WYNDHAM LEWIS: MODERNISM AND THE NEW RADICAL RIGHT

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influential and often overlooked relationship between literary modernism and today's radical reactionary ideology, enabling scholars to better understand and critically engage the New Radical Right's metapolitical influence in today's political-cultural landscape. Focusing on the work of Wyndham Lewis, it reimagines him as an intellectual contemporary, demonstrating how his 'reactionary modernist' inclinations are paradoxically interwoven with his critiques of revolutionary utopianism, organic nationalism, and modernist absolutism. By applying Lewis's 'insider-critique' of reactionary modernism to the New Radical Right's 'alternative modernism', this study sheds new light on Lewis's original meaning and argues for an urgent re-evaluation of his political legacy.

Utilising a transhistorical method, the study analyses reactionary modernism and the New Radical Right as successive iterations of Romanticism's 'anti-enlightenment' revolt against Enlightenment values. This analysis, conducted in Part One, establishes the theoretical background for Part Two's focus on Lewis's critique of this conservative revolutionary impulse within modernism. It finds that while Lewis shared his contemporaries' yearning to transform a rationalised world through radical cultural change, his postmodern scepticism of such desires—alongside his 'neo-classical' metaphysical concerns about the relation of a radically transcendent Absolute to a limited humanity—led him to advocate for a positive rational vision: one that embraces modern individualism, celebrates universal cosmopolitanism, and upholds art over 'resacralised' politics as a religion for postmodern man. In doing so, Lewis presents a third way between postmodern nihilism and modernist absolutism.

By tracing the development of this idea across Lewis's career—particularly in his understudied post-fascist work—and analysing it in the context of the New Radical Right, this study not only challenges the reductive interpretation of Lewis as merely reactionary but also offers a significant reassessment of his relevance to contemporary affairs.

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Quotations and pictures by Wyndham Lewis in this thesis are included by kind permission of The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Context and Background

Wyndham Lewis's personality, politics and art remain shrouded in paradox. He was both an ultra-modernist and an arch-modernist, a man whom T. S. Eliot (1918, p. 106) described as possessing "the thought of the modern" and the "energy of the cave-man", mobilising in his art forces or attitudes that appear contradictory.[1] In 1914, he founded Vorticism, England's only significant contribution to the visual avant-gardes flourishing in pre-war Europe (Antliff and Greene, 2010; Sewell, 2013), and produced a series of magazines, novels, paintings, and pamphlets (including *BLAST, Tarr, The Crowd* and *The Caliph's Design*), all marking an uncompromising campaign on behalf of avant-garde modernist art.

After returning from World War One, Lewis distanced himself from the avant-garde and its utopian aspirations, criticising fellow modernists such as Marinetti and Picasso. Throughout the 1920s, he launched successive cultural, political, and metaphysical critiques of post-war culture under the persona of 'the Enemy', and in 1931, published the broadly pro-Nazi book, *Hitler*. This ill-judged and ostensibly inflammatory work sealed his reputation as a far-right reactionary and, to this day, overshadows his cultural-political achievements as a modernist pioneer. Grasping the contradictory nature of Lewis's life and work is a classic problem in Lewisian criticism. Lewis appears both 'revolutionary' and traditionalist, oscillating between a

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[1] Russell Kirk (1955, p. 527) once described Lewis as "rather an old-fashioned man, Vorticism and "The Caliph's Design" notwithstanding.

Dionysian vision of cultural transformation and an Apollonian pursuit of rational transcendence—a duality he playfully acknowledged by describing his politics as "at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order" (1929, p. 70).[2]

Although scholarship has since established Lewis's rightful place as a leader of the modernistic avant-garde,[3] his adherence to the "ancient and valuable Iranian principle of duality" (1927, p. 25) has frustrated efforts to demystify his political legacy. Some critics have dismissed Lewis's contradictions as evidence of illogicality (Pritchett, 1964),[4] sardonic self-contradictiveness (Klein, 1991), deliberate evasiveness (Feijó, 1998), "consistent perversity" (Jameson, 1979, p. 3), insincerity (Frye, 1957), or an "ironically self-defeating" nature (Tilghman, 2007, p. 5); while Foshay (1992) and Gąsiorek (2004) positively interpret these

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[2] Lewis (1917, p. 36) lived by his own maxim: 'Contradict yourself. In order to live, you must remain broken up.".

[3] "Modernism" and the 'avant-garde' are not necessarily interchangeable terms– a point made by Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984). Today, the avant-garde is commonly regarded as the most radical and politically engaged subset of Modernism. It rejected mainstream art, social, religious, moral, and ideological conventions, along with the aesthetic principles of nineteenth-century realism (Wang, 2022). For this study, however, the commonalities are more significant than the distinctions. As Samuels (2011, p. 27) notes, over-focusing on the subtle differences between the historical avant-garde and modernism risks obscuring the numerous and significant similarities between the two movements. Both aimed primarily at utilising formal experimentation to access and explore new dimensions of human experience; both took an outsider stance towards Enlightenment society, and both sought to move beyond previous realist forms of art and literature.

[4] Pritchett claimed that the "first and last sentences" of "any of his paragraphs rarely… have any logical connection" (Pritchett, quoted in Wagner, 1957, ix).

traits as signs that Lewis's work represents a "fully-fledged postmodernism" at the heart of modernism. Others attempt to schematise Lewis's conflicting preoccupations and occupations into structurally binding dualities such as 'thought versus action' (Symons, 1989c, p. 274), "Old versus New" (Lafferty, 2009), 'Self versus Not-Self' (Kenner, 1954), 'time versus space' (Brooker, 2010), a "nostalgia for pre-enlightenment tradition" versus "avant-garde nihilism," (Quéma, 1999) "intellectual authority versus emotional anarchy" (Wagner, 1957) and most importantly "Art versus Life" (Phillips, 2015, p. 117)—a duality Wragg (2005, p. 12) believes was rooted in the "Kantian aporia" between rationality and aesthetics and its importance to the Enlightenment Project. Paul Edwards provides the definitive account by isolating two core aspects of Lewis's thinking:

> First, a theologico-metaphysical side concerned with the relation of a limited and contingent humanity to a postulated transcendent Absolute. . .. Second, a quasi-utopian Modernist ambition to establish a world that fulfils the potential plenitude revealed by the artist's imagination of a zestful modernity… (Edwards, 2000, p. 7)

The oppositional dramas Lewis's work sets up between these two poles go to the heart of his antagonistic relation to modernism. While Lewis's metaphysics recognised the impossible necessity of keeping art separate from life (Wragg, 2005a, p. 5), his desire to realise a 'zestful modernity' within a materialistic post-Enlightenment world by reconnecting social and artistic forms embodies Modernism's "inaugurating concern", which, for Brighton (1996, p. 180), is the "issue of the status and possibility of imaginative and ethical consciousness in a culture dominated by modern rationality."

At the turn of the twentieth century, the teleological narrative of Enlightenment modernity—the belief in the preordained march of progress, culminating in the Second

Industrial Revolution—had generated significant material advances but simultaneously eroded traditional guarantors of meaning provided by religion and shared community values (Rix, 2011). In the broadest sense, modernism can be understood as an array of artistic, literary, and cultural responses to this "crisis of meaning" (Ariño et al., 2023). In other words, what united the "muddle of Modernism" (Churchill, 2006, p. 222) was its bid to reinstate a sense of unified, transcendent meaning to the early twentieth century 'waste-land' and reverse its loss of a shared value system or "sacred canopy" of meaning (Berger, 1967) precipitated by the desacralising and fragmenting forces of modernisation (Koselleck, 1988). For Griffin (2007, p. 67), this attempt manifested either in 'epiphanic' modernisms—which sought to reintroduce transcendence into society by substituting for religion or morality an aesthetic justification of life (Bell, 1976, p. 51)[5]—or 'programmatic' modernisms, a political variant that aspired to revolutionise society as a whole by achieving transcendence *within* an 'alternative' modernity.

For both these reasons, Modernism is often considered a continuation of Romanticism by other means (Edwards, 2000).[6] While romanticism denotes a "great quantity of things," each differing among themselves "very widely indeed" (Lewis, 1971, p. 41),[7] at its core, the project

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5 For Bell (1976, p. 51), such modernists felt that to "create a work of art" or to "be a work of art" alone might "provide meaning in man's effort to transcend himself."

6 Paul Tillich (1952, p. 118) rightly observed that "Romanticism as an attitude has outlived the romantic movement."

7 Lewis (1971, pp. 42-43) describes Romanticism as ranging from Spengler, with his "faustian philosophy of catastrophic fatalism", to "Nietzsche and Longfellow", to "revolutionary aristocrats of Byron and Shelley", to the "illumination of German mystics…. throwing in the theory of Einstein as a congenial late-comer."

aimed to find or create a transcendent source of value to restore a degraded social reality—a "grand narrative" that might redeem modernity from its superficial appearance as a collection of fragmented, meaningless particulars (Edwards, 2000). Yet modernism had to confront a society reshaped by the all-encompassing influence of technology and science, which had transformed modernity in ways exceeding anything the Romantics dealt with. In its efforts to restore unifying values, modernism threw doubt on the viability of the "alternative grand narratives" it sought to embody (Edwards, 2000, p.4).

Lewis—who reflected on the impact of rationalism on modern life more than any other modernist, with the possible exception of D.H. Lawrence—was caught in this contradiction (Gąsiorek, 2001). He vacillated between a Romantic belief in the possibility of a source of value outside human life and the postmodern-Nietzschean suspicion that modernity was a total nihilism, a 'No Man's Land' where nothing but subjectivity remained (Lewis, 1939, p. 195). Such 'fierce scepticism' undermined 'all grounds of value', all efforts to locate a 'grand narrative' in nature—the 'NATURES-MORTES' of Cubism (Lewis, 1914, p. 139)—or in modernism's technological substitutions for it (e.g., the Futurist's 'man-machine') (Edwards, 2000, p. 4).[8] This side of Lewis's work prefigured the postmodern condition, which Lyotard (1979, pp. xxiv–xxv) schematised as "incredulity toward metanarratives" and any reliance on

[8] The art critic Brian Sewell (2013) characterised Vorticism as a "hapless rowing-boat" stranded between Cubism and Futurism, the "Scylla and Charybdis of the day". But it proactively steered a course between these extremes: navigating the too-abstracted 'deadness' of Cubism and the too-dynamic, imprecise, flux-ridden 'vitalism' of Futurism (Hickman, 2005).

"transcendent and universal truth"—in other words, he suspected modernity was a chasm "limitless in-depth" with literally "*nothing* at the bottom of it" (Lewis, 1984, p. 43).[9]

At the same time, Lewis's work was driven by the same desire for radical cultural change that obsessed his contemporaries, the same desire not to surrender to nihilism but to "reinstate" a sense of "transcendent value" and "purpose" to a desacralised, rationalised modernity (Griffin, 2008, p. 15). Across Europe, avant-garde nihilism was bound with hope, and pessimism with revolutionary vitalism (Herf, 1981, p. 47). Reactionary modernists, from Marinetti to Jünger, sought to counter modernity's rationalisation by paradoxically embracing technology and turning it against Enlightenment rationalisation—Thomas Mann (1977, p. 294) called this "highly technological romanticism"; Nietzsche termed it "active nihilism" (Jorjani, 2019). Some critics identify this irrational vitalism in Lewis's art, citing its combination of radical urban aesthetics with an "almost outright rejection" of even the emancipatory elements of Enlightenment modernity (Ferrall, 2001, p. 2).[10] Yet while a Nietzschean influence pervades Lewis's drive for an *aesthetic* transformation of modernity—to find new forms of expression to "shatter individual complacency" and "Kill John Bull with art" (Gąsiorek, 2001 p. 564)—his faith in the universal, timeless, *rational* element of Art as "phenomena of separation" and an "organiser of nothing" contradicted the Nietzschean 'proto-fascist' belief that art, like technology, could serve a politically reactionary function by valorising action and mythic particularism (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, pp. 236-237).

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[9] Elsewhere referred to as a "false bottom on wheels" (Lewis, 1972, p. 374)

[10] Gąsiorek (2001 p. 564)–reviewing Edwards's ***Painter and Writer*** (2000)–also states that Lewis's "aesthetic radicalism" was the "counterpart" to his profound hostility to liberal capitalism.

Both Nietzsche's vitalism and Bergson's intuitionistic irrationalism were foundational influences on reactionary modernists and their quest to restore a sense of purpose to a fragmented modernity. Yet where Nietzsche questioned the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal (Murdoch, 1992, p. 182) and elevated the "will to power" as the highest form of identity,[11] and Bergson rejected the intellect and linear time in favour of the "lived time" of inner subjective experience, Lewis instead strove for a conception of a radically transcendent Absolute as a guarantor of meaning (Gąsiorek, 2001, p. 566), one whose 'indifference' preserved the integrity of man and the secular world (Schenker, 1988, p. 63). The Absolute remains necessarily beyond reach, however, and although Lewis insisted the artist could access it through the imaginative intellect, he nonetheless acknowledged it was the artist's privilege to be no more than "imperfect imitators" of divine perfection (Edwards, 2000, p. 549). Consequently, Lewis stands apart from his contemporaries in that his work resists seeking to "articulate epiphanic moments" or "capture the ineffable" (Stearns, 2001, p. 344).

This said, for Edwards, the "impossibility of gnosis" haunts Lewis's work, and a crucial aspect of his modernism arises from this tension between a longing for transcendence and a recognition of its unattainability. In essence, Lewis's work is torn between a powerful

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[11] In short, Nietzsche challenged Kant's distinction between the phenomenal—the world we perceive through our senses—and the noumenal—the world as it exists beyond our perception, the 'thing in itself', a concept from Kantian philosophy. Kant argued that we can only know the phenomenal through reason, while the noumenal remains an inaccessible reality. Nietzsche considered this divide artificial, instead proposing the 'will to power'—a fundamental drive for self-assertion and enhancement—as the central force shaping existence and identity.

modernist urge for utopian transcendence—the Romantic ideal of redeeming modernity by connecting individuality with a restorative Absolute—and his postmodern scepticism towards the dangers of such desires. Yet, driven by these urges himself, he offers the most incisive insider-critique we have of the modernist effort to overcome modernity's dereliction by "violently breaking through" to a sphere of authenticity, to a reality transcending our divided condition (Edwards, 2000, p. 549) and bridging the gap between art and life—and politics and religion—that emerged since the Enlightenment separated these spheres (Huyssen, 1986).

This modernist conviction that transcendence and unity can be reclaimed through a complete transformation of social, cultural, and political structures left its imprint on the most radical elements of twentieth-century Fascism (Kermode, 2000; Griffin, 2007), which sought to reverse not only the Enlightenment's bifurcation of society and state and reason and faith but threatened to undo its separation of "myth and violence" from politics (Chwistek, 2017, p. 173). This underlines why Lewis's postmodern critique of modernism from within becomes even more relevant in the context of a contemporary radical anti-Enlightenment movement inspired by modernism: the New Radical Right.

0.1.1 Research Context: Lewis's Politics

The argument posits that Lewis's dissentient, dualistic position within modernism is key to critiquing the reactionary modernist elements of the New Radical Right (NRR; see Appendix 1 for a full definition).[12] Before proceeding, however, we must acknowledge that framing Lewis as a dualistic thinker is itself highly contentious. Owing to the post-war establishment's

[12] As Eliot put it, he was an 'archetypal outsider,' even within his own movement (Eliot, quoted in Wilson, 1989, p 83

'distaste' for Lewis (Brighton, 1996), scholars overwhelmingly depict Lewis as an *exclusively* right-wing, pro-fascist, anti-humanistic, and authoritarian thinker.[13] Early critiques, such as Harrison's *The Reactionaries (1966),* established this view by portraying Lewis as a classicist elitist who disdained the masses. In his preface to Harrison's book, William Empson described Lewis as an absolutist whose radically transcendent God justified the "vilest inhumanities" (Edwards, 2015, p. 228). Subsequent influential works, such as Jameson's *Fables of Aggression* (1979)—which argued that the repressed core of Lewis's work is anti-Marxism—deterred further exploration of the dialectical importance of Lewis's views. Consequently, despite renewed interest in Lewis's art, his contributions as a writer and thinker remain less studied than those of his fellow 'men of 1914' (Joyce, Eliot, and Pound).

A significant issue with this prevailing consensus is its neglect of Lewis's political evolution toward the end of his career. While it is generally observed that Lewis's 'pro-authoritarian' and anti-humanist stance intensified in the mid-inter-war years—as reflected in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926)*, Time and Western Man* (1927)*, Hitler* (1931)*,* and *Men Without Art* (1934)—critics overlook his shift towards a pro-democratic position in the late 1930s and 1940s. Worse, his renunciation of fascism post-1937 remains a scholarly terra incognita, as are expressly pro-democratic works like *Anglosaxony: A League that Works* (1941), the utopian-internationalist *America and Cosmic Man* (1948)—one of the first books to theorise the global village[14]—and his critique of absolutism in *The Human Age* (1955).

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[13] Even a broadly sympathetic critic like Geoffrey Wagner, writing in "The Fascist Mentality", branded Lewis's thought "fascist from the start" (1968, p. 35).

[14] This fact is indeed noted by one NRR writer, Kerry Bolton (2012), who observes that "unlike most of the literati who rebelled against Leftist dominance in the arts", Lewis came to champion a

Recent research has begun addressing this imbalance. Munton (1980) and Miller (2016) highlight his emancipatory and cultural revolutionary tendencies; Gąsiorek (2019) shows how his cultural criticism anticipated the Frankfurt School's methods, while Rosenquist (2009) and Stevenson (2020) explore Lewis's influence on the 'late modernism' of Henry Miller and the Beat Generation. Yet few critics have synthesised Lewis's dialectical critique of modernism throughout his career, tracing how his reactionary inclinations are counter-intuitively interwoven with his critiques of revolutionary utopianism, organic nationalism, and religious absolutism. This overlooks how the controversial transitions in Lewis's thought make him uniquely valuable as a political analyst and how they equip readers with a subtler awareness of hidden social and cultural logics (Waddell, 2015)—encouraging readers not only to think but to think "more freely" (Nicholl, 1997, p. iii). Lewis's pragmatic aim in texts like *The Art of Being Ruled* is to alert artist-intellectuals to these ideological manipulations of the *zeitgeist,* so "no human opinion will ever be able to get the better of you" (Parmenides, quoted in Lewis, 1989a, p. 375)—a practice increasingly relevant given the "sophisticated metapolitical acumen" of movements like the NRR (Bar-On, 2007, p. 120). This timeless, "portable" nature of Lewis's political writings remains undervalued, as does the possibility that his nuanced engagement with the political debates of his time deepens his resonance with future readers rather than obscuring it (Levine, 2015, p. 7).

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vision of a global US-style culture ran by a "central world state", and even presented a vision of nationalist humanity being superseded by a "'Cosmic Man.'"

Nevertheless, in the past decade, Lewisian criticism has undergone a significant shift in consensus from 'Wyndham Lewis the Reactionary' to "Wyndham Lewis the Radical".[15] Despite valuable research emerging from both perspectives, neither fully captures the dualistic nature of Lewis's work across his career. Critics have either denounced his traditionalism as evidence of fascism (e.g., Wagner, Jameson, Ayers) or interpreted his radical revolutionism as proof of left-wing credentials (e.g., Munton, Gąsiorek). Yet labelling Lewis a right-wing traditionalist or a revolutionary subverter of tradition is equally erroneous and neglects the strategic contradictions of his thought. Following Lafferty's (2009) suggestion that the next paradigm in Lewisian criticism should be of him as an ideological composite, this thesis instead provides an interpretation of Lewis where these two tendencies act as correctives on each other, recognising that his 'message' lies in a 'third way' beyond these extremes.

This interpretation will enhance future research by revealing how Lewis's idiosyncratic blend of authoritarianism and egalitarianism makes his work invaluable for analysing political ideologies, both historically and in contemporary contexts. Indeed, previous approaches to Lewis have limited themselves by circumscribing their analyses to inter-war interactions between fascism and modernism, overlooking the continued relevance of European avant-gardes like Futurism to today's radical right. As a promoter-turned-critic of revolutionary ambitions and antagonist of reactionary ideologues, Lewis offers an evolved critique of the internal inconsistencies between Traditionalism and Futurism in modernism and fascism, which can inform our understanding of the NRR.

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[15] *Wyndham Lewis the Radical* is the title of a 2007 book of critical essays on Lewis edited by Carmelo Cunchillos Jaime.

A common assumption is that we need history to understand the future. This thesis maintains that to comprehend the NRR, we *especially* require Lewis's insider-historical perspective. What links the NRR to literary modernism is their combination of a rebellious 'antimodern' tendency—the desire for a radical liberation from a liberalised, rationalised, deterministically progressive world—with their aspirations toward a revolutionary, technological and resacralised alternative future (Preston, 2011).[16] Lewis's modernism reflects this paradox more self-reflexively than any other. He is both the modernist idealist of *The Caliph's Design*, who felt "everything could be wiped out in a day, and rebuilt nearer to the heart's desire" (1963, p. 274),[17] and the theological modernist of *The Human Age* (1955) who embraced the 'ancient lights' of the eternal in its "platonic, heavenly perfection!" (1936, p. 63). Although he claimed not to be "reactionary"— never varying in what he considered "desirable", only what he considered "feasible" (1963, p. 274)— Lewis often adopted the "conservative viewpoint" of "permanent values and metaphysical truths" as a counterbalance to the "religion of impermanence" (1989a, p.25) imposed by the "Moloch of Modern Ideas" (1993, p. 527), namely all ideological tendencies that view progress as inherently good, "no matter how violent its conduct" (Nath, 1990, p.69). Yet he was never a fully committed member of the "anti-Enlightenment modernist project" (Webber, 2005, p. 33), instead aiming to "make a new world of Reason for ourselves" utilising "all the resources of the new world to build with" (Lewis, 1927, p. 391).

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16 As Marshall Berman neatly put it, "to be fully modern is to be anti-modern" (1982, p. 14).

17 The specific quotation is taken from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and relates– in the context of *The Caliph's Design (1919)*, to Lewis's desire to reconstruct a 'tabula rasa' London.

Lewis's many 'paradoxies' could be said to typify Modernism's proneness to contradiction, given the term signifies "not just different things, but precisely opposite things" and can only be properly comprehended through its "ambivalent" relationship with modernity (Friedman, 2001, pp. 493-513).[18] The NRR adopts a similarly "dialectical relationship to modernity" (Bar-On, 2013, p. 229), aiming for an alternative future that continues twentieth-century modernism's effort to "transcend" and "transform" rather than "negate" modernity (Euben, 1997, p. 429). Building on scholarship that challenged the view of right-wing ideology as a "relic" and highlighted fascism's modernist impulses (Antliff, 2002; Griffin, 2007; Roberts, 2009), this thesis will undertake a transhistorical analysis of the NRR's 'alternative modernist' project and reactionary modernism. It will chart the parallels between their era of crisis and our own postliberal age of political disenchantment while simultaneously applying Lewis's insider-critique of how this project developed in his time.

Although acknowledging the historical context of artworks is essential, unlocking the relevance of Lewis's insights today requires moving beyond viewing modernist texts as either "timelessly transcendent" on the one hand or "imprisoned in their moment of origin" on the other (Felski, 2009, p. 154). Although this may invite criticism for presentism, we should acknowledge that modernist writers envisioned their work influencing future audiences (Bronstein, 2018).[19] Lewis (1989a, pp. xi-xii), for instance, insisted that his political thought was not solely for a pre-existing audience, stating that "there must be a good deal of 'stretching of

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[18] Scholes (2006, p. xi) refers to the modernist 'paradoxy', meaning a "confusion" produced by a term that appears to make "clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot – or should not – be made".

[19] Cf. the subtitle of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil: "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future"*

the receptacle.'" By "stretching the receptacle" through a transhistorical analysis of modernism and the NRR, this thesis will demonstrate Lewis's relevance to future readers while illuminating the unseen contours of his original meaning.

0.1.2 Research Context: The New Radical Right

The urgency of this study is underscored by liberalism's rapidly declining influence in the Western world. After three decades of dominance, the West again faces the possibility of a post-liberal future. This shift is not only driven by governments in Russia, China, or Central Europe who declare the liberal era is "at an end," but from within Western democracies (Rose, 2021, p. 2). Sophisticated critics, not just populists, are increasingly challenged the core Enlightenment values of modern society. The most influential of these voices is the NRR. By exploiting apocalyptic rhetoric, fears of liberal elites, and the concept of metapolitics (the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for long-term political gain), the NRR is rapidly reshaping cultural discourse. Their efforts have already facilitated the electoral surge of illiberal and radical-right parties across Europe—the most significant political shift in democratic states in recent decades (Rydgren, 2018).

Radical-right parties, capitalising on socio-political trends summarised by Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) as the "four Ds"—Distrust (breakdown of trust in political elites), Destruction (erosion of collective identity through multiculturalism), Deprivation (decline in living standards due to neoliberal globalisation), and De-Alignment (breakdown of voter identification with political parties)—are increasingly reshaping mainstream politics. The growing acceptance and respectability of these parties is rooted in the metapolitical legitimisation of anti-liberal thought by the NRR, which postulates that "universal concepts" such as equality and individualism can be rejected on intellectual grounds rather than mere

prejudice (Nolte, 1966, p. 56).[20] For years, such notions were equated only with "antiquated books" and "defeated causes" (Rose, 2021, p. 3). Yet the North American wing of the NRR—which integrates elements of the European *Nouvelle Droite*, Archeofuturism, Identitarianism, and Dugin's "Fourth Political Theory"—has been described as the 'cultural vanguard' behind Trump's 2016 victory (Jorjani, 2017). In short, this movement is far from anachronistic—it seeks to advance modernity in an alternative, "revolutionary mode" (Bar-On, 2013, p. 91)

The most significant aspect of the radical right—now a prominent social and electoral force—is its challenge not only to the current liberal consensus but to the very core of Liberalism as the political embodiment of the Enlightenment's goal to refound morality and society on "universal, tradition-independent rational principles" (Gray, 2007, p. 224). The erosion of the cross-denominational acceptance of Enlightenment values has led analysts to revoke Fukuyama's (1989) claim history 'ended' with Communism's collapse. Observing that society has relapsed into the political instability of the interwar years, scholars including Žižek (2016), John Gray (2015), Frisch (2019), Sedgwick (2019), and Hanegraaff (2022) have all questioned the long-term viability of liberal democracy.[21]

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[20] As Lewis himself warned in *Anglosaxony* (1941), the problem is that the "all-out destructive attack" upon democracy has a beguilingly "beautiful simplicity": whereas the answer to it is more complex. He writes: "how often has been observed any fool can knock a thing down, whereas it takes a much smarter man to build one up as good!"

[21] Harari (2016, p. 281) claimed that as of 2016 there was no "serious alternative" to the "liberal package of individualism, human rights, democracy and a free market." This statement now appears obsolete and surreal: the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, the emergence of conservative populism, and the rise of illiberal democracies (Pied, 2019) have all questioned humanist convictions regarding progress and rationality.

Despite the rise of the radical right being one of the most studied political phenomena of the post-war Western world (Mudde, 2016), scholars have overly focused on electoral dynamics and post-hoc economic factors (Tuchin, 2016) and neglected the impact of the NRR as a "metapolitical avant-garde" (Friberg, quoted in Teitelbaum, 2019, p. 268). This extra-parliamentary, metapolitical stance marks a shift from the Old Right's populist approach,[22] and scholars underestimate how influential this 'right-Gramscian' focus on ideological and philosophic conflicts has been in fuelling the radical right's resurgence (Shekhovtsov, 2021). Alain de Benoist (1994, pp. 182–3), a founding member of the Nouvelle Droite, has long stressed the ability of theories to "set powers in motion (often unnoticed)" and the importance of "developing ideas and waiting for their impact," underscoring the NRR's strategic belief that cultural hegemony is a prerequisite for political hegemony.[23]

The most severe consequence of academia's overwhelming focus on party-political illiberalism is its neglect of literature's role in this metapolitical ambition to take over the "laboratories of thinking" (Krebs, quoted in Benz, 1989, p. 218) and "occupy culture" as the twentieth century Right "occupied politics" (Faye, 2010, p. 378). Whereas Fascism pursued an alternative modernity through political power, the NRR seeks influence by winning the battle of ideas *within* civil society (Griffin, 2007, p. 182). Its leading intellectuals recognise culture's critical role in undermining and offering alternatives to liberal society and privilege the arts as

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[22] The Old Right includes Fascist, National Socialist and additional national-populist movements– see Appendix 1 for a full definition of terms.

[23] De Benoist echoes Julius Evola's (2002, p. 237) conceptualisation of "occult warfare" as the dissemination of almost "undetectable ideological, social, and political changes," which act like the "first cracks in a layer of snow that eventually produce an avalanche."

a vital battleground for cultural hegemony (Hermansson et al., 2020). By using digital communications to disrupt intellectual boundaries and merge them into broader, fluid 'ideological families', the NRR (like Modernism) has fashioned a discourse that transcends traditional political groupings, forming alliances of dissident thinkers focused on undermining liberalism's core tenets: "individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism" (Gray, 2005, p. 200). Into this free-floating discourse, it has assimilated classic 'anti-Enlightenment' and conservative revolutionary philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Evola alongside modernist "artists of the right" such as Ernst Jünger, Ezra Pound, Marinetti, and Lewis himself (Bolton, 2012).[24] Unchallenged by mainstream academia, the NRR presents these thinkers as part of an "alternative intellectual history" or "counter-canon" (Frisch, 2019) that lends credence to its metapolitics and fosters societal acceptance of its 'alternative modernist' political objective: creating an ethnically and culturally homogeneous, hierarchically organised, organic, and 'resacralised' society within the "context of modernity" (Johnson, 2013).

While no single study can fully address the metapoliticisation of literature by the NRR, specialists in relevant fields and thinkers can each engage its proponents on this new 'battleground' of the cultural domain instead of ceding it through evasion. This study aims to contribute to this effort by examining the works of Lewis, whose dissentient, "conflictual" relation to modernism offers unique insights into the NRR (Eagleton, 1978, p.181).

[24] See Appendix 1 for a definition of the 'conservative revolution.'

0.2 Literature Review

Despite the “insatiable demand” for information on the right’s resurgence (Bale, 2012), the growing influence of the NRR remains inadequately explored in academic literature. This oversight arises from a general complacency in political and humanities studies, which assume the radical right lacks an intellectual tradition—a paradigmatic error stemming from the ahistorical conflation of today’s radical right with the “jackboot nationalism” of inter-war fascism (Bar-On, 2021, p. 48).

Post-war studies by Nolte (1963), Felice (1977), and Fest (1991) have reinforced this error by portraying fascism as an aberration linked solely to its Nazi-era manifestation, obscuring the NRR’s “performative dissociation” from the party politics, imperialism, totalitarianism, and genocide associated with the Old Right (Frisch, 2019, p. 233). Wendling’s (2018) approach, which decontextualises the radical right as 'unlike any other political force of modern times,' is equally flawed. While the NRR represents a new era and fights different battles (Prowe, 1994, p. 312), its goal of restoring traditional hierarchical social forms within modernity *is* continuous in spirit with interwar movements. To address both these oversights, a historically grounded yet forward-looking debate is needed, which this study aims to provide by exploring literary modernism’s interaction with fascism in contemporary contexts.

The generalisability of published research on this issue is also problematic, with existing studies struggling to reach a consensus on whether the NRR represents a cultivated cultural-intellectual neofascism (Bar-On, 2015), a new political paradigm transcending the right-left dichotomy in an anti-global front (Griffin, 2008a), or a synthesis of fascism with new left ideas (Piccone, 1993). To move beyond this categorical impasse and address the more significant issues at stake, this study adopts Payne's (1996, p. 19) observation that the radical right differs

from fascism not by being more moderate but "simply by being more rightist." Although Payne was referring to Weimar-era conservative revolutionaries like Jünger and Moeller van den Bruck, their elitist approach has been adopted by the intellectual arm of today's radical right, which views itself as "resolutely elitist" and necessarily metapolitical (Johnson, 2013, p. 26).[25] The persistent undervaluing of this "sophisticated metapolitical acumen" (Bar-On, 2007, p. 120) in previous studies has allowed the NRR to construct—unchallenged—a rhetorical bridge between its ideals and mainstream public discourse (Hartzell, 2018).

Recently, however, a growing body of literature has started exploring the NRR's cultural influence, examining its impact on rock music (Shekhovstov, 2009), meme magic (Lachman, 2018), and online activism (Hodge and Hallgrímsdóttir, 2021; Munn, 2021; Winter, 2019). While these 'low culture' elements are important to the NRR's agenda, focusing exclusively on them risks reinforcing the unproductive cliché that right-wing intellectualism is an oxymoron. Early studies like Ronson's (2016) exploration of the Alt-Right's influence on the Trump Campaign and Nagle's *Kill All Normies* (2017) perpetuate this oversimplification by portraying the radical right as a nebulous collection of conspiracy theorists, nationalists, and racists.[26] Even Hermansson et al.'s widely praised *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the twenty-first century?* misrepresents the role of high culture in the NRR's metapolitical agenda,

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[25] Greg Johnson (2013, p. 26), a leading NRR thinker, clarifies that whereas Old Right-style groups targeted populist messages at working-class and rural constituencies, the NRR directs its message to the "educated, urban middle and professional classes and above."

[26] Despite being laudable for initiating serious critical attention into the NRR's online 'Culture Wars' (Dematagoda, 2017), Nagle's work nonetheless aligns digital populism merely with "teenage gamers, pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers… anti-feminist pranksters… and meme-making trolls" (Nagle, 2017, p. 2)

concluding that the project offers only the “illusion” of an intellectual heritage by repackaging pop culture with “old racist ideas” (2020, p.119). By focusing on its more ‘cartoonish’ aspects, these studies overlook the NRR’s more serious efforts as disseminators of ideas that challenge the liberal-Enlightenment metanarrative of progress and neglect to thoughtfully engage their claim to be the “rightful heirs” of Western culture (Graham, 2018).

Noting these research gaps, Stevenson (2020) rightly calls for a more critical and rational examination of the anti-liberal ideology driving the contemporary radical right. As such, rather than dismissing their claims to an intellectual heritage, this thesis will examine the NRR as a continuation not only of reactionary modernist thought but as an inheritor of a larger, older counter-enlightenment tradition. This tradition opposes modernity's underlying ontology, which it sees as having originated in the Cartesian split and culminated in Nietzsche's metaphysics of “absolute subjectivity” (Heidegger, cited in Schalow, 2011, p. 242). Lewis—the man to whose mind “the Cartesian split and the Nietzschean energy were not hobbies but lifeblood” (Kenner, 1954, p.139)—was better equipped than any modernist to critique this tradition from within.

In taking this more synoptic and critical approach to the NRR’s intellectual lineage, this thesis builds on the groundwork laid by Bar-On’s *Rethinking the French New Right* (2013) and especially Sedgwick’s *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* (2019). Sedgwick provides a holistic analysis of classic and emergent right-wing intellectuals, examining how thinkers like Spengler, Evola, and Jünger shape the metapolitics of today’s Radical Right. By recognising the politics of literary texts reside as much in their transhistorical afterlives as in their original contexts (Bronstein, 2018), Sedgwick demonstrates how the Radical Right’s “new intellectual canon”

(2019, p. 273) exerts an indirect yet significant influence at the electoral level.[27] A related study is Teitelbaum's *War for Eternity* (2020), which explores the impact of new right thinkers such as Steve Bannon and Dugin on world leaders. Teitelbaum (2020, p. 215) determines that the ultimate effect of these thinkers is to align global politics with "what we were rather than what we dream we could become", to fight on "behalf of eternity rather than imagining a better future," and to value "stillness over progress."[28]

While both Teitelbaum's and Sedgwick's studies are valuable, Teitelbaum's conclusions underscore a significant shortcoming in their work: an overemphasis on the anti-modern and Traditionalist aspects of radical right thought at the expense of its radical and transformative modernist currents.[29] The NRR draws from a diverse array of intellectual influence beyond the Traditionalism of Evola and Guénon, encompassing 'conservative revolutionary' philosophers like Nietzsche, Spengler, and Heidegger, as well as modernist proponents of Promethean progressivism like Lewis and Marinetti. In his introduction to *Artists of the Right,* Johnson

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[27] Sedgwick (2019) evidences the impact of René Guenon and Julius Evola's thought on Steve Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist, on the leaders of Greece's Golden Dawn, and Hungary's Jobbik.

[28] Another valuable study to mention in this regard is Beiner's *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* (2018), which traces the "deepest philosophical roots" of influential Radical Right thinkers like Dugin and Bannon to the writings of Heidegger and Nietzsche.

[29] Other previous studies similarly understate the importance of modernist thought to the NRR, misrepresenting its cultural activity as mere 'plundering' of classical antiquity (Hermanson, 2020), of repurposing the history, literature, and myth of the 'ancient world'" (Zuckerberg, 2018); or as primarily exploiting "the iconicity and cultural capital" of a 'supposedly 'white' classical tradition' and classical art to invoke a sense of a lost past (Morse, 2018).

(2012, pp. 5-6) argues that artists like Lewis and Marinetti are valuable not just for "rejecting modern decadence" but for seeking to "preserve and restore healthier pre-modern social forms *within the context of modernity".* Above all, Johnson writes, the NRR can draw inspiration from how these thinkers "combated decadence" by unleashing the "vital creative forces imprisoned by ossified artistic tradition," giving rise to "startling forms of modernism, including Vorticism and Futurism."

No prior study has recognised modernism's importance to the NRR's stated aim of restoring "vital, archaic, hierarchical" values within the framework of modern science, technology, and mass society (Johnson, 2013, p. 21), an oversight this study will address by repurposing, in this new context, the insights of scholars such as Herf (1984), Gentile (1994), Osborne (1995) and Griffin (2007) who demonstrated that fascism was more than a mere 'rear guard' resistance to modernity.[30] Like the conservative revolutionaries before them, key elements of the NRR respond to the perceived decadence of modern society not with postmodern pessimism but with a conviction we are nearing a historical ''turning point" (Dupeux, 1985, p. 6), Jünger's "magical zero-point" (Guerster-Steinhausen, 1945, p. 200). Griffin's (2008a, p. xxii) assertion that fascism represented a "deadly serious" effort to establish an alternative vision of modernity is reflected in the NRR's belief that the present 'interregnum' will yield to a new type of 'suprahumanist' civilisation based on healthy mythic forces (Locchi, 2023), as well as in Jorjani's Prometheist philosophy of maximising the posthuman potential of the coming singularity. Jorjani's (2020, p. 1) declaration of a "revolutionary war against fatalism" is particularly revealing in that it opposes both liberal

[30] See also studies by Prose (1994), Schnapp (1995), Fritzsche (1996), Tucker (1999) and Roberts (2009).

progress *and* the 'inverse historicism' of other radical right thinkers who envisage a return to an "idealised past" of organic communities rooted in Platonic hierarchical metaphysics (Griffin, 2008a, p. 105).[31]

One of this study's core premises is that Lewis's critique of this same dialectic in modernism provides a crucial framework for examining the convergence of reactionaryism and revolutionism in NRR metapolitics. While notable scholarship has explored right-wing elements in Modernist literature (Sultan, 1991; Childs, 2001) and examined the links between modernism and interwar fascism (Antliff, 2002; Surette, 2011), there has been a lack of sustained effort to investigate the interaction between Modernist ideas and contemporary radical revolutionary movements like the NRR. The only previous Lewis-specific template for such a study was Hewitt's *Fascist Modernism* (1993); however, Hewitt's study was based on the unquestioned premise that an inherent paradox existed in the avant-garde's association with 'reactionary' forces like fascism, and he overlooked the possibility of an authentic synergy between modernism and fascism (Griffin, 2008a, p. 49). This oversight is particularly damaging for a study of Lewis, whose writings explore such irreconcilable opposites as fascism and anti-fascism, democracy, and authoritarianism, and revolutionism and conservatism without attempting to arrest them in any "apparent synthesis" (Feijo, 1998, p. 4).[32]

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[31] This 'return' is often styled as a 'retvrn' (Janega, 2023).

[32] Lewis's method of political analysis reflected Proudhon's observation that "as the two poles of an electric cell do not destroy each other, so the two terms of the antinomy do not become resolved. Not only are they indestructible, but they are the very motive force of all action, life, and progress. The problem is not to bring about their fusion, for this would be death, but to establish an equilibrium between them - an unstable equilibrium, that changes as society develops" (Proudhon, 1858, p. 229; Gilfedder, 2021).

Positioning Lewis as being in "constant dialectical conflict" with the cultural landscape of his time, rather than "merely its product" (Lafferty, 2009), is thus both faithful to Lewis's approach and crucial to addressing the limitations of previous research. Such an approach allows for historically grounded speculation about how his 'insider' or postmodern critique of modernism might have evolved in response to comparable movements like the NRR.[33] It also allows us to assess whether such speculations retrospectively alter our understanding of Lewis's original meaning and how they might equally challenge his reputation as a 'reactionary' (Rulo, 2012) or 'conservative' modernist (Hadjiyiannis, 2018).[34]

0.3 Significance of Study

This introduction has highlighted how the NRR appropriates literature, including modernist literature, to advance political and cultural objectives that may diverge significantly from the original authors' intentions. It further argued that, to address this, modernist studies must take a wider view of the works it examines, positioning itself as "responsible *to* a broader history" without "declaring (itself) responsible *for* it" (Bronstein, 2018, p. 25). This study aims

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[33] The prior work of Burstein (1997) and Koepnick (1999) in wresting 'modernism' from its secure confines within art and cultural history laid the foundations for this approach, enabling this study to re-theorize the excellent but contextually rooted studies of Lewis's politics (Gąsiorek, 2001; Munton, 2006; Phillips, 2011) in light of contemporary debates and to demonstrate the unique insights Lewis's work offers in exploring and critiquing developing 'reactionary modernist' movements like the NRR.

[34] Aside from these specifically modernist focussed studies, broader analyses of fascism and modernist by Herf (1984) and Griffin (2007) have also subsumed Lewis into the 'reactionary modernist' category along with Marinetti, Jünger, Pound et al.

to lead the adoption of this approach. In doing so, it will redress the current lack of academic scholarship on modernism and the NRR—a research gap that becomes particularly noticeable when considering the exhaustive studies of modernism's interaction with historical far-right movements (Gregor, 2000; Griffin, 1995).

This study will, furthermore, be the first to undertake a transhistorical analysis of modernism and the NRR, exploiting connections between interwar history, contemporary history, political science, and modernist studies to elucidate current cultural and political trajectories. It will map the evolution of reactionary thought within European history and philosophy from the late nineteenth century to the present, demonstrating how Romanticism, Modernism, and the NRR are successive movements within the anti-Enlightenment tradition.

Most importantly, it will assess how modernism foreshadowed and influenced the NRR as a radical response to the breakdown of the Enlightenment myth of progress, presenting visions of alternative futures that suggest a 'third way' beyond mainstream liberal and socialist responses to this crisis. To briefly contextualise, the idea of progress—the belief that "civilisation has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction" (Bury, 1920, p. 2)—faced its first major crisis at the turn of the twentieth century, making modernists the 'progenitors' of the NRR in developing a vanguard response to "post-Enlightenment" concerns. The Enlightenment notion of progress as teleological, linear, universal, and rationalistic seemed increasingly naïve in the wake of war, mass industrialisation, and revolution, and modernist figures—from Lewis to Walter Benjamin—challenged the assumptions and universal values that had defined the "liberal humanist epoch" for over two centuries (Škulj, 2003, p. 149). Drawing on the "illusions of Romanticism" (Griffin, 2007,

p.91),[35] modernists initiated cultural and political 'rebirth' projects against such values, often adopting anti-democratic, anti-humanist, relativistic, nationalistic, and anti-teleological forms.

While it is impossible to predict where today's post-liberal "crisis of progress" will lead, history provides a roadmap to the destiny of ideas, making it prudent to learn from it. Therefore, a transhistorical analysis of the parallels between modernism and the NRR is vital at this socio-political juncture. Such an analysis will help scholars not only grasp past radicals' conclusions but also gain insights into contemporary political possibilities by anticipating what today's thinkers may discover (Rose, 2021). Through this analysis, the study will contribute to two fields simultaneously: literary modernist studies and the emerging field of Far-Right Studies. Forging a link between these areas will add further significance to this study, given the concerning lack of interplay between Far-Right scholars and researchers of the very literary modernists appropriated by the NRR to fashion a legitimising 'intellectual ancestry'.

Finally, this analysis will make a specific contribution to Lewisian scholarship. Despite over six decades of attempts to address allegations of Lewis's 'fascism' (Kenner, 1954; Sisson, 1970; Normand, 1989; Dasenbrock, 1996; Munton, 2008; Waddell, 2015), controversy still mars his political legacy. This indicates that a novel, future-oriented approach is needed to account for the resonances of Lewis's views with current debates,[36] especially considering the productive

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[35] Griffin (2007) correctly argues that the convergence of the temporalisation of history with the disintegration of the "myth of progress" and the 'illusions' of Romanticism in the late nineteenth century served as the catalyst for 'aesthetic modernism.'

[36] Bridson's *The Filibuster* (1972) made an initial attempt at such an approach but was limited to general reflections on Lewis's 'afterglow' and revealed more about Bridson's political sentiments than Lewis's.

results this approach has yielded with thinkers like Blake and Heidegger.[37] Fear (2015) rightly states a study is urgently needed that focuses on what remains valuable in Lewis's political writings and articulates their relevance to contemporary debates. This study answers that call, challenging the new historicist bias in Lewisian scholarship, which overlooks one of literature's most significant effects: its interaction with readers distant from its moment of creation (Bronstein, 2018). More importantly, it will be the first Lewis-focused project to consider his post-fascist output properly, reassessing Lewis's relevance to contemporary affairs and revaluing his legacy as a reactionary.

0.4 Research Objectives and Outcomes

Lewis's controversial legacy has been a key reason why his critical dismantling of fascism in the 1940s and the pro-democratic attitude it generated in him have been neglected by literary scholars and political critics alike. With both fields struggling to effectively respond to NRR metapolitics, both in terms of its modernist influence and its increasing presence in contemporary discourse, this project:

1) Argues for Lewis's value as a thinker we need *now*, demonstrating how his 'reactionary modernist' inclinations are paradoxically interwoven with his critiques of nationalism, traditionalism, anti-humanism, utopianism, and political and religious absolutism, and how applying this insider-critique to the NRR necessitates an urgent re-evaluation of his 'original meaning'.

[37] Examples include Higgs' work on Blake and Brexit (2019); Zimmerman on Heidegger and Techno-Posthumanism, (2020) and Culkin on René Girard and the pandemic (2021).

2) Charts the resonances between our present era of political discontent and the modernist era, using Lewis's work to critically explore how modernism's response to social crises anticipates and foreshadows the NRR's.
3) Critiques the NRR's appropriation of Lewis as a radical 'reactionary modernist,' demonstrating that his work challenges rather than emboldens these ideologies, particularly his understudied post-fascist work.[38]

By examining the overlap between reactionary modernism and the NRR, alongside charting the curve of Lewis's disillusionment with radical reactionary thought, this project aims to provide an essential resource for literary scholars exploring the interaction between rightist and pro-democratic ideas in Lewis's work and for political critics seeking to comprehend the continued appeal of today's radical anti-enlightenment agendas to intellectuals.

0.5 Structure of the Thesis

This examination consists of six chapters, divided into two parts. **Part One** proceeds along expository rather than argumentative lines, contextualising the ideological symmetries between the NRR and reactionary modernism. It identifies both as revolutionary 'Romantic' projects seeking alternative modernities, initiated in response to a 'crisis' in society's experience of time and loss of shared value precipitated by the Enlightenment's fragmentation and secularisation of life. **Part Two** explores Lewis's criticisms of reactionary modernism's solutions to these crises. It contrasts his evolving counter-philosophy with the NRR's 'alternative modernist' agenda, which aims to transcend modernity through a post-

[38] The NRR's interpretation of Lewis is, ironically, in line with the mainstream scholarly consensus.

liberal, non-linear, and revolutionary framework (Bar-On, 2013)—specifically, the creation of an organically rooted ethnonationalism and resacralised state within the framework of modernity. A chapter-by-chapter breakdown of these parts is as follows:

Part One:

Chapter One contextualises the 'highly technological romanticism' of reactionary modernism and the NRR within a broader romantic backlash against the Enlightenment's "excessive" rationalism and the 'destructive' political and cultural legacies of 1789.[39] It principally focuses on the overlooked centrality of Heidegger's thoughts on the NRR, interpreting his project as a "conservative revolution in philosophy" (Bourdieu, 1988).

Chapter Two narrows the focus to the contextual parallels between reactionary modernism and the NRR in light of Heidegger's analysis of modernity as a 'descent' into the crisis of 'total nihilism', where nothing but subjectivity remains. It categorises both movements as conservative revolutionary responses to this supposed 'crisis of modernity,' which develops along two vectors: a crisis in the experience of time (a disoriented sense of time no longer seen as steady 'progress' but as ever-accelerating fragmentation and change), and a 'crisis of values' (loss of collectively lived meaning caused by massification, universalism, and desacralisation—all seen as synonyms of 'nihilistic' modernity).

Part Two:

Chapter Three examines how reactionary modernists and the NRR respond to the crisis in the experience of time. It shows how both propose spherical or messianic visions as alternatives

[39] These include egalitarianism, individualism, social democracy, and universal human rights.

to the 'dead' linear time of liberalism, where the past is "retrieved" as a "futural possibility," and tradition is "rediscovered as illuminated by a revolutionary future" (Beck, 2019, p. 152). For the NRR, only by this "radical restructuring"—not a return to the past—can "contemporary nihilism" be exorcised (de Benoist, 2012, p. 12). Modern, premodern, and postmodern values are to be synthesised in a "new pan-European", resacralised state, where the myth of "common origins" (Bar-On, 2013, p. 94) returns to counter the value crisis caused by the 'nihilistic' effects of Enlightenment ideals: mass individualism (**Chapter Four**), globalised homogenisation (**Chapter Five**), and the loss of higher meaning through desacralisation (**Chapter Six**).

In each of these chapters, we show how Lewis's alleged right-wing traits—his anti-time philosophy, elitist disdain for the masses, reactionary utopianism, and modernist absolutism—are counterintuitively interwoven with his respective critiques of reactionary modernist responses to social crises, including a return to 'mythical' spherical time, roots-based 'organic' collectives, and 'resacralised' ethnonational communities. Beyond merely critiquing reactionary modernism, however, these final chapters trace the emergence of *active,* positive values in Lewis's work that necessitate revaluing his legacy. **Chapter Four** demonstrates his 'anti-humanist elitism' was rooted in a Cartesian valuation of human imperfection and a defence of the lone artistic intellect ("politics of the intellect"). [40] **Chapter Five** shows him tempering his utopian perfectionism with gradualist politics and a positive association of democratic Anglo-Saxon internationalism with the 'nature' he had once opposed to his aesthetic idealism; **Chapter Six** explores how, in *The Human Age,* he

[40] Lewis's "politics of the intellect" (1984, p. 154) is characterised by an ethical allegiance to the human intellect and the welfare of intellectuals, prioritised above all else.

supplements his 'non-ethical' aesthetic idealism and politics of the intellect with recognition of eternal religious values—ultimately reconciling his radically transcendent, non-religious Absolute with a heterodox Christian God.

The study concludes with an analysis of *The Human Age's* 'Satan,' the "dapper Devil" Sammael (Slocombe, 2017), who brings together the dualistic aspects of Lewis's thought—encompassing both Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment elements—into a single focus. Through Sammael, we demonstrate how Lewis transcends both reactionary-romantic aspirations for utopian transcendence *and* his postmodern scepticism toward such desires. In contrast to Sammael, Lewis redefines his previously 'negative' view of God as a radically transcendent 'nothing' into a positive that secures man's individuality—the individualism many radical-reactionaries reject in the name of an immanent or 'non-transcendent' politicised Absolute.

0.6 Research Method

This study's transhistorical approach is premised on the contention that history provides a guide to the destiny of ideas and that concurrently examining Lewis, reactionary modernism, and the NRR through this method is the most effective way to analyse the latter's growing intellectual influence. This synoptic, longitudinal perspective overcomes the limitations of previous synchronic analyses that viewed the NRR as solely a contemporary political phenomenon and thus neglected its historical connections to an intellectual lineage of anti-Enlightenment thought. Similarly, it corrects the oversight of contextual analyses that treated the NRR as inextricable from the historical moment of interwar fascism and refused to conceive of right-wing ideology as anything other than anti-modern. Both these approaches

necessarily overlook the historically grounded yet future-oriented inspiration the NRR draws from 'right-wing' modernism in fashioning its own "futural, palingenetic agenda" of constructing a new "sacred canopy in a decadent world" (Griffin, 2007, p. 138). Just as Borges (1970, p. 236) suggested that "every writer creates his own precursors," so the NRR positions itself as an inheritor of this intellectual lineage, aiming to modify our "conception of the past" as it will "modify the future."

For this transhistorical method to maintain rigour, however, the thesis will heed poststructuralist warnings against constructing a seamless narrative from history—cultural or otherwise—since such efforts tend to dramatize, mythologise, and ideologise the past rather than critically evaluating it. The NRR is particularly prone to creating mythicising narratives from historical and cultural processes, so while dismissing their claims to an intellectual lineage would be a mistake, accepting their self-conception at face value would be equally erroneous. Rather than anatomising a direct line of influence from reactionary modernism to the NRR,[41] this study's cross-epochal analysis will focus more broadly on how the revolutionary anti-rationalism of the interwar period foreshadows today's radical anti-enlightenment thinking and ask what lessons political and literary scholars can draw from this. It will not presumptively treat modernist writers and episodes in intellectual history as part of an unbroken teleological tradition leading to the NRR but will examine them as symptomatic of a long tradition of counter-enlightenment reactions to the perceived crises of modernity.

On a specific note, it must be acknowledged that the transhistorical approach is not widely accepted in modernist studies, a field as dominated by the 'contextualist consensus'

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[41] The lineage from reactionary modernism to the NRR may not be literal–though it can be, as seen in Lewis's influence on Bowden (2014)–but rather figurative and symbolic.

(Armstrong, 2011) as any in English Literature studies. This necessitates reaffirming our rationale for employing this controversial method within this particular field. Critics of the transhistorical method often view it as a departure from literature's original ideological relevance, partly due to the supposed tendency of transhistorical art to overlook "excluded contexts and social realities" (Bronstein, 2018, p. 5). This study maintains, however, that to read transhistorically is not to read ahistorically (Matz, cited in Bronstein, 2018) and will demonstrate this by placing Lewis's writings within historically grounded dialogues with contemporary NRR ideas.[42] Contrary to the prevailing consensus, a transhistorical approach is particularly suited to modernist literature, which aimed not only to be new but to "stay new" (Rosenquist, 2009, p. 2). Moreover, this approach emulates Lewis's techniques in works such as *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) and *Time and Western Man* (1927), which developed strategies for pattern-seeking amidst volatile socio-political landscapes and forged provocative connections between seemingly disparate concepts. A transhistorical methodology further allows for a contrast between these works' idiosyncratic analyses of thinkers like Spengler, Nietzsche, and Heidegger with their interpretation by the NRR, offering new contextual relevance to Lewis's original insights while maintaining historical specificity.

To maximise the effectiveness of the transhistorical method, this study will broaden its analytical scope to include the 'radical right' and 'reactionary' elements in Lewis's writings rather than limiting itself to the strictly 'fascistic' ones. This is not intended to sidestep decades of debate surrounding fascism in Lewis's work; rather, it seeks to provide a more panoramic

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[42] This approach is most successfully executed by Sedgwick in ***Key Thinkers of the Right*** (2019), which demonstrates the future applicability of thinkers like Jünger and Schmitt to New Right figures like Dugin and de Benoist, without losing sight of the former's original historical context.

view of his ideology than previous studies have allowed, capturing the key developments and shifts in his politics throughout his entire career. Adopting this broader analytical framework addresses a prevalent shortcoming in Modernist studies, which, despite its claims to historical understanding, often takes a curiously synchronic view of Lewis—especially regarding its over-exclusive focus on his 1930s 'fascist' period. As Edwards (2015) argues, a truthful study of Lewis requires diligent examination of the specific moment and its position in a broader, evolving context.[43] While a synoptic interpretation such as this is thus preferable to the approaches of previous studies, it must necessarily be grounded on a firm grasp of the genealogy of Lewis's modernism to structure its analysis. All that remains before proceeding with our study is to outline this analytical framework.

Briefly, as earlier indicated, Lewis's thought can be understood as a continuation of Romanticism along two vectors: one a theological-metaphysical concern with a world beyond reach, and the other directed toward a 'quasi-utopian' realisation of a 'zestful' culture within modernity (Edwards, 2000, pp. 4-7; Nath, 2015, p. 174). In retrospect, we can observe a series of dialectical shifts in Lewis's career related to these: first, from his early modernist aesthetic radicalism (1910s) to his inter-war 'anti-humanist' social and metaphysical polemics (1920s/early 1930s), and secondly, from these polemics to his post-1937 reconciliation with humanity and nature and a heterodox Christian theology. Beginning in the 1910s, Lewis (broadly speaking) turned to art as an alternative to, and an escape from, the materialistic spirit of post-Enlightenment society. Vorticism's geometric, abstract, and exteriorised

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[43] Edwards's *Painter and Writer* (2000) transformed the conventional perception of Lewis as a reactionary antagonist to broader Modernism into a serious dialectical movement (Park, 2001, p. 176).

aesthetic represented a paradoxical romanticism, where ideal beauty was to be attained not by "flying up into the eternal gases" but through a cold, precise, 'impersonal' art "gleaming like the snows of the Himalayas" (Wilson, 1989). Yet the outbreak of World War One revealed the impossibility of such an escape—proving BLAST's avant-gardism could never achieve the radical cultural impact Lewis, in his "sea-green incorruptible" innocence (1969, p. 340), had dreamed it might—and his service as a gunner on the Western Front turned him into the bitter satirist of the 1920s, self-styled as 'the Enemy'.

Lewis's polemics in this inter-war period were collectively devoted to a "radical analysis of the ideas by which our society has been taught to live" (Lewis, 1971, pp. 82-83). He was particularly concerned with attacking the popular "culture of the present" (Ferrall, 2001, p. 86) and the anti-rational "vitalist, or actionist" trends Lewis (1927, p. 352) grouped as the 'time-cult' While many modernists in this 'cult' were also seeking an escape from capitalist modernity—albeit via nonrational spontaneity and intuitive religiosity (Hughes, 1961)—Lewis's need to distinguish his aesthetic 'spatial' philosophy from their "energetic doctrines" of flux (1927, p. 352) led him increasingly to consider values that transcended the "romantic chaos" (1971, p. 53) of his time and so attracted him to theological metaphysics (neo-Thomist rationalism, specifically).[44] Living, however, in the aftermath of Darwin and Nietzsche, and after his wartime experiences, Lewis could no longer equate the Absolute with a belief in a

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[44] As Michael Nath (2015, p. 174) rightly points out, the notion that Lewis was an opponent of 'flux' has "attained the status of dogma." Yet Lewis admits no Western philosopher ever ***refuted*** that there is perpetual empirical change and flux–he himself did not. His principal issue is with those doctrines who maintain there is nothing ***besides, behind, or over and above the Flux*** (Lewis, 1927, p. 247).

personal Christian God with ethical or agathological attributes (Schenker, 1992). Instead, Lewis developed a concept of a strictly metaphysical Absolute who served as a "supreme symbol of our separation and of our limited transcendence" (1927, p. 463)— a repository of the nonhuman and an urgent reminder man was "not the measure of all things" (Schenker, 1992, p. x). Lewis's theology typified the modernist view of the Absolute, which—when it did not reject it altogether—was to "place God in a transcendent realm far removed from the material world" (Gier, 2000, p. 41). As with Yeats's God, however, Lewis's Absolute was removed at such a distance that His attributes became "so absolute" as to be existentially irrelevant to man (Mann, 1991, p. 166).

