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Wyndham Lewis: Critical Intelligence

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June 1995

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fufilment of the requirements of
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis studies the intellectual development of the painter and writer Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957). His career is seen as an unique expression of the creative and critical intelligence within modern society. The liberal, secular, and individualistic aspects of Lewis's thought are stressed.

The thesis concentrates on four aspects of Lewis's life and work. First, Lewis's relationship with T.E. Hulme, usually described as one of direct influence, is shown to be adversarial and complicated by basic differences of their worldview. Second, the nature of Lewis's fascism is discussed using a new reading of *Hitler* (1931). Third, Lewis's view of the position and the role of the artist in society is explained by studying three of his models of culture and society, each drawn from a different period of his career. Finally, the relationship of Lewis and Marshall McLuhan is examined to determine the nature and extent of the ideas passed on.

Résumé

Cette thèse est une étude sur le développement intellectuel de l'écrivain et peintre Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957). Sa carrière est perçue comme un exemple unique de l'esprit créateur et critique dans la société moderne. Les aspects libérals, séculaires, et individualistes de sa pensée y sont d'ailleurs soulignés.

Cette thèse se focalise sur quatre aspects importants de la vie et l'oeuvre de Lewis. Premièrement, le rapport entre Lewis et T.E. Hulme, considéré habituellement comme un cas de l'influence directe, nous est montré plutôt adversatif et compliqué par la différence fondamental de leur conception du monde. Ensuite, la nature fasciste de Lewis est examinée en utilisant une nouvelle lecture de son livre *Hitler* (1931). Troisièmement, le façon dont Lewis a conçu le situation et le rôle de l'artiste dans société, est expliqué par l'étude de trois de ses modeles socio-culturels. Ces modeles proviennent de trois périodes différentes de sa carrière. Finalement, le rapport entre Lewis et Marshall McLuhan est examiné a déterminer le nature et le degré des idées échangées.

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Introduction

Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) is one of the least known and most misunderstood of the "Men of 1914," as Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce have come to be known. Pound, Eliot, and Joyce are practically house-hold names, and the scholarship on these men is impressive in size and depth. Any discussion of the group of writers, artist, poets, and painters that came from the generation before the First World War begins with their names. In this group, the lesser known Lewis is an especially interesting figure for the historian of ideas.

In a career that spanned fifty years as a novelist, painter, and essayist, Wyndham Lewis questioned some of the most basic ideas that animated his society. Some of those fundamental ideas remain with us, strengthened into inviolate truths by their constant reinforcement. He also questioned fringe ideas that have since become part of the mainstream. When we read his criticisms today there is a thrill of recognition, for his adversaries resemble us; he seems to be criticizing the ideas ascendant in the world of today.

During his life Wyndham Lewis pushed himself into the centre of many controversies. He was a ringleader of the Vorticist "art-politics" of London before the Great War, and along with Ezra Pound edited *Blast*, an innovative arts magazine. He satirized liberal Bloomsbury in *The Apes of God* (1929), avenging more than a decade of enmity. During the thirties he wrote a string of political works that were anti-liberal and anti-communist, and which led to him being charged with being a fascist. *The Revenge for Love* (1937), perhaps his most well-known novel, followed a group of communists in pre-Civil War Spain and in London. The novel portrayed the folly and danger of extremist politics. When he reached his sixties, and on through his seventies, the number of Lewis's opponents declined, though the ferocity of his sallies did not. Whether the

subject was politics, art, literature, philosophy, or the shape of society, Lewis took pleasure from public debate and the forceful exchange of ideas. He is an excelient subject not only for finding out what people were thinking and saying, but also for discovering the manner in which people could express their dissent.

The structure of this thesis is basically chronological. It starts with an examination of the personal and ideological relationship between T.E. Hulme and Lewis in the years before the First World War. Hulme is frequently cited as an influence on Lewis; the commonly understood nature of this influence will be modified. The second part of the thesis looks at Lewis's book *Hitler* (1931) and assesses the charge that he was a fascist. The final part looks at the relationship between Marshall McLuhan and Lewis during the Second World War, with particular emphasis on the way McLuhan incorporated Lewis's idea of cosmic man into his own way of thinking.

The third part of this thesis, and the exception to the chronological progression, draws Lewis's models of culture and society from three periods of his life. Examples are taken from *Tarr* (1918), *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), and *Rude Assignment* (1950) to show the way Lewis perceived his role and place in his society. An element of structural consistency in his models will be stressed, one that suggests that Lewis's oppositions are more complicated than they appear. It is put forward that Lewis's concern for the integrity of the artist is part of his wider belief in the sanctity of the self.

The larger unity of this thesis comes from the way Lewis represents a commentary on some of the most important movements of ideas in the first half of this century. Lewis sings a descant harmony, high and sometimes shrill, over the main melodic passages. His strains highlight the movements of the lower, more

authoritative melody, catching our ear as only counterpoint and criticism are able.

Ezra Pound once said of Lewis, "If another man has ideas of *any* kind (not borrowed cliches) that irritate you enough to make you think or take out your own ideas and look at 'em, that is all one can expect."[1] Well, we can expect more. We can expect that our enemy's ideas have a reason and purpose beyond a mere incitement to self-examination. Lewis's ideas are still dangerous, he is still The Enemy, as he dubbed himself, but his intent is not just to make us think, but to make us think more freely.

For those that question the merits of our present commercial-technological society, yet reject a regression to an idealized past or advance to a communistic future, Lewis offers an example of a line of thought, and a way of thinking, that, while dangerous and liable to extremes, permits a rare liberty. He treads carefully (and sometimes not so carefully) between mainstream beliefs and the major counter-beliefs of this century, in art, politics, philosophy, and literature. His exploration of his culture, so similar to our own, shows the perils, as well as the rewards, of a particular sort of intellectual freedom.

If we put Lewis in the form of a question it would be this: How can one be intellectually independent from one's time and culture, and yet not drift into irrelevance or reaction? And its corollary, Why should we be independent? In short, what is the role of the individual critical intelligence in society? These were questions that Lewis posed to himself, and found several answers for.

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[1] *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, D.D. Paige ed., (New York, 1971), 222.

Abbreviations

ABR	*The Art of Being Ruled*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1926.
ACM	*America and Cosmic Man*. London: Nicholson & Watson, 1948.
B&B	*Blasting and Bombardiering*. [1937] London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.
Hitler	*Hitler* [1931] New York: Gordon Press, 1972.
Tarr	*Tarr*. [1928] London: Calder & Boyers, 1968.
TWM	*Time and Western Man*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1927.
RA	*Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Biography*. [1950] Santa Barbara, CA.: Black Sparrow Books, 1984.

T.E. Hulme and Wyndham Lewis: A Question of Influence

The poet and essayist Thomas Ernest Hulme (1883–1917) is frequently cited as an early influence on Wyndham Lewis. While the men did have a short association and for a brief time actively supported the same things in literature and art, Hulme's relationship with Lewis has been exaggerated. Quite simply, there are similarities between the ideas of the men, not sameness, and the similarities are not as extensive as they have been portrayed. Lewis only accepted some of Hulme's ideas, and then with reservations and amendments that eviscerate them of almost all the force Hulme intended. The over-emphasised influence of Hulme has obscured the fact that Lewis used the classic/romantic split in an original way, and has placed him in a particular line of neo-classical, irrational, and authoritarian thinkers and writers. This part of the thesis does not wish to eliminate Hulme as a philosophical influence on other Anglo-American Modernists, only to modify the nature of his influence in respect to Lewis. There is nothing that better shows the unique path Lewis carved out for himself in the pre-First World War London scene, and beyond, than the way he received, ignored, criticised, and altered the ideas of Hulme.

Hulme was an important figure in the pre-war London avant garde. Various studies since the fifties have noted how he affected the thinking of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Richard Aldington, and others.[2] The sculptor Jacob Epstein said, "Like

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[2] See Vincent Buckley, *Poetry and Morality: Studies on the Criticism of Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis* (London, 1959), 92; John Raymond Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London, 1966), the chapter on Lewis; William M. Chace, *The Political Identity of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Stanford CA., 1973), 111; Erik Svarny, *The Men of 1914: T.S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Philadelphia, 1989), 15, 17–24.

Plato or Socrates, he drew the intellectual youth of his time around him."[3] The image of Socrates presiding over a youthful symposium is quite appropriate, for although Hulme was "brilliant talker," and a regular contributor to *The New Age*, he never published a sustained work of theory during his lifetime.[4] Like Socrates, Hulme's importance comes from the way his ideas were adopted and promoted by his "students." In the twenties, after Hulme's death, T.S. Eliot was an especially strong supporter. It was through the careful management of his legacy, as much as the work he did when alive, that Hulme became "one of the most influential thinkers of his generation."[5]

Hulme's greatest achievement during his life was the crystallisation of a vague feeling of discontent many writers and artists felt for their culture. Much of this had to do with the way he characterised the philosophy and aesthetics of the previous century. Hulme listed the errors of the Victorian era in art, literature, and philosophy, and suggested remedies; and even if people disagreed with aspects of his summation, they agreed it was valuable as a basis for argument. Lewis certainly felt this way, as will be seen. Hulme also claimed that a change in the aesthetic basis of the arts had already occurred, that a new classical era had already begun. This was comforting thought to the new generation of writers and artists who were struggling against the sentimentality and science of the Victorian era. Lewis is partially thinking of Hulme's prophecy

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[3] "Foreword," to T.E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, 2nd edition, Herbert Read ed., (London, 1936), viii.

[4] T.S. Eliot, "T.E. Hulme," *Criterion*, II (7 April 1924), 231–2; Hulme wrote quite extensive introductions for the two translations that he published during his lifetime, but they cannot be considered sustained theoretical works.

[5] Alun R. Jones, *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme* (London, 1960), 14.

of a new classical era when he says that the "Men of 1914" (Pound, Joyce, Eliot, and himself),

> ...are not only "the last men of an epoch" [...] we are more than that, or we are that in a different way to what is most often asserted. *We are the first men of a Future that has not materialized.* We belong to a "great age" that has not "come off." (B&B 256)

Hulme's lasting fame, however, comes from his introduction of certain proto-fascist ideas to the Anglo-American Modernists. Through his writings, lectures, and conversation, Hulme helped introduce continental thinkers to England. First there was the philosopher Henri Bergson; but later there came Charles Maurras and Georges Sorel. Lewis, thanks to his free-wheeling continental education, was already familiar with Bergson. This familiarity might partly explain the affinity he felt for Hulme, and his ability to look at Hulme's discoveries critically and independently.

Lewis was introduced to Hulme by Ezra Pound about 1910. Up to 1914, when there was a rift between the men, Hulme and Lewis were friends and frequently allies in artistic battles. They both took up the cause of Jacob Epstein when *The New Age* published a review by Anthony Ludovici that was critical of Epstein's sculpture. Hulme and Lewis both sent highly inflammatory letters to the paper. Hulme offered to beat up the critic. Lewis called Ludovici's review, "the grimmest pig-wash vouchsafed at present to a public fed on husks."[6] The London avant garde, of which they were both leading figures, was quite closely connected. Among their mutual friends were Ford Maddox Ford, Ezra Pound, A.R. Orage (editor of *The New Age*), Richard Aldington, and for a short time, Rupert

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[6] W.L. to the Editor of "The New Age," (8 January 1914), in *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis,* W.K. Rose ed. (Norfolk, Conn., 1963), 54. Hereafter, *Letters.*

Brooke.[7] In early 1914 the friendship came to an abrupt end, and Lewis's respect for Hulme seems to have faded rather quickly.[8] When Hulme was killed in shelling in 1917, Lewis and he were not on speaking terms. As was so common in Lewis's relationships with his contemporaries, there was a period of close association, followed by a definite break.

To understand the extent and nature of the relationship between the men the first thing we should take note of are some specific biographical details. Whenever there is direct contact between two people, intellectuals included, the dynamics of personal relationships should be considered. None of these biographical factors are meant to prove a definite ideological split between Hulme and Lewis, only the existence of an environment where differences were possible. Lewis was one year older than Hulme, being born in 1882. At the time they met they both were good looking young men nearing the age of thirty: Hulme a big blonde six-footer; Lewis dark, "continental," and given to wearing the capes and broad-rimmed hats of a bohemian artist. Both were supported by small incomes from relatives, had attended public school, and had made a tour of Europe. In short, being so similar, they were ideally matched competitors. In *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis's reminiscences of the period, Hulme is described as "sensitive and original," but in matters of art and philosophy, "profoundly ignorant, according to technical standards." (B&B 100) Since it was as a

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[7] Jones, *op. cit.*, 95.

[8] Lewis and Hulme had a fight over Kate Lechemere, an artist and the financial backer of the Rebel Art Centre. (B&B 36) Later that year Lewis wrote to Beatrice Hastings, a sub-editor of *The New Age* and friend of Hulme's, "Seriously, get rid of this hautise of the Hulme-Kibblewhite combination. They are pretty boring folk: Epstein is the only individual in that little sect who does anything or has any personality." W.L. to Beatrice Hastings, (ca. 1914), *Letters*, 63.

philosopher of art that Hulme first made his mark, this is partially a retroactive swipe at his reputation. Lewis is reminding readers that Hulme, for all his posthumous fame as an intellectual and an art theorist, was not a philosopher or an artist. In another way though, the amateurishness of Hulme's judgements was something to be valued as it gave a fresh, non-academic perspective to his criticisms. However, despite the obviously affectionate memories he has of Hulme in 1937, Lewis gives us just a hint that he considers Hulme only a bit better than a dilettante.

There are other biographical facts to note. Lewis met Ezra Pound in 1909, soon after Pound had arrived in London. Over the same period of time (1910-1914) their relationship was much closer than that of Hulme and Lewis. So the disagreement between Hulme and Pound over the "invention" of Imagism which occurred in 1913 is also a factor. Imagism was a poetry style that Hulme developed in the Poetry Club, a formal gathering he organised and chaired between the years 1907 and 1910. Pound joined the Club in 1909, and soon after he gave the style its name and began promoting it. It became associated with him, not Hulme. Pound was a great publicist and organiser, for himself and others. The young, brash American, acted as a sort of "scout leader" according to Lewis, (Pound described his actions as "*battistrada*," or streetfighting).[9] The energetic support of Imagism and of Hulme were just another example of the effort he expended for those artists and poets he liked. (Some of Hulme's poems were published as an appendix to Pound's *Ripostes* in 1912.) But Hulme did not appreciate Pound's enthusiasm: "Hulme's attitude toward Pound was always

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[9] Lewis quote, B&B, 250; Pound quote from, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (1918), qtd. in Gary Geddes ed., *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics*, third edition, (Toronto, 1985), 631.

slightly contemptuous and more than slightly patronising."[10] When Hulme rejected Pound's help in 1913, there was an understandable coolness on the part of Pound, though he still retained some respect for Hulme's poetry and continued to promote it. Since Pound soon after became involved with Lewis in the organisation of Vorticism (another movement christened by Pound), *Blast*, and the Rebel Art Centre, this coolness must be considered as another factor in the disintegration of Lewis's relationship with Hulme.

One final biographical fact to orient ourselves: the split between Hulme and Lewis occurred in early 1914 and from then on their lives diverged. When war was declared that summer, Hulme volunteered for the army almost immediately and was fighting by December 1914. During his hitch he contributed a series of pro-war dispatches, his War Notes, to *The New Age* under the pseudonym of North Staffs. In 1916 he translated and published Georges Sorel's *Reflections On Violence*. (This became the standard English version for some time.) These published works show a decided change of direction for Hulme, a change of direction that Lewis did not follow. The militarism that entered Hulme's final years has no counterpart in the thought of Lewis. Lewis joined up in 1915, trained for his commission during the year, and finally saw action in 1916. In contrast to Hulme, the harsh realities of military life and the massive scale of the destruction on the Front appalled Lewis. The First World War instilled a hatred of war in Lewis that was to last him all his life.

Hulme died in 1917, so obviously there is no way to know what direction his thought would have taken had he lived. He left behind some poems and lectures, many articles, his translations, and some unpublished essays in his

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[10] Jones, *op. cit.*, 33.

notebooks. He remains preserved in amber, as it were, forever trapped in a line of thought that appears to lead to fascism.

The management of Hulme's image and ideas in the post-war fell mainly to T.S. Eliot, Herbert Read, and Ford Maddox Ford. Herbert Read, who had never met Hulme, was commissioned by Ford to work up a book out of Hulme's notes. This project interested Lewis. In 1922 he wrote to Read and asked if he could publish some of Read's notes in *The Tyro*, but it never came off.[11] Hulme's image might have taken on a completely different complexion if Lewis had intervened. Besides the fact that he had experienced a competitive personal relationship with Hulme, Lewis had different preoccupations from Read, Eliot, and Ford. This was the period when Lewis was developing ideas for his major philosophical commentaries of the twenties. Important parts of Hulme's later thought simply do not agree with what Lewis was thinking at the time. One would have expected a more severe criticism of Hulme from Lewis. Some of Lewis's views eventually found their way into print in *Men Without Art* (1934).

In his review of *Speculations*, the collection of Hulme's unfinished essays which was published in 1924, Eliot wrote:

> In this volume he appears as the forerunner of a new attitude of mind, which should be the twentieth-century mind, if the twentieth-century is to have a mind of its own. Hulme is classical, reactionary, and revolutionary: he is the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant, and democratic mind of the last century.[12]

The modern attitude of mind that Eliot speaks of – reactionary, revolutionary, and classical – is perhaps what Eliot envisioned his own to be. However, this is

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[11] W.L. to Herbert Read, (10 March 1922), *Letters*, 132.

[12] *Criterion*, II (7 April 1924), 231-2.

basically accurate as a description of the later, more militant, Hulme. *Speculations* shows that in politics Hulme was a reactionary, aligning himself with the ideals of the Catholic French Right, particularly Charles Maurras and the Action Française. The essay "Romanticism and Classicism" begins with the admission that he uses the words classicism and romanticism to "conform to the practice of the group of polemic writers who make the most of them at the present day:" Maurras, LaSerre and the writers associated with the Action Française. He is well aware that these definitions have political connotations in France, and goes on to say that while he agrees with the Action Française that the French Revolution was result of Rousseau's romanticism, he sees romanticism itself as a product of Renaissance Humanism.[13] In philosophy Hulme was a grand revolutionary, in that he wished to overthrow the ascendant Humanist conception of man and all the "bastard phenomena" it had spawned.[14] And despite the scattered and journalistic quality of his polemic writing, he was a classicist, devoted to the cultivation of impersonality and the achievement of perfect form in his poetry. Yet there is something more about Hulme that is perhaps not always given the importance it deserves.

Hulme's first assumption, one that underlies all his thinking, is that man has a need for religion. Belief in God is a primal need, "...parallel to appetite, the instinct of sex, and all other fixed qualities." When repressed it "bursts out in some abnormal direction," such as the deification of the human.[15] Hulme's belief in the necessity of spiritual bonds came as a result of his experiences on the

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[13] Hulme, *op. cit.*, 114-115.

[14] *Ibid.*, 10.

[15] *Ibid.*, 118.

Canadian prairie in 1906. The endless horizons of the prairies were "incomprehensible on any single theory," and theories, Hulme felt, were all humanity had created.[16] He realized the separation of the human and the divine, and man's essential inadequacy in the face of the absolute.[17] This epiphany on the prairies in 1906 affected all Hulme's subsequent thought and action.

It is important to separate the pre-war Hulme and his ideas from the wartime Hulme, because, depending on the Hulme we choose, it affects the nature of the influence that he could have exerted on Lewis. As some recent writers have noticed, Hulme made a shift of belief from one intellectual tradition to its opposite.[18] The Bergsonian Hulme of the pre-war believed that truth was relative and personal (or intuitive), while the follower of Maurras that Hulme became in his last years believed that truth was objective and the imposition of external order, like the discipline he found in the army, and the adherence to tradition was the only way to avert the meaninglessness of existence. Hulme's change of direction was not absolute or strictly logical. The later Hulme retained Bergson's theory of art and had a romantic attitude toward army life; just as the earlier Hulme accepted Bergson's essentially humanist position despite his profession of classical aesthetics. Yet there seems a definite intent on the part of Hulme to move from one tradition to its opposite. SueEllen Campbell suggests that "the opposition that is diachronistic in Hulme... exactly matches the synchronic

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[16] *Ibid.*, 223.

[17] Jones, *op. cit.*, 23-24.

[18] H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (Cambridge, 1984), 150; SueEllen Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite: The Outlaw Criticism of Wyndham Lewis* (Athens, Ohio, 1988), 123-124.

opposition in Lewis."[19] That Lewis could hold in his mind two opposed methods of discovering truth and ordering society is very true. The ability to sustain an interior tension which is a principle aspect of Lewis's thought is entirely different from Hulme's willingness to embrace one side, one solution. However, the way Campbell's sentence is phrased seems to suggest that Hulme was the source of the second intellectual tradition in Lewis. The fact that Lewis and Hulme weren't on speaking terms at the time Hulme "turned" is perhaps forgotten; there could have been no direct influence. This leaves open the possibility that Lewis gained his understanding of the "classical" position from elsewhere, or that he was classical before he met Hulme, and that his classicism has a different basis. But the opposition is not an exact match in another way, for in Hulme, pre-war or wartime, there is always a spirituality that directs his philosophical inquiries. This led him on a completely different intellectual itinerary than Lewis. Even when the two men seem to be following the same line of thinking, their motivations and their basic beliefs are different.

Hulme's religious or spiritual assumptions led him first to the philosophy of the French philosopher Henri Bergson. During the first decade of this century, Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France were filled with both students and the fashionable elite of Paris. Bergson's philosophy was captivatingly simple, delivered in a pleasing fashion, and exceedingly popular. His work described a certain *élan vital* operating throughout all living things. Human perception worked in this vital, constantly changing world through intellect and intuition; but by far the most important faculty of the human being for understanding his world was direct intuition. Bergson made a distinction between duration, or lived

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[19] Campbell, *op. cit.*, 124.

time as experienced through intuition, and mathematical time, which was concieved by the intellect. In duration, the present and the past of the subject worked together, mixing impressions and unexamined sensations from the past with sensations of the present. Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (which was begun in 1908), could be considered a narrative example of this conception of time. The introduction of the concept of intuition into his metaphysics was hailed as a great discovery. It was also fiercely attacked as anti-intellectual by Bertrand Russell, among others.[20] As a modern philosophical concept, Bergson's intuition can be traced back to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and up through many German metaphysical philosophers.

Hulme's advocacy of Bergson began in 1910 with lectures at Cambridge and a series of articles in *The New Age* and other magazines. In 1913 Hulme published his translation of Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. For a time, Hulme became Bergson's most effective English lieutenant. Later, an explanation and endorsement of Bergson's theories on art appeared in *Speculations*.

