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Reading Late Wyndham Lewis: Critical Approaches

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Abstract and Keywords

Focused on the criticism of the later writings of Wyndham Lewis, this essay argues that Lewis's response to the ruining of Enlightenment hopes and promises in the Great War resulted in impassioned polemics and fictions that interrogate the possibility of humanist resistance to the brutalities of modernity. Lewis continues to inspire unusually heated, combative critical exchanges, particularly regarding his notorious if fairly short-lived intellectual and political embrace of fascism. Defenses of Lewis's late writing are easiest to make when one maintains some distance from the details of Lewis's texts themselves. Focusing on the example of Jessica Burstein's *Cold Modernism* and the kinds of reading enabled by her approach to Lewis's work, this essay concludes with the suggestion that an "ahumanist," "cold" Lewis may well be on the cusp of a new season of fruitful attention from the academy.

Keywords: Wyndham Lewis, fascism, fascist, politics, satire, cold modernism, late modernism, World War II, humanism, Rude Assignment, The Art of Being Ruled, The Revenge for Love, Hitler, Jameson, Kenner, Corbett, Gąsiorek

"blessed is the book without a history"

(*Rude Assignment*, 214)

In 1986, my second year of graduate school, I attended an Ezra Pound conference at the University of Maine, in Orono, where Carroll Terrell had established the National Poetry Foundation and presided over his monumental project of annotating the *Cantos* and promoting the study of modern poetry.¹ Pound's daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz, was there, with her ninety-one-year-old mother, Olga Rudge, and I remember how startled I was to witness them denouncing presenters who argued that Pound had been a supporter of Italian fascism and had been variously indebted to and influenced by fascist ideas in his poetry and prose. I was correspondingly shocked four years later when, during one of my first visits to the stacks of Hatcher Library at the University of Michigan, I found business cards from the New Aryan Order in most of the volumes by and about Ezra Pound shelved in the 828.Ps.² The horrors of twentieth-century

history are slow to recede: we are still trying to sort out errors and rightness, to use Pound's terms (CXVI, 797), still wondering, with Pound, "How came beauty against this blackness?" (CXVI, 796). Wyndham Lewis also remains soiled by the dark earth that clings to the roots of those moderns who were, for some period of their writing lives, drawn to fascism (or to communism in its Stalinist incarnation)—to totalitarian programs promising cures for the confusion of modern states; to Hitler or Mussolini or Stalin or, even, Pétain; to Brownshirts or Blueshirts or Blackshirts. This fact is of enormous consequence for a survey of critical writings about Lewis's later work, since that later work includes both the texts that have done so much to mar his reputation as well as the writing that may go some way toward redeeming him in the eyes of readers today.

I take "later work" to designate two distinct though related streams of Lewis's writing: the polemics that begin with *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) (which Lewis cites as the first instance of his newly political work) and the fiction that he published after *The Apes of God* (1930), his satire of the London art and social scene of the 1920s. *Apes* is dramatically different from the novels that commence with *The Revenge for Love* (1937) and follow until Lewis's death in 1957. One of Lewis's greatest critics, Paul Edwards, whose beautifully produced *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000) stands as the single most ambitious, most comprehensive study of Lewis's art, argues that "Lewis's career entered a new phase in 1931" (Edwards, *Lewis*, 381). Lewis himself might draw the line a little earlier, around the time of the General Strike, when, he tells us in his autobiographical *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), he published "the first of my non-fiction books, *The Art of Being Ruled*":³

in 1926 I began writing about politics, not because I like politics but everything was getting bogged down in them and before you could do anything you had to deal with the politics with which it was encrusted. And I've got so bepoliticked myself in the process that in order to get at *me*, to-day, you have to get the politics off me first. (*Blasting*, 339)

In this first of his two autobiographies (the second, *Rude Assignment*, was published in 1950), Lewis already realizes how contemporary events are continuing to inflect his polemical work, which, alarmingly, becomes both more meaningful and less under its author's control with each passing year. The ideological weight of its contents shifts in its transit through history. Hitler's brutal rise to power and the compounding violence and increasingly stark political divisions of the 1930s have brought Lewis's *Hitler* (1931) and the disputatious texts that follow it into a prominence its author did not intend. Six years after *Hitler*, Lewis gathers the many hundreds of pages of sociopolitical analysis and sociopsychological assessments of modern men and women into a heap that he would prefer to have washed away. He offers us an explanation and a partial apology for making an excrementitious muck whose proportions are justified, given their creator's perfectly reasonable motivations: "I am trying to save people from being 'ruled' too much—from being 'ruled' off the face of the earth, as a matter of fact" (*Blasting*, 339). But this enterprise of his has also become overwhelming: "I've never had a moment's peace since" (*Blasting*, 339).⁴ As Hugh Kenner, in his pioneering study of Lewis in 1954, describes the effect of this intervention: "Lewis's reputation underwent in 1931 an occultation from which it has never recovered" (*Lewis*, 85).

"Getting the politics off" proves impossible, but Lewis does at least offer a way to understand this phase of

his work that is divorced from party affiliation and particular programs or leaders: these are his “Anti-War Books” (*Rude Assignment*, 224). In addition to describing *The Art of Being Ruled*, the phrase designates a cluster of less obtainable but notorious texts produced in print runs of c.2,000 copies, selling indifferently, reprinted only once (in editions published in the United States by the Gordon Press in 1972):⁵ *Hitler* (1931), *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936), *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive! or, A New War in the Making* (1937), *The Jews: Are They Human?* (1939), and *The Hitler Cult* (1939). Especially since they had so little political effect during the decade in which they were composed, Lewis hopes that “this group of books against war can be written off as futile performances—ill-judged, redundant, harmful of course to me personally, and of no value to anybody else?” (*Rude Assignment*, 224). Looking back from the vantage point of 1950, he can reasonably summarize his aims in *Hitler*:

to break the European ostracism of Germany, call in question the wisdom of the Versailles Treaty and get it revised, end the bad behaviour of the French chauvinists, attempt to establish healthy relations in Western Europe. (*Rude Assignment*, 224)

All of which seems, as he ruefully admits in the next paragraph, “humane and sensible, but impossible” (*Rude Assignment*, 224). Noting, further, that nothing anyone said or did could have restrained Hitler from “wholesale ‘patriotic’ bloodshed” (*Rude Assignment*, 224), Lewis asks that we overlook his ironically pointless though costly political engagements. Pound, in roughly the same season (1955) of postwar self-assessment, hopes to be understood as “not arrogant from habit, / but furious from perception” (*Canto XC / 606*).⁶ With some justification, Lewis would have us focus not on his desperate and misguided insights and affiliations but on the larger aims of these books: arguments against the xenophobia and self-satisfactions bred by nationalism, against retributory justice, against taking the merely political and the “great pretences of democracy” too seriously (*Art*, 322). This is essentially a line of argument chosen by a number of Lewis’s most sympathetic and astute critics who address the polemics.

But the recommendation that we adopt this somewhat distant viewpoint will not neutralize the toxicity of many pages that Lewis wrote from the late 1920s forward, any more than Pound’s plea that we recognize his perceptiveness decontaminates what he wrote and broadcast during the same period. Nazism, even when admired only for a time, only before the war, exerts such an appropriately strong gravitational pull on anything in its orbit, and the ugly, sentence-by-sentence accumulation of details in Lewis’s polemical texts as well as the extent and the implications of those intemperate texts work against mere dismissal or the anodyne of summary and overview. Nauseated by “the great pretences of democracy,” counting politics and economics among the “boring and wasteful sham-sciences that have sprung up in support of the great pretences of democracy” and the “humbug” that is “anglo-saxon life” (*Art*, 322), asserting that the United States is “the only country in the world ... [that] would not benefit by a revolution” (*Art*, 321), Lewis turns to “fascism as interpreted by its founder, Mussolini” (Hitler was only recently out of prison when Lewis wrote this in 1926 and had not yet caught Lewis’s attention) and prescribes the “peace” that would come from a “powerful and stable authority”: “for anglo-saxon countries as they are constituted today some modified form of fascism would probably be best” (*Art*, 320–321). Fredric Jameson, in his important *Fables of Aggression* (1979) argues that Lewis’s “‘fascism’ ... is to be understood as ... a protest against the reified experience of alienated social life,” and might therefore be more justly called

“protofascism” (Jameson, 14, 15).⁷ This is an apposite distinction, but the “proto” often falls away in considerations of later Lewis.

And in an important sense, Lewis’s turn to fascism and his admiration for Hitler are only symptoms of a more comprehensive disaffection with Western civilization that is so deeply despairing that it can prove difficult to comprehend. In a chapter titled “Fascism as an Alternative,” from *The Art of Being Ruled*, describing the wise choice of Mussolini by his Italian subjects, Lewis foretells the atrophying of “the last vestiges of the party system” after which “all the humbug of a democratic suffrage, all the imbecility that is so wastefully manufactured, will henceforth be spared this happy people” (*Art*, 321). The cynicism and rage from which this analysis springs, its refusal to believe in even the possibility of an enlightened government responding to its citizenry, makes Lewis’s embrace of Il Duce almost incidental. He has so wholly given up on the promises of a rational state governed by empowered subjects that he argues most people would be happier if their rulers never even indulged them in the charade that their aspirations and ideas matter. The French Revolution, that event still regularly referenced as a plausible locating point in history for the birth of the modern liberal subject (see Peter Fritzsche, T. J. Clark, or Richard Terdiman, for example) withers, under Lewis’s scrutiny, into nothing more than a despicably misleading excuse for the dishonesties of poetry by the privileged: “millions of people were plunged in misery everywhere—especially in France, as a result of its great Revolution, which was the principal source of poetic inspiration for wealthy Englishmen for the first half of the nineteenth century” (*Art*, 323).