Lewis's theology drew on T. E. Hulme's neo-classical theory that the cultural crisis leading to World War One stemmed from Renaissance humanism, which, despite claims to the contrary, thrust man into the position once occupied by God (Schenker, 1992, p. 172). Lewis demonstrated this critique of man's pretensions to be more than mere 'Apes of God' through his externalist conception of satire in a book of the same name—a satirical method whose values, Paulson observed, were "aesthetic… not moral" (1971, p. xi). Foster (2004, p. 134) terms this the "gist" of Lewis's antihumanism: he insists upon a "separation of the human" not just from the divine and the natural but from its "intrinsic frailties"; moreover, he exalts this separation and "militates for culture to reinforce it". While Lewis became increasingly concerned with the relation of limited and contingent humanity to this radically transcendent absolute, Lewis's ablest critics—including Gąsiorek and Edwards—posit that Lewis remained a "despairing, disillusioned humanist", driven into this "furious, polemical" inter-war phase by the Great War (Whittier-Ferguson, 2016), but that his aim was always to distinguish those elements of contemporary civilisation that furthered his modernist desire for a renewed,

"zestful" culture from those that led to "atavistic fatalism" and "repetition of mass slaughter" (Edwards, 2000, p. 5).

In the 1930s, Lewis withdrew from painting, fiction and philosophy toward journalistic pamphleteering concerned with the minutiae of international relations (disastrously, in the case of 1931's *Hitler*). Yet as the barbarities of Nazism became apparent, Lewis increasingly realised his strategic theorising of aesthetic idealism and a non-religious absolute was backfiring, or at least being practised in a spirit alien to his own. The abstract systems of thought developed by twentieth-century arts and sciences were becoming facades behind which 'modernist' regimes perpetrated the most inhuman atrocities. The avant-garde's radical 'impersonal' aesthetic not only seemed "continuous" with these broader forms of depersonalisation (Arvidson, 2018, p. 810), but modernism itself was revealed as just another chapter in the post-Renaissance narrative of man's growing contentment with the exercise of his intellectual prowess without reference to an ethical God (Schenker, 1992, p. 172) .

Exiled in Canada at the outbreak of another World War 'mass slaughter', when '"almost all he had stood for in his lifetime" seemed to "have been proved wrong" (Bridson, 1980, p. 248), Lewis turned on the defeat of his own "aesthetic radicalism" (Normand, 1989, p. 62) and modernist theology and mastered that failure with "sombre gusto" (Sherry, 1993, p. 128). The result was his most 'human art' to date, ranging from a series of 'super-naturalist' watercolours to humanised fictions like *Self Condemned* which revealed a "new humanity" and a "recognition of human otherness" (Edwards, 2000, pp. 525, 457). He began to admit the 'natural' — particularly the feminine – as a ground of value itself, not simply the negation against which his old positive values (the aesthetic, masculine realm of 'genius') are thrown into relief. He even considered we receive intimations of the divine through life itself, through

incarnation, not just through aesthetics. Most importantly, realising his abstract definitions of the Absolute could be manipulated for "political purposes" and distorted "into a monstrous and inhuman Absolute" (Lewis, 2023, p. 452), Lewis aligns his anti-religious concept of the divine with a more traditionally defined notion of Christian God, and acknowledges that if life is justified in aesthetics, it is ultimately *judged* in ethics.

Lewis did not forsake his old ideal entirely, however: *The Trial of Man*, the unpublished fourth volume of *The Human Age*, reveals this god was to have remained absent. The root of Lewis's aesthetic philosophy had always been a conviction in the nurturing of a bearable and productive surface life, free from an "ecstatic paralysis of union" with the Absolute (Lewis, 2017, p. 186), whose perfection, if applied to our existence would 'cancel us out', make us nothing. Unity, for Lewis, was the "correlate of nothing" (Edwards, 2011, p. 236): hence his opposition to political religions that, in the name of mythic particularism, seek to limit the individual. Consequently, whereas God's indifference to man had been a negative in *The Childermass* (1928), written in the aftermath of trench warfare, Lewis now redefines this transcendental indifference as a positive. God is 'so democratic' that he became 'aristocratic' for the sake of others: by 'abdicating,' he saved us from the solipsism inherent in His position as Absolute, leaving us free to roam among his 'heavenly pictures', the aesthetic. Besides cancelling out Lewis's postmodernism, this 'reification' of nothing simultaneously cuts across the romantic-modernist desire to overcome nihilism and redeem our 'divided condition' by integrating the individual into an "abstract totality" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 25). Lewis embraces our distance from the Absolute and the onus it places on each individual's imagination to access the divine—not to mention art's collective role in aiding this process. Navigating, thereby, the excesses of postmodern relativism and modern absolutism, Lewis's rational,

positive theological vision—one in which art, not politics, serves as a new religion for post-modern man—aligns with his late-life utopian vision in *America and Cosmic Man*, which defends the cosmopolitan individualism today's reactionaries call rootlessness by redefining it as "freedom" (Bazelon, 1949).

This albeit reductive synopsis has shown how Lewis's life resembled a dialogic, in-process, and experimental staging of argument between these two poles—his 'theological-metaphysical' concerns with a radically transcendent absolute and the other a powerful modernist urge to transform modernity—which changed focus at each point but always returns to his central 'postmodern' critique of modernism from within (Edwards, 2000). The central thread of this thesis is to explore the implications of this insider-critique in light of the NRR's continuation of the modernist's Romantic, anti-Enlightenment aspirations.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: THE LONG SHADOW OF THE COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

In *The Lion and the Fox,* Lewis (1951a, p. 201) described the "master-subject" of Shakespeare's work, both "immediately and historically," as “the struggle between chivalry, ‘Celtism,’ and Christian mysticism on the one hand”, and the “‘scientific spirit’ of the Renaissance mind and the modern world on the other”. Likewise, for many Lewisian scholars (Quéma, 1999, Wragg, 2005a; Lewis, 2017), the ‘master-subject’ of Lewis’s work is its reflection of Modernism’s parallel struggle between the modern, rational worldview and a desire to reconnect with a mythic pre-Enlightenment mindset. Friedman (2001, p. 494) referred to this as a conflict between the “two modernisms”. For social scientists, modernism is the Enlightenment’s rationalist schemata of universal progress and the post-Renaissance ideology of human mastery over nature. For cultural critics, Modernism is an (imaginary) “break with the past”, a deliberate rejection of realism's universal, linear, and stable worldview; it embraces chaos and subjectivity and reflects the crisis of representation, fragmentation, and alienation. What is significant for our argument is how the NRR embodies this same “historical yet immediate struggle” today. They reject the socio-political effects of the Enlightenment’s rationalist schemata in the name of anti-rationalism, relativism and nationalism, yet are ‘modernist’ in their faith in political power's ability to ‘regenerate’ society as a whole, in cultural revolution as a remedy for the “malaises” of modernity, and in their readiness to endorse a secular state and technological advances to break with the past and form an “alternative modernity” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 64).

Like Shakespeare, Lewis (1951a, p. 23) “entered furiously” into the contest of the two halves which he and his time were composed, holding up a "very lively" mirror that reflected a “purged, not to say peculiar, view of the Hegelian ‘contest’ in progress" (Lafferty, 2009). Yet

he also occupied a 'middle' ground between Modernism's 'binary oppositions': Vorticism accepted the transformations of post-Enlightenment modernity in a "stoical embrace" and without "propagandist fuss" (Lewis, 1939, p. 79). It was not a utopian-functionalist modernism speaking "clearly and passionately" for Enlightenment values of progress (Green 2006, p. 89). But neither was it a species of reactionary modernism which (like the NRR) embraced modern technology while rejecting Enlightenment reason, a phenomenon Thomas Mann (1977, p. 294) described as a "highly technological romanticism".[45] Instead, as Sheila Watson (1964, p. xvii) stated, Lewis's prime concern was the artist's role in a world transformed by "technological magic".

Yet following Lewis's 1920s 'authoritarian' polemics and 1930s flirtation with fascism, it became a critical commonplace to argue that his work exemplified such romantic reactionary modernist thinking—with all its impersonal, nationalistic, 'proto-fascistic' and anti-humanist associations. This error was typified by the BBC's James Fox (2011), who claimed Vorticism dreamt of a "mechanical world order" and a "new society governed by machines". While Lewis did view the machine as opposed to the functionalism of Nature,[46] he equally feared its dehumanising, de-individualizing, and reifying effects, which Vorticism's metallic hues and abrupt angularities dispassionately and objectively examined. At its core, Lewis' interest in technology revealed a desire to register its social significance rather than a belief in its

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[45] Mann (1977, p. 294) described the most "characteristic" and "dangerous aspect" of National Socialism as its admixture of robust modernity and an affirmative stance toward progress combined with dreams of the past.

[46] The capital 'N' signifies Nature's metaphysical status within Lewis's framework of thought. Nature—object—takes on an important "supporting role" in artistic creation, serving as the "eternal antagonist of the human subject" (Lewis, 2017, p. 188).

mythical, regenerative potential; he felt that because technology was transfiguring the modern world, it should be “treated with scepticism” and consequently critiqued (Gąsiorek, 2015b, p. 161). The Vorticists declared they believed in “no perfectibility except our own” (Lewis, 1914, p. 7), suggesting that their ‘utopia’—insofar as that term applies in Vorticism—was to be a future “rooted in human values”, with all man’s “flaws and limitations” (Waddell, 2012, p. 145).

Contrarily, reactionary modernists like Jünger felt this “new landscape” demanded a totalising vision of politics and art appropriate to it, one which jettisoned the cultural baggage of an Enlightenment society unable to grasp the “martial side” of technology's Janus face (Herf, 1984 p. 105). Whereas the Left linked the advance of technology to progressive Enlightenment values, reactionary modernists saw in mechanisation the potential to overcome bourgeois individualism and replace its “passive nihilism” with a “heroic sense of reality” (Evola, 2009, pp. 217-8). This drive or ‘will to’ self-healing follows Nietzsche’s distinction between passive and active nihilism. The passive nihilism of Enlightenment cultures is regarded as a distorted will-to-power which cannot go ‘beyond good and evil’ and is “full of morality that is not overcome” (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 7)—a view adopted in the NRR's critique of Western liberal values as mere masks for the “will-to-power”, the “will-to-technology”, or the “will-for-capital” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 98). Active nihilism, by contrast, is a “violent force of destruction” directed against these unsustainable Enlightenment values, a “destruction that purifies humanity” (Gillespie 1995, p. 179). It aims at overcoming Enlightenment modernity and writing a “new mythic history” (Jorjani, 2017).

1.1. Personal Background of a Century

This violent clash between myth and reason, collectivism and individualism, anti-Enlightenment particularism and universalism can be “styled,” in Lewis's terms, as a “contest” or a “tragedy” (1951a, p. 201). As arguably the most perceptive critic of these colliding impulses in the modernist era, Lewis’s insights are particularly relevant to the resurgence of this conflict today, especially concerning the alternative modernism of the NRR. Such themes of epochal conflict and apocalyptic liminality were woven into Lewis’s biography from the start: born in the New World colony of Nova Scotia amidst an electrical storm and under the lights of the Aurora Borealis (O’Keeffe, 2001, pp. 6-7), by 1908, after a period of bohemian travel in Europe, Lewis found himself immersed in a new storm—the “melodrama of modernity” that was Edwardian London (Lewis, 1914, p. 143). The "Old World” of England, Lewis wrote, had been transfigured by the rapid economic, social, and technological transformations of the Second Industrial Revolution into an “industrial island machine,” a “pyramidal workshop” (p. 23). Electrification and Fordist mass-production turned the “simplicity” of nineteenth-century entrepreneurial capitalism into the corporate capitalism and advanced industrial society of the twentieth (Schleifer, 2000).[47] This second phase of rapid industrialisation, not the Great War (as is typically claimed), marked the true birth of the modernist era.

For some, this period represented the full realisation of Enlightenment-inspired progress in science and technology and the triumphant institutionalisation of its ideals across society (Hayes, 1941). From the late 1600s onward, the Enlightenment—building on the groundwork

[47] A ’universe of means, as Gunther Anders (1980, p. 260) termed it.

laid by Bacon and Descartes—fostered the triumph of secular and human values over absolutism, the severance of the bond between political and religious authority, and the displacement of irrationalism with successive waves of scientific, philosophical, and technological advances. Through the Scientific, French, and Industrial Revolutions, the Enlightenment movement transfigured modernity and, by the close of the eighteenth century, had established a new social order based on universal values, reason over myth, human mastery over the social and natural environment, individual autonomy, and an all-encompassing dedication to liberty, progress, and freedom (Kivisto, 2020). Jameson described its culminating phases as:

> One of the most active periods in human history… with all the smoke and conveyance inherent in new living conditions and in the rapid development of business and industry, with the experimental triumphs of positivistic science and its conquest of the university system, with all the bustling parliamentary and bureaucratic activity of the new middle-class regimes, the spread of the press, the diffusion of literacy and the rise of mass culture… (Jameson, 1981, p. 251)[48]

Yet, when the rationalising force of the Enlightenment's political, economic, and social changes became fully manifest in the disorienting years of the Industrial Revolution, the appalled counter-reaction of Romanticism exploded with an unprecedented intensity

[48] Additionally, A. R. Wallace (1898, p. vii), a prominent evolutionary thinker of the nineteenth century alongside Darwin, declared that this period was not only "superior to any that have gone before it" but also "the best" when compared to the "entire preceding historical period," marking the "beginning of a new era of human progress."

(Sternhell, 2010, p. 16). This reaction was carried forth by modernists of Lewis's era and the postmodernists of the late twentieth century, and persists today with the NRR. The founding grievances of this Romantic reaction—with their "Bee in the Bonnet about Modernity" (Lewis, 1963, p. 86)—are summarised by Habermas:

> …since the close of the eighteenth-century, the discourse of modernity has had a single theme under ever new titles: the weakening of the forces of social bonding, privatisation, and diremption— in short, the deformations of a one-sidedly rationalised everyday praxis (Habermas, 1990, p. 139)

Hobsbawm (1994) characterised this transformative period that gave rise to Romanticism as the "dual revolution," where the political and ideological shifts of 1789 fused with and augmented the technological and economic upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Before this "dual revolution," the modern concept of revolution—where history "begins anew" as "an entirely new story" (Arendt, 1963)—was unknown.[49] From the eighteenth century onward, it became possible to believe humanity had entered a unique 'modern' era marked by the secular teleology of progress and that human reason—through the unfettered application of scientific inquiry—had set humanity on a steady path of "perpetual advancement" (Koselleck, 1988; Hay, 2002).[50]

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[49] Following it, terms like "revolution," "development" and "progress" acquired new temporal meanings (Lopez, 2022).

[50] Balibar (2012, p. 301) more precisely describes this sense of 'perpetual advancement' as a teleology of "human rights" whose "natural consequence would be a democratic regime, and whose ideal horizon would be cosmopolitanism."

By the late nineteenth century, most educated opinion embraced this Enlightenment-inspired belief in evolutionary "progress" (Habermas, 1990). Enlightenment philosophy fundamentally altered the perception of the temporal nature of progress: instead of being a chronological sequence encompassing all histories in their cyclical course, time became a progressive, dynamic force with a historical quality of its own that propelled modernity forward (Ferrone, 2015, p. 6). The Enlightenment, in response to the spiritual anomie caused by the diminishing of Christianity's "sacred canopy"—a decline it had greatly expedited (Griffin, 2007)—substituted this vision of "secular historical time" as a new shared "universe of meaning" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), presenting it as an arena wherein human nature could perfect itself via its own agency. In this "cult of progress" (Olusoga, 2021), utopia was no longer a static, transcendental ideal but a future goal achievable via progress, rationality, and science.

Late Victorian modernity was defined by the products of this modernising vision: secularism, urbanisation, massification, and a belief in Britain's teleological advance to an enlightened, improved society (Grisham, 2023, p. 138). However, entering the modernist era, the concomitant growth of materialism and erosion of traditional social bonds and structures of meaning undercut the 'myth' of progress, leading creative elites like Lewis to perceive time not as "ever new" but as a continuous fall from the projected utopia (Jorjani, 2019). This undermined the myth of "secular historical time" and precipitated the rise of literary and artistic modernism (Harvey, 1989). While modernists inherited the nineteenth-century view of modernity as the aggressive surpassing of past achievements with ever-accelerating change, their work also reflected an apocalyptic imagination linked to that speed (Sherry,

2017). Lewis (1963, pp. 391-392), for example, described the capitalist world as “rampant as never before” and a “scarcity after its own heart [sic]”.

This reveals Modernist literature as not just a literature of “change” but of “crisis” (Childs, 2016, p. 15)—reflecting disillusionment, fragmentation, and radical disorientations in the collective sense of time and values (Kuiper, 2009). Like the romantics and anti-enlightenment thinkers before them, modernists associated an overly rationalised and disenchanted ‘modernity’ with civilisational decline and ‘decadence’—a term Giambattista Vico (1984, p. 78) defined as when men “finally go mad and waste their substance”. From Vico through Herder and Burke, the idea of decadence became entwined with anti-Enlightenment thought.[51] In Bolton's *Artists of the Right* (2012)—subtitled “Resisting Decadence”—a pantheon of artists, including Lewis, is imagined as opposing the cultural dissipation initiated by the Enlightenment, establishing a continuity between the NRR's metapolitical efforts and modernism—which Eliot viewed as the 'last holdout' against the rising tide of industrialism, secularisation, and egalitarianism (Tucker, 2002, p. 25).[52]

1.1.1 Plunging Back into Crisis

As in Lewis' time, this notion of cultural decline and decadence is fast seeping into the public domain from the metapolitical and cultural one. Political commentators increasingly draw comparisons between modern European society and the cultural conditions at the turn of the twentieth century. The concept of 'cultural decadence’—promulgated by the NRR—has

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[51] Sternhell (2010, p. 15) caustically notes that “for the enemies of the Enlightenment, decadence is inevitable in a world that adopts rationalism as a principle of behaviour”.

[52] Eliot’s views were shared by Q.D. Leavis (1932), who also saw literary modernism as the last stronghold against the “commercial and economic machinery” enveloping modern life”.

resurfaced, according to which Europe is on the brink of disaster due to self-destructive liberalism, democracy, and human rights (Ziegler, 2021). Similarly, the unquestioning belief that technology benefits humanity is once more being subsumed under a fear it may outpace our capacity to control it (Dematagoda, 2020, p. 489). The link between teleological 'progress' and liberal democratic capitalism—on which Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis was based—hangs by a thread (Lee and Stanley, 2014).

It is no overstatement to say that this sense of "crisis consciousness" (Schleifer, 2000) characterises life in the twenty-first century, much like it did in Lewis's era when the bond between the temporalisation of history and the grand narrative of progress was first ruptured.[53] Reason—meant to rule the world with peace, equality, and justice—is perceived as having degraded into calculations and bureaucratic control (Lipovetsky, 2001). Worse, as Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) argue, reason has proven inadequate to the things it seeks to measure, substituting a reflexive understanding of the natural world and human behaviour with conceptual and material domination—often termed instrumental rationalism or 'reification'.[54] Rather than making the Enlightenment the servant of human progress and self-knowledge, Western man has become the victim of modernity's aspirations (Wragg, 2005)—"we are all slipping back into machinery" because we "tried to be free" (Lewis, 1984, p. 204) .

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[53] Gray (2015) even posits that, for many liberal critics, the sense of being locked in an 'apocalyptic' struggle with the "forces of darkness" has "returned".

[54] As defined by Lukács, reification is "a cognitive occurrence in which something that doesn't possess thing-like characteristics in itself (e.g., something human) comes to be regraded as a thing" (Lukács, cited in Honneth 2008, p. 21). Fuelled by the Second Industrial Revolution, the notions of "instrumentalised rationality", or "means-end thinking" are often represented by this concept of reification (Wragg, 2005, p. 9).

Modernism gained momentum as the widespread belief in progress began to wane. Similarly, the rise of the NRR is catalysed by the increase in 'postmodern pessimism' (Marx, 1994)—a condition that rejects the "grand narratives of progress and explanation" (Lyotard, quoted in Ward, 2001, p. xiv) and indicates a culture shorn of its capacity to function in any autonomous or linear state.[55] Postmodernism is seen as ominous because, like the reactionary modernists who emerged from "within modernity" (Bar-On, 2013, p. 72), postmodernists reject liberal notions of progress as measured by material advancement and focus on the 'dark side' of Enlightenment modernity: the atomisation of mass individualism, the fragmentation of time and values, the rationalised "disenchantment of the world" (Weber, 1946, p. 155) and the instrumentalisation of Nature. Many NRR thinkers view the Enlightenment project only in such "pessimistic, Nietzschean terms" (Bar-on, 2013, p. 143), in contrast to the 'optimistic' perspective of liberal thinkers who see history as continually progressing toward a better society. Like the modernists, the NRR—to repurpose I.A. Richards's (1930, p. 320) words—perceives our century as in a "cultural trough rather than a crest," a situation "sufficiently serious to force" consideration of "available remedies."

Although typically viewed in exclusively literary or artistic terms, the reactionary modernists' counter-cultural efforts to reverse this decline by rejecting the past, creating new historical traditions, and envisioning alternative futures had "remarkable social and political implications" (Fritzsche, 1996, p. 12). Gentile (1994) traced the origins of Italian Fascism to Futurism's campaign for a 'modernist nationalism'—a cultural fusion of nationalism and

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[55] Jensen (2010, p. 32) accurately observes that postmodernism is no longer just an academic notion but impacts all of modern society: it has become intertwined with general culture and is evident in everyday life, extending beyond art, politics, or philosophy.

modernity that demanded a "total spiritual revolution." This modernist ambition resonates with the NRR because it aimed at more than just remedying the "malaises of Modernity" (Taylor, 1991, p. 1); it sought to revive European heritage through a new synthesis that challenged not only the contemporary aspects of liberalism but also its fundamental Enlightenment ideals. These ideals, such as progressive time (see Chapter Three), individual autonomy (Chapter Four), universalism (Chapter Five), and secularism (Chapter Six), remain integral to modern political thought (Bar-On, 2013, p. 73).

We can, therefore, consider the NRR as the latest 'wave' of this centuries-long countermovement against Enlightenment ideals and their impacts. The first wave was the Romantic rebellion against the rationalist excesses of 1789; the second arose in the late nineteenth century in response to the disorientating effects of urbanisation and mass production; and the third began in the 1980s as a backlash against the intensifying forces of globalisation, rationalisation, and homogenisation (Hirschman, 1991, pp. 3-8).[56] If the reactionary modernists were part of the second wave, responding to the rapid changes of the Second Industrial Revolution, then the NRR should be understood in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and our transition to postmodernity, or 'hypermodernity' (Ebert, 2019).[57] To explore this further, we must turn to the influential work of Zeev Sternhell (2010),

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[56] See Montgomery & Chirot, 2016, p. 332 for a further discussion of Hirschman's theory.

[57] 'Hypermodernity' is the era in which the individual integrates with a global network of abstract systems and digital technologies, becoming more "detached" than ever from the "great structuring principles of modernity" (Charles, 2005, pp. 11-12). It is regarded as the phase that follows postmodernity. Postmodernity refers to the late twentieth-century period when institutional barriers to individual liberation were removed, allowing for the complete expression of personal desires and the pursuit of self-fulfillment. However, Lipovetsky contends

who also traces the ideological genealogy of reactionary modernism to the eighteenth century, identifying its origins in the first wave of the Romantic Counter-Enlightenment movement.

1.2 The Two Modernities

To many scholars, Sternhell's proposition may seem surprising. The eighteenth century is often hailed as the "quintessential age of rationalist modernity" (Sternhell, 2010, p. 1), a period of unparalleled intellectual exploration and discovery (Cassirer, 1951) when belief in human reason to "explain and improve the world" reached its peak (Berlin, 1939, p. 35). It is characterised as an era when faith in humanity supplanted traditional religion (Gray, 2015) and when Immanuel Kant—the Enlightenment philosopher supreme— crowned reason the "highest good on earth" (1949, pp. 303-305). Yet, just as rationalist thought seemed to reach its zenith, a sweeping revolt against the Enlightenment's core principles erupted within European intellectual life. Like the reactionary modernists and the NRR, philosophers of the Anti-Enlightenment revolt fought not to defeat but to reshape and revalue modernity. They sought a 'different modernity': one based on tradition over progress, organic nationalism over mass individualism, myth over reason, and "difference over equality" (D'Auria, 2011, p. 726). Thus, for Sternhell, two modernities emerged from the eighteenth century: a rationalist modernity, which led to liberalism and democracy,[58] and an anti-rationalist modernity

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that we have now transitioned (post 9/11) into a new era of 'hypermodernity,' defined by the hypermodern individual and hyper-consumption–a more narcissistic and inward mode of individualism and consumption.

[58] The rather flabby heirs of social revolution" according to Lewis (1946, p. 563).

(revolutionary, relativistic, particularistic, communitarian, and opposed to universal values) that gave rise to the conservative revolution, reactionary modernism, and subsequently the NRR.

The first 'rationalist modernity'—upholding 'transcendent' universal values, individualism, and secularisation of community life—was epitomised by Kant's philosophy, but its metaphysical roots lay in the previous century with the Cartesian subject-object split. In search of the absolute certain foundation of knowledge, Descartes encouraged everyone to doubt everything. Through a process of elimination, he concluded the only thing one cannot doubt is: 'cogito ergo sum' (I am thinking, therefore I exist). The certainty of *cogito* became the basis of the subject, and the human ego— the thinking ego— was privileged as the main authority in the ontological judgement of Being.[59] If Descartes—'the father of the modern age" (Lewis, 1927, p. 290)—made the human mind the starting point for philosophical reflection, Kant subsequently elevated reason itself as the foundation for moral and ethical thought (Cortest, 2008, p. 59).[60] Modern humanism emerged from this new conviction in the agency of man (Smith, 2020), supported by Kant's (1784) moderate yet radically interpretable conception of the Enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage". With its motto "Have courage to use your own reason!" the Enlightenment project established a redefined morality grounded in the power of autonomous human reasoning.

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[59] Being is hereby defined, for brevity, as the "unconscious presuppositions in a particular time and place that make anything intelligible to us".

[60] Nietzsche (1968, p. 500) protested that "no one (should) gives man his qualities– neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. (The nonsense of the last idea was taught as "intelligible freedom" by Kant)."

Pre-modern rationalism had, in contrast, sought a basis for morality in an order of things independent of mankind—whether in Aquinas's theistic reworking of Aristotelian natural law or Plato's idea of the eternal and changeless Forms. (Gray, 2007, p. 241). The structure of Christian theology indeed derives from Plato's ontology, in which Being is measured through the correspondence between the thing and its archetype—though in Christianity, God replaces Plato's "Idea" as the supreme form of being.[61] Crucially, in pre-Enlightenment schemas, *both* subject and object draw Being from the absolute Being of God or supreme unifying principle.[62]

Put plainly, for pre-rationalist thinkers and their "hypothesis of Oneness" (Lewis, 1927, p. 402), everything takes place within the mind of God. But after Descartes, the subject thinks its own thought: it doesn't *need* God to. The ontological triangle—originating in Platonism and recapitulated in Christianity—is radically inverted: now, God's Being derives from the subject's Being. In other words, God as a self-sufficient entity is traded out for the subject, whose Being is justified through the empirical fact of the thought process. As Lewis (1972, p. 309) summarised, Descartes got us out of the mind of God and locked the "aspiring Everyman of the Enlightenment" in his "private, independent psychic cubicle".

The outcome of this, for Heidegger (1977a, p. 27), is the prevalent impression that "everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct", leading to the "final delusion" that "man everywhere and always encounters only himself." He and Lewis imply

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[61] Even Augustine remarked that Plato required little to make him a Christian (Allen, 2000)

[62] For St. Augustine, the twin poles of creation–subject and object–are justified by God's Being; human knowledge is a "reflection of the truth originating in the mind of God," similar to how the moon "derives the light it reflects from the sun" (Augustine, cited in Nash, 1971, p. 49).

this solipsism is intrinsic to the Enlightenment's model of reasoning, which determines metaphysical truths by depending on the workings of the individual mind (a model fundamentally at odds with the pre-rationalist one).[63] Freed from religion and tradition, the possibility arose of "human omniscience" as an "attainable goal" (Berlin, 2013, p. 47). This opened the door to man's "intellectual and moral" control over his natural and social environment (Smith, 2018, p. 135),[64] a Promethean conception of man's relationship with the external world—i.e., the global "humanist project" of "subjugating and exploiting the earth" (Gray, 2007, p. 248)— and Heidegger's 'planetarium'.[65] In short, man, as a subject, transforms everything else into what he is not: an object.

For Lewis, humanity's attempt to domesticate the external world represented the greatest danger to human culture, threatening as it does the collapse of the sacrosanct "dualistic tension" between subject and object, self and world—which, as Lewis concurred with Nietzsche, was what initially brought art into being (Lewis, 2017, p. 178).[66] It was for this reason he opposed the instrumentalising aspects of the Enlightenment and its meta-creed of

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63 More specifically, as Rieley (2021, p. 10) points out, this model is at odds with Aquinas's "participation" epistemology and was also subsequently critiqued by Burke.

64 As Megill (1985) notes, the enlightened philosophers aimed to achieve for the human world what Newton accomplished for the natural world: in other words, to create a science of man.

65 'Planetarium' is used in a not dissimilar context by Lewis in *Enemy of the Stars* (1979, p. 147, p. 170). Heidegger's metaphor from "The Age of the World Picture" (1977a) illustrates how modern techno-science fosters a universal, calculative, and objectifying view of existence. Modern man reduced the world to a "picture"—something to be observed, measured, controlled, and manipulated through scientific and technological means.

66 See Chapter Four for a more detailed explanation of this point.

totalising, universalising ‘progress’—a narrative underpinning all humanist ideologies, from the French Revolution to materialistic communism, that seek intramundane utopias and view man as the unique source of authority in the universe (Harari, 2016). Yet, as Part Two details, Lewis increasingly combatted these ideas in the name of a beneficent classical kind of rationality—a ‘good’ rationality distinct from the negative connotations above—and not, like his contemporaries, in the name of reactionary anti-rationalism.

1.2.1 The anti-rationalist modernity

It is often unacknowledged in genealogies of European thought that the rise of the Enlightenment's 'rationalist modernity' was paralleled by the growth of an alternative 'anti-rationalist modernity,' initially inspired by Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (1725) and later developed by thinkers like Burke and Herder. For Sternhell (2010, p. 16), this 'anti-rationalist modernity’ always served the “same function”: sustaining the “campaign against humanism”, much-derided “universal values”, and, ultimately, “democracy”.

Whereas Kant is said to have wept about a “day of salvation” (quoted in von Ense, 1846, p. 427) upon hearing of the French Republic, a constitution founded on reason, Burke (2005, pp. 290-291). saw it as “liberty without wisdom… the greatest of all possible evils... folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint.” Being “no great friend of the Tricoteuse” (Lewis, 1922, p.3), Burke (2005, p. 266) prophesied that the ‘enlightened’ politicians of metaphysics, inspired by abstract ideas of right, would create only “establishments for anarchy” and thus destroy “this European world of ours” (p. 340). Lewis (1952, p. 62) likened Burke’s fear of Europe "rallying to the mad cry of Liberty" to a man watching a "crowd of children lured into some ecstasy of unrestraint—to play truant, break bounds, and burn in effigy their masters

and mistresses" in a "saturnalia of destruction"— a characterisation uncannily foreshadowing the inaugurating fiesta of Sammael's 'Human Age'.

Indeed, Burke principally opposed the radicalism of 1789 not because it was violent and destructive, nor because it worsened social conditions, but because it was fuelled by the presumption that man, rather than God's providence, determines history (Sheldon, 2014, p. 22). Burke regarded society as a divinely ordained institution governed by natural law rather than one constructed by human agency. Following the scholastic tradition of Aquinas, he believed in a superior, universal order in which all existing rules play a harmonious role (Scattola, 2003, p. 7). In contrast, Enlightenment thinkers like Locke downplayed Aquinas's metaphysical justifications for universal human rights. Zuckert (2007, p. 32) suggests the entire Lockean philosophical project is, at its core, an attack on Thomistic philosophy—the theological rationalism Lewis strategically endorsed in *Time and Western Man.* Essentially, Locke 'liberated' man from tradition, and Kant established the newly autonomous man, via a "set of rational principles", as the basis of right and justice (Cortest, 2008). Consequently, Aquinas's Eternal law—in which divine wisdom directs "all acts and movements" (quoted in Borges de Macedo, 2017, p. 78)—faded from view.

This brings us to the central fault line between Sternhell's two modernities. For Enlightenment thinkers, individualism carries a fundamental political significance manifested in the rights of man, political liberty, Rousseau's conception of the citizen, Hobbesian Sovereignty, and the Rights of Subjects (Curran, 2019) and the "human origin of society" (Sternhell, 2019).[67] In contrast, Burke and his contemporaries maintained society was a

[67] Hobbes's political theory challenges absolutism in two key ways: (1) it establishes that sovereignty is contingent upon the sovereign's capacity to guarantee the safety of the people,

divinely ordained institution governed by natural law and *not* constructed by man. The schism between Kant and Burke et al. was irreconcilable; humanity could not have two origins: the one in Genesis and the one presented by Rousseau. Kant, inevitably, sided with Rousseau.

Significantly, Lewis (1952, p. 25) wrote that if he were to name modern freedom's political father, he would choose Rousseau. However, if "freedom-liberty" were to be regarded as metaphysical, he would attribute it to Kant. For Lewis, Kant's advocacy of freedom and human autonomy held none of the anarchistic connotations of political-revolutionary liberty; a member of Kant's ideal rational society—his *Kingdom of Ends* or "chilly ethical utopia"—would be more *responsible* than free. Nevertheless, it was against this "cold, mechanistic and impious Franco-Kantian Enlightenment" that Burke advanced his orthodox view of human nature and social life (D'Auria, 2011, pp. 726-728). The individual should be subordinate to the Absolute will, and social and political institutions integrated into an organic, hierarchical order.

Sternhell argues that contrary to appearances, this 'alternative modernity' proposed by Burke et al. was neither regressive nor traditionalist. The second 'anti-rationalist modernity' was not a counterrevolution but a different cultural revolution, which Sternhell deemed as significant as the industrial revolution. As Lewis (1952, p. 62) notes, Burke's mind was "anything but illiberal … he stands as the great pioneer of what we now call 'reaction'". Many traditionalist modernists like Eliot followed Burke's emphasis on the "interrelation and continuity of human activities" as a means to counter Enlightenment society's "separation into spheres of interest" (Williams, 1960, p. 12), just as the NRR derives its vision of a future

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and (2) it asserts that subjects possess inalienable rights—even against the sovereign—when their preservation is threatened (Curran, 2019).

society from Herder's German Romantic ideal of an "organic, corporative community" in which the social classes constitute a "hierarchy within a body" (Sternhell, 2010, p. 292)

Sternhell's distinction between rational and anti-rational modernities has further resonances in the context of the NRR. For instance, Dugin (2023, pp. 6-7) reinterprets Popper's dichotomy between the "open" and "closed" society to elucidate the division between Enlightenment liberals, who reject all forms of the Absolute incompatible with "individuality and its nature," and various 'enemies' of this doctrine (from Marxists to Fascists) who oppose the centrality of the individual and instead promote "alternative modernities founded on the Absolute."[68] The Absolute, Dugin concludes, "does violence to the integrity of the atomised personality", subjecting it to a "supra-individual impulse" that dictates goals, tasks, dogmas and norms.[69]

1.2.2. Anti-rationalist modernity and technological romanticism

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[68] In *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), Popper critiques historicist viewpoints—particularly those of Plato, Hegel, and Marx—and aims to demonstrate that the pursuit of comprehensive explanations of society in each instance was linked to governmental visions that were totalitarian in their principles and objectives (Scruton, 2007, p. 537). According to Dugin (2023), Popper contends that these thinkers share a common criterion: their support for "metaphysics, ethics, sociology, and economics" founded on principles which undermine the 'open society' and the supremacy of the individual.

[69] As indicated in the introduction, Lewis's— whose many-sided personality may well be described as an 'open' individual (Tomlin, 1969a)—was deeply opposed to any such ideological monisms even if this "friend of man" was obliged to launch his defence of individuality under the guise of The Enemy.

According to Sternhell (2010, p. 9), this 'absolutist' and anti-rational modernity—having rejected the idea of individual autonomy rooted in Hobbes and Locke—transformed at the turn of the twentieth century into an extraordinarily destructive, technologised force. When the communitarian, historicist, and nationalist elements of the anti-Enlightenment movement (particularly those articulated in German Romanticism) arose amid mass industrialisation and urbanisation, they were weaponised as never before. European states harnessed these impulses to maintain power and generate resources for modern wars (Hobsbawm, 1962);[70] in short, they leveraged "romantic nationalism" (Wilson, 1973) to modernise their economies and mobilise mass support (Montgomery and Chirot, 2016, p. 293). [71]

The growth of mass society in Europe following the technological revolution, rapid modernisation, and democratisation of political life was thus concurrent with the development of nationalism and the rise of 'the revolutionary Right,' the conservative revolution, and in the cultural realm, reactionary modernism. Herf (1984) views this development as similarly catastrophic.[72] He contends that reactionary modernists like Marinetti (and, for him, Lewis) associated technology with a new antibourgeois vitalism and the will to power, pitting technology against Enlightenment rationality. Like Sternhell and Mann, Herf concludes this fusion of technics and irrationalism shaped Nazism's equally

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[70] As Lewis (1929, p. 246) observed, scientific progress made it easier for men to slaughter themselves in orgies of "mechanised violence."

[71] Nationalism can be considered another unintended result of the Enlightenment's secularization of community life: nineteenth-century states, deprived of traditional 'divine' legitimacy, began to derive it from the nation itself (Tahmazyan, 2021).

[72] Herf coined the term 'Reactionary Modernism'—see Appendix 1 for a more detailed definition.

‘modernist’ belief that technological progress could align with German nationalism's revolt against positivism.

For Sternhell, the rise of reactionary modernism at the turn of the century, along with the widespread rejection of Enlightenment liberalism and humanism, was only made possible by the conceptual groundwork laid by the "aristocratic" revolt of Burke, Herder, and Vico. Catalysed by the French Revolution, their ‘anti-rationalist modernity’ led to the dislocation of the European world and, in certain interpretations, paved the way for fascist modernism (Appiah, 2019). Moreover, the hostility fostered by these early anti-Enlightenment thinkers endured as a powerful base of resistance to liberalism (Montgomery and Chirot, 2016). Given how profoundly the Enlightenment transformed Western cultures—with contemporary political thought grounded in its principles of empiricism, moral universality, cosmopolitanism, secularism, and progressivism—Sternhell concludes that the ongoing challenge posed by contemporary anti-enlightenment forces brings with it the rupture of the West's core intellectual traditions.

1.2.3 Conclusion

In light of this, it is unfortunate that academics overwhelmingly treat the NRR and its metapolitical objectives as isolated phenomena rather than situating them within the broader debate over Enlightenment ideology. Despite its oversimplifications, Sternhell's work is thus valuable for tracing a *fil rouge* from figures like Burke to conservative revolutionaries and

reactionary modernists, providing a framework for future scholars to contextualise forces like the NRR within this intellectual lineage.[73]

Public intellectuals like Stephen Pinker have, indeed, begun contextualising the NRR in this broader framework, noting the increasing number of New Right thinkers who credit anti-Enlightenment theoreticians as influences.[74] In *Enlightenment Now* (2018), Pinker categorises today's anti-enlightenment cultural movements as continuations of Romanticism's attempt to suppress the values of 'reason, science, humanism and progress'. Like Sternhell, Pinker argues that the Enlightenment project transformed Western culture so fundamentally that any threat to its current political manifestations—i.e., liberal democracy—simultaneously threatens the West's core intellectual traditions.

The failures of recent attempts to separate liberalism from its Enlightenment heritage inadvertently affirm these alarmist pronouncements. Take, for instance, Rorty's 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism' (1983), which aimed to eliminate the foundationalism of the Enlightenment project by asserting the ideal liberal society has "no purpose except freedom". As Gray (2005) notes, Rorty's historicist position is fundamentally flawed: it builds on historical practices—those of liberal society—without providing a foundation or transcendental justification for them. In other words, Rorty rejects Enlightenment

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[73] For example, drawing on Sternhell, Ziegler (2021) outlines a genealogy of anti-Enlightenment thought that starts with a "first wave" (including de Maistre, Burke, and German Romantics like Herder), progresses through a second wave (featuring Gobineau, Italian Fascists, and National Socialists), and culminates in a third iteration represented by Evola and de Benoist.

[74] Pinker (2018) also emphasizes that "the intellectual roots of Trumpism" are not an oxymoron, echoing this thesis's warning about underestimating the metapolitical threat of radical right intellectualism.

foundationalism while paradoxically presenting modernity as a universal cultural condition based on a Western model (Gray, 2005, p. 257). This ironically validates the NRR's critique of liberalism in the postmodern era—Dugin (2021) argues that while original liberal thinkers sought to "liberate" human reason from theology, postmodernists aim to liberate humans "from" reason, as reason itself is now "too hierarchical".[75] Put bluntly, postmodernism extends the Enlightenment's liberation *of* reason to liberation *from* reason. Optimistically, Rorty presents this 'self-consuming' extension of Enlightenment critical reason to its foundations as signifying the project's completion—rather than, as Nietzsche more accurately conjectured, signifying its self-undermining.

In line with Nietzsche, Gray (2007, p. 268) concludes that the continuous self-disintegration of the Enlightenment project will inevitably carry away much else in its wake, including many of the most constitutive concepts of Western civilisation. He concurs with Sternhell that all contemporary political ideologies originate in the Enlightenment but—contra Sternhell—argues that the challenges besetting liberalism today cannot be resolved merely by reworking intellectual traditions rooted in that project: our current crises are inextricable from the Enlightenment's ideological essence. Drawing on Schopenhauer's criticisms of Kant, Gray (2008, p. 82) contends that modern liberal humanism, following the Enlightenment, unwittingly inherits religious delusions. In striving to replace the 'Religion of God' with the 'Religion of Humanity', modern humanism repeats Christianity's error of treating humanity as distinct from nature, privileged with free will, and as controlling its historical trajectory: an anthropocentric worldview destructive to both humans and the Earth's other inhabitants

[75] In Dugin's (2012) view, liberalism ultimately seeks to extend this 'liberation' to all limiting or hierarchical factors in the realms of morality and identity (social, ethnic, and even gendered).

(Piper, 2010, p. 5). By transmuting the Christian doctrine of salvation into a project of universal human emancipation, Sternhell's 'rationalist modernity' inevitably gave rise to cultural imperialism and its nihilistic instrumental reason, eroding traditional and local forms of social and ethical knowledge by promoting autonomous human reason and privileging science above all other understanding.

Gray's critiques closely resemble those of other anti-Enlightenment thinkers, particularly Burke's critique of Kant's 'freedom' as "an insolent irreligion" (cited in Montgomery and Chirot, 2016, p. 291), Nietzsche's attack on the Enlightenment's secularisation of Christian teleology, and Heidegger's criticisms of Cartesian subjectivism and calculative thinking. All these thinkers denounce how Enlightenment theorists rejected religious interpretations of history while introducing their own teleology: the universalising and totalising 'grand narrative' of progress.[76]

Dugin's Fourth Political Theory and "Neo-Eurasianism" explicitly reject this 'nihilistic' Enlightenment belief in secular "unidirectional time" (Millerman, 2022, p. 116). Following Heidegger, Dugin (2014, p. 124) argues that time in the Enlightenment model is considered from the standpoint of *becoming*, of forward movement, rather than from Being. For "progressives", he asserts, Being is a "function of becoming" and is no longer seen as an idea but as a "value, development… and the will to power"— leading to the anthropocentric domination of nature feared by Gray and Lewis. That 'progress' betokens the progressive abandonment of Being—a sense epitomised in Hölderlin's image of the "flight of the Gods"—

[76] The implication that a totalising universalism is intrinsic to this concept is encapsulated in Koselleck's paraphrase of Kant: "So far history has conformed to chronology. Now it is about making chronology conform to history" (Koselleck, quoted in Jordheim, 2014, p. 510).

is most thoroughly analysed by Heidegger's narrative of the West's 'descent' into total nihilism.

To fully understand the metaphysical basis of the NRR as modern proponents of Sternhell's second 'anti-Enlightenment tradition,' we must examine Heidegger's 'descent' narrative more closely. Like the conservative revolutionaries of Lewis's era, the NRR draws from Heidegger a counter-vision that links a reawakening of Being with a renewed sense of rootedness—a vision realisable only through a metaphysical revolt against universalism and a reassertion of what is particular to national cultures. This analysis will establish the foundational concepts necessary for a more nuanced exploration of Lewis's relation to this counter-vision in Part Two.

1.3 Heidegger's "Descent into Nihilism"

Philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were preoccupied with the notion that the 'grand narrative' of progress could be unveiled by studying the history of civilisation (Condorcet, 1795; Montesquieu, 1748) and that this development could be interrupted through a structured series of stages (Little, 2020).[77] For right-Heideggerians like

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[77] Lewis (1984, pp. 37-28) defends the Enlightenment thought of Condorcet against Sorel in the essay "Three Fatalities", writing: "He (Sorel) shows extreme displeasure at Condorcet's mental habits, where that eighteenth-century worthy is found proposing to cure the people of their superstitions, so that the helpless Many may to cure the people of their superstitions, so that the helpless Many may cease to be the eternal dupes of their masters: so that a workman would be able to defend himself against political salesmanship, ballyhoo or charlatanry, or cure himself of prejudices and superstitions, 'by the use simply of his reason.'" . The book in question where Sorel critiques Condorcet is *The Illusions of Progress* (Sorel, 1969, pp. 27-28).

Dugin, this ontological view of history focuses not on beings but on the metaphysical message within the dynamic evolution of beings and the dialectic among them.

Despite his ambivalence towards the Enlightenment, this progressive historical ontology is most fully articulated in Hegel and can be best outlined through a brief exposition of his thought. Hegel's philosophy of history— or "existential system" (Lewis, 1963, p. 357)—is inherently progressive, with an underlying teleology he defines as "progress in the consciousness of freedom" (Hegel, 1988, p. 22). In the Hegelian model, social evolution begins from a primordial unity, then fragments, alienating individuals from society and subject from object, before reconciling both in a higher synthesis or "final social form", which preserves the individuality that alienation made possible while resolving the divisions that caused it (Boucher, 2014, p. 14). This "intelligible dialectical process" (Kracauer, 1966, p. 75)—with its "thesis and anti-thesis" (Lewis, 1984, p. 183)— leads towards the realisation or 'unfolding' of human freedom. In essence, world history aims to develop the self-consciousness of spirit and freedom; it is the process of the *actualisation of the spirit,* whereby the spirit "discovers itself and its own concept" (Hegel, 1975, p. 62; Little, 2020). Its final stages are realised through a progression from art to religion and ultimately to philosophy, the highest and most developed expression of the Absolute Spirit.

The process is detailed in the 'Geist' chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which interprets the development of Spirit—from ancient Greece through Rome, medieval Europe, absolutist Europe, and the Enlightenment—in terms of alienation, that is, the estrangement of Absolute Spirit from itself. In the ancient Greek world, Spirit was too natural and lacked self-reflection. The subsequent dialectic of spirit purified the subject of all that was natural and unreflective, enabling Spirit to become fully subjective (or 'Subject') (Hammer, 2013, pp.

234-235). Christianity was a crucial step in this process. The incarnation of God as man signified the unprecedented elevation of the individual (subjectivity): through Christ, humanity discovers the essence of Spirit *within* and so overcomes its alienation from God (Evans, 2018).[78] For Hegel, this process of purification and alienation culminated in the Enlightenment, where faith retreated "into the inner" (Hammer, 2013, p. 235), and reason, embodied in the divine Spirit, became incorporated into reality—not through religious activity but through the state. Humanity 'actualises' and becomes conscious of rational existence, political institutions, and laws. Hegel optimistically regarded this as the end goal of world history (Böckenförde, 2020, p. 207).[79]

Hegel's thought thus marked the transition from "trivial and unedifying" history (Lewis, 1965a, p. 351) to the 'history of philosophy'. This panoramic perspective shifted the focus from mere events and peoples to concepts and ideas, specifically the Absolute Idea, as it develops its "message" through the unfolding dialectical stages of humanity's evolution

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[78] Böckenförde (2020) shows that, in contrast to ancient philosophy, Christianity encompasses the principle of the uniqueness of the subject, which can and indeed has led to the acknowledgement of the right to subjective freedom.

[79] While Marx had yet to speak of the "realisation of philosophy"–that is, turning Enlightenment ideas into socio-political reality–Hegel already believed his idea of freedom had been realised in the modern Prussian state, his "omnipotent... god-state" (Lewis, 1984, p. 80) . Indeed, in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), Hegel envisioned the state as the highest expression of man's freedom and regarded allegiance to the state as a necessary condition for fully self-realized individuality.

(Dugin, 2014, p. 77).[80] Only within this grand teleological schema could Hegel establish that the essence of Spirit is subjectivity and self-knowledge, allowing his project to achieve its goal of reconciling reason with reality: "What is rational is real; and what is real is rational" (Hegel, 1991, p. 20). In other words, rational progress in history occurs only when there is progress in the self-consciousness of the Spirit of the world through human culture, especially regarding the consciousness of freedom.[81] With the advent of the modern, in the "glorious sunrise" (Habermas, 1990, p. 7) of the Enlightenment and French Revolution, Hegel (1975, p. 53) believed humanity had reached "the last stage in History, our world, our own time." Fukuyama's (1992) 'end of history' thesis restated this claim with a twentieth-century twist: global liberalism was history's ultimate terminus; the evolution of democratic capitalism and Hegelian freedom had followed parallel paths and converged in self-affirming triumph.[82]

Contrarily, influenced by Heidegger, modern critics of the Enlightenment perceive this 'grand narrative' of Progress as a "vilified" trajectory leading to the enthronement of man (Ferrone, 2015), with today's liberal West representing the triumph of Nietzsche's

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[80] After Hegel, any history, according to Heidegger, is not an account of beings but rather an account of the ***essence of beings***, i.e., metaphysics' account of itself (Dugin, 2014).

[81] To put this yet another way: there is reason in history because "reason rules the world" (Hegel, 1975, p. 12), and world history represents the progress of reason (Evans, 2018).

[82] According to Fukuyama (1989), world history, understood as the emergence of universal freedom, reached completion in the post-Cold War era, with fully developed liberal institutions providing the greatest freedom attainable.. Contrarily, Nietzsche (1968, p. 541) wrote that "liberal institutions... undermine the will to power; they level mountain and valley, and call that morality; they make men small, cowardly, and hedonistic—every time it is the herd animal that triumphs with them. Liberalism: in other words, herd-animalization."

'metaphysics of absolute subjectivity.' The decline of traditional values—initiated by Descartes' separation of the self from the external world and culminating in the French Revolution—resulted in the opposite of the 'rational modernity' envisaged by Hegel. Despite Hegel's prescription that philosophers should discover the rational *within* the real—rather than imposing the rational *upon* the real—many anti-enlightenment critics, following Nietzsche, contend that this is precisely what has occurred.

Nietzsche foresaw that instrumental reason, no longer directed by an Enlightenment project undermined by the "self-consuming" activity of critical reason (Gray, 2007, p. 248), would eventually express only the nihilistic "will-to-power" in the technological domination of the earth—what Lewis (2023, p. 451) characterised as the "brutal mindlessness of the capitalist industrial world" that destroys us with its "deadly array of gigantic machines" and "ideologies marshalled to infect us with its soulless will."[83] Heidegger rightly saw Nietzsche's critique as the most incisive diagnosis of modern nihilism:

> Nihilism is the world-historical movement of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age (Heidegger, 1977b, pp. 62–3)

Inverting the progressive Hegelian ontology, Heidegger interprets Western history as a descent into this "total nihilism', a progressive (or regressive) *vorsetzende Durchsetzung* ("premeditated self-imposition") that leads to the replacement of beings by the created and the technical (Dugin, 2014, p. 119)— man is, in Lewis's (1984, p. 204) words, "slipping back

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[83] For de Benoist, this modern metaphysics serves as the foundation for the ***Idéologie du Même***, which he views as a key aspect of the liberal homogenisation and bureaucratisation of the world that he rejects in favour of ethnopluralism (Backman, 2022, p. 8).

into machinery."[84] Although Heidegger admired Hegel's philosophy of history as a brilliant experiment, he believed Hegel remained within the categories of the concept where beings are enslaved by reason and cannot free themselves from this "premeditated self-imposition" (cited in Dugin, 2014, p. 122).[85] The subjective nature of the ontological argument, put bluntly, elevates the conscious primacy of will as the primary mechanism for the construction of Being.

Heidegger's philosophy of descent significantly influences NRR intellectuals, particularly Dugin. Invoking Heidegger, Dugin (2014, p. 162) contends that "calculating reason" lies at the core of Liberalism, whose values represent the final stage of the degeneration of Western ontology and the point beyond which it is "impossible" to descend any lower. In other words, liberalism is an expression of this "calculation source" at the heart of Western nihilism—a "total nihilism" that has reached such an intensity that it no longer recognises itself as such.

This reading of Heidegger's philosophy of history is crucial for grasping the ideology of the conservative revolution and the NRR and should be explored thoroughly to lay the groundwork for our forthcoming comparisons with Lewis's thought. In Dugin's (2014) summary, one of the first steps in man's estrangement from pure Being was Plato's transcendent understanding of Being, which placed ideas between man and existence and defined truth as the correspondence thereof. In its modern stage, initiated by Descartes, the emphasis changed from Being to thinking or, more specifically, to self-consciousness—the 'presence-to-itself' of the thinking subject (Backman, 2022, p.5). At this point, the Western

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[84] In "The Diabolical Principle", Lewis (1971, p.46) further warns that the "anaesthesia and mechanization involved in… nihilistic orthodoxy is represented by its adherents as a liberation."

[85] This is why Heidegger promoted a counter-enlightenment ideal of "revealed truth" (Linker, 2006).

metaphysics of presence became a ‘metaphysics of subjectivity’. With Kant's practical reason, the ‘will’—now in the form of the categorical imperative—became the primary moral foundation, responsible for affirming the Being of an object, subject, and ultimately "God”.

Through its Kantian and Hegelian transformations, this modern metaphysics attains its apotheosis and completion in Nietzsche's metaphysics of subjectivity, which elevates the will—as "the will to power"—to the highest form of identity (Backman, 2022). Man becomes the *only* subject, and his representational thinking grounds the certitude of all other beings (Jorjani, 2013, p. 99); in Heidegger’s (1977a, p. 128) words, he becomes the “relational centre of that which is as such”. For Heidegger, Dugin (2014, p. 124) concludes, Western philosophy ends with Nietzsche and his assertion that nothing but subjectivity remains: the meaning of subjectivity is in the will and self-imposition. The descent from the Greeks to Descartes and the Enlightenment is completed—the ontological triangle inverted. Once, Beings were defined by their corresponded to an idea (Plato). By the end of Modernity (Enlightenment), beings became beings because of “reason” (Kant). But today, Being is no longer an idea: it is merely a value, development, life, and the *will to power.* For Heidegger’s ‘Nietzsche’, Being is meaningless and chaotic raw material that only acquires "value" through the evaluating activity of subjectivity, i.e., life and the will to power (Backman, 2022). In other words, it is an arbitrary decision on the part of the subject. Because Being has become a “function of values”, we have arrived at a point of total nihilism, having lost everything that once connected us to “*beings* and to ourselves” (Dugin, 2014, p. 124).

1.3.1 New Millennium, New Nihilism

The most influential strands of modernism stem from this conviction that modernity is a “nihilism” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 106). Indeed, nihilism becomes a path to aesthetics in Nietzsche's

philosophical modernism: with the value of the objective world now nullified and all grounds of value undermined,[86] man must make his private world into an aestheticism (Ohana, 1989, p. 752). In 1937's *The Revenge for Love*, Victor similarly reasons that "nothingness... is all that there is... unless you conjure things up for yourself, and furnish this white screen with your private pictures" (Lewis, 1972, pp. 301-302). Such quotes clarify why many critics see Lewis's avant-gardisme as deriving "specifically" from Nietzsche's vision of modernity as nihilism (Foshay, 1992, p. 101), and link him with modernism's romantic individualism (Levenson, 1984).[87]

Equally, for conservative revolutionaries like Jünger, Nietzsche's 'active' nihilism was seen as foundational to modernism because it overturned bourgeois values by denying objectivity, promoting subjectivity and individualism, and viewed the world as both a "totality" and a "work of art" (Ohana, 1989, p. 752). Diagnosing modernity as a "mythless existence" (Nietzsche, 1993, p. 116), Nietzsche stated, "only if history can endure to be transformed into a work of art will it perhaps be able to preserve instincts or even evoke them" (1997, p. 95). Nietzsche's "philosophical modernism" (Osborne, 2012) elucidates Edwards's (2000) observation that the most radical modernists sought to pioneer not just the art but also the

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[86] Through tracing the origins of his own fundamental concepts, Nietzsche contends that modern man has discovered that the idols he created–God, morality, reason, and truth (Ohana, 1989)–are, as Lewis (1972) would describe them, "false bottoms." Modern man has come to realize that God is merely an image he fashioned with his own hands for self-protection, that reason is merely an illusion and deceit, that morality is simply an ingrained habit, and that objective truth is ultimately unattainable (Megill, 1985).

[87] For Weller (2007) his Nietzschean "nothing" supposedly lies at the heart of his externalist art, and he goes on to argue that that Lewis's critique of nihilism is built upon this "nothing."

life of the future (Griffin, 2008, p. 15). Their consequent "aestheticising of politics" conflated the previously autological spheres of art, morality, and science,[88] unravelling what Weber and Habermas regarded as the defining characteristic of the Enlightenment (Ferrall, 2001).[89] Indeed, for Habermas, it was the perceived "deformations of a one-sidedly rationalised everyday praxis" in Enlightenment culture that evoked in these reactionaries a counter-need for something "equivalent to the unifying power of religion," leading them to:

> …swear by the mythopoetic power of an art that is expected to form the focal point of a regenerated public life. What Hegel termed the need for philosophy evolved from Schlegel until Nietzsche into the need—critical of reason—for a new mythology (Habermas, 1990, p. 139)

It is as a radical *collective* embodiment of this 'anti-rational' need for a new mythology that Reactionary Modernism most strongly inspires the NRR, which also endeavours to overcome "contemporary nihilism" (de Benoist, 2012, p. 12) by revolutionising society as a whole (Griffin, 2008, p. 15)—utilising art to reconnect the mass to its sacred traditions and re-create and redeem modernity (Tucker, 1999, p. 81).

Vorticism shared this revolutionary impulse—as evidenced by Lewis's break with aesthetic formalists like Roger Fry—but with greater self-reflexivity, serving in part as a critical

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[88] Walter Benjamin argued that fascist aesthetics usurped the position of art after its "desubstantialization by modern technology" (Tucker, 1999, p. 59)

[89] For Habermas, the Kantian division of modernity into the three autonomous spheres of art, morality, and science, each maintained and managed by an assemblage of experts, bears "directly" on the possibilities of Enlightenment's realisation (Habmeras, cited in Wragg, 2005. p. 13).

response to Nietzsche's (1993, p. 39) idea that art might (as in Greek tragedy) heal the "gulfs" of modernity and revive an "overwhelming sense of unity that goes back to the very heart of nature". This notion, Habermas (1990, p. 88) writes, implies that art—"in the forms of a revived mythology"—can "reacquire the character of a *public* institution" and generate the power to revitalise the "ethical totality of the nation".[90] As the introduction highlighted, many Lewisian critics describe Lewis's ambivalent approach to Nietzsche and modernism as signs of a 'fully-fledged' postmodernism—a sign he was aware, while his reactionary-utopian contemporaries were not, of the futility in seeking grand narratives and universal authentic truth. Yet Lewis's was no autotelic modernism, as later typified by Clement Greenberg; [91] Lewis's avant-gardism deconstructs this form of Modernism by illustrating, through its own "self-critical logic", the "impossible necessity" of keeping Art separate from Life, thus posing an "insoluble" challenge to politicised aesthetics (Wragg, 2005a, pp. 4-5).