For the earlier Hulme, intuition seemed a way to include undemonstratable proofs, such as the existence of God, into philosophy. This was the same aspect of Bergson's philosophy that caught the attention of Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain when he was one of Bergson's students. Maritain described his conception of intuition as "a perception direct and immediate... a very simple

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[20] *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1945). The chapter on Bergson is a reprint from "The Monist," 1912. Russell says, "...but in the main intellect is the misfortune of man, while instinct is seen best in ants, bees, and Bergson." 793. See Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglas eds., *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy* (Cambridge, 1992), 339-42; and R.C. Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy in France, 1900-1914* (Calgary, Alta., 1988) chapter six, "The Catholic Revival," 139-174.

sight, superior to any discursive reasoning or demonstration, because it is the source of demonstration."[21] This admission of *a priori* knowledge was to remain a key concept in Maritain's philosophy. But Maritain broke with his master soon after his graduation and became a proponent of Thomism (or neo-scolasticism). His first book, *La Philosophie bergsonienne* (1912) was "a warning against the metaphysics of duration."[22] Though he rejected Bergsonian duration because it prohibited the stability of perceptions, Maritain retained intuition as a way to achieve the understanding of God.

Another branch of Thomist thought, centred around the leading writers, Mercier and Maréchal at Louvain, Belgium, was working on the refutation of Kant's critique. They disliked Maritain's acceptance of intuition and *a priori* categories because it undermined the possibility of "conceptual certitude" and the "primacy of being."[23] Lewis followed the debates in modern Catholic theology over the question of intuition quite closely. In *Time and Western* Man Lewis questions Maritain's "conversion" to Thomism from Bergson's philosophy. Maritain, "seems... to retain all of his old master's hatred of "intellect," so that it often seems as though he might perhaps without too conscious a guile have disguised himself as a thomist in order to better attack it." (TWM 246) In fact, Lewis's

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[21] *Preface to Metaphysics* (London, 1939), 46; qtd in Helen James John, S.N.D. *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York, 1966), 18.

[22] John, *op. cit.*, 6.

[23] *Ibid.*, 12. There were others in the Catholic community of the time who attacked Bergson for his focus on intuition and flux. The critique of Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, a professor of dogmatic theology at the Angelicum, Rome, bears a striking similarity to that advanced by Lewis in *Time and Western Man* a few years earlier. In *Le Réalisme du principe de finalité* (1932) Garrigou-Lagrange thought Bergson's ideas on change as "a simple revival of the ancient opposition of empiricism and radical idealism." John, *op. cit.*, 7.

criticisms of Bergson (and Maritain) which he produced later in life, show a remarkable similarity to the Louvain side of the debate.[24]

To take the question of Lewis's religious sentiments a bit further: there are certain writers that see Lewis leaning towards some sort of accommodation with Catholicism, particularly in his final years.[25] There are enough biographical connections that this position is reasonably appealing. Lewis's mother was born a Catholic. His wife Froanna became a Catholic after his death. During the Second World War he taught for a time at a Catholic university. The poet and writer Roy Campbell, one of Lewis's first disciples, converted to Catholicism in the thirties. Marshall McLuhan and Felix Giovanelli, young friends and admirers Lewis met while in Canada, were Catholics. In fact, Lewis's personal relationships with Catholics were quite extensive.

The only problem with this assumption is that there is nothing other than biographical details to prove it. Lewis wrote very little about religion itself, and almost nothing about Catholicism. As for discussions about spirituality, that too seems lacking in Lewis's critical writings. When he did talk about God Lewis was

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[24] As a sort of test of sympathy, Lewis would ask Catholics who they supported, Maritain or Louvain. See *Letters*, 370; 428.

[25] E.W.F. Tomlin, "The Philosophical Influences," in Jeffrey Meyers ed., *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation* (Montreal, 1980), 32; D.G Bridson, *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 1972), vi. Bridson, who knew Lewis in the fifties, bases his opinion on personal knowledge.

inclined to be ironic. Sturge Moore, one of Lewis's oldest friends, recounted to W.B. Yeats that,

> His [Lewis's] idea of God is that he has a composite back, as a fly has a composite eye, so that he can be back to back with every soul and that, he, God is not pleased with those who try to see him over their shoulders, but prefers those who merely lean against him and take no notice of him, giving all their attention to the world in front of them.[26]

This suggests that Lewis held to a sort of Deism, which would make sense given his belief in reason and abhorrence of the abstract or supernatural.

According to Lewis, Hulme's greatest contributions to the avant garde was the concept of Original Sin. In *Speculations* Hulme linked the classical view of Man with the Church dogma and said Man, or a man, "is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent."[27] Writing some time later, Lewis saw Hulme's Original Sin as a particularly useful strategy in the battle against the established order:

> For people who had definitely become queasy, after listening for a good many years to adulation of the moral state - of man-in-the-raw - this theology acted as a tonic. The atmosphere had become fuggy with all the greasy incense to Mr. Everyman. And here was somebody who had the bright idea of throwing the window open. There were the stars again! And even if the Star of Bethlehem *was* among them, well what matter! (B&B 102)

Toppling Man from its pedestal was essential to redirecting western thought to a more human and real understanding of the world and of human behaviour. But one would be hard pressed to find a single indication in all of Lewis's work that he wanted to replace Man with God.

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[26] T. Sturge Moore to W. B. Yeats (29 January 1928), in Ursala Bridge ed., *W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901-1937* (London, 1953), 120-121.

[27] Hulme, *op. cit.*, 117.

Lewis followed Bergson's line of thought as well - up to a certain point; but he had discarded most of it by the time Hulme began advocating it. Lewis had started his study of philosophy while he was in Paris, sometime between 1901 and 1909. He had friends who went to the Ecole Normale, and heard some lectures by Bergson at the Collège de France: "I began by embracing his [Bergson's] evolutionary system. From that I passed on to Renouvier and thus to Kant. When one is young *on fait les betises, quoi!*"[28] During the years before the First World War Lewis was looking for a philosophy which would provide him with certainty in his artistic expression. He eventually found it in Berkeley's Idealism, one of the "bastard phenomena" born of Humanism rejected by Hulme.[29]

One way to show Lewis's early divergence from Hulme in the matter of Bergson's theories is to look at the way Lewis's aesthetic ideas culminated in Vorticism. While Hulme was promoting Bergson's theories of art and perception, Lewis was in the process of reacting to them, criticizing them, and creating his own policy on art. The agent of reaction in all this was Futurism.

Futurism, in the person of its main populizer, the poet Fillipo Marinetti, arrived in London about 1912. Futurist manifestos, which proliferated everywhere Marinetti appeared, had come to London before then. The Futurists were a group of painters, poets, and writers who embraced the dynamism of the modern, mechanical world. The Futurist painters saw their subjects as always in movement and tried to express this continual movement by overlapping images and using mechanical repetition. The viewer was to discard his or her critical faculties and become involved in the sensation the painting created. Lewis thought the

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[28] W.L. to Theodore Weiss (19 April 1949), *Letters*, 489.

[29] Timothy Materer, "Lewis and the Patriarchs: Augustus John, W.B. Yeats, T. Sturge Moore," in Meyers ed., *Revaluation.*, 54-55.

aesthetics of this new movement was based on one aspect of Bergson's theories on art, especially the part that came from his theory of duration, or lived time. (Lewis accepted Bergson's idea that the artist works in a sort of conscious dream-state.)[30] Lewis's own group, the Vorticists, were formed in 1914 as a reaction to the Futurists. The Vorticist movement was about finding an inner calm place in the centre of the vortex from which the artist could view the world. Where Futurism was a glorification of movement and involvement, Vorticism expressed the classical virtues of stability, contemplation, and detachment. The Vorticist spectator was invited to use critical distance in order to understand the painting.

Recent studies have shown that some of the main elements of Vorticism were present in Lewis's work before Vorticism itself existed and before Lewis met Hulme. Looking at Lewis's Quimperlé Diary from 1908, one sees that the aesthetic detachment and contemplative attitude of Vorticism are already present in Lewis's thoughts.[31] Part of this is the way the young Lewis conceived of the role of the artist within society. For the bohemian, or earlier aesthete conception of an artist was very strong in Lewis due to the influence of Augustus John. The gypsy trappings of John – which were emulated by Lewis – indicated a deeper rift with society, and the membership in a counter–community. The diary also shows an understanding of, or at least an awareness of, the Apollonian/Dionysian split Nietzsche wrote about in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In Paris Lewis had access to

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[30] E.W.F. Tomlin suggests that "Some of the remarks in *Time and Western Man* on the process of artistic creation as a trance or dream-state remind one forcibly of the early pages of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)." Tomlin, *loc. cit.*, 40. This could put the origin of Lewis's belief back to his Paris days.

[31] Michael Durman and Alan Munton, "Wyndham Lewis and the Nature of Vorticism," in *Wyndham Lewis Letterura/Pittura*, Giovanni Cianci ed. (Palermo, 1982), 104–110.

French translations of Nietzsche's work. Unlike Nietzsche however, Lewis is on the side of Socrates, and prefers to be separated from the dionysian throng.[32]

The appearance of Futurism, with its popularity and elemental power, forced Lewis to identify and consolidate his most essential ideas on art. It was by facing an opponent that Lewis refined his ideas. By rejecting what he regarded as an unrewarding emphasis on flux and movement in Futurist art, he was forced to question Bergson's duration, and by logical extension, direct intuition. However, it was not until the mid-twenties that Lewis attacked the "time-philosophy," as he called it, head on. By then many more elements were involved in his attack.

Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that Lewis and Hulme were not speaking when Hulme "turned," that is, when Hulme switched from an intellectual tradition which declared truth was personal and relative, to one which said truth was external and objective. The first tradition, at least in the parlance of Lewis and Hulme, was romantic and humanist, while the second was classical or anti-humanist. Given that there was no direct contact between Lewis and Hulme when Hulme "turned" there was a possibility that Lewis's knowledge of classicism had a different source. This suggestion must be qualified even more.

The alliance of Hulme and Lewis was, or corresponded with, the beginning of a transitional period for Hulme. The first part of Hulme's transition to the French neo-classicists was in the company of Lewis, and during this time both men promoted a classical approach toward art. Lewis called Hulme and himself "fanatics" who "preferred something more metallic and resistant than the

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[32] This is also seen in Lewis's Crowdmaster stories, which were first publish in *Blast* (1915 issue). They also appear as chapters in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937): "Morpeth Olympiad," "Journey During Mobilization," "The War Crowds, 1914."

pneumatic surface of the cuticle. [They] preferred a helmet to a head of hair. A Scarab to a jelly-fish." (B&B 103-104) Lewis's painting and drawing of this period attempt to depict only the outer carapace of his subjects and show a distrust of emotionalism or sentimentality. The "Timon of Athens" drawings that Lewis did in 1912, and which were shown at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition organised by Roger Fry, are in both subject matter and execution very classical in Lewis and Hulme's terms. Vorticism flows out of Lewis's previous work and his personal reaction to the modern art of his time, and, as it promoted objectivity, form, stability, and clarity of expression, it can be considered classical in attitude.

The classical period of Lewis and Hulme's relationship, their collaboration, lasted aproximately one year. This assumes that when Hulme published his translation of Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1913) he supported most of Bergson's ideas, especially those ideas on direct intuition. Looking at the articles that he wrote during this period one tends to believe this. But as soon as Lewis began criticising Bergson, through his artistic critique of Futurism; and as soon as the "classical" elements of Vorticism began to appear in Lewis's work, Hulme began to "turn," that is move from an acceptance of Bergson to his final embrace of Maurras. Then the question arises, was it Hulme that influenced Lewis in this period, or was it the inverse? Was it Lewis that set Hulme on the road to Maurras?

Hulme and Lewis's views on art, however, are only one aspect of their classicism. What is far more important is the way they later inserted the classical conception of man into their political thought. Hulme was the first to try to describe a classical political man. This was during their period of estrangement. In *Speculations* he makes a very clear link between the conceptions of man and

various forms of government. The root idea of romanticism is that, "...man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress." Progress in Hulme's vocabulary is identified with the artificial advancements of Victorian commerce and science, and in politics with Fabianism or the English Liberals. Liberal political philosophy and practice attempted to reduce the restrictions on a citizen's freedom by eliminating traditional institutions. Hulme says that for the romantic and humanist "order is merely a negative conception."[33] The classical and religious view is that,

> A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline – ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary.[34]

The authoritarian possibilities of the classical attitude are obvious. Institutions, even bad ones, but good ones too, cure humanity of the vertigo freedom brings. To be free in any meaningful way, one must be in chains. For Hulme this type of classical religious society was in its formative stages, and was destined to replace the humanist age which began at the Renaissance. The new society would resemble the middle ages in its "subordination of man to certain absolute values." However not all will be swept away; the humanist period allowed "an honesty in science, and a certain conception of freedom of thought and action which will remain."[35]

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[33] Hulme, *op. cit.*, 116, 48.

[34] *Ibid.*, 47.

[35] *Ibid.*, 57–58.

Lewis began to explore the political possibilities of the classical and romantic conceptions of man after the Great War. The war had given Lewis his pacificism and also a fresh sense of urgency about the state of western society. The growth of a new classical era that Hulme had predicted, and which Lewis had believed possible, had been cut short by the war. For Lewis the pre-war artists and writers were attempting to escape politics and romance, to create a new objective sense of perception. Lewis's post-war attitude was an acceptance that the classicists had lost:

> The attempt at objectivity has failed. The subjectivity of the majority is back again, as a result of that great defeat, The Great War, and all that has ensued upon it. (B&B 250)

If one were highly sceptical, this admission that the Great War defeated classicism would appear to be merely an excuse for the failure of Lewis and his colleagues to capture the popular imagination. It took a world war, it would appear, to destroy the hopes of Lewis and his crew. Yet the difference between the optimism he professed before the war and the pessimism that came after is important to Lewis's subsequent writing and thought. In a sense, Lewis walked in two worlds, a possible world of his imagination and the real world of his defeat.

Lewis's broad assumptions which define classicism and romanticism are similar to Hulme's, but with important differences. Hulme had said that romanticism was one of the "bastard phenomena" spawned by Renaissance Humanism, and which came at the expense of the more natural classical and religious age that preceded it. Lewis reformulated Hulme's ideas on romanticism and classicism, creating a more secular and ahistorical explanation: "namely, the "classical" standing for the "old order," tradition and authority, the "romantic" for the new insurgent life of the popular imagination, the self assertion of the

populace." (TWM 25-26) These forces were not rooted in historical time, or in a particular old order or new insurgency, but in basic human ways of perception that were continually at odds. As categories, Lewis's classicism and romanticism are far more inclusive than Hulme's. *Time and Western Man* is Lewis's most intensive examination of what he saw as the universal spread of romantic or subjective attitudes and the abasement of the physical, concrete, classical, and objective. The "time-philosophy," as exemplified by Bergson in particular, but which he felt was also promoted by the historian Oswald Spengler, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, and incarnated on screen by Charlie Chaplin, and in cheap novels by Anita Loos, and others, was a threat to concepts that relied on space. Space and time in western philosophical thought were eternal adversaries. Philosophies based on time were now, as a result of the war, in the ascendant. The adoption of time as a basis for one's philosophy not only affected one's vision of society but altered one's conception of self.

> *Bergsonian durée, or psychological time, is essentially the "time" of the true romantic.* It is the same as a disbelief of the reality of life: the more absolute this disbelief is, as a formulated doctrine, the more the sensation of life (which we all experience impartially, whatever our philosophy) will assume a unique importance. [...] The less you are able to realize other people, the more your particular personality will obsess you, and the more dependent upon its reality you will be. (TWM 24)

The romantic attitude leads to a person believing that their reality, their sensations, are the only criteria for experiencing the world; it leads in its extreme form to total relativism. Life and the sensations that living engenders becomes supremely important to the individual, and the individual, in a sense,

learns to live outside himself, in the world of sensation. The modern time-philosophy is a re-statement of Heraclitus's conception of eternal flux.[36]

The political result of the time-philosophy is a proliferation of political cults or sects. Lewis thought that the "secular sceptical spirit of Western democracy" was threatened by "emotional semi-religious" politics that had arisen since the war. (TWM 163) Italian Fascism and Soviet Communism were two new forms of this semi-religious politics, but western democracy was included as well. The individual infected by the time-philosophy becomes eager to absolve himself of the responsibility to understand events. By using a particular political dogma the individual cedes responsibility for his life to others, becomes tractable, and is eventually used by others.

Writing such a massive, sprawling work as *Time and Western Man* was Lewis's way of releasing his readers from political, scientific, and philosophical dogmas, thus forcing them to accept the unpleasant vertigo that accompanies individual liberty. In this Lewis is the opposite of Hulme, for while Hulme would have us reject freedom, Lewis wants us to know it is possible, but denied to us. Lewis wants us to be very realistic, very down to earth when we consider the offerings of political prophets. He suggests that the question is "whether we should set out to transcend our human condition (as formerly Nietzsche and then Bergson claimed we should); or whether we should translate into human terms the whole of our datum." That is, should we base our politics on what man might

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[36] "Wyndham Lewis is but repeating in his own way under the titles of Space and Time the old distinction, and he claims that the regard for the ecstatic and amorous satisfaction in sensation and fleeting experience, the worship ... of the relative, are the characteristics of our present epoch and the signs of its decay." M.C D'Arcy, S.J., *The Nature of Belief* (London, 1937), 23.

attain, which is the romantic view; or should we accept man as he is, flaws and all, and organise for that, the classical view. Lewis answers:

> My standpoint is that we are creatures of a certain kind, with no indication that a radical change is imminent; and that the most pretentious of our present prophets is unable to do more than promise "an eternity of intoxication" to those who follow him into less physical, more cosmic regions; proposals made with at least equal eloquence by the contemporaries of Plato. (TWM 129–130)

Lewis and Hulme were both anti-humanists, a basic similarity that united them against their society, or how they perceived their society. "It must suffice for me to say that Man was not the hero of our universe," said Lewis of he and Hulme. (B&B 103) They agreed that for the majority of people, and in the bulk of modern philosophical thought, the perfectibility of humanity, and all that was attendant on the ascendancy of this belief, had become an unquestioned reality. For them, humanism was merely one way of organising reality, and perhaps not the best way. In the arts, for example, it had distorted the perceptions of artists, until art had lost its traditional freedom and become an adjunct to science. But even with their common distrust of philosophies based on Man, their differences are important. Hulme held that God was an absolute value – or should be returned to one – and that "in the light of these absolute values man is judged to be essentially limited and imperfect."[37] Lewis, for his part, had doubts about Man's supremacy, doubts which he felt were violently proven in the First World War, but he did not recognise God as an absolute value. The closest thing to an absolute in Lewis's thought was the self, and the self was a fragile, constantly threatened thing.

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[37] Hulme, *op. cit.*, 47.

The main point to remember, however, is that, almost from the first time they met, Lewis was either opposed to or diverging from Hulme in his aesthetics, his politics, and his philosophy. The main reason for this was that Lewis denied or ignored an overarching spiritual need in man - in that he was a humanist. Lewis saw that Hulme had conflated the classical view of man with the religious view, and he wanted to separate them. He agreed with Hulme that man "requires a great deal of brushing up before you can make him at all presentable," and this meant that discipline, government, and stable and open structures of thought were needed. (B&B 102) But he rejected the religious and anti-modern associations inherent in the doctrine of Original Sin. Original Sin was a metaphor for "the temporal and physical limitations of our human state." (Tarr 216) Acknowledgement of the spiritual needs of man would mean a reliance on intuition, in Lewis's view, which while it would prove the existence of God, would destroy the supremacy of the intellect. The high regard Lewis held for the intellect (and contempt for the body, in all its forms, metaphorical or real) is a basic tenet of Lewis's thought. It is also a basic difference between he and Hulme.

Lewis is similar to Hulme only in a superficial way, that is in their shared suspicions about concepts which shape the modern world. But at the centre, what is in Hulme a beatific smile is in Lewis an ironical leer. By the time Hulme arrived on the scene Lewis already had the basic elements of his anti-modern, anti-establishment ideas. It was the similarity of Hulme's ideas that caused Lewis to define his own, and to define himself. Lewis's view of man and modernity, as with all his thought, is far more complicated and calculated - and original - than Hulme's. All Hulme provided was the necessary opponent.

Wyndham Lewis, it can be stated right off, was never a member of the English Nazi party or of any other party. He was not part of a cell or group of writers that promoted fascist causes. Lewis wrote a total of one article for the official English Nazi Party review. He attended the meetings at the country home of the Sitwells one time. Despite this lack of tangible association, Lewis has been accused of being a fascist, or in milder formulations, a proto-fascist or a fascist sympathiser. The charge usually is supported with the evidence provided by Lewis's *Hitler* (1931). This book is cited as an instance where Lewis dropped the veil and showed himself as a Nazi or a fascist; it is usually suggested that Lewis "praised" the future Nazi dictator in the book.[38] But more than that, *Hitler* has been used as an ideological touchstone, a central point from which Lewis's supposed fascism spreads backwards and forwards through his career. Even when unacknowledged this ideological touchstone exerts its influence and calls into question all of Lewis's other work. Reading *Hitler*, then, becomes extremely important in understanding the nature of Lewis's relationship with fascism. And a proper reading of the slim and hastily written volume shows that the worst that can be said of Lewis is that he considered the Nazis a powerful political movement; and that he wrote about them seriously, without peremptorily rejecting them. When he did reject them, the damage to his reputation had been done.

Of all the writers or thinkers whose names have been linked to fascism, Lewis's reputation suffered the most immediate and permanent damage from the association. W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, for example, were both intimately involved in fascist movements. In 1932 Yeats helped launch General O'Duffy's Irish

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[38] Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 1980), 188.

Blueshirts and engaged in the innocent sounding activity of writing songs for them. Conor Cruise O'Brien believes that "Yeats the man was as near to being a Fascist as his situation and the conditions of his country permitted."[39] O'Brien doesn't say that Yeats *was* a Fascist, just that he was as near as circumstances in Ireland permitted. In the Irish Protestant middle class, of which Yeats was a part, fascist tendencies, or interest, were common. Of course the only other national liberation ideology was communistic, and thus antithetical to Yeats protestant, middle-class, Ascendancy attitudes. The protection of property and privilege was a stronger impulse than his Irish nationalism. Besides, he wanted an aristocratic order: "He would certainly have preferred something more strictly aristocratic than Fascism, but since he was living in the twentieth century he was attracted to Fascism as the best available form of anti-democratic theory and practice."[40]

Ezra Pound is another case of a great poet being intimately involved with a fascist movement. Starting with his adoption of C.H. Douglas's Social Credit theory in the early twenties, Pound followed a strange course of economic and social ideas which led him to a wholehearted support of Italian Fascism. He has a salient characteristic of a Nazi as well: he was violently anti-semitic. His wartime correspondence is punctuated with the curses "Yitts," "Yid," "Chews," and "Kikes." Pound's treasonous involvement with Italian Fascism began in January 1941 when he started his infamous stint on Italian radio. He lobbied the government for the position and the small, but necessary, remuneration it

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[39] Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats," in *Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats, 1865-1939*, A. Norman Feffares and K.G.W. Cross eds., (London, 1965), 258.

