1931). *Hitler*. Chatto & Windus.

Lewis, W. (1939). *Jews, Are They Human?* George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Michael, R., & Doerr, K. (2002). *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich*. GREENWOOD PRESS. Westport (Connecticut)/London.

Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. Routledge.

Troscianko, E. T. (2020). Reading for health: How the mind absorbs words and stories. *Medical Humanities*, *46*(4), 412–421. https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2020-011838

Warhol, R., & Lanser, S. S. (Eds.). (2021). *Narrative theory unbound: Queer and feminist interventions*. Ohio State University Press.

Werth, P. (1999). *Text worlds: Representing conceptual space in discourse*. Longman.

Zunshine, L. (2022). *The secret life of literature*. MIT Press.

Endnotes

---

[1] Free of Jews. Clearing all Jews out of a specific German area or European community, the overriding goal of the "Final Solution." (Michael & Doerr, 2002, p. 226)

[2] Nazi Party's self-image of dynamism and forward movement. (Michael, and Doerr, 2002, p. 98)