Today's NRR, like the reactionary modernists, also invoke the unifying power of religion—secularised as a civic or political religion—as a counter to postmodern ethical nihilism, which they attribute to the Enlightenment's failed attempt to refound morality and society on rational, universal grounds (Garrard, 2006; Gray, 2007). They view their situation as even more severe than that of the modernists, contending that if modernity was the culmination of Enlightenment morality, then "Postmodernity is not just a continuity with Modernity, but a

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[90] A theme also present in Hegel's notion that aesthetics should be "present at the highest level of social guidance" (Snyder, 2018, p. 104)

[91] Greenberg's concept of modernism, as best articulated in "Modernist Painting" (1960), can be understood as autotelic in that it highlights the self-referential qualities of art–art focuses on its own nature and limitations, striving for purity and autonomy within its medium, rather than pursuing political or cultural transformation.

taking of modern morality to its logical limit" (Dugin, 2023b, p. 3). Once again, Heidegger's 'history of Being' (*Seinsgeschichte*), with its endpoint in nihilism and Nietzsche's will to power (Faye, 2009), offers a philosophical (or, more precisely, *mystical*) framework for critiquing the Enlightenment's legacy. It enables NRR thinkers to link their opposition to contemporary liberal democracies with the deeper metaphysical ills of modernity—ills rooted in a rationalising teleology leading to the 'loss of Being' (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 142), a corporatised and de-spiritualised social reality, and the 'brutal mindlessness' of capitalism's transformation of the external world. In contrast to this bleak outlook, thinkers like de Benoist and Dugin can more cogently promote their anti-universalistic, communitarian and ethno-nationalistic solutions to these crises.

As belief in liberal grand narratives of progress wanes due to postmodern nihilism and socially corrosive neoliberalism, the NRR, following the reactionary modernists, argue that the resultant loss of meaning should be countered not by returning to the past but by creating new unifying myths and grand narratives. Dugin (2023b, p. 8) terms this initiative "alternative postmodernity," suggesting that while traditional critiques of modernity are important, pure traditionalism becomes obsolete without dynamic engagement with contemporary intellectual currents. Consequently, in developing this vision, Dugin draws "dark inspiration" from postmodern critics of the Enlightenment, such as the Frankfurt School theorists, alongside Heidegger's 'being-historical' narrative.

Dugin is not alone in this approach. The radical criticism of Enlightenment rationality and modernity by proto- and postmodern critics, including Horkheimer and Adorno, Baudrillard,[92] and Paul Virilio,[93] has influenced modern 'anti-rational' forces as diverse as 'right-Heideggarians' (Backman, 2022)—like Bannon and de Benoist[94]—to the aesthetic avant-garde, poststructuralist philosophers, conservative social critics, and Christian theologians. Referring to this as an 'unholy alliance', Jauss (1988, pp. 27-9)—adapting Marx—concludes that "a spectre is haunting Europe— the spectre of the postmodern". For Jauss, what connects this alliance is a shared call for a counterculture and rebellion against the logocentrism of rationalist modernity. Uniting in the name of an as-yet-unidentified alternative future, they seek to move beyond modernity while simultaneously holding the Enlightenment's heirs accountable for the crises of meaning afflicting postmodern society.

1.3.2 The spectre of the postmodern

For Herf, the idea that Hitler's evil had its origins in an excess of reason underlies much of contemporary cultural pessimism. This argument, advanced by Jauss's postmodern 'alliance,' suggests that the German catastrophe resulted from a connection between reason, myth, and

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92 Baudrillard argues that in a world ruled by media and simulations, reality itself becomes an uncertain and subjective concept–thus undermining the premise that society is collectively advancing toward a better, more rational future.

93 Virilio's work examines the speed and acceleration of modernity, arguing that today's rapid technological advances–typically associated with progress–contrarily result in a feeling of disorientation and fragmentation.

94 And, for Derrida, Heidegger himself…

domination inherent in Enlightenment thought since Kant and Hegel (Herf, 1984). De Benoist (2017, p. 124), for example, interprets Heidegger to conclude that the totalitarian impulse, an outbreak of the will to power manifested in Nazism, was “obviously” rooted in a metaphysics of subjectivity. Anticipating this claim, Lewis (1971, pp. 45-46) reasoned that the elevation of the will represented a “super-nihilism”, a strictly “inhuman… or rather anti-human vindictiveness” that enabled the “massacres of the various contemporary revolutions” and even had to its name a “holocaust.”

Their rationale can be summarised as follows: the Enlightenment’s efforts to counter myth with reason paradoxically created a new 'mythology' of a modern world governed by an excessive devotion to 'instrumental reason.' Reason came to be seen as a universal tool for achieving progress and understanding without reference to God—in Lewis's (1989a, p. 47) words, science became “the religion of industrialism,” supposedly providing humanity with a new world-soul”. From this perspective, as Adorno (2003) argues, the “administered” horrors of the Holocaust, characterised by means-end thinking or “calculating reason,” can be seen as an extension of this new ‘religion’, with technoscientific progress concealing and facilitating a collective regression to barbarism (Bar-On, 2013, p. 73; Mills and Burston, 2022). Similarly, the Catholic philosopher Guardini (1950) argued that the bourgeoisie’s 'superstitious faith' in progress, the false autonomy of the individual, and a belief in man’s self-enfranchisement without regard to God led to totalitarianism and the Holocaust (Ferrone, 2015, p. 50).[95]

[95] Additionally, Guardini warned of the ominous prospect of unchecked technoscience, which could produce only a "non-natural nature" and an “un-human man” absorbed in rational abstraction (Guardini, quoted in Ferrone, 2015, p. 50).

In Sternhell's (2010, p. 761) summation, these diverse 'enemies' of the Enlightenment share one common aim: to trace "the roots of evil" to the "intellectual origins of the modern world" and the philosophers of 'rationalist modernity.' They argue that by rejecting all forms of the Absolute incompatible with individualism—and replacing the Absolute with abstract conceptualism—these reason-centric philosophers paved the way for totalitarianism, the rise of dehumanising technoscience, and boundless individual freedom or a 'religion of man' that inevitably deteriorated into unrestrained positivism (Gray, 2007, p. ix).[96]

In stark contrast, Sternhell posits that the atrocities of totalitarianism did not arise from the rationalist modern project but from the *anti-rationalist*, romantic, anti-Enlightenment counterrevolution (Tremblay, 2017). For Sternhell, the barbarities of the twentieth century were motivated not by belief in "universal truth" or a desire to deviate from traditional order but by the 'irruption of the irrational', the destruction of human unity through ultra-nationalism, and the reactionaries' faith in political power's ability to 'revolutionise' society as a whole. Herf (1984, p. 10) similarly contends that it was the 'highly technological' revolt of the reactionary modernists (he includes Lewis) that ironically validated Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis of the dialectic of enlightenment, which posits enlightenment rationality harbours within itself a ruinous regression to myth.[97] Yet, as discussed in Chapter Four, Lewis

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[96] Lewis (1989a, p. 185) anticipated this argument in *The Art of Being Ruled*, where he contended that through the "machinery of the democratic flattery of democracy," political leaders could easily transform their populace into "readily manipulated tools," coercing them into becoming organised instruments of "social and political domination."

[97] Herf (1984) groups Lewis and Pound with Jünger in Germany, Marinetti and the futurists in Italy, and Sorel, Drieu la Rochelle, and Maurras in France to evidence his claim that this destructive return to myth occurred across Europe, irrespective of national histories and traditions

(1984, p. 73) makes this *precise* argument himself, asserting that the reactionary-romantic emphasis on irrationalism and voluntarism over reason and intellection led to "solipsistic valuations" and ultimately to the "blackened corpse at Gild-sur-Yvette… to the Gas-ovens at Belsen." A close reading of Lewis reveals his growing advocacy for this beneficent classical kind of rationality—a 'good' rationality that seeks to distance itself from the critiques of an overly rationalised industrial society in *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man* (Wragg, 2005a).

In this regard, Lewis aligns with Sternhell's claim that it was the revolt *against* reason, the Kantian sapere aude, and *against* the Enlightenment's mission to resist unjustified dominance and ideological absolutism—not the Enlightenment itself—that led to the tragedies of the twentieth century (Sternhell, 2010). Herf (1984) similarly posits that the deadly reconciliations of technics and irrationalism were not inherent to rationalist modernity or the Enlightenment but emerged from a peculiarly reactionary, illiberal, and unenlightened nationalist variant of them. While Horkheimer and Adorno correctly noted the intertwining of myth and reason in the Nazi dictatorship, their conclusion—that the 'true face' of Enlightenment reason and domination manifested in the Holocaust—was woefully mistaken. What proved calamitous in Germany was the *separation* of the Enlightenment from nationalism[98]—a corollary of reactionary modernists' desire to sever technical modernity from Enlightenment values. Bar-On (2013, p. 205) argues that today's NRR expresses a similar desire to reconcile "technical modernity" with a national revival in a sacralised "political framework".

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[98] For Herf (1984, p. 10), the issue was that German society remained partially – never "fully" – enlightened.

As Herf (1984, p. 234) concludes, what is striking about Adorno's influential work is how little attention it gives to the Enlightenment's contributions to the "liberal political tradition"—e.g., democracy and the championing of individual freedom against absolutism—and how much focus is placed on "scientific reason" undermining "universal normative claims to the good life". Isaiah Berlin (1984) offers a similar defence of the Enlightenment, though his perspective, like Lewis's, is more nuanced and ambivalent.[99] Latour (1993, p. 10) provides the most balanced conclusion by describing Enlightenment modernity as the "double task of domination and emancipation". Schleifer (2000, p. 14) adds that this emancipatory aspect is precisely what critics like Heidegger fail to acknowledge. The right-Heideggerian narrative discussed above—which situates Cartesian and Enlightenment thought as a critical step on the 'descent' to technological domination, nihilism and will to power, neglects to simultaneously recognise the liberty, equality, and democratic freedoms that—alongside the privileging of the individual will—define Enlightenment values (Bambach, 1995).

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[99] Despite critiquing the Enlightenment's naïve faith in empiricism and reason to solve all the problems of the world, Berlin (1984, p. 29) maintains that the Enlightenment was less misleading than the subsequent romantic anti-rationalist critiques against it–critiques that utilized equally fallacious reasoning but carried implications that were, intellectually and politically, "more sinister and oppressive." Berlin ultimately commends the Enlightenment's fundamental moral and political values–rationality, tolerance, equality before the law, and freedom of thought–asserting that, despite its shortcomings, the Enlightenment project played a vital role in alleviating human suffering, preventing injustice, and countering absolutism. He concluded that the eighteenth century remained "one of the best and most hopeful episodes in the life of mankind", a view René Harding echoes in *Self Condemned* by terming it the "most civilised" century yet (Lewis, 1965a, p. 103).

Lewis, too, came to associate the destructive effects of 'power' more with the counter-Enlightenment reaction *against* democracy than with democracy itself. [100] His view contrasts with Dugin's in *Political Platonism* (2019), where Enlightenment democracy—emphasising plurality and the affirmation of the Many—is depicted as a decline from Plato's Republic, which is valorised as a "Republic of the One." Lewis, by contrast, writes:

> For many eminent thinkers the State is of course everything — in Hegel's system it is a metaphysical absolute, conditioning the individual. Plato was by far the most illustrious exponent of this barbarous doctrine. Such a type of thinking is that of men in love with Power— Hegel, the slave of the idea of the Prussian State, Plato an unusually embittered member of the Athenian aristocracy (Lewis, 1984, p. 66)

In *Anglosaxony* (1941), Lewis concludes that democracy is a 'natural' system wherein change and improvement are possible, whereas fascism—an 'artificial' intellectualist contraption—regards ideals like individual freedom as unrealisable and even undesirable (Egles, 1997).

Given that we are witnessing the first significant mass democratic challenge to these Enlightenment legacies since the modernist era, there is an urgent need to examine the metapolitical forces driving this phenomenon more closely. While economic, social, and

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[100] Lewis (1946, pp. 572-4) went so far as to contend that such "detractors of democracy" were "unfair" in convicting it for crimes for which the "machine-age" and "the greed and cynicism of monopoly-capital" were instead responsible. If "the Many have been debauched" and "all that is worst in them exploited", then it is possible that mere "mass-production is the culprit" rather than any political doctrine. The maturer Lewis thus separates the destructive effects of modernity from democracy, arguing that it is "very difficult to decide when it is democracy that we are in the presence of, or something deriving from other agencies of the modern age."

political factors have accelerated the decline of progressive ideologies, a significant aspect of the cultural pessimism characterising the global landscape since 1989 has been the influence of postmodernism. This influence, as we have shown, cannot be overstated. However, it has overshadowed Modernism's role in shaping today's 'anti-Enlightenment' movements. Modernism, rarely studied outside a specialised context, often extols what Kuhn (2011) terms the "transformative potential of anti-humanism", a key influence on the NRR's radical reactionary responses to today's deepening nihilism. Unlike postmodernists—but like modernists—the NRR does not surrender to or ironise nihilism but seeks to overcome it, imagining transformative visions of alternative modernities and new myths to replace the failing grand narrative of progress.

This chapter has situated reactionary modernism and the NRR as successive 'waves' of a long-standing reactionary-romantic backlash against the rationalising processes of the Enlightenment, which are blamed for the nihilistic collapse of meaning in Europe. The next chapter narrows the focus to a contextual comparison between these two movements as the latest political-cultural responses to this 'crisis of meaning' and society's changing experience of time and values. This will set the stage for Part Two's analysis of how Lewis's critique of reactionary modernism's response to these changes can be applied to the NRR. Such analysis will require careful consideration of the evolving nature of Lewis's critique—as he himself noted: "the career of Mr. Lewis is often divided according to Mr. Lewis's change of approach to this problem of change" (1963, p. 274).

CHAPTER TWO: REACTIONARY MODERNISM AND THE NEW RADICAL RIGHT

As mentioned in the introduction, many scholars simplistically place Lewis—like Heidegger—within the Romantic tradition of critiquing the Enlightenment and its rationalisation of all spheres of life. This is despite Lewis and other High Modernists, like T.E. Hulme, presenting themselves as 'classicist' enemies of Romanticism. However, as Northrop Frye and Colin Wilson (1989) suggest, Lewis's anti-romanticism was more of a case of "late romanticism fouling its own nest" (Frye, 1957, p. 82), or—as New Right thinker Bowden put it—Lewis was a “cynical post-Romantic” (2014).

We argued earlier that modernism can be seen as an extension of Romanticism, with both movements seeking a redemptive force to unify an atomised world and restore transcendent values to a fragmented, desacralised culture. Modernists, however, had to confront the rapid social, economic, and technological advances of the Second Industrial Revolution, which far outstripped anything the Romantics experienced. In less than half a century, from the advent of electricity to the rise of automobiles, aeroplanes, and motion pictures, Europe underwent more seismic social, technological, and individual transformations than at any other time in modern history (Sternhell, 1996).

Yet, while the Second Industrial Revolution exponentially increased material goods and human knowledge, its rapid changes induced anxiety, anomie, disenchantment, confusion, crisis, and alienation—all clashing with the Victorian optimism of the preceding era (Kuiper, 2009). As Walter Benjamin (1969, pp. 83-84) put it, "a generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar'' suddenly found itself in a "field of force of destructive torrents and explosions'' in terms of warfare, physical existence, economic activity, and moral experience. For Heidegger, such rapid social and economic change meant history came to be perceived as

a "collision" of the past and the present rather than a "continuous" process (Schleifer, 2000, p. 6).

Perry Anderson (1984) argues that the modernist era was defined by this unique 'collision' of past and present. Reactionary modernists, in particular, questioned the Enlightenment's linear notion that rationalism and liberal values would inevitably lead to a brighter future. Instead, they operated in a liminal space between the "still-usable" classical past, the ambiguous technological present, and the uncertain political future, and developed from this space radical new ways to critique a modern world marked by increasingly disjointed and relativistic views of time and values (Anderson, 1984, p. 105).[101] But rather than surrendering to or ironising the attendant nihilism—as Dugin (2023b) claims postmodernists do—modernists sought to replace the crumbling Enlightenment myths with new grand narratives: they confronted the turmoil of accelerating modernisation and were inspired by the "imaginative proximity of social revolution" (Anderson, 1988, pp. 324-325). In short, the modernist impulse was fuelled by industrialisation and urbanisation in seeking an authentic "sense-making" reaction to a rapidly transfigured world (Griffin, 2007, p. 91).

For 'epiphanic' Modernists like Lewis and Joyce, this impulse manifested in new forms of aesthetic (avant-garde) expression—the attempt to find cultural images "in some way adequate" to the mechanised nature that had supplanted Romantic nature (Edwards, 2016, p. 113), and hopefully re-organise "early-twentieth-century experience" into a new "conceptual structure" (Preston, 2011, p.16). For others, like Jünger and Marinetti, it involved

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[101] For Perry Anderson (1988, p. 325), the social and technological upheavals of the modernist era offered a "critical range of cultural values" against which "insurgent" or reactionary forms of art could "measure themselves"—but also against which they could "partly articulate themselves."

creating utopian visions for 'alternative modernities' to end modernity's nihilism "once and for all" (Griffin, 2007, p. 69). This latter 'programmatic' approach has particularly influenced the NRR's effort to devise 'alternative modernities' that respond to the analogous philosophical, cultural, political, and scientific crises of twenty-first century life.[102] Drawing inspiration from reactionary modernist models—such as conservative revolutionaries like Jünger and fascist-aligned 'modernisers' like Marinetti—they aim to theorise contemporary but mythical metapolitical projects to counter the fragmenting tendencies of modern life. Like the modernists, the NRR perceives that the temporal "'disorientation' of all realms of life" in times of crisis accompanies a heightened sense of the "loss" of "higher values" and a "transcendental destiny" (Sanromán, quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 96).

In Lewis's era, these convergent crises in people's experience of time and their loss of "collectively lived meaning" (de Benoist, 2003, p. 56) essentially gave rise to two new ways of experiencing the world. Often, the modernist artist was not fully aware of these disorientations in the social environment and self-consciousness, which had "shaken the world" and made it seem as if it were only "fragments" (Bell, 1976). Yet modernism was compelled to reassemble these fragments in a new way (Pound's "Make-it-New")[103]—even when it recoursed to myth as part of this "sense-making" endeavour. Osborne (1995) thus

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[102] As mentioned in the Introduction, Griffin (2007, p. 67) posits that Modernism manifests in two distinct forms: 'epiphanic' and 'programmatic.' The former is purely artistic, aiming to reintroduce transcendent values *into* the burgeoning urban-industrial mass society through innovative aesthetic expressions (e.g., Joyce, Lewis, Beckett). In contrast, the political variant of modernism, or 'programmatic,' seeks utopian methods to revolutionize society as a whole, utilising art and intellectual discourse to achieve transcendence *within* an alternative modernity.

[103] Ezra Pound popularized this term in his 1934 essay collection, *Make it New: Essays.*

portrays reactionary modernism (like fascism) as a radical future-oriented approach to resolving the twin crises of modernity, and it is *precisely* this 'futural' approach which influences the NRR. They similarly realise that their 'reactionary' solutions can only be revolutionary if they establish a radically new cultural-political order by incorporating elements of the contemporary world. As Bar-On (2013, p. 2) concludes, the NRR's political-philosophical "framework" for a twenty-first century 'alternative postmodernity' is rooted in a "modernist synthesis" which fuses the most "redeeming" aspects of the "modern, postmodern, and premodern epochs" in an attempt to counter the manifold crises of our age.

2.1 The Crisis of Modernity

Chapter One outlined Modernism as both a literature of change *and* of crisis (Childs, 2016, p. 15). Like the NRR, it can be schematised as a 'romantic' response to two overarching crises in the post-Enlightenment era: one concerning a sense perception of the social environment and the other concerning consciousness about the self. The first pertains to shifting understandings of the social environment and temporality,[104] marked by increased fragmentation, impermanence, and insecurity. The second concerns the changes in self-consciousness arising from the erosion of beliefs, values and traditional certainties associated with religious worldviews (Bell, 1976; Barry, 2006, p. 135). These two crises are simplified herein as *the 'crisis in the experience of time'* and *'crisis in the experience of values.'*

The remainder of this brief chapter will define and contextualise these post-Enlightenment crises as they have shaped modernism and the NRR, establishing the

[104] "Temporality" understood as the structures through which one perceives and organises time.

framework for Part Two's analysis of the similarities between their responses to these crises and Lewis's insider-critique of those reactions as they manifested in modernism.

2.1.1 Crisis in the Experience of Time

The first of these changes in the modernist era was driven by significant advancements in transportation and communication, notably the rapid acceleration and mechanisation of production and mobility. Emphasising speed, travel, dynamism, and cultural revolution, these advances continually reshaped concepts of time and space, leading to disorientations in the quotidian experience of life (Rosa, 2015; Van Der Woud, 2007) and a sense of living in a "period of transition" (Lewis, 1951a, p. 84).[105] De Tocqueville (quoted in Bell, 1976, p. 100) described this perception that "the woof of time is every instant broken, and the track of generations is effaced" as a distinctive aspect of modernity. Likewise, Thomas Mann characterised the period in *The Magic Mountain* as "decades of violent expansion and numerous upheavals… decades of progress at a forced march" (1995, p. 23). The once slow-paced and secure world—eulogised by Stefan Zweig (quoted in Kern, 1983, p. 127) as "a world with definite classes and calm transitions, a world without haste"—was irreversibly shattered

[105] For example, the introduction of electrical and petroleum energies replaced steam-powered machinery, while the widespread use of telephones disrupted the stable epistolary culture of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the rise of imperialism in the late nineteenth century called into question traditional notions of fixed time and space associated with the nation-state (Schleifer, 2000, p. 132).

by these successive innovations, each acting as a miniature “Big Bang” upon modern consciousness (Verbrugge, 2013, p. 75).[106]

Zweig's reflections demonstrate how dramatically this shift from uniform to contingent temporality upended people's perceptions of their social environment. *Time and Western Man* expresses this same insight: industrial technique entails incredibly rapid movement and development, resulting in a society accustomed to incessant and accelerating metamorphosis as the norm (Frye, 1936, p. 179). The acceleration, abrupt discontinuities, and socio-political turmoil of the early 1900s destroyed the linear sense of steady progress and gave rise to a new historical time consciousness that articulated itself around the concept of” instantaneity" (Sherry, 2017; Beck, 2019).[107]

This altered perception of time is inextricable from the modernists' disjointed view of their social surroundings. The rapid increase in goods during the Second Industrial Revolution was accompanied by more complex "abundances" of new class positions, values, and social

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[106] According to Lewis (1989a, p. 23), these ever-accelerating “radical upheavals” occurred too rapidly for the “normal mind” to process while “retaining its independence.”

[107] As Heidegger (1959, pp.37-38) observed in ***Introduction to Metaphysics***, in such a world where one can "simultaneously 'experience' an assassination attempt against a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo," time becomes nothing but "speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity," and ‘time as history’ vanishes from “all Being of all peoples". In ***The Writer and The Absolute***, Lewis (1952, p. 70) concurred with Heidegger's consequent observation that 'An Asylum looked at from within… presents a more rational spectacle than the present epoch'—a ‘spectacle’ effect compounded today by Fourth Industrial Era technologies that collapse the boundaries between time and space (even digital and physical) like never before, promoting an overwhelming sense of acceleration as the norm.

perspectives, creating what Kern (1983, p. 9) terms a "crisis of abundance."[108] Traditional systems struggled to cope with this unprecedented growth, and the simple categorisation of society as "the very rich, the very poor, and those in between" (Aristotle, quoted in Coser, 1973, p. 443) gave way to a mass culture defined by isolation, disorientation, and crisis.

In short, "intellectually, materially, and phenomenologically", the experience of time as related to abundance led to a specific mode of consciousness at the turn of the century, which Schleifer (2000, p. 6). termed "crisis consciousness." Like the NRR, modernists felt that these socio-cultural and spiritual 'crises' had been aggravated by the 'nihilistic effects' of progress and mass industrialisation associated with modernity's "dead" linear time (Bar-On 2007, p. 145), or what Benjamin called the "homogeneous, empty time" of the Enlightenment (2003, p. 395). Lewis (1989a, p. 76; 1963, p. 489) noted that the "great cluster of movements" disrupting modernity went beyond influencing any personality or nation but aimed at an "entire human revaluation," and in all these movements, the "concept Time" played a "revealing and monopolistic" part. In response—as Griffin (2007, p. 90) asserts—the radical-reactionary mission aimed either to "suspend Cronus" through evoking "epiphanic moments

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[108] The substantial rise in commodities, the professionalization of labour, the shift from relatively small-scale entrepreneurial capitalism to large-scale finance capitalism, and the emphasis on desire over need as drivers of consumption all contributed to this "crisis of abundance" prior to World War One. Increasing material well-being coincided with escalating class conflict, as urbanisation and industrialisation eroded traditional bonds and distinctly separated companies from families. Furthermore, enhanced education and the "vast multiplications of knowledge" (Schleifer, 2000, p. 4) heightened individuals' awareness of the growing inequality. Many people began to feel felt the Enlightenment project–which was meant to apply to all of humanity–was failing to fulfil its promises (Montgomery and Chirot, 2015, pp. 331-332).

of revelation" or, for those whose "pessimism was 'stronger", " to "overcome it permanently" by directly contributing to the new radical political and cultural envisaging a 'regeneration' of society as a whole and the inauguration of a "new historical age beyond decadence."

2.1.2 Crisis of Values

In the 1920s, philosopher Guido de Ruggiero (1959, p. 428) examined the 'crisis consciousness' engulfing liberalism, highlighting—like de Benoist today—the connection between this crisis and the breakdown of 'shared values' in middle-class life and politics. He argued that the absence of such shared ethical values exacerbated the "bitterness" of modern social conflict because it was no longer moderated by principles from a higher, unchallenged sphere (Schleifer, 2000, p. 125). Such ethical values had previously been derived from God or, as earlier in Platonism, from an abstract transcendental principle—what Lewis (1984, p. 66) termed a "metaphysical Absolute" that conditions the individual. Ruggiero's analysis clarifies why, for anti-Enlightenment thinkers, the increasing experience of time as a 'crisis' of progress is inextricable from the crisis of values, particularly its disintegration of the structured, hierarchical worldview that previously secured man's ethical and metaphysical moorings (Crocker, 1963).

This general reasoning implies that, at the most fundamental level, Modernists suffered a loss of certitude in their temporal perception of the world and in their self-consciousness due to the removal of religion's "sacred canopy" of meaning (Berger, 1967; Bar-On, 2013). Throughout history, cultures navigated periods of dramatic change by relying on anchorages "rooted in experience" yet which also provide some "transtemporal conception of reality" (Bell, 1976, p. 28). Traditionally, religion provided this anchorage, aligning human actions with an envisaged "cosmic order" and projecting images of that order onto the human experience

(Geertz, 1973, p. 90).[109] As the last chapter demonstrated, Enlightenment critics argue that today's crisis of values stems from the Enlightenment's attempt to replace this stabilising concept with the promise of a secular Utopia to be realised through history (the advance of progress, rationality, and science) and fuelled by the "nutrients of technology and the midwifery of revolution" (Bell, 1976, p. 28).

As Lewis (1936, p. 265) notes, such idealisms were—"until yesterday"—rooted in the authority of the "dogma of a great religion," and without this authority, they become meaningless, as there is no 'rational' substitute for them.[110] Hence, in the early twentieth century, Lewis's contemporaries suffered a 'crisis of meaning' when the Victorian values of industrialisation and Enlightenment grand narratives of social progress and scientific advancement proved illusory, yet traditional sources of meaning were no longer available (Rhee, 2012, p. 8). This led to 'Nietzsche's' nihilism: a society with no past and no future, where emptiness prevails, and everything is dominated by the 'metaphysics of absolute subjectivity'. Nietzsche's declaration "God is dead" is popularly taken to epitomise this "crisis of subjectivity", for modern technology and rationalisation signalled the end of belief in eternal values and the religious foundations that had underpinned society (Vattimo, 1986, p. 16). Modernists following Nietzsche—himself often called a 'proto-modernist'—felt this rapid change and breakdown of traditional value patterns were overwhelming. It exacerbated the broader sense of 'crisis consciousness,' insecurity, and isolation, and inculcated what Jameson (1981, p. 252) termed "the experience of meaninglessness itself."

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[109] It is "incontestable," Lewis (1989a, p. 265) wrote, that man is a "religious animal."

[110] Equally, in *Men Without Art*, Lewis (1964 p. 209) argued that ethics became "absurd" when untied from a "theological system."

2.1.3 Conclusion

Taken together, the transition from uniform to contingent temporality and from literary realism's universal perspective to modernism's fragmented self-reflective one are all hallmarks of what Berman (1982) called the "maelstrom of modernity". For Berman, the sense-making capacity of "progress" as a social framework failed disastrously amid this 'maelstrom', which Lewis (1951a, p. 84) described as the "abrupt translation of an entire society from one set of values to another." The resultant "collapse of ontological continuity" (Everdell, 1997, p. 11) led to an unsettling sense of discontinuous subjective experience, increased meaninglessness, and a sense of having entered a "period of liminality" (Noll, 1994, p. 49). This revolution in the experience of time conditioned the modernist's "apocalyptic sense of the 'new'" or "crisis consciousness" (Schleifer, 2000, p. 10). Such apocalyptic perceptions are echoed by NRR thinkers today, who characterise liberal postmodernity as an "infinite end" (Dugin, 2014, p. 395) dominated by accelerating crises and the "Ideology of Consummate Meaninglessness" (O'Meara, 2010).

2.2 The Crisis of Postmodernity

While scholars generally identify World War I as the event that first shattered confidence in Enlightenment ideals (Murray, 2007),[111] Lewis (1936, p. 21) more accurately asserts that these underlying crises had already signalled the end of reason, liberal capitalism, and

[111] See also recent articles by Huber "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Progress, Hope, and History" (2021) and Tahmazyan "Is the Empire Eternal?" (2021).

"progress" and the beginning of a new and undefined world order.[112] Like today's NRR, modernist elites critiqued modernity as a 'regression,' as a liminal period of 'decline and fall,' long before this sentiment had resolved into a "generational mood of crisis" (Bambach, 1995)— the 'fatalistic' "hypnotism" that Lewis (1927, p. 263) felt made Spengler's *Decline of the West* a best-seller.[113] Even before the war, this acute sense of liminality gave rise to Modernism as a project for cultural and political revival (Griffin, 2007, p. 117)—a vanguard movement emerging from the ruins of the "cult of progress" as a counter to civilisational decline and decadence (Olusoga, 2021).

The NRR similarly mythologises its radical resistance to decadence, viewing itself as existing in a comparably liminal period within postmodernity. Enlightenment faith in reason, which once imbued modernity with pride, hopefulness, and grand narratives, has again collapsed in the post-9/11 era, much as it did in Europe during Lewis's era. However, today's age of crisis manifests in more diverse forms than merely rejecting Enlightenment ideals of progress. For the NRR, the "hostile currents" (Lewis, 1964, p. 265) contributing to today's sense of liminality include, inter alia, the intensified destruction of the planet's "ecological equilibrium," ongoing anthropological impoverishment, individualistic atomisation of mass society, the disruptive effects of globalisation and ethnocultural universalisation (Bar-On, 2013, p. 205), widespread economic and demographic crises and worsening international

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[112] Rather than simply referencing "World War One, etc.," Lewis (1952, pp. 37-38) insists future historians should "capitalise the ETC.".

[113] Lewis (1927, p. 263) wrote that the "hypnotism" of the "crater-mouth of catastrophe"– not a "Marxian 'catastrophe this time", but a "fatalist, 'scientific', 'detached', and *'historical'* catastrophic picture"– drew the "awestruck sheep of as many "mass-democracies" as Spengler's book could "rapidly be translated for".

instability. Unsurprisingly, NRR philosopher Giorgio Locchi (2023) labels this new 'age of crisis' an "interregnum."

2.2.1 Interregnum

The concept of the interregnum is a key part of NRR metapolitics, for it suggests a belief that the modern era of liminality and crisis might yield in a sudden reversal (*Umschlag*) to a new civilisation based on healthy mythic forces. While this “magical zero-point” (Jünger, quoted in Guerster-Steinhausen, 1945, p. 200) may seem indefinitely postponed in a “meaningless” postmodernity (Kermode, 1983, p. 89), Locchi (1973, p. 3) follows Nietzsche's interpretation of modern man as existing on the cusp of a "turning of History" where "something is dead” (i.e., God) and “nothing else is yet born.” Like the modernists after World War One, the “interregnum” the NRR finds itself in today is one where the “old order” of neoliberal capitalism has “crumbled”, but the “new order is not yet visible” (p. 3). Indeed, the NRR draws its conception of the interregnum from conservative revolutionaries of Lewis’s era, such as Mohler, who wrote:

> The old structure of the West as a synthesis of classical culture, Christianity, and the impulses of peoples entering history for the first time has broken down. A new unity, however, has not yet emerged. We stand in this transitional period, this interregnum which leaves its mark on every spiritual activity (Mohler, quoted in Griffin, 1999, p. 9).

According to Locchi, this interregnum will only last until the conflict between two opposing historical tendencies is resolved: the 2000-year-old egalitarian tendency of Christianity and the developing push towards a 'suprahumanist' society. Locchi (1969) regards Marx as the

culmination, or at least the start of the culmination, of the former tendency, which originated as a religious belief in Christianity and evolved into the ideology of progressive teleology during the Enlightenment—what Lewis called the "system of mechanical betterment" (1989a, p. 28). Locchi reasons that—with the majority of humanity now identifying as egalitarian—'modern' thought would have been doomed to perpetual rumination on Marx had not the counter-revolutionary idea of 'suprahumanism' been introduced through Nietzsche's philosophy and Wagner's artistic and metapolitical endeavours.

Suprahumanism, briefly defined, signifies the transition of European civilisation into a new phase beyond the 'interregnum'. It is a Promethean response to the crisis of values where modern Europeans repurpose, rather than reject, the transformations of modernity to rejuvenate European history and address its "anthropological decline" (Locchi, 2023). Just as ancient Indo-Europeans adapted to the changes of the Neolithic Revolution (e.g., increased specialisation and changing societal structures due to the domestication of nature) by forming new communal bonds and introducing a pantheon of gods to reflect these transformations,[114] so today's Europeans—now even more specialised and divided—must find unity and fulfilment through a self-created 'suprahuman' origin and a shared 'community of destiny'.[115]

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[114] Locchi (2023) writes that if Homer, Greek tragedy, the Germanic Edda, or the Rig-Veda embodied the new origin of the "second man" transitioning beyond the 'first' man of the Neolitihic era, so the suprahumanist myth embodies the upcoming vision for the European "Third" Man.

[115] Locchi's ideas resonate with other NRR thinkers like Forrest, who, in 2014's *Suprahumanism*, contends that twenty-first-century Europeans find themselves in a "waiting period," where fate is suspended between two outcomes: the complete triumph of liberal progressive ideology, which would consummate the "end of history," or a revival of civilisation through a

According to Locchi (1969, p.1), this new thought is the only modern thought that can "truly be called revolutionary" for it represents, within the cyclical view of history, "the return of an initial origin, an overcoming, an opening upon an exhilarating, unknown destiny." [116]

For Guillaume Faye, another NRR thinker, the twenty-first century also represents an interregnum between two civilisations— the egalitarian and the archeofuturistic. Faye characterises our era as one of liminality and chaos but, like Locchi and Jünger, envisions a new period emerging from its apocalyptic termination. *L'Archéofuturisme* (1998) predicts this 'sudden reversal' will be expedited by a "convergence of catastrophes"—catastrophes rooted in the liberal egalitarian teleology outlined by Locchi but exaggerated by the unrestrained globalism of capitalism.[117] From the ashes of this catastrophic event, Faye (with de Benoist) suggests rebuilding a pan-European ethno-national empire that fuses premodern "archaic

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suprahumanist regeneration. Just as prehistoric Indo-Europeans adopted the Neolithic revolution's 'domestication of living nature,' so the future European 'third man' must adopt our century's domestication of matter-energy, including biotechnologies, genetic modifications, and AI. In this light, Locchi's 'epochal struggle' between suprahumanism and egalitarianism takes on a more apocalyptic importance as a battle against transhumanists, who aim to exploit these twenty-first-century advancements to pursue their own goals of transgressing or even abolishing "natural" and "eternal laws."

116 Locchi does not use the term Revolution in its modern sense of a sudden and violent upheaval in government. Initially, "revolution" referred to a movement cantered around an axis, indicating a return to a starting point rather than a rebellion or insurrection (Rix, 2011).

117 These include the rise of Islam, geopolitical competition for scarce resources, 'colonising' immigration from the South into the Northern hemisphere, uncontrolled global pollution, the precariousness of economic, technological, and information networks, and the increasing availability to all nations of weapons of mass destruction (Faye, 2009; Bar-On, 2013).

values” with hyper-modern technological advancements—in short, one that embraces modernity but rejects its concomitant individualist and egalitarian cultural values. An ‘archeofuturistic’ Europe’s foundational values would thus come from its polytheistic and 'rooted' past: a premodern, non-teleological worldview characterised by “totality, unity, and above all, purpose” (Gier, 2000). Faye’s “community of shared destiny” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 196) would be a secular religion of politics (revolutionary, hierarchical, and “pagan-oriented”) in the sense that it elevates the community to the Absolute or ‘highest good’—an ambition Lewis (1927, p. 295) earlier critiqued as the reactionary modernist drive toward “unity in everything.”

Faye argues that the ‘archeo-’ aspect of this post-catastrophe Europe cannot imply a longing for the past, as the past has produced modernity, which has stagnated in the interregnum. Returning to the archaic roots of 'European Being' prior to the instatement of a linear time based on Judaeo-Christian egalitarianism is thus a radical rather than a regressive move, one that might induce a "regeneration of history” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 193). Following Mohler (and influenced by Nietzsche's “eternal return”), Faye advocates for a ‘suprahistorical’ or spherical conception of time wherein the “past, present, and future” are interwoven: they are "affirmed as constituted in every moment, for in every moment, all time is re-evaluated" (Beck, 2019, p. 42). The past can return, but it is linked to the present and future (Bar-On, 2013): a notion that also captivated reactionary modernists in their similarly ‘futural’ rejection of the Enlightenment’s “chronological, teleological time” (Childs, 2000, p. 8).

2.2.2 Conclusion

The ongoing relevance of the concept of "interregnum” suggests that the crises of time and values have similarly affected the NRR and the Modernist movement. Both share a sense

of liminality, a sense of existing in a "transitional" society (Lewis, 1989a, p. 25) devoid of collective meaning. As earlier established, Modernists viewed war and mass industrialisation as the end of Enlightenment reason and linear progress, signalling a “great turning point” in planetary history (Lewis, 1936, p. 22)— a sudden reversal to an alternative modernity rooted in organic, hierarchical, supra-individual and heroic values. The NRR believe today’s society is on the brink of such a reversal, where “archaic social configurations” re-emerge in a “new context" (Faye, 2010). They argue that while liberal democracy still holds power, it lacks the vision to lead and seeks only to perpetuate its survival, creating the conditions for our “postmodern interregnum” (Rix, 2011). Indeed, Frans Timmermans (2022)—executive vice president of the European Commission—warned that “belief in progress” is rapidly being replaced by a “fear of loss” among the middle classes of contemporary democracies and that this crisis in society’s perception of ‘time as progress’ is causing global capitalism to lose its strategic capacity.

Unlike the aristocracy of old, whose authority relied on references to the past and origins, liberal-capitalist democracies depend on their capacity to guide society toward a better future, and their authority is fatally diminished when this narrative collapses.[118] This doubtless occurred in the modernist era, when the "march of progress" became increasingly associated with the "breakdown of the current 'capitalist' system” (Lewis, 1936, p. 31). The rise of the

[118] Arantes (2014) characterizes this phase as “the new time” of the post-Cold War era, marked by diminished expectations and a prevalence of liberal technocratic political rhetoric that offers no significant promise of teleological or revolutionary change. He contends that the legitimacy of liberal democracy is no longer rooted in progressive visions for a better future, but rather in the necessity and fear of worse alternatives (Lopez, 2022).

radical right often occurs at such moments, as in the inter-war years when ‘crisis consciousness’ normalised irrational and particularist ideas that opposed Enlightenment and universal traditions—for example, the exaltation of myth and violence as tools for revolutionary transformation, a cyclical view of history, the importance of sacralised ‘organic’ communities, and the irrelevance of the individual (Griffin, 1999; Tucker,). The idealised concept of 'reason,' due to its connection with industrialisation and technological upheaval, became intricately tied to the perceived 'rationalisation' or 'instrumentalisation' of modern life by progress, which was, in turn, challenged in favour of the anti-rational modernity that Sternhell anathematises.

At the turn of the millennium, it would have been easy to consider the intellectual counterrevolution of the reactionary modernists a historical outlier. After the Axis powers’ defeat and Europe’s division into a liberal democratic West, it appeared “progress had resumed full-throttle” (Dale, 2019). The global spread of stability and prosperity appeared to preclude the conditions of crisis that had fostered modernism and fuelled revolutionary nationalism. Yet Fukuyama’s so-called ‘end of history’ paradoxically marked the moment history “restarted” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 238). As at the start of the twentieth century, a 'crisis consciousness' has swiftly replaced progressive optimism, plunging society “backwards” into a ‘generational’ sense of impending socio-cultural collapse and a loss of faith in progress “from which, not so long ago, we imagined we had emerged for good” (Lewis, 1965a, p. 94). Midway through the 2020s—with ever-intensifying social, economic, and international instability—our era appears seems as shrouded in crisis and liminality as the modernist period, making Lewis’s (1989a, p 136) description of the "luxurious, hand-to-mouth, capitalo-revolutionary society of the interregnum" all too relevant. The temporal perspective of modernity has again collapsed

into prospectless immediacy (Boukalas, 2021, pp. 18-19): anxieties about the future have "replaced the mystique of progress", and the present is "lived out in a sense of insecurity" (Lipovetsky, 2005).[119] Abandoned to himself, more distanced than ever from the "great structuring principles of modernity" (Charles, 2005, pp. 11-12), the hypermodern individual is deprived of the social structures and sense-making images that once helped him stay afloat "upon the surface of nihilism" (Lewis, 1927, p. 54)

Bauman (2000) contends that our current era of crisis is simply an extension of the processes related to modernity, albeit with heightened uncertainty, calling it 'late-modernity' or 'liquid-modernity'. Like Ebert and Lipovetsky, Bauman emphasises the increased fluidity in beliefs and lifestyles as well as the anomie caused by the erosion of traditional shared value systems; in short, the melting of all that is solid into a "fluid, futuristic mass" (Lewis, 1927, p. 453). De Benoist (2012, p. 219) endorses Bauman's theory that today "liquidity' is 'everywhere", citing the supremacy of global capitalist networks, the "abolition of frontiers" (2011, p. 3), the triumph of the instantaneity over the eternal 'now', and the deterritorialisation of organic cultures in favour of a placeless flow-based economy (Bar-On, 2013, pp. 70-76). Unlike Bauman, however, de Benoist (2012, p. 308) asserts that our postmodern age represents not merely an intensification of modernity but an "epochal change" unlike any since the "neolithic revolution".

In addition, then, to upheavals faced by the reactionary modernists, the NRR believes it faces unprecedented manifestations of the crisis of time and values caused by uncontrolled globalisation, the increased homogenisation of politics and society, the rise of mass individualisation, and the secularisation of life—in short, an aggravation of the "nihilistic

[119] Lewis (1989a, p. 390) termed this the "suspense of a time of transition."

collapse of meaning" diagnosed by Nietzsche and Heidegger (Garrard, 2006, p. 110). To restate, these two crises are interconnected: the disintegration of the Enlightenment concept of time suggests the breakdown of the shared social values that uphold it, namely, the belief that society is historically dynamic and progressing toward a brighter future (Rosa, 2011). Just as Lewis and his contemporaries addressed these crises by envisioning alternative modernities, the NRR proposes alternative solutions to the spiritual crises of today.

With this theoretical framework now established, Part Two will delve deeper into these upheavals in the experience of time and values and the radical reactionaries' responses to them, commencing with Chapter Three's examination of the attempt to overcome the changing conceptions of time with an 'alternative temporality' and recourse to myth. Chapters Four to Six will investigate subsequent responses to the crisis of values (mass individualism, universalism and desacralisation respectively). In each of these cases, we find that the NRR espouses a brand of political and cultural particularism (Nineham, 2017) opposed to universal concepts such as individualism, seeking to revive, in the context of modernity, a premodern conception of society as one of totality, unity, and "collectively lived meaning" (de Benoist, 2003, p. 56).

We find that while Lewis shared many of the reactionary modernist's critiques of modernity's rationalising tendencies, his unique perspective was that the twentieth century's 'descent into nihilism' was not the inevitable result of Enlightenment idealism but, on the contrary, stemmed from the reactionary betrayal of human reason. Against the anti-enlightenment recourse to myth and 'organic' unity, *his* defence of reason and individualism sought to reinvigorate a form of rational enlightenment—the Western tradition that Lewis (1984, p. 207) believed travelled the "Graeco-Roman highway" lit by the beacons of "Voltaire,

Newton, Raphael, Dante, Epictetus, Aristotle, Sophocles, Plato, Pythagoras" but which was threatened by the reactionaries and time-philosophers who "presided at, and speeded, the dissolution" of this "ancient culture" (p. 237).

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE: CRISIS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME

The preceding Part demonstrated how the eighteenth century radically altered people's perception and expectations of time, driven by the French Revolution and the emphasis on progress, rationality, and belief in human potential (Mäkikalli and Mueller, 2011, p. 108). History became 'temporalised,' perceived as "singular" and superior to the past (Koselleck, quoted in Hunt, 2016, p. 71). The era's economic, technological, and scientific advances reinforced this perception, and a belief in progress and evolution (both "secularisations of the eschatological" expectations of Christian teleology) put this empty 'universal' temporality of the Enlightenment at the forefront of daily life (Grant, 2009, p. 13).

By the end of this period, a distinct form of acceleration emerged, redefining modernity's perception of time and marking a fundamental shift from Enlightenment-era "early modernism" to twentieth-century modernism (Schleifer, 2000, p. 6). Fuelled by population growth, socio-political transformations, and industrialisation, the acceleration of progress made incessant change a part of daily experience.[120] As noted in *The Art of Being Ruled,* mechanisation's imposition of a "continual changing" affected not just the economy but also art, science, and politics—where once people possessed the "consciousness of working for eternity," by the close of the nineteenth century, they worked merely for the "fugitive effect of a moment" (Kautsky, quoted in Lewis, 1989a, p. 21).[121]

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[120] McLuhan (1966, p. 16) claimed *The Childermass* was "concerned precisely with accelerated media change as a kind of massacre of the innocents."

[121] *The Art of Being Ruled* addressed the political aspect of Lewis's critique of this process, while *Time and Western Man* concentrated on the literary and philosophical influences he believed were complicit with it. Lewis primarily targeted the 'time-philosophies' of Bergson and Einstein,

The uninterrupted temporality of progress, exemplified by Hegel and based on the Newtonian model of time as "absolute, true, and mathematical" (Newton, 1999, p. 408-409), sharply contrasted with the fragmented, subjective view of time imposed on modernists (Jameson, 2009, p. 29). According to Lewis (1989a, p. 39), his era succumbed to the “Great God Flux,” departing from the “formal Hegelian world” of hard, rigid outlines, such as those “found in logic”. Modernists no longer perceived time as preordained optimisation or *perfectionnement* (Hunt, 2008) but as an ongoing ‘interregnum’ of ruptures and crises. As alluded to in Part One, this fresh form of historical time consciousness arising from acceleration, abrupt discontinuities, and societal and political tumult articulated itself most powerfully around the concept of "instantaneity" (Beck, 2019, p.1).

3.1 Instantaneity

The concept of instantaneity suggests that the future arises from the "discontinuous present" rather than gradually evolving (Beck, 2019, p. 1). Instantaneity does not imply a singular moment on the path to progress, nor the immobility of what Gumbrecht " (2014, p. XIII) named the "broad present”. Instead, it represents the intrusion of a moment or event “breaking into history”, transcending and being “heterogenous” to it (Blumenberg, 1990. p. 30). Unlike the positivist model of nineteenth-century temporality,[122] the Modernist concept

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but he considered the fixation with time and process as all-pervasive and injurious to fellow artists such as Proust and Joyce (Rzepa, 2021).

[122] In the nineteenth century, positivism, founded by Auguste Comte, reshaped the understanding of time. It promoted a linear and progressive view, comprehending time as a series of measurable, successive moments. Positivism’s emphasis on empirical data and scientific

of time acknowledges the “fully historical nature” of these decisive moments—D.H. Lawrence (1966, p. 109) spoke of "the quick moment of time,” Benjamin (1983, p. 49), envisioned his messianic ‘now-time’ as a revolutionary confluence of the “Then and the Now,” while Heidegger—following Nietzsche—invoked the “Moment” where past and present "collide" (quoted in Schleifer, 2000, p. 6).

Lewis’s belief that this new understanding of history as “continual change” would replace the concept of steady progress has been validated, especially given the diminished authority of progress after the upheavals of the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Hunt, 2018). The NRR also believes that ephemerality is intensifying in our era, signalling not just the end of progressive teleology but also negating their spherical ‘Suprahumanist’ vision of time—the hedonistic present “wins out” over both (Rix, 2011).

Lewis and his contemporaries likewise came to experience History as a series of such eruptive moments or “resonant intervals”, where time is comprehended as simultaneously "epochal”—e.g., the mechanical age, the electric age—*and* discontinuous (Nicholls, 2021, p. 1481).[123] The Modernists’ relationship between past and present morphed from one of “dialectical connectedness” to one of “exuberant instantaneity” (McLuhan, quoted in Nicholls, 2021, p. 1481). History was no longer completed through a continuous process but through its “interruptions” (Beck, 2019, p.14). These phenomena blurred the line between ordinary

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methods–aligning with the era's focus on progress and development–contrasted with earlier cyclical or relativistic views.

[123] In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1989a, p. 21), Lewis, again citing Kautsky noted that "everything ancient" was "rapidly disappearing," with "novelties" succeeding one another at increasingly "short intervals.”

and extraordinary experiences, leading to “new understandings” of life, such as Bloch's "darkness of the lived moment," Jünger's "danger," and Benjamin's "shock" (Beck, 2019, p. 5).[124]

For Williams (1989), Modernists sought to capture the "actuality of the now" by positioning themselves as pioneering artistic movements into this "newness”—welding experiences of crisis, war, and revolution with the philosophic-literary concept of the "instantaneous" to make collective sense of a fragmented and subjectivised present disconnected from history. Earlier, Nietzsche had sought to overcome the transient nature of modernity with his ‘supra-historical’ concept of eternal return; [125] Lawrence (1966, p. 17) did so by depicting novelistic characters as "phenomena... representing some greater, inhuman will”; Hulme, Pound, and Eliot turned to cyclical time as a sense-making response to de-sacralised linear time (Ferrall, 1994, p. 362), and Bergson conceived his *durée réelle* or lived, ‘inner time’ as a counter to this same process.

Modernist writers, in their effort to convey a shared reality amid these disorientating changes, rejected the fixed universal norms and linear temporality of their nineteenth-century realist predecessors, aiming instead to capture in language the lived experience of the present

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[124] Yet modernism’s ‘catastrophic’ encounter with Cronus held a positive implication: the 'instant'—be it in Bloch's temporalised utopia, Jünger’s primaeval fate, or Benjamin’s messianic “now-time”—exists in paradoxical proximity to eternity, as “momentary flashes” where one might glimpse the “timeless absolute” (Gubser, 2021, p. 736).

[125] Modernist theorists have generally assumed that the mythical time referenced by writers like Pound, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Yeats, and Hulme—articulated, as Frank (1977) posits, through their use of ‘spatial form’—represented a compensatory avant-garde response to the disruptive nature of progressive temporality (Ferrall, 1994, pp. 361-362).

as "a flash of being" mirroring nothing but the "flight-pattern of its own emergence" (Castle, 2015, p. 7). This rejection of the unitary, representational objectivity of literary realism coincided with Modernism's "inward turn" to experimental subjectivity (Kavaloski, 2014, p. 17), 'introspection,' and "feeling" (Edel, 1961)—what Benjamin called the "subjective experience of a qualitative time in which every instant is lived in its incomparable singularity" (quoted in Mosès, 1992, p. 150). Paradoxically, instantaneity, a concept rooted in individual subjective perception, became the reference point for the modernist's apprehension of a "*collective* historical experience" of discontinuity (Beck, 2019, p. 162)—as expressed in the hybrids of personal and cultural language in Joyce's free indirect discourse or the "pluralisation" of subjectivity in "Woolf's cultural cliches" (Schleifer, 2009, p. 143).

The modernist conceptions of alternative temporalities—spherical time, revolutionary now-time, subjective time—each revealed the inadequacy of the Enlightenment concept of gradual linear progress to account for isolated moments of seismic crises (Schleifer, 2000, p. 5). Modernists could no longer accept the nineteenth-century belief in a "homogeneous" and "empty time" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 396) filled by the "stubborn belief in progress" of "evolutionism and the philosophy of history" (Habermas, 1990) p.11). Instantaneity became part of their effort to 're-enchant' modern temporality—to find a "subjective access to a superhuman temporality" (Griffin 2008, p. 15), or to start time anew, *Neuzeit*.[126] This effort is reformulated today by the NRR in various ways, from Superhumanism's 'spherical time' to neo-Eurasianism's politicised rejection of the West's "unidirectional time" (Dugin, cited in Millerman, 2022, p. 116).

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[126] For Osborne (2012, p. 390), modernity represented not only a break the old but with the temporality of tradition itself. This shift is captured in the term "Neuzeit" (new time).

3.2 Spherical Time

Part One demonstrated that a prominent aspect of modern experience since the late nineteenth century has been the imposition of mechanised "empty time" by science, technology, and the Enlightenment economy upon all aspects of life. (Beck, 2019, p. 91). In response, Modernist, anti-Enlightenment, and NRR thinkers seek a new relation to time, linking this empty, uni-directional time with capitalist catastrophes (Benjamin), anthropocentrism (Gray), and the Heraclitean elevation of becoming over Being (Locchi, Dugin). The 'emptiness' of Enlightenment time implies that its stages evolve within a 'hollow shell' of natural chronological time, without diachronic connections; they move "in" rather than "through" time (Jansen, 2016, p. 73). Time becomes merely the medium for historical occurrences, with no organic link between the past and present—only an artificially theorised sequence of stages through which humanity progresses towards enlightenment.[127]

Conversely, for anti-Enlightenment thinkers, time is "incarnated" in historical events or instants (Jansen, 2016). These time perceptions can be called "concrete" (Bergson, 2005), embodied, or "organic" (Hölscher, 2014). They posit the revolutionary instant as disruptive events 'breaking into' history—a non-teleological vision that stands on contrast to the Hegelian concept of a historical reason progressively realising itself through the linear stages of a preordained telos. This holds even when such thinkers look to the past for their concepts of instantaneity, as the reapparance of past elements can act as a form of "sudden interruption" (Beck, 2019, p. 5). A notable example is Benjamin's "now-time." In the messianic

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[127] For both modernists and New Right thinkers like de Benoist, history has "little to do" with the aggregate of momentary actualities that historicists "fabricate into their flattened narratives" (de Benoist, cited in O'Meara, 2017, p. 97).

now-time, the return and the vision converge in the present instant because, within the "temporality of interruption," tradition is "rediscovered" as illumined by a transformative future (Bohrer, cited in Beck, 2019, p. 152). Benjamin's version of instantaneity, while influenced by Marxism and mystical Judaism,[128] shares with his reactionary modernist contemporaries an appeal to cyclical rather than linear time. It rejects the progressive, mechanical view of time as "beads on a rosary" (Wu, 2020, p. 65), reinterpreting the present as a "time of the now" pierced through with "chips of Messianic time" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 263).

As discussed in Chapter One, the NRR similarly advocates for a cyclical (precisely spherical) view of history and time, rejecting 'empty' linear time and its 'catastrophic' associations with industrialisation, liberalism, and modernity's 'nihilism'. In spherical time, history is not a continuous trajectory of infinite progress but works in cycles of "eternal return". At any given *moment*, history can be "rolled in a direction" which places eternal, hierarchical, supra-individual, and organic values back at the centre of society (Griffin, 1999, p. 9). Indeed, de Benoist—in Benjaminian terms—asserts that the historical "past" is a dimension or perspective implicit in every given moment: "Each present contains it… the past, thus, is latent in existence and can always be revived" (quoted in O'Meara, 2013, p. 97).[129]

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[128] As Habermas (1990, p. 11) writes, Benjamin's 'now-time' displays a "singular mixture of surrealist experiences and motifs from Jewish mysticism."

[129] For Beck (2019, p. 42), this illustrates why Nietzsche's idea of eternal return does not negate but rather affirms the instant as a unique or "peak" experience; he argues that Zarathustra's "great noon" unites the eternal return with the instant as a 'revolutionary moment.'

The idea of an alternative temporality is equally relevant to the political understanding of Dugin's (2017) neo-Eurasianist project, which rejects unidirectional time for a "synchronic model".[130] The neo-Eurasianist conservative does not fight for the past but for the "constant" and "perennial", that which always remains "identical to itself". In other words, the conservative, having rejected "empty time", is concerned with "that which has been, that which is, and that which will be"—namely, Being as constant but under different modalities (Dugin, cited in Millerman, 2022, p. 117). While for 'progressives', Being is a "function of becoming," for conservatives, time is a function of Being. Being is primary; time is secondary. However, in progressive 'Western' temporality, being becomes not an idea but a "value, development, life, and the will-to-power... an arbitrary decision on the part of the subject." (Dugin, 2014, p. 124). Because Being becomes the "function of values", as Heidegger's narrative of decline indicates, we arrive in "the space of total nihilism". Indeed, Dugin (p. 172) views Heidegger as the exemplary "conservative revolutionary" who recognized that man's called upon to be the "guardian of Being," while simultaneously taking a daring leap into "another Beginning"– the "Revolutionary" moment, the orientation toward the future (Backman, 2022).

The NRR's various metapoliticisations of 'spherical time' centre most coherently around Heidegger's notion of "retrieval." For Heidegger, the past can be "retrieved" within the "horizons of the present and the future," revealing that it exists not merely as the past but as

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[130] The conventional belief that Putin (allegedly influenced by Dugin) merely aims to "take Russia back in time" (Spillius, 2011)–back to a period before liberalization, Westernization, and human rights–fails to grasp the conservative ***revolutionary*** nature of this ethno-nationalist project on its own terms.

a “futural possibility” (cited in Bambach, 1995, p. 211).[131] Consequently, conservative revolutionaries like Mohler favour the Sphere over the circle as the clearer model for 'eternal return,' as the sphere symbolises that everything is contained in each moment; the present, past, and future coincide (Locchi, 1973).

A notable parallel in Modernism is Yeats’s cyclical vision of history. Yeats believed that history, biology, and metaphysics were governed by two-thousand-year cycles, which he called "gyres." Like the spherical model embraced by Nietzsche and the NRR, Yeats’s alternative concept of time, while anti-teleological, does not strictly conform to a circle. Each ‘gyre’ should instead be visualised as a cone that starts as a tiny circle and then spirals outward and forward, expanding with each revolution. When it reaches its widest point, it starts to “break apart under its weight”, but simultaneously, another gyre starts spiralling out in an “antithetical direction to the first” (Kingsnorth, 2018). According to Yeats, we are approaching the historical moment in which the current “gyre” of monotheism, father-worship, universalism, and linear time (initiated when the birth of Christ replaced particularist paganism) starts to break down. Some rough beast, slouching towards Bethlehem, "its hour come round at last," will sow the seeds of the next gyre, which is its antithesis (Yeats, 1982, p. 211).