[40] *Ibid.*, 260.

provided. It was propaganda that Pound produced, pure and simple. The more than three hundred programmes which he recorded in Rome were broadcast in the U.S.A., Australia, and England. Timothy Redman contends that Pound, always politically naive, was not aware of the real situation in Fascist Italy, and that "as the war dragged on and with information from other countries cut off, the points of coincidence between his beliefs and announced policies of the fascist regime increased."[41] Pound was perhaps the perfect propagandist, that is, somebody who is so involved in his vision of what should be he cannot see what is; somebody so blind that he cannot be a hypocrite. After the war Pound was tried for treason, found insane, and locked up for twelve years in a Washington D.C. mental hospital.

Critics have no doubt that Pound and Yeats were important modern poets. The same can be said of T.S. Eliot, who was much more cautious and circumspect about advertising his political affiliations. His admiration for Charles Maurras and the Action Française, his despair at the fruits of modern liberal democracy, and his world weary high Anglicanism have all been well documented.[42] The scholarship on these men, when it deals with it at all, has tended to agonize over the question of how we can accept the poetry and reject the political or social opinions of the poets themselves. In the study of Lewis this has not happened. Some Lewis scholars (beginning with Hugh Kenner) see *Hitler* as unimportant to the Lewis *ouevre*, or maintain a dignified silence about his political opinions, which they believe to be fascistic or at least authoritarian, and study Lewis

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[41] *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge, 1991), 206.

[42] John D. Margolis, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922-1939* (Chicago, 1972); Erik Svarny, *The Men of 1914: T.S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Philadelphia, 1989).

simply as one of the foremost Modernists.[43] Many appraisals of Lewis have tended to go the other way; that is, because scholars believe him to be a fascist they dismiss his art and writing. There has been no attempt to save Lewis from the charge of fascism, only the creation of more and more ingenious ways to implicate him.[44] Lewis is "...the only one of the Anglo-American Modernists whose engagement with fascism has been over, not underestimated," says a recent scholar. Yet that same scholar, after freeing Lewis from all tangible associations with fascism, detects "a fascist imagination" working in him, and a distaste for politics which is similar to that espoused by the fascists and the Nazis.[45] The spectre of fascism has haunted Lewis like Banquo's ghost - yet Lewis is innocent. He is, perhaps, guilty of something else.

An example of the earlier studies which tried to connect Lewis to fascism is a 1966 book called *The Reactionaries*. John Harrison studied Yeats, Pound, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and Lewis. This survey of the anti-modern Modernists poses the question, "Why is it that great creative artists can totally reject a liberal, democratic, humanitarian society, and prefer a cruel authoritarian, bellicose society?"[46] This is a politically framed variant of the "how can bad men write good books" question, an insoluble question really. As a question, it is

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[43] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (Norfolk, Conn., 1954), 81-86.

[44] For example, Frederick Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley, CA., 1974).

[45] Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Wyndham Lewis's Fascist Imagination and the Fiction of Paranoia," in Richard Golsan ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture.* (Hanover and London, 1992), 89.

[46] John Raymond Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London, 1966), 15.

representative of much of the direction of scholarship on these writers.[47] Harrison claims that there are four things that characterize the reactionaries. These things are, an idealisation of the past; a connection with the "cult of irrationalism;" a fear that democracy was destroying cultural standards; and a "bewilderment before the problems of the modern world."[48] No doubt some reactionaries have all or some of these qualities. However, when Harrison analyzes Lewis these characterisations fall apart.

First of all, Lewis did not love the past. Certainly he was pessimistic about the future, if things remained in the state they were, but this did not lead to an idealization of humanity's former states. In 1937 he wrote,

> My mind is ahistoric. I would welcome the clean sweep. I could build something better, I am sure of that, than has been left us by our fathers that were before us. Only I know this is quite impossible.[49]

The desire Lewis felt to break away from the past and become purely modern is linked with a pessimism that this could ever occur. This sentiment is reflected in much of his writing. *Time and Western Man* is an attack on, among other

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[47] William M. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Stanford, CA., 1973); Lesley Johnson, *The Culture Critics: From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams* (London, 1979); John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Elite, 1880-1939* (London, 1992).

[48] Harrison, *op. cit.*, 25-30.

[49] "Letter from Wyndham Lewis," *Twentieth Century Verse*, Wyndham Lewis Double Number, 6 & 7, (November & December, 1937), 106.

things, the very mentality and philosophy that leads to the glorification of the past.

> All the most influential revolutions of sentiment or of ideologic formula today, in the world of science, sociology, psychology, are directed to some sort of *return to the Past.* The cult of the savage (and indirectly that of *the Child*) is a pointing backward to our human origins, either as individuals (when it takes the form of the child-cult) or as a race (when it takes the form of the "primitive"). (TWM 52)

In *Paleface* (1929) Lewis attacked the cult of the primitive; and in *The Doom of Youth* (1932), he attacked the cult of t child. These works, outriggers to the larger philosophical works of the twenties, show that Lewis considered the desire to regress to a former state in an individual, or in a race or culture, as something to be deplored, but, perhaps, unstoppable. Lewis was quite dismissive of all modern revolutionary movements, for he saw them as a political evocation of a desire to return to the past. Lewis notes that Italian fascism began with an "exclusive glorification of the Present." This it got from Marinetti and Futurism - "But however "revolutions" may begin, they always end in what Marinetti named *passéism.*" (TWM 52) Thus Mussolini's attempt to restore the Roman Empire is the sign of a revolution that is backward-looking, and not one devoted to the future. In the most important sense, Italian Fascism was not revolutionary at all. For Lewis the love of the past was a love of the unreal, a romantic attribute, and something that he tried to suppress.

Nor did Lewis follow the thinking of the irrationalists. Though he had read Nietzsche and Georges Sorel long before most English speaking writers, and had heard Marinetti speak in London between 1910 and 1914, all his comments on them show his distaste for important parts of their way of thinking. Any attempt to place Lewis in the continuum of thinkers that lead from Charles Maurras is

misguided.[50] Lewis's connection to T.E. Hulme, and thus to the ideas of Charles Maurras, has been overstated, as pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis. The books of philosophic commentary Lewis wrote during the twenties raged against irrationalism (or as he called it, intuition) in literature and philosophy, and its results in politics. In fact, Lewis's speculative writing can be considered as a gloss on the texts of the irrationalists, explanatory notes which clearly lay out the dangers of their thought.

As for being bewildered by the problems of modern society, Lewis, more than any other in his group, gave a very acute analysis of the state of modern man. Granted, Lewis was not enthusiastic about the effects of modern society, but he was not perplexed by it. He was one of the first to recognise that advances in communication technology had made the world a radically different place, an observation that Marshall McLuhan expanded upon.

Finally, there is the anti-democratic character of Lewis's thought, something which Harrison fails to see the complexity of. Lewis was concerned that cultural standards were falling; however, it was not the democratisation of the arts which he blamed but their politicisation and commercialisation. Lewis was one of the first serious observers of popular culture, long before post-modern theory standardised the practice.[51] He saw political intentions hidden in supposedly politically-neutral material, in advertising, in newspapers, books, movies and magazines. The threat to pure, detached intellectual thought and art was very real in his opinion. To Lewis, mass culture, which appears to be synonymous with a democracy of ideas in Harrison's view, was actually the purveyor of approved

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[50] As suggests Harrison, *op. cit.*, 25.

[51] SueEllen Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite: The Outlaw Criticism of Wyndham Lewis* (Athens, Ohio, 1988), xv.

ideas, and, in fact, a method of rule. Democracy as practised in the west was, put simply, not as free as it claimed to be.

Harrison, it seems, has fallen into the trap of deciding beforehand what constitutes a reactionary, and then forcing each of his subjects into the pattern. In the case of Lewis, it is only by a very biased reading and selection of material that Harrison can support his conclusions. There are any number of ways to categorise Lewis and his ideas, but Harrison's framework is simply wrong. If Lewis is a reactionary in any way, it is in a much more complex and troubling way than that envisioned by Harrison. It will not escape anyone's notice that Harrison's definition of a reactionary owes alot to the understanding of fascists common in the post Second World War period. In 1966, to include Lewis in a group of right-wing romantic nationalists, mystics, pure-race theorists, and economic cranks might have seemed natural, even though it is wrong. Any cursory study of Lewis shows that this framework will not work: thus the production of more ingenious methods of including him in the ranks of the fascists that have occurred since 1966. Each of these new means of classifying Lewis has started with the assumption that he was some sort of fascist, and looked for its proof in his work.

Any study of Lewis's fascism, or supposed fascism, must start with a reading of his book of 1931, *Hitler*. The book was compiled from a series of articles he was commissioned to write for the magazine, *Time and Tide*, a journal he was a regular contributor to during the early thirties. The articles began appearing in January 1931; the book came out in April.

Later, Lewis regretted he had ever written the book. In the forties Marshall McLuhan asked Lewis to sign a copy. Lewis went into rage and threw the book down an incinerator chute, claiming that the slim volume was the cause

of all his many troubles.[52] In the highly political decade before the Second World War Lewis seemed to be constantly drawn into public controversies, and made efforts to explain himself and define his positions that did nothing for his reputation. *Hitler* was only the first in a string of political polemics that Lewis produced in the thirties. In 1937, in a letter to *Twentieth Century Verse*, he asserted, obviously thinking of the Hitler book, "I have been much deceived by politicians, and I will never write another line for or against any of them."[53]

Lewis was not an expert on German politics. He knew the German language, and he felt some affinity for the German people, in theory at least. The visit that provided material for the articles was about a month long, and coincided with a honeymoon of sorts for Lewis and his long time companion, Froanna. The articles were not in-depth studies of the German political situation, and they did not claim to be. Lewis was trying to impart a bit of the political atmosphere of Germany to English readers, and perhaps explain why Hitler was a force to be reckoned with. The articles were argumentative and colourfully written.

His sources were newspapers, Nazi propaganda literature, and personal observation. Lewis's reliance on Nazi propaganda was immediately criticized in letters to the editor of *Time and Tide*. One critic was Cicely Hamilton (1872–1952), a playwright, feminist, and author of *Modern Germanies*, a book which Lewis quoted extensively and with approval in his *The Doom of Youth* the following year. The other letter writer was Frederick A. Voigt (1892–1957), a journalist and authority on German politics. They suggested that he was far too uncritical in his acceptance of the Nazi version of events, and claimed that contrary to their

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[52] Meyers, *The Enemy*, 282.

[53] *Twentieth Century Verse*, Wyndham Lewis Double Number, 6 & 7 (November & December, 1937), 106–107.

propaganda, it was the Nazi's that instigated the street violence. In his response to the letters Lewis insinuated that Hamilton and Voigt were in the thrall of communist propaganda, and he was just providing a necessary corrective.

There was no doubt in the minds of his interlocutors that Lewis was pro-fascist, or pro-Nazi, at that time. But the time was 1931, and Nazism did not have the same connotation as it was to have ten years later, or even five years later, after the start of the Spanish Civil War. Hitler had jumped from 25 to 107 deputies in the last Reichstag election, but was far short of a majority. Lewis was writing about only one of the revolutionary parties vying for power in Germany. The Nazis of Kristalnacht, Buchenwald, and the Blitzkrieg did not as yet exist. Was it irresponsible of Lewis to fail to predict concentration camps and barrages of V2 rockets? He was not alone in his lack of foresight. The English mainstream press at the time were not unfavourably disposed to the Nazis, especially since the Nazi's platform was solidly anti-communist. In England, the Communist and Socialist parties were the only large political groupings that were against the Nazis from the beginning. Lewis, of course, was not a voice of the Left. Actually, most people, Lewis included, were still unsure of what exactly a Nazi was, and in *Hitler*, Lewis, to some extent, made the Nazis in his own image.

If one cannot link Lewis with something that at the time did not exist, then the temptation is to suggest he helped provide an intellectual climate which allowed the Nazis to grow unimpeded. By diminishing the threat the Nazis posed to western democracy and liberty he must have in some way helped them; thus he must have been a fascist sympathiser or supporter. In the opening paragraph of his article he claimed, "...it is as an exponent – not as a critic nor yet an advocate – of German National Socialism, or Hitlerism, that I come forward." (Hitler

4) Was this assertion of neutrality sincere, or was Lewis covering up his actual support for the Nazis? In 1937 T.S Eliot defended Lewis and himself this way:

> As for Mr. Lewis's politics, I see no reason to suppose that he is any more of a "fascist" or "nazi" than I am. People are annoyed by finding that you are not on their side; and if you are not, they prefer you to surrender yourself to the other: if you can see the merits, as well as the faults, of parties to which you do not belong, that is still worse. Anyone who is not enthusiastic about the fruits of liberalism must be unpopular with the anglo-saxon majority. So far as I can see, Mr. Lewis is defending the detached observer. The detached observer, by the way, is likely to be anything but a dispassionate observer; he probably suffers more acutely than the various apostles of immediate action.[54]

Is it possible to be neither a fascist nor a leftist and reject the centre as well? Can one, or even should one, be a "detached observer?" Whatever the answer to these questions may be today, in the thirties the safe alternative political route for an artist or writer was to be a communist or Marxist. To Lewis's critics of the right, left, and centre a sincere belief in any political dogma might have been more understandable than his claims of being above political allegiance. To be without politics was the last and not best refuge of a scoundrel, in their eyes. George Orwell used the term "crypto-fascist" in just such situations. There was no defense against the charge of being a "crypto," for the fascism was hidden deep in one's thought and could not be denied publicly.

Reed Way Dasenbrock says that *Hitler* shows Lewis to have been "an utterly inept interpreter of German politics."[55] This statement is true for the most part: Lewis is unconscionably incorrect as a prognosticator. However, while Lewis's analysis is superficial and needlessly argumentative, it is on rare

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[54] "The Lion and the Fox," *Twentieth Century Verse*, Wyndham Lewis Double Number, 6 & 7, (November & December, 1937), 111.

[55] Dasenbrock, *loc. cit.*, 85.

occasions quite acute. Lewis, it must be said, got some of the most important parts of the Nazi political agenda horribly wrong. As an example:

> I do not think that if Hitler had his way he would bring the fire and sword across otherwise peaceful frontiers. He would, I am positive, remain peacefully at home, fully occupied with the internal problems of the Dritte Reich. And as regards, again, the vexed question of the "anti-semitic" policy of his party, in that also I believe Hitler himself - once he had obtained power - would show increasing moderation and tolerance. (Hitler 48)

As a political prophet Lewis failed miserably. He was wrong about Hitler's militarism, and also, terribly wrong, about the outcome of the Nazi Party's antisemitic policy. The reasons for the inaccuracy of his predictions will be looked at a bit later. However, throughout this slim volume there are insights into the character of Nazism that are extremely valuable, though often they are linked to conclusions that are untenable.

A good example of this is Lewis's understanding of the *Judenfrage*, or the Jewish question. At the time he wrote *Hitler* the anti-semitism of the Nazi Party, and the inflammatory nature of Hitler's pronouncements on race, were well known. Anti-semitism was disturbing to liberals and communists alike; and also to Lewis. Lewis's explanation of the Nazi's antisemitism is based on an implicit understanding of romantic or ethnic nationalism, though he does not use the phrase. He sees that antisemitic thought is pervasive in Germany due to a "peasant doctrine" of "the blood and the soil." Antisemitism,

> ...if it does not find its justification, finds at least its *rationale* in this peasant-doctrine of fierce exclusiveness and jealous "hard headed" resolve to "keep out" at all cost the "alien," when the peasant mind suspects (whether rightly or wrongly - and no doubt it is sometimes one, sometimes the other) of having designs on its patrimony. (Hitler 34)

The peasant mind is emotional, anti-intellectual, conservative, religious, and dominated by fear; it is also a type of mind that Lewis particularly despises. So it is curious then that he appears to accept this product of the unthinking, elemental mass when he doesn't accept its other products.

Implicit in his argument are two antithetical minds, the enlightened mind and the peasant mind, though he only talks of the peasant mind, and its racial expression, antisemitism. Lewis believes that the peasant mind can be overcome, surpassed, as it has been in England and English speaking North America, for example. Antisemitism is not as important in these areas of the world, and, in fact, according to Lewis, there is no *Judenfrage*. The public debate concentrates on other things. But here one should also mention that, though Lewis acknowledges prejudice against Jews in the Anglo-Saxon countries, he seriously underestimates its extent - the absence of public debate does not mean that antisemitism is less virulent; and he does not question his own extremely stereotyped view of Jews.

In the normal course of events racial prejudice would die out and be superseded by a more cosmopolitan and enlightened attitude towards race and religion. (Or if one wishes, more highly codified and subtle forms of discrimination.) The reason this has not happened, according to Lewis, is that throughout German history fear of the outsider has been used by those in power for their own political ends. People cannot move beyond their outdated prejudices because they are always drawn back by the blandishments of their leaders, whether their leaders are religious, political, commercial or cultural. Lewis notes that all modern nationalist movements in middle Europe use antisemitism as an "instrument of political agitation." (Hitler 36–37) The Nazis are like other modern nationalist movements in that they utilize the subconscious fear of the outsider

for their own political ends. The real culprit in this latest conspiracy against European Jews, and the real reason that there continues to be a "peasant mind," is the doctrine of romantic nationalism itself. In Lewis's terms the peasant mind and its accompanying nationalism is opposed to the anglosaxon attitude, which to put into modern language would be the difference between romantic nationalism and civic nationalism.

In an article which he wrote at the end of the Second World War, Lewis traced the peasant doctrine of *Blut und Boden* back to a group of pre-First World War French intellectuals. "Intuition versus the Intellect, or is there such a thing as an *Intellectual*" (RA Chapter VIII), was first offered to the *Sewanee Review* in 1946. Lewis argued that the emphasis on intuition in French pre-war philosophy had led to a de-intellectualizing of intellectuals and had contributed to the mentality of group-life as the only life. The high estimation that French intellectuals had for the consciousness of the group or race led to the decline of individualism and liberal ideas of community. This was an old theme for Lewis. The review's editor, John Palmer, frightened by the complex content of the argument proposed giving the article to "opposition" readers who would write a rejoinder. The readers were to be Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. Maritain did not read the piece claiming he was too busy; Gilson did and refused to write anything, saying that he found Lewis's discussion of the character of French intellectuals incoherent. (RA 296) The piece was refused by the *Sewanee Review.*

An important thing to keep in sight is Lewis's contention that the carefully nurtured prejudices of the peasant mind are being used to attain something else, in this case a cohesive nation state based on exclusive racial characteristics. Lewis had no doubt that once the Nazi regime had become secure enough the use of this peasant doctrine would be moderated or completely discarded. He was

wrong; he did not see how essential it was to National Socialist ideology. Unlike the Nazis, Lewis did not believe that being linked to the soil and the blood of the nation, or subsuming one's being in the racial consciousness of a people was a good in itself. He does not say that *Blut und Boden* are essential for the completion of a satisfying identity.[56] In the context of Lewis's writings and his thought this will of the peasant to lose his identity to the group is something to be deplored. However, he is not startled by the collective aspects of this train of thought and this doctrine because he sees it operating in different forms all throughout Europe. Lewis wrote in *Time and Western Man* that while people were in reality becoming more similar, technologically and industrially one indistinguishable nation, "simultaneously, and in frenzied contradiction, is the artificially fostered nationalism rampant throughout the world since the war." (TWM 96) The Nazis are merely employing, in a racial or national way, a policy which is a variation of a deeply felt, European-wide rejection of cosmopolitanism and liberal conceptions of the state. This universal change in political orientation to the ethnic nation is linked to the creation of new forms of government. The National Socialists in Germany represent a new and powerful permutation of the ideology of authority, in the same way as the Communists in Russia and the Fascists in Italy incarnate this new ideology in their respective countries. In the democratic west the ideology of authority works in different, more subtle and insidious ways.

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[56] Later Lewis would come out against roots of any sort. For example, in *America and Cosmic Man* (1947) Lewis writes, "There is something that I have never seen seriously challenged: namely, this notion that to *have roots* (as if one were a vegetable or a plant) is a good thing for a man: that to be *rootless* is a bad thing for a man. The exact contrary, of course, is the case. ...to be rooted like a tree to one spot, or at best to be tethered like a goat to one small area, is not a destiny at all desirable." (ACM 164-165)

This is the main, unspoken point of *Hitler*: that National Socialism and Adolf Hitler are powerful, dangerous, and likely to succeed, precisely because they appeal to all the things that Lewis despises about western society. Hitlerism values the life of the group over the life of the individual; it bases its ideology on action, not on contemplation and stability; it extracts an all consuming religious fervour from its disciples; it is anti-intellectual. The Nazis do all these things, appeal to all the most base attributes of modern man, much more openly and efficiently than the democracies of the west.

Then in one way *Hitler* shows Lewis's position as pessimistic acceptance of the universal appeal to the mind of the common man, in this case the German common man. The racially exclusive dictatorial state which emerges is the inevitable result of the ruler acceding to the wishes of the majority, after having implanted the desirability and workability of the notion in the mind of the majority. The masses believe because it is in accord with their subconscious desires to be part of a large cohesive group and to be ruled. Nazism is the ultimate proof of Lewis's belief that there is a generalized dislike of liberty.

There are two other aspects of *Hitler* that bear close attention. The first is Lewis's profession that Hitler is an "armed prophet" yet a "man of peace." The second is Lewis's section on the spurious economics of Nazism at the end of the book. These two aspects are related to Lewis's view of politics and to his pacifism. They also help explain Lewis's bad predictions.

Early in the book Lewis lays out the unstable nature of the economic and political situation in Germany. The rise of the Nazis is attributed to all the usual culprits: inflation, the War Debt, government ineptitude, and failure of the traditional ruling class. All these problems provide fertile ground for the Nazi movement to grow. (Hitler 33) On the social and political problems caused by the

War Debt and reparation payments, Lewis is not that far off from what Maynard Keynes prophesied in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). The situation in Germany provides a revolutionary group the opportunity to gain power, but it needs a singular man to take advantage of the situation.

In the chapter entitled "Hitler an Armed Prophet" Lewis tries to explain why a "man of peace" such as Hitler needs a militia. He quotes Machiavelli: "All armed prophets have conquered, and the unarmed ones have been destroyed." This quote is taken from chapter VI of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli considers the lasting political success of Moses, Cyrus (leader of the Persian Empire), Theseus (a hero of Attic mythology), and Romulus (the mythical founder of Rome). Machiavelli is explaining how a creator of a new principality, or an innovator in his terms, must act in order to achieve and consolidate his power. The innovator must first of all have ability and opportunity, the situation must be favourable for the exercise of his talents. On his way to lasting power he will have to overcome the resistance of the old order and the luke-warm support of his own faction. If he relies on his own forces, and not the help of others, the innovator is assured of success.