The First World War provokes this grim conception of the powerless modern man, perfectly represented by the *poilu*, the beleaguered infantryman, whose only path to a form of brutish happiness might be learning how to accept his powerlessness:

he is compelled to kill other mechanics of neighboring states for certain well-defined purposes, of which he is completely, indeed blissfully, ignorant ... [, and] he is described as a volunteer. That part of the earth on which he has had the misfortune to be born is called “*his country*,” which is as though you called the Ritz *his* hotel. (*Art*, 323–324)

David Peters Corbett’s “Introduction” to the valuable collection, *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War* (1998), offers a cogent description of the devastating effects of the Great War on Lewis, who enlisted with the Royal Artillery (1916–17) and then became a war artist for the Canadian government (1917–18):⁸

Faced with the precarious state of civilisation and art and the fallen nature of humanity which were grotesquely revealed by the war, Lewis suffered a blow to his earlier confidence in the mission of art to civilise and instruct. It came to seem to him that the role of art in constructing an ideal society and in ameliorating the world was now questionable in ways he had not hitherto understood. Faced with this uncertainty, the way was prepared for the “disillusion” Lewis suffered in the post-war years, and for the increasingly passionate and idiosyncratic thinking which dominated his attempts to recreate or theorise the conditions for the ideal society, ushered in by a revived, modernist art, which he pursued in the 1920s and thirties. The political positions Lewis took up in those decades are seen to flow directly from the shock of finding his belief in the possibility of amelioration through art undermined by his experience in the war.

(Corbett, "Introduction," 8)

In the hands of a different social critic, this radical outrage at the bad faith underlying modern nation-states and their wars might turn into an attack directed more at the lies perpetrated by those states than the failures of their duped citizenries. But given Lewis's fundamental lack of sympathy for people in the abstract or the aggregate, this text and the polemics that follow it become a welcoming of the ruler's strong hand—the openly ruthless guidance required not by Lewis and his cohort but by all of those other people, those "mechanics" with whom Lewis theoretically sympathizes but about whom Lewis also cannot avoid expressing his abhorrence. Kenner astutely notes: "Lewis's taste for system and his temperamental indifference to persons" (*Lewis*, 82). "When late in the 1930's human beings entered Lewis's world," Kenner continues, "his lack of alarm at Hitler's sanguinary grimaces required a good deal of rationalizing" (*Lewis*, 83).

"Sanguinary grimaces," an artfully compressed, rhythmically and aurally arresting phrase, may or may not adequately describe for readers today Hitler's actions in the early 1930s. Lewis's own breezy characterization, in *Hitler*, of the hygiene that "the young German politician" would bring to the debaucheries of Berlin remains shocking, even though we understand that it was written before anyone could know what we now know:

"Juda verrecke!" ["kill the Jews!"] he would no doubt mutter, or shout, if he got into [a Berlin nightclub]. Sooner or later he would desire to be at the head, or in the midst, of his *Sturmabteilung*—to roll this nigger-dance luxury-spot up like a verminous carpet, and drop it into the Spree—with a heartfelt *Pfui!* at its big sodden splash. (*Hitler*, 27–28)

It matters that we have at least some small sampling of this book's actual prose before us (not summarized, not redacted) if we would understand the effect it and its sequels had on Lewis's reputation, and if we want to measure the distances between Lewis's writing from this decade and the writing about his work from this period by his later critics. There is a breathtaking, immoral carelessness to his figuration of the slapstick "housecleaning" promised by his emblematic Storm Trooper, in which humans are reduced to the merest racist phrases and then tiny bugs before they vanish with a cartoonish sound from some special effects department. In the following sentence that closes this chapter from *Hitler*, Lewis insists that neither the tourist to Berlin (who goes into the nightclub hopeful to discover such exotics on display) nor the student of culture (i.e., the author of this study) would dispose of these vermin as the Brownshirt will:

—Neither the "restless analyst," nor the guileless tourist, will feel that way about it: that is the attitude of the ascetic of Politics—an asceticism not without its nobility, one that is little understood. (*Hitler*, 28)

That Storm Trooper's "asceticism," though—the wholesale disgust at and turning away from the affairs of human government and the professional, political management of those affairs—receives Lewis's greatest admiration. Underlying the thousands of pages of satire and invective, of analysis and reporting and speculation about the ways of his contemporary world there lies Lewis's yearning to become an "ascetic of Politics": simply to be done with the mire of human affairs, to start afresh, finally and utterly modern,

painting and writing about anything other than institutions and propaganda and the “unseemly joke” of the war just past and the one that’s coming (*Blasting and Bombardiering*, 4).

Since Lewis the artist and writer is far too opinionated and engaged to achieve this silent “nobility” of the political ascetic, he turns to satire, which performs some of the same “cleansing” of his surroundings undertaken by the “german politician” (without offering solutions), all the while allowing his “restless analyst’s” eye to linger over details. In one of his many fine discussions of this later Lewis, “Wyndham Lewis on Art, Culture and Politics in the 1930s,” Andrzej Gąsiorek explains that “[s]atire emerged as Lewis’s chosen mode of truth-telling because it exposed the imbecilities of a reified social order, but refused to offer premature solutions to the degradation it denounced (215). Satire “was bound into contemporary politics,” Gąsiorek continues, “but engaged with them obliquely, from a distance. Satire was a paradoxical form because it was an alienating mode chosen as the best means available for a politically pessimistic writer to mount an assault on alienation” (“Lewis in the 1930s,” 215). That last phrase and its assertion that Lewis fights against alienation provides a perfect, tiny instance of the disorientations that strike me as I read Gąsiorek’s analyses of Lewis (which often give me a Lewis I’d prefer to the one I’ve been reading), since that positive battle, that humane bid for connectedness is something I find scant evidence for in Lewis’s own work.

It is a central argument, too, in Gąsiorek’s monograph on Lewis: *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (2003), in which compassion and sympathy for humanity become the keys to Lewis’s project: “it is when one grasps that separateness and plurality belong to the realm of phenomena, beneath which lies a hidden essential unity, that one can see oneself in the other and on this basis embrace altruism” (Gąsiorek, *Lewis and Modernism*, 126). At this point, Gąsiorek has to pause, so far from anything we might have been reading by *The Enemy* is this articulation of holistic devotion to others.⁹ He admits: “Lewis did not phrase it like this.” “At his best,” Gąsiorek continues, the qualifying phrase allowing him to present his subject in a startlingly unfamiliar guise, “he ... posited a modernity that began not with the interpellation of the other as an inferior but rather as a partner in dialogue” (Gąsiorek, *Lewis and Modernism*, 130). Gąsiorek is too good a critic not to have captured a theoretical truth about the ideas underlying Lewis’s work, but as he is helping us understand those ideas, he loses hold of the no-less-important texture of Lewis’s writing—the anger, the bitter pleasure in sheer excoriation, the ferocity of his pedagogy, the send-ups of political programs, the evisceration of and violence enacted against his characters. It is possible, sometimes, to wonder whether we’re reading the same author:

His writing sought to embody canons that resisted the inner-directed, psychologically-minded modernisms, which for him compromised artistic form and surrendered to the temporal flux; his external aesthetic drew on classicist claims about the need for limits, relied on metaphors that emphasized structure and building, and urged the importance of values held in common by the community at large. (Gąsiorek, *Lewis and Modernism*, 121)

One will not find a more cogent explanation of Lewis’s rejection of modernism’s descent into the troubled streams of consciousness, of his allegiance to the philosophical clarities of neoclassicist, Augustan thought, and of the reasons for Lewis’s opposition to so many of his Anglo-American modernist contemporaries,

but that last phrase of Gąsiorek's, in particular, is more serene, more reasonable, more equable and equitable than the Lewis I find when I turn back to his own books.

Gąsiorek belongs among a group Lewis's finest critics—(e.g., Gąsiorek, Edwards, Corbett, Vincent Sherry)—who argue that Lewis is a despairing, disillusioned humanist, driven into his furious, polemical phase by the Great War. This narrative posits that at some point during the 1930s Lewis fortunately recognizes that hopes for sociopolitical reform are doomed. Giving up on reshaping the crazy world, he discovers how to write with some degree of sympathy about others, how to extend at least some welcome to the unperfected humans and the fallen world around him. Sherry puts it powerfully, distinguishing Lewis from Pound, who fails to make this crucial turn before the Second World War, who does not undergo “the gradual unmaking of the aesthetic premise of politics” (*Radical Modernism*, 123). Lewis performs “a turning back on his own deluded, fiercely intelligent hubris, which averts its ultimate tragedy by recognizing its mistake” (Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 99).

A very different way of understanding Lewis's later allegiances and programs is to argue that he never quite believes in any position sufficiently to charge him with the consequences of that belief. Tyrus Miller's pivotal study, *Late Modernism* (1999), does not bring us to the later Lewis, since he ends his Lewis chapter with the very beginning of the 1930s and *The Apes of God*, about which he writes: “Fascism for Lewis here, like femininity for Joan Riviere, appears as a masquerade—a costume, a set of signs to be deployed, an aesthetic construct extending theatrically into the political sphere” (*Late Modernism*, 116). Lewis's lifelong fascination with shells and simulacra, puppets and masks, ideologically and psychologically hollowed-out structures and humanoid figures, as well as his relentless criticism of the shams on which society is built and of the delusions promoted by politicians can lead his critics to mistakenly assume that he believes in nothing (and never even tries to believe), that he is always and only play-acting, that his world is something like a wax museum with cleverly designed, moving figures, a “cemetery of shells,” as he describes the faculty at “a great university in one of the eastern states of the U.S.A.” in the title to the last chapter of *Self Condemned* (407).