Yeats’s vision aligns with the NRR metapolitical argument the time is ripe for a "retrieval" of pre-Christian, Indo-European paganism (Bar-On, 2013, p. 104). Just as centuries of particularist polytheism gave way to centuries of universalist Abrahamic monotheism (and its

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[131] As Frye (1976, p. 175) puts it: "The past is not returned to; it is recreated, and when time in Proust is found again (retrouve), the return to the beginning is a metaphor for creative repetition"

secular variant, progress), so the ideological defeat of modern liberalism will expedite the destined reversal to a pagan, 'organic' and roots-based social order. In the "interregnum," society faces the collapse of entire frameworks of understanding as the centre no longer holds, anarchy spreads, and grand narratives lose power (Kingsnorth, 2018). Nevertheless, the cyclical conception of time in Yeats's and the NRR's model renders inevitable this demise of the linear, egalitarian Judaeo-Christian tradition.

This notion that time is both cyclical and *fated* is arguably the most challenging and undesirable feature of the Yeatsian or Spherical vision. History follows cycles, and we cannot control it; it "controls us" (Kingsnorth, 2018). Lewis had a particular penchant in his polemics for rejecting these alternative visions of history. He admonished Spengler's cyclical theory of the rise and fall of civilisations, saying Spengler probably reasoned it was "about time the West 'declined'" to fulfil his "periodic principle" and satisfy "chronology."[132] In *Artists of the Right* (2012), Bolton concedes that Lewis, unlike many modernists of the 'Right,' viewed organic and spherical interpretations of history as fatalistic and "demoralising for the survival of the European race." More truly, Lewis wanted the European mind to liberate itself from the fatalism inherent in these modes of thinking, which had resulted in "the Great War" and would precipitate the wars that "threatened" to come. For Lewis (1927, p. 284), all manifestations of the "historic" time-mind were deleterious to human agency and were "peculiarly useful to the promoters of wars," for such doctrines imply "it's time for another war." In other words, adherence to the concept of eternal recurrence would render the vision in Yeats's 'The Second

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[132] Lewis (1927, p. 391) wrote that Spengler entertained the "profoundest fatalistic respect" for this "historically fated 'Decline'", and that the "last thing" that would ever occur to him, even if he were able, would be to "interfere with" or challenge this process.

Coming' more probable (Caracciolo and Edwards, 1998, p.121).[133] A similar apprehension may have dissuaded Lewis from finishing his own fictional portrayal of armageddon in the thirties—in his original (abandoned) sequel to *The Childermass,* the "whole affair" was to "end in chaos" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2000, p. 529).

A closer analysis of the book, however, suggests Lewis's critique of Spengler does not signify a complete rejection of eternal recurrence.[134] Lewis even seems to share with Yeats a vision of the present moment as existing within a longer historical cycle. Significantly, Tomlin (1969, pp. 26-27) highlights the cyclical structure of *The Childermass* and notes the occult significance of the Maha-Yuga symbol on the Bailiff's Punch-and-Judy booth. In Hindu cosmology, the Maha-Yuga (great age) represents one complete historical cycle. It consists of four world ages ('Yugas'), and implies the "successive decline in human righteousness", culminating in the Kali-Yuga, where righteousness "reaches its nadir". Other occult symbols, like the 'goat-hoof' beneath the Maha-Yuga sign and the recurring imagery of the serpent,[135] indicate that modernity has entered its final cyclical phase of degeneracy: man is in hell, as Pound (1975, p. 63) said, "without dignity, without tragedy."[136]

The theme of eternal recurrence is further suggested by the arrival of the dead at the transit camp outside Heaven, where "with the gait of Cartophilus", some "homing solitary shadow" is "*continually* arriving" in the "restless dust" of the turnpike" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 10;

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[133] According to Roger Nyle Parisious, Yeats's copy of ***Time and Western Man*** shows signs of particularly close attention at the chapter on Spengler (Caracciolo & Edwards, 1998, p. 147).

[134] Yeats, incidentally, declared ***The Childermass*** a "masterpiece" (quoted in Carter, 1956, p. 326)

[135] This image appears again, with redoubled significance, in ***Malign Fiesta*** (Lewis, 1955, p. 536).

[136] Tomlin, who knew Lewis personally, states that this interpretation "had Lewis's approval" (Tomlin, 1969a, p. 27).

Murray, 2020). These separate 'solitary' souls become one stream arriving perpetually—'turnpike' evoking not only the idea of a toll-paying road but also of rotation (Caracciolo and Edwards 1998, p. 120). This sense of the eternally revolving slaughter mill of history is amplified when considering that the protagonists, Satters and Pullman, likely died in the Great War and are just two more lost souls roaming this plain of death, awaiting admission to the Magnetic City.

Despite its pessimistic evocation of eternal recurrence, *The Childermass* demonstrates that Lewis, in his creative work, was willing to explore ideas he would not countenance in his polemics. 1927's *Time and Western Man* launched an unequivocal—almost doctrinal—attack on the 'Time-mind', a term Lewis used to group seemingly disparate concepts (including eternal recurrence) that he believed exhibited mechanistic thinking (Rzepa, 2021). For Lewis (1927, p. 179), anything that is "*becoming,* not *become*" is a "function" or "process" and hence "mechanistic". Describing his critique of 'time-philosophies', Lewis writes:

> I have attempted, variously, since 1927, to translate this analysis into more popular forms. But you have to go back into the philosophies that went hand-in-hand with Nineteenth-Century Science (as, for instance, Nietzsche came out of Darwin…) and into the philosophical glosses of the time-physics, really to master the structure of the contemporary mechanical Juggernaut (Lewis, 1963, pp. 261-262)

Lewis saw much of modernism as the next chapter in this process, arguing that its literary and philosophical works, which embraced history as a "process", exalted continual change, and portrayed reality as perpetually in flux, ultimately stripped the self of "stability, free will, and agency" (Rzepa, 2021, p. 158).

This “time-for-Time’s-sake” (Lewis, 1927, p. 36) philosophy, obsessed with becoming and perpetual flux, was directly opposed to Lewis’s ‘spatial’ philosophy, which championed form, presence, and the principles of classicism—principles that Spengler (Lewis argued) denigrated in favour of a “formless” Romantic yearning for tragic “Faustian” man (Bolton, 2011) and a return to a mythical “superhuman temporality” where “past, present, and future merge” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 98). Contrary to the Nietzschean idea that this suprahistorical outlook is the temporality of eternal return, Lewis (1927, p. 232) contends that the “world of Space,” rather than the “mental world” of time, embodies the true world of the ‘pure Present’. Only ‘faustians’ are historic, whereas the “pure Present” of the ahistoric Classical Ages is “obviously” the world that is “born and dies every moment.”

This idea is central to understanding Lewis’s “vortex view” of art and civilisation, which, as McLuhan (2011, p. 7) explains, contrasts with the reactionary-romantic view. For Lewis, the “moment of art is not a moment of time’s covenant”. Rather, it is “specifically that experience of arrest in which we pause before a particular thing or experience” (McLuhan, 2011, p. 10). McLuhan conceptualizes the vortex not as a flux but as a “dynamic, moving image” which is related to time yet also contains a “stable point,” the “spatial element from which its energy spirals originate.” (Lamberti, 2018, pp. 219-220). While the vortex, like the sphere, gyre, or lightning flash, can thus be viewed as one of many radical modernist counters to ‘Enlightenment time’, it does not aim to redeem or ’re-enchant’ temporality. Instead, Lewis seeks to “arrest the flux of existence” so that the mind may be “united with that which is permanent” (McLuhan, 2011, p. 6). In Vorticism, art “plunges to the heart of the Present” (Lewis, 1914, p. 147)—an “aesthetic solidification of time” (Sutherland, 2018, p. 13) that

momentarily disrupts the “insistent, hypnotic” flux of modernity, particularly the “romantic chaos” and crises of industrial society (Lewis, 1927, p. 42; 1971, p. 63).[137]

3.3 Now Time

Another modernist who associated progressive time with catastrophe and nihilism was Benjamin. Like Lewis, Benjamin considered the "arrest" of time a solution to "accelerated change" (McLuhan and Parker, 1968, pp. 252–53), albeit from a messianic standpoint where interruption is reinterpreted as the "standpoint of redemption," and as fulfilling a "dialectical redemption of the destruction of tradition by the new" (Osborne, 1995, p. 115). Yet while Lewis maintained that the true world of the 'pure present' resembled that of the Classical Ages, 'Now-time' symbolised a new understanding of time charged with (Marxist) revolutionary potential.

Benjamin’s revolutionary perspective is best understood through his metaphor of the 'angel of history,' adapted from Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus” (1920). The painting shows a lion-like angel gazing into the past while being propelled into the future by a storm called 'progress.' This storm causes history to accumulate "wreckage upon wreckage" at the angel’s feet (Benjamin, 1965, p. 85). The angel wishes to "make whole what has been smashed," but the storm has become stuck in his wings, propelling him "irresistibly" into the future (Benjamin, 1992, p. 149). Inspired by this interpretation, Benjamin aimed not to restore the

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[137] For McLuhan (1969), reflecting on the dualism in Lewis's work between “the flux of existence” and “that which is permanent” was crucial to him moving beyond his own “sterile” and “moralistic” view that equated progressive time with catastrophe, the Industrial Revolution with “original sin,” mass media with the Fall, and the Gutenberg era with “universal nihilism.”

past's completeness but to 'explode' the "continuum of history," thereby creating space beyond linear time for an "alternative temporality" (Griffin, 2007, p. 92) infused with suprahistorical 'Messianic time.'

From Benjamin's "anarcho-marxist" perspective (Löwy, 2016), the capitalist doctrines emerging from this idea of history as predestined progress are intrinsically grounded in the concept of catastrophe: that "it continues 'like this', *is* the catastrophe" (Benjamin, 1983, p. 592). Benjamin argues that capitalism requires crises to perpetuate itself, a perpetual dialectic of production/destruction that creates a constant "state of emergency" (Benjamin, cited in Noys, 2012, p. 10)—as Lewis (1989a, p. 52) notes, "catastrophe" is the "method of the capitalist". Both thinkers see catastrophe as inherent to Enlightenment temporality: progress demands dismantling existing conditions to make way for new ones (Bould et al., 2009, p. 458). Similarly, modern critics link the Enlightenment's homogenising and universalising temporality to anthropocentric globalisation (Gray, 2015), the "exploitation of natural resources", the "subjugation of non-Western peoples" (Germanà and Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 4; Scharre, 2009), to "colonial time" (Lagji, 2023, p. 14) and to "Western nihilism" (Heidegger, cited in Dugin, 2012, p. 22).

In response, however, to these perpetual crises of progressive temporality, Benjamin (contra Marx) argued that revolutions should "activate the emergency brake" rather than serve as the "locomotive of world history" (cited in Dale, 2019). Avant-garde movements should not try to accelerate history along its pre-existing tracks (as Futurism did) but rather "make the continuum of history explode"—a conviction Benjamin manifested in his conception of "now-time" as the "simultaneity of past and future" in an "instantaneous present" (Anderson, 1983, p. 30). Benjamin's perspective thus differs from other revolutionary

politics of temporality, like new right accelerationism, which advocates intensifying capitalism's dynamics to expedite its transformation or collapse. Significantly, Dematagoda (2020) suggests Marinetti's Futurists were precursors of today's new 'right-accelerationists' such as Nick Land, who view accelerating social change as a strategy to achieve a radical transformation that reinforces vitalist principles *within* modernity.[138]

Lewis (1989a, p. 338) also critiqued the 'conventional modernist' and 'false-revolutionary' approach of Futurism as self-defeating, seeing it not as a "counter-movement, but a surrender" (Watson, 1964, p.92).[139] He felt the notion of revolution was too intimately associated with mechanistic 'progress', a submission to Hegel's advancing logic of the dialectic and to its counterpart, the historical determinism and biological fatalism of Spengler's 'world-as history'" - which, according to Lewis (1927b, p. xxxiv), "so excellently fits in" with the "fatalist and evolutionist requirements" of orthodox 'revolutionary' thought. Lewis (1989a, p. 338) writes that in their unflinching romanticism and blind devotion to the "river-god, the god Flux", the Futurists counterintuitively humanised the "mechanical juggernaut" of modernity, naturalising it into an "anachronistic conceptual framework" (Sutherland, 2018, p. 10) or "organic mechanism" (Lewis, 1927, p. 182). [140]

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[138] Contemporary accelerationism spans both the political Left and Right. Contrary to Land, left-accelerationists like Reza Negarestani hope to accelerate past capitalism by democratising productive technologies, paving the way for a 'post-capitalist society' (Fluss & Frim, 2022)

[139] Pound characterised Futurism as "the disgorging spray of a vortex with no drive behind it. DISPERSAL" (Pound, quoted in Lewis, 1914, p. 153).

[140] For Benjamin, "modern mechanised time" is also an "abstraction" produced by modernity rather than a natural state merely perceived by the moderns (Schinkel, 2015, p. 40)—like Lewis, he identifies and critiques its naturalization in Futurism (Benjamin, 1982, p. 693).

A closer parallel to Benjamin's revolutionary politics of temporality is that of Mohler's conservative revolutionaries. While conservative revolutionaries also aimed to accelerate social and technological transformation, they did so not to progress toward utopia but to hasten the end of the present historical cycle, or "revolution," and reattain a timeless ideal that needed to be "reactivated" in the "transformed light" of new conditions (Backman, 2022, p. 2). In other words, they shared with traditionalists like Evola" (2021. p. 6) a desire to "cut the knot of the 'dark age'— the Kali Yuga."[141] Like these radical conservatives, Benjamin viewed revolutionary upheavals as historical exceptions disrupting the "dictatorship" of liberal capitalist temporality (Beck, 2019, p. 150). Both affirm the revolutionary significance of the irruption of the absolute within time's linear flow, and both were inspired by the instant and eternal return—concepts foundational to Nietzsche's earlier response to nihilism (Beck, 2019, p. 43).

It is easy to confuse Lewis's non-teleological stance with these anti-progressive positions (see Puchner, 2006), but for Lewis (1927, p. 27), the temporal politics of both eternal return and instantaneity, while 'timeless' in theory, were "very much concerned with Time in practice." Lewis viewed his era's "general revolutionary programme" (p. 47) as another example of his contemporaries' obsession with time, whom he satirised as "poor ostriches of

[141] Striking an almost accelerationist note, Evola in 1955 posited the "path of action as a viable solution for the West" (Sedgwick, 2023, p. 176). He envisioned 'a magical epoch' in which the West could "'cut the knot of the 'dark age'– the Kali Yuga". The new traditional form that the West will make its own will arise from the spirit of its most ancient tradition: from the ancient Arctic-Atlantic spirit... the legacy of heroic, active, and conquering races' (Evola, 2021, p. 6).

Temporality!" (1979, p. 73).[142] From Benjamin to Jünger, modernists across the political spectrum turned to 'suddenness' as a unifying category of experience, using it as a foundation for identifying "new forms of subjectivity" rooted in instantaneity (Beck, 2019, p. 161). They contrasted apocalyptic, momentary time with classical conceptions of temporality, which upheld the core assumptions of Enlightenment modernity: that time is universal, a "succession without content," and that the "individual subject of knowledge and experience is atemporal" (Schleifer, 2000, p. 2). For Benjamin and many modernists grappling with the radical upheavals in the early 1900s, time was populated by "constellations" of historical moments, perspectives and meanings— "collisions" of the "Then and the Now" coming together "like a flash of lightning" (Benjamin, 1983, p. 49)—leading to the yet more radical possibility of a "post-Enlightenment" subjectivity (Benjamin, 1969, p. 91).[143]

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142 In the first half of *Time and Western Man*, Lewis (1927, p. 135) contends that time philosophy– the "master-concept of our day" –had infested not only philosophy and science but the main literary products of his era: "Without all the uniform pervasive growth of the time-philosophy starting from the little seed planted by Bergson, discredited, and now spreading more vigorously than ever, there would be no *Ulysses*, or there would be no *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*" (Lewis, 1927, p. 106).

143 Benjamin (1969, p. 91) described "post-Enlightenment subjectivity" as having a "chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis". Foucault countered that, rather than being emancipating, post-Enlightenment subjectivity was a tool of oppression–by believing ourselves to be active subjects of our own creation, we internalise and thereby reinforce our own subjugation (Vaughan, 1991, p. 16).

3.4 Subjective Time

Lewis (1989a, p. 23) felt it was no surprise that those who experienced the cultural collapse and apocalyptic change of the early twentieth century came to “see and feel everything” in fragmented, subjective “revolutionary terms.” In response to these new conditions, Lewis’s contemporaries, like Bergson, sought to establish a new, revolutionary connection with time that displaced concerns with the “rational self” in favour of reviving “lived, immediate experience” (Beck, 2019, p. 81). For instance, the creative aspect of Jünger’s *Worker* was his construction of a ‘new subjectivity’ from crises, one acclimated to the "particular demands" of a totally mobilised landscape characterised by danger, "variability," and the "malleability of the deployment of men and means" (Jünger, 2015, p. 74, p. 207). Similarly, Benjamin exchanged objective universal temporality for the “subjective experience” of qualitative time, where “every instant is lived in its incomparable singularity” (Mosès, quoted in Beck, 2019, p. 151). His "politics of interruption" represented a radical revision of the *Augenblick* or decisive-moment theme—central to conservative revolutionaries like Heidegger and Jünger—and an integration of subjective, "epiphanic" visions of time into politics, a vision through which Benjamin aimed to counter the crises engendered by capitalist teleology (Beck, 2019, p. 148).

Conversely, Lewis (1927, pp. 406-407) regarded subjective time as another consequence of the anthropocentric worldview developed during the Renaissance which culminated in romanticism. The “subjectivism” of the romantic, ‘Faustian’” (or today ‘suprahuman’) man was “associated fanatically” with a “deep sense of the reality of Time” as “against 'Space,’” the “pure Present” of the antique world. He maintained that subjective time was one of the “ultimate phases” of a “universal attack” upon 'Substance,' upon the “common-sense of the

Schoolmen", and, finally, upon the whole "rationalist body of dogma… the beliefs of the Classical World." The temporal instability of the early twentieth century—Spengler's "Faustian or present period"—turned mankind into a "very quicksand for the foundation of an unchanging civilisation," rendering him a "shifting basis on which no equilibrium of habit and civilisation could be established" (Butler, cited in Lewis, 1989a, p. 16); in other words, a "Subjective Man."

Similarly, for Taylor (1989), the temporal instability and 'crisis consciousness' of the early twentieth century shifted modern culture's centre of gravity of culture from the unified "I" of Romanticism to the "fragmented ego" of modernism (Beck, 2019, p. 60). In aesthetic terms, this shift was reflected in the transition from a subject rooted in expressivity (Romanticism) to a self rooted in experience and language (modernism)—particularly the subjective comprehension of time.[144]

This shift was epitomised by Bergson's philosophy, which advocated a radical pivot in philosophy from studying objective "abstract time" to emphasising the "lived time" of our inner subjective experience (Moravec, 2020). Bergson (1910, p. 114) paradoxically considered lived time as "concrete time"—the real-time we experience in our own conscious life (Taşdalen, 2003, p. 11)—and to this "concrete time of duration" (Allen, 2023, p. 36), which took the shape of continuous flux, he gave the name "durée".

In *The Childermass*, Bergson's position is represented by the Bailiff, a Devilish Mr Punch who is completely obsessed with subjective time and durée (Schenker, 1992, p. 146). Retorting to a critical appellant at his court (Macrob), he shouts:

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[144] For example, time in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) is highly subjective and far from simple duration (Henry, 1981, p. 6).

> Eternity is in love with the productions of Time! The Eternal loves Time if you do not! …Time is the mind of Space - Space is the mere body of Time. Time is life, Time is money, Time is all good things! - Time is God! (Lewis, 1965b, p.229)

Here, time is understood not as an abstract entity but, à la Bergson, as an immediate subjective experience, as *durée*—an inner experience grasped by intuition (Taşdalen, 2003, p. 11). For Lewis, in an age that increasingly values the subjective and the self, "Time" becomes "God" (Schenker, 1992, p. 147).

The very environs of the book—the phantasmagoric time flats— can be considered a sardonic dramatisation of this logic, a manifestation of Bergon's *durée* put into "crazy practice" (Wagner, 1957, p. 297). It is as if Lewis is saying: "You want a world without Space, a featureless world given over to Time? Very well; here is what it will be like!" (Carter, 1956). Pullman and Satters are thrust into the deepest clouds of "space-time", a Bergsonian hell where the objective world has been degraded into a farce of subjective time, with everything in constant flux. As Bergson (1911a p. 2) put it: "The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change." Macrob is one of the few who dares challenge this notion of constant becoming and change, protesting to the Bailiff: "This static degradation is the opposite, even, of the becoming to which you are so partial" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 229)—a direct retort to Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1910, p. 207), which (in strikingly similar terms) discusses the extra-spatial "degrading itself into spatiality." As a consequence of his protest, Macrob is cut into "fragments... stuffed and stamped" into a "large executioner's basket" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 237).

The Childermass suggests that, for Lewis (1989a, p. 337), the emphasis on change in subjective time is a distortion of the natural order, a "rendering back" to LIFE—that "feverish

chaos"—all that the mind had taken from her to build into forms and concepts.[145] This is why he rejected Futurism and Spengler as "Romantic" for fetishising time and instead championed "ahistoric" and "static" Classical cultures (Chinese, Indian, and Egyptian) for their emphasis on the "hard-edged" forms of space (Klein, 1994, p. 42), as well as the 'Classical Man' who focused on the "immediate and sensuous… the 'spatial'" (Lewis, 1927, p. 406).[146] For Eden (2023, p. 121), these assertions underscore Lewis's essentialism, his devotion to 'essence' as contrary to 'being' and 'becoming'—an essentialism expressed in *Time and Western Man's* preference for Parmenides, who emphasised the unchanging and eternal nature of reality, over Heraclitus, the 'weeping philosopher' who proposed there is "nothing but dissolution and vanishing away, so that the river into which you step is never twice the same river, but always a different one" (Lewis, 1927, p. 247).[147]

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[145] Likewise, in Dugin's philosophy, the concepts of Plato and Apollo symbolize the forces of order and structure that shape civilization and are contrasted to Cybele, who represents the materialistic, chaotic, and primal forces that exist before (or after the collapse of) this order. Crucially, if in the realm of Apollo, there is only the eternal "now", then Cybele's realm is ruled by time (Kronos). This presents an overlap with Lewis's (1989a, p. 338) argument that Bergson's philosophy of change and becoming leads to a "capitulation to the material… in struggle against which the greatest things in the world have been constructed."

[146] Bergson, by contrast, is the "arch enemy of every impulse having its seat in the apparatus of vision, and requiring a concrete world" (1989a, p. 338).

[147] Lewis described Heraclitus as the "first" "Western protagonist of the Flux and nothing but the Flux" (1927, p. 247). Lewis admits no Western philosopher ever ***denied*** that there is constant empirical flux and change in time (Plato did not, and neither does Lewis). But Lewis's issue is with those doctrines following Heraclitus (like Bergson's) who maintain there is nothing ***besides, behind, or over and above the Flux*** (1927, p. 247). Parmenides rejected Heraclitus's idea of ever-

Edwards (2016) also reads *Time and Western Man* as a critique of philosophies of becoming for their propensity to dissolve both individual personality (subject) and external world (object) into "streams of… breathless transformations" (Lewis, 1927, p. 130) none of which have any more reality than any other. The modernist disciples of Bergson's 'subjective time' wish to return us to that 'feverish chaos' of pure sensation, where "identities dissolve", and there is no "coolness of separation between you and me or between either of us or the senses that compose the empirical world" (Edwards, 2016, p.104). Lewis figured this as a struggle between the 'classical' spatial world of common sense and a 'dogmatic primitivism'—a primitivism which, in its (oxymoronic) incarnation amongst his contemporaries as "modernist primitivism" (Pavloska, 2013, p.xi), he critiqued in 1929's *Paleface*.[148]

For Lewis, the pursuit of unity—the guiding motif of modernism's turn to myth, primitive intuition, and 'Time-worship'—threatened the disastrous collapse of the sacrosanct dualism between subject and object (Lewis, 2017). His endorsement of the "rational logos" against modernism's irrational inclinations was thus a theoretical strategy aimed at restoring this dualism and preserving the oppositional binary upon which individuality and (crucially) art—as we see in the next chapter—depended (Lewis, 2017, p. 200). To counter these philosophies of 'becoming' that defy easy separation between subject and object, Vorticism figured "movements of vision" as an "arrest and detachment from the great mechanism of the world"

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present change, and in *Time and Western Man* Lewis (1927, p. 251) further reflects: "Neither Plato nor the Pythagorean doctrines were so ideal ' as the word 'idea' popularly suggests…. Parmenides and the Eleatics answer to the popular meaning best in Greek philosophy."

148 Lewis focusses his attack in *Paleface* particularly on Sherwood Anderson and D.H. Lawrence (whose *The Plumed Serpent* is a particularly egregious specimen of modernist primitivism) (Daly, 2004, p. 138).

(McLuhan 2011, p. 11). McLuhan categorises Lewis's artistic intellectualism as essentially Schopenhauerian: for Schopenhauer, who derided the German Idealists' obsession with historical becoming, the principal worth of aesthetic beauty also lay in achieving a state of "pure contemplation, temporarily suppressing all willing, i.e., all desires and concerns" (Schopenhauer, quoted in Sutherland, 2018, p. 13).

Yet this conclusion—that Lewis simply adopts a traditionalist notion of a superior, metaphysical, immortal, and ahistorical realm of Being against the flux of modernity—is problematised in *The Childermass.* Lewis's depiction of characters in the afterlife—who are not 'purified' essences but remain as socially conditioned as they were in life—suggests the 'anti-traditional' Heideggerian critique that, contra Evola, Being itself is inherently "changeable" and "historical" (Cleary, 2020). Once again, we find a postmodern scepticism—or, more precisely, Shakespeare's "signifying nothing!"—undercutting Lewis's metaphysics.

The Time Flats' satiric take on Bergson's 'subjective time' also engages with broader trends concerning subjectivity in the post-war period, an era characterised by significant advancements in language, science, and psychology, all of which contributed to a more fragmented perception of reality (Kavaloski, 2014, p. 17). Saussure introduced his linguistics of "perception and not of expression" (Greimas, cited in Schleifer 1987, p. xix), Freudian subjectivity gained prominence, and Einstein's theory of relativity challenged Newton's absolute concept of space and time. According to Lewis (1989a, p. 18), the colliding "constellations" of "wars and revolutions" with the resultant changes in meaning and consciousness created a sense of departure from the past, a feeling that "something had been skipped." Language, struggling to keep pace with this rapid "change-stream" (Lewis, 1927, p.

384), ‘decayed with imprecision’—the mere act of naming and describing could no longer capture the new sensibilities of the time.

In response, modernist literature broke from *both* Romanticism and its mid-nineteenth-century successor, literary Realism. Novels like *Ulysses* (and, more self-critically, *The Childermass*) adopted new experimental styles, rejecting critical aspects of literary Realism such as the reliable narrator, a stable sense of self, chronological narratives and objective, unified perspectives of society and neat narrative closures (Childs, 2000; Yakin et al., 2014). Such changes reflected modernism’s scepticism regarding the possibility of absolute moral values and their increasing uncertainty about the nature of linear progress and objective temporality itself. Whereas Lewis turned outward to a ‘non-ethical’ and aggressively externalist satire, his contemporaries—Influenced by Bergson, Freud, and Saussure— “turned inward”, placing a heightened valuation on the subjective and showing a fascination with the fragmented self (Konzett, 2015, p. 171). [149] Although Freud de-centred the individual and Einstein de-centred time, Saussure’s de-centring of language had the most immediate impact on this 'inward turn' in literary modernism. Saussure's work contradicted the traditional realist view of language as a reflection of society, proposing that language "does not reflect" reality but constructs it (Chandler, 2002, p. 28). This perspective inspired modernism’s relativism and subjectivism, which developed into the nihilism of postmodern art later in the century.

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[149] This 'inward-turning' is primarily linked, in literary terms, with the "stream-of-consciousness" fiction of the early modernist era, exemplified by the works of Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Joyce, and Proust (van Rooyen, 2011, p. 94). The latter two are specifically criticised in *Time and Western Man* as epitomizing the “exasperated time-sense of the contemporary man of the industrial age” (Lewis, 1927, p. 101).

Georg Lukács (1962, 1977) consequently critiqued modernism's inward turn to subjectivity and saw it as diametrically opposed to realism's engagement with life. We must be wary, however, of overstating the difference between realism and modernism (Baldick, 2004). Unlike postmodern writers—who believe language is the only way to access reality—modernists still viewed language as a medium for conveying the world. Where postmodernists contend that 'reality' can only be interacted with subjectively via language, Modernists maintained that there *did* exist such a shared world, only that language was being stretched to breaking point in its endeavour to encompass it (Childs, 2000). *The Childermass* shows the struggle of this endeavour, and while a less ambitious work than, say, the proto-postmodernist *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), it strives to be a book about the world (or at least, about a world), not the book "*as* the world" (Schenker, 1992, p. 139).[150]

The challenge for Modernism—existing "temporally and theoretically" between realism and postmodernism (Childs, 2000, p.62)—was that it became increasingly difficult to communicate a shared reality through language as words began to "slip, slide," and "perish" under the "tension" of modernity (Eliot, 1959, p. 160). Paradoxically, this led to subjectivity emerging as a unifying concept for interpreting modern life. Individual perception was yoked to the collective historical consciousness of discontinuity, a phenomenon evident not only in Woolf's pluralisation of subjectivity or Proust's "subjective discontinuity" (Weinstein, 2005, p.

[150] Lewis, like Joyce, found the idea of history as an orderly progression of events unpalatable, but rather than replacing progress with a "playful dialectic", *The Childermass* depicts a deadlock between opposing forces (Caracciolo & Edwards, 1998).

180) but also in the works of Jünger, Benjamin, and Bloch.[151] The writings of these modernists underscore the interconnection between subjective apprehension of personal time and a fragmented collective consciousness of modern history (Beck, 2019).

As we explore in the next chapter, the modernist-Romantic shift from the "rationalist body of dogma" to collective subjectivity—a "new sensibility… now self-affirming or self-creating" (Pippin, 1991, p. 41)—was firmly opposed by Lewis. His emphasis on the critical intelligence's role in revealing modernity's degradations reflected a contrasting desire to revive classical Enlightenment values, seeking to confront the crises of time and values by reinforcing what remained of the Enlightenment's rationalist aspirations (Wragg, 2005a). This explains why the vortex, rather than "freezing time", offers a vantage from which one can observe the process of time from "outside itself" (Sutherland, 2018, p. 13)—the observer embodying Lewis's belief in the power of the independent intellect and, above all, the artistic intellect to throw the mechanised world of flux into relief (Arvidson, 2018, p. 793).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter described how a new consciousness of time as acceleration, fragmentation and continual change differentiated twentieth-century modernism from the optimism of Enlightenment-era early modernism, leading to a new understanding of history not as steady optimisation but as an ongoing 'interregnum' of chaos and crisis. We saw how, for Benjamin, the real catastrophe in this development was not so much the loss of teleology but the sense

[151] Jünger, for instance, extrapolates on the collective experience of suddenness during wartime and the extension of this experience to civilian life due to "total mobilisation" (Beck, 2019).

of being trapped in a persistive cycle of crisis and 'crisis recovery'—an eternal return of the same.

These issues go to the roots of modernism, as evidenced by Baudelaire's "nightmare evocations" of "unendingly empty" time and the related sense of language as a body of "inert and reified" signs from which the human guarantee of meaning has vanished along with the divine (Nicholls, 1995 p. 22).[152] Lewis's contemporaries likewise found that language began to 'decay with imprecision' under the 'strain' of an endlessly "turning world" from which higher meaning had fled, prompting their 'inward turn' towards subjectivity and 'lived time' and away from the linear, universal, and objective perspective of literary realism, which had proven inadequate for making sense of the twentieth-century turmoil in collective values and individual perception.

While Lewis satirised modernism's Romantic recourse to mythical and 'subjective time,' *The Childermass* nevertheless invoked a pessimistic notion of eternal return and ultimately shared modernism's agnosticism toward absolute values in a disjointed, transitional world. Lewis (1964, p. 209) indeed felt universal ethics were "absurd" when untied from a "theological system," and the climactic debate between the representative of classicism, Hyperides—who believes there are "eternals in human history" and ideas unmolded by temporal localities—and the Bailiff, representative of the time-cult—who sees all as flux and "good and evil" as relativistic—ends in metaphysical stalemate (Goodwin, 2008, p. 9). In sum,

[152] Baudelaire coined the term 'modernité, with its "main characteristics" being "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" (Baudelaire, quoted in Beck, 2019, p. 51).

the modernist experience of time as a 'crisis of progress'—including Lewis's—was intrinsically tied to a feeling of life as a meaningless "great chaos of values" (Lewis, 1964, p. 209).

The NRR perceives a comparable link between the crisis of time and values in the twenty-first century—Dugin (2019, p. 39) writes, "Progress is the collapse of values and a path into the abyss". As shown in Chapter One, they, like Benjamin, believe the future has lost all teleology and become a "permanent catastrophic present" of anthropogenic activity (Lopez, 2022, p. 55). The prevailing time consciousness has again shifted from a belief in continuous progress to a sense of instantaneity, with sudden interruptions, "breaks and intermittences," and "great chaotic violences" (Lewis, 1927, p. 365) replacing the linear-progressive "ongoingness" of time in our quotidian experience of life (Schleifer, 2000, p. 13).

Modern theorists have variously categorised this as a Hypermodern temporality of the "here and now" (Lipovetsky, 1987; Rix, 2011), as an atemporal time of perpetual urgency (Arantes, 2014), and as time at a *rasender Stillstand* or "frenetic standstill" (Virilio, 2015). For all these thinkers, twenty-first-century society exists in a state of perpetual motion and crises without progressing in any direction. Virilio, in particular, describes this as the 'contraction' of time in the present, where the linear, unitary, and progressive chronology underpinning the Enlightenment worldview disappears. Indeed, underneath this experience of the ever-accelerating tempo of life, there is an experience of 'crystallisation', a feeling that "nothing essential changes" and "nothing new occurs" (Rosa, 2015, pp. 14-15)—as Lewis wrote in 1954 (p.67), our "illusion" of something "violently progressing" merely conceals a "deceptively inconsequential movement."

As we saw in Chapter Two, New Right thinkers like Faye and Locchi believe this interregnum will end with a sudden reversal that leads to an alternative postmodernity

combining Faustian vitality and ethno-European rootedness (Rix, 2011). In this new, illiberal, and revolutionary synthesis, spherical time prevails over "de-sacralised" linear time, and the myth of “common origins” for Indo-European civilisation re-emerges—giving rise to a new, hierarchical, and modern ethnonational state that will ‘cleanse’ Europe of its present state of decadence (Bar-On, 2013, p. 166). The inauguration of “suprahuman temporality” will banish the “modern sense of alienation, loss, and fragmentation" (Versluis, 2006, p. 106) and provide individuals with a revived sense of “collectively lived meaning” (de Benoist, 2003, p. 56).

Gathering together the themes of the previous chapters, we see that for the NRR—as for other anti-Enlightenment critics—the principal cause of today’s crisis in collective meaning and “higher values” (Sanromán, 2006) is that the Enlightenment, by secularising eschatological time, replaced religion's unified value system or ‘sacred canopy’ with a new cosmology centred around the concept of 'progress.' In the words of Thomas Mann’s (1995, p. 682) apostle of Romantic anti-Enlightenment mysticism, Leo Naphta, the Enlightenment “presumed to abolish the Book of Genesis and replace it with a stultifying fable of enlightened knowledge,” as if “Haeckel had been present at the creation of the earth.” Yet, as Taylor (1991) argues, the rituals and myths of traditional society held more than just "instrumental significance.” The Enlightenment’s ‘presumptuous' substitution of a cosmic "hierarchical order in the universe" with what Weber (1946, p. 155) termed an "optimistic faith" in rationality led to a contemporaneous sensation of the "disenchantment of the world" a loss of the "heroic dimension to life," and a diminishment of both "higher purpose" and "something worth dying for” (Taylor, 1991, pp. 3–4). [153]

[153] As Green (2005, p. 53) notes, Weber's phrase "the disenchantment of the world" draws on Schiller’s earlier concept of "the de-divinisation of nature" or the ‘flight of the gods’, a theme

This new secular ideal or 'pseudo-religion' for centuries underpinned and legitimised advances in liberalism, individualism,, rationalism, and technology (Griffin, 2007). Yet amidst the challenges posed by this ideal by war, revolution, catastrophe, and accelerated disruptions, this sense of 'disenchantment' became more acute.[154] By the modernist era, many artists, including Lewis, became convinced that modernisation—the Enlightenment's Victorian-era sibling (Grisham, 2023, p. 138)—was "leaching" modernity of elements essential to a "healthy civilisation and culture" (Griffin, 2007, p. 63) and turning it into a 'wasteland' where the 'creative myths and dreams of the poets' were "no longer allowed" (Lewis, 1927, p. 52).[155] Jünger captured this sense of post-Enlightenment apprehension in *Eumeswil*:

> Fear is symptomatic of our times—and it is all the more disturbing as it comes on the heels of an epoch of great individual freedom, in which hardships of the kind portrayed by Dickens were already virtually forgotten (Jünger, 1951, p. 31)

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central to Schiller's work and the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition, which endured into modernism (Greisman, 1976) and now influences the NRR. Schiller's notion of the "de-divinisation of nature" originates from his poem "The Gods of Greece."

154 As exemplified by Leavis's attack on a "technologico-Benthamite" civilisation obsessed solely with productivity, enhanced living standards, and technical progress (Day, 2006, pp. 130-9).

155 For Jünger, this conviction explained the "disconcerting" element that he believed all modernist artworks shared, and which marked their "total foreignness" to all "immediately preceding works of art". Commenting on paintings such as Braque's "Homage to J. S. Bach" (1912), Juan Gris's "The Scottish Girl" (1918), and Lewis's "The Surrender of Barcelona" (1934-7), Jünger observed all these works seem to have "little to do with art", instead giving the impression that the field of art has been abandoned or is even "in danger."

Jünger's apprehension is shared today by both NRR and leading postmodern sociologists, as evidenced by Lipovetsky's (2005, p. 35) observation in *Hypermodern Times* that "anxieties about the future are replacing the mystique of progress," and in the *Empire of Fashion* that:

> We have embarked on an interminable process of desacralisation and desubstantiation of meaning… this is how the gods die: not in a much-predicted nihilist demoralisation of the West and anguish over the loss of values, but in small jolts of meaning (Lipovetsky, 2002, p. 206).

For the NRR, as for the modernists, this new experience of time as a crisis of progress—a "'disorientation' of all realms of life"—is inextricably tied to the "loss" of "higher values" and a "transcendental destiny" (Sanromán, 2006). The hypermodern individual finds himself "abandoned" in the face of this turmoil, more distanced than even the postmodern man from the "great structuring principles of modernity" (Charles, 2005, pp. 11-12) and lacking a protective shell against the "hostile currents" of a world "in dissolution" (Lewis, 1964, p. 265).

This elucidates De Benoist and Champetier's (2012) argument that the Enlightenment's "great project of modern emancipation" culminated merely in a "generalised alienation". Alienation is seen as the inevitable outcome of Enlightenment 'freedom': the individual who "dares to be wise" (Kant's "Sapere aude") "dares" by breaking every mythical taboo under the banner of reason, questioning the ordered and hierarchical universe of the premodern community (Chua, 2009, p. 571; Bar-On, 2013). The unifying hierarchical and cosmic orders of tradition were torn asunder by these individualistic impulses of Enlightenment modernity, whose 'deluded' search for a universal civilisation based on reason led to the subsequent loss of "ancestral values and

realities" (Faye, 2009), opening the door to a destructive "demythologisation" of the world (McKenna, 2018). [156]

NRR thinkers follow the original counter-enlightenment writers and reactionary modernists in adhering to this broadly pessimistic analysis of modernity. It is a non-progressive perspective of a civilisation advancing materially but regressing spiritually—a bureaucratised, corporatised world in which materialism has replaced "feeling" and "heart" and led to the "death" of spiritual life (Sanromán, quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 96). This view of the historical trajectory of the Enlightenment corresponds to Weber's (1946, p. 155) diagnosis of capitalist modernity as the irreversible *rationalisation* of social life and the inevitable "disenchantment of the world."[157] As de Benoist (quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 144) concludes, global capitalism is inherently 'nihilistic' as it eliminates "the symbolic" and leads to this all-pervasive "disenchantment": superstitions "disappear", life becomes "increasingly rational", and cultures grow "more homogeneous."

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156 Locchi (1979, p. 2) makes a comparable argument: the epoch of Myth has been displaced by the epoch of ideologies–ideologies that strive in vain to achieve an impossible synthesis through an "ultimate science," aiming to reclaim thereby the lost paradise once secured by the harmony of Myth.

157 Rationalisation, in Weber's sense, is the process by which social life is increasingly governed by efficiency, calculation, and instrumental rationality, leading to the disenchantment of the world as traditional beliefs and values are supplanted by a focus on logic and control. For Bell (1956), the concept of "rationalisation" encompasses ideas of "alienation," "reification," and the "fetishism of commodities"–all of which convey the notion that in modern society, man has become a "thing," an object manipulated by society.

The NRR consequently reject linear-progressive time and the associated ‘hostile currents’ of liberal modernity they deem responsible for this ‘crisis of values’. These ‘hostile currents’ are manifold but can be grouped into three categories:

1) the individualism of mass society and the dissolution of organic, rooted, ethnically and hierarchically based communities of belonging.
2) a homogenising universalisation rooted in the global pull of the Western Enlightenment model, whose temporal framework is uncritically accepted as the most rational and sovereign model for mankind and, underlying both,
3) the de-sacralisation of the world and the rationalisation of all social life in a society that rejects all forms of the Absolute “incompatible with individuality” (Dugin, 2023, p. 6).

Each of these points requires substantial elaboration to fully understand how modernism and the NRR intersect in responding to the crisis of values and to grasp the complexities of Lewis’s insider-critique of modernism's reaction to these concerns. We will address each point sequentially, starting in Chapter Four with the mass society and the related concepts of reification, individualism, and alienation—all factors that the NRR sees as inextricable from the Enlightenment's 'disenchantment of the world' and today's loss of “transcendent value, meaning, or purpose” (Griffin, 2008, p. 15).

CHAPTER FOUR: MASS SOCIETY AND THE CRISIS OF VALUES

The concept "mass society" describes modern society as both a monolithic, homogenised force and a disaggregated collection of atomised individuals (Munro, 2017). Locchi (1979, p. 3) argues that when a people lose their memory of origins, history, and shared values, they cease to be a people and become a "mass," just as a "community" mutates into a "society." De Benoist, drawing on Tönnies (1887),[158] also distinguishes between 'community' and 'society', noting that traditional communities preserved an organic "social link" that allowed collectives (ethnic groups) to thrive on "shared values" (quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 147).[159] These communitarian and 'holist' values, however, are dissolved in mass society—a phenomenon peaking in the postmodern era where the "rational, autonomous individual" (Dugin, 2012, p.96) is "divinised in the name of equality" (Locchi, 1979, p.3). Post-Enlightenment democracy organises "atomised" individuals into citizens viewed through the "prism of abstract egalitarianism" (de Benoist, 2003, p. 55), with each becoming, in Lewis's words, an "abstract man of democracy", thus replacing the former 'community' with a "society" of such little "sham gods": "know-alls" who are "nothing at all"—not bootmakers, engineers, carpenters, or doctors (Lewis, 1989a, p. 30). In short, individualism—or what

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158 Ferdinand Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) examines the clash between small-scale, neighbourhood-oriented 'communities' and large-scale, competitive market 'societies.'

159 De Benoist (2003, p. 55) observes that the "democracy of antiquity was communitarian and 'holist'," defining citizenship by a man's origins and offering him the "opportunity to participate in the life of the city." While ancient democracy was thus rooted in the concept of organic community, modern democracy, the "heir to Christianity and the philosophy of the Enlightenment," is rooted in the individual.

Susman (1979, p. 218) termed "the culture of personality"—becomes enmeshed with a culture of impersonality and depersonalisation.

4.1 The Crowd



Figure 1: Wyndham Lewis *The Crowd* (1915)

© The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

Arvidson (2018, p. 792) argued that no modernist was more attuned to this entanglement of personality and impersonality in mass modernity than Lewis. This is evidenced by *The Crowd (or Revolution)* (1914-15), which presciently captures the tragicomic paradoxes of democratic mass-individualism (Rancière, 2010, p. 52).[160] The more people are individualised—

[160] According to Normand (1992, p. 78), this painting signalled the end of Lewis's artistic apprenticeship and the beginning of his life's work proper.

"liberated" from the shared social bonds of faith, tradition, and authority (Dugin, 2012)— the more they resemble each other. The individual dissolves into the democratic mass—note how Lewis's stick figures are indistinguishable from each other *and* from the urban vortex that 'enframes' them. Referring back to Heidegger's historical narrative, such alienation results from the uprooting of *Dasein* from its reflexive absorption in the everyday world (Turner, 2012, p. 66), with the Cartesian subject-object split pivotal in this process. A decade after *The Crowd,* Lewis (1989a, p.30) described this abstract human average or "phantom man" as precisely what the democratic Enlightenment "envisaged": a "*homme moyen*" who is the antithesis of the "caste-man" or narrow "occupational mannequin" of traditional life (p. 92). In Enlightenment society, every such individual is reduced to the "same value"; personality is not "taken into consideration" for the "good reason" that "there's no longer any referential system of social value" (Locchi, 1979, p. 3).

By contrast, in the premodern community, Locchi argues, human value was measured by its degree of conformity to 'ideal types' proposed by Myth, which each community member internalised as their superego.[161] Myth, as a shared 'world feeling', created social bonds, defined communal norms and structured personalities, and served as the foundational source

[161] For Locchi (1979, p. 3) human value is "always social personality." Lewis would agree, but sees this as a negative, not a positive. In the *Enemy of the Stars* (1915) Arghol views 'the Self' as a 'loathsome deformity' contracted from others like a disease; the artist, however, must live, so he "must strike some sort of truce with this self; he must live among Hanps… he must come to a working arrangement with them" (Kenner, 1950, p. 27).

of a world-view.[162] This “vital force” that animated historic peoples and organised them into a “community of shared destiny” had been known by many names: Dostoyevsky called it God and believed that when a people lose their God, they suffer and die. Similarly—Locchi states—Nietzsche proclaimed to Western societies that their God was dead, and so they, too, would perish (1979, p. 1).

Following these conclusions, neo-communitarian theorists like Taylor (1991) lament the inexorable decline of modern society towards the dominance of 'instrumental reason' and subjectivism. As discussed in Chapter One, this ‘decline’ leads to Nietzsche’s nihilism—a “negation of all horizons of significance” (Taylor, 1991, p. 61) [163]— and engenders a “fragmentation” where individuals conceive themselves “more and more atomistically” and feel “less and less” connected to their compatriots in “common projects and allegiances” (pp. 112-13). This eventuality is foreshadowed in the sculptural rectangles of *The Crowd*, which depict the modern urban environment as a hive of cage-like apartment blocks. [164] Taylor (1991, p. 9) concludes that mass society fosters such aggregations of individuals who are "enclosed in their own hearts”—people who, as de Tocqueville observed, favour the “satisfactions of private life” over participating actively in self-government.

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[162] As discussed in Chapter Two, Locchi (2023) argues that the ancient Indo-Europeans adopted to the social restructuring of the Neolithic revolution by introducing a mythological pantheon of gods to mirror the increasing specialisation of social roles.

[163] It is important to clarify, as Taylor himself notes, that Nietzsche used the term ‘nihilism’ to designate something he rejected.

[164] Will Self (2017) observed that Lewis’s work foreshadowed the attendant problems of filter bubbles and echo chambers long before the advent social media.

This reference to Tocqueville is not incidental; his critiques of mass society have a substantial, though often overlooked, influence on the modernists (including Lewis) and the NRR.[165] Tocqueville (1956, p. 99) argued that egalitarian mass democracies not only “make every man forget his ancestors” but separate him from his contemporaries and throw him back "forever upon himself alone”, confined within the “solitude of his own heart.” NRR thinkers consider Tocqueville's critiques vital to the "inegalitarian and ethno-nationalist" strands of Western thought (Durocher, 2016), maintaining that his insights into egalitarianism and the alienation of democratic individualism remain relevant. For example, Tocqueville's (1841, p. 13) assertion that “only… patriotism *and* religion” can restore a common purpose to the “body politic” aligns with the NRR's contemporary vision to ‘unify’ mass society through the establishment of a sacralised religion of politics (see Chapter Six).

4.2 Democracy and the Mass Society

Central to Tocqueville's (1969, p. 44) argument and his influence on Lewis is his diagnosis that while democratic equality brings benefits to mankind," it also fosters "very dangerous instincts." Democratic mass society "isolates men from each other so that each thinks only of himself” and exposes the soul to “an inordinate love of material pleasure.” The word ‘democracy’ indeed derives from dā (də-), meaning ‘to divide’ and ‘to separate’ (Pokorny, 1959), and Tocqueville, following Montesquieu, argues that despotism thrives on such separation, with isolation being the best guarantee of helplessness.

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[165] Tocqueville was an early critic of mass society, predating Nietzsche, Weber, and Ortega y Gasset (Meskill, 2013), and his ideas were engaged with by many modernists, including Lewis, who wrote a dedicated article on Tocqueville, “De Tocqueville and Democracy” in 1946.

Tocqueville's argument, however, is complicated by the fact that equality not only "divides" but conceivably "unites at the same time" (Lom, 1999, p. 17). Egalitarianism dissolves the cohesive social hierarchies of traditional communities but, by the same process, encourages people to identify intellectually and emotionally with each other as never before—albeit based on broader, more impersonal, and abstract bonds (see Durkheim's (1997) theory of "functional interdependency").[166] The issue is not simply, as Dugin (2012) claims, that liberalism and egalitarianism "liberated" the individual from shared social bonds. Rather, as Lewis (1989a, p. 151) argues, mass society re-establishes 'artificial' bonds to unite people: note how the flag-carrying stick insects in *The Crowd* are 'united' by their "doctrinaire" revolutionary ideologies. The French and Communist flags symbolise the ideological 'religions' that offer mass man a "world in a corner of the world, full of rest and security" (Lewis, 1982, p. 316). Lewis's crucial insight is that these new 'artificial' bonds are always "exclusive" in nature: the 'Proletarian' is made to forget he is also a Catholic and vice versa (1989a, p.151).[167] Consequently, in a less optimistic vein than Lom, Lewis concludes that the democratic individual loses awareness of all the other things he is outside his particular category, making

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[166] In other words, as the traditional bonds of community and religion are eroded by societal massification, social cohesion increasingly begins to depend on less tangible and more impersonal (i.e., abstract) ties of "functional interdependency" (Durkheim, 1997). De Benoist and Champetier (2012, pp. 17-18) argue that modern societies characteristically "unite individuals who perceive one another as strangers" and who "cannot conceive of a social relationship not governed by a 'neutral' regulatory authority."

[167] This foreshadows Badiou's thesis (2007) that the individual is not what counted in the twentieth century; rather, the measure of the century was to be made in terms of categories, i.e., revolutionary class, proletariat, party, or race.

the “so-called” democratic masses more susceptible to manipulation. [168] This critique underpins *The Art of Being Ruled’s* notorious claim that "Democracy (was) to blame for the war" (Lewis, 1989a. p. 82).

For Lewis (1989b, p. 171), these dangers are intensified in the post-Enlightenment milieu of rapid industrialisation, modernisation, and “modern mob politics.” Lewis (1984, p. 23) observes that “the Public has deteriorated, having neither the “will nor common sense of a peasant or guildsman, but are more easily fooled…. this can only be a source of concern and regret, *to all except ‘the leaders of men.’”* He attributes this to popular culture’s "mesmeric" advertising methods, which leave democracy, in practice, "invariably" at the "mercy of the hypnotist” (Lewis, 1927, p. 42).[169] This anxiety is dramatised in Lewis’s fiction, where his stylistic practice reflects the inevitable pollution of the “collective mind” and “language itself” by the “increasing and inescapable influence of mass culture in modern times” (Jameson, 1973, p. 320). This is best illustrated by *The Childermass* (1928), where Pullman and Satters, trying to orient themselves in their newfound ‘afterlife’, end up internalising the Bailiff’s power by adopting his definitions of reality, using a language they believe to be their own but which is riddled with the “terminology of subjection” (Munton, 1980, p. 121).In both his fiction and cultural criticism, Lewis anticipates Kornhauser’s (1959, p. 33) "mass society theory,” which posits that mass society, being “objectively the atomised society”, is, therefore, a

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[168] Kornhauser’s influential *The Politics of Mass Society* makes the same case: people who are “atomised readily become mobilised” (1959, p. 33) since they lack affiliations to the local community, to independent groups, occupational groups, and so forth (Buechler, 2013).

[169] For Lewis (1989a, p. 74), one of the most pernicious traits of modern advertising methods is that they foster a vicious cycle: because of the techniques of the hypnotist, the public confirms his cynicism towards them, learning to "live up to, or down to, its detractor”.

system in which there is the “high availability of a population for mobilisation by elites”. According to Kornhauser (1959, p. 84), when social conditions resemble a mass society—wherein populations and elites can emotionally provoke one another to extreme actions—unrestrained socio-political movements are likely to erupt, potentially escalating to totalitarian extremes like those seen in Nazi Germany. Lewis’s fear of this is evident in *The Crowd’s* depiction of the will-less “intricately moving bobbins” (Lewis, 1982, p. 315), illustrating why the broader concept of "the crowd" became synonymous with a fear of "mass society" for many modernists (Stott and Dury, 2017).

Given the above, it is not unreasonable to view Lewis's art and criticism from the 1910s-1920s as transposing Tocquevillian critiques of democracy into the new context of urban-industrial mass society. Lewis himself reflected on this parallel in 1946, noting that both his younger self and Tocqueville perceived democracy as:

> …hopelessly structureless… hardly better than a political jellyfish: as liable to result in the systematic oppression, or suppression, of the first-rate by the second-rate in everything (cf. my "Politics of the Intellect"), as a social system in which the values are always adjusted to suit the vanity of the indolent, unintelligent, jealous average (Lewis, 1946, p. 568)

Although Lewis (1946, p. 571) eventually concluded he would rather have a “parliamentary democracy than a king", what continued to impress him about Tocqueville's analysis was its insight that democracy, both in theory and when "strictly practised," entailed a law of impoverishment that applied on *both* intellectual and social planes. Critics typically attacked democracy only from a socio-economic perspective, regarding it as a levelling force for "depriving dukes of their titles... or taking away the rich man's money" (Lewis, 1946, p. 562)—

as Lewis himself had done in 1927's *The Lion and the Fox.*[170] To Lewis (1946, p. 570), Tocqueville's unique recognition was that, if left unchecked, this impulse of "democratic levelment" would "lump art" in with "arrogance of nobles" in one sweeping condemnation, with the mass man considering "taste and sensibility"—prerequisites for the creation of art—to be "synonymous with privilege." "Brains *in excess*" would be as bad as "money *in excess*" (Lewis, 1932a, p.131).[171] Lewis (1946) concludes that 'Littleness, plainness, aridity, and lack of enterprise in all things' would thus be "de rigueur" in Tocqueville's dreaded mass society of "universal uniformity"; a vision embodied in *Monstre Gai's* (1955) artless but commercialised urban dystopia, a.k.a. 'Third City'.[172]

4.3 Modernism and the 'malaises' of Mass Culture

One reason the NRR draws more direct inspiration from reactionary Modernists than from theorists like Tocqueville is that they were the first cultural movement to address

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170 Lewis (1951, p. 135) therein described the democratic impulse as a politicised "universal organised revolt" against "even the most modest eminence"–an attack which, in its thoroughness, was "rapidly shifting" from the truly eminent (who were considered already destroyed) to the "petit bourgeois mass of the smally privileged".

171 Jameson's 1979 book on Lewis suggested that proto-fascism was reactive to these 'levelling' effects of democracy and the impact of the omnipotent majority–a theme central to his reading of Lewis as fundamentally driven by anti-communistic principles. In *Doom of Youth*, Lewis indeed links the ills of democratic levelment specifically to communism, described therein as a "more fanatical, highly-energised democracy" (Lewis, 1932a, p. 130).

172 In *Men Without Art*, Lewis (1964, p. 225) speculated that if Art were fated to die, its final purpose "before doing so" would be to paint a "picture of what life looks like without art". That picture would "of course" be a "satiric picture", and in Lewis's late fiction, it *is* one.

democracy's 'dangerous instincts' within the ‘dystopian’ context of urban-industrial mass society. Resonating with the NRR’s current objectives, reactionary modernism aimed to continue—amidst the "quotidian inferno of modern life" (Stelzig, 1979, p.63)—the Romantic aspiration to "re-enchant" society as a whole through artistic innovation or even novel forms of religion (Gray, 2007, p. 231).

Writing for the NRR site Counter- Currents, Jeelvy (2022) hails the “vast treasure trove of the Right’s modernist heritage,” particularly highlighting the 'high-modernist' art of Lewis, Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, all of whom scrutinised mass society (Ferrall, 2001), questioned democratic structures (Rulo, 2012), and responded with ambivalence, if not disdain, to their historical moment. For Johnson (2012, p. 5)—founder of Counter-Currents—these “modernist trailblazers” sought new overarching structures of collective meaning in opposition to the encroaching "rationalisation," "disenchantment," and “atomistic individualism” of their era, envisioning avant-garde art as a means to provide unifying visions of renewal and creation amid the depredations of mass culture, whilst also affirming the counter possibility of "creative and heroic individualism.”

Among the ‘high modernists’, Lewis (1976, p. 205) most particularly urged rescuing culture from the "cheapening effects of the contamination of the Capitalist mind"—the “impersonal forces of science”, industry, and “advanced capitalism” that had combined to create a “culture of commodities” which threatened to “consume both art and the individual” (Wood, 2015, p. 85). As Martha Gruening (1934, p. 320) noted, impersonality was both “in the air” and “part of the ‘climate of opinion’” in the modernist era, “the invasion of the community” by new “impersonal and mechanical modes of combined human behaviour” having become the “outstanding fact of modern life” (Dewey, 2012, p. 94).

Like Eliot and the modernist critics Q.D. and F.R. Leavis [173] as well as I.A. Richards, Lewis (1964, p. 14) explored how art could remedy the historical situation, agreeing with Richards and “his appendix the Leavises” that "standardisation, mass-production, and levelling-down" were transforming society into a "finely homogeneous, very thoroughly levelled" civilisation. Lewis and Leavis shared an “essentially Romantic critique” of the individual artist’s role in the face of mass depersonalisation (Wood, 2015, p. 86)—Leavis (1932, p. 13) believing the poet is “at the most conscious point of the race in his time”—but that individual genius was precisely what was most threatened by the “commercial and economic machinery” of urban industrial democracy. In *Doom of Youth* Lewis (1932a, p. 131) warned of democracy's “semi-religious drive” to “deprive the individual of anything he possesses in excess,” and so ‘genius’ was marked “down for extinction” for genius is, ultimately, nothing but an “excess of individuality.”

Proceeding from this pessimistic view of mass society and literature's role within it, Lewis and other high modernists concurred on the necessity of a “conscious and directed effort” to address the situation, advocating a near-militaristic “resistance by an armed and conscious minority” (Leavis, 1932, p. 270). With varying degrees of self-awareness and creative skill, they sought a transcendent, redemptive vision of the world and a community to share it with—even if that community was limited to fellow creative elites (Griffin, 2007).