> Consequently, all armed prophets succeed, whereas unarmed ones fail. This happens because, apart from the factors already mentioned, the people are fickle; it is easy to persuade them about something, but difficult to keep them persuaded. Hence, when they no longer believe in you and your schemes, you must be able to force them to believe.[57]

As an example of this dictum Machiavelli notes that where Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus succeeded, the unarmed Savonarola failed. No matter how just or noble the innovator's cause might be, force must be used to maintain the new

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[57] Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Quentin Skinner and Russell Price eds., (Cambridge, 1988), 21.

regime; people must be made to believe, that is, to obey. Machiavelli uses the Italian word *profeti* to mean all new rulers, not just theocratic ones.[58] Lewis, however, takes the literal meaning of the word.

Lewis has prepared us for the description of Hitler as an armed prophet by calling Nazism "a religion comparable to Marxism" earlier in the book. (Hitler 10) He has also said that "Hitler is a prophet, like Mahomet, Mussolini, or Lenin." (Hitler 48) As an armed prophet Hitler fits neatly into Machiavelli's framework, according to Lewis. It is necessary for the Nazis to have a military organization in the present context of German politics because "...relying on police protection for the safety of its platform, or its party premises, it would be laid out in a week." (Hitler 53) Lewis notes that in Germany all the political parties have their own private militia; the Communists, the Fascists, and the Republicans (i.e. the state police); and that this is similar to the Camelots du Roi in France and the cells of the Communist party which operate in all western countries. Even though the social and economic situation is propitious for Nazi success, their political survival depends on having "sufficient force to take the initiative."[59]

There is no morality or ideology behind the militant actions of the Nazis, it is simply the ancient quest for power in modern clothes. No doubt Lewis was enchanted by Machiavelli's idea that "prophets," who are usually associated with a religious code, could act as immorally as any other creator of a new regime. But on a deeper level this is a satire, or at least an ironic reading of all ideologies competing in the modern political arena. Underneath the drapery of ideology is the naked reality of power and rule.

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[58] *Ibid.*, note *a*.

[59] *Ibid.*, 21.

Throughout *Hitler* important aspects of Nazi ideology and their agenda are consistently downplayed by Lewis. The *Judenfrage* is "a mere bagatelle," or "a racial red-herring." (Hitler 42, 43) The concern about a resurgent German militarism is fear-mongering. Since Germany has been disarmed, "such an eventuality as a "war of revenge" - or even, if the French were not there, an attack upon Poland about the famous "corridor" - would be like asking a naked unarmed man to make a frontal attack on a machine-gun nest..." (Hitler 56) Lewis quite simply does not believe what Nazi propaganda says, and he considers it unlikely that Hitler does either. Hitler is merely an astute strategist who uses the peasant doctrine and other aspects of the political, economic, and social situation around him to gain power. Once in power he will rule by force, as all armed prophets must do in order to survive. The techniques of power available to Hitler have multiplied since Machiavelli's day, as has their subtlety; Hitler need not kill people. He will not jeopardise his power by wasting it in a suicidal international war. To Lewis, that would be unthinkable. However, at the end of the section, Lewis remarks, "...if arms were available, as they are not - its [the Nazis] well disciplined partisans would constitute a dangerous force." (Hitler 56) Essentially, Lewis is saying that as long as Hitler is an armed prophet without the machinery of war, Germany, and Europe as a whole, will remain peaceful.

There is another reason Lewis sees the Nazis programme as a hopeful sign for peace. In the final chapters of *Hitler* he lays out an analysis of Nazi economics. This is the only instance in all of Lewis's vast outpouring of writings in which he tackles economic issues in any depth. As a caution Lewis says that he "has never had either the aptitiude or application required to master even the elements of that strange science." (Hitler 162) But he nevertheless bluffs his way through it in the most brazen and incoherent way. In the section entitled

"Hitlerist Economics" (with subheadings such as "Are You a Credit Crank" and "Credit Crankism") Lewis seems to be promoting the economic theories of Social Credit, theories which were also advocated by Ezra Pound. This appears to be a totally unnatural position for Lewis to take. In 1931 Nazis economics were not well developed, and their economic theory practically non-existent; perhaps in practice, and much later, they had some success with a sort of corporatism. But German corporatism was not like Social Credit except in its vague outlines, if at all. This appears to be the worst case of wishful thinking on Lewis's part. To understand his position we have to go back to the Great War.

Many writers have pointed out the change in Lewis's ideas that came after the First World War. When he joined up in 1915, Lewis, like many of his contemporaries, thought that soldiering for one's country was something of a duty. Sigfried Sassoon, Richard Aldington, Robert Graves, and others in Lewis's generation joined up not knowing what to expect. Nothing could have prepared them for the destruction they witnessed. What Lewis saw in the trenches turned him off the Rupert Brooke style of patriotism forever. Everything in his body and soul told him it was his duty to stay alive, and not become part of a foreign field forever England. And he was intelligent enough to assume that the Germans on the other side of no-man's-land felt pretty much the same way. If the soldiers did not enjoy the fighting and would rather be home going about their business in a peaceful fashion, then the cause of the war, its whole *raison d'être*, must be found elsewhere.

To Lewis the source of war was obvious. The only people who gained from modern war were the politicians, financiers, and manufacturers of arms. They must be the ones who wanted war since they were the only ones who profited from it. The financiers and arms dealers became rich, and the politicians and

generals gained power over the lives of others, thus satisfying a psychological need inherent in all rulers. But this fact was shrouded behind the veil of national honour and sacrifice woven by war propaganda. War was purported to be fought for King and country, or freedom, or any other resonant catchword; in reality it was conducted so a few could make money. The belief that he was a pawn in somebody else's game, that his personal freedom and the freedom of his society were being subjected to rigorous control simply to satisfy the will of a few, turned Lewis into a life-long pacifist. Lewis's pacifism is more complicated than a first level rejection of war's destruction of property or human life.

> Certainly I understand that almost all wars are promoted by and directed by knaves, for their own unpleasant ends, at the expense of fools, their cannonfodder. And certainly knaves are *bad men*, very bad men. But the greatest wickedness of all - if we must deal in moral values - is the perpetuation of foolishness which these carnivals of mass-murder involve. (B&B 85)

In the opinion of Lewis, the First World War had accelerated the decline of the arts and rigorous, detached intellectual thought. Propaganda insinuated itself into fabric of the state and society as a method of mass control, until all was organised, regularised, made mechanical, a vast submissive machine ready for future wars.

Timothy Redman notes that the arrival of Social Credit was part of a general rejection of liberal economics that followed the First World War. The new economics of John Maynard Keynes would exemplify a more scholarly approach in the same vein. During the First World War, the first "total" war, the British economy had been under the complete control of the government. After the war, when the system was returned to the bankers and financiers, there came a post-war depression, or slump. It seemed obvious to many people what had caused the

slump: the return of the economy to the bankers. Douglas's simple solution was to turn the state into the only banker, that is, return control of the economy to the community.[60] Douglas's books, *Economic Democracy* and *Credit Power and Democracy* (both 1920) were elaborations of this simple idea.

In the twenties, when Lewis began his Man of the World project, the new economics were in vogue. Social Credit seemed to offer a third way, neither marxist nor capitalist, for people to change to their economic system. It also identified one group of people, in the bankers, as the source of the slumps and deprivation.[61] By 1930 Lewis had incorporated some of this preoccupation with finance and economics into his work; however he did so in an unique fashion. Early in *Hitler* Lewis claims that it is significant that "the Nazi is not a sex-moralist at all," and then coins a motto for them to use: "The Bank is more important than the Backside." According to Lewis western democracies have "a long history of astute side-tracking down moralist culs-de-sac." (Hitler 22-3) (The pun is no doubt intended.) The real power circulates among the bankers and politicians, and morals (like Marx's opiate of the masses, religion) is a trick of legerdemain designed to misdirect people's attention or make them feel better about themselves. Politics, ideology, and morals were false fronts, that is, they concealed the true motivations of the rulers.[62] Economics was something concrete.

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[60] Redman, *op. cit.*, 55.

[61] Douglas's Social Credit ideas corresponded with, or buttressed, other far less savory notions. He, as did Pound, believed in the basic accuracy of that famous piece of forgery and misinformation, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. (Redman, *op. cit.*, 69-70) The idea that international bankers were the ruling evil of the world, and had caused the post-war slump, fitted neatly with the paranoid belief that there was a vast conspiacy of Jewish bankers.

[62] Dasenbrock's discussion of "false bottoms" and the rejection of ideology found in Lewis's *The Revenge For Love* (1937) makes the same point. See Dasenbrock, *loc. cit.*, 93.

Considering this materialist bias it is then easier to understand why Lewis "re-invents" Nazi economics. If the Nazis took away the power of the bankers to profit from war, the most important reason for war would cease to exist. Social Credit offered an opportunity for European society to avoid future wars, and if the Nazis adopted some form of Social Credit, they were on the side of peace. What seems to have escaped Lewis's notice is the fact that Douglas's theory was based on how a war economy functioned, and was adaptable to future wars just as easily as was capitalist economics.

Lewis's own desire for peace and his belief that politics and political ideology were screens for real motivations were transferred onto the Nazis. The main tenets of Nazi ideology, such as the belief in the threat to German culture and society by Jewish people, he does not believe, though he sees how the Nazis have shaped their policies to gain the widest spectrum of support, prejudice being a powerful tool to the ruler. Lewis's Nazis are not sincere, they are openly Machiavellian; and it is their lack of false sincerity that Lewis finds so appealing. In reality, Lewis's conception of the Nazis bears little or no relation to the Nazis of 1931, or any other year.

The complexity of Lewis's argument in *Hitler* can only be seen when the book is looked at in the context of his other writings and in a historical context. Normally this would be an abdication of responsibility on the part of the analyst, but this is the only way the book can be understood. As *Hitler* was a work of political polemic and not political theory, Lewis did not include the theoretical justification for his view of Hitler and Nazism. There are hints of the deeper roots of his analysis but they appear to be cut off in an attempt to make the book accessible. However, this book does have roots in Lewis's other writings and follows the general direction of his thought; and read with these understandings

long as they are recognised. Perhaps this more optimistic attitude shows a contempt for humanity; however, the society that would emerge is quite different from any envisioned by a fascist or Nazi. In his work and thought Lewis oscillated between hope and gloom, between idealism and realism, and also between the suitable political and social remedies that accompanied them. This fluctuation makes his writing hard to categorise. What *Hitler* shows is Lewis's embrace of an attitude of hopelessness, a capitulation to inevitability of the historical processes that lead to organised unfreedom. In *The Doom of Youth*, which was published in the following year, he seems to be in a more optimistic frame of mind and attacks what he sees as the universal mechanisation and militarisation of modern youth.

Pessimism and an open and associative mind do not make a fascist, they are simply psychological attributes. A fascist is something more than a critic of society, even a particularly despondent or violent critic. He or she has a specific view of society's problems and limited arsenal of solutions. SueEllen Campbell suggests that Lewis's description of Georges Sorel as intellectually "a sensitive plate for the confused ideology of his time" could be applied to Lewis himself. (ABR 132-3)[63] In some ways Lewis does represent the political and psychological tensions that existed in western society during the first fifty years of this century. If parts of fascism, communism, and liberalism seem to all find a home in Lewis's political writing at various times it is perhaps understandable, since he was unusually sensitive to the tendencies of his society. Perhaps this is what T.S. Eliot meant by the detached but not dispassionate observer, someone who is

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[63] Campbell, *op. cit.*, 129.

in mind the book takes on a different character. *Hitler* becomes a case study of a nation where the tendencies that he discussed in *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man* have achieved reality. Since Lewis's Nazi Germany is so different from the actual article, one could say that Lewis's book is an utopian fantasy, or more precisely, a dystopian nightmare based on a very dark reading of western culture.

The pessimistic vision that produced *Time and Western Man* and *The Art of Being Ruled* implied that the philosophical, literary, social and scientific trends in western culture, or civilisation, were leading toward more authoritarian forms of government. Communism and Fascism were two obvious dictatorial forms that had recently emerged, and modern liberal democracy was another, less apparent form. Over his life, and even between *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man*, Lewis wavered between two positions. The first was the acceptance of this general movement toward authoritarian government. Since some form of dictatorship was inevitable, he wished to make it as efficient and open as possible. The other position suggested that society and government should be more anarchic, individualistic, and libertarian. The pessimistic attitude is found in *The Art of Being Ruled*; the following year, in *Time and Western Man*, he wrote,

> I now believe, for instance, that people should be compelled to be freer and more "individualistic" than they naturally desire to be, rather than that their native unfreedom and instinct towards slavery should be encouraged and organised. (TWM 138)

There remains a pessimism about the natural desires of humanity in this more optimistic position, and general feeling that people must be directed or governed, but humanity's natural urges are seen as something which can be overcome, as

involved in the political life of his community not as an idoologue, but as a register of the political reality.

The Artist in Society

The first indication that Wyndham Lewis was destined to be an artist occurred at Rugby. Useless at academic studies and none too fond of sports, Lewis sequestered himself in his room and began to paint. When this strange and anti-social activity came to the notice of the school drawing master, Lewis was recommended for the Slade. And once at the Slade he flourished. From almost the beginning of his adult life, Wyndham Lewis was an artist.

His early writings show his concern with defining what he was. In his Breton travel diaries from 1908, his "Crowdmaster" stories from Blast in 1914-15, and in his letters of his early years, one sees a person who enjoyed exploring the place of the artistic temperament within society. Lewis had chosen - or had been chosen for - a vocation that was misunderstood and frequently vilified by his society. The philistines that had made life so difficult for Wilde, Butler, Whistler, and others in the Victorian era still existed, in high and low places. It was this sense of being under seige, both individually and as part of the artistic community, that motivated Lewis to define his particular role as an artist and place a value on the role of artists generally. His personality and individuality had to be defended, as well as the whole notion of the worth of art.

The way Lewis imagined his place in society, as an artist, writer, and creative human being changed marginally over his life. Throughout his career, as a new popular culture of film, radio, television, and popular magazines grew in the west, dismantling or rendering irrelevant the old, elite culture of his youth, Lewis retained an almost romantic vision of what an artist was and did. To a large extent, Lewis kept the anarchic and avant garde ideals of a pre-war bohemian painter. Over his life Lewis came up with several models of his culture in which he attempted to explain the place of the artist within society. Each

model had a specific purpose, and was created to respond to his particular concerns at the time. But they all have points in common and a unity of vision and structure. They are all attempts to explain where he, and artists in general, fit into society.

The Two Publics

The Two Publics is Lewis's explanation for the gradual lowering, deadening, sentimentalizing, and de-intellectualizing of modern literature. Or, in other terms, the growth of popular culture. The preeminent fear that prompted Lewis to conceive this model was that the Lowbrow threatened to overwhelm the Highbrow. The antagonism of the High and Low brows is also the reason that courageous, difficult authors like himself were being squeezed out of existence. Though Lewis used parts of this model in *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man*, it is described best in *Rude Assignment*, chapter two.

In this model the two publics are essentially "watertight" and there is little penetration from above to below. Highbrow literature has to enter the Lowbrow public "by way of the bedroom window." (RA 20) This is what Lewis believes D.H. Lawrence and Hemingway have done. While they were originally marketed to the Highbrow public, the emphasis on sex in Lawrence and violence in Hemingway make them extremely sellable to the Lowbrows. Some Highbrow literature enters through the university lecture room, but not much. The threat to the Highbrows comes from the expansion and eventual hegemony of one set of values and ideas. The ideas of the artist, or in this case, the Highbrow writer, are dismissed as irrelevant, obscure, and difficult; they are not even respected as ideas.

HIGHBROW	INTELLIGENTSIA	- a minority public - critics/critical of society - "highbrow" a derisive term - dialect separates them from Lowbrow - *The Way Of All Flesh* = Literature
LOWBROW	BOURGEOISIE/WITH INTELLECTUAL PRETENSIONS	- a majority public - uncritical/sentimental - philistines - *Forever Amber* = Literature; also sentimental novels and detective stories - put pressure on the highbrow to conform to their values
NOBROW (Not really a PUBLIC)	PROLETARIAT/NO INTELLECTUAL PRETENSIONS	- no public - to become part of the majority public - pressured by the lowbrows to conform to middle-class/lowbrow values - eventually to be absorbed by means of Hollywood style movies

Lewis believed that in the twentieth century the image of the artist had undergone a pointless and destructive change. The 19th century respect for the artist, "shivering in his garret" no longer existed, and in the twentieth century they are "sneered at as "Highbrow" and starve just the same." (RA 20-1) This is in part due to the "primitive Christian impulse" to reverse values - "to say what has been considered high is really low, and what has been thought low is really high." Lewis cites the "democratic levelment" described by De Tocqueville, but he could just as easily have cited as similar process in Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*. (RA 21) The artist in the Victorian era was respected, but only by a select, interested, educated few, and essentially ignored by the majority of people in the society. When culture became more democratic, or the illusion of democracy was imposed upon it - when Culture was invented, in other

words - the serious artist was associated with the deposed elite. Highbrow was created as a derisory term.

Part of what Lewis is doing in this model is using an analysis of economic class and commercial principles to explain the demise of high or difficult literature. The middle-class, with its massive buying power, determines the existence of items in the marketplace. What doesn't sell or can't be sold easily and quickly becomes a liability for the merchant. Items such as books must be geared to the mass market, and that means they must appeal to the sweet tooth of the masses. Sour or distasteful books are avoided; and eventually, following commercial logic, they are not even written. The class which is destroyed in this process is the producer of those difficult books, the intelligentsia. But more than that, the middle-class comes to believe that its tastes are the only possible tastes - that those few who like the occasional dose of castor oil somehow don't count. There comes an aggressive dislike of the Highbrow and a negation of all they stand for, simply because it is the taste of the few. Lewis mentions religion because middle-class values have become a sort of religion, with all the trappings of faith and the monopoly on truth that religion implies.

The commercial impulse drives Lowbrow culture. This would not be a problem except due to the desire of the promoter to increase his profits he "steals the halos from the statues of the saints." This adds to the products "book value," and reinforces the idea that "the low public - the commercially promoted majority... is the real, the best, and the only one." (RA 22) The point is that it is natural for people to steer away from material that is difficult, perhaps too difficult for their training, and to seek out entertainment. But the crafty promoter takes the intellectual label and affixes it to a product that has no intellectual qualities. Lewis feels that there is a place for entertainment in any

society, just as there is a place for art. But one is doing a great disservice to civilisation when one claims entertainment as the sole criterion for art; that art must amuse the sensitive palate of the middle-class. The commercial promoter, by stealing just the glowing halo and leaving the whole, tedious, difficult statue behind, hoodwinks the Lowbrow public into believing they are looking at art when they are being entertained; and thus they believe they are just as "good," if not better than the Highbrow because they can enjoy "art" without struggle. Lewis acknowledges, here, the desire of the Lowbrow public to appear literate, to appear part of the cognoscenti, and perhaps that people really do want to wrestle with adventurous and disturbing ideas. He just says that because of the mechanics of the Lowbrow market, readers are not provided with the real, often distasteful and difficult materials which would allow them to cultivate more than a superficial acquaintance with literature.

The majority public is the product of monopoly capital and mass production; and also the desire or need of some people to have power, a psychological need. (RA 23) The middleman in this, and the real villain in Lewis's eyes, is the commercial promoter. He moulds the majority into a docile consuming mass which makes him money and gives him control over their lives and thoughts. The "Many" are degraded by this need of the "average smart man" to manipulate. The psychological motivation of the "average smart man" is "to keep other people on mental leading-strings, to have beneath you a broad mass of humanity to which you (though no mental giant) can feel agreeably superior." (RA 23) Lewis asks who really despises the people, the social critic who points out their bondage and therefore their "stupidity," or the man who put them there, the commercial promoter. Lewis feels that in this case the slave's anger is being directed toward a false master; it is not the social critic or Highbrow that are

the enemies of the majority but the "average smart man." The indignation of the slave at being used is deflected by means of advertising. The mass public is shown things which reinforce its view of itself and are kept away from ideas that are difficult and upsetting. They are coddled children to the adult advertising executive, the "average smart man," and the commercial managers. This shows "a crisis of respect for human kind." (RA 24) "Those engaged in publicity services or in popular entertainment..." Lewis claims, "cannot retain much respect for the million-headed Baby, whose mouth it is their job to make water, or from whose big blue eyes it is their job to extract buckets of tears." (RA 26) This is a nanny society with a difference: it is not citizens who are treated as children, but consumers.

Incapable of thinking independently, kept away from art and literature that would help them think independently, hypnotised by advertising into believing that they *are* thinking independently, the majority public exists in a sub-human state.

> The cheapening of human life – until we have all grown like doctors in our necessary callousness about the human animal, whose "ideals" look sillier at every fresh homicidal outburst: the lowered standards of life ensuing upon war – all this conspires to dethrone homo sapiens and to put in his place homo stultus, or the Yahoo of Swift. (RA 25–6)

The pessimism of this statement, with its grim forecast of a new dark age, shows Lewis at his most despondent. Lewis had first used the term homo stutlus in *The Art of Being Ruled* in 1926, but after the depression of the thirties, and almost a decade of European wars, the Yahoo's arrival seemed unavoidable.

The concepts of Highbrow and Lowbrow are not new with Lewis. In the interwar period there was a great concern among authors that standards of literature were slipping. Virginia Woolf, in her aloof and perceptive way, wrote

an article in which she decried the Middlebrow. She said much the same thing as Lewis, though for her the Middlebrow was simply a person with bad taste in art, architecture, furnishings, and literature. Their orientation was toward an ersatz culture, fuelled by money and fashion, unconnected to the living cultures which thrived on either side of them. She claimed that "the true battle... lies not between highbrow and lowbrow, but between highbrow and lowbrow joined in a blood brotherhood against the bloodless and pernicious pest who comes between."[64] For her the Middlebrow lacked an essential vitality of thought and action, a quality that the highbrow and lowbrow both possessed. She was optimistic that there could be an alliance between the highbrow and lowbrow, that is between the right-thinking intelligentsia and the honest and sincere working class (the nobrows in Lewis's terms) to revitalise modern culture.

It was a very common complaint in Lewis's time that artists were unnecessarily obscure and forbidding; that they deliberately cut themselves off from the masses. The great artists and writers of the early twentieth century, writers like Joyce and painters like Paul Klee, for example, were deemed totally incomprehensible by the majority of people, that is, the majority public; and their incomprehensibility was considered a sort of self-isolation. But Lewis believes that these serious artists have not insulated themselves from a common lived reality:

> the artist has not "escaped" or "fled from", the outer world of men in general, of reality: he has been *driven* from it. There the philistine businessman and his satellites have it all to themselves. A materialism such as Rome at its worst never knew has invaded everything. (RA 29)

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[64] *The Death of the Moth: And Other Essays* (London, 1942), 118.