But this profound falseness is a condition of modernity that Lewis deplores and feels trapped by, even as it is also a source of material for satire and enraged critique. Reed Way Dasenbrock, in “Wyndham Lewis's Fascist Imagination and the Fiction of Paranoia,” urges us to understand Lewis's engagement with fascism as being fundamentally theoretical and performative: “Lewis's deepest engagement with fascism is on the level of imagination and plot (the kinds of stories he tells), not on the level of ideology or practical politics (what he abstractly or concretely advocates)” (“Fascist Imagination,” 89). Miller and Dasenbrock have both captured a crucial aspect of Lewis, who often seems almost pathologically reluctant to claim belief in anything, and yet these critics' understanding of this radical skepticism suggests a level of satisfaction with this state of unbelief that, I think, becomes increasingly difficult for Lewis himself to feel. It is also important never to lose sight of the fact that whether or not Lewis believes in the authenticity of a person or a program has no effect on that entity's power in the actual world (one of the most horrifying lessons of the Second World War for Lewis is that puppets and barely realized humans can nevertheless reduce cities to rubble and millions of humans to corpses).¹⁰ Dasenbrock is convinced that Lewis wants us to learn to greet even the most fervently promoted beliefs as performances, as theater (“Fascist Imagination,” 88).

And though certainly aspects of this approach suit Lewis's satirical approach to the world, I find myself inclined toward those who insist that Lewis is not simply playing games about belief, and that he cares deeply about his positions, even when he offers them with a grin or a sneer. Shane Weller (whose work on Lewis and Nietzsche I will discuss in greater detail below) argues that "[i]t would not be particularly difficult to demonstrate that Lewis's entire oeuvre is in fact nothing less than an unremitting critique of nihilism in one form or another" (Nietzsche among the Moderns," 634).

In addition, as Sherry points out in *Radical Modernism*, a demonstrably real program lies behind Lewis's polemics, and fascism appeals to Lewis precisely because of the promise it offers for realizing principles not only in theory, but also in practice, with Hitler at the helm: "already, in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis has agreed that postwar circumstances may require a violent, dictatorial oppression. On this political reality Lewis imposes his aesthetic screen, and its effect can be measured by the number of sheerly *personal* antipathies he had to overcome in order to admire Hitler" (*Radical Modernism*, 119). Sherry argues that these polemical texts appeal to Lewis's profound desire to arrange actual political matters along aesthetic lines (*Radical Modernism*, 119). This insight that the abstractions of political systems and aesthetic form command Lewis's attention and, in the case of fascism, his admiration in ways that the messy human world does not is morally disturbing and seems to me true to the texture of Lewis's prose and the contours of his thought as those contours take shape over the course of his entire career. It shows itself in especially stark form from 1926 to 1939, when the political landscape of Europe seems filled with theories put into practice, those practices sometimes looking, if only for a few years, perfected in ways that democracies cannot hope to achieve.

Joel Nickels, in *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude*, presents a different, surprising but plausible explanation for Lewis's early attraction to fascism. A crucial strand of his argument derives from an essay, "The Physics of the Not-Self" that was appended to the 1932 revision of Lewis's play *Enemy of the Stars* (the first edition of which appeared in *BLAST* I [1914]). Nickels describes Lewis's development of an idea of impersonality, of "the Not-Self," that leads, paradoxically, to a social, collectivist vision. If we can cultivate "the ability to suspend [our] habitual affirmations and explore alternative truths that are part of an 'unofficial' landscape of intersubjective valuations," we will discover, together, "a potent form of social spontaneity, since it allows [us] to break with the mental reflexes that bind the ego to ruling ideology. In doing so, the Not-Self finds itself involved in a collective world in which it participates" (*Poetry of the Possible*, 106). The elites who rule us, not surprisingly, loathe this ungovernable, selfless collective, and in the early 1930s, Lewis is able to romanticize Hitler and his nascent Nazi party, discovered precisely at the "antihegemonic moment of fascist agency, in which the political leader can be depicted, like the artist, as a persecuted, wandering outcast, beset from above by a hostile ruling class and from below by a recalcitrant and undisciplined multitude" (*Poetry of the Possible*, 112–113). Nickels imagines this utopian gathering of "not-selves" under Hitler's leadership exploring the social question of how a group might "develop institutional structures to express its self-organizing capacity without reverting to the statist constructions of constituted power" (*Poetry of the Possible*, 131). It is not difficult to see how Lewis kicks against the "strictures of codified, hierarchical, constituted power" (*Poetry of the Possible*, 131), and it is almost possible to imagine Lewis believing in this early, uncorrupted Hitler leading his band of impersonal seekers toward a state founded on principles of anti-

authoritarian social justice. But the questions that Nickels phrases so forcefully concerning equity in social structures and how governance might continue to honor “forms of spontaneous self-direction” (*Poetry of the Possible*, 132) lead us farther and farther not only from Hitler’s very earliest political practices, but also from the actual prose of Lewis’s polemics and from the style of all of his later writings. Nickels acknowledges this growing distance between his extrapolated Lewis and the one we have read: “Admittedly, these kinds of qualms are surprising in an author who exhibited such sympathy for the doctrinaire political leadership of both the right and the left in his political writings of the late 1920s and 1930s” (*Poetry of the Possible*, 120).

It may seem unfair or perverse to open this discussion of Lewis with references to the corrupted and corrupting frame of fascism. Dasenbrock proposes that “Lewis is ... the only one of the Anglo-American Modernists whose engagement with fascism has been over, not underestimated” (“Fascist Imagination,” 89). Jameson’s characterization of Lewis’s active interest in a fascist solution to the disorders of modernity (especially in that solution’s German form) still seems to me accurate in its essentials.¹¹

Ideologically, Lewis’s brief flirtation with Nazism—celebrated in the notorious *Hitler* (1931) stands as a symptom somewhere in between his deep misogyny and his violent anti-Communism. The episode may have been no more (but no less) serious than the comparable enthusiasms of Pound, Yeats, Shaw and others.... (*Fables of Aggression*, 5)

It should be added, though, that Jameson’s phrase, “brief flirtation,” fails measure the years from 1931 to 1938 accurately, and Hitler undertakes a specific, detailed set of political actions that make Nazism different from misogyny. A demonstrable reality characterizes Hitler’s implementation of fascism that, Sherry points out, Lewis comes to realize in the later 1930s: “the advance of history leaves the schemes of avant-garde art further and further behind” (*Radical Modernism*, 123). Sherry describes how Pound “[i]n 1938 ... still praises Lewis for his early ‘discovery’ of Hitler ... (like his own find, Mussolini),” though by this point in the 1930s Lewis has recognized “the practical reality of fascism” and how that reality compels “a gradual unmaking of the aesthetic premise of politics and a revamping of the political conclusion to which it drew him” (*Radical Modernism*, 122, 123). But *The Hitler Cult* (1939), Lewis’s defensive, often tone-deaf attempt to retract much of *Hitler*, comes too late and a little too quietly to divorce its author cleanly from his earlier admiring embrace of this leader who promised to fill the “pure political void” presided over by the weak-kneed “Mr. Democrat” (*Hitler Cult*, 195).¹²

William Pritchard’s judicious introduction to Lewis¹³ notes that, following the cataclysmic failures of governments that led to the Great War, and to the General Strike in Britain in 1926 and then the Great Depression, “all serious politics had to be revolutionary politics” (*Lewis*, 50). Communism and fascism at least promised astringent alternatives to the “piecemeal enfeebled unreality without organization or vitality” that occupied the political center of Lewis’s dysfunctional Britain: “In the middle of nowhere stood the liberalist democracies of Western Europe and America in post-Arnoldian anarchy” (Pritchard, *Lewis*, 50). Lewis searched for answers to the cultural, social, and political problems of modernity for decades. His most ardent defenders regularly write as though *Hitler* stood alone, outside the sweep of his other tracts, though it is as inaccurate to claim that *Hitler* is isolated from or inexplicable in terms of

Lewis's other writings as it is reductive to label Lewis a fascist. Readers today, approaching Lewis's work through the haze of notoriety generated by the largely unread and difficult-to-find *Hitler*, ironically sustain the disputatious climate Lewis created and promoted throughout his writing life: the self-styled "Enemy" of so much in his own time still provokes animus unusual in academic debate.