4.3.1. Mass Culture and Consumerism

The notion of exclusive artistic elitism—or “reactionary elitism” (Ferrall, 1994)—is often associated with the High Modernists, suggesting they denounced the 'crowd' as part of a

[173] Leavis was the founder of *Scrutiny*

retreat to a premodern ideal of an "artistic aristocracy"; a "pseudo-courtly" (Holland, 2004, p. 58); secret society of Modernism bound by aristocratic codes and indifferent to contemporary life (Lyon, 1999, p. 124).[174]

Lewis (1989a, p. 242), however, always rejected the idea of withdrawing into isolated intellectual coteries dedicated to cultivating '"an elegant sterility or cautious and critical eking out of a little jet of naivete"—asserting in *Blast No. 2* (1915, p. 8) that he was "against snobbery" as much as he was against "the glorification of ''the People". He maintained that he was no "Mister Ivory Tower" (1984, p. 107) but rather an enemy engaged in a "lifelong battle" with the cultural contradictions of his era (Lafferty, 2009, p. 200).[175] Unlike Tarr, who is content to gaze on the herd with 'autocratic scorn', Lewis (1984, p. 77) declared in the 1920s that he was "moving outside" to become, in his "solitary schism," a self-appointed critic of society and even an "Enemy" to the modernist movement; a stance influenced by World War One's exposure of avant-garde movements' failure to realise the 'zestful modernity' they envisioned. He spent the first half of the 1920s dissecting the ideologies that now 'almost unnoticed' saturated the mind and had contributed to society's dangerous "universal

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[174] Such interpretations of 'aristocratic modernism' evoke Hesse's elite realm of Culture in 1943's *The Glass Bead Game* (Castalia), which is set apart to pursue its aims in perfect isolation, uncontaminated by a 'reality' that Hesse (like the modernists) had come to distrust. Equally, it could be said to foreshadow the NRR's effort to create an elite cultural "alt grid" or "dissident high culture": a parallel society in which dissident podcasters and livestreamers champion artists within the movement (Populi, 2023).

[175] A tentative parallel could be drawn here to the NRR 'alt-grid', whose most metapolitical thinkers advocate methods such as "meme warfare" over "abstract refutations of dominant narratives" as a means of engaging the public with their "counter-narratives" (Smithee, 2016)

stupefaction" (McLuhan, 1944). This work culminated in a “megalomastodonic masterwork” titled *The Man of The World*—an exhaustive documentation and analysis of the art, science, and philosophy that manufacture the Zeitgeist, i.e., the force which manipulates the puppets who govern the mass (Lewis, cited in Meyers, 1980, p. 105).[176] This unprintably large tome was divided into *The Lion and The Fox, Time and Western Man*, and *The Art of Being Ruled*, the latter of which McLuhan (2010, p. 181) claims makes one terrifyingly aware of the “scope” of the forces arrayed against reason and art.

It is through such works that Lewis stands out among the NRR's pantheon of dissident 'artists of the right' as the most committed antagonist to 'mass culture.' Lewis (1984, p. 23) declared himself a "highbrow" in a century 'badly-infected' by a "lowbrow" virus spawned by 'monopoly-capital and mass-production' and 'transmitted' through cultural institutions like cinema, popular music, theatre, newspapers, and the spread of trivial novels marked by “best-seller vulgarity” (1927b, p. 94).[177] The growth of literacy and the proliferating industry of “vulgar” journalism (Lewis, 1914, p. 120) catering to it signalled the increasing power of 'the masses’—a phenomenon that deeply unsettled Lewis and other high modernists, particularly

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[176] Kenner (1966, p. 231) describes *The Man of the World* as a “satirico-fantastico-polemic omnium-gatherum”. He writes that “as though bolts of lightning had melted together Gargantua and Pantagruel, the Critique of Pure Reason and the collected works of Thomas Nashe, this grotesque cumbersome pantechnicon filled up his work-room, unpublishably long, irrepressibly vigorous.” It ran to over 800 pages (O’Keefe, 2001), and was “longer than War & Peace, Ulysses & so on” (Lewis, 1985, p. 144).

[177] Lewis's (1964, p. 32) argument in *Men without Art* is that mass culture, "proletarianisation," and the "Americanising" process were too "far advanced" in 1930s England, setting in motion the march "Towards an Art-less Society.”

due to their anxieties regarding the degradation of language among a public whose minds were "rotted by the incessant consumption of popular novels" (1929, p. 94), and who were coming to resemble a "million-headed herd of tiny tots of all ages" (1965b, p. 97).

4.3.2 Mass Culture and Violence

Lewis's Vorticist-era works had already explored the relationship between the artist and the growing urban masses, expressing concern about how an individual endowed with "one synthetic and various ego" should interact with large homogenous crowds (Lewis, 1928, p. 237). These works also address Lewis's anxiety about popular culture's influence over a mass democratic populace susceptible to ideological manipulation and "quite possibly desirous of it" (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 261). In "The Crowd Master" (1914), the press whips up the electrified crowd into a patriotic war-desiring organism, echoing the fate of characters like Brobdingnag and *Tarr's* Soltyk, who are too easily charged with the impulses that control them (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 156).[178] Lewis's (1989a, p. 20) central concern is that in a 'brutalised' society, not "amenable to ideas", ideas instead assume physical form. Personality "takes the place of thought, and physical things of spiritual", leading to 'catastrophic' revolutionary violence.[179]

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[178] Such concerns became especially pertinent after the war: a period Lewis excoriated for the growing popular 'veneration for the violent' observable in detective novels (e.g., Edgar Wallace) and gangster fiction, whose effect he lamented for keeping 'the Jolly Roger of "Romance"' flying (Lewis, 1934, p. 148)—not to mention reviving the "faded Kiplingesque jingoism" (Lewis, 1915, p. 23) which ***BLAST*** once aimed to purge.

[179] Lewis critiques the role of modern advertising in this trend for promoting an idealised physical self—a "sinister idol"—to the tired everyman or "small-muscled clerk," thereby emptying the mass

The Childermass epitomises this 'brutalised' society, where ideological conflicts cannot be resolved intellectually; physical violence is the only means of victory (Edwards, 1975, p. 81)

Tocqueville observed a similar link between mass violence and the expansion of popular culture vis-à-vis the French Revolution, an insight supported by recent studies like Markoff's (1986) on the correlation between literacy and revolt in 1789.[180] Eliot (1982, p. 53) similarly concluded that popular culture and "unlimited industrialism" caused the rise of the "mob" by creating a populace disconnected from tradition and estranged from religion, thus making them "susceptible to mass suggestion."

4.3.3. Mass Culture and Materialism

The critical overlap between Lewis, Tocqueville, and the NRR is this association of progressivism with the Platonic critique of democracy as "majoritarian mob-rule"—particularly the rise of literacy, mass communication and materialism (Cochran and Pickowicz, 2011, p. 213). Lewis and Tocqueville's belief that democratic egalitarianism is inextricably linked with rising materialism is, indeed, best understood through Plato's argument in *The Republic,* which posits that democracy's elimination of hierarchies eventually levels not just social relations but all distinctions between high and low—everything we evaluate as honourable or base (Plato and Larson, 1979; Lom, 1999).*The Republic* (1979, p. 219) argued

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mind of intellectual concerns through an obsessive focus on the body (Lewis, quoted in Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 155).

[180] Tocqueville noted that, before the ***Révolution***, cultural barriers between elites and the masses precluded social disturbances from interfering with the "normal" operations of government; later, however, as these barriers grew increasingly porous, mass revolution fomented (Markoff, 1986; Tanter & Midlarsky, 2017, p. 278).

the democratic man grants an "equality to his pleasures"; if told some pleasures arise from "good and beautiful desires" and others from base ones, he insists that they are "all alike and should all be honoured equally." Denying hierarchy at this most metaphysical level, this man of the *plethos* succumbs to materialism or "the mob of the senses" (Plato, quoted in Maes-Jelinek, H., 1970, p. 173).

Burke argued similarly: after the order of God comes an order of spiritual and intellectual values which are necessarily differentiated—just as all impulses and men are differentiated—because a natural gradation teaches us to hold some sentiments dear and others cheap. However, the levelling radicalism of mass society amalgamates these emotions and sensations into a uniform mediocrity, erasing the moral imagination that distinguishes men from beasts. Burke warned that in an egalitarian mass culture, "learning would be cast into the mire" and "trodden… under the hoofs of a swinish multitude," leading man to become indifferent to anything "not of the flesh" (Burke, cited in Kirk, 2017).

From Plato to Burke to the modernists, we see a development in the idea that the outcome of equality is a shift toward materialism and the corporeal.[181] For the NRR, this is encapsulated by Guénon's argument that modernity represents not progression but regression—a fall into the abyss of matter, sensuality, corporeality, and mechanisation (Dugin, 2019). Similarly, Dugin (2019, pp. 38-39) contends that under the modern 'logos' of Cybele—to which society has descended from the traditional Apollonian (Platonic) logos—matter becomes absolute, and corporeal values displace spiritual ones. Lewis (1989a, p. 14) also feared the triumph of democratic mass society, warning it would lead not to the idealistic

[181] Paleo-conservatives like Gottfried subsume this notion under their critique of "materialistic democracy" (Gottfried, cited in Bartee, 2019, p. 115),

Enlightenment dreams of liberty, consciousness, and social responsibility—goals he (in the 1920s) felt were beyond the majority—but to materialism, to the passive, wormlike existence that 'Life' per se "must be".[182] As this indicates, however, Lewis stands out among these thinkers by distinguishing Enlightenment ideals from the perceived depredations of mass democratic modernity.

De Tocqueville also identified the pursuit of passive well-being as one of the "strongest impulses of a democratic society," though—as Saul Bellow's Herzog notes—he "underestimated" its destructive potential (Bellow, 1964, p. 59). Lewis did not make this oversight, nor did Eliot (1982, p. 53), who observed: "The more highly industrialised the country, the more easily a materialistic philosophy will flourish in it… *and the more deadly that philosophy will be."* Consequently, Lewis (1989a, p.130) distinguishes between two types of 'liberty' that revolution aspires to: the "old libertarian claim" for liberty, which rejects passivity and emphasises the "prose" of "consciousness and responsibility", and the modern "poetry" of mass society, which by contrast resembles the passive, more or less "ecstatic, rhythmic, mechanical life". While NRR thinkers perceive the primary threat of liberal mass individualism as the "destruction" of collective cultural and ethnic identities (de Benoist, quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 157), for Lewis (1989a), the main issue with the "libertarianism of today" is precisely this valuation of the "poetry of the mass" over the classical "prose of the individual" and the "rhythm of the crowd" over the "rhythm of the person."

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[182] For Dugin (2018), Cybele is symbolic not only of modernity but of pre-Indo-European cultures that were "sedentary… not nomadic… matriarchal not patriarchal", and "Chthonian" and "earthly' rather than 'heavenly'.

4.3.4 Mass Culture and Mechanisation

Lewis's first significant novel, *Tarr* (2010, p. 20), explores the challenge of maintaining authentic individuality in such a society, which reifies and mechanises the subject to the point that independent thinking becomes unsustainable—as the titular protagonist observes, "no thought can come out of your head before it has slipped on its uniform." Early on, Tarr confronts the "herdesque" Hobson and suggests this representative of the mass is not a person but a thing, a "perfectly disciplined social unit" (2010, p. 20). He feels such men are "essentially spies" against the individual, echoing Arghol's view that between Personality and Mankind, it is "a question of dog and cat… Self is the ancient race…the race that lost,"—albeit that the mass "still suspects Egotistic plots, and hunts Pretenders" (Lewis, 1914, p. 66)

Tarr embodies Lewis's suggestion that the dangers of massification can be countered by a Goethean division of humanity into Natures and Puppets—or, more precisely, into "natural" and "mechanical men". Tarr typifies the former, Otto Kreisler, the latter: Kreisler hurls himself toward violence, rape, and murder mainly because "the rusty machine had a thirst for action" (2010, p. 131). Significantly, Kreisler represents German Romanticism, which, as shown in Chapter One, fostered "romantic nationalism" in the nineteenth century—a nationalism subsequently technologised and weaponised in the twentieth. Lewis (1984, p.204) foresees an "absurd war" brewing between these two types: the puppets or "mechanical men" are the natural allies of technology, and with "the great development of machinery," the pressure they exert on the "natures" can only increase.[183]

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[183] Like Heidegger, Lewis (1984, p. 204) sensed that mass modernity was "slipping back into machinery, but he feared even more that these 'mechanical men' would actively abet this decline into mechanistic primitivism.

At its most simplistic, *Tarr* suggests that the way to preserve independence amidst such mechanical animality is to maintain clear delineations between “intelligent individuals” and the multifarious “groups that importune them” (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 286). In response to the threat of individuality's extinction, *The Art of Being Ruled* thus considered a political system that upheld anarchism for the "natures" and fascism for the "puppets" (Lafferty, 2009). But Lewis’s notorious (ultimately rejected) consideration of “fascism as an alternative"[184] must be viewed in light of his concurrent call for an “anarcho-syndicalist” union of artist-intellectuals partitioned off outside society. (Lafferty, 2009, p. 58). In other words, Lewis’s view of the artist-intellectual's role in society was *not* hierarchical, as it was not authoritarian. Like René Harding, Lewis (1965a, p. 85) did not envisage a “Philosopher King" but a republic where a “committee of Sages would perhaps be the rulers”—an elite creative minority.[185]

4.3.5 Mass Culture and Revolution

To Lewis, this creative minority’s role was to serve as an “advance-guard for the civilised intelligence” (Tomlin, 1969a, p. 13). His ruthless critiques of contemporary mass culture stemmed from a conviction that a society hostile to art is also hostile to life and *reason* (McLuhan, 1944)—the reason opposed by technophilic ‘anti-rationalist’ modernisms such as

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[184] “Fascism as an Alternative" is the title of a chapter in The Art of Being Ruled (1989a, pp. 319-322).

[185] As Rotter opines about of ***Self Condemned’s*** scholarly protagonist, the “supermanism” of Professor Harding is “dogmatically restrained… all he desires is to see the upper plane substituted for the under plane: the only kind of superman he would like to see installed is the superior man already there, the ***creative minority***.” (Lewis, 1965a, p. 85)

Futurism. Like Eliot, Lewis saw art as aligned with order, while subjective vitalism and revolution were aligned with anarchy (Ayers, 2008). Yet Lewis (1927, p. 32) was prepared to view revolution sympathetically as "simply the will to change and to spiritual transformation"—an ambivalence shown by the bold colour scheme of *The Crowd.* [186] His issue was that the irrationalism and vitalist anti-intellectualism accompanying mass revolutions betrayed that will, rendering it destructive of genuine freedoms. Lewis's point is that without innovative models furnished by the creative intellect to aspire to, 'revolutionary will' cannot affect real change. The role of the intellect is hence paramount for Lewis, for whom a successful revolution was always a "revolution of ideas" (1989a, p. 19)—not emotionally incited political upheavals or romantic nationalisms. He states this explicitly in *Rude Assignment:*

> My interests, in the first place, have been those of the civilised intelligence— 'the politics of the intellect'... At a time when everyone was for a fanatical étatisme, I was not. (Lewis, 1984, p. 154)

In opposition to fervent mass statism and, in particular, to the "romance of action" that fuelled fascism and war (1927, p.36), Lewis found himself in 1920s Britain—like Thoams Mann (2003, p. 20) in Weimar Germany—as "nothing but a grey sparrow of the intellect among a flock of emotional Harz songsters".

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[186] Lewis's portrayal of the standardised revolutionaries of *The Crowd*, whose depiction as busy-bodying automatons who "strut and pant in insect packs" (Lewis, 1979, p. 79) embodies a critique of unreflective, vitalistic revolt, yet the painting's bold colours suggest that Lewis, in principle, approves their swift anarchist effort (Edwards, 2000).

Lewis's critique of his era's "romance of action" foreshadows Badiou's *The Century* (2007, p. 58), which describes the period from 1914 to the fall of the USSR as the "century of the act".[187] Despite the consensus characterisation of the twentieth century as an age of idealistic but destructive philosophies, Badiou (2007, p. 32) proposes that it was not, in fact, an era of 'ideologies' in this sense of the imaginary and the utopian. Instead, its defining subjective trait was its "passion for the real"—a commitment to the immediately practicable, to the here and now, stemming from a conviction of being summoned to the "real of a beginning". Whereas the nineteenth century "announced, dreamed, and promised", the twentieth *acted;* instead of submitting to the dialectic of Hegelian history, it *confronted* history, seeking to reshape humanity in the present. Badiou concludes the twentieth century was one of realisation and, above all, of 'victory'—with 'revolution' being one of the names of victory.

4.3.6 Mass Culture and Romantic Nationalism

Lewis's unique insight was not that his era's political and philosophical tendencies aimed at revolution (as Badiou suggests) but that they were directed *against* the intellect to which everything is owed (Edwards, 1975, pp. 80-81). Lewis (1927, p. 38) insisted the "intellect works alone", and it was precisely this authority of intellect—the ability to reflect and create—that was endangered by the 'mystical mass doctrines' of revolution and action, which privileged subjective intuition and voluntarism over reason and deliberation. This is evident in Futurist paintings like Russolo's *The Revolt* (1911), which, unlike the critical distance displayed in *The Crowd*, employed intuition to capture both the "emotive force of political violence" and to

[187] Badiou focuses on the "short century" of seventy-five years, opening with the wars of 1914-18 and closing with the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War.

"forcibly oblige the spectator" to be at the "centre of the painting" and "relive" the intensity of the action (Antliff, 1993, p. 164).

Žižek (2002, pp. 5-6), like Badiou, posits that "the key feature of the twentieth century" was this desire for a "direct experience of the Real" over prosaic social 'reality.' This impulse courses throughout modernism, from the Imagist demand for the "direct presentation of the thing itself" (Brent, 2008, p. 469) to D.H. Lawrence's and Woolf's yearning to explore the reality neglected and unrepresented by nineteenth-century realist fiction. For Žižek (2005, pp. 5-6) and Lewis (1976, p. 29), the 'Real' in its "extreme violence" or "brutality" was the price to be extracted for "peeling off" these "deceptive layers of reality"— "breaking out of the horrible shell of wisdom," as Marinetti put it (1992, p. 146).

Lewis believed these modernist philosophies of subjective vitalism were not only theoretically flawed but also destructive in their political applications.[188] For example, German fascists exploited Jünger's mythification of the collective and heroic *Fronterlebnis* (front experience) to instigate intuitive political action (Tucker, 1999, p. 67), while Bergson's subjectivist thought politically inspired Sorel's "vitalist or actionist" (Lewis, 1927, p. 352) theories for "revolutionary heroism" (Shils, 1957, p. 138). Swayed by such doctrines, the 'low-brow' mass man became "virtually a child," an automaton plunged from one "discontinuous, self-sufficing unit of experience" to another (Lewis, 1927, p. 36). Building on Benda's *Le Bergsonisme* (1912), Lewis contends that flux philosophies like Bergson's, by denying the intellect an understanding of "mobilité," invariably romanticise intuition and prioritise action

[188] For Affron and Antliff (1997, p. 5), modernist vitalism was not merely a "vehicle of social revolt and regeneration"; it was, furthermore, the "authentic source of creative energy in a fascist order, with the ability to transform the individual".

over consciousness (Wagner, 1957, p. 186).[189] The 'average man' becomes "no longer a unit" but an ephemeral "containing frame" whose experience is sliced into a series of "one-day lives", living only in the moment, immersed in "undiluted sensationalism"—a 'degraded', 'segmented' and puppet-mechanistic creature who easily becomes the "ideal slave" and "instrument" of any "far-seeing" person— be that a fascist dictator or democratic manipulator (Lewis, 1927, pp. 28-36).

If Lewis's early support for Hitler appears inconsistent with this broader argument, it can be partly attributed to his supposition that Hitlerism would prove a doctrine of *intelligent* "action" (Wagner, 1957, p. 86) and that "the Hitlerist dream was full of an imminent classical serenity" (Lewis, 1931, p. 184).[190] Hitler represented for Lewis a "popularised classicism" descended from the "intellectual and abstract sphere" onto the "socio-political" plane (Normand, 1989, p. 280); his 'classicism' would tame the masses by centralising power in a single personality, thus restoring the "powerful and stable authority" needed to foster the "sort of peace" Lewis (1989a, p. 321) felt the creative artist traditionally required to work. Essentially, Lewis hoped fascism would "recreate" the "continuous thread" between social and artistic form, between a stable civilisation and art, which had been "torn apart" by mass modernity (Normand, 1989. p. 280; Wragg, 2005a).

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[189] *Time and Western Man* serves as the English counterpoint to Bergson's essay "Time and Free Will," in which Bergson contends that the intellect distorts reality by spatialising it (Wagner, 1957).

[190] Other critics, such as the Canadian essayist Bruce Powe (1987), speculated that Lewis's total dedication to reading intellectually, without feeling or intuition, was partially responsible for his initial misreading of Hitler as a potential ally against a decaying society.

Only after the full extent of Nazism's barbarity became clear did Lewis reject Hitlerism as another doctrine of "action", renouncing Hitler's worship of 'force and action' in both *The Hitler Cult* and through his characterisation of Vincent Penhale in *The Vulgar Streak* (1941), who embodies Fascism as Stendhal's Julien Sorel embodied Napoleonism (Materer, 1976, p. 135).[191] Lewis concluded that fascism— entangled as it was in doctrinal streams of progress, vitalism, and action—was just the latest mass "political model" arising from the "emotional" biology and psychology of Darwinism and Nietzscheanism (Bracewell, 1900, p. 66-67). Fundamentally, Lewis (1927, p. 215) believed Darwin's theory of "the struggle for existence"—the "law of animal survival by ruthless struggle"—underpinned the twentieth century's "propaganda of violence (and) action".[192] He argued that Bergson's "creative evolution" and Nietzsche's "will to power" were both Darwinian, just as Bergson's "élan vital" was equivalent to Schopenhauer's "will" or Spenglerian fatalism, which, for Lewis, culminated in the irrational catastrophe of World War One.

Lewis had long criticised his modernist contemporaries for succumbing to these twentieth-century doctrines. He was particularly hostile to Futurism, which subordinated art to a "mythic philosophy" centred on the "creative power of intuited action"— a "relativistic promise of a new future" (Tucker, 1999, p. 67) that complemented Mussolini's regenerative vision of Italy. Indeed, the second section of *Anglosaxony* ("How Fascism Began") builds on

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191 In a letter to H G Wells, Lewis (1963. p.332) says he intended Vincent Penhale (protagonist of *The Vulgar Streak*) to be a twentieth-century Julien Sorel. Penhale is a man stricken with the same mal du siècle as Hitler, namely the worship of force and action; Lewis describes him as "a child of his time…", and "infected with a disease that as a by-product gives us fascism."

192 "If you wanted to put your hand on the instigator of fascism ... Charles Darwin is your man" (Lewis, 1941, p. 48)

Lewis's (1927, p. 213) earlier critique of Futurism's 'suicidal faith' in action and its corollaries, suggesting that Fascism was essentially "futurism in practice". Lewis traces his own Sternhellian *fil rouge* of fascism from "Signor Marinetti" (the "precursor of fascismo"), through Sorel (a "disciple of Bergson" and apostle of "dangerous living, pure action"), to Machiavelli, and finally to Nietzsche, to whom Mussolini frequently acknowledged his debt (Egles, 1997, p. 100).[193] Lewis identified Nietzsche as the intellectual root of fascism's 'family tree', with Darwin's theories as merely the fertilising soil.[194]

From this, Weller (2007, p. 628) concludes that Lewis had "no truck" with the Nietzsche who privileged the Dionysian over the Apollonian. Yet, to avoid oversimplifying the nuances in both Lewis and Nietzsche, it is worth noting that "Apollonian culture" served Nietzsche as a "form of *necessary* illusion" protecting against the "barbarism" of unfiltered "Dionysian energy," with this "illusion" becoming "the special province of art" (Wragg, quoted in Lewis, 2017, p. 154). Similarly, for Lewis, art and its cultural images separate us from too close contact with the 'brutal' and 'incoherent' Real—a function that modernism's violent drive to unity threatened. Art, in Lewis's theory—like Žižek's 'fantasy' (1997)—sustains our sense of 'reality' by distancing us from the 'Real' (Brent, 2008, p. 471). Whereas Futurist art extolled Sorelian themes of revolutionary action and the will to violence (Tucker, 1999), Lewis (2010, p. 264) saw existence not as a struggle for power but as a conflict between "life" and Art, with

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193 Of Sorel, Lewis (1984, p. 33) was particularly critical, noting that the Frenchman may have owed much to Nietzsche, but "of all the apostles of dangerous living, pure action, "heroism", blood and iron, Georges Sorel was the worst - the most shrewd and irresponsible".

194 Nietzsche, Lewis (1941, p. 48) said, was the "principal philosopher of Darwinism"– Darwin was just the "generalising research-student".

‘life’ defined as “everything that is not yet purified so that it is art”. Art is (or should be) a “constant stronghold” of the “purest human consciousness” (Lewis, 1927, p. 39)—not an “activist aesthetic” of political violence (Tucker, 1999, p. 70). It has “nothing to ‘revolt’ against, except conditions such as in the mass society, where art “does not exist,” or where “spurious and vulgar art triumphs” (Lewis, 1927, p. 40).

4.4 Reactionary Modernism’s Response to Massification

Whereas movements like Futurism responded to the “era of vulgarisation” (Lewis, 1926, p. 191) by seeking violent release from the demands of Enlightenment ‘reason,' the High Modernists responded by allegedly retreating into an 'ivory tower' (Tucker, 1999, p. 87), rejecting the emotional romanticism of nineteenth-century subjectivity in favour of radical and 'objective' new styles like Vorticism and Pound’s Imagist poetry (Pace, 2022). High modernism, in all its manifestations, was consciously adversarial and elitist, positioning the artist and the art object against a democratic mass culture characterised by “callous industrialism”, “philistine empiricism” and “consumerised tastes” (Wood, 2015, p. 86). Pound’s ‘In a Station of the Metro’ (1913) exemplifies this approach (Holland, 2004). By cloaking the crowd "within the resonant obscurity of the static Image", ‘Metro’ becomes not a crowd poem but an instance of a "kind of poetry that excluded the 'mob.'" (Longenbach, 1988, p. 51). In Longenbach’s view, Pound wrote unpopular poems to nurture an aristocratic "state of mind," reasoning that the common man—having little other choice—would eventually follow.

This typifies an irony of High Modernism: it was ‘elitist’ in despising mass culture but ‘populist’ in its aspiration to influence a future popular audience. Hence, in Lewis’s work, elitist

and 'populist' sentiments frequently intertwine—as the just-cited dialogue between 'Art' and 'Life' shows (Wragg, 2005, p. 17). Parallels can be drawn with the NRR's dual nature as an elitist yet metapolitically ambitious movement. As the Introduction established, their cultural discourses are also written for and by intellectual elites, following the Gramscian notion that popular cultural change begins by first reshaping the worldview of society's elites. Believing 'history is not made by the masses…. (but) by elites moulding the masses" (Johnson, 2013, p. 26), the New Right renounces "majority-based schemes" of the Old Right, focussing on creating alternative cultural institutions targeted at "the minority of our people" still able "to think for themselves" (Pierce, 2000).[195] Moreover, the New Right's ambition to create a "Dissident High Culture"—and, ultimately, its own "meaningful, edifying, and vital art" (Populi, 2023)—consciously draws upon the legacy of the reactionary High Modernists. Figures like Lewis are upheld as instances of past 'right-wing' artists who nurtured a "dissident culture class" independent of consumerist mass culture *and* a hostile elite culture, offering an "aristocratic answer" to "the mass age" (Jeelvy, 2022).

Indeed, Lewis's use of defamiliarisation, juxtaposition, abstraction, and montage in his artworks—methods emphasising disruption, ambiguity, and shock—sought not only to destabilise the viewer but also to distance his work from the familiar, particularistic nature of its mass cultural context in favour of a more "transcendent realm of autonomy" (Sorochan, 2017, p. 221). Sensing that his "literary contemporaries" were not "keeping pace" with this "visual revolution," Lewis extended this approach to his prose, seeking to invent a language equivalent to his painterly abstractions. This resulted in the "literary experiment" of *The*

[195] Johnson's site Counter-Currents, for example, positions itself as the 'university' of the Dissident Right.

Childermass (Schenker, 1992, p. 168), the Vorticist prose of 1918's *Tarr*, and most formidably *Enemy of the Stars*,[196] whose textual juxtapositions and abstractions aimed to "show" his contemporaries "the way" (Lewis, 1984, p. 139).With mass industrialisation and bourgeois market values making art vulnerable to commercial pressures, Lewis's confrontational strategies were a leading part of the modernists' dissident effort to create literature autonomous from a utilitarian and massified world.

High Modernism's "literary revolution" thus betrayed "deep social and philosophical foundations" (Bush, 2004, p. 232), with its detachment and rebellion against the degradation of language entailing a more fundamental critique of rationalised mass culture.[197] Yet while many modernists abandoned the faltering aspirations of a rational Enlightenment in favour of negation, revolution or a retreat to myth, Lewis was more concerned with modern art's ethical dimension when detached from the lifeworld in an era reducing everything to exchange-value and means-end thinking.[198] Painfully aware of this process, Lewis's employment of detachment strove to counteract rationalisation and its corollaries (e.g., the ideology of "What the Public Wants' satirised in *The Childermass*, or the 'societification of art' criticised in *The Apes of God*) by objectifying them as the founding condition of modernity (Wragg, 2005a, pp. 19-20).

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196 As Hatherley (2010, p. 12) notes, to disassemble the play's "chaotic mess" of "pronouncements, atrocities, apocalyptic imagery, and disjointed description" into a narrative of events is "all but impossible."

197 As Bush (2004, 2004, p. 233) contends, the Modernist revolt against "mass literacy and journalism" symbolised a broader challenge to "Enlightenment reason and progress," exploring and exploiting the "irrational motives" behind both newspaper prose and "all logical discourse".

198 The processes of "bad" rationalisation identified by Weber (Wragg, 2005a).

This “radically detached” (Jackson, 2012, p.112) aspect of Lewis’s work nevertheless explains why many critics link him with the broader "anti-humanistic" (Lyotard, 1993) elements of modernist art, an imperious aesthetic stance that, for Badiou (2007, p. 161), typifies twentieth-century art: a sombre, inhuman, or "over-human" art that rejects particularity and individual pleasure, as well as familiar forms, simply because it considers that ordinary man “does not amount to much" and that there is "no need to make such a fuss about him.” This perspective is critical for understanding the modernist influence on the NRR, illustrating why the modernist revolt against mass culture was both artistically revolutionary and culturally conservative. The modernists' geometric, rigid, and ‘inhuman’ art is interpreted not only as a corrective to the destabilising effects of mass culture but, more fundamentally, a response to the Enlightenment’s humanist pretensions. Mainstream critics like Honeywell (2011) also regard Modernism’s geometric forms as an aesthetic embodiment of T.E. Hulme's classicism, which countered twentieth-century humanism by presenting man as limited and static and capable of achieving civilisation only through tradition and organisation. Indeed, Hulme praised abstraction in art as creating harmony and escaping chaos by depicting “something essential” (Honeywell, 2011, p. 39). Grounded in the Platonic ideal of pure forms of beauty—existing not in the forms of the ‘natural’ world but in objective, rational systems like geometry—abstract modernist art like Vorticism is seen as embodying virtues such as order and purity as opposed to the 'romantic' image of man as individual and dynamic, which Hulme argued was rooted in a ruinous notion of progress that threatened the divine order. Other influential works, like Ellman’s *The Poetics of Impersonality* (1987, p. 5), suggest that Lewis and modernism’s embrace of impersonality constituted a political “crusade against Romantic individualism in society.”

Levenson (1984, p. 135) is one of the few critics to distinguish Vorticism from this general categorisation, noting a critical paradox: insofar as Vorticism celebrates "pure form," it appears to "overturn anthropocentric values…. and mark a break with a romantic aesthetic," but insofar as the "freedom of the artist" and the "absolute priority" of the intellectual imagination became the metaphysical foundation of Lewis's art philosophy, then it manifests as an "extreme romantic individualism". Overall, however, the critical consensus is correct in understanding abstract modernist art as an aesthetically radical yet ideologically conservative 'reaction' to Enlightenment-humanist theories of man—theories that eroded traditional foundations of societal unity built on divine right and cosmic order (Kester, 2004, pp. 27-8).

NRR thinkers perceive themselves as "revolutionaries" in a similar sense, seeking a "full re-vo-lu-tion" away from a "superficial, mercantile" mass culture and towards the "natural, the hierarchical, and the divine" (Populi, 2023). Like reactionary modernism, they draw on earlier counter-enlightenment theorists such as Burke, whose principle of order served as a pre-emptive critique of utilitarianism, positivism, and commercialism while affirming a reverential view of society traceable to Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca (Kirk, 2017). Burke, akin to the modernists, utilised radical new styles to advance his counter-cultural ideas, with the aesthetics of his poetic prose in *The Reflections* (1790) reflecting qualities later associated with *BLAST* and Imagism (Castellano, 2007).[199] The NRR's response to mass culture is similarly "archaic and avant-garde," sifting through pre-modern mythologies for the "precious seeds of the post-modern future" (Eagleton, 2002) and leveraging radical new art forms such as meme

[199] As Novalis (1997, p. 43) said: "Burke has written a revolutionary book against the Revolution". Thomas Jefferson also noted in 1791 that "The Revolution in France does not astonish me so much as the Revolution in Mr. Burke" (quoted in Fidler & Welsh, 1999, p. 33)

warfare and digital media in their modernist-inspired quest to restore a "racially and culturally homogeneous… hierarchically differentiated, *organically* unified society" (Johnson, 2013, p.161)[200] within the "context of modernity."[201] As we shall see, this alternative modernist vision was one that Lewis grew increasingly critical of in his time.

4.5 Lewis vs. the reactionary 'Organic' society

The modernist movement is defined as much by its anxieties over mass individualism as by the alternative modernities it proposed in response. Regarding the former, we have seen how Lewis's anxieties about the "abstract man of democracy" typified broader concerns among radical modernists that liberalising trends of universal suffrage and centralised welfarism were diminishing individuals to a condition of anonymous servitude, rendering their votes—and their very identities—as "mere statistical abstractions" (Mead, 2015, p. 6). The

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[200] Johnson (2013, p.161) expounds upon his addition of term organic to mean "a body politic, a racially and culturally homogeneous people, a people that is one in blood and spirit, a people that is politically organised and sovereign and thus in control of its own destiny."

[201] Through various mediums such as videos, blogs, articles, books, and podcasts, the NRR has blended traditional and contemporary art forms to create a vibrant intellectual metapolitical scene that is increasingly influential in the promotion of dissident nationalist doctrine and challenging mainstream thinking (Populi, 2023). Additionally, by establishing prominent alternative publishing houses like Arktos and Counter-Currents, the NRR aims to develop its own dissident "music, novels, films, and more," believing that, similar to the work of reactionary modernists, leveraging the "immeasurable" power of mythos through autonomous art production is crucial for effectively engaging in a culture war and achieving "a genuine counter-culture" (Populi, 2023).

'fear of abstraction' in modernist texts[202] (and in paintings like *The Crowd*) manifests this animus toward the individuals' subjection within the mass, drawing on deep-rooted anxieties —such as those expressed by Burke and Tocqueville—regarding the 'general will' (Mead, 2015; Fernihough, 2000).

The 'reactionary' nature of modernism's response to these abstracting forces is best elucidated by North's (1991) study of modernism's 'political aesthetic,' which underscores the obsession in post-Kantian political theory with preserving individual value while "concentrating the power of the community" (Mead, 2015, p.7). Philosophically, this relates to Hegel's argument (see Chapter One) that the subject and object, along with the individual and the community, must be unified via the dialectical processes of world history. This concept aligns with the German Romantic notion that "the aesthetic object… 'a whole in itself,' (has) the power to harmonise faculties that are in conflict outside it," aiming for a "reconciliation of multiplicity in unity" (North, quoted in Mead, 2015, p. 7). Modernism inherited this Romantic utopianism, which, as Eagleton (1990, p. 25) describes, is "a dream of reconciliation—of individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity, of an *abstract totality* suffused with all the flesh-and-blood reality of the individual being". For Williams (1959, p. 140), the modernist opposition to atomisation and their vision of "identity-in-diversity" led them not only to critique "laissez-faire" capitalist society but to articulate alternative visions of a "superior society," an "organic conception" to be realised within modernity. This vision, following Burke, emphasised interrelation, and interdependence rather than a separation into spheres of interest— that is, the Kantian division of modernity

[202] Exemplified by Pound's (1950, p. 49) formulation of the principles of Imagism as "objectivity, and again objectivity," or Yeats's (1949, p. 167) disdain for "modern abstractions."

into the autonomous spheres of art, morality, and science, which Habermas regarded as the defining characteristic of the Enlightenment (Ferrall, 2001; Wragg, 2005). [203]

While Lewis shared Pound and Yeats's concerns about mass society, his scepticism about the feasibility and desirability of an organic society, along with his opposition to reunifying subject and object—the tension between which, in his view, gave rise to Art—differentiates his work from that of his modernist contemporaries. This 'insider-critique' can be extended to today's NRR, as the concept of the 'organic,' derived from German Romanticism, has become central to their reformulated modernist visions of the 'nation.'

Nationalism, as Chapter One showed, emerged in nineteenth-century Germany in response to the French Revolution and Enlightenment rationalism. The interrelated concept of the organic society, particularly in the Counter-Enlightenment philosophies of Herder and Fichte, envisioned the nation as an expression of an organic community, contrasting with the liberal-Enlightenment notion of the 'nation' as a collection of citizens with equal rights bound by an abstract—or, in Dugin's (2012) view, "artificial"—social contract. When these organic nationalist theories of German Idealism and Romanticism infiltrated British culture, they

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[203] In Modernism and Mass Politics (1995), Tratner contends that, despite modernism's conservative and elitist tendencies, many of its prominent figures did not retreat into solipsism or aesthetic detachment as is commonly believed. He argues that even conservative modernists like Eliot engaged with "distinctively collectivist phenomena" and frequently employed artistic forms designed to "speak the language of the mass unconscious" to foster cultural renewal (Stockton, 1996). Tratner (1995, p. 3) claims that "modernism was an effort to transcend the constraints of nineteenth-century individualist conventions and address distinctly 'collectivist' phenomena," emphasizing that this pursuit was not purely aesthetic but also politically motivated (Berman, 1998).

merged with existing thought-streams regarding the 'organic society,' traceable back to Burke's "conservative organicism" and later writings by Carlyle and Ruskin, all of whom condemned "utilitarian ethics" and *laissez-faire* capitalism while drawing unifying connections between literature, art and society (Mead, 2015, p.7). Influenced not only by Morris, Ruskin, Burke, et al. but also by the "continental ideas" outlined above, Lewis's modernist contemporaries developed an aesthetic that was "radical in style" but (like Burke's work) paradoxically "conservative in ethical principle", aiming to lay the groundwork for an organic society realisable *within* modernity (Mead, 2015, p. 7).

From the late eighteenth century to the modernist era, this Burkean organic model of society became "the basis of an attack on the conditions of men in 'industrial production' . . . and on the claims of middle-class political democracy" (Williams, 1960, p. 151). Even Lewis's lesser-known peers, like David Jones, lamented how the organic society of the past had been destroyed by "the Reformation… the rise of liberalism… secularisation, the Industrial Revolution, and capitalism" (Villas, cited in Powers, 2019, p. 2). The irony, as Williams (1960, p. 151) observes, is that Burke was the "last serious thinker" who could locate the 'organic' in an "existing society". As industrial society took hold, critics such as Carlyle and Ruskin could only find the 'organic' in the "backward look," and this formed the basis of their 'medievalism'.[204]

'Organic' became an even slippier concept in modernism, which aspired to blend "forward momentum" with a sense of tradition (Mead, 2015, p. 7). As Rose (1986) suggests, artists in

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[204] A critique not lost on Lewis (1976, p.182), who referred to Carlyle as "too sententiously homespun" and deemed "poor Ruskin" to have been "overtaken mid-career by an irresistible insanity."

late Edwardian London had to seek their new organic integrity within the dark heart of an urban mass that swarmed under “green electric globes” (Dismorr, quoted in Lewis, 1915, p. 67). For instance, Pound’s perspective on the “organic” human material that inspired his poems is more complex than mere nostalgia for a lost England (Holland, 2004, p. 59)—it redefines the ‘organic’ in a modern context. ‘The Audience’ describes the urban mass as the “rich effluvium… the waste and the manure and the soil” from which grows the “tree of the arts,” while ‘In a Station of the Metro’ portrays the apparitional faces of the crowd as “petals” on a “wet, black bough” (Pound, 1913, p. 12).[205]

These organic metaphors are noticeably absent in Lewis's writing. Jameson, who interpreted his modernist aesthetic as the "realism appropriate to modernity" (O'Neill, 2004, p. 158), notes that even the supernatural world of *The Childermass* is crafted as a satirical collage of pre-existing "cultural and mass cultural clichés” and the "junk materials of industrial capitalism" (Jameson, 1979, p. 73). More radical than other reactionary modernists, Lewis (1927, p. 101) dismantles the organic metaphor itself by attributing modernity’s ills to this ‘false-revolutionary’ obsession with time and history—a “fanaticism” he identifies in *both* anti-Enlightenment Romanticism and progressivism (Parker, 1973, p. 85). Rather than longing for a vanished community of the past or imagining ‘archeofuturistic’ organic societies, Lewis (1934, p. 123) focuses intently on the present, on the “visual medium… in which men exist”.

[205] Yeats, who saw Pound as "full of the middle ages" (Yeats, quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 555), might have argued that such metaphors modernise the concept of 'organic' wholeness implicit in the hierarchy of traditional society: peasants at the root and nobility as the flower (Holland, 2004, p. 59)

His approach is spatial rather than temporal, rejecting the "reactionary historicism" of Spengler, which manifests today in the philosophy of the NRR (Krause, 2018).

This reactionary view of time is paradoxically progressivist; like Hegel, it believes there is a proper path to the unfolding of History but that something (liberalism) derailed this unfolding. The reactionary's quest is to "go back" to identify and correct this error; it is not about "restoring the past"; rather, the "way back" is seen as the "way forward" (Krause, 2018). Like the NRR, the reactionary modernists did not seek to recreate past organic societies but to reinterpret history in ways relevant to the "altered present" (Gąsiorek, 2015, p.451). Eliot (1959, p. 55) speaks of history being "renewed" and "transfigured" in "another pattern" and—like Yeats and Ford Madox Ford[206]—was drawn to a neo-feudal organicism that contrasted with Lewis's metropolitan modernism (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 437).

Lewis's resistance to notions of organic communal hierarchy distinguished him from his fellow artists but more broadly from the prevailing early-mid-twentieth-century view on "culture" championed by critics such as Leavis and the Scrutiny group. Emphasising tradition and collective meaning, Leavisite criticism was a backlash against the perceived dissolvent effects of modernity on these values, including the shift from 'community' to the 'mass-public' and the transformation of the intellectual class into a disconnected urban elite. It upheld a high/low culture dichotomy driven by the pursuit of an idealised "organic culture", against which "mass culture" could be moralistically measured (Corcoran, 2012, p. 603). Crucially, it advocated for the importance of canonical English texts as sources of knowledge about life and repositories of core national values, promoting 'unity' in literature as an analogue of a

[206] See Eliot's 'After Strange Gods' (1934), Yeats's 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited' (1937) or Ford Madox Ford's 'Great Trade Route' (1937).

cohesive community. Literature was expected to be “integrated and integrative” in both narrative content and form, with metaphors radically unifying experience and merging object and subject in a cohesive expression that subtly ‘situated’ experience within a desired vision of "life” (Edwards, 2015, p. 221). Irony was likewise valued for its reliance on shared communal values— satire was, unsurprisingly, seen as an inferior mode.

Lewis’s work could satisfy scant value criteria within this critical framework. Despite his ambivalence towards modernity, Lewis (1936, p. 200) was very much of the 'great metropolitan world' and, like Harding, showed “little interest” in the rural 'organic' society modernity had supplanted or in the values it had allegedly woven into the language and “life-world” of Englishmen (Edwards, 2015, p. 221). While Ford, Eliot, and others were preoccupied with preserving continuities between the pre-industrial past and the technologised present, Lewis was more purely an “unabashed modern” (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 466). His cosmopolitan inter-nationalism (*Anglosaxony*), anti-historicism (*Time and Western Man*) and mechano-morphic vision of humanity (*The Crowd*) starkly contrasted with, for example, the feudalistic Irish Nationalism, mysticism and eccentric historicism of the “romantic… magic-loving” Yeats (Lewis, 1927, p. 93).

Criticising the regressive mythicisation of the past as harshly as the Futurists' progressive mythicisation of the future, Lewis satirised the “armchair exoticism” (1940, p. 196) and nostalgia for pre-Enlightenment cultures characteristic of other reactionary modernists. Even the NRR’s Bolton (2012) acknowledges that Lewis had reservations about Fascism because it stood for the past rather than the realisation of the present.[207] For Lewis (1976, p. 101), the

[207] In *Time and Western Man*, Lewis explicitly links such ‘time-fanaticism’ with the romantic nationalism and the regionalism inherent in the reactionary-modernist backlash to mass society,

“only place” where ‘the past’ is a reality is “in time, not certainly in space”, and he observed this mental world of time was “more and more" being used as a compensating principle—hence Pound’s proclivity to deem a “scuffle in fourteenth-century Siena” as fundamentally more interesting than a “similar scuffle in Wigan or Detroit today” (Lewis, 1964, p. 61). Only by fully engaging with his own time—creating "new beauty" and supplying a "new material" (1989a, pp.99-110)—could the artist avoid escaping, like the historical romancer,’ into an emotional flow that served only to maintain a sentimental approach to events (Lamberti, 2012, p. 224).

Crucially, Lewis was not only critical of nostalgic mythification but doubtful, too, of the prospects of reviving any “unalienated society” in the future (Edwards, 2015, p.221). This distinction from his contemporaries further distinguishes Lewis’s thought from the ‘archeofuturistic’ modernist vision of the NRR, which seeks a “restoration of order” out of the "fragmenting, alienating,” and “anti-communitarian” impulses of modern life (Woods, quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 77). While Leavis et al. perceived the creation of the ‘Individual’ as signifying the decomposition of the community, Lewis looked further, foreseeing our hypermodern condition where the machine causes the *decomposition of the Individual* (Lipovetsky, 2005). *The Caliph’s Design* states: “already man’s body in no way indicates the scope of his personal existence” (1919, p. 40), and in "The New Egos" (1915), Lewis describes how, for every modern man, the "frontiers" separating ego from life interpenetrate, blurring individual demarcations. To see a new 'organic community’ as a remedy for such mass alienation is to neglect how deep the 'fragmentation' of modernity cuts.

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negatively contrasting such thought with the “non-nationalist, universal mind… of classical Chinese intelligence (1927, p. 102).

This is ultimately why Lewis's fiction deals not with organic metaphors but haphazard analogies. His prose, drawn from mass cultural clichés, is a means of demonstrating that individual thought and individual experience are illusions—concocted, as Jameson (1979, p. 73) said, out of "the junk materials of industrial capitalism," with its "degraded commodity art" and "serial alienation of language". Note how Satters leans against a door jamb with the "smile of Leonardo's St John, appropriated to the features of a Germanic ploughboy" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 121). As this brief example illustrates, however, the material Lewis uses for his stock of cultural cliche was not simply "second-hand and fragmented" in the 'pulp modernist' sense Jameson implies, but replete with "specialised discourses... beyond the cultural horizon of most readers" (Edwards, 2000, p. 325). *The Childermass* could have served as an incisive anatomy of mass industrial life—exposing the effects of Bergsonian durée, behaviourism, cinema, fascism, democracy, fashion, and a meshwork of other "ills"—yet, in the process of exposing this ideological matrix of post-war culture, the complexity of the connections Lewis draws simultaneously exhausts the reader's capacity to absorb the critique effectively. If we assume this is deliberate (as one must with Lewis), then it seems he intended to convey the perception of a culture "atomised beyond the capacity of any one person to reintegrate it" (Edwards, 2000, p. 325). As such, Lewis's fictions directly refute the possibility of restoring a cohesive 'organic' society in the Machine Age and Leavis's presumed "integrated and integrative" role that literature might play in this endeavour.

4.6 Lewis vs. Reactionary 'Romantic' Nationalism

It is no surprise that Lewis scholars within the Leavisite paradigm, such as Materer (1976), overlook *The Childermass*, while Leavis himself critiqued Lewis's writing as "brutal" and

betraying a "truculent inhumanity" and "mechanistic externality" (quoted in Parker, 1973, pp. 1-2). Yet Lewis's externalist approach did not celebrate the mechanistic world. On the contrary, works like *Cantleman's Spring-Mate* (1917)[208] reveal that Lewis adheres to the tenets of seventeenth-century automatism, namely the Cartesian notion that the more animalistic an organism is, the more mechanical it becomes (Wagner, 1957, p. 38).

This is another crucial reason Lewis rejected reactionary nationalism and the organic community as panaceas for industrial mass society. In Lewis's work, "mechanical" not only denotes mechanisation as connected with industrialisation or rationalisation—as it does for other modernists—*but also* conveys a "thing"-quality, a primitive state of being coerced by one's environment into a collective animality marked by a lack of *reason* and intelligence (Wagner, 1957, p. 38-9) This is exemplified in *The Apes of God* by Zagreus declaring jazz as the "folk-music of the metropolitan mass… the slum-peasant, machine-minder" (1932, pp. 84-85), or *Snooty Baronet's* satire of D.H. Lawrence's 'modernist primitivism', whom Lewis lampooned for romanticising the "mechanical" Mexicans (Wagner, 1957, p. 39). Leavis (1962, p. 245) overlooks this nuance, negatively contrasting Lewis's "hard-boiled, cynical, and external" approach and Lawrence's 'vital' animistic worldview, visionary consciousness, and hatred of the industrial Moloch (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 437). Lawrence's 'blood-consciousness,' hostility to the intellect,[209] and instinctual revolt against capitalist materialism and hubristic

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[208] This short story depicts the casual and brutal seduction of a country girl named Stella by an infantry officer on leave–it continues the theme from an earlier short story, "A Young Soldier" (Lewis, 1916, p. 46) which equates the "profound and sinister business" of the soldier with the "functional existence" of women (Ashford, 2010, p. 743).

[209] "Let all schools be closed at once," Lawrence once said (Lawrence, quoted in Eagleton, 2013, p. 214).

Enlightenment rationalism (cf. *Women in Love's* Gerald Critch) are, indeed, typically seen as protests against soulless mechanisation. However, Lewis (1989a, p. 130) refers to the Laurentian-style "poetry" of the "passive, more or less ecstatic, rhythmic, mechanical life" and "the intoxicated dance of puppets" as if instinctual protest and industrialised 'progress' are interchangeable. To clarify, for Lewis, Romantic anti-rationalism and rationalisation are *both* de-individualising forces that endanger human individuality, threatening to obliterate the "human dimension" by sensuality at one end of the scale and by "sheer abstraction at the other" (McLuhan, 1955).

Lewis's nuanced critique of the 'primitive', organic and the machine thus further distances him from the lineage of Romantic nationalism traced in Chapter One, which began with Burke and Herder but mutated in the mass era into a destructive, technologised force. This scepticism was inherent in Lewis's work from the start, and while some critics interpret *BLAST* as a form of wartime nationalist propaganda, Lewis (1915, p. 34) insisted there was never anything "chauvinistic or picturesquely patriotic" about the magazine's claims regarding industrial England.[210] Nonetheless, it was only after the war that Lewis (1927, p. 96) most vocally criticised the paradoxical link between reactionary nationalism—growing increasingly "intolerant" even in cosmopolitan states—and the "inevitable" homogenisation of national characteristics due to "technological progress." He observed that nationalism was absurdly

[210] Lewis's most vigorous anti-nationalist critiques often coincided with times of war. At the onset of World War One, Lewis described nations as "Press-poisoned Imperialistic masses of men" (1915, p. 72), and at the start of the Second World War, he described them as scarcely more than "an ideal excuse for breaking somebody else's head" (1941, p. 32). More pithily, he asserts in *Rude Assignment* that "all nations are brutes" (1984, p. 237).

becoming more "rampant" as mechanisation made people more alike and as "local colours" that had "endured for centuries" faded to a "uniform grey tint" (pp. 95–6). Lewis satirically concluded that machines were making a "nonsense" of nationalism, but he also (like Sternhell) seriously feared the backlash of "artificially fostered nationalism," which, with the "impetus given it by machines," might all the sooner drive the masses from "civilisation" to "savagery" (1932b, p. 99).[211]

For Lewis (1927, p. 78), the tragedy of modernity is that as people become increasingly indistinguishable, they *ideologically* grow more "separatist and conscious of 'nationality'" and turn in their "abstract rage" upon neighbours whom they resemble "more and more closely".[212] Ishay Landa (2018, p. 323)—who claimed Lewis exhibited only 'disdain and aloofness' toward the masses—once claimed the intervention of programmatic modernism into mass culture intended to weaken the massified element and enhance the national one. Landa's argument is compelling, but Lewis must be distinguished from its generalised

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[211] Akin to Lewis's thesis, Tocqueville predicted that the masses—living in an era 'emancipated' from traditional communal values, yet whose "enlightenment" remained "incomplete"—would develop an artificial, dubious relation to their homeland. Their nationalism would no longer be rooted in the soil, the customs of their ancestors, or religion, all of which they had been taught to doubt. Lacking a true connection to their "fatherland," they would retreat into a narrow and unenlightened egotism devoid of either the instinctive patriotism of monarchy or the reasoned patriotism of a republic (Tocqueville, 2016).

[212] This recalls Jünger's prediction that patriotism in a mass society will also become "subjected to the same processes of secularisation which affected the faith we envy today in the lives of martyrs" (Jünger, cited in Hafkesbrink, 1951, p. 282).

conclusion.[213] Although Lewis shared numerous critiques of post-Enlightenment mass culture with reactionary modernists—its "standardisation," "levelling down" (Samson, 1992, p. 39) and dominative, mechanised reason—he rejected the "aggressive nationalist romance" of "'organic' antithetic cultures" as a solution to these crises (Lewis, 1927, p. 286). "For better or worse," Lewis (1927, p. 99) argued, local colour (the material of the past) was a "thin mixture" that did not "inhere in what it embellished" but was instead "painted on, often with a clumsy insolence," and "fantastically" unsuited to the "external nature of the machine-age."[214]

What Lewis critiques in his contemporaries is the extent to which an "essentially valuable Romantic critique of modernity" had deployed an "essentially wayward" interpretation of romanticism as an antidote (Wood, 2015, pp. 87-88). Reactionary modernists not only pitted 'organic' nationalism against universalism but also 'imagination' against 'reason,' the 'natural' against the artifice, subjectivity against objectivity, spontaneity against calculation, and the mythical forces of cultural life against the "hubris" of technologico-positivist enlightenment (Leavis, 1972, p. 12). It may seem surprising that Lewis's contemporaries rejected Enlightenment universalism and rationality just as 'progress' reached its zenith, but this is often attributed to Bergson's influence, whose philosophy prioritised spontaneity, intuition, and emotion as more "authentic and creative" than reason (Montgomery and Chirot, 2016, p.297). Indeed, Bergson's ideas were utilised by French ultranationalists (like Sorel) to reinvigorate patriotism by appealing to a "mystical" sense of emotional solidarity (Sorel, 1999, pp. xxviii-xxi)—a transition that elucidates similar intuitive and mythic developments in fascist

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[213] As should other modernist émigrés like Conrad, James, Ford Madox Ford, and Joyce.

[214] In similar terms Lewis (1927, p. 100) critiqued *Ulysses* as a big variegated heap of such "locally-coloured material"

thought (Tucker, 1999, p. 52). While Bergson was not fascist, his ideas facilitated an intellectual shift away from Enlightenment rationalism towards "intuitive religiosity" and "non-rational spontaneity" (Montgomery and Chirot, 2016, p.297) as counters to the "prevailing positivism" of the era (Adorno, quoted in Truskolaski, 2022, p. 71). Eagleton (2013, p. 214) argues it is "difficult," faced with these "right-wing modernist" responses to modernity, to draw a line between critiques of reason that are "plain irrationalist" and those that challenge not reasoning itself but the "alienated, dominative" forms of reason characteristic of the post-Enlightenment age. What in the latter case can be an eloquent protest against "mechanised reason" may, at its most dangerous, suggest discarding rationality as a form of alienation and relying on "blood and racial instincts" instead—an aspect of modernist literature Bertrand Russell believed led directly to Auschwitz.

Lewis, despite his critiques of the "Industrial Revolution-cum-Bourgeois Enlightenment", also identified in Romantic reactionaryism an excessive preoccupation with emotions, internality and 'organic' sentiment that he considered dangerously "immature and undesirable" (1927, p. 309)— not to mention ineffectual (Rulo, 2012, p. 89). Lewis (1964, p. 78) accused the Eliot–Richards–Leavis axis of being an "art-for-art's-sake" movement,[215] arguing that such movements—"however disguised"—represented an organicist retreat from the "incessant rapid change" of the machine era with its "uprooting of life" (Leavis, 1932, p. 91), harking back to a "fanciful" historical vision of an "older order… rural, customary, moralistic" (Steiner, 1986, p. 245). Like George Steiner, Lewis (1927, pp. 101-102) linked the

[215] Benjamin argued that *l'art pour l'art* symbolised the "consummation" of fascism, in so much as twentieth-century fascists co-opted art stripped of social context in order to make it serve political ends (Tucker, 1999, p. 59).

"time-fanaticism" of the Romantics and reactionary modernists with emergent anti-rational "nationalisms and regionalisms" and condemned both as dangerous.

In contrast to this Romantic utopianism, *The Caliph's Design* (1919) argued that the future's potential is rooted in the present, which should be remade and transformed in the "here and now" (Gąsiorek, 2015). Social life, Lewis insisted, should be regenerated through the "techne" of civilisation—not by reviving an Eliotian "myth" of a "twelfth- or a seventeenth-century organic unity" (Steiner, 1986, p. 256).[216] He was singularly idealistic in believing modernist aesthetic principles—not socio-political schemes— were the best means to implement these changes (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 342). Art could reshape post-war life by making "a new form-content for our everyday vision," but only if allowed to remould the urban environment "on a more conscious pattern" (Lewis, 1919, p. 18).[217] Misinterpreting this as a 'programmatic' statement, Maher (2013, p. 254) claims that "what Lewis envisions is… nothing less than a cultural integration of modernism', which architects of the state turned to explore how modernism could be nationalised (Bullock, 2002; Eden, 2023). But Lewis did not seek to develop a "regional strain of modernism" (Maher, 2013, p. 263), nor an "adversary culture" or "other modernity" that challenged the "modernising forces" of "science, commerce, and industry" in the name of a "spiritual alternative" (Adamson, quoted in Griffin, 2007, p. 56). Rather, *The Caliph's Design* envisaged replacing the "impure Present" (1915, p.

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[216] It is interesting to note that the "organic" comes from the Greek root "organikos," which relates to an organ or instrument– the kind of "mechanism" to which the 'organic' comes to be opposed (Williams, 1958, p. 263).

[217] Lewis (1984, p. 169) envisaged a 'bright, new, enchanting capital' that would have been white like the "sets for a movie about Babylon (designed, perhaps, by Le Corbusier) … with blueprints for hanging gardens between Blackfriars Bridge & Westminster."

148) with a “vibrant, zestful culture” (Edwards, 2000, p. 491), one that might stem the tide of ‘romantic nihilism’ and ‘atavistic fatalism’ and—precisely opposite to what reactionary nationalism encouraged—forestall future mass slaughters.