This division of Western culture into two seperate camps is the basis of Lewis's critique of society. Part of this, of course, comes from his transfering and imposing the British class system onto a wider cultural scene. Lewis was English after all, and his vocabulary came from what was around him. Much of the confusion about Lewis's politics comes from his usage of this very basic class analysis. For example, under normal circumstances this sort of class analysis should lead to a marxist or socialist solution, perhaps even a liberal solution. But Lewis performs an about face. Rather than pretending he feels affinity for the masses - as a communist, a socialist or even a liberal theorist might - he very plainly states that he cannot like them, that he has no solidarity with them, and that they threaten his very existence. But he feels pity for them because they are the dupes of others; their existence threatens him but it is not their fault. Between the Highbrow and the Lowbrow stands Lewis's third man, (the businessman, the "average smart man," the commercial promoter) who prevents any meaningful transfer of ideas.

The Two Cultures

Lewis travelled Europe extensively before the First World War. His milieu was the galleries, museums, and cafés where artists and writers congregated. It was natural for him to compare the artist's situation in the countries he visited with the circumstances at home in England. *Tarr* (1918), Lewis's first published novel, is about a group of bohemian artists in pre-war Paris. The work was first serialized in Harriet Weaver's review, *The Egoist*.

Like many of his novels, *Tarr* is a working out of philosophical ideas in a fictional setting. In the passage which Lewis describes the two cultures one of

the main characters of the novel, Tarr, is talking to Anastasya, a Russian girl, born in Berlin, educated in Germany and America, and whose family lives in Switzerland.[65] She represents the totally international or cosmopolitan bourgeoise outlook that Tarr, and his creator reject.

Tarr sees the basic difference between France's attitude to art and that of the rest of Europe as coming from their opposing Mediterranean and Northern cultures.[66] The northern culture is exclusive in nature, the ideas come from the individual; in the south

> "...you have a democracy of vitality, the best things of the earth are in everybody's mouth and nerves. *The artist has to go and find them in the crowd.* You can't have "freedom" both ways and I prefer the *artist* to be free, and the crowd not to be "artists."" (Tarr 214)

This contrast of the two types of freedom allowed an artist is the basic difference between the two cultures. The two freedoms are antithetical: in one the artist functions as part of a greater whole, in fact, derives his existence from the mass of people around him; in the other the artist is separated from the whole, and is an individual creator. As a northern European, and an Englishman, Tarr finds his existence in himself, not in the crowd; he is free from "interference," a negative freedom. One could say that the "southern" freedom is positive, that is *freedom to*, an enabling of one's potential by group support. Lewis (Tarr), does not seek a balance, or even suggest one could be happily found, but opts for one extreme.

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[65] The differences between the 1918 version and the revised 1928 version are quite minor in this case. The following quotations are taken from the 1928 version.

[66] The concept of northern and southern cultures originates with Andre Suarès's book, *Trois Hommes: Pascal, Ibsen, Dostoievsky* (1912). *Tarr: The 1918 Version*, Paul O'Keefe ed., (Santa Rosa, CA., 1990), 234, note 1.

The "Crowdmaster" sketches which Lewis included in the second issue of *Blast* (1915), written at about the same time as he was putting the finishing touches on *Tarr*, described the same sort of desire for an individual, exclusive artistic identity. The stories are set during the patriotic exultation and mass frenzy at the declaration of the First World War. The protagonist of the stories, Cantleman, is Lewis's alter ego, though Lewis denied his character and himself were the same. Lewis says,

> ...what I meant by "Crowdmaster" was that I was master of myself. Not of anybody else – that I have never wanted to be. I was master *in* the crowd, not *of* the crowd. I moved freely and with satisfaction up and down its bloodstream, in strict, even arrogant, insulation from its demonic impulses. This I regard as, in some sort, a triumph of mind over matter. It was a triumph (as I saw it then) of the individualist principle. (B&B 84)

The self-possession that an artist must always maintain, a detachment and ironical distance, even in the midst of a mob which seems to act with a single elemental mind, is central to Lewis's conception of the role of an artist.

Tarr claims that France is a nation of "petite maitres," that is minor artists, "each individually possessing very little taste, really, living together and prettifying their towns and themselves." This is more dangerous than the philistinism of England, for example, because in France a work of art is subjected to "professional jealousy" by the artistic crowd, and is thus "unsafe." In England the work of art and the artist are ignored, and therefore the artist can freely create. (Tarr 215)[67]

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[67] Lewis says much the same thing in a letter of 1919. "The Englishman accepts the poet or the artist as he accepts a "native" in a colony, as different & therefore inferior, & proceeds unruffled with his British life, & in most cases treats the native [?] better, & quite inhumanly." W.L to John Quinn (7 February 1919), *Letters*, 103–104.

But then comes the interesting part of Tarr's disquisition. Anastasya has been defending Paris as a cosmopolitan city open to the arts. Tarr says that the attitude toward art in Paris is intelligent; but he goes on to say that "... no friendship is a substitute for the blood-tie; and intelligence is no substitute for the response that can only come from the narrower recognition of your kind." I want to think that Lewis here is suggesting that only artists can recognise art, but the real meaning is different. Nationality and "race" has entered his conversation. Even though the reaction of the English philistines to new art is conservative, uninformed, and dismissive, it means more to the English artist than popular or "intelligent" recognition on the continent. Art speaks to the racial (or ethnic) consciousness of a nation; and when the nation responds the artist is satisfied as in no other way.

But here Lewis (Tarr) shifts gears. We find out he has been talking of "an average" and his theory "would not apply to works of very personal genius: country is left behind by that. Intelligence also." It seems the genius does not have a blood tie to a nation and that his work does not exist in historical time: "...the *best* has in reality no Time and no Country - that is why it accepts without fuss any country or time for what they are worth." (Tarr 215) So there is one rule for the average smart artist, or rather two rules - in the south artistic democracy and intelligent appreciation, and in the north independence, obscurity, and the sub-intellectual blood-link with the nation - and there is

another rule for the genius. Perhaps we could say that the genius, or the true artist, has no rules, no time, no country.

> ...all effectual men are always the enemies of every time. Any opinion of their contemporaries that they adopt they support with the uncanny authority of a plea from an hostile camp. All activity on the part of a good mind has the stimulus of a paradox. To produce is the sacrifice of genius. (Tarr 216)

This has echoes of Lewis's "Enemy" about it, couched in the short, cryptic phrases of *Blast*. The genius, the man with a good mind, living in a hostile camp, or, in other words, a true artist, is above and beyond the time, nation, and culture he physically exists in. He – most definitely a he – is a spiritual contemporary of other men of genius.

Lewis's third man, in this case, the genius, has entered the strict opposition of the "southern" and "northern" cultures; and the genius has a culture all his own. Rather than being the curse of civilisation and the progenitor of homo stultus (as was the average smart man), he is the highest example of homo sapien, the ideal.

Natures and Puppets

The Art of Being Ruled (1926) is Lewis's response to Machiavelli's *The Prince*. It is "a survival guide" for the citizens of western democracies; where Machiavelli's book is a handbook for princes, a primer in the art of ruling.[66] Both books can of course be read in the opposite way. But keeping with the

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[66] Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Wyndham Lewis's Fascist Imagination and the Fiction of Paranoia," in Richard Golsan ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (London, 1992), 87.

intended meanings, in *The Prince* Machiavelli tried to disassociate morals and romance from politics, and in the process created a cold automaton viciously scheming for power in his prince. Lewis intended to show the functioning of various techniques of power by which a citizen was ruled in a free democratic society, and created the eternally ruled masses. Lewis's essential premise is this: since we, the ruled, are destined to be ruled by someone or some group, it is in our own best interest to be as well informed about the motives and methods of our rulers as possible.

Of all the books Lewis wrote in the twenties, *The Art of Being Ruled* is the most political. But having said that, one must realize that politics in Lewis's view was not an isolated and distinct human activity. Politics insinuated itself into all aspects of human life, and was in turn influenced by other areas of life and knowledge. Political philosophy, literature, religion, economics, science, sexual identity, vegetarianism, history, childhood, etc., all are dealt with in the book. All are linked with each other in a sometimes confusing web of relationships. Lewis's self-imposed task was the exposing of relationships and the deconstructing of their patterns, until the whole complicated network of connections was laid open. Add to this the fact that Lewis speaks with many voices, that is, he takes the positions of the democratic, fascist, or communist ruler (and ruled) with such effectiveness and obvious glee, it is sometimes difficult to know which side he is on.

One of most disturbing things about the book for many readers and critics is the model of society and culture Lewis uses to base his opinions. According to these readers the model is bipolar, a perfect clash of opposites. They see the model as having two opposing groups, "a small class of true individuals capable of independent thought," and under them "the unthinking masses who wish for

nothing better than to be ruled." SueEllen Campbell, who sees the "third man" in Lewis's subsequent cultural models, believes, "Such a vision is conspicuously authoritarian and has... obviously distasteful practical implications."[69] In all other cases her reading of Lewis's cultural models is extremely acute, but here she misses the hidden third party. In the Natures/Puppets opposition, as with the models shown above (The Two Publics and The Two Cultures), Lewis's seemingly strict oppositions always have a third factor which provides him with an escape.

In part five of *The Art of Being Ruled*, called ""Natures" and "Puppets,"" Lewis makes the division between "two species and two worlds, which incessantly interfere with each other, checkmate each other, are eternally at cross purposes." Lewis takes the names Natures and Puppets from Goethe, and redefines them slightly as "*natural* men and *mechanical* men."(ABR 135) In this "absurd war" between opposites the "natural man" is losing.

> We are *all* slipping back into machinery, because we *all* have tried to be free. And what is absurd about this situation is that so few people even desire to be free in reality. (ABR 135)

This is an example of the hard opposition that is so disturbing to many readers. The implications are that while freedom is necessary for some, the natural men, others do not want it; they want to shuffle off the responsibility of freedom and be, simply, efficiently, ruled. The natural man wants and needs freedom, while the mechanical man prefers submission to authority. The obvious conclusion is that the natural man should rule the mechanical man, since the mechanical man desires to be ruled and there is no other person included in the model. But as will be

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[69] *The Enemy Opposite: The Outlaw Criticism of Wyndham Lewis* (Athens, Ohio, 1988), 174-175.

shown, in reality the division is between two different types of freedom, not groups: a liberal freedom based on the individual and a communitarian freedom that flows from the group, and which is its opposite. A liberal believes that a particular type of personal liberty is necessary for the happiness of an individual, and is especially desirable for the whole of society. In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis claims that the liberal concept of freedom, born in the revolutionary 18th century and nourished by elites in the decades since, has proved itself unacceptable to people. He cites communism and fascism as two political ideologies whose success shows the bankruptcy of the liberal (or libertarian, as he sometimes calls it) formulation of freedom. The rejection of freedom and responsibility is happening in the democratic West as well. This global rejection of a particular type of freedom shows a realignment of political orientation; there is a similar (and connected) flight from the freedom of the intellect.

There are several things that soften the hard opposition that is most obvious to the reader. First of all, the term "puppets" that Lewis uses in this part of the book is an extension and slight variation of the term "public" he uses in earlier chapters. This comes in a discussion of the doctrine behind the phrase "What the Public Wants." (The first chapter of Part V is called, "What the Puppets Want.") Lewis sees an ideological chain linking the pessimistic philosophers who say man is not good enough and should be made better, and the leaders of democratic and capitalist society who put this creed into operation. "What the Public Wants" is a statement heard only from the lips of the rulers, in Lewis's opinion, and in democratic countries it means the same as what the rulers want. One reason for this is that the control of the means of publicity, ("suggestion, persuasion, and "education""), which create a public will, are in the

hands of an interested few. (ABR 85) "What the Public Wants" is a perverted form of *noblesse oblige*, in which the leadership, while exerting a small amount of force and extracting its traditional benefits, shelters itself behind a concern for the well-being of the masses.

One of Lewis's strongest points is the opacity of power in a democracy. Education, to take one example, is a form of control, of power; and through it the rulers can sustain their regime without overt physical force. In a democracy force, or coercion, is diffuse: "The physical part of power, like the bloody part of revolution, should not be insisted upon." (ABR 98) Conformity to the opinions of the majority is encouraged in education. In *The Lion and the Fox*, published in 1927, Lewis capsulizes the operation of this procedure very well.

> The child is made to feel that the individual in himself or in herself is the enemy. And the death or submission of that enemy is the task of the child. He must kill himself before he can be allowed to kill other people: or he must deaden himself before engaging as a qualified human being in the world-wide occupation of making life mechanical and uniform, and fit for even the vastest herd to live in.[70]

Democratic states are "educationalist states," in Lewis's opinion, and the student is "trained up stringently to certain opinions." (ABR 111) When called upon to vote, the citizen casts his ballot as he is told, within the parameters laid down by his education and the publicity machine of the elite. The control exercised through advertising, education, and other means is just as effective as physical force.

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[70] *The Lion and the Fox: The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare*, (New York, 1927), 79-80.

The merit of the communist or fascist state's rulers, from the viewpoint of the ruled, is their openness about the employment of power. The western democracies are not truthful:

> ...all *the frankness* is on one side, and that is not on the side of the West, of democracy. [...] It is we who are the Machiavels, compared to the sovietist or the fascist, who makes no disguise of his forcible intentions, whose *power* is not wrapped in parliamentary humbug, who is not eternally engaged in pretence of benefaction; who does not say at every move in the game that he is making it for somebody else's good, that he is a vicar and a servant, when he is a master. It is true that he promises happiness to the masses as a result of his iron rule. But *the iron* is not hidden, or camouflaged as christian charity. (ABR 74-75)

The lack of hypocrisy on the part of the Soviet Presidium or the lictors of Mussolini about their holding of power benefits the ruled by separating, identifying, and isolating the ruler from his subjects. It is the duty and right of the ruled to make the life of the ruler as unpleasant as possible. By excluding the ruler from the life of the group, by forcing him onto a different, not happier or more fulfilling, plane of existence, the ruled make power a burden for the ruler. But in a democracy this right of the masses is taken away. Where all supposedly rule, no one person or group can be held responsible, it is just "What the Public Wants." (ABR 96-99)

The modern democratic ruler, it will be remembered, was the "vulgariser" of pessimistic philosophers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. According to Lewis, the philosophers of the Will were philosophers of action for action's sake. They could not see beyond the constant Darwinian struggle in the material world. For them there was no play, ever, and thus no art, literature, or science. In *Time and Western Man* Lewis made clear the limits of this philosophy: "The man of action is not very speculative or intellectually free, usually, nor is he a "free intelligence" as a rule, but an extremely narrow, unreflective, functional person."

(TWM 164) The deadly earnestness of the action philosophy exerted its influence on the rulers, and through them to the ruled, because the prospect of being supermen and women appealed to their vanity. (ABR 120-127)

It will be obvious to the reader that neither one of these two groups, neither the ruled nor the ruler, are free in the liberal sense. They are both enclosed in a reciprocal relationship which forces them to act in certain ways; their freedom of action is circumscribed. Even the introduction of Nietzsche's superman, in a debased form, does not give them freedom, because they still are enslaved by the requirement to continually struggle in the material world, even though the struggle is unnecessary. Each has rejected a personal responsibility for their actions. They exist in the world of politics, business, and action, where events and outcomes are the inevitable result of the roles they play. They are both, to some extent, mechanical men, in Lewis's terms. They both want the freedom of the machine.

Opposed to the mechanical man is the natural man. For Lewis, the natural man has a different type of freedom, a liberty of spirit and intellect that neither the ruler or the ruled can attain. The political plane, or the social plane of the ruler and the ruled are different (not better or worse, Lewis is quick to point out) from the plane of the natures. The distance and detachment from politics that Lewis deemed so necessary for artists, is similar to the personal and psychological distance he saw as the essential feature of the natures. In an age where all politics were to some greater or lesser extent revolutionary, at least in Lewis's mind, art and its adjuncts, could not be revolutionary: "For art is, in reality, one of the things that Revolutions are about, and therefore cannot itself be Revolution." (TWM 40) The natural man, in a fashion akin to that of the genius or the Highbrow of the previous models, contemplates the world.

One of Lewis's best similes comes in the discussion of the new liberty that has overtaken the old, liberal concept. This liberty is equally applicable to the whole of the puppet class (both rulers and ruled), and it is equally held as true by them. The only individual who escapes this new formulation is the natural man.

> Consciousness and responsibility are *prose* as contrasted with the *poetry* of passive, more or less ecstatic, rhythmic, mechanical life. There is, therefore, the intoxicated dance of puppets, and beside that the few *natures*, as they were called by Goethe; moving unrhythmically, or according to a rhythm of their own, which is the same thing. The conventional libertarianism of a century ago envisaged this latter form of personal freedom, this *prose of the individual*, as it could be called. The libertarian of today rejects with horror the idea of that "independence." In place of this *prose of the individual*, it desires the *poetry of the mass*; in place of the *rhythm of the person*, the *rhythm of the crowd*. (ABR 142-143)

The natural man is not a ruler, for a ruler must adapt himself to the needs of crowd, and become like them. The ruler might be an individual, a single person, but he is not allowed to have the erratic prose freedom of a nature; there is no prose for him, as he must learn the poetry that stimulates the crowd. Add to this the introduction of a philosophy which encourages the use of instinct and primal, mechanical urges, (that of Bergson, Nietzsche, Sorel, and others) and the ruler becomes completely divorced from the life of a nature.

Apparently, natures are artists, writers, some philosophers, and scientists, or at least those who work in their field in a pure and detached way. They can advise the rulers and the ruled, as Nietzsche advised a generation of aspiring supermen, and their words will be popularized and put into motion on the social, political plane. It seems that the importance of the philosopher that Plato made the preeminent feature of his Republic has returned; though the definition of the philosopher is expanded to any artist, writer, or scientist who works in a

detached manner, and the separation of the philosopher from the throne is insisted upon. A nature is neither a servant nor a king.

In *Time and Western Man* Lewis reuses the prose/poetry metaphor in a slightly different way. If we read nature for artist and poetry for music the full meaning of the following comment and its relation to the natures/puppets opposition becomes clear.

> But no artist can ever love democracy or its doctrinaire and more primitive relative, communism. The emotionally-excited, closely-packed, heavily-standardized mass-units, acting in a blind, ecstatic unison, as though in response to the throbbing of some unseen music - of the sovietic or fourierist fancy - would be the last thing, according to me, for the free democratic West to aim at, *if* it were free, and *if* its democracy were of an intelligent order. Let us behave *as if* the West were free, and as if we were in the full enjoyment of an ideal democracy. (TWM 42)

Lewis can never love what he sees as the debased form of democracy that currently exists. An ideal democracy would have a freedom based on personal responsibility and the retention of consciousness of self. It would be based on the prose freedom of the natures, or the 18th century "libertarian" freedom. The only way to see the corruption of democratic or liberal ideas is to be, in some sense, an artist, a nature.

The Nature/Puppets model implies a three way division of society. There are the speculative intellects whose clarity of thought is ideally unimpeded by power or utilitarian concerns but have succumbed to a mechanistic vision of humanity; the rulers, who incarnate and then put into practice in a debased form the findings of the first group; and the ruled, the group for which all philosophy is ostensively to benefit, but have been ill served by their philosophers. This is not the ideal, but the reality, in Lewis's view.

Dividing society or culture into various levels, each with its own quality, character, and function, is, of course, objectionable in this democratic age. Today the essential similarity of all human desires is insisted upon. Or we could say that there is a tolerance for the infinite plurality of human desires because no single one is seen as better than another. The three models which we have seen (the Two Publics, the Two Cultures, and Natures and Puppets) all make a distinction between the artist (variously defined) and the rest of humanity. The artist is seen as separate from others and as needing a special type of freedom in order to pursue his vocation. But is this valorisation and separation of the creative intelligence an example of Lewis promoting his own vested interests, and making a violent statement of claims for his class, as thinks Frederic Jameson? Does this form of cultural critique as outlined in the above models prohibit a universal vision of society?[71] Or is it more a restatement of concerns and ideas that have circulated in western society since the Enlightenment? Ever since Descartes recreated the self through subjective affirmation, there have been attempts to reconnect the individual mind to others. Individual cognition cannot prove the existence of others, so some bridge must be found, some commonly experienced reality must be identified. The artist, whose function is to communicate his or her mind to others, is an ideal example of mind reaching out, and attempting to create a bridge between self and society.

In the modern western tradition, the artist, more than any other human being, must retain a sense of self, an individuality of thought and personal perception that exists before the concerns of society. What is valuable about art

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[71] Frederick Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley, CA., 1974), 129.

is its personal nature, the way it illustrates the mind of its creator, the way it comes from an individual. "Artistic freedom" is actually a responsibility to the self. When societies or political powers or the logicians of commerce try to determine what is put on canvas or printed in a book, they attack the self of the artist. The powers of the phenomenal world will attempt to draw the artist into the flux of life. In this way the artist represents the individual consciousness in us all, and the threat to his autonomy shows the threat to individual intellectual freedom:

> For our only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our "self." That must cohere for us to be capable at all of behaving in any way but as mirror-images of alien realities, or as the most helpless and lowest of organisms, as worms or as sponges. (TWM 5)

The concentration of outside forces upon the self can lead to its destruction, and for an artist, or any other human being, this means that an individual identity and an ability to act as an individual is lost. Lewis valued his identity, rather extremely perhaps. In *The Art of Being Ruled* he suggested that most people do not. By instinct or by suggestion modern human beings were drawn into the fluid life of the group. Industrialisation, urbanisation, advances in communication, nationalism, all these recent historical phenomena emphasised and strengthened the life of group. At the same time as the industrial revolution was making group life the only life for many people, one branch of philosophy followed a different

course, one which put greater value in the individual and on nature, as in Rousseau. From his perspective, in 1926, Lewis saw that the romance of nature, or the free, natural man, at home in a solitary Arcadia and forced by circumstances to interact with others, was rather terrifying to most people:

> ...most people's favourite spot in "nature" is to be found in the body of another person, or in the mind of another person, not in the meadows, plains, woods, and trees. They depend for their stimulus on people, not things. (ABR 35)

To be solitary and contemplative, and to take intellectual sustenance from concrete things, ideas, to act as an individual – to be classical – was to resist and perhaps obstruct the great plan of Mankind. People who depended on other people for their existence, humanists in other words, were the majority. In an environment such as this the threat to the integrity of the self was everywhere.