Lewis, of course, is divided against himself. Witness his vacillations about matters of belief and performance, as well as his dramatic reversal in the late 1930s concerning Hitler and Nazism. Weller, in his brilliant essay "Nietzsche among the Moderns" (2007), has parsed tendencies and interpretive gambits among Lewis's critics, with particular reference to how they use Nietzsche in their arguments. For the purposes of my critical review, Weller is most helpful in showing us how Lewis is read both as essentially fascist in spirit (even before Mussolini's March on Rome and Hitler's rise to power) and as a writer who teaches us how to see fascism as little more than a façade. I do not have space here to do justice to the central strand of Weller's essay—the enormous complexities of Lewis's changing readings of Nietzsche—and of how "the distinction that Lewis makes both in *Rude Assignment* and elsewhere between two strands in Nietzsche becomes a way of making sense of [Lewis's] own intellectual history" ("Nietzsche among the Moderns," 630). For Lewis, Nietzsche is sometimes "the great vulgarizer"—a huckster of the idea that commoners might remake themselves as members of a new aristocracy, a peddler of a cheaply exercised will-to-power—and, at other times, "the truth-bearer, the philosopher who articulates the truth of the depthless surface, which calls for the very externalist art that Lewis himself will aim both to theorize and to practice" ("Nietzsche among the Moderns," 631). The vulgar Nietzsche becomes the figure admired by the Nazis; the more sophisticated, philosophically rigorous Nietzsche opens a door to postmodern rejections of modernist, psychological-subjectivist aestheticism. To show this contrast at work in criticism of Lewis, Weller turns to John Carey, whose *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) "[tarrs] Lewis with Nietzscheanism" preparatory to binding him to Hitler ("Nietzsche among the Moderns," 627). "Whereas Carey identifies Lewis as Nietzschean in order to dismiss him," as an artist who privileges the intellectual élite over the masses, a rejecter of democracy for precisely the kind of pseudo-Nietzschean "overman" celebrated in Nazi ideology,

both [Toby] Foshay and Gąsiorek identify Lewis as Nietzschean in order to save him, not least from his association with fascism. Crucially, however, they would save him not as a modernist but rather as a postmodernist. This reading depends not only upon a reinterpretation of Lewis, but also upon a reinterpretation of Nietzsche, a reinterpretation that ironically finds its specific point of origin in Fredric Jameson's 1979 monograph on Lewis, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis: The Modernist as Fascist*. The Lewis that Jameson presents to us is characterized by a "consistent perversity"; Lewis becomes an antinomic figure at the very heart of the modernist movement,

"at one and the same time the exemplary practitioner of one of the most powerful of all modernistic styles and an aggressive ideological critic and adversary of modernism itself in all its forms." ("Nietzsche among the Moderns," 627)

For Foshay (whose work we will return to briefly when we look at Lewis's late fiction), and for Gąsiorek

(Weller also includes Edwards in this assembly), the “postmodern” Lewis is not an artist without belief, but an artist who refuses the aesthetic promises of modernism to capture buried truth, to record, in forms that are ultimately redemptive, the inner workings of mind and heart. I take some issue with Weller here: I believe both Gąsiorek and Edwards are drawn back toward depths and away from sheer surfaces and simulacra as they lead us toward a final phase of Lewis’s work characterized by a highly idiosyncratic Christianity and a profound, even theological recognition and understanding of Others. These two critics are to be distinguished from some even more recent Lewis critics with whom I will conclude this essay.

Weller shows us ways that Lewis continues to remain important for twenty-first-century critics and theorists. Rebecca Beasley, in her essay on Lewis in the *Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* (2007), also concerned with the subject of fascism in Lewis, makes the more general point that, while Lewis is getting more attention these days than he did for many years in the preceding century, much of that attention comes in the form of attacks and critique. She points out that Lewis returned to the notice of the American Academy in the last two decades of the twentieth century, as critics were looking for writers whose work directly and provocatively addressed matters of political, social, and historical interest. Lewis’s writings, reissued by Black Sparrow Press throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, “were rediscovered as emphatically engaged works, which yet also displayed the commitment to formal experiment that is characteristic of modernist fiction” (Beasley, “Lewis and Modernist Satire,” 127). But the particulars of that engagement lead also to the irony that “Lewis has been represented most consistently as a major modernist figure in criticism that is explicitly antagonistic to modernism” (Beasley, “Lewis and Modernist Satire,” 128). The press, the public, and academics who are unfamiliar with the range of Lewis’s work know one thing about him, if they know anything at all: he is, to use that phrase Jameson chooses as his monograph’s subtitle, “the modernist as fascist.” Announcing a proposed (but not yet realized) reissue of *The Human Age* by Oneworld Publications in 2008, *The Guardian* offered this lede: “The one-time Nazi sympathizer Wyndham Lewis is about to undergo a literary rehabilitation, more than 50 years after his death”—the sentence’s opening phrase ensuring that whatever rehabilitation comes to him will remain only partial.¹⁴ In the same year, *The Telegraph* carried a review of Lewis’s work then on show at the National Portrait Gallery—“a monster—and a master of portrait painting” is its subtitle—with an even more incendiary opening: “Fascistic, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, overweeningly arrogant and personally vicious: you can be all these things and still be a great artist.”¹⁵ The execrable, sensationalist BBC film on Lewis in the “British Masters” series shaped and narrated by art historian James Fox in 2011 illustrates, in its melodramatic opening narrative, how readily Lewis can be used to bring inquiry to a boil.

The angry complements to these slurs come from “The Enemy’s” defenders (Lewis’s critics, pro and con, can seem as though they have been bound together in reciprocal antagonism like Hanp and Arghol in *Enemy of the Stars* [1914], arrayed in martial opposition by the very extremity of the dualisms that characterize every aspect of Lewis’s art and thought). Alan Munton, one of the most committed of Lewis’s proponents, opens his 1997 survey of the field with dismay: “Wyndham Lewis criticism is in crisis” (“Imputing Noxiousness,” 5). Diagnosing the failures of contemporary readings, Munton discovers “paranoid psychosis” in Lewis’s critics, notes that “Lewis’s texts have been mutilated,” and concludes his hot-tempered evaluation by issuing “an invitation to these aggressor critics to examine their own aggressivity” (“Imputing Noxiousness,” 18). The website of the Wyndham Lewis Society, edited by

Melania Terrazas and Munton, is characterized throughout by a similar, often belligerent defensiveness—defenses rendered necessary, the site’s principal contributors clearly believe, by the errors and inaccuracies, the attacks, the perverse misunderstandings of so many who have read Lewis wrong, who do not comprehend his art, who use him for their own questionable ends. Munton’s list of “TEN THINGS you THOUGHT you knew about WYNDHAM LEWIS” is central to the site and points readers to the blog that has superseded the site, “Satire Interactive,” whose acerbic tone and corrective purposes are similar to its parent site.¹⁶ Sounding a good deal like Lewis himself, speaking for a besieged community, Munton responds to a review in *The Guardian* of the “Vorticism” show at the Tate Gallery in 2011: “It is difficult to see how proper intellectual debate can take place in this country when writing of this kind is published, apparently without any sense that it is worthless” (“Wrong Kind of Raine,” 3). Lewis’s most ardent supporters do not always serve his own reputation well, due to either intemperate attacks or what looks like evasion. The existence of the special Wyndham Lewis issue of *Modernism / modernity* (4(2) [April 1997]), is itself a sign that Lewis was, as Beasley argues, becoming newly important in the academy. The chronology that opens the issue gives this two-line summary of Lewis’s political writing of the 1930s, one that is so truncated—so sparing of details that it seems disingenuous:

1930: Visits Berlin, and on his return publishes articles on Hitler in *Time and Tide*.

...

March 1939: *The Jews: Are They Human?*, which attacks anti-Semitism and advocates admission of Jewish refugees into the British Empire, is published.¹⁷

The issue itself, however, with strong essays by Hal Foster, Paul Peppis, Lisa Tickner, Vincent Sherry, and Jessica Burstein as well as a newly edited selection of Lewis’s own writings, is not only unusually coherent for an edited assembly of articles. It also serves as a marker of what will continue to be, I believe, a newly productive period of studying Lewis’s writing and his work as an artist. The essays all might be said to revolve around what Burstein calls—in an extremely useful critical formulation—Lewis’s “cold modernism.” I shall discuss this concept and its significance to the future of Lewis studies in greater detail toward the end of this essay, but it is worth noting here that this important special issue of the preeminent journal in the field, with the articles’ focus on prosthetic, post–Great War bodies (with references throughout the issue to fascism and technologically enhanced bodies), modern machines and mechanized humanity, Vorticism, the performative self, the comedies of the automaton-body, sets a new stage for analyses of (and debates about) Lewis’s significance. Burstein describes the shift in the object of study:

In Lewis’s cold modernism, the permutations of available characteristics—race, sex, nationalism—are radically rescripted. Identity and identitarianism—being a particular citizen of a particular country—just don’t work. They are both secondary concerns beside a methodology lodged between satire on the one hand and the modernist commitment to exploring the relationship between a sign and its referent, a name and its subject, on the other. According to cold modernism, you start at the outside, where resonance, be it psychological, narrative, or ideological, dissipates. To probe any deeper is to ask an automaton how it feels.... (Burstein, “Waspish Segments,” 152)

But before we dwell further on this Lewis of the twenty-first century, this Lewis who, in some respects, because he is interested in surfaces, not selves, may dodge some of the moral questions vexing his most controversial work simply by being “outside” the uncomfortable sociopolitical resonances that attend the bloody history of all-too-human affairs, we should turn to the most important, most wide-ranging of Lewis’s contemporary critics. Paul Edwards achieved, in his magisterial *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000), a study equally at home with Lewis’s visual art and with his writing, spanning the entire career of this extraordinarily productive artist. Written in compelling, lucid prose, graced with high-quality, large-format reproductions of the paintings and drawings, making connections to Lewis’s life that turn the book at times into a critical biography (though Edwards is primarily an interpreter of his subject’s art), this book will remain the foundation for future studies of Lewis, whatever directions those studies follow. Edwards is Lewis’s most important critic since Kenner, whose early work on Lewis in many ways set the course for Lewis’s reception from the mid-1950s and for the rest of the twentieth century. It becomes quite clear now, if we reread both Kenner’s work and the literary and cultural criticism of Lewis himself, how much Kenner’s hugely influential understanding of Anglo-American modernism marked a continuation and elaboration of principles and ideas laid down by Lewis. Kenner gave us Lewis the brilliant nihilist, the “necessary antidote to everything, from Freud and Lawrence to the cults which have surrounded Eliot and Joyce” (Kenner, *Lewis*, xv), the critic who sees into the empty heart of modernity’s pretensions to mastery:

Afoot in the void, his savagely energetic intelligence hunting down chimerical images of itself not only enacts in a dream-play the suicide of the West, but demonstrates the ubiquity of the illusions into which more fortunate intelligences have from time to time barely succeeded in not being betrayed. (Kenner, *Lewis*, xiv)

And it is possible to trace a line directly from this man of the void to Burstein’s cold modernist.