In other words, the social transformation *The Caliph's Design* (1919) proposed was not a “political modernism” (Griffin, 2007, p. 198); Lewis did not seek a fusion of aesthetics and politics or a “new cultural synthesis between nationalism and modernity” (Gentile, 2003, p. 29)—as seen between Mussolini's Italy and Futurism—but rather a transformation based on a symbiotic relationship between the mass and the artist, wherein the culture “pent up” in the studio is released into the life of the community, and from thence, this “life outside” returns to “enrich and invigorate the studio” (Lewis, 1919, p.7). Where “fascist modernism” prepared conditions for new forms of “collective life” suited to the machine age (Gentile, 1994, p. 46), Lewis (1964, p. 235) devised his modernist visions exclusively from the individual “standpoint of genius”. Lewis (1919, p. 19) insisted it was not for *his* sake he sought a revolutionised aesthetic order— after all, a Rembrandt could create a “new thing of anything,” whether working with windmills in Holland or England’s industrialised vistas— the best “half-dozen artists” of any nation are never dependant on “the objective world” for their “success or stimulus.” Lewis’s modernist ambitions were always tempered by his classicist judgement that the “life of the Crowd” is, unlike the artist, limited and solely “external”: he lives only through others and outside himself,” his “beauty and justification” being in the “superficial exterior life” (p. 16). Lewis's vision for external order—for “formal beauty” and “significance” in the “arrangement and aspect of life” (p.14)—was thus not ‘modernism nationalised’. *The Caliph’s Design* did not call for a “total spiritual revolution” (Gentile, 2003, p. 29) in the nation’s culture, consciousness, and politics. Instead, Lewis (1984, p. 204) aimed to create a

“gay intellectual shell” to counteract the instrumentalisation of “plain” men into “mechanical men”, thereby securing the individual artist with greater freedom and peace within which to work.

Although Lewis would revise his expectations of what art could feasibly be expected to accomplish in the inter-war years, he never strayed, in principle, from his faith in art’s radical potentialities (Gąsiorek, 2015), nor the Vorticist’s stipulation that art be “organic with its Time” (Lewis, 1915, p. 34).[218] The rapid changes in twentieth-century life demanded art forms appropriate to them: the new reality had to be faced, not retreated from; humanity had to be "stiffened” (Wood, 2015, p. 88). This required literature and art to bypass romanticism entirely—including the technological romanticism of the reactionary modernists, which both Herf (1984), Griffin (2007) and NRR writers (Bolton, 2012; Bowden, 2022) erroneously associate with Lewis.

4.7 Lewis vs. Technological Romanticism

This conviction that art be organic with its Time explains Lewis's preference for the classical genre of Satire —the classical being the expression of the individual "who lived firmly in the present" (Lewis, 1964, p. 74). Assuming that both man and the world were *not* to be improved—a sentiment particularly raw after 1914—satire regained prominence as a means to structure chaos, create emotional distance and render modernity more bearable through art (Lessenich, 2017, p. 83). Justifying his “non-ethical” or “anti-humanist satire” (Faulk, 2016, p. 193), Lewis writes:

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[218] Vorticism fulfilled this stipulation: as Munton (2010, p. 265) rightly notes, the troubling urban environment is best expressed in Vorticist “diagonals, zig-zags and verticals”.

> If you regard man as a perfectly fixed and 'static'— corrupt, evil, untidy, incomplete— animal, as I do, as Mr Hulme did, it is pretty evident that a kindly, tolerant, and humanitarian attitude is the last thing to expect of us. But the ethical will, as generally understood, is inspired, and sustained… by such bland and kindly sentiments" (Lewis, 1964, p. 211)

Criticisms of Lewis's style as "inhuman" or mechanistic, as articulated by Leavis and others, stem from their artistic and moral hostility to neo-classical satire (Edwards, 2015). This tradition directly challenged the coherence of the unified personality—a concept Lewis no longer saw as viable—and contradicted the modernist dream, shared by the NRR, of reviving organic coexistence amid mass modernity.

Although the Leavisite "heritage was transformed in the work of Williams and Eagleton", the "distaste" for Lewis endured (Edwards, 2015, p. 221). This 'distaste' crystallises in Jameson's thesis, which posits that Lewis's satiric style is inherently fascistic due to his 'hatred' of the masses and resistance to levelling "proletarianisation," as well as his belief in classical authority and elitism, which allegedly underpin his "racist stereotyping" and "muscled prose" (Jameson, cited in Powe, 1987, p. 50). The human body as a grotesque, machinic or puppet-like automaton is still seen as Lewis' "dominant trope", with many recent books on modernism treating his work as emblematic of a 'dead' disembodied aesthetic (Stevenson, 2020, p. 1406).[219]

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[219] This impression dominated the first Lewisian studies, too: Wagner (1957, p. 281) wrote that Lewis's satiric imagery exemplified "Bergson's idea of comic automatism… Nearly all his characters are called machine".

Especially since Jameson's study, Lewis's satiric response to mass man has rendered him the "pariah of anti-humanist modernism – a master of anti-Cartesian exteriorisation tainted by fascism" (Kuhn, 2009, p. 14). Scholars have continually interpreted Lewis's satiric imagery as evidence of a 'proto-fascistic' reaction to mass society. Burstein (1997, pp. 139-158), for instance, argues that the recurrence of the "prosthetic body" in Lewis, Marinetti, and Jünger's works is indicative of fascism's "prosthetic imagination," embodying a "cold modernism" that is intrinsically violent, destructive, and inhuman. Yet, as Eliot (1918, p. 105) noted, Lewis's "peculiar intellectuality" only made his work *appear* 'inhuman'. Dehumanised—to borrow from Ortega y Gasset— would be more accurate, Lewis being clear in his aim to critically engage the automatising tendencies of his time rather than valorise them.[220] His satiric imagery was not a totalitarian 'propaganda' where men are "reduced to objects" (Johnson, 2014, p. 23). Instead, it was a means of truth-telling about society, exposing how popular culture, industrial media technology, and urbanisation transformed the autonomous individual into a mass subject (Wood, 2015).[221] His cityscape's metallic hues and "fungoid oddities" (Lewis, 1963, p. 245) were not examples of 'Imperial-modernism'—they did not impose "an updated version" of modernity, a "future condition of the present" (Quinn, 2017,

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[220] For the NRR thinker Jonathan Bowden, Ortega y Gasset's essay "The Dehumanization of Art" (1925) was one of the earliest statements of Right-wing modernism (Bowden, 2014). This modernist dehumanisation', continues and intensifies in the postmodern period–see McAleer (2015, p. 19) on Pynchon's novels.

[221] As McLuhan says, Lewis was the first to demonstrate how the dehumanisation of life proceeds through centralised methods of "communication" (i.e., popular culture) and the "lethal abstractionizing of the machine," (2010, p. 180); two factors that, when combined, mean that "the life of free intelligence" has never "encountered such anonymous and universal hostility.

p. 42), nor did they seek “an aesthetic consolation” for the “proto-fascist imagination," a “strategy of fixity” that “reproduces current power dynamics” (Eden, 2023, pp. 149, 210). On the contrary, Lewis’s 'mechanistic externality' was diagnostic in spirit (Dematagoda, 2020, p. 491): it used the aesthetics of urban alienation to critique a rationalised world in which the subject struggled for distinction—a world stripped of religion's 'sacred canopy' of meaning, and where the ideology of holistic individualism and even bodily integrity were becoming dangerously tenuous. Anticipating by nearly fifty years McLuhan's theory of the dissolution of individual identity by the rise of mass electronic media (Stacey, 1993, p. 132), *BLAST* declared that:

> THE ACTUAL HUMAN BODY BECOMES OF LESS IMPORTANCE EVERY DAY. It now, literally, EXISTS much less (Lewis, 1914, p. 141)

This statement encapsulates modernist anxieties about the fragmentation of experience and loss of individual unity—anxieties arising not only from the immediate traumas of urbanisation, industrialisation, and the mass mobilisation of World War One but also from the long-term repercussions of the “Copernican upheaval” and the Cartesian subject-object split that decentred the human (Lewis, 1927, p. 336). Yet Lewis was just as concerned with the subjective and vitalistic counter-reactions of Bergson et al., which, contrary to their intent, exacerbated the dissolution of the individual into the mass by catastrophically merging subject and object and art with life. Consequently, unlike other modernist movements, Vorticism was not an effort to adapt the subject to modernity or encourage art to “merge any further into life”; rather, it arose from the striving to differentiate oneself against encroaching uniformity

and “resist absorption” into mechanization. (Lewis, 2017, pp. 178-179). [222] Indeed, Lewis (1914, p. 30) theorised Vorticism as establishing a "violent structure of adolescent clearness” between such “extremes” as organicism and mechanism and art and life. While these “playful but aggressive” (Edwards, 2000b, p. 113) divisions were self-consciously artificial (Mansell, 2011, p. 123), Lewis (1989a, p. 232) nevertheless felt it was the “spirit of the artist” to maintain this “superficial” but necessary “differentiation of existence… our detached life” that stands “in distinction” to the “crowd life.”

For Dugin (2023b), the sociology of late modernity reveals how overwhelming the crowd’s dominance over the individual became in the twentieth century—a dominance that, as indicated by Durkheim’s functionalism, is characterised by the power of social structures to define individuals rather than their supposed 'autonomous' content. In Dugin’s view, modern liberal individualism responds to this sociology by seeking new ‘exotic’ strategies for individual liberation—such as transhumanism and evolving gender boundaries—none of which preserve individuality but lead to further fragmentation into the sub-individual, rendering the human a mere “parliament of organs” (Latour, cited in Dugin, 2021, p. 28). Foster (2004, p. 110) claims that resistance to this trend was pioneered by modernist art, which was characterised by reactionary “returns to the figure,” whether naturalistic or machinic.

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[222] This can be contrasted to the ‘technological romanticism’ of NRR-associated thinkers today. Note the contrast between *The Crowd’s* geometric rigidness and H.R. Giger’s ‘darkly Promethean art’, interpreted by Jorjani to depict the overcoming of alienation both from machinery and from fellow humans - or humanoids - through an orgiastic communion of the new beings (Jorjani, 2020, p. 54)



Figure 2: Wyndham Lewis *Timon of Athens* (1912)

© The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

Figure 3: Pablo Picasso *The Pipes of Pan / La Flûte de Pan* (1923)

Available at: https://images.grandpalaisrmn.fr/ark:/36255/18-512316

At the naturalistic end of the spectrum is Picasso's 1920s work, part of the "Return to Order" movement that swept post-war Europe. Responding to the fragmentation and relativisation of man, this movement offered the nostalgic "fiction of an intact body" (Foster, 2004, p. 110), recoiling not only against the mangled bodies of industrialised war but also against the geometric, abstracted figures of high-modernist art, especially Cubism. While Lewis also distanced himself from Cubism, he critiqued his Spanish contemporaries' "'back to nature' crusade" as escapist and romantic (quoted in Stacey, 1993, p. 141). In line with Jünger's concerns about the displacement of human nature by the technocratic structures of modernity, Vorticism's early "designs" instead confront the friction between the modern figure and their urban surroundings. The fierce abstraction of Vorticism suggests a "body ego"

that is “never secure”, caught between autonomy and fragmentation (Foster, 2004, pp. 134-7). Lewis (1915, p. 141) adapts Cubist abstraction not to diffuse the figure further in space but to dramatise its “struggle for distinction” within an overly rationalised urban desert-city (Foster, 2004, p. 137).

An exemplary instance is Lewis's *Timon of Athens* (1913) series,[223] which depicts Shakespeare's ancient misanthrope as suspended between definition and dispersion. As Timon struggles for autonomy, he becomes “imbricated in space”; the “cubist forms” that seem to emerge from his body also subsume it into its surroundings (Foster, 2004, p. 127). Edwards (2000) makes a similar observation about “The Vorticist” (1912), noting how this drawing of an “apparently screaming figure” portrays the new machine man as ‘just as trapped in and defined by his surroundings as Timon was in matter’: an alienated man in the vortex of the modern city (Tickner, 1997, p. 100). Writing for the NRR’s *Counter-Currents,* Bolton (2011) claims that Timon's depiction as a "snapping puppet" embodies Lewis’s belief that man can "rise above the animal by classical detachment," while also reflecting his conviction that the "majority of men will always remain as…automata.” [224] But, as Gąsiorek (2014, pp. 142-3) points out, Lewis focused “less on (anti-humanist) visions of the deficient human organism” and more on the “threat posed to the individual” by the “incursions of technology into all aspects of social and personal life”—an empathetic interpretation of

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[223] Originally commissioned by Max Goschen to illustrate a new edition of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*. Despite being rejected by Goschen, Lewis self-published them under the "The Cube Press" imprint.

[224] Having read Nietzsche, Bolton (2011) argues, Lewis was determined on remaining a Zarathustrian-esque figure, solitary upon his mountain peak far above the mass or ‘herd’ of humanity. Bolton is referring to Lewis’s 1917 “The Code of a Herdsman”.

Lewis's intent, supported by Edwards's analysis of 'The Vorticist' and the *Timon* series, and also by Kuhn (2009, p. 152), who contends that Lewis's detached embrace of 'dead things' and 'outer shells' was more a "frantic attempt" to preserve some "semblance of a self" than an acquiescence to the new "anti-humanist mode of mass urban life." Indeed, Lewis savages modernism's "purveyors of aesthetic impersonality", reproaching Joyce and Eliot not only for failing to resist a dehumanising culture but for "replicating"—and "naturalising"—the scientific pretence of diminished personal agency (Arvidson, 2018, p. 803).

While this "frantic attempt" of Lewis's (1914, p. 141) was rooted in his fear that the subject—the "isolated human figure of most ancient Art"— was being diminished as an autonomous agent, it was driven by his conviction that "the old form of egotism" was "no longer fit" for the savage conditions of modernity. In contrast to Picasso's escapist "return to order" movement, Lewis adopted a 'machinic reaction' to mass culture: one that, according to Foster (2004, p. 110), looked to the mechanisation of the modern body itself for a new principle of physical being—a "New Man". Indeed, in "The New Egos", Lewis (1914, p. 141) asserts that "Dehumanisation is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World" and that the modern artist's remit was to make "NEW BEINGS" (p. 132) to adequately address this challenge.

Dehumanisation, Foster (2004, pp. 136-7) claims, was not only the "chief diagnostic of modernity" for Lewis but also its chief remedy—Lewis allegedly believing that if modernity was to survive its dehumanisation, it must be dehumanised further, pushing "strangeness, surprise, and primitive detachment" to the limit. Foster (p.115) argues that Lewis's work not only imagined a new ego capable of withstanding the upheavals of the "military-industrial, the modern-urban, and the mass-political" but also sought to transmute man into a new subject

capable of *proactively thriving* on these upheavals.[225] This aligns with Locchi's (2023) thesis that the Suprahuman or "third European" man, confronted with the "shocks" of modernity—such as biotechnologies and AI, upheavals comparable to those faced by their Indo-European ancestors during the Neolithic Revolution—must adopt this imminent transformation of man rather than retreat into nostalgia for a prior state. Like Lewis's call for 'new egos' to replace the 'old form of egotism,' Locchi insists that while this new origin naturally claims continuity or "appropriation of our European heritage", it *also* requires its overcoming.

Foster contrasts the Marxist project of overcoming technological self-alienation dialectically with this 'potentially fascist' desire, pioneered by reactionary modernists, to elevate "uniquely modern forms of otherness and alienation" (Gier, 2000) into an absolute value of their own, transvaluing "reification and regression alike" by forging them into the ecstatic condition of a 'new ego' or 'cold consciousness' (Foster, 2004, p. 172; Gilfedder, 2021). 'The New Egos' again provides evidence for Foster's claims, wherein Lewis (1914, p. 26) describes the modern city-dweller as constructing 'impersonal' defences against the world's encroachment—a "hysterical wall built around the ego".[226] Figures such as The Tyro are also interpreted by Foster as symbols of this reactionary "egotistic hardening" (Lewis, 1915, p.

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[225] Tickner (1997, p. 100) argues that the negative dehumanisation of *The Crowd's* "will-less" automata–mere cogs in a machine–can, alternatively, be interpreted as a *desirable* dehumanisation.

[226] An impersonal boundary that *BLAST* arguably extends to the nation, figured as an "industrial island machine" (1914, p. 26). Lewis even savours the irony that while his Britain was buckling on the "brilliant and electric armour of the modern world" (1989b, p. 33), the Futurist's Italy still resembled, by contrast, a backward "Borgia-haunted swamp of intrigue" (1989b, p. 33).

134),[227] allegedly aligning Lewis's vision with the technological romanticism of Jünger, Marinetti and today, Locchi, but first evoked by the proto-Futurist poet Verhaeren, who believed the "new conditions of existence, the din and dust of great cities, the never-resting activity of modern brains" necessitated a "new man" whose "nervous system would be able to bear the strain imposed upon it" (Bithell, cited in Harrison, 2021, p. 42).

Yet if, according to Foster, Lewis intended to create a new 'ego' capable of thriving on the shocks of technological modernity, Dematagoda (2020, p. 491) rightly counters that this intent contained a forewarning of how such an 'ego' might evolve in the future. This clarifies why Lewis likely saw the "savage invective and brutal imagery" of Shakespeare's Timon as a vehicle for his own critical stance against Modernist fantasies of the total transformation of life (Edwards, 2010, p. 3). These insights are essential correctives to Foster's interpretation of Lewis, as it is only a short step from Verhaeren's 'epiphanic' Futurism to Marinetti's (1972, p. 91) programmatic vision of "hyper-masculine mechanomorphic beings" with 'organs adapted to the needs of a world of ceaseless shocks"—a vision that corresponds to Jünger's 'proto-fascist' archetype of the Worker, who can only survive modernity's violence owing to his sculpted, hardened body, and today to Locchi's 'suprahuman' man.

Jünger's archetype—a new type of being who, amid situations that are "lethal to anyone else," can derive from them an "absolute sense of being alive" (Evola, 1972, p. 192)—is influential in shaping further elements of the NRR's critique of technologised mass culture and its 'passive nihilism' (Benoist, 2008). For Jorjani (2019, p. 357), philosopher and founder of the

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[227] Lewis's most significant 'Tyros' painting, ***A Reading of Ovid***, the Tyros could be more clearly interpreted as a riposte to the reactionaries' 'plundering' of the classical (in this case, Ovid) for political purposes.

Prometheist movement, what linked Jünger and other “militaristic” reactionary modernists to National Socialism was their “vitalistic” and “onto-theological” understanding of “dehumanising technology” as a “fateful expression of a uniquely perilous and promising human existence”. In contrast to the nostalgic and “escapist” reactions of less daring conservatives like Eliot (Herf, 1984, p. 24), these radically futural and "anti-pastist" (Griffin, 2007, p. 298) [228] modernists saw that “positivistic techno-scientific knowledge” could be integral to the project of ‘revolutionising’ society as a whole, rather than merely being corrosive to old forms of life (Jorjani, 2019, p. 357).

Lewis’s seemingly 'Promethean' belief—that the world could either be degraded by society's accepting of the most "basic mechanical standards" or transformed through its use of culture (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 342)—is often conflated with a pro-technological strand of romantic thought. However, it is crucial to note the caveat “through society's use of culture.” Critics who associate Lewis’s self-reflexive response to mass culture with the technological romanticism of, say, Jünger’s *Storm of Steel* (1920) or *Feuer und Blut* (1925) should bear this distinction in mind. Lewis did not believe, like Jünger (1929, p. 81), that technology was “beautiful” for one who loves life in all life's “fullness and power” and must be integrated into “what Nietzsche meant when he attacked Darwinism,” i.e., that life is not merely a “merciless struggle for survival” but possesses a will to higher goals.[229] For Lewis (1989a, p. 60), the 'will

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[228] Griffin (2007, p. 299) does not distinguish between the “neophilia of the Italian and Russian futurists, of Wyndham Lewis, or of Ernst Jünger” in his discussion of modernism and fascism.

[229] Lewis also appreciated Nietzsche was “opposed to the evolutionism of Darwin”– a mechanical brand of evolutionism too drab, utilitarian, and spiritless– but perceived (rightly) that Nietzsche was nevertheless significantly influenced by the Darwinian “notion of a hopeless and meaningless struggle” (1926, p. 117). Lewis says that what Nietzsche truly opposed in

to power' was still merely a will to action, “surplus energy” over and above that required for Darwin’s “struggle for existence”. And as in Nietzsche’s philosophy, whatever this “super-something” Jünger’s romantic technology might wrest from evolution’s “hopeless and meaningless” struggle was never put toward “beauty, significance, and so forth—i.e., to achieving a zestful modernity—but reinvested in doing the same things that people were doing without it, i.e., “fighting and struggling” (Lewis, 1989a, p. 117).[230] Indeed, the Futurist manifesto exalts “aggressive action… Except in struggle, there is no beauty” (Marinetti, 1973, p. 19).

As Chapter One demonstrated, while pro-futurist New Right thinkers reject the ‘decadent’ humanistic cultural trends of Enlightenment progress, they—like Jünger and Marinetti—embrace the technical advances of Enlightenment modernity and their advocacy for a Promethean ‘will-to-power’ fits within an alternative “modernist framework” (Bar-On, 2013,

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Darwinism was its conception of a "struggle for ***existence***", believing that all living creatures, far from tending to preserve their existence, strove to enhance themselves, to grow, and to generate more life (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 246).

230 For Lewis (1989a), any criticism of Nietzsche must rest on that point: that of his suggested employment and utilisation of this superfluous energy to go on doing the same things that we should be doing without it. For, in practice, this precious “something over” is put to the same base uses that “many of the lowest of (Nietzsche’s) helots would have put it to”, i.e., the “average” mass man who cannot truly get beyond the conception of "the struggle for existence." This made it even more unfortunate that Nietzsche converted, in the “vague general mind” of the mass, the Darwinian formula into the even more vitalist and politically disastrous doctrine of a “struggle for power” (Lewis, 1989a, p. 199). Lewis attacked this same vitalism in Bergson and Schopenhauer and which he saw as underlying the many catastrophes of twentieth-century mass politics.

p. 228). Likewise, in Lewis's era, the technocratic, Promethean elements of fascism did not reject modernity but only its 'decadent' aspects, embracing a reactionary modernist ethos that fostered the spiritualisation of technology as integral to the nation's rebirth (palingenesis) and "autarky" (Griffin, 2007). By suggesting a synthesis between tradition and modernity, modernism's technological romanticism informed Fascism's efforts not to renounce but *redirect* the world's inexorable technologisation towards the relation of a "transcendent organic nation" (Griffin, 2007, p. 244).

It is true Lewis *also* sought to redefine and make conscious the technological phenomena transforming society rather than allow humanity to "sleepwalk mechanically into the future" (Edwards, 2013, p. 6)—the future Spengler predicted would eventuate "with the individual or against him" (Spengler, 1928, p. 507; Gilfedder, 2021).[231] While his rejection of Spenglerian fatalism might suggest a Promethean faith in man's ability to create his destiny, Lewis, however—like Hulme and Eliot—believed that the inherent limitations of mass humanity made it unlikely such a destiny would be entirely benign. His alleged attempt to 'transvalue' reification into a "new ego" (Foster, 2004, p. 172) was tempered by his non-Promethean view of mass man as a being with a "strictly limited capacity for change", contrasting with his contemporaries' "quasi-Nietzschean" valorisations of instinct and will (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 418).[232]

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[231] As Lewis wrote in his editorial to *The Enemy 2*, "We are the changed too much: we are not enough the changers" (quoted in Watson, 1964, p. 42)

[232] For Lewis (1989b), the masses are "creatures of habit" rather than of change; they do not desire genuine social transformation, and what they call revolution or "progress" is merely a difference in *kind*, rather than in *value*': a "horizontal" affair (quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. 41).

4.7.1. Neo-Classicism and Hierarchy

For Ferrall (2001, p. 137), Lewis's machinic caricatures demonstrate most clearly this "animus" towards "mechanical men" and mass culture and represent Lewis's explicit rejection of the progressive faith in the perfectibility of mankind. Schenker (1988, p. 60) goes further, suggesting Lewis's painterly abstractions emphasise not just the distance between God and mass man but the flaws in man's nature that might have occasioned God's abandonment of him. The strongest evidence for these interpretations is in the diminutive abstractions of Lewis's early paintings, especially 1917's *Labour Deputation: Marine*. These insubstantial figures, engaged in disagreeable labour, evoke the peons of *The Childermass*: "halted human shells," twice-dead puppets with their "long-peaked caps" and blank eyes like "discoloured stones"—a vast mechanised proletariat described by Pullman as the "masses of personalities whom God, having created them, is unable to destroy" (1965b, pp. 20-28). It seems God's omnipotence has been undermined by the accumulating mass of humanity He brought into being, and if God has been overwhelmed by mass society, Lewis suggests, genius can hardly expect to fare better (Schenker, 1992, p. 140).



Figure 4: Wyndham Lewis, *Labour Deputation Marine* (1917).

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Following research indicating that fascism requires and perpetuates "othering-narratives" to create a moralised hierarchy of difference (Bailey, 2022, p. 14, 22), Frisch (2019, p. 176) contends that Lewis's machinic 'peons' represent a hybrid of working class, communist, and racial "others" on whom the dominant ideologies of his time relied, either as supposed antagonists or supposed allies. Lewis's (1965b, p.22) description of Pullman's feeling "calm and masterful" in the presence of these "inferior natures" could support this reading, which is also made by Eden (2023, p. 212), who claims the peons suggest Lewis's "unsentimental solution" for the damaged subjects of modernity: namely accept your dehumanisation as a more "accurate expression of human nature" and assume your place in the "hierarchy it offers." Seemingly anticipating NRR's ambition to restore "hierarchical values" within the context of mass society, Eden (p. 210) claims Lewis's "elitist machinic modernism" was proto-fascistic in that it strove to remould the modern subject and society in a "new and stable hierarchy"

However, what is significant in Pullman's description is his use of the term 'personality.' In Lewis's schema, mechanical men lack true personalities; they merely project a 'personality' they assume to be distinctly their own, yet which is, in reality, imparted to them by the collective (Frisch, 2019). Lewis's machinic caricatures echo his description of "Inferior Religions" description of figures who attach themselves to beliefs that subsequently dominate and steer their lives. Animated by forces concealed from their self-awareness, these figures are mere "shadows of energy, not living beings," as their "mechanism is a logical structure, and they are nothing but that." (Lewis, 1982 p. 150)—there is no soul distinct from the body, the soul which, in Lewis's Cartesian metaphysic, is identified with reason. This is especially the case with the peons, whose terrestrial 'identities'—unstuck from the cohesive glue of David Hume's 'Deadening habit' in the "chilly laboratory" (Ayers, 1992, p. 126) of *The Childermass's* afterworld—are revealed to have been entirely contingent upon social constructs and the external "type-life" on which the masses rely (Lewis, 1926, p.151).

Lewis does not, therefore, divide peons and protagonists based on a proto-fascist 'hierarchy', but rather on his idealistic belief in an absolute split between distinct and indistinct Beings.[233] In Pullman's words, the peons represent the modern masses who "are not distinct enough to remain" more than "indistinct ideas..." (1965b, p. 28). Judged by Eliot (1955, p. 523) to be an "unforgettable" detail, the peons closely approximate his description of the 'Hollow Men':

[233] According to Schenker (1992, p. 111) Lewis's uncompromising view of the world shares with Calvinism a coterie of the elect (artists), a mass of sinners (nearly everyone else)

> …shapes without form, shade without colour / Paralysed force, gestures without motion (Eliot, 1980, p. 56)

For Lewis (1984, p. 202), however, unlike Eliot (or reactionary classicists like Maurras), this "changeless Many," or group of society composed of "things," can include *all social classes*. In *The Lion and the Fox,* Lewis emphasises that any true personality or genius transcends and is distinct from "the mechanical ascendancy" of class and race (1951a, p. 296). Conversely, his herd of "things" is drawn from all strata of society, distinguishable only by a lack of intelligence, i.e., the enlightened 'reason' identifiable with the soul. It is *this* "moronic majority" which dominates *The Childermass's* time flats. They do not embody Lewis's 'anti-communism' so much as reflect his non-Promethean view that the majority—the "eternally shiftless mass of *inapertiva* mankind" (Lewis, 1989a, p. 45)—are as much machines as the Cartesian animal (Wagner, 1957, p. 228). Thus, they inevitably (and tragically) become automatons in an increasingly industrialised, urbanised, and rationalised world (van Lunteren and Hollestelle, 2013, p. 519). In a society that has lost a 'sacred structure', the measure of all becomes 'instrumental reason', making the 'peons' particularly susceptible to being "treated as raw materials" or "instruments of… projects" (Taylor 1991, p. 5)—mere fodder for today's 'programme of depersonalisation' (Lewis, 1951a, p. 300). This is another reason Lewis railed against the "modernist doctrine" of impersonality (Rives, 2012), perceiving it as continuous with broader cultural forms of anti-human depersonalisation: impersonal art, in other words, perpetuates impersonal life (Arvidson, 2018, p. 810).

While Lewis, like Jünger, acknowledged the irreversible transformative power of the technological *Gestell*, [234] his classicist view of man's limitations led him to focus defensively on technology's potential to depersonalise humanity and create a standardised "society of robots" (Lewis, 1936, p. 22), rather than redeploying this force as an 'activist metaphysic' for modernist nationalist purposes (Herf, 1984, p. 120). For Lewis, the principal danger of technologised mass culture was not merely its tendency to treat individuals as programmable automata but its encouragement for individuals to see themselves as such, thereby increasing their susceptibility to political and ideological manipulation (Gąsiorek, 2015).[235]

In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1989a, p. 46), however, Lewis more pessimistically questions whether people *want* to be automata, speculating that freedom might be the "last thing" the "mechanical" masses desire—do they truly want the "rigours of true freedom"? A decade later, in *Left Wings over Europe* , he answers an "emphatic No!", arguing that "freedom and irresponsibility are commutative terms, where the average man is concerned" (1936, p. 294).[236] This underlines why *Snooty Baronet* (1922) critiqued behaviourism for treating human beings as programmable machines: such doctrines exploit the pessimistic truth that "in the

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[234] Heidegger, frequently linked to conservative revolutionaries like Jünger, diverged from them in his rejection of technology; however, he shared their perspective that it was an autonomous force with its own will (Herf, 1984, p. 115).

[235] As Lewis's poem 'One-Way Song' warns: "first they teach you that you are just nix / And wear you down with barbarous pinpricks / The philosophy of a full-blown automaton / Is cooked up for you" (Lewis, 1979, p. 85).

[236] The publication of ***Rude Assignment*** in the 1950s revealed no mellowing of Lewis's stance, as he asserts that "the great majority of men have no desire to be free, if by that we agree to mean individuals" (1984, p. 192).

mass" people prefer to be nothing but "obedient, hard-working machines", as near dead as they can get "without actually dying" (1989a, p. 151).[237]

Lewis (1915, p.7) perceived this combination of social mechanisation and the automata-like "UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMANITY" as particularly hazardous, for if most people were already inclined to subordinate themselves to external power rather than embrace the responsibility of freedom, then the advent of mass mechanisation and mass politicisation could only intensify the threat of an "easily influenced… credulous" majority being used to destroy the "natural" minority (1989a, p. 85). Even in his earliest stories, Lewis explored this dangerous intersection of accelerating automation with man's 'primitive' and mechanical nature, using electricity as a metaphor to illustrate the capacity of ideology to take control of those through whom it coursed. In 1911's "Brobdingnag, " the titular wife-beater is depicted as a thoughtless dynamo whose body serves as a conduit for the current that surges through him, transforming him into a vessel of energies he cannot master, yet which imbue him with power: "another form takes hold of his mind… electrifying him, charging him with infernal energy and fury… this form, at least, he can grasp!" (quoted in Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 154). And in *Tarr*, when Soltyk loses his self-control, we read: 'His hands were electrified… Will was at last dashed all over him, an arctic douche" (Lewis, 1918, p. 287).

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[237] *Snooty's* critique is equally applicable to Fordism, which emerged nearly concurrently with behaviorism and emphasized similar concepts of the self as an adaptable machine. Indeed, in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis (1989a, p. 43). cites Henry Ford's testimony that "for the majority of minds, repetitive operations hold no terrors," an assertion that led Ford to dismiss the 'parlour experts' who decried his factories "terrible mechanical conditions." Ford had reasoned with 'admirable candour,' as Lewis put it, that most men desired nothing more than to be assigned a "quite mechanical and 'soulless' task."

Such passages directly contrast Marinetti's heralding of the "new man" who "feeds upon *electricity*" and understands nothing but the "desire for danger and day-to-day heroism" (2006, p. 44). Marinetti's rhetoric typifies how reactionary modernists associated irrationalism, opposition to the Enlightenment, and a romantic vitalism with a "cult of technics" (Herf, 1984, p. 24). Jünger (1929, p. 37) too, saw the reconciliation of archaic values and machines as a route out of the "grey, frightful world of utilitarianism…. the Manchester landscape in which coal dust covers over all values"—just as the NRR believe Enlightenment modernity will be transcended through combining "hyper-modern technical methods" with a renewal of "premodern, pagan values" (Bar-On,2013, p. 192).

Technological romanticism, which Horkheimer (1974) identified in National Socialism, constituted an organised "revolt of nature" against modern capitalism and the rationality of Enlightenment science while rejecting the anti-technologism of traditionalist modernisms. Although Lewis's response to mass culture is generally included in this category, the contrast just outlined reveals that his "main adversary" (Ferrall, 2001, p. 137) was not so much modern science and the Enlightenment rationality from which it arose but *rather* these anti-rational and vitalistic 'philosophies' of the radical reactionaries, which attempted to bring the mechanised body to 'life' by "pumping it full of "time" or spirit" (Lewis, 1927, p. 170).

4.8 Lewis vs. Reactionary Modernist Irrationalism

Lewis's subtle argument against irrationalism follows that of French neo-classicist thinkers like Benda and Massis, who, even before World War One, attributed the devaluing

and popularising impact of democracy to Romanticism and Bergsonism.[238] They argued that Romanticism spread the humanitarian ideal that gave rise to democracy, devaluing art by reducing it to the realm of the popular and "vulgar" by glorifying sensation and emotion (Maes-Jelinek, 1970). Like Lewis, they contended that Bergsonism, by emphasising the "becoming" and flux of life, over-identified man with his surrounding world, thereby stripping the subject of his individuality. Against this "pathetic" (Péguy, 2019, p. 27) philosophy of feeling, they championed the 'idee claire'—the Cartesian criterion of truth. [239]

Such a conclusion infuriated French actionist thinkers like Berth, a Sorelian disciple who also critiqued democracy but in the name of the very "romantic, the mystical, and intuitional" anti-rational philosophies that Benda condemned (Lewis, 1984, p.44). Like the NRR and the reactionary modernists, Berth "bracketed" mass democracy and 'enlightenment rationalism,' viewing vitalist thought as a means to give "renewed force" to nationalism, revive the religious spirit, and impose a 'heroically pessimistic conception of life" against the "insipid optimism of eighteenth-century thought" (pp. 36–41)—the Enlightenment 'rationalism' blamed for universalism and egalitarianism, the urbanisation of the Industrial Revolution, and the ascendancy of the middle class (Tucker, 1999, pp. 80–81)

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[238] Wagner (1957) was the first to establish Lewis's debt to what "French Neo-Classicists" (among whom he groups thinkers as distinct as Maurras, Massis, Benda, Lasserre and Maritain). Yet for Edwards (2015, p. 232) Wagner's attempts to present Lewis as principally under the influence of neo-classicist right-wing philosophers like Maurras and Massis is a "strange misreading".

[239] The word 'pathetic' refers to Benda's critical essay on Bergson, titled "Une philosophie pathétique," published by Péguy in 1913. Péguy's use of "pathetic" (le pathétique) does not carry the negative connotations of "inadequate" or "pitiable" as in English. Instead, it reflects its ancient Greek root, ***pathos***, meaning "suffering passion".

Berth—whom Lewis dubbed 'Faustian Man at his most floridly Faustian' (1984, p. 42)—found it insidious that neoclassical intellectuals like Benda claimed to defend 'aristocratic conceptions' by upholding rationalist intellectualism when, *au contraire*, the 'warlike' and 'heroic' spirit of the 'true aristocracy' was more truly 'anti-intellectual' (Antliff, 2007, pp. 101-102). Lewis, however—summarising Benda's position with the maxim "the values of action are always philistine"—concluded Benda's was the "better" case (1984, p. 43). Like Benda, Lewis (1927, p. 318) treated "vulgarising" time-philosophies— "religious, national, historic"—as self-defeating responses to mass modernity. These philosophies artificially restored to the mechanical masses the "stolen, aristocratical monopoly of personality we call the mind,'" dethroning the ego and substituting it with "democratic passions" (Gilfedder, 2021, p. 28). Inverting Berth's critique of Benda's 'elitist' detached intellectual as "anti-traditional, anti-physical...anti-historic," Lewis (1984, p. 40) affirms these as positive qualities in opposition to vitalist irrationalism.

In the artistic sphere, this reactionary exaltation of irrationalism, Bergsonian vitalism and collective subjectivity was epitomised in the Parisian journal *transition* (started 1927), which Lewis (1971, p. 63) critiqued as fostering not the 'New Romanticism' it intended but a "romantic nihilism". Described by editor Eugene Jolas as an "organ for a modern pan-romantic revolution" (1941, p. 29), *transition* aimed at a 'revolution of the word' and promoted a new understanding of the individual: the rational was to be "synthesised with the irrational," and the self's inner experience to be "harmonised" with the external world (Gąsiorek, 2015, p.

418).[240] *Transition* had strong ties to the Dadaists, expressionists, Cubists,[241] Surrealists and Joyce, whose Work in Progress (*Finnegans Wake*) the magazine serialised. To illustrate the contrast with Lewis's position, in Joyce's final novel—as Tratner (1995, p. 121) argues—Joyce "turns every character into a 'mass'" and, by bestowing the "thoroughly anti-elitist" name Here Comes Everybody on his anti-hero, completes a shift from a Tarr-like interest in a "D'Annunzian artist-leader" who rises above the masses (as in Portrait or Stephen Hero) to a more pluralistic view of society, emphasising collectivist subjectivity over individualistic social systems (Lilly, 1999, p. 107). Despite their political differences, Dada, Surrealism and Futurism held similar views of subjectivity, which, they believed, could help the modern subject liberate itself from oppressive mental constraints through an ecstatic immersion in 'the Real', a "plunge over the side of the precipice" (Lewis, 1954, p. 33) that would bridge the alienating split between self and world (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 417).

Early twentieth-century philosophers and artists widely hailed this interpenetrative union of subject/object, self/world as part of their 'passion for the Real' (Lewis, 2017, p. 178). To neoclassical critics like Benda, however, this vitalistic "merging" and "penetrating" of all life in a striving to apprehend it as a whole—to" seize and mingle with the supreme Reality" (Lewis, 1927, p. 389)—was a metaphysical communism that denigrated the status of the artist-hero

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[240] Jonas (1929, p. 12) advocated for a "new type of man ... a universal being, an harmonious being, synthesizing in himself the impulsions of the spirit and the social sense of the twentieth-century'.

[241] The Expressionists were trying to transform their art into a "socially binding, intersubjective, or collective experience" (Tucker, 1999, p. 57), while a concurrent evolution in Cubism was Jules Romains' unanimist theory, which asserted that through art the "individual could directly experience the thoughts of others and so participate in a collective consciousness" (Antliff, p. 40).

(Maes-Jelinek, 1970), the ideally detached Lewisian 'intellectual' who works in isolation above the "partisan passions of the moment" (Lewis, 1984, p. 34).[242] Worse, for Lewis, the subjective vitalism embodied in *transition* threatened art itself. For Lewis, art is "identifiable" with the emergence of the "individual or Subject", and its dissolution would be "coeval with the death or suppression of the Subject" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 236). In this view, modern art's purpose was to uphold the dualism of subject and object, not unify them. Lewis insisted art was a "phenomenon of separation" that emerged when the "cleavage" between the subject and the object, between the 'Self' and the 'Real', grew large enough to require it: it is the "organisation" of 'the Real'—that chasm beyond a "precipice we should not see" (1984, p. 43), limitless in depth, with 'literally nothing' at the bottom—out of which Being evolved, and which without art would return. Yeats (1962, p.4) summarised Lewis's position: "If we reject, [Lewis] argues, the forms and categories of the intellect, there is *nothing* left but sensation, "eternal flux".

Just as Bergson's 'flux' philosophy was intended to deliver a route out of mechanism into an "unlimited field of spirit and creation" and thereby redeem nature (Edwards, 2015), Lewis's rival modernisms sought to exploit the irrational and the subjective as a remedy for the debilitating reification of modern life (Wragg, 2010). By identifying 'true' reality in the irrationalist domain of myth and intuition— abandoning the intellect for the mystically conceived *élan vital* (Gąsiorek, 2004, p. 112)—they hoped to liberate the subject from the demands of 'reason,' overcome the split between self and world, and redeem the "instrumentalisation of personal and collective life" (Touraine, 1996, p. 297).

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[242] Like Benda, Lewis held that the triumph of sensation over reason had fatally harmed the artistic and intellectual in mass society (Wagner, 1957, p. 158),

Contrarily, Lewis insisted that art "orientated to the irrational" could never deliver personal or collective emancipation (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 418); instead, it would yield to disintegrative intellectual proclivities that undermined the "successful and self-assured society" to which the "teaching of Descartes" was leading (Lewis, 1984, p. 41). Consequently, Lewis approached the challenge of reification in terms later formulated by Habermas, namely, *how to hold on to the idea of rationality in the face of its rationalisation* (Wragg, 2005a, p. 10). It is *this* struggle that *Tarr* and the *Timon* plates dramatise; Lewis's figures were not (*pace* Foster) an attempt to transvalue reification into a 'new ego' or 'cold consciousness'.

Lewis's 1920s polemics underscore this point: rationality was imperilled not only by its distortion into instrumentalism but by his contemporaries' counterreactions—their Bergsonian subjectivism, apotheosising of the human subject, vitalist intuitionism, and, most critically, their reconciliation of this anti-Enlightenment cultural rebellion with technology. The modernist faith in technology to open "infinite opportunities for self-expression without limits" (Herf, 1984, p. 235) and transcend bourgeois modernity is echoed in the NRR's belief that Enlightenment 'instrumental' reason can be transvalued as a "dynamic voluntarism" that more accurately reflects the 'Faustian' culture of the West and is affirmed as a 'will for power' that "laughs at all temporal or spatial limitations" (Rix, 2011).[243] On a deeper level, the modernist's cultural rebellion anticipates Dugin's (2023, p. 23) reinterpretation of the 'irrational' not as the pejorative 'un-rational' but as an "aggressive and active destruction of the rational," a struggle with "everyday consciousness," and an immersion into the raw elements of the 'new life'. The radical right of Lewis's era similarly drew inspiration from

[243] Voluntarism is a theory that conceives will to be the dominant factor in experience or in the world.

modernist vitalism in their quest for a political solution to rationalisation: the aesthetic and mythic elements of modernism suggested a way to not only leverage art for political purposes but also to aestheticise politics, reestablishing the connection between the mass and its sacred traditions, and transform society as a whole (Tucker, 1999, p 81)

4.8.1 Lewis vs. Vitalist Irrationalism

Even though Lewis's rival modernisms had "superficial" differences, he saw them all as sharing this drive to metaphysical unity and vitalist irrationalism that he traced to the influence of Bergson and Nietzsche (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 418). Having spent his intellectually formative years in Paris (1904-1908) immersed in the anti-rational and anti-positivist thought of these two principal European thinkers, Lewis (1984, p. 178) concluded that "the vitalism" with which Futurism was "drenched", or with which Surrealism was "charged", held "no attractions" for him.

The crux of Lewis's critique is that Bergson and Nietzsche (without the genius of Leibniz) served as popular purveyors to the "little aspiring" mass man of industrial modernity: Bergson provided him with a certificate of "creativeness and of 'uniqueness'," and Nietzsche with a certificate of "blue blood" (1927, p. 309).[244] The Übermensch or 'Man of Action' glorified by the Futurists—"steel-jawed…stone-hearted"—was merely this mass man inflated with a

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[244] Lewis (1989a, p. 14) specifically objected to the "vulgarising" popularization of the "notion of aristocracy and power" arranged by "Dr. Nietzsche"– a "snobbish pill very violent in its action". For Lewis, Nietzsche led the mass populace to believe in its own aristocratic nature, thereby negating the very principle of the aristos. Hence Lewis writes: "The vast face of the Massenmensch - the enormously magnified visage of the Little Man - is a degeneracy" (Lewis, quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. 91)

"philosophy," the "Time-for-Time's-sake philosophy" (Bracewell, 1990). While Dugin defines the superman as one who expresses "the greatest will to power and domination," for Lewis, the Übermensch is an automaton enslaved to the operations of will, drunk with the 'romance of action'—a victim of the *élan vital* rather than master of his fate.

Situating this (admittedly simplified) interpretation of Nietzsche's thought within the 'time-cult' allowed Lewis (1927, p. 213) to group him with Bergson as providing sanction to the reactionary modernists for "'ACTION'" and "'LIFE'"—paralleling Evola's (2009, p. 21) critique that the "'Life'" which "Dadaism… in exasperated, Bergsonian terms was hoping to free through destruction, subversion, incoherence, contradiction, and abstraction" was "something different: something other than life." Bergson's *élan vital* suggested that the alienation of the modern self might be overcome through "passionate" intuitionism (Bracewell, 1990, p. 64), that vitalistic "'will' and 'movement quality'" (Lewis, 1927, p. 273) could provide a "third way" (Lukács, 1981) beyond both liberal idealism and Marxist materialism—each associated with the failures of modernity—and that subjective experiences were the best means to glimpse life's "true reality"(Tucker, 1999, p. 48).

For Lewis, Bergson's advocacy of the "interpenetrative" capacity of intuition as a means for transcendence consigned the individual subject—and art itself—to what he considered a fatal merging with 'Life' (Lewis, 2017, p. 50). Lewis's critique of the vitalist paradigm of Bergson and Nietzsche was personified in the "antithetical artist figure" of Kreisler (Wragg, 2010, p. 104). Though appearing decisive, the mad German's violent, passionate actions are not acts of freedom: they reflect the triumph of impulse. They are expressions of servitude rather than controlled self-assertions of will.[245] Kreisler exposes the inherent unfreedom in the

[245] He is an "Auto Chrysler", an "automaton" bent on self-obliteration (Powe, 1987, p. 34).

reactionaries' 'dynamic voluntarism', revealing it as a surrender to impulse and thus to mechanism—an abdication of rational agency, which Lewis repeatedly figured as a "form of death" (Dwan, 2015, p. 27). Indeed, "Otto Kreisler's Death" was an early title of *Tarr* (Emmanuel, 2010, p. 174), and Kreisler's fate shows vitalism to be as mechanical as the mass, reified culture it aimed to redeem.[246]

The arbitrariness of Kreisler as a "man of action" throws into relief the virtues of *inaction* and Tarr's unique type of irony—his disconcerting reasonableness and externalist detachment—qualities Kirk (1955) believed the protagonist shared with his creator. From the heights of near-Olympian indifference, Tarr regards Kreisler (and indeed his own fiancée, Bertha) with an "impersonal, if not uncharitable, self-sufficiency" (Kirk, 1955, p. 524). Lewis (1984, p. 34) associates this position of "proper detachment" with such "high and incorruptible intelligences" as to which belonged Malebranche, Goethe, La Bruyere and Renan.[247] To state it clearly: for Lewis, *reflection*, not action, defines the true elite, an elite more tolerant and benevolent in the Classical Greek mould than Nietzsche's Dionysian superman, yet just as "superior and remote" from the masses as the Übermensch purports to be (Bracewell, 1990, p. 67).[248] From this Olympian perspective of 'artistic elitism,' Lewis, like

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[246] Likewise, Lewis critiqued the Hemingway hero an objectionable representative of a mechanised mass society, a herdlike dolt "to whom things happen" (Wagner, 1957. p. 164).

[247] In *Rude Assignment* (1984, p. 52), such detachment is equated with Lewis's anti-romantic conception of satire, reiterating the aspirations of Tarr's externalist aesthetic: "wherever there is objective truth there is satire...all "realism" is apt to be classed as "satire" … all that is unemotional and objective".

[248] Tarr even suggests himself as a vast improvement on Nietzsche's Übermensch, a "new animal… that will succeed the Superman" (Lewis, 2010, p. 273).

Tarr observing Kreisler, critiques the irrational underpinnings of reactionary modernisms like Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, arguing that their dependency on vitalist "philosophies of flux" encouraged "voluntarist" and subjectivist outlooks that emphasised the lower value of action over the higher one of reflection (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 416).

4.8.2 Irrationalism and Solipsism

Lewis's (1971, p. 66) rejection of the "dogmatic subjectivism" of his rival modernisms was further based on a recognition that such philosophies inevitably "manipulate the objective truth" in favour of some "version of the private world of the isolated mind". Modernisms aligned with these convictions not only lent credence to vitalist philosophies of the will but—more grievously—led to solipsism by dissolving publicly-shared reality into subjective perceptions (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 419). Lewis viewed this as particularly dangerous. If politics, like art, is ultimately founded on a 'nothing'—or, more precisely, on the fragile public artifice constructed to repress that nothing (Edwards, 2011, p. 236)—then romanticising subjectivism risked collapsing ethics and politics altogether.

Lewis's view anticipates Lukács, who warned against aestheticist tendencies as an inward turn to "irrational subjectivism" and solipsism (Lukács, quoted in Kavaloski, 2014, p. 16). Yet Lewis's perspective aligns even closer with Thomas Mann's, who claimed the romantic soul affirms life only insofar as it provides purely subjective, aesthetic experience, thus denying individual responsibility to society and tending to be politically reactionary. This mindset was most tragically manifested in fascism, where politicised, "irrationalist aestheticism" was given "free rein to affect the world" (Tucker, 1999, p. 81). As Lewis (1984, p. 73) wrote, the romantic privileging of intuition and voluntarism over intellection and deliberation contributed to "the

subjective temper" of the twentieth century, leading to "solipsistic valuations" and even to the "Gas-ovens at Belsen."

Tarr's externalist detachment and emphasis on the artist's singular position as an "intellectual" removed from life's flux convey Lewis's countervailing classicist conviction that the artist, guided by reason, is not only the architect of Western culture but also solely responsible for safeguarding it against destruction by 'romantic nihilism' (Maes-Jelinek, 1970).[249] Lewis describes this quality as the "Not-self", an objective, non-personal intellect which is the "patent and property of the Western genius", for it is in these "non-personal modes of feeling"—rather than through the "hot, immediate egoism of sensational life"— that "non-religious Western Man" has always expressed himself "at his profoundest, at his purest" (1927, p.271).This contrasts with NRR thinkers (Steuckers, 2010) who argue, following Spengler, that "*homo europeanus"*— despite centuries of "alien" Christian influence—possesses an innate "voluntarist and anthropocentric religiosity" and that to "affirm and carry out our own will" is the "ultimate basis" of "indigenous European religiosity," namely, the "old-European Faustian spirit".

In *Time and Western Man*, Lewis (1927, p. 326) employs the simile of music to clarify this contrast: music is the "highest accompaniment" of the "dark volitional Unconscious" upon which the "'Faustian'" man's "system is built"—Classical Man, by contrast, that "inveterate "spatializer'"—was in love with Plastic.[250] He satirises Spengler—with his drive for a "unity in

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[249] In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis (1989, p. 373) writes: "it is my effrontery to claim that men owe everything they can ever hope to have to an "intellectual" of one sort or another.".

[250] Hegel also observed that music exists "temporally rather than spatially" and requires a certain degree of noncognitive 'intuitive' appreciation (Tucker, 1999, p. 65).

everything”—for setting ‘Plastic’ and ‘Music’ at each other’s throats until the former dissolves into the latter, leaving “only Music” reigning in the “triumphantly Gothic World” (p. 295). Mann likewise believed that music (emotional, irrational) was a German predilection, while classical "Western" civilisation was founded on literary (intellectual) values. Mann’s definition of “Western” aligns with that implicit in the title *Time and Western Man*, which Lewis (1927, p. 9) regarded as a heritage “distinct in tradition and outlook". Lewis perceived this heritage as undermined not only by the perversions of the Enlightenment reason in mass modernity—by “Left Wingers” who “repudiated the Western norm” (quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. 60)—but also by reactionary modernists who believed the only escape from mass rationalisation was to ‘transvalue’ it, rejecting the Enlightenment while embracing technology as an activist metaphysic. This conviction resonates today in NRR’s Spenglerian view that mass modernity can either embody a “homogenising and inorganic ideology” that threatens to “standardise the whole planet” or, in their "tragic" vision, manifest as a "Faustian and adventurous vitalism… a transformer of organic nature" (Rix, 2011).

The blind striving of anti-intellectual Will in Schopenhauer's philosophy, subsequently echoed in Nietzsche's Dionysian principle, exemplified this subjectivist, vitalist turn in European philosophy (Tucker, 1999, p. 48). While Lewis, following Nietzsche, saw the “transformative creativity” of the aesthetic as a means to overcome the present (Gàsiorek, 2004, p. 122), he stopped short of Nietzsche's 'Dionysian' solutions, arguing (as he did against the Futurists’ proto-accelerationism) that we cannot simply replace the doctrine of a mechanism with one of 'organic mechanism.’ All this tells you, Lewis (1993, p. 512) says, is that the machine is alive, which is “not such an agreeable belief”, predisposed as men are to believe it is “partially inert”, and he denounces this “subtle darwinism” that calls itself “‘life’”

merely to “advertise death.” Bergson’s ‘lived time,’ for instance, was intended as a way out of mechanism to an intuitively-experienced time unblemished by the mechanical logic of linear homogeneous segmentation. Nevertheless, Lewis saw it as just another mechanical ‘process,' a “philosophical reification” of machinery's clockwork nature and industrial instrumentality (Sutherland, 2018, p. 10). Lewis asks: “For locomotion and movement, ‘organism’ in the making, or *becoming*, not *become*… what is that but a machine?” (Lewis, 1927, pp. 178-179)."[251]

Lewis fundamentally objected to this vitalist effort to situate a humanly fulfilling value system within nature itself. He accused Bergson and the reactionary modernists—in their drive for ‘unity in everything’—of seeking to subvert Cartesian dualism and relocate the “privileges of the mind” back into the “processes of nature” (Edwards, 2015, p. 31). Rather than trying to violently 'breakthrough' to a reality transcending this divided condition, Lewis (1979, p. 195) *affirmed* this self-contradictory state, cherishing the “traditional role” of human intellect as “the enemy of life… an oddity outside the machine”. For Lewis, creating a “conducive home” for human culture in modernity required a renewal of the Enlightenment’s division of subject from object and self from world—*not* their reunification (Lewis, 2017, p. 178). As such, his visual art aimed not at expressing our spiritual estrangement from the ‘real’ world of nature and mechanism—and certainly not at intimating that true reality existed beneath appearances, as Bergson claimed—but at suggesting there might be another world

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[251] As Tucker (1999, p. 50) further elaborates, Bergson’s conviction that only the intuitive faculties of the mind can grasp the reality of duration–thereby “glimpsing reality” in its “truest form”–constitutes a “repudiation of the intellect’s ability to perceive the reality beneath appearances” and poses an “open challenge to the Enlightenment.”

beyond reach that might more truly be our home (Edwards, 2015). While subjective modernists derived philosophical validation from Bergson's claim, Lewis—like another 'modernist idealist,' W.B. Yeats—was more concerned with the position of the soul "out(side) of nature" (Yeats, quoted in Edwards, 2015, p. 32).[252]

4.8.3. A New Rationality?

One could reasonably turn Lewis's criticism of Eliot's nostalgia against him on this point, arguing that he turned away from the modern world to another, seeking in art—like Margot in literature—a means to "remain outside of nature" and not "participate in its sunny dream" (Lewis, 1972, p. 308). Yet, as Yeats (1961, p. 405) described Berkeley, Lewis was both an "idealist and realist alike". He was not an advocate of a 'misty ideal' world—idealised or romanticised to the point of being unrealistic—but rather of what Žižek might term 'reality' in contradistinction to 'the Real' (Brent, 2008, p. 470). The conclusion of *Time and Western Man* affirms this paradox that Idealism offers a more sensuous, common-sense 'reality' than the philosophical and scientific 'Real': "the entire physical world is strictly unreal... and the unrealist part of it… is that part or aspect supplied us by science" (Lewis, 1927, p. 473).

For Lewis (1927, p. 467), as for Žižek, 'the Real' is counterintuitively associated with the 'irreal': it is the primordial, "brutal… incoherent" nothing which art keeps us from too close a contact with. Art (like Žižek's 'fantasy') creates a barrier that preserves our fragile 'reality' from

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[252] The phrase "out of nature" derives from Yeats's 1927 poem 'Sailing to Byzantium." In *The Revenge for Love*, Margot–a lover of Wordsworth and Ruskin–says she reserves her right to "remain *outside* of nature," a nature she finds more "artless" and "empty" than the abstract 'nature' evoked in her book, which she deems a more "subjective and obedient medium" than the "unsympathetic beauty" of the 'real' countryside set before her (Lewis, 1972, pp. 308-309).

intrusion by the Real: "madness" arises when this barrier is breached (Žižek, 1991, p. 17). This elucidates why Lewis's (1969, p. 331) art philosophy—self-styled 'super-naturalism'—preferred nature "pre-digested" and "transformed… into something outside 'the real'". Such a vision was diametrically opposed to the modernist 'passion for the real,' most potently expressed in the Futurist Manifesto, where Marinetti, racing his car at death-defying speed, declares:

> Let's break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind! Let's give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd (Marinetti, 1992, p. 146)[253]

While Lewis (1984, p. 43) theoretically agreed "with Pascal and with Newton" that "human reason is a toy of very limited availability", he concluded that the use reactionary modernists like Marinetti made of their "anti-cartesian technique" was "dangerous," solipsistic and "childishly irresponsible", whereas neoclassicists like Benda directed their rationalism toward "humane, sensible, and social ends." Like Žižek (1991, p. 17), Lewis recognised social reality was a "fragile, symbolic cobweb" and feared its being "torn aside" by the "intrusion of the Real." Consequently, Lewis regarded the Romantic withdrawal into subjective expression not merely as "impoverished" and "naive," as March-Russell (2012, p. 167) suggests, but also as

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[253] Marinetti subsequently crashes his car into a "maternal ditch" full of factory waste, gulps down the 'nourishing sludge' and is liberated from the centuries' dream of culture ('the horrible shell of wisdom') into the life of the present. He emerges from the ditch smeared with "good factory muck," and with this, Nicholls (1995, p. 86) writes, "the rite of mock baptism is complete, christening the venture under the triple sign of technology, speed and occult sensualism".

destructive and dangerous. (Lewis, 2017). Evoking the vehicular descents into the ‘maternal ditch’ of the Futurist manifesto or the “gorge” of *The Revenge for Love* (1972, p. 374), Lewis (1989c, p. 184) warns that the “car, which is our civilised life” is being plunged by such attitudes “over the side of the precipice” into a “nihilistic nothingness of zero.”

None of this is to deny the revolutionary elements in Lewis’s work, which have led—and still lead—critics to associate him with reactionary modernism’s romantic revolt against bourgeois rationalism and what Dugin (2023, p. 23) terms “everyday consciousness”. As Wragg (2010, p. 105) argues, there is a real sense the young Lewis sought to use the body not only as a diagnostic tool of modernity but also for its "regenerative" potential, as seen in the first Wild Body stories (begun in Brittany in 1908), where the 'wild' body's otherness to modernity was itself of strategic avant-garde value. By 1912, however, in watercolours like *Lovers* and *The Dancers (study for ‘Kermesse’)*, Lewis—while still employing radical modernist techniques—broke from the ‘poetic’ values of the modernist rebellion. The tautened, dynamic geometry translates Lewis’s early ‘vitalism’ into a “formalism” that delivers the wild body over to the “laughing observer” (Tickner, 1997): his ‘wild’ Breton characters are dehumanised into mechanical, instinctual forms— “gigantic fantastic insects descended upon earth from some other planet” (Konody, 1913, p. 10). Though not yet the stick insects of *The Crowd,* their ritualistic, ‘Dionysian’ peasant fêtes are no longer organic but “automatic” and “determined” (Normand, 1989, p. 78). The body begins to merge with Lewis’s 'externalist' critique of human limitation (Wragg, 2005a), paving the way for its full-fledged satiric treatment in *The Apes of God* (the un-English character of which so alienated Lewis from the Leavisite tradition).