The belief that the self must cohere is a dangerous one, for there is the possibility of the self or the mind of the subject becoming completely cut off from the minds of others and slipping into solipsism. Again the metaphor of the artist is a helpful way to look at the problem. In Lewis's view the artist has a duty to filter out impressions and ideas that he does not need:

> But my conception of the rôle of the creative artist is not merely to be a medium for the ideas supplied him wholesale from elsewhere, which he incarnates automatically in a technique which (alone) is his business to perfect. It is equally his business to know enough of the source of his ideas, and ideology, to take steps to keep these ideas out, except as he may require for his work. (TWM 10)

An artist needs to communicate his understanding of a common reality, for what else does an artist do if not that; but he does not have to reflect unconsciously the Zeitgeist, or spirit of his age. Lewis assumes that there must be a critical engagement with the world. The artist, like all others who wish to maintain a

degree of self-consistency, must be critical of his time and the ideas that are supplied to him.

In Lewis's view there is an interior struggle to understand and identify the self's true nature. An individual is a battle-ground of principles and ideas imported from outside, from the flux. The real self, the stable core of the human being must observe the various opposing principles fight it out.

> I have allowed these contradictory things to struggle together, and the group that has proved the most powerful I have fixed upon as my most essential ME. This decision has not, naturally, suppressed or banished the contrary faction, almost equal in strength, indeed, and even sometimes in the ascendant. And I am by no means above spending some of my time with this domestic Adversary. All I have said to myself is that always, when it comes to the pinch, I will side and identify myself with the powerfullest Me, and in its interests I will work. (TWM 6)

This three part model of the self (I, essential ME, and domestic Adversary) with its balance of "micro-cosmic opposites" (essential ME and domestic Adversary) keeps a person from lapsing into rigidity or complacency. (TWM 6) There is always a tension within the self, a push and pull of competing forces that keep the self alive.

Lewis's belief that there is a battle of competing forces deep within the self rejects any possibility of a tranquil mental existence. One side must always fight against its opposite, and there is a constant flow of new opponents. Lewis does not accept that there ever could be a harmonious co-habitation of competitive forces. Only the superior, watching "I" remains above the violence, but it must be a spectator to the battle, and its ability to act and the direction of its actions is determined by who becomes the victor. The mental life of a person, once they recognise the micro-conflict within, is never easy, it separates them from others. it creates "the other," but it is necessary. To be an individual means one is not anybody else, and "...how can we evade our destiny of being

"an opposite," except by becoming some grey mixture that is in reality just nothing at all?" (TWM 6)

All Lewis's concerns about the arts, science, philosophy, politics, and society flow from his position as an artist in society, a creative intelligence which has to protect itself. His philosophy was anchored in his vocation as an artist, an occupation he chose as "as responding to an exceptional instinct or bias." (TWM 7) Later in his life Lewis recognised a movement in his thought from a personal or craft concern to an all encompassing concern for humanity and human-ness. His political ideas, his cultural ideas, and his opinions on modern philosophy were all marshalled to one end. In *Rude Assignment* he talked of why he, as an artist, got involved in political commentary, or the study of the state.

> With me the first incentive to so unattractive a study was a selfish, or at least a personal one: namely a wish to find out under what kind of system learning and the arts were likely to fare best. A craft interest, that is to say. Of course later my intellectual zeal transcended this limited and specialist enquiry. I saw human life was threatened. (RA 69)

Lewis believed that the machinations of politics, the musing of philosophy, and the advances of science and technology all exert their influence on the individual. Ignorance of their fundamental ideas and their effects limited the individual to merely a receptive entity, a passive being that was easy to rule or shape. The arts, detached from the pragmatism of rule, were the only area of human life where a true reflection of society was obtainable. What happened to the free artistic intelligence was especially relevant to the way society functioned. If artists were swallowed up in the general flux, then there was no stable reflection of society, no register of its reality. Human beings would either drift off into an atomistic vacuum, swaddled in their self, or cede all mental power to a larger consciousness, the group. Either way, the individual was lost,

and the most important creation of western civilisation, the knowing self, would be destroyed.

Lewis, McLuhan, and Cosmic Man

The nature of the relationship between Wyndham Lewis and Marshall McLuhan is the subject of this last, short and speculative chapter. The friendship, brief working relationship, and intellectual similarities between Lewis and McLuhan brings up a whole other series of questions and so, properly, requires a long examination devoted entirely to them. What is to be attempted here is much more modest. One could say that it is the discovery of these questions that is to be brought to light here; questions that have been anticipated by the previous chapters of this thesis.

The fact that there was a personal and intellectual relationship between Lewis and McLuhan might come as a surprise to some people. Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) was as original a thinker as Canada has ever produced. The novelty of his ideas, which are as invasive and widely dispersed as the media he talked about, as well as the uniqueness of his writing style, seem to preclude a source or influence. There are many sources of his ideas, of course, but Wyndham Lewis is one the most important and most direct, and one that McLuhan himself acknowledged.

Lewis and McLuhan met in Canada during the Second World War. Lewis and his wife arrived in Canada in September of 1939, just days after the declaration of war by England, and they remained in North America, mainly in Toronto and St. Louis, until August 1945. These were hard and dispiriting years for Lewis: money and work were scarce, recognition almost non-existent, and Toronto, that "sanctimonious icebox" as he described it in *Self Condemned* (1954), seemed especially hostile. However grim the circumstances were in his personal life and career, Lewis underwent a positive metamorphosis in his thought. He wrote later

that his experiences in the United States transformed him from "a good European into an excellent internationalist." (ACM 7)

In the summer of 1942 Father Stanley J. Murphy, a teacher and official at Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario, sought out Lewis in Toronto and asked him to speak at the Christian Culture Series he organised each year. In the following January Lewis gave his lecture, and was later asked to teach a course in modern literature at the college. Lewis needed the money and accepted. Over the next two years the small Catholic teaching college was to become home base for Lewis. In the fall of 1943 Lewis gave the twelve Heywood Broun Lectures at the college called "The Concept of Liberty." It was the material from these lectures which was reworked for *America and Cosmic Man.*

McLuhan could recall his first meeting with Lewis quite vividly even thirty years later:

> My first meeting with Wyndham Lewis occurred as a result of a letter I received from my mother who had heard him speak in the Christian Culture Series. His theme was "Rouault, Painter of Original Sin." Lewis had delivered the lecture at the Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit – it must have been 1944 [1943]. Having checked that he was *the* Wyndham Lewis, the ogre of Bloomsbury, I got on a train with my friend Felix Giovanelli.... We found Lewis in a basement apartment in the heart of Windsor. [...] Lewis accepted us at once, with no kind of formality and we finally formed a project to bring him to St. Louis[72] where we hoped to find him some painting commissions and lectures.

McLuhan's project was slow in fruition but eventually gained Lewis several engagements around St. Louis in February 1944. McLuhan's most brilliant *coup*, however, was obtaining a commission from Mrs [illegible]horn, a St. Louis trend-setter

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[72] M.M. to Robert Cowan (7 May 1976) in Matie Molinaro, Corrine McLuhan, and William Toye eds., *The Letters of Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto, 1987), 519.

and Ernest Hemingway's mother-in-law. Despite the attack Lewis had made on him in *Men Without Art*, Hemingway cabled a favourable reference.

At first McLuhan's help was welcomed by Lewis. But in February 1945 Lewis broke off his friendship with McLuhan. Lewis gave no reason. Their correspondence did not resume until 1953. If McLuhan's sensibilities were hurt he did not show it by renouncing his admiration for Lewis. Over the next few years McLuhan would write the *Mechanical Bride* (1951) which emulated the print dossier technique Lewis used in the *Doom of Youth* (1932), and also seemed to appropriate the flamboyance of Lewis writing style. Later McLuhan put together *Counterblast* (1954) a short pamphlet which used the typographical and graphic techniques first employed by Lewis in *Blast* forty years earlier. (*Counterblast* was later expanded and published in 1969.) McLuhan continued over his lifetime to publish essays praising Lewis's technique, insights, and importance.

However interesting the personal relationship, it is at the level, or in the field, of ideas that the influence of Wyndham Lewis on Marshall McLuhan must be understood; and the effect of Lewis on McLuhan must be clarified in much the same way as the influence of T.E. Hulme on Lewis thirty years earlier.

The previous chapters in this thesis have tried to show the principles guiding Lewis's criticism of modern society as essentially liberal, secular, and individualistic. Behind the histrionics of his critical and polemic writing is a man who desired to be physically free to pursue his vocation and intellectually free of a single confining ideology. Lewis's liberalism is not party liberalism, or even the liberalism of political philosophy, but akin to the intellectual freedom that certain Enlightenment philosophers claimed. That modern society was making people less free physically, psychologically, and intellectually, Lewis assumed as a matter of fact. Or rather, he believed that western society had never been

completely free and its best chance at attaining freedom had been snuffed out by the First World War. This was one of Lewis's fundamental beliefs. The attitude of critical detachment that he adopted in his writing was a response to the lack of freedom in society. He would think freely even if no one else would.

While Lewis's attitude of critical distance and his underlying principles remained the same in his later writing there was a rather dramatic shift in his political and social thinking. In the inter-war years Lewis had accepted as fact the general slide of western society into unfreedom and the authoritarian ways of government that unfreedom entailed. He saw the ideology of authority working on all sides, in mostly covert ways, in all countries of the western world. As "a sensitive plate" he registered the changes in orientation his society went through. He exposed himself to the ideological directions of his society and then reflected back the image he had received. By presenting the reality of events to others, without the distorting effect of dogmas, ideologies, or utility, he was fulfilling his role as an artist, that is, to show the world in a human, not abstract way.

Beginning with his short pamphlet, *Anglosaxony: A League that Works*, in 1941, Lewis commenced a more internationalist phase of his thought.[73] Lewis had written in *Time and Western Man* that the world was becoming more and more one world as a result of technological advances in transportation and communication. National identities were in reality dissolving as a result of these pressures, yet the political structures that Europeans had created in the last century and continued to use did not recognise this fact. The illusion of a nation-state's

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[73] Lewis wrote to his old friend Sturge Moore, "A "new-deal" in some form or other is sorely needed, in almost every nation, where industrial technique has outstripped social organisation, and made nonsense of government on the old lines." W.L to Sturge Moore (15 July 1941) in *Letters*, 292.

ethnic or racial exclusivity, of its cultural impermeability, internal cohesion, and political sovereignty was erected on rapidly shifting soil. (TWM 96) In the inter-war years Lewis thought that the illusion of the nation state was stronger than the real forces that were dissolving it; and so he supported, or exposed, the structure that seemed the strongest and most essential: nationalism: the illusion was more powerful than the reality at that time. Over the course of the Second World War Lewis saw that the technological and commercial forces of world unity, what we would call globalization, had finally overpowered the illusion of the nation-state and rendered it obsolete. Ethnic nationalism was dead, and the romantic illusion was to be replaced by a freer, more cosmic (cosmopolitan) reality. To bring western political structures in line with the new reality of "cosmic man" World Government was needed. *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) was the working out of this belief in political and social terms. In that book Lewis claims that "The United States is a fragmentary, most imperfect, and in some respects grotesque advance-copy of a future world-order." (ACM 25) America represented the future of mankind, as it had for De Tocqueville and so many other visitors.

America and Cosmic Man has many ideas that McLuhan employed to great effect in his work. The most well-known is the idea of the global village.[74] For Lewis the global village is a cultural and technological fact with political consequences. The new technologically integrated world forced him to rethink his political ideas. In *Rude Assignment* (1950), which was written at about the same

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[74] This is also suggested by Philip Marchand in *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (New York, 1989), 75; and by Matie Molinaro, *et al.* eds. *The Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 253, note 3.

time as *America and Cosmic Man* (though published three years later), Lewis makes clear the extent of the change in his thought:

> A nationalist I have never been. But I believed, say twelve years ago, that the doctrine of national sovereignty was an indispensable guarantee of freedom. [...] Freedom of the kind I formerly advocated is not possible, then, because scientific techniques have so diminished distance, and telescoped time, that the earth, which once was for man an immense, mysterious, and seemingly limitless universe, is no longer that, but a relatively diminutive ball, which, if we want, we can dart around in a few days. (RA 98)

In *America and Cosmic Man* (a book that McLuhan owned) Lewis's discusses the name of the "United States." He suggests that the U.S.A. is far more a unitary state than a collection of independent states à la Europe. The world as a village is suggested for the first time:

> And since plural sovereignty anyway – now that the earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to the other, and air transport, both speedy and safe – must be a little farcical, the plurality implied in that title could be removed as a good example to the rest of the world, and the U.S.A. become the American Union. (ACM 16)[75]

In fact, the smallness of the earth seems to make one political entity inevitable. World Government is the political shadow cast by the global village. Rival concepts of nation could not co-exist in a technologically smaller world. The *Blud und Boden* type of ethnic nationalism or the maintenance of a *terre sacré* was not only impossible in a world where borders were increasingly permeable, but also violently opposed to the victorious cosmopolitan or citizen based nationalism of the United States. (ACM 22) The effect of the universal blurring of national

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[75] A marginal note by Marshall McLuhan is found in the University of Toronto Library copy of *America and Cosmic Man*. Beside the passage cited above, McLuhan has written in pencil, "a global village." B. W. Powe, *The Solitary Outlaw* (Toronto, 1987), 41.

distinctions is to take away roots, ethnic identity, and all old allegiances. The United States replaces them with an "authentic soul" in the form of American citizenship. When a person becomes an American citizen all his old world characteristics drop off him like a suit of old clothes. A new identity, not racial or tribal, is given:

> It is even a little like death. You commit suicide, in the nationalist or tribal sense: you say good-bye forever to Cambria or to Slovakia [...] and sail away into an abstract Goodness - or into something better, at all events, than the land of your birth. [...] It resembles death in many respects - but death for the devout; a rebirth, and a reunion, in a better world. (ACM 28)

Lewis had no reservations about this process of killing national or ethnic roots. Roots in any form were onerous restrictions on the freedom of an individual. For Lewis America was "a rootless elysium," and "a slightly happy-go-lucky vacuum, in which the ego feels itself free." (ACM 165, 166)

The political arrangements of the new world state occupy Lewis in the latter chapters of the book. He sees that any world state would have to have a strong "democratic" character. But what the character of democracy actually is and how democratic a world state could be are yet to be defined. The main question as Lewis sees it is what type of freedom the new state would provide. He looks to the extent of freedom available in his model world state, the U.S.A. Here he follows Harold Laski (1893-1950), an English Marxist, Chairman of the Labour Party (1945-6), and authority on American politics, history, and law.[76] Laski, though a Marxist, traced his political ideology back to Thomas Jefferson.

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[76] Laski's books include *The American Presidency* (1940), *The American Democracy* (1948) and *Liberty in the Modern State* (1948). Lewis quotes extensively from *The Grammar of Politics* (London, first published 1925), 15-19.

He believed in some role for the state in social reform. Lewis calls Laski "a genuine democrat." (ACM 200)

The type and extent of new world democracy is what concerns Lewis. He has surrendered to the fact that some sort of democracy is inevitable, "but from there on everything becomes complex." (ACM 200) Democracy, yes, but what one can see of modern democracies is not encouraging. The 19th century Benthamites thought that reason would guide the voters hands and inform their ballots, but "We have been taught by long experience that the part played by reason in politics is smaller than we supposed. Indeed, it is almost non-existent." The ultimate power rests with the Demos, yet the masses are uninformed by choice and inarticulate by nature, and the "Press and Radio step in, so that they may know how to vote." (ACM 201) The press and radio are not promising guides for a ruler. In his books of the twenties and thirties Lewis examined this form of media manipulation. "Press-Government" is the control of public opinion by the media; in other words government by propaganda. In *The Doom of Youth* Lewis capsulizes: "Whether openly or covertly, it is Press and Cinema hypnotism that rul Great Britain and America," not the legislative assemblies.[77]

Lewis agrees with Laski that the ruling of a modern state is "a technical matter," and that most people are not equipped by their training or interest, to make policy. In fact, the Demos do not make policy, they don't rule, at least in the old sense: "..."government of the people, by the people, for the people," is just a political fairy-tale. A fairy-tale told to the people to lull and please them." Jeffersonian thought envisioned a level of political awareness and education that cannot exist in the modern world. When the franchise was restricted to a few of

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[77] *The Doom of Youth* (New York, 1932), vii.

equal merits equality was a possibility, but "political equality is useless, the franchise is a mockery, without social equality of *training*, that is of education." (ACM 202) This education must come before the citizen is inundated by the press and other shapers of public opinion. So there is no true democracy on the 19th century, or 18th century model. According to Lewis we live in a technical oligarchy called democracy. But there is one thing about democracy which makes it better than all other forms of government:

> ...what might be termed the right to interfere, on the part of the citizenry (a right only existing in democracies), is of great importance. [...] Its [the voting public's] votes may be ill-considered, emotional, the result of hypnotic suggestion by Press and Radio; but at least it has the power to strike back at despotism." (ACM 203)

In the above passage Lewis goes back to his old position on the inability of the majority to rule, all the while proclaiming democracy as the "only" form of government possible in the coming world state. He retains at no great expense the trappings or illusion of democracy while the reality remains a lovely and unattainable dream.

For Lewis the new cultural universality meant a corresponding change in political orientation. Many of his old concerns about democracy are still present in the new world order, but they are to some extent rendered less onerous by the new individual freedom that will emerge. What we give up with the nation-state, says Lewis, is an eternity of wars, and along with that the regimentation of society that inhibits personal freedom. In itself the new global culture delivers none of these things. In an important codicil to his vision of a globalized political entity Lewis says that the economic structure will be forced to change as well. There will have to be some political control over commerce, a sort of socialism. (ACM 155)

It is difficult to know if McLuhan followed Lewis in this belief in World Government. McLuhan was not as politically inclined as Lewis, and was certainly not as political a writer. Lewis thought in terms of philosophy, politics, and art; concerns that were especially important to him in the first half of this century. For Lewis "Press-Government" by radio and the movies was first of all a political act, one that was parasitic on the philosophic tendencies of the time. McLuhan's understanding and involvement in the modern media was greater than Lewis's, but his involvement with politics, either as a writer or as a witness, was far more limited. As an external presence the modern communications media had been with McLuhan since birth. Though his education and family background was fairly elitist, McLuhan instinctively knew that comic books, movies, detective novels, and self-help books were more relevant to ordinary people's lives than esoteric works of philosophy and theory.[78] So by examining pop iconography McLuhan tried to "...assist the public to observe consciously the drama which is intended to operate upon it unconsciously."[79] In McLuhan, at this early stage, this was primarily a pedagogical concern. It is significant that the format of *The Mechanical Bride* is similar to a school textbook, with discussion questions before each chapter and large illustrations. In the early years, when McLuhan thought of a global village, or when he looked at Lewis's formulation of a universal culture, it was in the limited sense of an area of study.

Lewis and McLuhan both claimed that they had no political agenda and were merely exposing the machinations below the surface of events and processes. Yet all media studies are political because they assume that there are

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[78] Matie Molinaro, *et al.* eds., *The Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 173.

[79] Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Modern Man* (New York, 1951), vi.

hidden or unobserved intentions in the most straightforward of material. Someone or something orchestrates the information and ideas we receive for a purpose, and generally that purpose is to attain or retain power. In his books of the twenties Lewis was trying to liberate himself and western society from an army of old ideas. Science, Progress, Man, Country, Art (all capitalized into abstractions) were considered by Lewis to be the dangerous illusions of an older generation. Lewis wanted to deconstruct those ideas, show their reliance on political motivations and outworn needs, expose how they operated in society. He looked at the overt manifestations in popular culture "to expose the true nature of those ideas underlying the artistic ferment of this time." The purpose of this was to emancipate people from the illusions they lived under; to empower the individual:

> For to understand the time he lives in at all, and to take his place as anything but a lay-figure or infinitely hypnotizable cipher, in that world, he must make the effort required to reach some understanding of the notions behind the events occurring upon the surface. (TWM 149)

In *The Mechanical Bride* the vortex imagery from Edgar Allan Poe's "A Descent into the Maelstrom" is used by McLuhan as a metaphor for the confusion of the present day. He admits a similar motivation to,

> set the reader at the center of the revolving picture created by these affairs where he may observe the action that is in progress and in which everybody is involved. From the analysis of that action, it is hoped, many individual strategies will suggest themselves.[60]

The diffuseness and even gentleness of power which Lewis talks of in *The Art of Being Ruled* is adopted by McLuhan as the preeminent characteristic of modern

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[60] McLuhan, *op. cit.*, v.

control. Waking people up to this undercover operation is deemed the first step in the road to meaningful freedom. In a similar way, both McLuhan and Lewis feel that the means of escape from control are based on a radical change of perception in the individual. They were both attempting to teach people to see differently.

The similarities between Lewis and McLuhan do not end here. But perhaps the differences between the two thinkers are more important. The first major distinction between the men is their radically different moral visions. McLuhan was a practising Catholic. He converted in 1937 while a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. The motivation behind his examination of the modern world was to "confront the secular world in its most confident manifestations, and, with its own terms and postulates, to shock it into awareness of its confusion, its illiteracy, and the terrifying drift of its logic." The method could be modern and secular, such as the "New Criticism" of F.R. Leavis or the method of Wyndham Lewis, but when done by a Christian it is more effective and assured of success because it is "applied with all the energy and order denied them from faith and philosophy."[81] So there are two agendas in McLuhan's work. One was the modernisation and disillusioning of Catholic thought. And second, the education of the public. McLuhan had no doubt that the stripping away of layers of illusion and ideology would lead people back to more religious and traditional understandings of the world and of human behaviour.

Within the Catholic intellectual community in which McLuhan moved, there was a turning away from, for lack of a better term, the sheltered, regressive attitude toward modernity. Bishop Fulton Sheen, whom McLuhan admired, was an

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[81] M.M. to Clement McNaspy, S.J. (15 December 1945) in *The Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 180.

expert in media manipulation and one of the popular new forces in the American Catholic church. What was occuring was a strategic acceptance of certain aspects of modern industrial, commercial, and above all, secular society with a view to regaining some of the former power of the Church. Then, it would appear, the close examination of modern culture (as communication) that McLuhan professed was part of larger, more widespread change in the thinking of Catholics. The link between Lewis and McLuhan (and the Catholic new direction he promoted) effectively joined the early literary anti-modern Modernists (Lewis, Pound, Eliot, etc.) and the Neo-Scholastics (Thomists such as Maritain and Gilson) to post-World-War II thinking. So while it would appear that McLuhan was a promoter of modern technical society, he was in reality a believer in the destruction of that society. McLuhan thought that new machines would tear apart the social systems that had been put in place over the last three-hundred years: the factories of the industrial revolution would be superseded by smaller less hierarchical units; the liberal democratic political system would crumble and be replaced by a more communitarian model; and the idea of nation or race would become irrelevant as borders and identities were breached by electric impulses. Lewis believed most of this too. And, it should be said, all of these changes foreseen in the coming years were compatible with a redirected and reinvigorated Catholic Church; that is if the Church was ready to accept the modern system and seize the opportunity.