Edwards, too, acknowledges the aspect of Lewis that believes very deeply in Nothing. This is the artist whose work’s

fierce scepticism seems to undermine all grounds of value, all attempts to find a “grand narrative” in nature or in our technological extensions and substitutions for it. In particular, it rejects and satirises other “Modernist” attempts to locate in some deep psychological interior a redemptive nugget of authenticity.... This is the side of Lewis’s work that provokes an almost physiological response of fascinated wonder or shuddering distaste. (Edwards, *Lewis*, 4)

But Edwards also finds another Lewis—eclipsed, for much of his career between the wars, by the polemicist who was his society’s scourge—a man wounded by the brutality of his time who nevertheless reveals a “Romantic” antidote to the dehumanizations of the technologically enhanced, lethal conditions of modernity. This humane Lewis

accepts absolutely the Romantic presupposition that value is real, that there is a “grand narrative” or ultimate coherence, and that “style,” or the aesthetic, is actually an echo (necessarily relative and partial) in the human imagination of the valuations of a transcendent

Absolute.... Lewis's work explores, bemoans and celebrates the paradox of the contradictory condition of humanity between these two possibilities. (Edwards, *Lewis*, 5)

For Burstein and other "posthumanist" Lewis critics, the First World War becomes an occasion for the advent of the new, cold Lewis; for Edwards, who reads Lewis along lines that are somewhat more biographical, the cataclysm of the war is what Lewis fights against as a doomed Romantic. It is the intensity of Lewis's antiwar sentiments, Edwards argues, that drives him into his unfortunate work of the 1930s (Edwards, *Lewis*, 5).

"Evidently," Edwards acknowledges, "Lewis's hatred of war went beyond all reasonable bounds" (*Lewis*, 383) (thus his polemical work from 1926 forward), but the story Edwards tells in his prodigious book is one of Lewis working through that hatred (and recovering from his own war trauma).¹⁸ In the last phase of his art, from roughly 1937 until his death in 1957, his work reveals a "new humanity" and moves toward "a recognition of human otherness" (Edwards, *Lewis*, 525, 457). This artist and promoter of the arts learns to renounce his "modernist *hubris*"—the terribly mistaken belief that it is his task (and that he has the ability) to "justify the world aesthetically" (Edwards, *Lewis*, 5). Edwards gives us a late Lewis who might almost be a soul mate to the Eliot of *Four Quartets*:

The drama then arises from Lewis's reluctance (gradually overcome in the course of his life) to recognise that the world reveals God's valuation of it not only through aesthetic representation, but also simply through life itself, through incarnation. Ultimately, the drama implicit in Lewis's work is always religious, and the religious, now and then, breaks through the surface to become its explicit subject. (Edwards, *Lewis*, 5)¹⁹

This hopeful, wholehearted, generous embrace of the world beyond art that dawns upon Lewis once he has given up his reformer's compulsion to reshape that world according to his avant-garde visions is perhaps something we glimpse in Lewis's late paintings (about which Edwards writes with notable power), but I find it difficult to discover in Lewis's three most important late fictions or the latter two volumes of what Jameson calls his "theological science fiction" (*Fables of Aggression*, 6), *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*. Like Gąsiorek, Edwards brilliantly illuminates Lewis's difficult texts but tends to move, especially in his conclusions, toward a Lewis I could wish were more evident in the pages of his own late writings—a man more tentative, more other-directed, kinder to his female characters, less bitter, more forgiving than the author I find in sentence after sentence.

If there is one aspect of Lewis's work about which critics—pro and anti—tend to agree, one bit of comparatively uncontested ground on which many of them meet, it is Lewis's late fictions. These three novels, *The Revenge for Love* (1937), *The Vulgar Streak* (1941), and *Self Condemned* (1954), are the location of defenses mounted for Lewis's humanity, the place where his recantation of Hitler and Nazism, first articulated in *The Hitler Cult*, becomes manifest in complex and believable form, the texts in which Lewis saves himself by allowing his polemical compulsions and his satirist's certainties to fall away. As Sherry phrases it: "Triumph manqué, his great success in these conventional efforts turns on the defeat of his own aesthetic philosophy, and Lewis masters that failure with somber gusto" (*Radical Modernism*, 128). "That Lewis controlled the demise of his earlier ideals," Sherry writes in the Epilogue to his study of

Lewis and Pound, “marks his main point of difference from Pound.... That history will betray *clerics* who intrude into politics is a truth Lewis grasped with masterful despair in the thirties—its recognition perhaps the best influence the Enemy could have exerted on his old friend” (*Radical Modernism*, 196). These fictions, less experimental than his earlier work, are where we may find Lewis welcoming Others into his world, conveying a newly profound understanding of women, eschewing his fatal attractions to belief in anything political. “The most well-known presentation of this new, humanist Lewis,” I write in my chapter on Lewis in *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature*, “is Jameson’s stirring, celebratory conclusion to *Fables of Aggression*, which leaves us with a profoundly romantic description of Percy Hardcaster’s ‘sudden tear’ at the end of *The Revenge for Love*” (*Mortality and Form*, 168). *Self Condemned*, Robert Chapman argues, is “one of the most powerful tragic novels of our time” (*Fictions and Satires*, 153–169). Foshay celebrates *Revenge for Love* (“his best novel” [*Lewis and the Avant-Garde*, 79]) as a synthesis of “his prewar interior and artistic concerns and his postwar exterior and political concerns, achieving a certain reconciliation of his static dualism in a more dynamic and dialectical theory of art” (*Lewis and the Avant-Garde*, 108). In *Self Condemned*, Foshay believes, Lewis “joins the autobiographer to the philosopher-novelist” and “successfully engages a fictional talent that ... had lain largely fallow for fifteen years” (*Lewis and the Avant-Garde*, 132). Timothy Materer argues that Lewis is able to realize a genuinely profound “tragic vision” in his “greatest novel, *Self Condemned*” (*Lewis the Novelist*, 133). Miranda Hickman, in “Casualties of the Vortex,” presents a powerful argument for the humanity in *Self Condemned*, concluding that “by presenting a chillingly critical view of its central character, René Harding, in the novel’s final episodes, Lewis reaches further than René does into a zone of contrition” (“Casualties,” 217).

Many of the admirers of this fiction discover a source of its power in the cataclysm of the Second World War. As Materer puts it:

World War II brought Lewis’s disgust with his era nearly to a despairing pitch. In *The Vulgar Streak* and *Self Condemned* a paradoxical fear of and fascination with violence characterizes his protagonists. Lewis’s characters break under the strain of these antagonistic feelings.... Through their agonies ... we sense Lewis’s involvement in his characters’ fates as never before. (*Lewis the Novelist*, 134)

Materer makes a convincing comparison between *Self Condemned* and the roughly contemporary *Pisan Cantos* (Sherry is not the only critic to bring Pound and Lewis into fruitful conjunction): Pound’s later cantos constitute a similarly complex monument to the intertwined failures of his ideals and of modern culture (*Lewis the Novelist*, 140). Edwards traces Lewis’s surprising, late success directly to the spectacular failures that precede the last fictions:

Unexpectedly, then, at this moment of political desperation, his art could become in some way less anxiously engaged with the frustration of its own deferred ambitions, since they were now definitely frustrated, and become more playful and imaginative. Fiction no longer had to fulfil the Modernist ambition of critically projecting a monumental anatomy of a whole civilisation. (*Lewis*, 392)

In *Mortality and Form*, I take issue with these arguments for Lewis's convincingly realized, tragic late fictions and with the positive, even redemptive narratives built on this idea of his turn toward Others. (I cannot help recalling the dry comedy of Kenner's perfectly qualified description of what motivates this almost-new Lewis: these novels come "out of a sort of act of belief in the existence of other people" [Lewis, 121].) I believe that central to Lewis's late fiction are, indeed, questions about the status and reality of others, the foundations of belief, the possibilities of love, the imagined anguish of loss. But as one reads these three novels closely, attending to matters of diction, style, dialogue, character description—those fundamental aspects of the novel that are basic to our experience of reading—it is difficult to stay convinced of the worlds these books are trying to create. Many (though not all) of the pages of each of these three novels fail according to the terms laid down by Lewis's critics (and aspired to by Lewis, it would seem from his correspondence about these new fictions as well as material within the novels themselves): that the fictions are tragic, the characters realized, the women no longer only sexualized bodies or victims-in-the-making (or both), the conversations plausible, the main characters complex enough to command our sympathy. These problems of fiction-making become, for me, the central subject of these late texts.

Each of Lewis's readers, of course, will have to try the claims for an essentially post-satirical Lewis on his or her own pulse, bringing those claims to the testing-ground of the novels. The existing criticism suggests that our estimation of the moral and psychological complexities of these novels will have a direct bearing on how fully we believe Lewis's reputation recovers from *Hitler* and its sequels,²⁰ how much we might grant that in the last phase of Lewis's work women become something other than "purely erotic objects" (Parker, "Enemies of the Absolute," 221),²¹ how willing we might be to allow *The Enemy* to turn from satirist and scourge to an artist whose contributions are also constructive.