While early Vorticist art seems to suggest a reified body, Lewis’s (1982, p. 315) comments on his 'wild body' period clarify that these works focused strictly on studying the "fascinating

imbecility of the creaking men-machines" as they engaged in their daily routines—activities whose "subtle and wider mechanism" merged, for spectators, with the "general variety of Nature." Julian Symons noted that Lewis increasingly perceived men and women as walking machines, their "appendages of ears, nose, hands oddly stuck on, their activities from speech and eating to excretion and copulation stutteringly awkward and comic".[254] Another acquaintance, Walter Allen, described Lewis's thinking as profoundly un-English, suggesting that the shorthand expression for it might be Cartesian (Symons, 1989c, p. 2).

As Edwards (1975, p. 211) summarises, the sense of the "absurd"—the hallmark of Cartesian man—was, therefore, a "major theme" of *The Wild Body.* Foster (like Burstein and North) takes this further, asserting Lewis (1997, p. 28) saw man as "nothing but" an absurdly "mechanistic thing… ridiculous only when we pretend to personhood"—with the comic originating from the spectacle of "a machine trying to act like a man " (Powe, 1987, p. 34).[255] It is erroneous, however, to assume that because works like *The Apes of God* stage an "all-puppet cast", Lewis endorses a vision of an all-puppet world (Arvidson, 2018, p. 793). While depicting men as "machines governed by mere routine" is one thing, [256] it is quite another to maintain they *are* machines—hence Lewis's qualification that men are only, to a "greater *or*

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[254] In *Men Without Art*, Lewis indeed writes that "Men are sometimes so palpably machines, their machination is so transparent, that they are *comic*" (1964, p.116).

[255] The precise quote Powe paraphrases here is: "all men are necessarily comic: for they are all things, or physical bodies, behaving as persons" (Lewis, 1982, p. 158). Powe adds that in the case of Kreisler, it may be equally appropriate to say the origin of the tragic Is in person trying to become a machine (Powe, 1987, p. 34).

[256] Lewis here is citing William Hazlitt's critique of Ben Jonson's characters as "like machines", as opposed to Shakespeare's who are "men" (Hazlitt, quoted in Lewis, 1964, pp. 111-113)

less extent", machines (Lewis, 1964, pp. 111-116). For Arvidson (2018, p. 793), Lewis's vision of human potential hinges on the critical awareness of a subject or observer who, being *less* of a machine than others, can seize the absurdity and "restage it as comedy, ideological critique, or both", visually reorganising the object until it attains a dignity transcending its initially degraded state.

It is *precisely* this Cartesian aspect of Lewis' thinking that is key to understanding Lewis's alternative response to mass culture. His "preoccupation with men as automata" (Tomlin, 1969a, p.28-29) was not part of "reactionary anti-humanism" (Delavenay, 1969, p. 18) but rather rooted in this belief in the separation of body and rational mind—a belief that we exist (i.e., are not 'mechanical') *only* to the extent that we reason consciously. As such, his externalising technique served as a satire on antithetical irrational philosophies that sought to counter Enlightenment rationalisation by emphasising subjective intuition and action. Lewis suggests the opposite response, exemplified in paintings like *The Crowd* and *Labour Deputation Marine*, where a *rational apprehension of rationalisation* is reflected through the visual ordering of the depicted subject and its "related aesthetic effects" (Wragg, 2005, p. 10).[257] The relationship between the observing subject (e.g., Tarr) and the object (Kreisler) in Lewis's fiction functions similarly: the observer embodies Lewis's real-world belief in the power of the independent intellect, particularly the artistic intellect, to throw the rationalised world into relief (Arvidson, 2018, p. 793).

It is for the sake of this figure that Lewis's cultural polemics wage their allegedly 'anti-humanist' campaign against subjectivism. Contrary to Foster's (2004, p. 137) claim that Lewis's

[257] A particularly poignant example of this, discussed in Chapter Six, is Pullman observing and thus redeeming Hachilah's macabre 'version' of Paolo and Francesca from Dante's fifth Canto.

work pushed "primitive detachment" to the limit as part of a strategy of dehumanisation, the Lewisian response to rationalisation—an insistence on the ability of critical intelligence to unmask the depredations of mass modernity—thus becomes a classic example of an attempt to reinvigorate a rational Enlightenment (Wragg, 2005, pp. 21-22).[258] Against the perception of Lewis as modernism's "quintessential anti-humanist," his attack on irrationalism in the name of individualism demands that his work be understood as part of a campaign against anti- or post-humanist cultural developments in modernism (Dematagoda, 2017, p. 36)—developments that resonate in the futuristic or suprahuman aspects of the NRR today.[259]

4.8.4 Lewis, the Mass, and Human Perfectibility

Hays (1992) defines posthumanism in modernism as an "aesthetic and epistemological" response to technological modernisation that embraced the anti-individualist implications of technological progress. It sought to channel the perceptual effects of modernity for collectivist socio-political ends—as seen in Hannes Meyer's functionalist modernism—or enthusiastically yielded the subject to the very forces that ensure its disintegration, as demonstrated by Hilberseimer's impersonal *Groszstadt-architektur* (Metropolisarchitecture). Interlinked with posthumanism was modernism's "reactionary anti-humanism," which served both as a

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[258] Lewis's devastating unmasking of modernity and all its "false 'politics'" is not from a reactionary viewpoint. For instance, in *The Revenge for Love*, the figure that unmasks the "bourgeois fraud" in the Popular Front is himself a communist (Lewis, quoting Citkowitz, 1984 p. 234).

[259] Significantly, Šehić (2023, p. 41) argues that transhumanism "started from modernist subjectivism" and "postmodern ethical nihilism", developed through posthumanism as a transitional phase, has now culminated as an "antihumanism which–through the idea of end of man–leads to the deconstruction of God's creation."

critique of humanism and a "living, affirmative promise" of man's "transformation into something other", through encounters with the other. (Kuhn, 2009, p. 32).[260]

In contrast to these transfigurative and deconstructive trajectories, Lewis's art presents technology as a disastrous reduction of humanity to the mechanical. Whatever their stylistic debt to modernism, Lewis's stick figures and grinning marionettes unveil the impossibility of man transcending his 'tragic' natural limitations. This (in part) illuminates why laughter features prominently in Lewis's satire: laughter, instinctive and primal—like "the mind sneezing" (1928, p. 238)—is comic proof of man's base attachment to nature.[261] It exposes the absurdity of post-human aspirations and renders the romantic glorification of nature equally grotesque (Normand, 1989, p. 77). One could even argue Lewis's 'hollow laughter' becomes a defence mechanism against utopian visions of transforming man: "laughter does not progress. It is primitive, hard, and unchangeable" (Lewis, 1982, p. 237).

This is not to suggest Lewis affirmed a 'static' conservatism that viewed humanity as incapable of bettering itself—otherwise, he wouldn't have spent so much satirical energy showing how modern society might learn from its historical errors (Waddell, 2013, p. 67)—but he was sceptical that humankind could endlessly (and unproblematically) transform itself through technology. Moreover, Lewis (1922, p. 26) stated that the art impulse rests on a determination that the "state of limitation of the human being" is more agreeable than the

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[260] Marinetti, for instance, conceived of technology as a Promethean means of "unleashing the 'wings… asleep in the flesh of man'" (1972, p. 91).

[261] Speaking of 1911's *Smiling woman ascending a stair*, Lewis said "that picture is a laugh though rather a staid and traditional explosion…the body is a pedestal for the laugh" (Lewis, quoted in Normand, 1989, pp. 74-74).

"state of the automaton'—our "human fallibility… our mechanical imperfection" secures our "superiority" and "independence" from the impersonal, mindless perfection of machines (1969b, p. 204).[262] For Lewis (1997a, p. 173), the best the machine can ever do is to enlarge man "as you enlarge a small photograph," but it can never "enlarge" or "multiply anything good"—after all, if the machine reproduced the Mona Lisa a thousand times over, this would "doubtful" be an improvement. McLuhan classifies this as Lewis's neo-Platonism: art is of the spirit, the divine spark in man, and can alone imbue the world with a quality of reality (2011). The destiny of the Machine, however, is bound to the "destiny of the Mass" (Lewis and Edwards, 1997a, p. 173).

Lewis's perspective contrasted sharply with reactionary modernists, who excluded technology from their otherwise total condemnation of mass society and viewed the machine not as the source of modern decadence but as a means of overcoming it. For example, Jünger's *Worker* saw technology as a centrifuge to propel Nietzsche's Will-to-Power into every aspect of life, aiming to reshape the bourgeois, materialistic civilisation that had previously rendered the masses' interaction with the machine as one of 'passive nihilism'. While Lewis, like Nietzsche, sought an "aesthetic overcoming of modernity" (Wragg, 2010, p. 106), he was never uncritically Nietzschean. He mistrusted Nietzsche's (and Bergson's) "slightly hysterical optimism" and was concerned about the effects of their "unrealistic visions of transcendence" (Edwards, 2000, p. 491) on his fellow modernists, whose anti- or posthumanist transvaluation

[262] Schenker (1992, p. 168) refers to this as Lewis's "theology of imperfection."

of the machine would not improve humanity but merely reduce it "to its own automatical level" (Lewis, 1984, p. 204).[263]

Akin to the Heideggerian critique of National Socialism,[264] Lewis recognised that technological romanticism—regardless of its ideological appeals to irrationalism and voluntarism—was merely a force that fostered further rationalisation. This fact was also recognised by Jünger's brother, Friedrich Georg, whose treatise *The Failure of Technology: Perfection Without Purpose* (1949) analysed the 'demoniacal' destiny of the machine and concluded that rather than counteracting moribund 'bourgeois' rationalisation, the machine was—as Lewis (1989a, p. 232) put it—on the side of the "thing," not a "differentiator," like art, but an "identifier" that merged man into a "mutually devouring," indistinguishable mass. Against such a process, Lewis (1927, p. 7) insisted on everyone's "formally fixed self" to preserve the individual subject from this collective surrender to technological forces (Frank, 1996, p. 942)—whether that surrender manifested as a drive toward impersonality or a desire for liberation from stable egos (Caserio, 2019, p. 41). [265]

From the shocked vantage point of the post-war era, Lewis devoted the next two decades of his writing life to "warning about and explaining" the anti- and posthuman "nihilism"

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[263] If, for the anti-humanist modernists, it is the will to power that is a road to civilisation's redemption, then for Lewis–as for Conrad–it is the will to power that threatens civilisation (Bell, 1976, p. 5).

[264] For further elaboration on this point, refer to Herf, 1984, p. 115

[265] This is why Rives's *Modernist Impersonalities* (2012, p. 57) errs in using Lewis to illustrate its otherwise engaging thesis that modernist impersonality serves as a "politically problematic response" to the effects of "democratization and the fictions of individuality and self-expression it is understood to support".

emanating from modern culture, philosophy, and physics (McLuhan, 1955, p. 98). During his final years of intellectual re-evaluation after World War Two, Lewis's use of rationality advocated for a form of Enlightenment, envisioning a new cosmopolitan 'world of reason'. However, as Wragg (2005, p. 26) notes, Lewis's most resonant insight arguably lay in his 'nostalgia' for an integrated and genuinely enlightened world where a text like *Hitler* could not have been written.

4.9 Late Lewis and Mass Culture

Lewis commenced these final years of intellectual re-evaluation at a philosophical and geographic remove from "enigmatic and shadowy" regions of tragic mysticism and violence, having departed eve-of-war Europe for the detached realm of a then-neutral America (Lewis, 1984, p. 42). This phase of Lewis's life mirrored that of his protagonist René Harding, the disillusioned philosophical historian who also left England on the verge of war, trading family, country, and career for an "abstracted state of angelic perfection" (Parker, 1973, p.265)—the purer form of "enlightenment" both saw as "awakening" in the New World (Lewis, 1965a, p. 321). From this vantage, Harding looked back on the Old World of 1939, condemning Spengler's "vortex of slush and nonsense" as the "pillage and carnage" his contemporaries glorified as "history": a "ten-millennia-long" conspiracy leading Europe to be engulfed in the dark "romanticism" of fascism and another cataclysmic war (1965a, p. 85, p. 351).

Harding's critiques of his contemporary historians substantiate *Time and Western Man's* attack on Spenglerian theory: the "proper subjects of history" should be the "creative happenings" of a culture—the "story of ideas, theories of the state… scientific discoveries, literature, art, philosophy, the theatre"—and not the "wars" and "civil massacres" of the

"uncreative life-stream" emphasised by Spengler (Lewis, 1965a, p. 83).[266] Contra Spengler, Harding adopts what his Hegelian contemporary R.G. Collingwood maligned as the "anti-historical" and "polemical" Enlightenment approach that rejects all "non-rational periods of human history" (Lewis, 1965a, pp. 92-93). Unlike Collingwood's view in *Self Condemned* that "genuine history" serves the needs of all men who "corporately created it" and is a "natural dialectic" between the "rational and irrational", Harding believes that the "story of mankind" should be drawn from the "designs" of these "inventive and creative few', the "heroic" creators who attempt to "build something" that "transcend(s) the historical" (pp. 84-92). [267] Sadly, according to Harding, the story we "encounter in the history books" is not the narrative of the "creative minority" but the "proceedings of the uncreative mass": a "blood-stained and idiotic record" characterised by the "outrageous blackguardism of hereditary or elective government(s)," a mass "gang-rule" that climaxed in the "wickedness and wastefulness" of the "great nationalist war" (1965a, p. 83, pp. 92-93).

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[266] This is possibly an allusion to ***War and Peace***, where Tolstoy disparages 'History' as the "unconscious, general, swarm-life of mankind" (2010, p. 649)

[267] Harding's view aligns more closely with Toynbee's than with Spengler's, as Toynbee, although he also saw the history of civilization as a mechanical cycle of rise and fall, believed that moments of challenge could foster genuine progress by stimulating the response of a 'creative minority' (Gilfedder, 2021). Notably, Lewis was reading Toynbee's A Study of History while writing ***Self Condemned*** (Parker, 1974, p. 279).

For Russell Kirk (1955, p. 532), what redeems Harding's stern indictment of mass modernity from the 'satire of nihilism' is Lewis's "staunch liberal prejudice",[268] namely, his belief that the twentieth century's "plunge backwards into barbarism" was not inevitable but the consequence of a betrayal of human reason (Lewis, 1965a, p. 94). This argument is summarised by René's friend Rotter: [269] had the vitalist "doctrine of the necessity of catastrophe" not intervened to incite "hatred and civil war," the "liberal idealism" of the nineteenth-century would have led to a twentieth-century rebirth—a "burst of inventive genius" reaching a "liberal climax" in the 1920s (pp. 76, 91). When Lewis speaks of "a new world of Reason" (1927, p. 391), a democratic world predicated upon "the desire for human freedom" (1941, p. 68), he expresses Harding's 'idealistic' belief that "man has within him the power to be something better than a Hardcaster or a Furber," and that the triumph of unreason and brutality is not fatalistically determined (Kirk, 1955, p. 532). The instrument for mass man's salvation is his reason; yet, amid the confusion of humanitarianism that is, in fact, inhumane, of collectivism masquerading as sympathy, of fallacious notions about human nature and the state, and of uniformity under the guise of justice, modern man is denying this reason (Kirk, 1955).

Kirk observes a similar argument developing in Lewis's polemical works of this period. While Lewis had long criticised doctrines of irrationalism, in these later writings, his proactive

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[268] Lewis always rejected the 'satire of nihilism'. The art of satire, as Lewis contends in *Rude Assignment* (1984), can survive only while the satirist stands upon a firm ground of moral principle, from where he can "assail his victims with confidence" (Kirk, 2008, p. 319).

[269] Rotter's real name is Robert Parkinson—another throwback to the "ages of Individualism" (Lewis, 1965a, p. 76)

liberal proclivities shine through more clearly.[270] Like Wagner (1957, p. 60), Kirk recognises that liberalism carries two meanings in Lewis's work: modern 'liberalism' is always used pejoratively, but less acknowledged is the Lewis who tells us "Western connotes Liberal"—i.e., the liberalism that is truly "Western" for having travelled the "Graeco-Roman highway" lit by the beacons of "Voltaire, Newton, Raphael, Dante, Epictetus, Aristotle, Sophocles, Plato, Pythagoras" (Lewis, 1984, p. 207). It is this 'good' liberalism (and 'good rationality') that Lewis defends—not the twentieth-century liberalism, which had turned into an ideology, but the "confident and robust" liberalism of nineteenth century England (Kirk, 1955). [271]

Although the nineteenth-century world was more materialistic than the "elegant scepticism" of the eighteenth, it nevertheless promised, as Rotter put it, a "new age of tolerance and intelligence", of "decency" and "humaneness" beyond the "odious survivals" of an "unenlightened past" (1965a, p. 91). Through Rotter, Lewis acknowledges the naiveté of expecting this 'liberal idealism' to endure very long, and after the "death-blow" dealt it by the war, laments that little has been done to reaffirm it. The glories of modern civilisation, the "civilising work" of Lewis-René's "creative minds" (1965a, p. 86), had been undone in mere decades by destructive reactionaries, "men of action" and time-philosophers who "presided at, and speeded, the dissolution of an ancient (read: Western) culture" (Lewis, 1984, 237). After the late 1930s— when, as Kenner (1954, p. 83) dryly notes, "human beings entered (his) world"—Lewis came to feel a "certain pity" for man, concluding humanity deserved better

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[270] Kirk (1955) goes so far as to suggest Lewis embodied the Lockean tradition of English liberal thought.

[271] To briefly summarise a key difference: for classic liberalism the individual is the primary unit of society; and for modern liberalism the "plural interest group" (Bell, 1976, p. 257)

than the “debased ‘Human Age’ the Devil was in the process of establishing” (Schenker, 1988, p. 70).

This marks a revealing shift in tone from the twenty-eight-year-old (1963, p. 45) who wrote to Augustus John: “I believe with a Calvinistic uncompromisingness that one cannot be too hard on the stupidities of one’s neighbours.” No longer could Lewis (1963, p. 246) be described as a “pure revolutionary" and "man of the tabula rasa" who valued perfection above all and "hated humankind for sullying it" (Schenker, 1988, p. 68). In various letters of the period, Lewis repeats a phrase that underlines his evolved outlook: "I see now that I thought... too much about our tribe... not enough about 'le genre humain' of the revolutionary song." (Lewis, 1963, pp. 324, 328, 334; Parker, 1973). This older Lewis resembles the spiritually reborn René from the latter part of *Self Condemned,* whose reconciliation with Hester (and, allegorically, humanity) parallels the “renewal-in-suffering” (Parker, 1973, p. 282) Lewis experienced while he and his wife were confined together in the ‘sanctimonious ice-box' of Methodist Toronto (Lewis, 1963, p. 309). Harding begins the book as a modern-day Faust whose “rejection of history”—like Lewis’s—stemmed from an “ascesis” intolerant of life’s “impurities” (Gąsiorek, 2004, p. 110). He abandoned human nature for tabula rasa ideals but, by fleeing to Canada’s abstract purity, discovered there (like his author) a renewed sense of unity with humanity—irony, as Balzac said, is the basic characteristic of Providence (1990, p. 25).

Although Lewis had always been sceptical of his contemporaries’ renderings of modernism’s ‘revolutionary song’, the revaluation of his *own* modernist value system and

growing sympathy with *le genre humain* remains largely overlooked by scholars.[272] A notable exception is Gąsiorek's *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (2004), which contends that sympathy and compassion for humanity become the "keys" to Lewis's project (Whittier-Ferguson, 2016, p. 6). Challenging the view of Lewis as a 'perfectionist' avant-gardist who empathised with Henry Ford and thought "mass culture is fine so long as it is for others" (Ferrall, 2001, p. 137), Gąsiorek presents him as a humane social critic who proclaimed, "I am…after my fashion…upon the side of the ruled. I identify myself with humanity" (Lewis, 1984, p. 206)."

While Gąsiorek's monograph is commendable for recognising in Lewis's evolving thought something beyond crude proto-fascism, disdain for the masses, or other overtly reactionary attitudes, we should be wary of *overemphasising* a 'humane bid for connectedness' as central to Lewis's work (Whittier-Ferguson, 2016, p. 6). Doing so risks overlooking a critical duality in Lewis, as noted by McLuhan (1955, p. 98), who observed that even as Lewis's political and social writings increasingly pursued a humanist course, his art remained on the "doctrinaire super-human" plane of "abstract art and neo-Platonic spirit". Art, for Lewis, is a "timeless

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[272] Materer (1976) was an early exception, observing how ***Self Condemned*** reflected Lewis's self-criticism in this period. Indeed, in ***Rude Assignment***, Lewis (1984, p. 203) "regretfully" admitted that in his 1920s polemics there was a certain intolerance "regarding the backward, slothful, obstructive majority-homo stultus."

thing"; its values are "universal and static"—contra the "mythic particularism" of fascist culture (Tucker, 1999, p. 64) [273] —and it *must* remain apart (Wagner, 1957, p. 157).[274]

This duality in Lewis's thought is epitomised in "The Credentials of the Painter" (1989b, pp. 75-6), which argues that art must be "the standard of value" in human society on the solidaristic basis that if "our values" were reduced to "the values of stones or matter generally… we will perish,"—yet, for precisely this reason, concludes that art "must" therefore "remain the monopoly of the intelligent few". Such is the rationale behind Lewis's (1984, p. 202) proposal of an "intellectual minority" forming the "occupational nucleus" of a "partitioned-off area of creative development" at the apex of the "massive human group". Although Lewis maintained this proposal held "no effluvium of eliteness" for him, it nonetheless reveals an ideological commonality with reactionary classicists like Maurras, who held the masses should cede all responsibility to an elite (Maes-Jelinek, 1970). The critical difference is that Lewis, *unlike* Maurras, argued this elite should be cerebrally rather than hereditarily selected. Still, by positioning creative elites at the zenith of an intellectual aristocracy, Lewis's Neo-Platonist defence of arts supremacy aligns him with a 'classical' tradition of order and authority "entirely foreign" to the "English cultural tradition" (Maes-

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[273] This distinction further separates Lewis's vision of art from Fascism's use of art in the aestheticisation of politics, contrasting especially with the type of Fascist art that conveys the "mythic particularism" of fascism by simultaneously suggesting its "regenerative potential" and stressing its uniqueness (Tucker, 1999, p. 64).

[274] This aesthetic principle haunts Lewis's sociological ideals (not the other way around, as Wagner claimed (1957, pp. 157-8).

Jelinek, 1970, p. 226)—and to the NRR's Herderian vision of "hierarchically organised, organic society" (Johnson, 2013).[275]

As this chapter demonstrated, the socio-political order defended by traditionalists coheres with a conceptualisation of society as an organic whole; it is far from the *absolutist split* or "frontier" Lewis (1984, p. 202) proposed between the ARTIST and the "changeless many."[276] Responding to massification and its purportedly alienating individualism, the various modernist 'returns to classicism' were, unlike Lewis's, rooted in unifying ideals—whether in visions of 'identity-in-diversity' or of art as a "socially binding, intersubjective, or collective experience" (Tucker, 1999, p. 57). In these idiosyncratic ways, they followed Burke's emphasis on the "interrelation" of "human activities" as a means to counter the Enlightenment's "separation" of society into "spheres of interest" (Williams, 1960, p. 12). Eliot, aligning with Burke, insisted that culture relied on a stratified but harmonious class system—just as the NRR draws comparable inspiration from Herder's notion of an "organic, corporative community," in which the social classes constitute a 'hierarchy within a body'

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[275] Even when Lewis rejected authoritarianism in favour of democracy as the political model best suited to his ideals (Waddell, 2015, p. 138), he still asserted, through Ned in *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!* that "if we are to have a democracy", it would be pyramidal in structure (Lewis, 1937, p. 6).

[276] In Eliot's case, for example, as Barac (2011, p. 191) notes, cultured existed at the "level of the individual, the group (or class) and the society as a whole." Schenker (1992, p. 111) similarly notes that Lewis proposes a less holistic divide between the "elect (artists)" and a "mass of sinners (nearly everyone else)"

(Sternhell, 2010, p. 292). [277] Both views oppose the idealistic and non-hierarchical 'separation' Lewis (1984, p. 199) envisions between the 'creative man' and his 'backward fellow'. [278]

Yet more importantly, the organic-traditionalist worldview, grounded in the Burkean notion of the State as the necessary agent of human perfection, contrasts with Lewis's "theology of imperfection" (Schenker, 1992, p. 168), which posits that our "mechanical imperfection," revealed through Cartesian self-consciousness, ensures our independence from "artificial, mindless perfection" (Lewis, 1969, p. 204). Interlinked with this metaphysical defence of the autonomous, rational individual is Lewis's (1984, p. 66) argument that the state, being concerned solely with power, is "below" the individual, just as politics are 'below' morals and crucially "below the reason". [279] This is a critical attitude of Lewis's to emphasise, for it typifies the neoclassicist opposition to the "barbarous" Platonic doctrine that the State can "condition" and improve the individual (1984, p. 66) —a doctrine reformulated today by Dugin in *Political Platonism* (2019).

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277 Contemporary scholars correctly view the NRR as inheritors of the anti-Enlightenment tradition that traces back to Herder. Steve Bannon, for instance, echoes Herder's romantic organic nationalism by regarding the working class or peasantry as the group that imparts a society with its defining traits (Teitelbaum, 2020).

278 Lewis's (1937, p. 44) opposition to hereditary hierarchies led him, in ***Count Your Dead, They are Alive!*** to positively contrasting the German "classless" society with the "bogus fatuity of our class-machinery"

279 Lewis (1984, p. 237) claimed there are "no good politics"; it is merely an instrument of power, wielded by the State to control the masses. There is a hint of a contradiction here, however, for he also acknowledges politics as a necessary evil (Wagner, 1957, p.31), aligning with Machiavelli's view that men are not inherently good. Augustus John (1952, p. 73), incidentally, once referred to Lewis "our new Machiavelli."

Similarly, while allowing for exceptions, it is crucial to restate that even the most ‘elitist’ of Lewis's reactionary contemporaries were never ‘classical’ in his sense of the word, i.e., “exclusively rationalist” (Maes-Jelinek, 1970, p. 226). As Chapter Three outlined, in response to the instrumentalising tendencies of modernity, many avant-garde artists abandoned the aspirations of a rational Enlightenment in favour of "negation, revolution” or the embrace of collective subjectivity, a “new sensibility… now self-affirming or self-creating” (Pippin, 1991, p. 41). In contrast, this chapter demonstrated how Lewis's growing insistence on the critical intelligence's ability to uncover the depredations of modernity reflected his alternate desire to reanimate a rational Enlightenment—that is, to confront the crisis of values by attempting to reinforce what remained of the Enlightenment's rationalist aspirations. (Wragg, 2005a, p. 21). As even Leavis (1966, p. 243) acknowledged, Lewis stood, in a “paradoxically high-pitched and excited way”, for “common sense.”

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described how the NRR and reactionary modernism are both anti-Enlightenment movements opposed to the democratic “mass” culture that emerged from Enlightenment thought. Both sought to counteract the ‘disenchanting’ and ‘alienating’ effects of rationalism and individualism on society by searching for new spiritual values—often expressed in irrational, vitalist, or subjectivist forms—and by establishing “organic” institutions within modernity (Antliff, 2007, p. 19). In the most extreme case of fascist modernism, their intervention in mass culture aimed to weaken the massified element and strengthen the national one, rejecting Enlightenment individualism and universalism for political and cultural particularism (Tucker, 1999). This could be premised either on the

regressive mythification of a pre-Enlightenment age or on the *progressive* mythification of an alternative future, such as Sorel's notion of myth as a "spur to unreflective and violent action" on behalf of a future state (Tucker, 1999, p. 62). In contrast, we showed how Lewis's non-vitalist valuation of reason over intuition and his classical insistence on art's universal and static values—which opposed art serving a romantic nationalist function by celebrating action and mythic particularism—set him in a characteristically antagonistic relation to reactionary modernism.

Furthermore, we suggested that, counterintuitively, Lewis's classical emphasis on humanity's limitations was the primary reason why he was not a reactionary nationalist. As Wagner (1957, p. 95) dryly notes, Lewis could not conceive of "any one nation" as "more intelligent than any other". When applied to the core issue of Lewis's 'proto-fascism', this assessment highlights why Jamesonian interpretations of Lewis, such as Burstein's (1997) or Foster's (2004)—as well as the NRR's— are mistaken in claiming that Lewis's mechanistic characters represent an anti- or posthumanist "fascist body" that "stands in for a previous incarnation, the völkish body, that of the people" (Burstein, 1997, p. 139). In fact, Lewis's pessimism towards mass man *inverts* the Herderian notion that ''just like individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, its own culture" (Sternhell, 2010, p. 18). As demonstrated, the crux of Lewis's argument is that they are *only* true to the mechanical mass culture that has become the norm. Hence Lewis's determination that "the machine… has made nonsense of nationalism" (Lewis, quoted in Lamberti, 2012, p. 223), leading to his universalistic advocacy of a "proto-McLuhanesque globalism" (Stacey, 1993, p. 149).

This conclusion raises questions about the relationship between Lewis's critiques of nationalism and the now more prevalent phenomenon of ethnonationalism, which the NRR

favours over nationalism in response to universalism (the second driver of the 'crisis of values'). [280] De Benoist and Mohler have defined this new ultra-nationalism or 'ethno-pluralism' as an alternative vision that rejects homogenised 'world culture' in favour of a radicalised Herderian separation of cultural groups into "Volk or *ethnie*" (Schlembach, 2013, p. 10). Likewise, Dugin's Neo-Eurasianist "internationalism"—characterised by Sedgwick (2019) as Herderian and by Fellows (2018) as an offshoot of Romantic nineteenth-century European Nationalist thought, coupled with a rejection of Western rationalism—proposes a plurality of civilisations as a corrective to the "baselessness" of Western universalism. The theory maintains that Russians and other civilisations can overcome an "atomised" and "rationalised" unipolar system through an alternative "multipolar world order" based on a shared traditionalist perspective rooted in mystical contemplation, elite rule, and a civilisation's historical, ethnic character (Fellows, 2018, pp. 5, 56, 70).

In adopting this ethnopluralist perspective, the romantic 'organic nationalism' discussed throughout this chapter becomes not just a repudiation of mass democracy and the universalism implicit in the Enlightenment model of rationality but, more fundamentally, a reaction against the 'disenchantment' of life driven by the global instrumentalisation of reason (the third and ultimate driver of the 'crisis of values'). The remainder of the thesis will contend that Lewis's insider-critique of 'organic' nationalism, irrationalism, and the drive towards unity—as outlined in this chapter—can be extended to encompass not only

[280] Ethnonationalism is defined by Johnson (2013) as: "the idea that every distinct ethnic group should enjoy political sovereignty and an ethnically homogeneous homeland or homelands." It is distinct from multiculturalism, which holds that multiple ethnic groups should share the same homelands and governments.

ethnonationalism but also the NRR's interconnected goal of countering a disenchanted world by establishing a new civil or political religion in the form of a "transcendent organic nation" (Griffin, 2007, p. 244).

CHAPTER FIVE: UNIVERSALISATION AND THE CRISIS OF VALUES

Turning first to universalisation, one can immediately grasp the urgency of this issue by noting the intensifying alarm of current liberal thinkers who fear that modernity's unipolar dream is fast yielding to ethnonationalism and multipolarity. This development undercuts the earlier certainties of Habermas (1990) and Fukuyama (1989) that post-Cold War globalisation would usher in a lasting era of post-national universalism and global democracy—if not a world-state, the abolition of conflict, and the end of history. Instead, scholars are questioning whether the much-touted "escape of the political" from the "categorical framework of the nation-state" has contrarily led to the rise of more diverse and consequently "less controllable" forms of the political; that is, whether liberating the political from national constraints has simply released nationalistic forces on a "global scale" (Pankakoski, 2019, p. 157).

How scholars frame these challenges is critical in determining effective responses. Rather than approaching such trends ahistorically, it is better to acknowledge the deep prehistory of radical-conservative globalisation thought and how these historical dimensions are being mobilised against global political unification (Pankakoski, 2019). For example, the NRR's advocacy of globality without universalism traces back to Lewis's reactionary contemporaries, who were among the first to confront the phenomenon we now term 'globalisation', especially after World War One's technologisation of everyday life ('total mobilisation'), and the subsequent centralisation and totalisation of states (Pankakoski, 2019). Jünger, for instance, felt the war had transformed the Earth as a 'globe' into a battlefield, unifying it under

the banner of progress—at the cost of war, he laconically noted, “the great principles of reason” had attained “planetary dominion” (2001, p. 579).

Lewis (1969b, p. 259) also observed that technological and cultural changes after the war had turned the earth into a cosmopolis, making it “ONE place” rather than a “romantic tribal patchwork of places.” Unlike his reactionary contemporaries, however, Lewis (1984, p. 192) reconciled himself to the “desirability” of this new “cosmopolis”, seeing it as a remedy for all the old “competitive nationalist emotions,” Although Lewis’s cosmopolitan internationalism cannot easily be reconciled with liberal, pluralist approaches, he nevertheless came to see “cosmic man" and a "world society" as the only “guarantee of freedom” in the atomic post-World War II age (p. 98), fearing that a “third world war” would mean destruction of “unspeakable totality” (1989c, p. 182).

Jünger, however, like the NRR, theorised that only a balance of empires and continents and empires, rather than universalism, could uphold world order (Pankakoski, 2019, p. 169). Moreover, he believed the planetary energies of revolution and war should be harnessed to form this new totalitarian order, both domestically and internationally, aiming to replace “weak liberal globality” with a global constellation of nationalistic powers (Pankakoski, 2019, p. 161). The masculine ‘communities’ of the trenches were to remedy not only decadent mass culture but also democratic internationalism, which had no “firm grounds,” stood “between nations,” and aspired to establish a “mixture of Esperanto nations” based on “expediency” rather than “*organic* ties” (Jünger, 2001, pp. 142, 144, 189). By hypothesising a ‘planetary’ anti-universalism, Jünger and other conservative revolutionaries were among the first to consider the possibility of a global perspective transcending mere internationalism.

This strain of alternative modernist thought—anti-liberal yet international— continues to influence how the NRR conceptualise global issues, particularly in moving beyond reactionary nationalism towards a globalised conservative revolutionary politic. For instance, de Benoist's advocacy of a post-nationalist identitarian Europe echoes another of Lewis's contemporaries, Drieu la Rochelle, a French avant-gardist who described his fascism as post-nationalist (Spektorowski, 2016) and wrote of a Europe *contre les patries* (La Rochelle, 1931). In de Benoist's vision, this translates to a new European integral "organic" federalism, as opposed to the "technocratic Hamiltonian federalism" of Europe's liberal elite (Spektorowski, 2021, p. 89). Rejecting the nation-state or indeed a union of nation-states (such as the EU), the NRR proposes the seemingly 'post-modernist' concept of a "decentralised federation of organic, ethno-cultural identities." (Shekhovtsov, 2009, p. 702). Yet, as Shekhovtsov points out, this concept is more precisely a modernist or "alternative modernist" re-synthesis of earlier theories of organic nationalism with New Left theories of political regionalism, one that transitions in focus from the organic nation to a *federation* of organic nations which conjointly embody the "profound 'historical' spirit of cultural Europe" (Spektorowski, 2003, p. 123). This recalls the German Romantics' dream of "reconciliation of multiplicity in unity" (North, quoted in Mead, 2015, p. 7) and is quite distinct from the Lewis of the 1940s and 50s, who described his self-exile in the new world as having turned him from a "good European" into an "excellent internationalist" (1969c, p. 12).[281]

[281] During the six years Lewis spent in North America during the Second World War, he embarked on a "passionate defence of internationalism" and vehemently repudiated the European nationalisms he had defended in the thirties (Hammond, cited in Lamberti, 2012, p. 297).

As the preceding chapter outlined, the NRR and reactionary modernist conception of cultures as organic, homogeneous, and historically rooted ethnic communities—rather than as transient social and 'artificial' constructs—originates in German Romanticism, particularly in Herder's ideas.[282] Embracing Herder's notion that each cultural group or *Volk* possesses a singular "centre of gravity" to which individuals are "by nature" rooted, the NRR propose the propagation of numerous such 'homogeneous' ethnic communities within a 'heterogeneous world'—advocating, essentially, ethno-democracy at the local level and the 'great State' at the geopolitical level (Spektorowski, 2021, p. 89). For de Benoist (2012, p. 248), encouraging this new pan-European unity is "an absolute necessity" vis-à-vis 'regulating' globalisation and challenging the multiculturalism embodied by the 'Great Melting Pot' of the United States—a model Lewis (1969d, p. 276) declared himself to be "heart and soul" in support of against the "non-melting" one of Europe.

Intersecting with de Benoist's concept of regional authenticity is Dugin's (2023) comparably 'Herderian' vision of Eurasianism, which also asserts the superiority of the *Volk* over the modern nation-state and champions a 'Eurasian empire' built on principles akin to the European Right's 'organic federalism' (Spektorowski, 2021, p. 91). Just as de Benoist's 'pluriverse' stresses the pluralism of cultural consciousness, so Dugin emphasises the particularity of the Heideggerian concept *Dasein* as key to ethno-regionalism. Since *Dasein* varies by people and culture, Dugin concurs with de Benoist that a multipolar world is inherently superior to Western liberal universalism. To challenge the commercial global model

[282] In an article on Herder, another NRR thinker, Markovics (2019), notes that "unlike the nation the people isn't an artificial community, but an historic organism".

dominated by Anglo-American 'sea powers', Dugin extols the continental "land powers" of a Russia-oriented "Neo-Eurasian Order" (Shekhovtsov, 2009; Spektorowski, 2021).

Those who regard Lewis as a critical link in this metapolitical lineage may find his views in *Anglosaxony* (1941) surprising. The final section, "Sea-Power and Universalism," almost uncannily anticipates Dugin's arguments by valorising the sea as having given birth to Anglo-Saxon democracy.[283] Lewis argues that the roots of Anglo-Saxon democracy are to be sought in the ocean wave, while "nationalist-fascists are mystically obsessed with land and have as their watchword 'blood and soil" (1941). Yet Lewis's (1941, p. 68) internationalist Anglo-Saxon, representing the ocean, feels "no atavistic twinges of remorse" at the idea of "dissolving nationalities and the monster blending of human breed." After 1949, Lewis advocated for a cosmopolitan world government patterned after the United States, suggesting it was necessary to prevent global nuclear war. He dismissed racial and nationalist foundations for political cohesion, critiquing the 1930s German nationalism that relied upon a "blood-tie, uniting the entire Volk," and heralded the United States as a model "great community" in which "race has been thrown out" (1969c, pp. 30-31).[284]

Lewis's overlooked 'post-fascist' work represents a significant departure from reactionary modernist and NRR thought, beginning with *Anglosaxony's* appreciation of democracy as a

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[283] *Anglosaxony* (1941) contends that democracy is "merely a name for the Anglo-Saxon peoples and their traditional way of behaving." For Lewis, the "universalism" of the Anglo-Saxon, and of Anglo-Saxon democracy, finds its "most perfect expression" as a "ship's crew": "the Norsemen are after all our ancestors, and they have never cared so much as all that about soil… what the earth is for the Hitlerite… the ocean is for us."

[284] Lewis (1969b, p. 18) proclaimed the post-racial US as "a new kind of country," the "Cosmopolis" that "the Greeks of antiquity only dreamed of."

“natural phenomenon” and culminating in *America and Cosmic Man’s* championing of a ‘rootless’ internationalism over ‘artificial’ reactionary political utopianism. This late-career intellectual revaluation—commenced in the late 1930s after Lewis witnessed the emergence of Fascist parties grounded in racial essentialism—was further shaped by his rejection of utopian reactionary modernism during World War II, coupled with his growing attraction to gradualist ideologies as a humane alternative to Übermensch schemes and “models of human perfectibility” (Waddell, 2015, p. 138). Lewis’s late-career, full-throated rejection of reactionary modernist ideology is significant given how intimately his early work intersected with these ideals—ideals which continue to shape the NRR’s anti-liberal internationalism. In the 1920s, for example, Lewis tempered his forward-thinking advocacy of a 'melting pot’ with criticisms of cosmopolitanism, leading him to advocate an isolationist Europe united by race rather than nationalism. By the mid-1930s, he adjusted this view, aligning with the “politics of national sovereignty” (Waddell, 2015, p. 141).

We must examine these shifts more closely to understand Lewis's ultimate return to internationalism and its implied critique of the 'alternative modernist' response to universalism and the crisis of values. Such analysis will demonstrate how Lewis’s metaphysical opposition to ‘unity’ and rootedness made this development inevitable. The remainder of the chapter will explore Lewis’s argument for the internationalisation of a specifically Anglo-Saxon democratic model and how this emerged from a revaluation of ‘nature’ and gradualism over utopian ‘blueprint’ planning—even if his endorsement of a Cosmic Superman revealed how much the modernist “man of the tabula-rasa” (1963, p. 274) he remained.

5.1 The 1920s and 1930s: the Melting Pot and National Sovereignty

1929's *Paleface*, one of Lewis's earliest politically-focussed polemics, reflects an ambiguous stance on reactionary thought and universalism. His support for internationalism at this point was not based on equality (as with liberal pluralism) but on the belief that a local 'melting-pot' could cleanse Europe of outdated nationalist sentiments.[285] While Lewis (1929, p. 15) critiques slavery and *theoretically* supports racial equality, he contends that sentimental and "ethical" arguments for equality had hitherto been accompanied by "darker and darker cloud(s) of poison gas…. gathering upon the horizon" —implying liberal arguments for equality were ineffectual in preventing war and must be substituted by alternate stratagems for international peace. Hence, Lewis proposed that race—i.e., "European whiteness" (Stinson, 2016, p.175)—might be a cohering principle for "a new West" and a pan-European "Melting-pot" could dissolve national boundaries and prevent the sovereign disputes that ignited World War One (1929, p. 256). He writes:

> It has always been fratricidal that people should be taught to disembowel, blind and poison each other on the score of their quite imaginary 'differences' of blood or mind, but today there is less excuse for it than ever. So why not a Melting-pot? (Lewis, 1989c, p. 119)

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[285] In his letters, Lewis (1963, p. 368) cites Schopenhauer's view that a man who was "proud of being a Frenchman, or a Spaniard, or an Englishman or what not" could have very little else to be proud of. "He (Schopenhauer) meant of course that there were more important things about an individual – or should be – than his national label."

It now seems extraordinary that an author who could inveigh so strongly against national sovereignty would, just two years later, write a favourable study of Hitler. To put it mildly, Lewis's infamous 1931 book represents a shift, if not a complete reversal, in his attitude towards internationalism (Symons, 1989c). Lewis later admitted that, in the early 1930s, he erringly considered the "doctrine of national sovereignty" rather than the 'melting-pot' as the "indispensable guarantee of freedom" but denied any deeper ideological inconsistency, insisting he had "never been" a nationalist and that as early as BLAST had been antinationalist, viewing nationalism as antithetical to art (1984, p. 98).[286] While critics like Wagner (1957) claim that the '1930s Lewis' jettisoned such artistic ideals (along with his 'internationalism') in favour of fascism, Lewis was correct to protest that his missteps during these years resulted from a warped ideological consistency. As established, Lewis fundamentally believed that art was a 'phenomenon of separation' which emerged with the arrival of the "individual or Subject" but would vanish with the "suppression of the Subject" (cited in Edwards, 2011, p. 236).[287] Thus, while Lewis' political views—as politics—were not always stable or humane, they *were* consistent in their desire to safeguard the subject (and, by extension, Art) from any 'unifying' forces that threatened to suppress it (Edwards, 2011). His misguided temporary defence of fascist nationalisms stemmed not from seeing a world state as the ultimate evil but

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[286] These quotes, taken from two career retrospectives nearly ten years apart (1948's *Rude Assignment* and 1939's *Wyndham Lewis the Artist from "Blast" to Burlington House*), indicate Lewis' desire to amend his reputation on this score.

[287] Lewis's argument here is primarily summarised from 'The Perfect Action'—available only in typescript at the Lewis collection in Buffalo. A published variation of it can be found in his essay "The Dithyrambic Spectator" (1971, p. 204).

from fearing an “indivisible” and specifically communist world state within which the subject’s individuality would be suppressed and the art *BLAST* championed cease to exist. [288]

As discussed in previous chapters, Lewis believed the salvation of the contemporary individual rested not in collective unity but in his/her further individuation. In the early 1930s, Lewis viewed Communism as the primary threat to that individuality: it was the apotheosis of mass society, a “proletarian imperialism” which suppressed the subject and rendered him indivisible from his environment (Lewis, cited in Wagner, 1957, p. 71). Paradoxical as it now seems, this was why Lewis positioned nationalism and fascism *against* communism as counterbalancing forces, hoping to establish a “new political equilibrium” (Lewis, 1989a, p. 325), a resistance to the internationalism of the League of Nations he regarded as a "collectivism" of underdogs (Wagner, 1957, p. 83).[289] Lewis rationalised that the nation-state resisting this "collectivism" was analogous to his idealised individual struggling to distinguish himself against the levelling forces of the mass society.

Lewis always resisted ideological monisms, fearing in them the total subsumption of the individual into the collective—traits he later attacked in fascism’s ‘political religion’. In 1937, however, the focus of this attack was the United States, the USSR, Britain, and France, which he saw as constituting a restrictive "monism”—a ‘moneylender's dream’—that was heroically

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[288] For Lewis at this point, the threat of a communist world state was embodied by the “world-brotherhood at Geneva” (Lewis, 1936, p. 144)

[289] *The Art of Being Ruled* presented a comparable argument regarding global peace. Even if it skirted fully advocating an authoritarian future, it nevertheless advocated replacing capitalistic, class-based, and nationalistic democracies with a fascist "world-state and a recognised central world-control" (1989a, p. 367), which Lewis believed would unify humanity and prevent global conflicts (Waddell, 2015. p. 241)

defied by the decentralised "pluralism" of Fascist nation-states (Wagner, 1957, p. 83). This foreshadows Dugin's vision of ethno-nationalist powers resisting the maritime commercial empire of today's Anglo-American order. Indeed, in Lewis's fiction of this period, characters opposed to internationalism—like Don Alvaro, the Francoist prison-warder in *The Revenge for Love*—are portrayed sympathetically. Conversely, the Bailiff's 'democratic' camp in *The Childermass* is rife with "cosmopolitan imaginary" (Papastergiadis, 2012, pp. 103-4) and populated by a transnational "emigrant mass" (Lewis, 1965a, p. 9).

5.1.1 The 1940s: A return to Internationalism

A year after *The Revenge for Love*, as the true horror of Hitler's nationalism became evident and a Second World War loomed, Lewis (1984, p. 192) modified positions yet again, urgently emphasising "the great disadvantage of competitive nationalist emotions" and advocating cosmopolitanism." This shift is evident in *The Mysterious Mr. Bull* (1938), which disputes essentialist concepts of English national identity and advocates a new type of internationalism. Rather than arguing for a "racially-essentialised pan-Europeanism" (as in the 1920s), Lewis now suggests a "non-patriotic Britain" that was "cosmopolitan in its outlook" (Stinson, 2016, pp. 179).

Lewis's return to internationalism was further emphasised in his 1939 works, beginning with *The Hitler Cult* (1939), where he acknowledges that, despite its flaws, English society was more desirable than the tyranny and racial bigotry of Hitler's Reich (Waddell, 2015).[290]

[290] Lewis (1939, p. 254) writes "The mere thought of Hitler's Germany almost reconciles one, does it not, to our ramshackle civilization?"

Similarly, in *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939),[291] Lewis no longer depicted Nazism as a counterforce to communism but satirises both as monstrous standardising forces, as products and propagators of the Machine Age, inflated puppets contesting their ideological 'differences' like cartoon characters in newspapers (Ayers, 1992). A year later, in *America, I Presume* (1940, p. 59), an auto-biographical character disparages Hitler as a "barbarous little mountebank" and "demagogue", while in the concluding chapter of *Rotting Hill* (1951b, p. 307), the narrator symbolically shoots targets of Hitler and Mussolini at a fairground rifle range and then makes peace with "poor old silly Britannia" by dropping his "last threepenny bit" in her mug for alms— a small but symbolic act reflecting Lewis's call in *Anglosaxony* for the global spread of a 'natural' Anglo-Saxon democracy over 'artificial' reactionary nationalism.

Despite these significant developments, it wasn't until the end of the 1940s that Lewis wholeheartedly embraced cosmopolitanism, rejecting race and nationality as meaningful political categories. In *America and Cosmic Man*, *Rude Assignment* and *Writer and the Absolute*, Lewis (1984, p. 72). advocated for a 'world state' and identified as a "'pure internationalist."[292] *America and Cosmic Man* proposed the multi-racial makeup of the Americas as a "model for all other nations, still battened down within their national frontiers" and that a US-style "World Government" was "the only imaginable solution" to global chaos (1948, p. 200). Lewis (1963, p. 368) contended that the shrinking of the world "to the size of a pea" made "glaringly evident" the absurdity of traditional nationhood and criticised reactionaries who, in response, sought to "artificially" entrench themselves "more, rather

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[291] An ironic but unfortunate title for an anti-fascist text.

[292] This transition dismayed many of Lewis's long-time supporters such as Roy Campbell (Wagner, 1957)

than less, in a stupid nationalism and growling isolation: as if we were Neanderthal Man rather than twentieth-century Man."[293]

America and Cosmic Man thus seems to complete Lewis's radical shift toward progressive universalism and has even been interpreted as a precursor to Fukuyama's *The End of History* (Brown, 1998). However, while Lewis's 'post-fascist' transformation distinguishes him from anti-enlightenment nationalism, it does not, *ipso facto*, align him with liberal pluralism. As Bachman (2016, p. 154) notes, Lewis's "cosmopolitan internationalism" and advocation of an America-like world state merely adopts Bergson's (1932) opposition between closed and open societies but switches the value terms associated with each. Rather than aiming for the realisation of Bergson's "open society," *America and Cosmic Man* envisions a global *closed* society enveloping the planet after the catastrophic nuclear war Lewis anticipated. Indeed, evidence suggests Lewis's advocacy for a liberal democratic world-state was grounded in strategic political pragmatism rather than idealism (Lafferty, 2009, p. 153), and he remained sceptical that democracies could be authentically free societies (Stinson, 2016). In his correspondence regarding the book with conservative writer Geoffrey Stone, Lewis stated: "What I recommend is a matter of expediency only—of necessity… not what I should myself enjoy" (1963, pp. 457-458).[294] The letter concludes:

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[293] In various correspondences of the 1940s, Lewis foresaw these antagonists would eventually become "globalonists" (Lewis, 1963, p. 368), envisioning that this "global war" would necessarily lead to a "global peace," wherein "at the worst," a "kind of universalism… which is much better than internationalism" would be "imported into the thinking of every national" (p. 329)—accurately predicting the anti-liberal universalism of the NRR today.

[294] Geoffrey Stone was an American Catholic convert and contributor to the conservative journal, *The American Review*.

> The choice to my mind is a black one, between (1) cosmic or universal man or (2) no man at all. The earth is too small to sustain all the old romantic tribal and national identities (Lewis, 1963).

If Lewis's declaration is taken at face value, then the apparent disparity between his 1930s support for fascism and his 1940s-1950s Americanism may be less significant than initially seems.[295] In both cases, Lewis aligned himself with political doctrines he wasn't in full intellectual accord with because, at the time, he saw them as the best means for securing the survival of the individual subject (Lafferty, 2009, p. 153).[296]

This leads to the conclusion that, even if Lewis's 1930s faith in certain "positive" political trends may have been misguided, his core vision of a successful society from that time through to the 1950s never fundamentally altered. At his core, Lewis stood for the "*principium individuationis"* (Lewis, 2017, p. 186) and against all collectivising drives to find 'unity in everything'. For Lewis, unity was the "correlate of nothing" (Edwards, 2011, p. 236), under whose doctrines—philosophical or political—man could not retain his humanity. This conviction led Lewis finally to reject both pan-European and nationalist bases for political

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[295] For Maes-Jelinek (1970), Lewis's inconsistency in politics is a paramount example of the contradictions which pervade his work, and she argues that Stephen Spender (1967, p. 372) was correct in claiming that "the politics of the reactionaries are secondary effects of their thoughts about the tragedy of culture in modern industrial societies."

[296] In *Rude Assignment* (1984, p. 106), Lewis likewise explains away the 'inconsistencies' between his "radically" differing "changes of view" on internationalism. He writes: "if I am found advocating today a maximum of centralisation, whereas twelve years ago I was all for the doctrine of the sovereign state, these diametrically opposite principles both have been adopted… with the same end in view"–to avoid war."

unity and herald America as the exemplary— if 'perfectionist'— model for a post-racial, post-national society.

Stinson (2016, p. 182) cautions against interpreting Lewis's late-life rejection of racial difference as an embrace of liberal pluralism: Lewis does not address or advocate respect for "cultural differences"; rather, he argues for their "radical dissolution" into the figure of a 'Cosmic' man.[297] Nonetheless, Lewis's proposition of a cosmopolitan "rootlessness" which *transcends* "racial doctrines" (or even "thinking in terms of soil, or rootedness") diverges sharply from the reactionary notion that "the nation is an organism" (Stinson, 2016, p. 179)— a viewpoint Lewis indiscriminately ascribes to Franco, Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler (Lewis, 1969c, pp. 172-173). Much like Nolte (1966), Lewis increasingly associates *all* fascisms with anti-transcendence or anti-universalism— "transcendence" denoting any thought system that moves beyond an obsession with roots and particular differences toward universal ideals like freedom and individuality (Tucker, 1999, p. 56). Fascism's counter-reaction to this notion was to defend and advance the 'rooted' differences the transcendent impulse sought to eradicate,[298] a stance that Nolte, like Lewis, argues reveals the fundamental similarities between German and Italian Fascisms. It also clarifies the principles underlying the NRR's promotion of ethno-nationalism today, an 'alternative modernist' vision to which Lewis's critique of collectivism and rootedness can be revealingly applied.

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[297] Lewis (1969b, p. 203) even proposes a "perfectly eclectic, non-national, internationally minded creature, whose blood is drawn… from all corners of the earth, with no more geographical or cultural roots than a chameleon."

[298] This explains, in a nutshell, fascism's counterrevolutionary espousal of nationalist and racial 'rootedness' and its rejection of "democracy, liberalism, capitalism and individualism" (Tucker, 1999)

5.2 The Case against Roots: The American Elysium and Democratic Gradualism

One of Lewis's (1938, p. 227) most prescient insights was that such organicist nationalist thinking "tends to internationalise itself," a trend manifest today in the NRR's desire to create a federalism of organic nations, one that might revitalize Europe by implementing a "hierarchically structured organic community" within a post-liberal, ethno-pluralistic order (Shekhovtsov, 2009). Inspired by Herder, ethno-pluralism mythologises *ethnies* themselves as homogeneous, historically rooted communities rather than the 'nation'—a concept which found its first political expression in reactionary modernists like Jünger.[299]

To clarify, following Herder, the NRR regards *peoples* rather than the nation as the true historic "organism", above which only civilisations exist (i.e., aggregates of *peoples* sharing a common religion, history and living space). For Markovics (2019), as for de Benoist, this ultra-nationalist, civilisational perspective must supersede nationalism as a means of challenging contemporary liberalism: Europe should form a "common empire" in the "traditionalist sense" to ensure domestic peace and safeguard its "sovereignty" against the "onslaught" of globalism and multiculturalism. Against multiculturalism, where diverse ethnic groups occupy the same territories and governments, the NRR consider the only proportionate response an 'organic nationalist', confederational empire representative of Europe's "diverse" ethno-regional *peoples* but excluding non-Europeans.

Aligning with this Herderian belief that people are "deeply rooted in their cultures," NRR thinkers like Tomasiewicz reject the Enlightenment conception of man as a "citizen of the

[299] For Markovics (2019), unlike the nation the people isn't an "artificial community, but an historic organism".

world" (Bar-On, 2013, p. 144)—a direct contrast to *America and Cosmic Man's* praise of rootlessness as essential for world citizenship. In "The Case Against Roots," Lewis (1948, p. 217) celebrates America's lack of rootedness: "Everyone," he writes, "has left his roots over in Poland, Ireland, Italy, or Russia, so we are all floating around in a rootless Elysium".[300] Lewis's argument was hailed in the Partisan Review as "a brilliant and original defence of what we have gotten into the bad habit of calling 'alienation'" (Bazelon, 1949, p. 862). Bazelon's remark encapsulates Lewis's contrast with the NRR's overall argument that globalisation and the massification of society are leading to alienating individualism—an alienation they link with the erosion of the hierarchical order of traditional societies, the dissolution of ethnically-based communities, and man's disconnection from a "greater whole" (Woods 2007, p. 40). Bazelon concludes: "he (Lewis) calls this rootlessness", but more truly, it could be called "'freedom.'"

America symbolised freedom for Lewis: a *tabula rasa* society where identity could be shed, vitality renewed, and Europe's nationalistic tragedies forgotten (Powe, 1987, p. 40). In *Self Condemned*, the New World represented "the abstract, the imaginative, the planning intellect and the executive will of man" (Parker, 1973, p. 286)—an ideal world, a "wholly

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[300] Lewis (1945, pp. 518-519) presaged this theme in an article written for *The Sewanee Review*: "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 in itself at all desirable. It is a matter of surprise that the bluff of the rooted boys has never been called–I mean radically so, by a plain statement of the excellence of what is the opposite of rootedness… The sight of the root depresses me…"

excellent vacuum" (Lewis, 1945, p. 519). When Lewis wrote "The Case Against Roots," he had returned to post-war London but was soon looking back to the "transatlantic lands" (1963, p. 310) in yearning.[301] He contrasted the New World with the Old, deciding that everything "obnoxious in the Family" is encountered in the latter, while all man gains by "escape from the Family is offered by the former… The United States is full of people who have escaped their families, figuratively" (Lewis, 1989c, pp.133-134; Parker, 1973).

Lewis's hero-protagonists—termed "Men from Nowhere" by Kenner (1954)—have always embodied this ideal, being Individuals who realise themselves by rejecting their roots, families, and past— a tradition stretching from Tarr to Zagreus and culminating in Harding's forsaking of Europe, family, and career for the New World. René, the perfectionist antihistorian, articulates Lewis's optimism for the 'Cosmic Man', feeling America promises an "awakening which amounts to an Enlightenment" (1965a, p. 321), one that would transcend the Old World's nationalistic 'monstrosities' after their purgation in the flames of World War Two. The symbolic destruction of Europe by war (the hotel fire in *Self Condemned*) suggests that René's "indifference to roots" had much appeal for Lewis. Yet, as René's subsequent fate suggests, it also served as a "cautionary tale" (Parker, 1973), leading Lewis to propose not only an idealistic universalism but a specifically democratic universalism.[302]

5.2.1. Rootless Perfectionism

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[301] As Michel (1971, p.136) notes, Lewis was hardly in England a year before we read of his desire for a visit to the United States.

[302] Similar to Pound in *The Pisan Cantos*, Materer (1976, p. 146) that Lewis both admits his protagonist's faults and the extremity of his positions, and occasionally tries to justify them.

The symbolism of the ruined hotel as a microcosm of a world at war seems unambiguous but gains complexity when applied to René's character. Throughout *Self Condemned*, the claustrophobic Hotel Blundell becomes a metaphor for René's mental state (Materer, 1976, p. 148): in his *tabula rasa* isolation, René realises he has been separating himself from half of his life—severing his mind from his body, like his French namesake (and his Cartesian author). Thus, the fire represents not only the purification of Europe but also the purgation of Rene's perfectionism. His growing intimacy with Hester marks this transformation; he tells her Canada's barren purity had "dried out of me a great deal that should not have been there. And you have become integrated in me" (1965a, p. 239). Yet René's newfound reconciliation with nature and humanity (particularly the feminine) is short-lived. The fire turns to ice once he recommences his intellectual historical pursuits. Hester realises he is replicating his old life patterns, becoming a "glacial shell", much like "the gutted, frozen remains of the Hotel Blundell". Despite her wish to return to London, they remain in Momaco—with disastrous results. Harding, who "discovered the secret of History", suffers the "doom of any Prometheus" (Kenner, 1965, p. xiv) and ends his career in an academic "cemetery of shells", the Faculty having "no idea" it was such a "glacial shell" who had come to live among them, primarily as they were themselves "unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing" (Lewis, 1965a, p. 407).