The nature of Lewis's moral vision and his personal mission is quite different from McLuhan's. For himself, the necessity of intellectual freedom precluded religion. The desire for complete independence from others meant he belonged to no formal organisations. Even marriage was suspect. He married late in life, and only because a marriage certificate allowed him and his commonlaw

wife of several years to pass through borders with less trouble. Over his life Lewis developed a technique of intellectual self-preservation that resembled Schopenhauer's belief that we must view life like spectators at a play, that is with intellectual detachment.[82] Ideas from the outside, from others, had to be thoroughly vetted and usually rearranged before they became part of his intellectual equipment. Even those people that were close to him in their opinions were examined for differences. Lewis believed that the natural dignity of human beings was not in their marks of affiliation but in their individuality and uniqueness. But it was an individuality based on an engagement and a reasoned appraisal of the world of ideas. The grit at the centre of the human soul, Hulme's Original Sin, or the restrictions of our physical existence, was something that ideas built around, like an oyster makes a pearl.

What the adoption of Lewis's technique and ideas by McLuhan shows is a reconnection of Lewis's thought with the religious attitude. In his work after the Great War Lewis had secularized and rendered ahistoric Hulme's categories. He expanded the classical and romantic into the larger philosophical categories of space and time and inserted himself in a tradition of thought that went back to Ancient Greece. McLuhan did not make Lewis's thought religious, there was no chance of that happening, but he did put Lewis's technique of intellectual self-preservation to a religious use. Lewis's way of looking at the world was always amenable to certain Catholics, particularly Thomists. McLuhan perhaps emulated the Thomists, and Hulme, when he later divided human history into scribal man, print man, and electronic man. The ages that they represent (medieval, modern,

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[82] E.W.F. Tomlin, "The Philosophical Influences," in Meyers ed., *Revaluation.*, 36.

and post-modern) are fairly common dividing points. McLuhan's belief that electronic man had already arrived and had not yet been recognised as essentially different is similar to Hulme's belief that a new classical era had begun, yet was still fighting resistance. There is more than a touch of the millennial in McLuhan.

In some ways McLuhan put the rudder back on Lewis's ship, he re-attached the religious principles that Lewis had discarded and which had set him apart from Hulme and Eliot. McLuhan's "rational detachment as a spectator" was as a Christian spectator.[63] Complete detachment, even with the guiding force of reason, can be quite dangerous because it allows one to pursue any number of strategies quite freely. That, of course, was the whole point for Lewis. For anything valuable to be discovered the perils of complete intellectual liberty had to be courted. What rules and ethics one eventually decides upon, the system of self-governance that responds to one's requirements, must come from the free working of the individual mind. That is one reason why cosmic man would be better and perhaps happier than tribal man: illusions of nation, the romance of roots, and other restrictive categories would be finally swept away.

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[63] McLuhan, *op. cit.*, v.

Conclusion

Summing up a life in a few words is not an easy task: nor is summing up the findings of this thesis, which is a pale echo of a life. The career and ideas of Wyndham Lewis are much more compelling and complicated than they have been portrayed here. His literary output, his novels, stories, and poetry, have not been mentioned except in a cursory manner. His books of art criticism and his art itself have been likewise scantily surveyed. Only a few instances from his life story have been considered necessary, and his psychological profile has been left completely aside. This thesis has concentrated on only four aspect of Lewis's work and life, and these aspects must appear distorted by magnification.

Understanding these four aspects of Lewis's life and work, however, is an important first step toward understanding the uniqueness of the intellectual path he followed. Lewis's connection with T.E. Hulme, the nature of his engagement with fascism, the essence of the ideas he passed on to Marshall McLuhan during their association, and his conception of the place and role of the creative intelligence within society are all indicators of Lewis's independence. Lewis thought that the creative intelligence is by necessity solitary, singular. In his relations with others, his political beliefs, and in the way he perceived his function in society, Lewis acted out this belief.

In the introduction to this thesis it was suggested that the question Lewis poses to us is this: How can someone be critical of his society, and remain independent of its most attractive intellectual postures, without lapsing into irrelevance or reaction? The answer shown in Lewis's life and work is simple. Articulating one's individual perception of the world is never reactionary or irrelevant, provided one's perception is truly one's own. Intelligence, reason, judgement, all are critical in determining the nature of one's relationship with

the world. Failure to use these tools renders the human being less human. Borrowed or unconsciously adopted perspectives are worthless, as are unquestioned ideologies, philosophies, and faiths. It is the intelligent engagement with popular forms of human understanding that is critical to the preservation of society, and which is the task of the critic. This was Lewis's answer to the question.

Lewis was part of an intellectual tradition, or more exactly, a shared attitude of mind. By using a basically chronological sequence in this thesis, a temporal and spatial arc was created which joined the artistic fervour of Edwardian London to the tranquillity of a Southern Ontario Catholic College during the Second World War. It is a span that links the Men of 1914 to Marshall McLuhan, a man whose thoughts on communication and culture entered western society during the sixties. The direct link, the bridge between these two worlds, is Wyndham Lewis.

The arc that Lewis's career describes has as its starting point the period before the First World War. From the time he met T.E. Hulme Lewis's intellectual path was almost entirely solitary. His relations with others in his group and the ideas of his day were critical, detached. Lewis had no real master (Hulme certainly was not one) and thus no single originating point for his thought. Lewis also had few intellectual allies: he preferred opponents. In pre-war Paris and London Lewis gathered strands from many sources (Hulme, Henri Bergson, Nietzsche, Filippo Marinetti, and others), and wove a personal philosophy that reflected his individual perception of the world. Lewis's classicism, for example, is different from that of Hulme, and is different from that of the French neo-classicists. The attitude of mind that allowed him to consolidate these various

ideas and influences, in fact, made it mandatory for him to do so, was a hallmark of the Modernists.

The meeting of Lewis and McLuhan in Windsor, Ontario, in 1943 marks the passing of the torch, as it were, from one generation to its proper successor, skipping a generation in the process. Lewis presented a challenge that a willing McLuhan took up. The critical attitude of the Anglo-American Modernists was detached, interdisciplinary, and individualist. The link between Lewis and McLuhan (as with Lewis and Hulme) was not so much one based on shared ideas, though they had those, but a shared attitude toward the modern world. The Men of 1914 were almost Gnostic in their belief that a false world, a false modernity had been imposed upon western man. We live in the wrong world, they said. We are chained in the cave and see only the shadows play upon the wall. They appointed themselves as humanity's guides to the light. Yet their criticisms and strategies in the fight against this imposter age were incredibly diverse, as were their conceptions of what made this particular modernity unwholesome or inhuman.

Lewis's particular stance was reinforced by the First World War. He became a pacifist. Lewis had believed that a new classical age, an age of objectivity and reason and clarity was on the horizon. To Lewis, the First World War seemed to have accelerated the decline into subjectivity, intuition, and obscurantism. War inhibited free thought and encouraged uniformity. The hope that a classical age could still be attained propelled him to write *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man*, his political and philosophical exposés of the twenties. This hope was balanced with pessimism, for the forces of irrationalism, nationalism, militarism, and romance, at times, appeared too powerful to stop.

The nature of Second World War, the first truly global war, seemed to Lewis a sign of hope. *America and Cosmic Man*, which portrays a change of thinking for Lewis, suggested that the political organisations of this false modernity - independent nation-states in particular - were doomed. New technology had made a political reorganisation of the world imperative. McLuhan followed this line of thought, and, using the same critical attitude, probed the psyche of the emerging global man, the electric villager. The acceptance of electric or cosmic man which Lewis and McLuhan both professed was not the acceptance of the false modernity. It was, in reality, a rejection of all the age of nations and industry had created.

One of the creations of the false modernity was mass democracy. Lewis believed that true democracy, one that did not equate freedom with irresponsibility, had been replaced by politics that urged submission to the intoxicating life of the group. In *Hitler* Lewis had shown one evolutionary terminus of the usurper modernity: the ethnic nation-state, one led by a charismatic leader, and in which an insulated people were skilfully manipulated in their machine-like (un)freedom. Everything Lewis had written before *Hitler* shows his personal distaste for this definition of freedom. He never suggested that Italian Fascism or National Socialism or Hitlerism should be attempted in Anglo-Saxon countries. Howe··er, he did believe that there were similar tendencies in countries with a parliamentary tradition, and that most Englishmen would find themselves quite at home in Hitler's new Germany. Mass democracy in the west was a cousin of mass production, and the end product was uniformity of thought.

When Lewis says, "Let us behave as if the West were free, and as if we were in the full enjoyment of an ideal democracy," he means two things. (TWM 42) First, that an ideal democracy allows and encourages free actions, it expects

diversity of opinions and cannot exist without them. Second, that we in Western society do not have this sort of democracy. To be effective, to fulfil his role, the artist or critic must pretend that he is in that ideal free democratic society. Even though the pressure to conform with the mass of society is intense, the artist must think and act independently. The reason that an artist must act independently is the same as that of everybody else.

In the models of culture Lewis used the artist is separated from other sorts of human beings. These models, which are usually seen as bipolar oppositions, have an often neglected factor: the "third man." In the battle between Highbrow and Lowbrow he sees the "average smart man" and the "commercial promoter" as guilty of deepening the gulf between the intelligentsia and the lowbrow public. The model taken from *Tarr* shows he believed in two cultures, each with its own specific artistic freedom. Above each culture is the figure of the truly free genius, who exists outside ethnicity, nationality, and temporality. And in the Natures and Puppets opposition we also see a three part division of society. Natures have an ecstatic "prose freedom," while the puppets (the rulers and the ruled) have the metronomic freedom of poetry.

This separation of the artist from society is only partly a result of Lewis's counter-culture mentality. Lewis perceived that in Western society the idea of the knowing self was under attack. Its main defenses - reason, stability, and objectivity - were being eroded by technology and philosophy, with the aid of political and cultural leaders. The artist had a vested interest in preserving the integrity of his self. Without an "I" he could not see. But this concern reflected a broader concern for the whole of society. If at times Lewis seems to be pleading solely for his own artistic identity, it only because the two concerns are so similar. To be an intelligent being, critical and reflective, to be truly human,

one must accept a measure of psychological and intellectual solitude. We must have distance from the ideas and interior life of others, otherwise we exist as "mirror images of alien realities." (TWM 5)

Lewis was conscious of his difference from others, he even played it up when he created "The Enemy." But his position as an artist and writer of the avant garde, as a creator within society, was a much more important and serious vocation, at least in his estimation. Lewis was an intellectual, the midwife and wet-nurse of ideas. His role within society was to foster new ways of looking and understanding, to goad and to chastise; in all, to give society complex and challenging forms of relating to itself. He called himself an intellectual because he spoke to the intelligent, in language that was only comprehensible to the intelligent and informed. For most of humanity, the ideas Lewis discussed were simply not important - they were too busy living their lives to think about art, literature, or politics.

> Yet the artist is, in any society, by no means its least valuable citizen. Without him the world ceases to see itself and to reflect. It forgets all its finer manners. [...] Deprived of art, the healthy intellectual discipline of well-being is lost. Life instantly becomes so brutalized as to be mechanical and devoid of interest. (B&B 259)

Lewis called himself part of the "creative elite" and hoped by his writings to revitalize both his society and his profession. By the time of his last auto-biography, *Rude Assignment*, he knew that his own particular type of intellectual, the satirist and independent critic, courageous and even foolhardy, was a depleted species.

Appendix: A Short Biography of Wyndham Lewis

There is something appropriate about the circumstances of Percy Wyndham Lewis's birth. Lewis was born at sea, or more exactly, he was born on his father's yacht, the *Wanda*, which was moored in the waters off Amherst, Nova Scotia. Such an unusual beginning to life, with its suggestion of apartness and distance, presages Lewis's later artistic and literary career, and his outcast *persona*.*

Wyndham Lewis's parents were part of an Anglo-American elite that spanned the eastern border of Canada and the United States. His father, Charles Edward Lewis, was an American from a wealthy, well connected, and industrious New England family. The Lewises had interests in banks, a railway, a large coal company, and a Toronto law firm. Charles Lewis was not industrious, however, and after several unsuccessful attempts at business his family gave him an substantial living allowance. Charles preferred riding horses, hunting, sailing and other sporting pursuits. He dabbled in writing. Lewis's mother, Anne Stuart Prickett, was an Englishwoman whose family lived in Oakville, Ontario. She was born in London and had received some tutoring in languages and drawing in Bloomsbury finishing schools; the education of a young lady. In 1876, when she married Charles Lewis, she was sixteen; Charles was nearly twice her age.

After Wyndham's birth (8 November 1882), the family – Wyndham was an only child – lived in Maine and Maryland. The generous allowance from Charles's

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* Jeffrey Meyers's book, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), is the most complete and accurate biography of Lewis. Lewis's two autobiographies, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) and *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Biography* (1950), are less accurate but more exciting reading. *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Press, 1963) is comprehensive and has very helpful short commentaries by its editor, W.K. Rose. These books, and to a lesser extent those found in the bibliography, have been consulted in preparing this short biography.

family financed a leisure-filled upper middle class life-style. In 1888 the family moved to the Isle of Wight, ostensively to be near Anne Lewis's ailing mother. The move was welcomed by Charles because it removed him from the direct surveillance of his family and allowed him more freedom to ride, hunt, and chase women.

In 1893 the Lewises' marriage broke down. Charles ran off to live with the family's red-haired housemaid. Wyndham was eleven years old when his parents separated - they never divorced - and he remained with his mother. Though both the scandalized Lewis family in America and, later, the remorseful Charles sent the deserted mother financial help, money was scarce when Wyndham was growing up. Anne Lewis was forced to try her hand at business: a small laundry, a dress-making shop. She attempted to retain the vestiges of their middle-class position, however, keeping the silver and china plate, and taking Wyndham on an annual visit to Paris. Theirs was the refined poverty of the recently impoverished. During this time, Wyndham's affections naturally turned more to his mother than his absent father. She doted on her son and encouraged his first artistic and literary efforts.

Wyndham's formal education, like most boys of his time, was started late by today's standards. He was twelve when he entered his first preparatory school, the County School in Bedford. He was not considered a good student. It was the same at Rugby School, which he entered three years later, in January 1897. Rugby, the birthplace of rugby football and the model for all "modern" English public schools since the headmastership of Thomas Arnold in the 1830s, was a important part of the socializing process for England's elite. Students of Rugby were readied for Oxford or Cambridge, and from there they went into the clergy, government, or colonial service. But Lewis was a poor student, ranking

the lowest in his class of twenty-six. He received uniformly bad reports: poor marks in English, Latin, French, Physics, Mathematics, and Chemistry, as well as rebukes for being frequently tardy and inattentive in class. He was also poor at sports. The other boys didn't like him and the masters thought him stupid. The one bright light for him in all the gloom was the solitary pleasure of drawing and painting, and thanks to the support of his Scottish drawing master, after two years at Rugby, Lewis was directed toward the Slade.

It was at the Slade school of Art in London that Lewis, for the first time, gained recognition for his unique abilities. He enroled in December of 1898 and stayed until 1901, approximately three years. The Slade emphasised a rigid drawing technique, which Lewis rebelled against, but learned from nevertheless. He won his Certificate of Figure Drawing in 1899. In his second year he was awarded a Slade Scholarship worth £35 and tenable for two years. The teachers and other students - some of whom became close friends - recognised Lewis as a fine draughtsman, the best since Augustus John, a former Slade student. In fact, Augustus John, theatrically dressed in a black cape, large black hat, sporting a bushy black beard and gypsy ear-rings, made occasional visits to the school. John's romantic bohemian life-style, his drinking and sexual escapades, as well as his appreciation of Renaissance art, provided something of a role model for Lewis. They eventually became friends and, like all Lewis's friends, competitors.

At nineteen Lewis's formal education was over, and a far more important education was about to begin. Financed by small loans from his mother, who could hardly afford the expense, Lewis travelled in Europe for approximately seven years. He copied Goyas and El Grecos in the Prado, drew nude models at the Académie Julian in Paris, studied Frans Hals's *Banquet of the Officers* in

Belgium. He attended Henri Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France with the elite of Paris, and sipped absinthe at Left Bank cafes with bohemian friends. He was introduced to many famous people: the American writer Gertrude Stein, journalist and *Action Française* founder Charles Maurras, artists Modogliani and André Derain, the anarchist Prince Kropotkin, and many more. He associated with other artists, poets, and writers in Paris, Madrid, Munich, Hamburg, and Haarlem. He read the great Russian authors – Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky – in French translations. Nietzsche's *Gay Science* was a favourite. Lewis learned German and Spanish, and improved his colloquial French. He went on painting vacations in Normandy and Brittany with Augustus John. He fell in love and fathered a child, then left the woman and the child. He contracted venereal disease.

It was an erratic and unconventional education, but still very important in the development of Lewis's beliefs and attitudes. It is important because it was unconventional in the middle-class sense. Besides increasing his knowledge of art, literature, philosophy, and life, these years confirmed the sense of outsideness Lewis already possessed. When Lewis returned to London in 1908 his outlook was that of an European, an artist, and an intellectual. The feelings of not belonging he had felt at Rugby and the Slade were no longer proof of his unsoundness, but invaluable assets to the artist and intellectual in him. He was filled a new creative confidence and viewed the tastes of middle-class Edwardian England with unbridled disdain. His outlook began to take on the hard edge and aggressiveness of the "Enemy."

London in the years just before the First World War was a hopeful and exciting place. Like major cities all across Europe, London had a group of artists, writers, poets, and scene makers dedicated to throwing off the last vestiges of

Victorianism. Dark-haired, good-looking, and eccentrically dressed, Lewis, who was then in his late twenties, became a vital figure in the London *avant garde*.

Lewis had trained as a painter, but it was as a writer that he first received attention in London cultural circles. In 1909 his short story, "The Pole," appeared in the May issue of the *English Review*, then edited by Ford Maddox Heuffer. (He later changed his name to Ford Maddox Ford.) Other stories followed in *The Tramp*, a short lived travel magazine, and *The New Age*, an alternative arts review. Lewis's first long work, *Khan and Company*, was a pot-boiler designed to raise some money while he worked on other things. The novel was rejected by publishers and never appeared in print during Lewis's lifetime. Lewis took the book's rejection as a lesson and never again wrote "pap" for money.

Ford Maddox Ford was a shrewd judge of literary talent - he "discovered" D.H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound, among others - and he encouraged his proteges with kind words, exposure in the magazines he edited, and occasional loans. It was through Ford that Lewis met the writer and feminist, Rebecca West. Though she disagreed with many of Lewis's opinions, she admired the force of his intellect and personality; and he respected her as his most perceptive critic. Perhaps the most important introduction Ford performed at this time was between Lewis and Ezra Pound. The rough and ready American poet and the bohemian writer/artist with the upper-class English accent were wary of each other at first but soon became close friends and conspirators. They were partners in Lewis's new literary and artistic movement, Vorticism, and collaborated on the two issues of *Blast*, (June 1914 and July 1915) a ground breaking cultural magazine. Though there were periods of estrangement, the two men remained friends until Lewis's death in 1957.

Lewis had shown his first picture at the New English Art Club in 1904, but most of the work he did on the Continent was destroyed or lost. Coming back to London he had no money for art supplies, models or a proper studio; writing was an easier way of promoting his ideas. By 1910 he had secured some commissions and was painting again. He had exhibitions with the Camden Town Group in June and December of 1911; with the Allied Artists' Association, at the Albert Hall, in July 1912 and 1913; and was part of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition organised by Roger Fry, in the fall of 1912. For the Post-Impressionist show he submitted drawings based on Shakespeare's play, *Timon of Athens*. He was also one of the artists who decorated the Cave of the Golden Calf, a popular modernist night-club owned by Frida Strindberg (the playwright's wife). During this time he was experimenting with Cubism and Futurism, eventually rejecting them both and developing his own angular, cerebral, almost abstract style. The theoretical justification for his technique, he called Vorticism. By virtue of his forceful personality and intelligence he gathered a following. The Vorticists were a small group, stylistically diverse, but solidly against English academic impressionism as touted by Bloomsbury Group members Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Vorticism, the only "home-grown" artistic movement England produced in the twentieth century, did not last out the First World War.

One of the most famous incidents of this pre-war period was Lewis's public fight with Roger Fry. Because their dispute affected Lewis's later artistic and literary career it is worth going into in some detail. Fry was an influential art critic, a convincing lecturer, a tireless organiser, and a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group. He was also a painter of modest talent. It was Fry who had brought together the works of Picasso, Van Gough, Manet, Monet, Cezanne, and many other French painters and sculptors for the first Post-Impressionist

Exhibition in December of 1910. The (now priceless) collection of paintings which he assembled for the show was scathingly reviewed by the mainstream press, and literally laughed at by gallery goers. Lewis respected Fry for trying to educate the British public and was happy to be included in the Fry's second Post-Impressionist show in 1912. Lewis was also happy to make some extra money as a member of Fry's Omega Workshop in 1913. The Omega was a manufacturing and design firm along the lines of William Morris's nineteenth century artisanal company Morris & Co. The Workshop produced furniture, wall paper, and other decorations in the modern style for its wealthy clients. Fry paid his artists a small wage and a percentage of each sale. After the fight over the Ideal Home commission in the fall of 1913, any respect or gratitude Lewis had felt for Fry turned to bitterness; not just for Fry, but for Bloomsbury and the English art establishment as a whole. It was the beginning of a life-long antagonism.

The success of the decorations for the Cave of the Golden Calf had prompted the Daily Mail art critic, P.G. Konody, to offer Spencer Gore (one of Lewis's fellow decorators) the job of decorating a modernist room at the Ideal Home Exhibition. Gore was unable to accept the commission and he suggested Lewis as an alternative. The men decided that Lewis would do the decorations and Fry's Omega Workshop would provide the furnishings. Gore went to the Workshop to tell Fry and Lewis the news. Neither were there and he left the message with Duncan Grant, the painter and another Bloomsbury insider. Gore then left the scene and spent the summer at his country cottage. Grant passed the message on to Fry but forgot to relay it to Lewis. Lewis only heard of the Daily Mail's offer when he ran into Spencer Gore a few days before the exhibition opened in September. In the mean time Fry had taken over the commission for the Omega.

Upon learning of the usurped commission, Lewis immediately went to the Workshop and confronted Fry, who claimed that when he had talked to the Ideal Home people Lewis had not been mentioned. Lewis was certain that Fry was lying, and he was certain that Fry had purposely sabotaged his chances for this important assignment. Infuriated, Lewis then gathered together all the non-Bloomsbury artists at the Omega and staged a walk-out. These artists became the core of the Vorticist group.