Unlikely to have such direct bearing on Lewis's reputation, at least for a good many years to come, is the strangest collection of texts he wrote: his theologically inflected, dystopian allegory, *The Human Age*, consisting of *The Childermass* (published in 1928), *Monstre Gai*, and *Malign Fiesta* (published in 1955; a fourth volume, *The Trial of Man* was planned but unwritten at the time of Lewis's death in 1957).²² Because of its length, its (perhaps not even fully worked out) allegorical difficulty, its confusing generic status (what *are* these books?), its gratuitous violence, its baffling collection of characters moving about in a world whose shape and details remain inconsistently and disconcertingly both familiar and alien, this is a collection of texts that the vast majority of readers will never start and even fewer will finish. *The Human Age*, however, is already the subject of some impressive critical attention, and the very resistances that it offers to readers are likely to provoke further criticism.

The "Retrospect" on this project offered by D. G. Bridson, the BBC producer who worked with Lewis on the production of the multipart broadcast of Lewis's narrative ("some four and a half hours of listening" [Bridson, "Retrospect," 240]) gives us a moving portrait of the artist near the end of his life and at the end of his era, too.²³ Lewis was blind, by this point, from the brain tumor that would take his life two years later, living a fairly isolated life, and he was also in considerable financial difficulties. "It was written," Bridson summarizes, "when almost all that he had stood for in his lifetime seemed to have been proved wrong" ("Retrospect," 248). Bridson's essay offers a usefully down-to-earth summary of this otherworldly

assembly of characters and events. He advises us that “we should be wrong, of course, to regard *The Human Age* as a coherent trilogy, for that it clearly is not” (“Retrospect,” 244). Lewis is “reversing the order of the *Divina Commedia*” (“Retrospect,” 244) in the second and third volumes, Bridson explains, moving his characters from Purgatory to an Inferno, from a satirist’s facsimile of the postwar British welfare state (in *Monstre Gai*) to a hellish “Punishment Center” (in *Malign Fiesta*) where tortures and exterminations dominate. Paraphrase and summary and theoretical analyses cannot do justice to the baroque violence of this third volume.

Reading other writers on this misshapen assembly, however, is interesting, sometimes because of the challenges this late work offers to critics who argue for the redemptive aspects of *The Human Age*. Writing of *The Childermass*, Schenker argues that the book “presents such a horrific picture of the world as to throw us back upon our intuitive sense of the sacredness of life” (*Religion and Modernism*, 258). Schenker notes changes between the broadcast and the published versions of *Malign Fiesta* (the work was broadcast in May and published in October 1955). Pullman is accidentally squashed by a satanic angel in the broadcast; in the published version, the clumsy foot just misses Pullman: a “peony vanished beneath this awful tread” (*Malign Fiesta*, 562). Schenker quotes a letter Lewis wrote to Kenner about “the hero, Pullman” in August of this year: “He favours the Divine. I favour the Divine” (*Letters*, 562) and argues “Lewis apparently came to feel a certain pity for man and concluded that he deserved to inhabit something better than the debased ‘Human Age’ the Devil was in the process of establishing” (*Religion and Modernism*, 183). We are left, then, mired in Lewis’s *Malign Fiesta*, but had he lived longer he had plans to rescue his hero and his readers from the horrors he imagined in such disturbing detail.

Gąsiorek regrets, in his “Introduction” to *Lewis and Modernism* that he has not had “space to consider *The Childermass*” (7), though it is difficult to see how such a consideration would have allowed him to sustain his argument that Lewis moved toward a modernity that would recognize Others as “partners in dialogue” (130). Focusing only on *The Childermass*, though, as Munton does in a strong essay on that first volume of the trilogy, allows for a much more positive reading than if one includes the latter two volumes in the collection. Munton urges our admiration of the principles that underlie this first part of *The Human Age*:

By his satire Lewis hoped to release the western democracies from a form of control which he deplored; once released, a period of cultural regeneration would follow. Absurd as this ambition now appears, Lewis wished intellectuals to have a prominent and influential place in society, and regarded his own critical writings as an active intervention in culture and politics. It was, in the 1920s, an honourable delusion.... Within three years of *The Childermass* Lewis had written *Hitler*; this and the inept political books that followed exploded his claim to detachment and a sense of political realities. (Munton, “*Childermass*,” 129, 132)

The postwar volumes prove much more difficult to describe in such essentially hopeful terms. Though he strongly objects to this reading, Edwards admits that it is easy to understand the violence of *Malign Fiesta* as “the expression of a core of sadism and misanthropy that Lewis’s failing mind, overcome by the tumour that was destroying his brain, could no longer keep under control” (*Lewis*, 538). For Edwards, the tortures are symptoms of Lewis’s anger at the Nazis, “International Capital,” usurers, and others who belong in this

updated Hell: “Lewis is juxtaposing the traditional, medieval version of Christianity [i.e., sinners tortured by Satan] with the world of twentieth-century ‘civilised’ savagery, as practiced during the Second World War in particular. The personnel is chosen by the same mixture of personal grudge supported by doctrinal principle as in Dante’s *Inferno*” (Lewis, 540). Dasenbrock, who traces the autobiographical roots of *The Human Age* (*Literary Vorticism*, 184–185), explains the ferocity of Lewis’s allegory not by reference to medieval Christianity but by the conditions of the mid-twentieth century: “Lewis’s recoil from totalitarianism and from the totalitarian elements in his own earlier thinking does not lead him towards any relaxed acceptance of the realities of Western democracies or of man as Lewis finds him in the twentieth century” (*Literary Vorticism*, 185). But Dasenbrock’s argument that “Hell is power and the exercise of power, and ... the only source of this opposition to power is divine” (*Literary Vorticism*, 186) leads him into a biographically moving but theologically unconvincing argument that Lewis is “poaching in Eliot’s territory” and that *Four Quartets* is comparable in its lessons to those that Lewis would teach in *Malign Fiesta*: “Just as Lewis preceded and influenced Eliot in his development of a modernist aesthetic, Eliot in turn preceded and influenced Lewis in his shift towards an explicitly theological aesthetic. After this turn, a theological vision of man replaces a satiric version of man in Lewis’s work just as it had in Eliot” (*Literary Vorticism*, 188). I find this “turn” even more difficult to discern in the actual texts of Lewis’s trilogy than I do the related “turn” he is said to make in his fictions of the 1930s. Dasenbrock himself appropriately registers his own doubts in the following paragraph: “We may be inclined to wonder whether Lewis tilted quite as decisively to the Divine as my account thus far has suggested” (*Literary Vorticism*, 189).

Two somewhat more recent readings that are more narrowly focused and less concerned with defending the project of the whole, whatever that project might be, are by Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism’s Other Work: the Art Object’s Political Life* (2012), and Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (2005). Siraganian dwells largely on *The Childermass* and reads the allegory as “art theory dramatized” (*Modernism’s Other Work*, 52). This first book of the *Human Age* is “a cautionary satire of a modern world dominated by time-philosophy” (*Modernism’s Other Work*, 63): it shows us how aesthetic, political, symbolic representation becomes incoherent if representative forms relinquish their distance from the observer and welcome the spectator to mar their formal perfection by participation. Because she spends comparatively little time dwelling on details of the text itself, Siraganian’s writing about *The Childermass* is more coherent than Lewis’s book, though she is persuasive in her interpretation, and she astutely connects Lewis with one of his archenemies, Gertrude Stein (as I also note in my chapter on Lewis in *Mortality and Form*, Stein and Lewis are remarkably similar in crucial aspects of their aesthetic theories).

Approaching *The Human Age* from the standpoint of political rather than aesthetic theory, Nicholas Brown’s *Utopian Generations* provides an especially convincing discussion of the allegorical terrain of the trilogy in terms that are sociopolitical and economic: the works stage confrontations between “proto-fascism” and “gangster capitalism,” briefly complicated by “the forces of religion and communism.” Capitalism, “embodied in Satan himself” wins out, but Satan’s defeat was to have occurred in the planned fourth volume of this dystopian comedy (*Utopian Generations*, 135). Like Siraganian, Brown devotes comparatively little space to detailed readings of *The Human Age*, which also gives his chapter on Lewis the corresponding virtue of clarity. And he proves refreshingly willing to sum up his subject with a

praising but critical eye.

Lewis is best served, I think, by critics who allow him his flaws while acknowledging his genius, rather than promoting him with defenses he cannot sustain. Materer's still crucial study of the novels (it was published in 1976) remains a perfect example of this judicious treatment. His biographical assertion that "[n]othing in the postwar years mitigated Lewis's despair over the unreasoning violence of his era" provides a context for much of the horror in *The Human Age*, but Materer also insists that the "fantasy world" of the trilogy itself was not able to express Lewis's sense of civilization's ruin and loss or provide forms of redemption (*Lewis the Novelist*, 152). Lewis is not an idiosyncratic, late-blooming Christian, and he is not writing a companion piece to *Four Quartets*: "Novelist, philosopher, and painter, Lewis was a Renaissance man without a culture vital enough to support the fulfillment of his talents" (*Lewis the Novelist*, 166). The extraordinary set-pieces scattered throughout *The Human Age* (and Materer singles some of them out for discussion) "are not integrated into a coherent vision of the afterlife. Lewis's powers of execution do not match his conceptions" (*Lewis the Novelist*, 158). And Materer then offers one of the most concise and insightful analyses of Lewis's writing that I know—a "measur[ing] of Lewis's achievement" of a kind that is no longer fashionable in criticism but that should be read in its entirety (rather than only in the brief extract I quote here):

On the narrative level, a related problem is that Lewis's satire can descend into denunciation ... and his tragedy into melodrama.... The violence of Lewis's art thus accounts both for its steady power and its intermittent weaknesses. His prose sometimes leaves his fictional world devastated rather than artistically molded. (*Lewis the Novelist*, 163, 165–166)

Materer appropriately holds up a great deal of Lewis's writing for celebration, and the last sentence of his book on Lewis's fiction strikes a balance that does justice to this furious and incisive body of work: "Lewis's life and works seem designed to mirror the era of violence. If he sometimes stands before the mirror, obscuring some areas of human experience with his aggressive presence, the surrounding image is no less sharp" (*Lewis the Novelist*, 167).