What made the situation worse in Lewis's mind was that Fry had deceived him into performing a minor role in what was actually his own project. Fry had said that there were to be no decorations on the walls and had asked Lewis, a painter, to carve a stone mantlepiece. But as the project neared completion Lewis discovered that there *were* to be wall decorations, a much more important part of the overall design and something that Lewis had done with some success for the night-club. In fact, the wall hangings and murals of the Golden Calf were the reason why Lewis had been accepted by Konody in the first place. But Fry had bypassed Lewis, the obvious choice to paint the hangings. Coupled with other lesser slights, Lewis came to one possible conclusion: Fry, out of professional jealousy or simple venality, was deliberately seeking to destroy his career.

Whether or not Lewis's contention was true - and the charges and counter-charges continue to this day in biographies of the protagonists - the break between Lewis and Fry, and by extension between Lewis and the whole Bloomsbury Group, marked Lewis as a trouble maker in established art circles for decades. His ungentlemanly conduct was confirmed in many eyes when Lewis and the other non-Bloomsbury artists sent out a "round-robin" letter to the Omega's customers and share holders. The open letter charged Fry with stealing the Ideal Home commission from Lewis, systematically cheating his workmen of money owing

them, and behaving in an elitist, mercenary and morally irresponsible manner. The charges went unanswered. It was, of course, Roger Fry's hypocrisy that Lewis was protesting. He expected rotten behaviour from the philistines, who to their credit did not cloak themselves in higher motives, and were brutally open about their dislike of modern art and artists. Lewis had believed Fry was different. But with newly opened eyes he saw that Fry had only pretended that he was helping artists, in reality he was as susceptible to petty jealousy and as driven by greed as the philistines he tried to educate. Fry's invidious actions destroyed Lewis's belief in the solidarity of the *avant garde*. It was now apparent to him that there were philistines to be battled everywhere.

Lewis and his Vorticist colleagues founded the Rebel Art Centre in the spring of 1914. It was an ambitious yet unorganized and under-financed project that failed within four months. Lewis, despite his intelligence and charismatic personality, was not the person to run what was basically a store-front gallery. One highlight of the centre's short existence was the lecture of the Italian Futurist poet Filippo Marinetti. Lewis had already progressed past Cubism and Futurism, two artistic styles he had helped introduce to England, but Marinetti was strangely appealing figure. Though he disagreed with Marinetti's theory of literature and ridiculed his glorification of speed and violence, Lewis respected the Italian's consummate skill at publicity. When Marinetti used Rebel Art Centre stationary to send a Futurist manifesto to *The Observer*, Lewis was upset and, sensing an opportunity to definitively separate Vorticism from all other movements, impressed his fellow Vorticists into a vigilante band and disrupted Marinetti's speech at the Doré Gallery. This *coup de théâtre* occurred a week before the Vorticists, with Lewis at their helm, promulgated their own manifesto in the first issue of *Blast*.

Ezra Pound and Lewis put together *Blast: The Review of the Great English Vortex* in the final days of the Rebel Art Centre. The first issue came out only weeks before the declaration of the First World War. The revolutionary graphic style and acerbic content of the magazine owed much to Futurism, but the attitude was pure Lewis. In lieu of normal type Lewis used bold headlines, laid out at odd intervals. Essays and articles were abandoned for a more epigrammatic and oracular style. Blasts and Blesses listed individuals or things that the Vorticists (mostly Lewis and Pound) liked or disliked. James Joyce was blessed, castor oil was blessed, hairdressers were blessed; John Galsworthy, Henri Bergson, and the British Academy of Arts were blasted.

The optimism of the London cultural scene, with its vibrant atmosphere and its intramural rivalries, was soon quashed by the regimentation and destruction of the First World War. Of Lewis's friends, the poet, critic, (and translator of Georges Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence*), T.E Hulme, and the sculptor Henri Gaudier–Brzeska died in the fighting. Due to medical problems (another case of gonorrhoea) Lewis did not enlist until March 1916. During the time he finished his novel, *Tarr*, edited the second number of *Blast*, completed many private commissions, and participated in some group exhibitions. Lewis began another important, life–long friendship at this time. Through Ezra Pound, Lewis met the young American poet and writer T.S. Eliot. The men became closer friends after the war, but Lewis recognised Eliot's talent and published two of his early poems in the second issue of *Blast*.

Many of the artists and writers who joined up, because of their university education and social position, entered the army as officers. Lewis enlisted in the artillery and made his way through the ranks, gaining his commission at the end of 1916. He was sent to France in May, 1917, and stayed at the Front until the

end of the year, seeing action in the Battle of Passchendaele. After a quick trip home to visit his sick mother, Lewis asked for a transfer to the Canadian War Memorials project. A few months earlier, Canadian-born press baron, Lord Beaverbrook, had initiated a scheme to record Canada's wartime contribution. Through the intervention of P.G. Konody, who chose the artists for Beaverbrook, and Lady Cunard, Lewis got posted to the Canadian War Artists early in 1918. One of his paintings, the massive and stylistically conventional *A Canadian Gun Pit,* is at the National Gallery in Ottawa.

In June of 1918 *Tarr* was published by Harriet Weaver's Egoist Press. Lewis's first published novel garnered favourable reviews, but sold only six-hundred copies. Great notices and small sales became a frequently repeated pattern with Lewis's books. He was always a writer for the specialist taste, and the war fatigued public was perhaps not prepared for his brutal expressionistic style. It was similar with his painting and drawing. Lewis oversaw his first one man show, *Guns,* in February of 1919. For this exhibition Lewis returned to a simpler, more representational style to tell the story of an artilleryman's life at the Front. The reviews were good (the *Nation* review was by Ezra Pound) but the sales were mediocre, and Lewis made little money.

Lewis was demobbed in April, 1919. Post-war England was repairing itself after the psychological destruction of four years of war. Lewis, too, was in a stage of reconstruction. From the end of the war, until the publication of *The Art of Being Ruled* in 1926, Lewis kept a relatively low profile. Though a constant need for money kept him writing magazine articles and painting portraits, Lewis was quietly re-examining his political and philosophical beliefs. The death of his mother in 1920 had given him a small inheritance, (he received nothing on the death his father in 1918). He used the money to purchase a fairly comprehensive

library. He reread the books of his youth. Perhaps the best indication of Lewis's state of mind at this period is the title of his second magazine: *The Tyro*, (two issues: April 1921; March 1922). As he neared forty, he saw himself as a novice, forced by the war to begin again.

Lewis's fallow period was filled with new acquaintances. In 1920 he travelled with T.S. Eliot to Paris and met James Joyce. Though the men had never met, Joyce was among those "blessed" by Lewis in *Blast*. Many days and nights of drinking followed their first tentative meeting. The two writers remained on good terms until Lewis criticized *Ulysses* in 1927. In the early years of the decade Lewis also met American writer Ernest Hemingway, short-story writer Katherine Mansfield (shortly before her death in 1923), and "Lawrence of Arabia" (T.E. Lawrence). Perhaps Lewis's most important friendship at this time was with the Sitwells, (Osbert, Edith, and Sacheverell). Lewis had met this poetic and highly eccentric family at the end of the war. They were at the centre of the most sophisticated artistic clique in London in the early twenties, and they disliked Bloomsbury almost as much as Lewis. Lewis later parodied them, along with several figures from Bloomsbury, in *The Apes of God* (1930). Another new friend was the young South African poet and satirist Roy Campbell. Still in his teens, Campbell became a disciple of Lewis. He also appears in *The Apes of God*.

Lewis's most fertile period in terms of publications began with the appearance of *The Art of Being Ruled* in 1926. Between 1926 and 1939 Lewis published 26 books or pamphlets, and three issues of *The Enemy*, a magazine which he edited and wrote most of the material for. Some of these books were short works of political polemic or art criticism which Lewis did not lavish much time on, but at least eight can be considered major novels or critical works of great depth and complexity. Included in the massive outpouring was a collection

of his pre-war short stories, a re-issue of *Tarr*, and a play which had appeared in *Blast* - all were completely revised. There was also an autobiography and a book of poetry. The volume and variety of Lewis's literary output is amazing, but when one considers that he also painted some of his most acclaimed portraits during this period, and that he lived surrounded by controversy, hounded by creditors, and debilitated by disease, his creativity seems unreal.

Lewis's first batch of books were originally concieved of as one massive work to be called *The Man of the World*. Publishers dissuaded him from the gargantuan and impractical project and the parts came out under six separate titles from 1926 to 1930. The first was *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), a series of essays on political and philosophical themes that surveyed much of the territory he was to cover in the following books. The next year saw the publication of *The Lion and the Fox*, a study of Machiavellian politics and theories of power in Shakespeare, and *Time and Western Man*, a spirited attack on the "time-cult" in modern literature and philosophy. The "time-cult" was exemplified by such writers as Joyce, Pound, Proust, and Gertrude Stein, philosopher Henri Bergson and historian Oswald Spengler. Lewis criticized all these writers for promoting the abstract and relative (or time) over the concrete and objective (space). Lewis felt that the "time-philosophy" eroded the self by placing a greater value on immaturity, emotions, the subconscious, and instinct. In effect, the "time-cult" took away the defenses of the self - maturity, intellect, commonsense, reason, and the ability to communicate - and allowed the individual to disintegrate. The various threats to the integrity of the self in modern mass society was a theme that Lewis returned to again and again. In 1928 *The Childermass*, an allegorical satire which dramatized Lewis's main concerns, was published; and 1929 saw the long essay, *Paleface*, an elaboration of the instinct versus intellect opposition

with troubling racial overtones. The final book of Lewis's original conception was also one of the first he had begun. Several chapters had appeared in *The Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, in the early twenties. *The Apes of God* (1930), was a thinly disguised *roman à clef* which satirized the anaemic and self-important English cultural scene.

If the title of *The Tyro* described Lewis's self-conception in the early twenties, the name of his late twenties magazine, *The Enemy*, indicated a new and proudly antagonist Lewis. *The Enemy* ran three issues, one a year, starting in 1927. In it Lewis published extracts from his upcoming books, essays by himself, Eliot, and others, and several of his recent drawings. The money for printing came from Lewis's patron at the time, Sir Nicholas Waterhouse, a senior partner of the accounting firm founded by his father, Price Waterhouse. Waterhouse and his wife remained life-long friends and supporters of Lewis. Lewis needed (but resented) the backing of a wealthy patron due to the controversial nature of his writing. *The Enemy*, as well as his books of the period, championed unpopular views and attacked prominent people. As a writer of difficult, semi-scholarly books, Lewis's audience was limited. Besides the obvious concern with small sales, publishers worried about the legal consequences of Lewis's writings, and frequently suggested changes or moderation of his language before they would publish. Chatto and Windus, who had bravely put out most of Lewis's other books in the twenties, refused Lewis's satiric *tour de force*, *The Apes of God*, when he demanded a large advance. They suspected that any book that mercilessly parodied Bloomsbury, the Sitwells, and almost everybody of note in English arts and letters, would tarnish their reputation among the literary elite. Lewis eventually sold the first edition by subscription and had it printed privately, the cost underwritten by Nicholas Waterhouse.

The "Enemy" was also a literary persona, a mask that Lewis employed in his satire and commentary. The solitary antagonist that it represented allowed him to explore unpopular opinions with complete independence. Lewis, under this guise, could be extreme and immoderate, he could bash accepted wisdom, ridicule popular ideas or fashions, he could attack with violence the bastions of modern thought and society. Nor were Lewis's friends exempt from the Enemy's attack. Ezra Pound is chided for being a "revolutionary simpleton" in *Time and Western Man*; and the mind of James Joyce, in the same book, is subjected to a rigorous and cutting analysis. But he also ran the risk of retaliation. In the thirties three of his books were withdrawn due to legal problems. *The Doom of Youth* (1932), a look at the western fascination with youth, was the subject of a libel suit by writer Alec Waugh. Waugh claimed Lewis had besmirched his reputation by insinuating that he was a homosexual. The suit was eventually dropped, but Chatto and Windus, the publishers, voluntarily took the book off the market. Almost a thousand of the original edition of 1500 were "guillotined and pulped."

The thirties were an especially difficult decade for Lewis. He was ill for several months at a time with a severe urinary tract infection caused by his earlier cases of venereal disease. The operations he required were painful and he was frequently unable to work: once he was near death. As if this was not bad enough, he and his wife (whom he had married in 1930) were in constant need of money. As well as the expensive operations, there were many legal entanglements - libel suits, breach of contract suits - all requiring money to fight or settle. To avoid his creditors he employed a safe-deposit box, and this added to the rumours of his paranoia and mental instability. But the worst aspect of the thirties was caused by Lewis himself. He was ostracised and attacked for his political views.

Lewis and his wife, Gladys Anne, (called Froanna), visited Berlin for a month while on their honeymoon. On their return Lewis wrote a series of articles for the magazine *Time and Tide*. These articles were collected and published as *Hitler* (1931). The articles and the book looked at Germany, German politics, the growing National Socialist movement, and the character of Hitler. For some critics Lewis's conclusions about Hitler were far too favourable. From the appearance of the first articles Lewis was labelled a Nazi, a charge he was never was able to shake. Lewis publicly rejected Hitler and the Nazi's racist programme in two books before the war. The badly titled *The Jews: Are They Human?* (1939), in which he rather condescendingly admits Jews are human, and *The Hitler Cult, And How It Will End* (December, 1939).

Politics dominated Lewis's writing of the thirties. His reputation slowly trickled away as he wrote such anti-communist books as *The Old Gang and the New* (1933) and *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936), and *Count Your Dead – They Are Alive* (1937), a pacifist treatise which warned of the coming European conflict. These political tracts obscured the important and creative work he was doing in art and in literature. *Revenge for Love* (1937) was perhaps Lewis's best book of the thirties, but the novel about a weary communist agitator operating in London and pre-Civil War Spain appeared and disappeared with barely a whisper. "The Surrender of Barcelona," (1936) and various portraits showed that Lewis was still a fine and inventive artist. But the Royal Academy's rejection of his portrait of T.S. Eliot in 1938 confirmed that Lewis was an outsider.

When England declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, the Lewises and their dog were in the mid-Atlantic, sailing to Canada. What was originally envisioned as a short working holiday became a five year exile. These five years of Lewis's life were perhaps the bleakest and least creative of any that he had

ever suffered. Lewis was cut off from friends and patrons in England, and the locals, for the most part, seemed intent on ignoring him. Due to English currency restrictions he could not get any of his royalties from his London publishers. The few portrait commissions and writing assignments that he was offered did not pay him enough to save up the $1000 required for the trip home.

Lewis's first year in North America was spent in Buffalo and New York. He subsisted on the money from portrait commissions, chalk drawings, a small book advance from a New York publisher, a few lectures, and loans from friends. When his visa expired Lewis was forced to leave the United States and go to Canada.

Lewis spent the next two years in the bleak, dispiriting environment of wartime Toronto. The Toronto literary and artistic community effectively shut him out. There were a few exceptions. The painter A.Y. Jackson, a member of the Group of Seven, greatly admired Lewis as a painter and helped with a hundred dollar loan. They had met during the First World War when both men were Canadian War Artists. Except for a few portrait commissions arranged by supporters and four articles for *Saturday Night*, Lewis lived in poverty and obscurity. The life of exile in provincial Toronto was unbearable to the cosmopolitan Lewis. He envied Joyce's refuge in Geneva.

In the summer of 1942, Father J. Stanley Murphy, acting as a representative of Assumption College, Windsor, asked Lewis to deliver a lecture in the Christian Culture series he organised every year. Lewis readily agreed and in January 1943 he gave his lecture entitled, "Religion and the Artist." The lecture was a success and Lewis was offered the post of "special author/artist" in residence at the Catholic College. Lewis accepted. Though Lewis was not Catholic he was well informed about contemporary controversies in the Church and had read the works of the neo-scholastics Jacques Maritain and Etienne

Gilson with some interest. He also needed the $200 a month salary. Lewis, his wife, and their dog moved to Windsor in the summer of 1943.

During Lewis's stay at Assumption he met Bishop (then Monsignor) Fulton J. Sheen, who praised Lewis's *Time and Western Man,* and the French moral philosopher Jacques Maritain. But perhaps the most important meeting was with a young professor from St. Louis University. Marshall McLuhan, then in his early thirties, was well acquainted with Lewis's work as an author and painter. Over the next two years McLuhan help arrange portrait commissions and lectures for Lewis in and around St. Louis. McLuhan later claimed that Lewis had a profound influence on him, and that his own book, *Counterblast* (1968), was a continuation of *Blast* principles and techniques.

In August, 1945, after the defeat of Japan, the Lewises (sans dog) sailed to England. They had borrowed the price of the fare from the British High Commissioner in Ottawa. Lewis's exile was over. On returning to his apartment he was immediately dunned for £400 in back rent, £50 for damages from a burst water pipe, and £36 for telephone charges. This welcome was indicative of the obstacles he had to overcome. Once again, Lewis, this time at age sixty-three, was forced to start again. Post-war England was a grim, poor, defeated place, but at least he was among friends and able to earn money. And over the next decade Lewis regained much of his reputation, even if he did not become popular. In 1946 he joined *The Listener* as their art critic, a post he held until his eyesight failed five years later. The B.B.C asked him to speak on radio several times, and in the fifties produced a radio-play based on the *Childermass.* B.B.C. producer D.G. Bridson paid Lewis £1000 for the broadcast rights to the two subsequent volumes of *The Human Age* trilogy. Friends, like T.S. Eliot, now a prosperous and

much respected fixture in the literary scene, lent Lewis money and in 1951 helped get him a Civil List pension of £250 a year.

The gradual darkness that enveloped Lewis's vision was a tragic counterpoint to the brightening of his reputation. When Lewis was in Canada a doctor wrongly diagnosed him as having glaucoma, and predicted he would be blind in six months. The English doctors he consulted in 1946 believed that Lewis's decayed teeth were poisoning his eyes, and recommended that all his teeth be extracted. This was done, but the deterioration of his sight continued. After visits to specialists in Vienna, Paris, Stockholm, and London the cause was finally confirmed as an inoperable cyst pressing on the optic nerve. By 1951 he could only distinguish light and dark.

Though Lewis's blindness prevented him from painting and drawing he continued to write, first by scrawling words in large block letters on innumerable sheets of paper, and later by dictating to a secretary. From 1948 until his death in March, 1957, Lewis published three works of criticism or commentary, an autobiography, a book of short stories, and three novels. *Self-Condemned* (1954), a novel based on his experiences in Toronto, the two final volumes of *The Human Age* (1955), (*Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*), a long delayed continuation of *The Childermass*, and his final book, *The Red Priest* (1956), were all written when Lewis was completely blind.

Lewis's non-fiction work of the post-war continued a transformation in his political ideas which had begun with the small pamphlet, *Anglosaxony*, published in Ottawa in 1941. *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) reversed his previous position on the question of national sovereignty. Citing the advances in communication and military technology (television and the atomic bomb) Lewis claimed that the age of the nation state was over. He now supported a world government that would

actively disintegrate national identities, something along the lines of the federal system of the United States. In *Rude Assignment* (1950) he predicted that world government would only come after a final, apocalyptic confrontation between the atomic powers. He disclaimed any preference for the type of political system to be set up after armageddon, though he believed that it would have many elements of the socialist state.

Throughout his life, Lewis's concern was not with the material betterment of mankind but the place of the individual creative spirit within society. The one central idea that Lewis carried over from *The Art of Being Ruled*, and his other polemic works of the twenties and thirties, was the belief that the creative man was being stifled by the culture of mass man. In fact, there was an active antagonism between the creative man and the non-creative, consuming mass. Lewis sought a society where an artist could operate free of constraints, where he could oppose the fashions, trends, and the orthodoxies of his time, and exalt in his own freedom and individuality without fear of censorship by the *demos*. All of Lewis's writing has a subcutaneous disdain for certain democratic values. He judges society and politics as an artist, that is as an individual who must be completely free to freely create. In his final "mellow," internationalist phase, Lewis's misanthropy, indications of which can be traced back to the *Timon of Athens* drawings he submitted to the Second Post-Impressionist Show of 1912 and perhaps before, still animated his political philosophy.

Two incidents show the ambiguous nature of Lewis's artistic achievement. In November of 1956 Wyndham Lewis was seventy-four. He had been an artist for over fifty years, first recognised as a revolutionary abstractionist before the First World War and later as an insightful portraitist. In the summer of 1956 the Tate Gallery belatedly acknowledged Lewis's artistic contribution with a

retrospective exhibition. Lewis, blind, heavily medicated and confined to a wheelchair, attended the opening. T.S. Eliot sat beside Lewis for most of the night; the Sitwells also attended. On March 8th, 1957, the day after Lewis died, workmen from the London City Council began to demolish his apartment. Lewis had been warned that they were razing the block of apartments to make way for a new subway line, but he had been too sick to move. The wreckers started with Lewis's dusty and deserted studio. When a friend went to gather some of Lewis's drawings he found that the workers had thrown the pictures on the floor and trodden on them. A drawing of Ezra Pound had its head torn off.

Lewis's personal philosophy was one of apartness, of reserve and distance. Even his best friends said they never felt intimate with him. The "Enemy," the literary mask he created in the twenties, was perhaps the most extreme example of the otherness Lewis wanted to project. Having no affiliations allowed him to be intellectually independent of others, and to be completely subservient to his own intellect; for while he constantly fought his emotions there was surrender to his own intellect. In his writing Lewis was more honest than Joyce, Pound, or Eliot - "The Men of 1914." His writing was not incomprehensible as Joyce's frequently was, nor steeped in arcane languages like Pound, nor morbidly anti-modern like Eliot. Lewis dared his readers to match their intellect against his own, to follow his line of argument, to understand his mind and way of viewing things. Reading Lewis's novels one is always conscious of a mind and will, an authorial presence, directing the action; one is aware of the creator. The most challenging of his writing simply required a knowledgeable reader ready to engage in a clash of intellects, someone as willing as him to put emotions in a straightjacket and discuss subjects with absolute freedom.

Over his lifetime Lewis had three concurrent vocations: artist, novelist, and critic of modern society. His contribution in each of these fields was professional and revolutionary; it also has been underplayed or forgotten. In fact, had Lewis been solely a novelist, or solely a painter, it would be easier to study his works. Because, each time one sets out to talk of Lewis the novelist, one invariably runs up against Lewis the social critic or Lewis the painter: the discussion becomes bogged down with too much information, or people wander out of their own area of expertise. But to compartmentalize all his various activities tends to destroy the complex interactions between them, and to exclude some of the most interesting aspects of Lewis's thought. The novels, the paintings, and drawings; the political polemic and critiques of society; his personal qualities and the way he lived his life; his vision of society and culture, all fed into each other. Perhaps Lewis has been overlooked as a modern master, not because of his politics, his obnoxious personality, or the uneven quality of his output, but because, in a world of specialists, he was creatively omnivorous.

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