As moving and as important and as just as this estimation is, I believe that the future of Lewis studies lies at a vast distance from such judgments of a life's work, rooted in historical knowledge and comparative estimations of how Lewis and his contemporaries met the challenges of their time. I have already introduced Burstein's *Cold Modernism* and the kinds of reading enabled by her approach to Lewis's work—an approach, as I also noted, that suits Lewis's austere, anti-psychological aesthetic perfectly and that Kenner anticipated in his work on Lewis from the 1950s. In this hyperborean territory, aspects of Lewis that we might find morally disturbing become theoretically intriguing. Questions of character development, whether the late fictions are genuinely "tragic," and whether Lewis can be shown, finally, to exhibit some degree of empathy and altruism (to believe in other people or in God) seem beside the point. Fascism itself may start to seem fascinating in performance-theory or gender studies terms and less like an actual political movement, dominant in a particular time and place, resulting in the deaths of many millions of human beings. "There are no laments in cold modernism," Burstein writes, "for there are no characters who would conceive of themselves as subjects. Insofar as cold modernism engages a world without selves or

psychology, it is not antihumanism, but ahumanism” (*Cold Modernism*, 2).

This enormous distance from the world may itself be considered in terms provided by contemporary theory. Trevor Brent, in his article from 2008, “Keeping Up Appearances: Reality and Belief in Wyndham Lewis’s *Time and Western Man* and *The Revenge for Love*,” uses Žižek, “in particular his elaboration of Jacques Lacan’s notion of ‘the Real,’ to explore and elucidate some of the problems of reality in Lewis’s work” (470). Brent’s essay deploys ideas about “the real” not so much in historical or moral terms but in ways that show us a new approach to Lewis’s fiction: “Lewis did not see ‘the Real’ as ‘ultimately inaccessible’ but as dangerously close and unsurvivable, and *The Revenge for Love* is more concerned with the ultimate unavoidability of ‘the Real’ than with its inaccessibility, and with the tragi-comic uselessness of illusions rather than their spuriousness” (“Keeping Up Appearances,” 483). *The Revenge for Love* succeeds because it preserves rather than resolves its author’s fears about going beneath any and all surfaces. Whatever “coldness” we discover in Lewis is motivated by his horror at the naked will to power that governments cloak in ideology and by his fear of the hot and ungovernable blood that courses beneath our skins. But his best fiction deliberately violates these surfaces and breaks through the “false bottoms”—to use Lewis’s general figure for that which hides all manner of fatal truths in *Revenge*. Brent proposes a formula for this periodic violation: “Lacan said that ‘what is refused in the symbolic order returns in the real’: in Lewis’s work ‘what is refused in theory returns in fiction’” (“Keeping Up Appearances,” 484).

And it is possible to use Lewis’s writing about fascism, as Andrew Hewitt shows us in *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Modernism, and the Fascist Imaginary*, not to convict Lewis of deplorable political sympathies but instead to pursue a sophisticated and deeply disturbing set of questions concerning “a recurrent conflation and / or association of homosexuality and fascism” (*Political Inversions*, 2). At its heart, Hewitt’s book is an attempt to deconstruct our culture’s terrible conflation of queerness and totalitarian politics (*Political Inversions*, 2). The Lewis that Hewitt studies is “cold” in a sense that Burstein develops in her text. For Hewitt, Lewis is one of the artists who lead modernism away from interiority and psychological exploration. Late modernism, as Hewitt understands it, is not characterized simply by a retreat from formal experimentation but is more accurately described as a turn toward masks and simulacra: “the project of literary modernity is curtailed not by a reactionary return to representation, but rather by a more radical shift into the politics, the aesthetics, the sexual practices of performativity” (*Political Inversions*, 173). In his *Hitler* and some of his other politically reactionary writings, Lewis ironically undercuts whatever traditional ideas about gender he might be expected to propound, because his writing is consistently “dependent on a certain ‘homosexualized,’ or performative, notion of masculinity” (*Political Inversions*, 173). As Lewis presents it, Nazism comes to have a camp, ludic quality to it (which is, of course, the case with so much that falls into the comic-absurd machinery of Lewis’s art), so that we come to understand Nazism as “the performance of a representation” (*Political Inversions*, 180). Hewitt reminds himself and his readers, as he moves farther and farther away from the actual dead and the events that demonstrably took place in the 1930s and 1940s (and continue to occur under neo-Nazi banners today): “The aristocratic (homosexual) fascism suggested by Lewis should not be mistaken for fascism’s empirical historical instantiation” (*Political Inversions*, 194). And yet, in an interpretive leap that is part absurd, part perfectly diagnostic, part performative itself, Hewitt insists on “Lewis’s all-but-explicit assertion: that Nazism is a mode of transvestism freed from all belief in gender as / or essence; that

Germany is a country in drag” (*Political Inversions*, 182).

We have returned, again, to the still-consequential, still-out-of-print *Hitler* and to one chapter of that increasingly famous (if hidden) book in particular—a chapter that has not been read (and can scarcely be read) by anyone but a handful of Lewis critics: “The Berlin ‘Eldorado,’” in which Lewis, serving as a sardonic guide for the “anglo-saxon reader,” leads us into a nightclub where we discover a transvestite (*Hitler*, 23). The chapter forms a centerpiece of Burstein’s Lewis chapter (and is also important to Hewitt, to Ferrall, and to my work on Lewis). With the clearly stated proviso that she is indulging in a bit of useful fiction-making, Burstein explores “the fascism-modernism nexus” (66), not in the “ideological or pathological” vein that Lewis’s earlier readers worked but as an instance of a quintessentially modern fabrication.²⁴ Lewis the satirist gleefully displays the manufactured sexualized body of this man who has chosen to play a woman, and Burstein calls us to compare “[t]he fascist body[, which] is a construct: fabricated, renovated, and consisting of extensions and projections” (*Cold Modernism*, 65). Though I believe that Burstein underestimates Lewis’s dismay at this womanly man (fascinated though he is by the artifice and deception in the encounter), she astutely chooses Lewis as her “first course” (*Cold Modernism*, 36) in her presentation of “cold modernists.” Lewis has posthumously found a theoretical matrix that suits his temper: “I am not an anatomist,” he told us in his first autobiography; he is nauseated by “Gothic skeletons or surrealist guts.... And what applies to the body applies likewise to the mind Give me the surface of the mind, as well. Give me the *outside* of all things. I am a fanatic for the externality of things. Their *ah-ness* gives them too sickly a beauty” (*Blasting and Bombardiering*, 9).

In our twenty-first-century moment, this ahumanist, “cold” Lewis is, I believe, on the cusp of a new (textual) life, or at least a new season of attention from the academy. The time is propitious. Our (Western, First World) academy carries us into the latest “post”: posthumanism.²⁵ We practice surface reading; we work with digital texts and consider the changes those texts may bring to our experience with what were once called books, only the backward-looking among us proposing reading deeply, in silence and slow time. We have come to understand our own bodies as bio-technological hybrids, more deeply, intimately modifiable than we would have imagined even a decade or two ago.²⁶ Philosophical musings and applications of technology move us closer and closer to forms of artificial intelligence, encounters with cyborgs, dreams of the singularity, dismissals of old-fashioned ideas concerning agency and will. Burstein ends her chapter on Lewis with a discussion of insects and machines, “biomorphic technologies” that Futurists and Vorticists ecstatically imagined and later men and women ended up building and being (*Cold Modernism*, 93). Lewis’s comic, grotesque, incisive, deeply unsettling and sometimes objectionable art helps us to measure the importance and implications of books that might seem worlds apart from one another—like Sharon Cameron’s *Impersonality*, and William Mitchell’s *Me++*—and more than half the movies and games we watch and play, and drones and web crawlers, and even, as Alan Weisman and many others have proposed, the environment we are busily making for life on earth (or Eearth). We may ironically produce, as our final contribution to our own and other species’ undoing, *The World without Us*, as Alan Weisman describes it. Burstein uses virtually the same phrase in the conclusion to her book: “Rather than gesturing toward the mind’s secrets, or the furtive appearance of meaning, cold modernism confronts us with a world complete without us” (*Cold Modernism*, 258). In 1937 Lewis famously described his small band of artist-compatriots from before the Great War as “*the first men of a Future that*

has not materialized,” adding “We moved too quickly for the world” (*Blasting and Bombardiering*, 256). We may be just catching up with an avant-garde that Lewis believed the First World War had destroyed forever. Studying Lewis and his critics will help us understand what joining that company may mean, how it may look and—if the verb itself is not outmoded—feel.

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Wyndham Lewis Website. Edited by Melania Terrazas and Alan Munton. Webmaster: Almudena

Fernández Fontecha. <http://www.unirioja.es/wyndhamlewis/htm/welcome.htm>.

Notes:

(¹) Carroll Terrell: <http://www.dwildepress.net/critica/terrell.html>; National Poetry Foundation: <http://www.nationalpoetryfoundation.org/about-us/>.

(²) New Aryan Order: <http://www.theneworder.org/>.

(³) Lewis speaks here of his “non-fiction books” as the series of polemics from the late 1920s and afterward, omitting mention of the nonfictional *Caliph’s Design* (1919), which is different in focus and import from the more politically engaged later nonfiction. *The Caliph’s Design* announces its polemical-aesthetic agenda immediately in its subtitle: “Architects! Where Is Your Vortex?”

(⁴) Tyrus Miller subscribes to this division in his *Late Modernism*, the post-1926 activity following the “post-war” period (*Late Modernism*, 69).

(⁵) The one exception is *Left Wings over Europe*, which was printed first in June 1936 (1,500 copies) and then reprinted in August 1936 (Morrow and Lafourcade, *Bibliography*, 80).

(⁶) Vincent Sherry’s *Radical Modernism*, from which I quote elsewhere in this essay, is an essential study not only for understanding Lewis’s work, but also for placing the particular modernisms of Pound and Lewis in conjunction.

(⁷) In his “Introduction” to *Lewis and Modern War* (3–4), Corbett takes Jameson appropriately to task for his reading of Lewis (and, in particular, Lewis’s anti-Semitism) in *Fables of Aggression*. Corbett also finds fault with David Ayers (in his *Wyndham Lewis and the Modernists*) for a similar “decoupling of the imputed ‘aggressivity’ and violence in his texts from their formation in history” (5).

(⁸) The most useful biographies of Lewis—though none has readings of his art or his writing that come close to those in Edwards’s *Lewis*—are by Paul O’Keeffe and Jeffrey Meyers.

(⁹) Lewis takes on the persona of “The Enemy” starting around 1912. It applies first to his quarrels with Roger Fry, the Omega Workshops, and post-impressionism as Fry codified and exhibited it in London. Lewis later becomes “The Enemy” to the “Bloomsburies” more generally (Meyers, *Enemy*, 34–35 and chap. 4). Lewis founded the Rebel Art Centre in early 1914 (Meyers, *Enemy*, 51); the journal he edited (and supplied a great deal of material for) called *The Enemy* began in 1927; its third and last issue came out in 1929 (Meyers, *Enemy*, 135, 211; see also Morrow and Lafourcade, *Bibliography*, 207–211). *The Enemy* has been reprinted in editions edited by Corbett.

(¹⁰) Lewis expresses this disproportionate power of puppets and simulacra often in his later work (see, for example, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 16–17; *Rude Assignment*, 73). *The Revenge for Love* and *The Vulgar Streak* both depend on this irony at the level of plot.

(¹¹) See Edwards on the missed opportunities, throughout the 1930s, for Lewis’s recanting his admiration

for Hitler and his politics: “It is easy to see in hindsight that Lewis’s cosmopolitanism, internationalism, anti-war obsession and fundamental scepticism about ‘utopias’ all had the potential to overturn this sympathy and replace it with critical rejection.... Nevertheless, he did not write a word in criticism of Nazi Germany until late 1937, when he made his final visit there” (Lewis, 387).

(¹²) Edwards finds the tone of *The Hitler Cult* more successful than I do: “Retraction though it is, its tone is not penitent, but surprisingly playful and engaging: those qualities of wit and imagination that had turned sour in much of Lewis’s polemical writing in the thirties are here refreshed, and he writes like someone relieved of a burden, pleased at last to be able to be rude about Hitler” (Edwards, Lewis, 479). I am more taken with Ferrall’s evaluation that the structure of argument Lewis turns against Hitler is unchanged from his earlier arguments in *Hitler*: “there is a sense in which Lewis’s anti-fascism repeats the Nazi’s antisemitism”—since Lewis insists on the racial inferiority of Hitler (his “smallness,” in particular) (*Reactionary Politics*, 153). Ferrall adds that “If his ‘chronic oppositionalism,’ to use Jameson’s phrase, originally drew him towards Hitler it also ensured that he would become a vociferous anti-fascist. As Arghol says, ‘Anything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is’—including fascists” (*Reactionary Politics*, 156).

(¹³) Published by Twayne Publishers in 1968, the volume is one of the best in the “Twayne’s English Authors Series”—a collection of mostly undistinguished, very basic introductions. That a critic of Pritchard’s caliber published his book in this series suggests something about the market for single-author studies of Lewis, at least in the late 1960s.

(¹⁴) *The Guardian*, “Lewis Comes Back into Favor,” August 19, 2008. In 2013, Oxford University Press announced plans to publish a complete scholarly edition of Lewis’s work.

(¹⁵) *The Telegraph*, “Lewis a Monster,” July 8, 2008. Lewis show at the National Portrait Gallery, May 9, 2008: <http://www.npg.org.uk/about/press/wyndham-lewis.php>. Characterizations of Lewis like this one may owe something to Ernest Hemingway’s famously brutal two-page attack on his character in “Ezra Pound and His Bel Esprit” from *A Moveable Feast* (1964), where Lewis is “nasty” and “like a frog” and, most terribly, has “the eyes ... of an unsuccessful rapist” (109). Fox quotes this last phrase in the opening of his BBC show on Lewis.

(¹⁶) The Society’s website is copyrighted in 2008; the tumblr blog contains postings from 2012–2014. Searching the fairly small archive of the blog yields further examples of the pugnacity of these admirers of Lewis (<http://satireinteractive.tumblr.com/archive>).

(¹⁷) Even these two lines are scarcely adequate on their own terms: Lewis wrote more than “articles” on Hitler; the summary of Lewis’s book on Jews is so simply positive that those few who can find the book for their own study are not likely to feel it is accurate to the letter or even the spirit of the text.

(¹⁸) See Edwards, “Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock,” which argues that Lewis’s postwar writing is the result of his wartime “experience [which], if not quite shellshock, is traumatic enough for him to empathize with the total disruption of ordinary values that shellshock brings about” (233). “No one else,” Edwards concludes, “has made a better or more profound use of shellshock” (“Uses of Shellshock,”

240).

(¹⁹) Daniel Schenker, in *Wyndham Lewis: Religion and Modernism* (1992), also argues for “Lewis’s eventual attachment to God,” which “seems to have caught even Lewis by surprise” (182). I discuss Schenker in more detail below.

(²⁰) Judy Suh, in *Fascism and Anti-fascism*, argues forcefully that *Revenge for Love* is by no means the text in which Lewis makes a “definitive break from his earlier far right-wing polemics” (42). Instead, Suh finds that “the novel is the work that out of Lewis’s entire fictional oeuvre most (not least) effectively illuminates his sympathy for fascism. It presents fascism, although problematic, as superior politics for modern, technologically bound humanity because it appears to forge peace and benefit women who only pose a threat to society and themselves when they demand political agency” (*Fascism and Anti-fascism*, 43).

(²¹) Parker is one of a fairly small handful of critics who attempt to argue that Lewis presents women in a positive light (Edwards argues that, in his later work, Lewis comes to see that women are an important “natural” complement to “the absolute” [Lewis, 504]). I am unconvinced by Parker’s assertion that “Lewis was not hostile to women but found it necessary to adopt this stance because he was trying to reject the ideology and structure of the English nineteenth-century novel,” though I agree with her that “[i]n later novels Lewis allowed himself to see the psychological cost of being a companion to the Enemy” (“Enemies of the Absolute,” 212, 216). It is true, too, that “Lewis gives women central roles to play” (“Enemies of the Absolute,” 212) in the later fiction, only those roles are as suicides, victims of male violence, doomed romantics, and sex objects—hardly a collection of parts that argues for any sort of parity or Lewis’s ability to conceive of women in complex and nuanced terms. See also Anne Quéma, who attempts to make Lewis a progressive interrogator of gender categories: “I will try to show that his treatment of the gender question indicates a typically modernist ambiguity concerning the traditional roles associated with gender” (*Agon of Modernism*, 20). Douglas Mao, in “A Shaman in Common,” his essay included in the important anthology *Bad Modernisms*, argues that Lewis (and Auden) are comparable in their embrace of forms of dissent—resistance to liberalism that may be seen to include queers and anthropology’s discoveries of “shamanized individuals, whether savage or modern” (“Shaman,” 229). Mao’s Lewis will be familiar to anyone who has read Lewis’s work, and Mao does not argue that Lewis finds the resistance he values available to “most modern children, homosexuals, and women” (“Shaman,” 208).

(²²) I say “unlikely” since it is possible that later critics will domesticate this collection of texts. Considering the guides to Zukofsky’s *A* or *Finnegans Wake* or *Gravity’s Rainbow*, I realize that it is a mistake to underestimate the power of the academy to make the strange more familiar and accessible.

(²³) Listening to these recordings is difficult. The only institution in the United States that has a (noncirculating) copy is Harvard University. The BBC catalogue lists *The Childermass* and *The Human Age*, but they must be listened to in the BBC reading room unless one obtains permissions for a copy.

(²⁴) Quéma, in her *Agon of Modernism*, argues for a thwarted homosexual desire at the heart of Lewis’s

work and offers what I find an ultimately unconvincing “speculative psychoanalytical interpretation of Lewis’s writings” (*Agon*, 21). But like the theoretically radical Lewis of these other critics of the last decade or so, Quéma’s Lewis is also revolutionary (even if she argues for that radicalism in psychosexual terms): “I will show that his texts display what looks like unconscious, if not repressed, homosexual strategies as a means of repudiating sociopolitical authority traditionally associated with male roles” (*Agon*, 20).

(²⁵) For a definition and brief exploration of this term, see Gillian Whitlock’s “Introduction” to the “Posthumanism” issue of *Biography*.

(²⁶) By way of illustration, consider this recent article on computer-mediated brain-to-brain communication: “The final round of experiments targeted the demonstration of online brain-to-brain transmission of information between remotely located subjects.” This was communication mediated by technology but occurring at a level of thought: “The BCI [brain-computer-interface] communication subsystem used in our experiments converted conscious voluntary motor imagery into brain activity changes that could be captured non-invasively as physical signals conveying information” (Carles Grau, et al. “Conscious Brain-to-Brain Communication”).

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