With the downfall of "yet another Lewisian superman", *Self Condemned* typifies a pattern that pervades Lewis's later novels from *The Revenge for Love* to *The Vulgar Streak* to *The Red Priest*: just as Hester's perspective prevails over René's, so Margot, April, and Mary's views of reality—not their Übermensch husbands—ultimately incarnate the higher truth (Parker, 1973,

p. 286). Of these figures, the perfectionist Harding most closely reflects Lewis.[303] Harding is not only a prototype of 'Cosmic Man' but a representative of Lewis's earlier perfectionism: the radical modernist of *The Caliph's Design* and the anti-historian of *Time and Western Man* who advocated a classical 'ahistoric' mind as a corrective to the time-mind.

Lewis (1984, p. 168) retreated from these extreme positions in later life, writing, "What I call a 'perfectionist'… in art or politics… is an apriorist, working in the void… with a propensity to ignore the conditioning factors." Equally, a decade after *Time and Western Man*, when he wrote to Symons that "my mind is ahistoric," he sounded more apologetic than proclamatory: "I have learnt my lesson… in spite of being the pure revolutionary, I am a bit of a realist too" (1963, p. 246).[304] While Lewis did not entirely forsake *tabula rasa* ideology—as shown by his conception of a Cosmic Superman transcending race and family—he nevertheless acknowledged that gradualism, at least for the masses, was preferable to political theories denying that a "community, tribe, or nation, grows like a tree", with "its past… as real as its present" and upon which "radical changes" should and cannot "be imposed… arbitrarily" (Lewis, 1941, p. 72).[305]

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[303] Significantly, the word 'perfectionist' first appeared in Lewis's letters (1963, p. 366) when describing Harding

[304] Lewis added that would welcome the "clean sweep," because he felt there he "could build something better…than has been left by our fathers." Reflecting on this letter, Symons (1989c, p. 3) reflects: "that 'something better' he (Lewis) identified not as a political revolution but as a finer art, which would be achieved in a society revering works of art as the greatest products of civilisation."

[305] Lewis (1938, p. 231) further stressed that human beings "are not bricks and mortar, or ferro-concrete," indicating a heightened sensitivity to the dangers of employing such metaphors

Lewis's eventual advocacy of democratic universalism hinged on this "renewed denunciation" of utopian and particularly "messianic, perfectibilistic, and totalitarian" thought (Waddell, 2015, p. 140). He acknowledges that "the organic and the historic (inevitably)… gets the upper hand… everything always ends with the discomfiture of the theorist" (1938, p. 262). Inverting, as it were, the reactionary interpretation of the word 'organic', Lewis (1941, p. 36) concludes that it is *Fascism*, not democracy, which is the 'artificial' intellectualist contraption— "the fascist, like the communist, is a theorist." Democracy, by contrast, is a natural phenomenon, likened by Lewis (p. 18) to "one of those carvings in the Mountain Temples of India… cut out of the rock-wall of a cave, not quite emerging from the substance in which they are embedded". Democracy is only ever a "part of something…" and "can only be considered in relation to something else"; as such, it never becomes an all-engulfing ideological monism "desirous of imposing its belief on all and sundry"— in short, it is "not politics at all" (p. 29).

5.3 Universalism and 'Super-Naturalism'

In the 1940s, Lewis's support for democratic universalism as a natural system coincided with a return to naturalism in his visual art—a shift further illuminating Lewis's break with reactionary modernist thought. Critics captivated by Lewis's Vorticist period (like Kenner) often overlook the significance of this late stylistic shift from abstraction to naturalism, despite

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when speculating about societal change–as Waddell (2015, p.139) notes, this is quite a departure from the writer of *The Art of Being Ruled* who had hypothesised about utopianism in a "more detached manner."

Lewis (1963, p. 254) declaring the "'death' of abstract art" in the 1940s.[306] Suspicious of how easily abstract art had established itself in a bourgeois culture that should have rejected it, Lewis recognised that modernist abstractionism had come to occupy the same place as the humanistic naturalism before World War One: both reflected man's post-Renaissance conviction that he could remould the world according to his preconceptions (Schenker, 1992). For all his radical commitment to art "organising nature" (Stearns, 2001, p. 344), Lewis always recognised it was the artist's privilege to be no more than "imperfect imitators of that authenticity" (Edwards, 2000, p. 549).[307]

In the 1940s, therefore, just as he had previously rebelled against humanism by producing abstract art, Lewis now dissented from the 'new norm' by adopting naturalism (Schenker, 1992, p. 172-173). "Today I am a super-naturalist", Lewis (1939, p. 59) declared—quite a development from the Vorticist who advocated a "complete divorce from the external sensuous reality" (1963, p. 504) and from Harding who condemned the "lifeless" naturalism of *Middlemarch* by hurling it out to sea (1965a, p. 156). While Lewis (1939, p. 59) had always remained conscious of the "underlying conceptual truths that are inherent in all appearances", he was now content to "leave them" as he found them rather than "isolating them" in perfectionist and abstracted "conceptual arabesques."

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306 Lewis wrote an article on the same topic, "The End of Abstract Art', for *The New Republic* in 1940.

307 More precisely, Lewis (1915, p. 75). held that the artist not imitate nature, as the Purists did, but create in its manner, "with all the beauty of accident" yet "without the certain futility that accident implies."

Lewis's transition from abstraction to naturalism was thus, paradoxically, motivated by a recognition of limits and an understanding that these limits guarantee man's humanity. He illustrates this point with a comparison of two cities:

> Venice is built upon the most disadvantageous basis imaginable… Manhattan on the other hand depends for its existence upon the rock-mass beneath it… you may cite Venice as an example of man imposing his will upon the waters, but in fact the charm of Venice is the waters… With Manhattan the rock underneath is of no importance except as a socket and platform (Lewis, 1997a, p. 172).

Lewis continues that Venice is a "specimen of human art," signifying man's submission to the natural beauty of the waters. In contrast, Manhattan is a "specimen of the non-human", and after weighing up the two, he concludes Venice is the "better place", as the Venetian is the "better man'. It is in this vein that he concludes Democracy is the 'human' system, being "living" and "constantly changing" and "only part of something else…". In contrast, theoretical political models that "impose" the "ready-made… upon recalcitrant organic bodies" are artificial and "non-human" (Lewis, 1941, p. 29).

This shift in perspective was visually manifested by Lewis creating his own most 'human art' to date: a series of paintings considered by Walter Michel (1971, pp. 136-142) as the "imaginative and gayest" of Lewis's career. These works range from Etty-inspired nudes and

bathers, evoking a new "feeling of harmony between man and nature", to *Allégresse Aquatique* and *The Island.*[308]



Figure 5: Wyndham Lewis *Bathers* (1942).

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Despite the soft outlines, however, there was "still a hint of the human puppet underneath Lewis's newly-flowing lines" (Smith, 1994, p. 541)—suggesting that his gradualism and reconciliation with nature were extensions, not reversals, of his revolutionary principles (indeed, the originals of *Homage to Etty* show Lewis's nude figures were mechanistic in

[308] *The Island* was described by Stacey (1993, p. 133) as the last "major imaginative picture of Lewis's life" Michel (1972) goes further, believing that Lewis's work is one of the important pictures of the century, and the equivalent of one of Cézanne's large Bathers.

origin).[309] Nonetheless, as Schenker (1992, p. 173) observes, the joyful style of these later paintings—executed in "the mixed idiom of pure-abstraction-and-stylized-nature" (Lewis, 1963, p. 505)—indicates the "nature" Lewis returned to was less Newtonian than the one he had abandoned.[310]

The salient point is that these paintings reveal Lewis's growing acceptance of the 'natural' —particularly the feminine—as a source of value in itself, rather than merely a negation against which his positive values (the perfectionist realm of 'genius') are defined (Edwards, 2000, p. 538). Lewis's previous distrust of the "material, generative" elements of existence—often coded in his work as misogyny (Gąsiorek, 2001, p. 567)— is overcome by an acceptance of "the continuity between artistic creation and the natural process" that he had previously "thought of as its opposite" (Edwards, 2000, p. 504). This pictorial development is consistent with his revaluation of democracy as the more natural, 'living' system suited to human individuality, change and growth.

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309 Michel (1971, p. 140) offers a contrasting perspective, suggesting that the distinct 'biomorphic' quality of these late works signifies a break from Vorticist ideals, as the "vortex of abstract organic forms" they display seems to reject rather than embrace mechanism.

310 In *Homage to Etty*, for example, offers a striking contrast to *A Battery Shelled*, which had inverted the nature-mysticism of Korin's screen as a means to symbolise the instrumental and destructive energies with which modern Western science had substituted for nature (Gilfedder, 2021). The "scalloped plumes" of the shelled battery unit take the place of Matushima's clouds, the rocky islands turn into outcrops of corrugated iron, and Lewis (1919, p. 29) himself described the Mk. 19 guns as being "of exactly the same importance, and in exactly the same category, as a wave on a screen by Korin."

What is extraordinary is that this transformation occurred when Lewis, like Harding, was isolated on a foreign continent, chronically poor, and contemplating another "great nationalist war" his intellectual efforts had been powerless to forestall. It would have been understandable if Lewis's pessimistic vision of human existence resulted from this desperate state, but that was a product of his Vorticist prime (Kenner, 1966, p. 235). Instead, from his shabby and lonely hotel room at the Tudor emerged this set of brilliant watercolours proclaiming a "mature reconciliation with life" (Stacey, 1993, p. 14). Displaying a renewed interest in the human figure within the landscape, these Forties' drawings, with their prominent sea imagery, are described by Stacey (1993, p. 112) as the fruits of an artist giving full reign to his imagination's inner gaze—an imagination more "vivid, lighter, and deeper" than ever before (Michel, 1971, p. 143).[311] It is as if Lewis, the idealising realist cast away on the *tabula-rasa* isle of America, conjured, Prospero-like, these "fantastic and introspective" designs to defy fate, history, and the "very sea-mists" that were to enshroud his vision (Stacey, 1993, p. 153).[312]

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311 The sea is at the heart of Lewis's literary as well as visual production. In ***Rude Assignment*** (1984, p. 122) he reflects on his "primordial literary backgrounds, among the meadows and rocks and stone hamlets of Finisterre, thundered at by the Atlantic…"

312 Lewis was diagnosed with glaucoma in 1941, but by 1951, he had become completely blind due to an inoperable cerebral tumour that had been pressing on his optic nerve (Stacey, 1993, p. 112). As an art critic for The Listener, Lewis reflected stoically on his blindness, remarking: "Pushed into an unlighted room, the door banged and locked forever, I shall… have to light a lamp of aggressive voltage in my mind to keep the night at bay" (Lewis, quoted in in Michel, 1971, p. 137).

The shoreline theme in these artworks underscores their relevance to Lewis's universalism, especially their focus on the "vast planetary abstraction of the OCEAN," along with the ports, ships, and seafarers celebrated in *BLAST* (1914, p. 22). This idealisation of fluid, maritime Anglo-Saxon universalism served Lewis as 'counter-propaganda' to organic nationalism and, by implication, ethnonationalism. The "open-mindedness and tolerance" of the Anglo-Saxon, Lewis (1963, p. 310) asserted, was that of a man whose "homeland is the ocean": one "cannot dig a root out of the salt tides of the Atlantic Ocean or North Sea… yet that is where the roots of the Englishman are found… rather than in any Boden" (1941, p. 36).[313]

Most importantly, it is in these sea images that Lewis's reconciliation with nature and the feminine—intricately linked to his idealisation of Anglo-Saxon democracy as universalistic, mutable, and cosmopolitan—finds its visual anchor. This is particularly evident in the paintings inspired by William Etty, the nineteenth-century artist renowned for his historical and mythological nudes.[314] Etty's maritime nudes, like Lewis' semi-abstracted bathers, link the figure of the naked woman to water, symbolising not only her sensuality but also her

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[313] Lewis returns to this theme in a 1945 article "The Cosmic Uniform of Peace", writing that the English are of all people the "least susceptible to racial doctrines, or even to thinking in terms of soil, of rootedness. Their roots being as much in the sea as in the land, and having regard to their phenomenal dispersion, it is but natural that should be so" (Lewis, 1945, p. 508).

[314] Despite the apparent differences between Etty and Lewis, both were "externalists" and shared a fascination with the "oceanic"—particularly the interaction or tension between the littoral figure (solitary or grouped) and the wave-lapped shoreline. The main distinction in their approaches lies in the tone of their work: Etty's treatment was "hot," while Lewis's was "cold" (Stacey, 1993; Michel, 1971).

connection to the generative flux. Water, as a "transitional element between earth and air," recalls the ancient association of the female principle with birth and fertility and the mythology of Venus rising from the waves (Saunders, 1989, p. 98). Lewis's acceptance of this conceptual association and the reconciliation it implies between creative and natural processes is highlighted particularly in *Allégresse Aquatique*, which Michel describes as representing the "fertilisation of an earth spirit in a corner of a world of cloudy and watery spaces in which float huge marine shapes" (1971, p. 107). Such paintings visually correlate with Lewis's notion that "democracy, like Venus Aphrodite, was born of the sea" (1941, p. 53).

In summary, the evolution of Lewis's visual art complements his 'post-fascist' argument that democratic universalism offers the possibility of change and improvement, while fascism regards such universal ideals as freedom, justice, and equality as unrealisable and even undesirable (Egles, 1997). "Democracy is like the sea", Lewis writes, and like "all other living things", is "constantly changing" (1941, p. 26).[315] His vivid sea imagery—preoccupied with the enduring bond between humanity and the watery medium from which we primordially sprang (Stacey. 1993)—embodies the "dramatic contest" Lewis posits between the "rootless", generative ocean and "the stuffy conservatism of the land-locked peasant-mind" (Lewis, 1963 p. 310). The sea, as a traditional symbol of mutability, stands in "stark" allegorical "opposition" to the "Blut und Boden" approach of the Nazis" (Lewis, 1963 p. 310). It becomes *Anglosaxony's* "appropriate symbolical counterweight" to Hitler's "much-advertised Soil": "against Hitler, the Peasant, let us put forward a Seaman to stand for us - a symbol of animal restlessness

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[315] In similar tones, Lewis defined his ***Creation Myths*** series as fantasies "of the worlds moving round together in a chaotic corner of creation"—emphasising the "idea of ***Creation***" as being synonymous with "spontaneous growth" (Lewis, quoted in in Stacey, 1993, p. 119)

against the Nazi symbol of animal fixity". The "wave," Lewis (1941, pp. 51-52) concludes, represents the elasticity of freedom, intangibility, and a sense of rootlessness and change, and "should be our watchword as Boden is theirs". [316]

This analysis of Lewis's 'super-naturalism' has shown why, in his conception of "power politics" (1984, p. 88), land and sea serve as symbolic counterparts of fascism and democracy. We can now conclude by examining how Lewis's rejection of organic nationalism for 'sea power' equally contradicts the organic federalism proposed by the NRR—setting the stage for Chapter Six's discussion of his metaphysical opposition to the 'sacralisation' of the organic community in these alternative modernist models.

5.4 Sea versus Land: Universalism and Ethno-Nationalism

The symbolic division suggested by Lewis's work significantly mirrors that of Schmitt, whose *Land und Meer (1942)* framed world history as a confrontation of land and sea, using World War Two as an example of a 'telluric' European state (Germany) challenging the 'Atlanticist' latitudinarianism of the Anglo-Americans.[317] Today, this theme is most

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316 Lewis (1945, p. 507) later defined *Anglosaxony* as "counter-propaganda" against the Axis propagandist attacks upon "Anglosaxon maritime universalism," but reflected that his argument maintained a validity "beyond the special pleading of the moment".

317 According to Hooker (2008), much of Schmitt's later international history can be interpreted through the dialectical relationship between land and sea. Relevant to Lewis's argument is Schmitt's assertion that England, and later the United States, embraced a radical concept of oceanic space that challenged the territorial basis of the European state. In this context, Schmitt frames the world war as a geopolitical struggle between land and sea, positioning Germany as a traditional European state in contrast to the Anglo-American spatial worldview.

prominently reflected in Dugin's work, where continental Eurasia symbolises a resurgence of authentic ethnocultural heritage in opposition to the "maritime universalism" of Western liberalism (Lewis, 1945, p. 507). Dugin (2023, p. 19), like Schmitt, identifies a "fundamental geopolitical dualism" between East and West, combined with an “ethnic dualism”: the “land-faring 'ideocratic' Russia” (i.e., the Slavic world and Eurasian ethnicities) versus the “island-borne, 'plutocratic' Anglo-Saxon West”. Mythologically, Dugin associates Eurasia with the ancient Greeks and the Atlanteans with the sea: an age-old conflict between the maritime geopolitics of Island states and the telluric geopolitics of the Greek Olympian gods (Spektorowski, 2021). In this schema, Dugin’s pan-continental vision of Eurasian ethnonationalism stands directly opposed to the democratic sea-mindedness championed by *Anglosaxony*, the geopolitics of which Lewis outlined thus:

> …we the island-nations, with our sea-power, will be the outsiders, in the coming years… of the big power-groups that are in process of formation, we are the inhabitants or controllers of the great ocean wastes, outside the old continental nucleus.... We shall subdue the land-citadel in the end.” (Lewis, 1963, p. 290)

The ideological struggle finds its earliest—and, for Dugin (2023, p. 17), most "lucid description”—in the work of Edwardian geographer Halford Mackinder. Mackinder's argued that history’s eternal battle is waged between maritime, mercantile island nations and the peoples of the world’s largest landmass, namely the super-continental Russian ‘heartland’. For Eurasianists, the maritime nations are Dugin’s Atlanticists, representing ‘fluidity’ with their

sea-faring nature and preference for globalised commerce.[318] Against this Atlantean fluidity, Eurasia embodies “rock-solid”, traditional, “eternal," and above all Absolute values (Lachman, 2023). In this model, Dugin (2023, p. 7) argues that the cosmopolitan individual (the ‘cosmic man’) is swiftly limited by the Absolute, causing the "society of persons" to lose its openness and potential to develop “in any and all directions”. The Absolute conditions and shapes the individual as a “sculptor does with his clay."

Eurasianism thus brings a “final clarity” to the historical conflict between sea and land (Fellows, 2018, p. 195). The sea signifies "rootlessness and Western cosmopolitanism" (Dugin, 2023, p. 66); the land is characterised by hierarchical rule and dominated by religious ideals and “absolutism” (Fellows, 2018, p. 195), where the “principle of integrity, the authority and sacral nature of power, and divine law predominate” (Dugin, 2019, p. 18). For Dugin, this aligns with Dumont’s division between the “methodological holism” of non-Western societies based on an ‘organic, integral nature’, and the “methodological individualism” of Western societies based on an affirmation of the Many (Bubandt and Otto, 2010). In his “apocalypse-rich writings” (Lachman, 2023), Dugin anticipates a "final, no-holds-barred smackdown" between these two eternal enemies, where the Eurasian land-power emerges victorious, and the invidious Western individual of the open society is “obliterated."[319] Dugin (2023, p. 8) asserts

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[318] Dugin (2023, p. 133) notes that it was only after Britain unified its lands into a unitary state that she regarded herself as an “Island”, changing her religion, shifting over to a “maritime form of existence”, and laying the “foundations of capitalism and industrialization”.

[319] Dugin’s works are more nuanced this necessarily brief overview suggests. In *Templars of the Proletariat* (2023), he writes that the “national angel” of Russia as an “angel of integration” – a certain “luminous being who teleologically strives to unite within itself other angelic entities without defacing their individuality, but rather elevating their individuality to a universal,

that National Bolshevism (an ideological root of Eurasinaism) is, in its broadest scope, not merely one of the ideologies inimical to individualistic liberalism but rather its "total, deliberate, and essential antithesis." It is a worldview premised upon a "total and radical negation of the individual and his centrality" and on promoting "alternative (pan-continental) models founded on the Absolute" (pp. 7-8)—that is, models which affirm "the One' against 'the Many'.[320]

Dugin's vision aligns with the European NRR's program to counter universalism through a "community of shared destiny"—a model founded on the belief that preserving the organic society requires making *the community* the highest value or Absolute—essentially, to create a *civil religion* (Faye, cited in Bar-On, 2013, p.196). As Bar-On (2013, p.11) notes, the NRR remain "firmly rooted" within a modernist framework in this desire to create a "sacralised yet

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imperial breadth". Nevertheless, it is true that Dugin is radically opposed to ***Western*** individualism and "rationalized egoism" and consequently the modern, capitalist society built upon this ideology. He identifies the nature of Capital's 'angel', as per Tradition, as 'Mammon', whom he characterises as "the demon of the Atlanticist West and the perverted 'angel of cosmopolitan Capital.'"

320 In 2019's ***Political Platonism***—which re-theorises the two theses of Plato's Parmenides as "models of the world and society"— Dugin rejects Western democratic models based on 'methodological individualism' (represented by the "liberal-atomists" Democritus and Epicurus) and instead praises regimes based on the Platonic theses that affirm 'the One' (2019, pp. 22-23). He argues that Western democracy is rooted in the affirmation of the Many, emphasising plurality rather than unity, whereas Plato's Republic is a "Republic of the One" (2019, p. 28).

secular" political state that will "re-enchant" Europe in a transnational spirit.[321] Jünger, for instance, adopted a "theological perspective" to redress the nihilism of a radically technologised world while simultaneously advocating the "political remedy" of consolidating nation-states into larger wholes (Pankakoski, 2018, p.169).

This intertwining of international "power politics" and theology became an increasingly pressing concern for Lewis in his final years, as indicated by *Anglosaxony's* conclusion that "fascism is a religion, democracy is not" (1941).[322] To grasp the theological significance of Lewis's championing of democratic universalism and individualism—and the contrast it offers to the NRR's Absolutist response to desacralisation—we must turn to Lewis's most significant late fiction, *The Human Age,* and analyse the insider-critique it launches of power, political religions, and the relation of the modernist intellectual to these forces.

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[321] In this vision, the nation and race are transfigured into "mighty 'sacralised communities'" and "laboratories of a 'utopian future'" for the collectivity and for the world at large (Kallis, 2008, p. 3).

[322] One of Mussolini's infamous speeches indeed declares that "fascism is a religious conception, one in which man is seen in his "immanent relationship with a superior law and with an objective Will that transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership in a spiritual society" (Mussolini, quoted in Cohen, 1962, p. 330).

CHAPTER SIX: DESACRALISATION AND THE CRISIS OF VALUES

The last chapter showed how 'multipolar nationalism' feeds into the NRR's response to the 'disenchantment' of Enlightenment modernity, namely their ambition to reinstate a transnational sense of collective meaning through forming "sacralised communities" and civil and political religions (Kallis, 2008, p. 3). Dugin's work is particularly revealing here. According to Shekhovtsov (2009, p. 697), Neo-Eurasianism—which provides a "clear break" from nationalism toward the New Right ethnopluralist model—is "sacralised" by Dugin and his followers as a "political religion". Describing National Bolshevism as a "super-ideology" shared by all enemies of the "open society", Dugin (2023c) suggests it stands for "*any* version of the Absolute… *any* motivation leading to a negation of the 'open society'".[323] He asserts that National Bolshevism exhibits a "will to universalise the Absolute at any cost," promoting an "ideology and philosophical program" that integrates all intellectual forms opposed to the 'open society' into a "unified conceptual-political bloc" (2023, p. 8). [324]

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[323] Popper's 'Open Society' is defined by Dugin (2023, p. 6) as one centred on the individual and their "fundamental traits", such as "rationality, discreteness" and "activities unmotivated by a global teleology."

[324] Fascism studies differentiate between 'political' and 'civil' religions, though NRR thought encompasses both. While a 'civil religion' denotes a secular belief system that can exist alongside traditional religious practices (Gentile 2000), political religions demand absolute conformity to a singular "mythical core" (Kallis, 2008, p. 3). They aim to displace or replace existing faiths and serve as the indisputable foundation for national rebirth and salvation

While it would be overreaching to claim Lewis as a radical thinker, what makes him a valuable counterpoint to the NRR's ideology is that he arrived at a contrasting viewpoint almost despite himself. This applies not only to *Anglosaxony's* reconciliation with gradualism and democratic universalism but also to the heterodox metaphysics of *Time and Western Man*. Lewis (1927, p. 390) stated that while he *personally* prefers the notion of a Thomistic God—a rationally comprehended absolute Oneness—he recognises that since no man can apprehend the absolute except in terms of the "hungry Self" and thus reduce the divine to the human, we ought better to think of the cosmos in terms of multiplicity (Schenker, 1992, p. 193).

As argued throughout this thesis, the root of Lewis's distinction from both reactionary modernism and NRR thought lies in his recognition of "multiplicity as a condition of value" and his defence of the rational subject against the reactionary drive for "unity in everything" (1927, p. 295). Such principles contrast sharply with Dugin's (2019, p. 25) advocacy of the "fundamental unity" of societal systems arranged hierarchically from the One to the Many, where all hierarchy stems from a higher principle. Consequently, just as Lewis opposed the sacralisation of politics in its nationalist twentieth-century form, he would likely have opposed the NRR's 'pan-nationalist' variation—critiquing, as he did, all systems that locate values in the transcendent, wherein individuality is subsumed into a "monotonous Absolute" whose

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(Gentile, 2004). Political religions not only secularise religious roles and concepts but also seek to sanctify secular institutions, beliefs, and figures of authority (Tal 2004, pp. 30-31).

“invisible weight” crushes, and is “meant by its hierophants to crush, the personal life" (1927, p. 398). [325]

As if to illustrate the continued relevance of Lewis’s critique, NRR thinker Johnson (2013, p. 130) posits that a transnational sacralised community would regard itself—its origins, existence, and destiny—as the “highest good” to which “all lower values must defer”. Similarly, Dugin (2023, p. 132), reflecting on the concept of "Empire,” writes that as a state structure, Empire is the "highest category," akin to “sacred and all-encompassing gnoseological” concepts including “‘God,’ ‘Truth,’ and the ‘Good’”. He argues that the “sacrality of Empire” stems from its ‘gigantic’ boundaries, which convey an “absolute, universal message,” a “global mission” that defines the “essence of the imperial state” as having both “historical and national commonality,” adding that “the boundaries of the Empire are directly linked to its foundational theological orientation.”

This goal of establishing a re-sacralised religion of politics continues a larger modernist wave of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with NRR and modernist thinkers echoing Herder in perceiving the “greatest threat” of mass modernity as the disappearing of collective belonging, “confusion between abstract individuals and peoples” (de Benoist,

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[325] Dugin’s (2019, p. 28) views are more complex than can be fully explored here, but briefly, his model of a society grounded in transcendent values does not entirely conform to Lewis’s critique. While Dugin acknowledges Plato’s Republic as a “Republic of the One,” he emphasises the transcendence of this concept and argues that the normative Republic must remain “open at the top.” He asserts it “cannot be self-identical” because the One does not exist immediately– in other words, the Republic must necessarily be structured around something “greater than itself… An apophatic hole must gape at the centre of the Republic. Only then will the Republic be holy.”

quoted in Bar-On, p.67), cultural homogenisation, and the secularisation of life or “disenchantment of the world” (Sanromán, quoted in Bar-On, 2013, p. 98). Against these dislocating effects of rationalistic and individualistic liberalism, reactionary modernists—such as the avant-garde movements arising in Italy before Fascism—strived to be religious movements (Griffin, 2007). They aimed to cultivate a “new sense of life and the world” and disseminate it through "modern myths" to facilitate the masses' integration into the national State, thereby imparting a collective conscience of the nation as a "community of values and destiny" (Gentile, 2003, p. 53; Griffin, 2007). In essence, fascist modernism, by fusing the political and the sacred, sought to create a vision of eschatological deliverance for the national community, forging a synthesis of tradition and modernity—without renouncing modernisation—that enabled the nation to achieve its objectives of power (Kallis, 2008; Gentile, 2003).

Lewis vehemently opposed this vision, criticising various forms of prototypical ‘modernist nationalism,’ such as in Mussolini’s Italy, which demanded that the industrial revolution and societal massification be accompanied by a parallel spiritual revolution and a “religion of the nation” that could shape the character, sensibility, and conscience of the “new Italian” (Griffin, 2007, p. 202). Lewis (1941) remarked that when a political philosophy, like fascism, starts making “mystical claims upon the body, soul and entire being” beyond what a mere political philosophy should “reasonably do”, it can then be described as a “religion.” Hence, Fascism is a “religion”, whereas “democracy”—being but “one among several ways of life”— “is not.”

Lewis’s pejorative use of the word "religion" in this context aligns with Gentile’s. Gentile (2006, p. xiv) asserts that a "religion of politics" is characterised as such because it forms a "system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and symbols” that interprets and governs the meaning of

human life by subordinating both individual and communal destinies to a "supreme entity" or Absolute. Lewis's final novel, *The Red Priest* (1956, p. 43), warns of the dangers of obsession with absolutes and argues that introducing power politics into religion corrupts the Absolute: "When Christianity leads to the Black Throne—when it is power—that is ungentlemanly." Expanding on the "important difference" *Anglosaxony* identified between democracy and the "religion" of fascism, Lewis (1941) emphasises that a "British prime minister" or "American president" never becomes an irrational "object of worship" like an Italian *Duce* or Teutonic "Fuehrer."[326] Yet the actual "supra-mundane principle" of Fascism's "barren cult," Lewis concludes, is not the individual who embodies it but the *state itself*.[327] As in all political

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[326] If, for Lewis, genius is but an "excess of individuality" (1932a, p. 131), then elevating collective worship over individual religious experiences is inimical to art. Lewis exemplifies this in "The Dithyrambic Spectator" through a historical analogy: in Greece, worship was more individualistic, which allowed art to flourish, but in Rome—with its "jus divinum," standardised religion, and "rigidly state-gods"—art hardly existed (Lewis, 1971, pp. 203-204)

[327] Lewis's differentiation between the state and its leader in political religions parallels Collingwood's ideas. Collingwood asserts that political religions combine two intertwined concepts: "ancestor worship" (i.e., veneration of the collective) and "autocrat worship" (cited in Gilman, 2007, p. 170). According to Collingwood, both forms of worship reflect communal self-idolatry, aligning with the paganism deeply rooted in the European tradition; thus, he classifies political religions like Nazism as 'Neo-pagan'. Regarding "ancestor worship" (which Lewis refers to as worship of the state or the collective), Collingwood argues that the highest freedom in this concept is the conformity of one's will to the will of the ancestral racial community. Meanwhile, autocrat worship promotes a cult of personality, enabling the "aristocratic leader" to harness the emotional and irrational forces necessary for the sacralised state's 'pagan mythology' to triumph over rationalism and sustain its way of life (Gilman, 2007).

religions—where the 'holy' honoured by the community is not necessarily the supernatural but the community itself—Lewis underscores that for the Fascist "votary", the object of worship is not God, "as with the Christian religion," but rather something of "colossal power," a big "mass-animal" or "monstrous unity" like Deutschland or Italia (1941, pp. 4-5).[328]

In Lewis's framework, power in modernity functions as "God's ultimate Ape" (Kenner, 1966, p. 232), a theme extensively explored in the final two novels of *The Human Age.* Schenker (1992) rightly views *The Human Age* as the logical outcome of Lewis's fraught relationship with modernity, but more specifically, it examines Modernism's uneasy relationship with power.[329] Yet *The Human Age* is even more than this, for power manifests in the novels in divine, theological terms. The novels invoke a Manichaean theme of a war in Heaven between Good and Evil and question the intellectual's (and humanity's) fate as torn between these powers. Inevitably, in evaluating such "ultimates", Lewis ended up passing judgment on his own career and what it represented in terms of permanent theological values.

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328 In Germany, this deification of the nation can be linked to Fichte's concept of the national "I," and in Italy, to the mythologised *Risorgimento* (Nolte, 1966). Lewis's argument could also be illustrated by Maurice Barrès's veneration of the "soil and the dead" or Maurras's mythical exaltation of "D'esse France" (Tucker, 1999, p. 62). These terms evolved into the "myths of a secular religion," intelligible to the faithful in a nonrational manner. They were designed to channel the "irrational energies of the fascist collective into the immediate" (Tucker, 1999, p. 62).

329 As Klein (2015, p. 181) notes, the trilogy embodies Lewis's most comprehensive effort to envision "alternative versions of the universe" as reflections of his coherent yet continually evolving understanding of the relationship between intellectual and political power.

Before proceeding, it may help to briefly recap the introduction's overview of Lewis's evolving theology leading to *The Human Age*. Broadly, the intractable nature of political and social evils in the 1920s and 30s prompted Lewis to consider eternal values transcending the humanistic crises and "political chaos" of his time (1971, p. 63). Living, however, in the aftermath of Darwin and Nietzsche, Lewis could no longer equate religion with simple belief in an all-knowing God, a "kindly uncle" (1927, p. 463). Instead, Lewis's 'God' served as the repository of the nonhuman and an urgent reminder that man was not the measure of all things (Schenker, 1992, p. x)—a means to "correct" our "soft conceit" (Lewis, 1964, p. 121). This conception, in principle though not in intention, aligns more with the NRR's abstractly defined Absolute than the traditional Christian God.[330] Indeed, theorising about civil religions in *New Right vs. Old Right*, Johnson (2013, p. 130) argues that the Absolute does not have to denote "God or gods or any supernatural beings" but simply the "highest good" within any belief system. For de Benoist (2012, p. 15), similarly, the Absolute is the "nothingness, or Being" that lies beyond human limitations. Even Dugin (2023, p. 8)—himself an Orthodox Christian—remarks that the term Absolute, in whose "name the individual is rejected", can have the "broadest, most general" meaning.

Lewis felt this postulated transcendent Absolute, a "negation of man" (Edwards, 2000, p. 546), was necessitated by his neo-classicist philosophy in *Time and Western Man*. He later described the Absolute as "nothing but a Blank", most perfectly expressed in Spinoza's

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[330] As Lewis (1936, p. 261) wrote in ***Left Wings Over Europe:*** "the only real logical God of man is the exact opposite in every respect to him - the infinity of his finitude, the eternity of his life-in-time: in short, his support and explanation. For the only total explanation of anything finite is its total opposite".

monotheism, whose God was "Everything and Nothing" (1936, p. 261)—"where there is nothing, there is God", as Yeats (1953, p. 245) wrote.[331] Yet, contrary to the embrace of the Absolute's power in political religions, Lewis's (1936, p. 261) concern with locating values in the transcendent was that "the effect of this God" when "chemically applied to our existence" is to "make it cancel out. It makes it Nothing". Intriguingly, the concept 'nothing' holds a near-positive connotation elsewhere in Lewis's work: people "struggle passionately" for what "regarded dispassionately would be "strictly nothing" (Lewis, quoted in Tomlin, 1969a, p. 315), and in *The Revenge for Love* the source of value is founded on a 'nothing'—Margot's attachment to a Spanish dwarf who claims her as its surrogate mother (Lewis, 1972, p. 300).[332] When tackling religion, however, Lewis is more chary about this 'nothing', precisely because he perceives the Absolute as so potentially all-encompassing—"a being so much everything, that it is nothing" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 238). Lewis critiqued the idealist and monist, F.H. Bradley— "the most representative" of the "philosophers of the Absolute"—because "Nothing 'satisfies' in Bradley's world; for he lives incessantly beneath the oppression of Something which is more than itself" (Lewis, 1927, pp. 395-398).

Contrary to Bradley—and the immanisation of the Absolute in political religions—Lewis (1927, pp. 462, 405) argues that only a transcendent God secures "true individualism," for the "limited transcendence" of principles like Bradley's "monotonous" Absolute withdraws all individuality and subordinates individuals to the power of one single "supreme Object". This

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[331] Yeats himself was an admirer of *Time and Western Man*, being one of the volumes the poet "defied the doctors" by reading (cited in Caracciolo & Edwards, 1998, p. 110).

[332] As Materer points out, *The Revenge for Love* makes repeated use of the word 'nothing' (1976, pp. 129-30).

Absolutist outlook, like the NRR's, harks back to a "premodern" view of the world as one of "totality, unity, and above all, purpose" (Gier, 2000, p. 41). It stands in contradiction and reaction to the modern worldview, which is secular, atomistic, and predicated upon a linear view of history (Bar-On, 2013, p.75). Lewis's modernist theology navigates between these. In doing so, it typifies the modernist view of the Absolute, which, as Gier (2000, p. 41) argues, is to "place God in a transcendent realm far removed from the material world". Like Yeats's God, Lewis's Absolute 'absconded' at such a distance that His attributes were "so absolute as to become almost irrelevant to man" (Mann, 1991, p. 166).

As the twentieth century progressed, however, Lewis became increasingly aware of the unintended consequences of his modernist theology. Recognising that such an abstractedly transcendent Absolute could be manipulated for "political purposes" and distorted "into a monstrous and inhuman Absolute", Lewis, by the late 1930s, began to align his anti-religious concept of the divine with a more traditionally defined understanding of God and eternal values (Lewis, 2023, p. 452; Mann, 1991).[333] He urged emphasising God's "specifically Christian attributes" (Lewis, 1936, p. 264) and even considered we receive intimations of this God through life itself, not just through aesthetics—a belated recognition that if life is justified in aesthetics, it is ultimately *judged* in ethics.

It is extraordinary that a writer without traditional religious convictions, an aesthetic idealist who critiqued 'ethical judgement' as a crowd philosophy, should arrive at such a conclusion. But what significance, Schenker (1992) asks, should we attribute to the heterodox Christian theology that develops across *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*? This and other "major

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[333] Luger (2018, p.24) provides a useful if reductive definition of the Absolute as "term used by idealists to describe the one independent reality of which all things are an expression."

queries" (Constable, 2014, p.4) posed by *The Human Age* return us to this study's core questions: what insights do the ideological transformations in Lewis's post-fascist work offer to contemporary affairs? What does his insider-critique of political and religious absolutism reveal about the ongoing appeal of such ideologies to intellectuals? And how does applying this critique in light of the NRR's alternative modernist 'resacralising' initiatives redefine our understanding of Lewis's 'original' meaning?

These questions will be addressed in three thematically ordered subsections. The first (6.1) engages *Monstre Gai's* analysis of power and absolutism; the second (6.2) focuses on the evolution of Lewis's heterodox theology in response to these themes and the changes in his value system suggested by Pullman's decisions. The third (6.3) analyses *Malign Fiesta* and Lewis's Janus-faced devil Sammael, who represents the ultimate narrative test of these developments in Lewis, embodying both modernism's reactionary-romantic aspirations and the young Lewis's 'anti-humanist' critique of these impulses. As the most profound manifestation of Lewis's insider-critique of "radical modernistic fascism" (Bowden, 2014) and his own modernist ideals, an analysis of Sammael provides a fitting way to conclude this chapter and the study.

6.1 Political Religion, Power, and the Intellectual

We concluded Chapter One by referencing Guardini's (1956) theory on power and religion in the modern age, which parallels Heidegger's and Dugin's narratives of modernity's 'descent into nihilism.' Guardini argued that modernity severed humans from their historical roots and estranged them from traditional, organic cultures— cultures rooted in the concept of the One, or at least a harmonious relationship between the One and the Many, which provided a shared

hierarchical cosmology that oriented human actions. Modern liberalism, deprived of this cosmology, takes its cue from an intramundane nature (the materialism grounding Enlightenment rationalism), and consequently aims to establish imperial rule in the temporal domain. This, for Guardini, explains the recurring assertion of twentieth-century intellectuals that 'all politics is a struggle for power'.

Lewis was foremost among these intellectuals. *The Art of Being Ruled* was dedicated precisely to analysing the "political power" taking "command in the world today" (1989a, p. 162) and its focus on cultural superstructures as a means by which this process advanced anticipated the arguments of the Frankfurt School. The 'zeitgeist' Lewis dissected was embodied in *The Childermass* as the Punch-like Bailiff: a clownish, deceitful, and vulgar demagogue, likely modelled on Mussolini, whom Lewis considered the representative personality of the modern age and its obsession with materialism, Bergsonian flux and the "cult of action" (Wagner, 1957, p. 301). [334] The Bailiff re-emerged twenty-seven years later as the titular 'Gay Monster' of *The Childermass's* sequel, and significantly, the environment Lewis conjures in *Monstre Gai* (1955) refers directly *both* to the activities of the 1928 Bailiff *and* to the conditions of the Cold-War austerity period with little shift of emphasis. This implies that,

[334] Kenner (1966, p. 234) succinctly characterises the Bailiff as "dark, vulgar, empty." Lewis also perceived him as a somewhat blackly comic character. Caracciolo (1996, p. 281) notes that in Bridson's radio adaptation of the Human Age, Donald Wolfit, who played the Bailiff, asked Lewis about the character's conception. Lewis responded that he envisioned the Bailiff as a George Robey figure, suggesting that he should be portrayed within the music-hall tradition.

whether in the 1920s or the 1950s, politics remained the manipulation of power, and the Bailiff remained the epitome of that power.[335]

That Lewis still accepted his earlier socio-political valuations of modernity is confirmed in 1948's *Rude Assignment*. Here, Lewis (1984, p. 180) restates the validity of the quarter-century-old theories of *The Art of Being Ruled*, declaring that "socially… life in the modern age" resembles incarceration in a "power-house", an "immense building… full of a radioactive something we call 'power'…. it is 'malignant', this kind of power… we are all slightly cancered". This "malignant… radioactive something" emanates from the magnetic walls of Third City, upon whose steps Pullman and Satters are stranded as *Monstre Gai* begins:

> The colossal mushroom-coloured walls… contained some repulsive agent… It was like a new impalpable film, or new atmosphere, into which they had unwittingly penetrated. It held them as it repelled them, like an existential element, neither cold nor warm, but subtly terrifying (Lewis, 1955, p. 4).

The image of radiation—reminiscent of the Atom bomb ('mushroom-coloured walls')—befits the cataclysmic bombardments that beset Magnetic City in the following pages, foreshadowing that here, as in the Bailiff's camp, the ultimate reality will be power. This marks the clearest continuity between *The Childermass* and *The Human Age* (Edwards, 1975). Third City is no more a utopia than the post-war 'socialist' London satirised in 1928. The "Heaven"

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[335] Indeed, in comparing the polemics of the 1920s with *Monstre Gai*, Kenner (1966, p. 232) noted that one of Lewis's enduring insights was that "power is always wielded by vulgarians"—whether they are hypostatisation's of societal forces (like the Bailiff) or sinister figures who typically operate behind the scenes (such as Abershaw and O'Hara) (Edwards, 1975, p. 234).

Pullman and Satters glimpsed across the Styx in *The Childermass* is revealed as another "ante-chamber of salvation" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 155), a rundown Purgatory and travesty of the Attleean welfare state where Pullman, the archetypal genius, remains reliant on uneasy alliances with the archetypal man of power, the Bailiff (Kenner, 1966). *Unlike* in *The Childermass*, however, the locus of power within the city is not the only issue at stake; one can hardly mistake the supernatural origins of the mysterious blitzes with their "ghastly resemblance" to atomic bomb blasts (Schenker, 1992, p. 170). After one such blast, Pullman sees a "fiery cross… blood-red" quivering in the "blue-black sky" (1955, p. 179), recalling a passage in *Self Condemned,* where René predicts the evils of war are "supernatural, of vast powers, and ageless" (1965a, p. 134).

Like Harding, the Lewis of *The Childermass* era pessimistically believed power alone directed history—Jameson (1979, p. 150) termed this the "nonmoral calculus of sheer power" governing Lewis's thought. Yet, in 1950, Lewis is prepared to speculate that the historical evils of war might be explained in divine rather than human terms (Materer, 1976, p. 157). In *Malign Fiesta*, we learn the chief destructive power is not the Bailiff but Satan himself. Sammael—a cross between Milton's Satan and a "modern corporate executive" (Schenker, 1992, p. 169)—is driven by the solipsistic value of power, and his utopian 'romantic' scheme to merge human and divine is but part of this "perennial struggle" (Edwards, 1975, p. 247).

At the outset of *Monstre Gai,* however, these supernatural elements remain ominous allusions, and the "mock-democratic" Bailiff (Klein, 2015, p. 195) lingers as the principal figure of Third City power politics. The change is only in the mise-en-scène: the 'Waste Land' of the 1920s—with its Parisian bohemias, Bergson's, Steins and Sitwells—has given away amid worldwide cataclysms to "that middle-class heaven on earth the Welfare State… the Lubianka

Prison in Moscow, and… the Festival of Britain at Battersea" (Kenner, 1966, p. 232). Far from being a "half-way house to heaven" (1955, p. 297), Pullman and Satters find themselves on "a cheerless twentieth-century side-street," a scene so "unexpectedly the reverse of what the imagination demanded" that Pullman emits an "explosion of hysterical mirth": "is this Heaven?'… it reminded him of Barcelona" (p. 12). Peopling this 'Universal Cafe' are the "passive, unnaturally youthful crowds" (Materer, 1976, p. 156) that Lewis excoriated in *Doom of Youth.*[336] Surrounding the scene, "cyclopean battlements" rise into the sky", leading Pullman to reflect that at least "the dimensions of what enclosed this place… were unreal, were enormous... *But that was the extent of the departure from the norm"* (Lewis, 1955, p. 7).

As such, *The Human Age*, like most fantasies, appears to be a familiar world extrapolated: just as *The Childermass* reflected the reality critiqued in *The Art of Being Ruled,* so the Third City embodies the 'artless society' of *Men Without Art* and the bourgeois-bohemia of *The Apes of God.* Yet what distinguishes *The Human Age* is its focus not on social appearances or customs but on the *processes*—which we term 'political' when discussing their techniques—by which people's lives are directed (Kenner, 1966). Lewis believed the true subject of politics, concealed behind flattering theory, was the metaphysics of power. Power thrives because the masses respond to the rhetoric of freedom but (as Chapter Four discussed) secretly prefer not to be free. Man is insignificant: they tolerate rulers and embrace Power as a substitute for the Absolute. This, like all radical political theories, was a theory about the nature of man and the universe—so it was little surprise Lewis needed to complete it with something akin to a theology.

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[336] A fact highlighted by Mannock's remark that "perhaps fifty per cent of the city is the desiccated remains of youth-propaganda of forty years ago" (Lewis, 1955, p. 33)

Consequently, Lewis's extrapolations of "earthly" power politics in *The Childermass* are complicated in the sequels by the "introduction of the supernatural into the play" (1955, p. 265)—specifically, a traditional Christian mythology. While superficially attenuated like its earthly counterpart, this mythology remains a "literal, physical" reality for the denizens of Lewis's celestial realms (Edwards, 1975, p. 232). Described by Nath (2012, p. 620) as modernism's "most substantial encounter" with the supernatural, Angels appear in these latter books, and the interaction between them and their mundane surroundings—as revealed through Pullman's thoughts —imbues the work with heightened relevance to today's political struggles. While *machtpolitiks* in *The Human Age* initially appear as merely a "reflection" of the terrestrial post-war era, Pullman recognises he was being deceived on Earth as to the ethical import of this eternal "struggle" (p. 263). On Earth, it played out on a "superficial level" (p. 263), whereas in Lewis's afterworld—as Eliot (1955, p. 525) noted—"Good and Evil can no longer be disguised" and one was "speedily involved upon the one side or the other; upon the side of God or of His Enemy" (Lewis, 1955, p. 263). Pullman laments to Mannock that it was the "essence of things here" for man—"helpless, powerless mites of intelligence"—to be caught in this everlasting struggle among "supernatural creatures":

> Meanwhile there is us, small, mortal, defenceless; naturally on the side of the angels, hating naturally the Devil and all his works: our position is a fearful one.' (Lewis, 1955)

This quote indicates that Pullman, now a more seriously drawn figure than the 'Pulley' of *The Childermass*, is to stand as a surrogate not only for Lewis and his 'politics of the intellect' but

more generally for the modern intellectual facing contemporary political conflicts. [337] A closer analysis of Pullman at this juncture will be crucial in attaining one of our research outcomes, namely, demonstrating the relevance of Lewis's work to the comparable dilemmas faced by intellectuals in today's acrimonious political environment—characterised, as in Lewis's era, by disenchantment with post-Christian liberal democracy, the rise of autocrats over traditional politicians, and the allure of alternative ideologies to enlightened yet cynical thinkers.

6.1.1 The 'Politics of the Intellect' in Purgatory

The choice Pullman faces in *Monstre Gai*—between a "common sense" alliance with the Bailiff or an "emotional" one with the church and the city's nominal governor, the "gentle" Padishah (p. 263)—relates to Lewis's critique of political religions in *Anglosaxony* (1941), where he questions the allure of "modern Caesars" and asks "why not try God for a change? Why not have the great Architect of this universe for a Fuehrer instead of going to the advertisement bureau of Politics for your god?" However, Pullman cannot afford to contemplate such hypotheticals. His isolation as a "small, defenceless" (1955, p. 163) mortal compels him first to secure his survival; the enormity of the immortals literally towering over

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[337] Pullman's name was revised in subsequent editions of *The Childermass* to reflect his elevated status in the sequels (Edwards, 2000, p. 226). He is no longer the stock self-important writer of 1928, an intellectual 'alazon' to Satters's *eiron* (Caracciolo, 1996). The initial Pullman bore a suspicious resemblance to Joyce–sharing an Irish background, a stick, glasses, and a fastidiously superior manner–but in the 1950s sequels, he is regarded much more seriously, evolving into a composite figure of Joyce and Lewis (raised in Ireland by the Jesuits, educated at an English public school, having lived for "five years in Basle," and recognised as a great satirist rather than just a writer) (Edwards, 2000).

him renders the ethical aspect of his dilemma somewhat academic. [338] In this celestial city where an absolute perspective seemingly has no force, and under "emergency conditions" where "values change", Pullman feels "compelled" to focus on what is "pragmatical and useful" and "less upon" what is "eternally true" (Lewis, 1931, p. 129). These words are not, however, from *Monstre Gai* but *Hitler* (1931), indicating that Pullman's dilemma, while broadly a critique of intellectuals functioning without reference to eternal values, also serves as an autocritique of Lewis's earlier pragmatism and intellectual rationalisation (Edwards, 2000, p. 531).

Pullman's "frightful dilemma" (1955, p. 263) intensifies as Third City descends into chaos, and he finds himself in a flare-lit Piazza packed with followers of the city's four primary factions. He must choose between the representatives of these "camps", which reflect the "earthly alignments" of twentieth-century politics: a dying Christianity (Father Ryan), liberalism or "gangster-wealth" (the Bailiff), communism (Vogel)and fascism (Hyperides).[339]

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[338] Pullman laments that "men have never been in such a situation as this," and feels his situation "even more dramatic" than in the Attic tragedies of Euripides and of Aeschylus, for in Third City it is as if "the King or Queen of the Greek city-state, put upon the stage," were "actually… a god or goddess" (Lewis, 1955, p. 163)

[339] Brown (2005, p. 153) contends that ***The Human Age*** essentially stages a clash between "proto-fascism" and "gangster capitalism," which is briefly complicated in ***Monstre Gai*** by the addition of "religion and communism." But by ***Malign Fiesta***, Brown claims that fascism—along with religion and communism—has vanished, and Capitalism, "embodied in Satan himself," alone prevails—an allegory, perhaps, for the development of politics in the twentieth century. The only remaining opposition to Capitalism is the Divine, that is, orthodoxy. According to Brown, Satan's defeat by God signifies a resolution of the Manichean aspect in both ***The Human Age*** and Lewis's broader philosophy.

The only serious contenders for Pullman's attention are the Bailiff and Father Ryan. [340] The Catholic priest "beyond any question" was his preferred speaker, and having "abandoned the Catholic religion" on Earth, he wonders if he could "enter once more into that communion?" (1955, p. 266). He almost follows through with this good intention, especially after his encounters with the expanding angels, but ultimately sides with the wicked Bailiff, the "most dishonest man he knew" (p. 489), rather than submit to religious orthodoxy and the "martial angel", the Padishah (p. 160).

Pullman's reluctance to make an ethical choice could be attributed to the absence of a moral atmosphere in Third City, akin to 1930s Germany where 'values change' and the 'absolute perspective' has 'no force'.[341] While Eliot (1955, p. 526) wrote that he could not accept *Monstre Gai's* "affirmation of the stupidity of Angels", the atmosphere Lewis conjures in Third City nevertheless embodies Eliot's view—summarised by Colin Wilson (1969, p. 116)—

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[340] Pullman dismisses out of hand the other two alternatives: "Would he be a Fascist, mouthing all that stupid, claptrap, moralistic stuff? …. Would he be inflaming himself in favour of equality, under the leadership of Vogel, or playing the part of such a leader himself? No." (Lewis, 1955, p. 267)

[341] While the boulevards and café-goers of Third City are typically read as a satire on the post-war British Welfare State, they may also allude to Lewis's memories of the Kurfürstendamm in 1937. He described the Kurfürstendamm as a "big boulevard, thick with cafés… Within these spacious tents, infested with palms, the elegant ladies and gentlemen of the new Berlin discuss coffee and cake… There is a great surface effect of luxury… (but) you will find that more than half the customers are not eating, or not more than one dish…". These "big marquees and open tents" are "colossal tableau-vivants of genteelness", and Lewis asks, "what Hitler, with his dreams of a "classless society, must think of all this I cannot imagine." (Lewis and Edwards, 1997b, pp. 176-177)

that “civilisation cannot survive without religion.” The “deplorable… senseless” (Lewis, 1955, p. 162) state of affairs in Third City also mirrors *Anglosaxony’s* (1941) prediction that in a de-Christianized century, the “law of the jungle” would displace “the law of God”. Angels and Fallen Angels engage in ‘Gigantic’ and ‘diabolic’ conflict, and, miraculous though this seems to Pullman, it remains physical combat merely, just “enormous creatures having a row”, where the good (the “winged giants of orthodox angelic colour”) hold no inherent advantage over the “darker-winged” giants” (1955, p. 162).[342] In such an environment, Pullman’s decision to side with the Bailiff over the divine can appear the rational choice for the intellectual.

Another ‘mitigating’ factor is the circumscribed nature of the ideological positions presented to Pullman. Other than the Bailiff—representing a “conspiratorial alliance between gangster capitalism and the zeitgeist” (Brown, 2005, p. 135)—Pullman's only alternative to the other two “theories of modernity” (Dugin, 2012, p. 17) [343] was the "effective, if flawed, intellectual alternative" of the traditional church (Lafferty, 2009, p. 85). The circumscribed nature of this choice mirrors the ‘earthly alliances’ open to Lewis: traditionalist modernists like Eliot, for instance, would accept no alternative to the political religion of totalitarianism bar the supremacy of a Christian Elite, declaring “if you will not have God… you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin” (Eliot, quoted in Wagner, 1957, p. 96). While Lewis (1951b, p. 299) also warned of a future in which power-hungry "men-gods like Stalin or Hitler" would

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[342] Pullman even equivocates between the two: “the inhabitants of Heaven were Titans… Lucifer and his rebellious army were all Titans” (1955, pp. 160-161).

[343] For Dugin (2012, p. 17), liberalism, fascism and communism represent the “three political theories of modernity”, each being based on the concept of the Cartesian subject (individual, class, and nation/race respectively).

replace Christ, he was not so dogmatic as Eliot in believing the only counter to political religions was an elite Christian community that maintained the official body of belief in the State.[344] In 1948's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot proposed this elite act as a repository of cultural values, implying a strong correlation between art and religion—even presuming art should serve religion—that contravened Lewis's core belief that art must remain separate and supreme (Wagner, 1957, pp. 97-8).[345] Such principles sharply distinguished Lewis's thought from contemporary Thomism and, by extension, from the alternative 'theocracy' represented by Father Ryan. .

A turn to Orthodoxy is thus not Lewis's counter to political religion or modernity suggested in *The Human Age*, despite Lafferty's (2015) and Dasenbrock's (1985, p. 188) claims.[346] Nevertheless, Pullman listens sympathetically to Father Ryan's denunciation of fascism's "messianic zeal" (p. 256), and Lewis similarly shared Eliot et al.'s anxieties about political religions—concerns that apply equally to the NRR's 'resacralising' vision today.

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[344] Another of Lewis's contemporaries, R.G. Collingwood (Harding's adversary in ***Self Condemned***), similarly maintained that the only means by which democracy could counter the growing influence and power of 'Neo-pagan' political religion was through the preservation of Christianity (Gilman, 2007, p. 161).

[345] Lewis's passing remark on the book– in a letter to Eliot from November 1948–is laced with sarcasm. In the postscript, Lewis tells Eliot: "You are wrong, to my mind, about England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland" (Lewis, 1963, p. 473). This remark specifically pertains to Chapter III of Eliot's Notes, titled "Unity and Diversity: The Region."

[346] Dasenbrock (1985) even claimed Lewis was "poaching on Eliot's territory" in ***The Human Age.*** This said, Lewis did write in his letters: "As a theologian I am inferior to what Eliot is supposed to be. That must be remedied!" (Lewis, 1963, p. 546)

Lewis's (1927, p. 386) theological answer was, however, more heterodox than the "incurably 'conservative'" viewpoint of Neo-Scholasticism would allow —as subsequent analysis will reveal.

6.1.2. Liberalism, Orthodoxy and 'Neo-Pagan' Political Religions

Although Eliot (1934, p. 48) shared the NRR's aim of re-establishing a "vital connection between the individual and the race" as part of the "struggle against Liberalism", an essential aspect of *his* argument was that liberalism's deficiency of positive substance rendered it impotent against political religions like fascism, which he saw as animated by resurgent paganism and a threat to Christianity on its own ground (Barac, 2011)—a concern echoed today regarding the growth of "radical-right, anti-Christian, neo-pagan thought" (McLemee, 2022).[347] Harding's bête noire, Collingwood, reasoned similarly: liberalism, as a product of the Enlightenment, lacked the emotional and religious substance to counter the 'irrational' intensity of 'Neo-pagan' political religion (Gilman, 2007). By demythologising Christianity's rational aspect and "disenfranchising" the passion and power of its irrational element, Collingwood (1940, p.168) argued that the Enlightenment's secularisation of European society left liberalism without the emotional drive necessary to resist antagonists like fascism—a situation paralleling the allure of the NRR to intellectuals today amid the perceived 'failure' of liberalism.

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[347] In *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939, p. 51), Eliot writes: "By alienating the mass of the people from orthodox Christianity, by leading them to identify the Church with the actual hierarchy and to suspect it of being an instrument of oligarchy or class, it leaves men's minds exposed to varieties of irresponsible and irreflective enthusiasm followed by a second crop of paganism."

For Eliot, Collingwood, and Lewis's Father Ryan, political religions presented a threat not because they undermined human rights, but rather because they displaced religion with a "secular messianism" that offered individuals and communities the "wrong kind of purpose" (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 453).[348] This parallels Father Ryan's critique of the Hyperideans as "false Messiahs" whose "salvationist passion" provokes a "religious zeal" but whose message has a "deceptive Rightness" (Lewis, 1955, pp. 256-264). Father Ryan plays on the dual meaning of 'Right': the Hyperideans are "not wrong for being on the Right" but for "*pretending* to be on the Right" while violating its core tenets: order and tradition (Frisch, 2019, p. 217). Fascism, akin to the NRR, positions itself as a re-sacralising force in Enlightenment societies that abandoned religion as a "way of life... a thing of absolute value" (Collingwood, 1940, p. 168). Father Ryan contends, however, that fascists are incapable of substituting their *own* enduring values because they lack a cause, being fundamentally destructive and pagan. While admitting what they denounce is usually 'diabolic', he views them as mere "watchdogs" with "as little idea as have watchdogs of absolute value" (Lewis, 1955, p. 256).

The striking similarity between Father Ryan's argument and Eliot's has led other scholars, notably Frisch (2019), to speculate that the speakers in the Piazza are an allegory for Lewis's contemporaries. Father Ryan's criticism of Hyperides's destructiveness, however, can be viewed more broadly as a traditionalist critique of modernism's response to the post-

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[348] Collingwood specifically argued that neopagan religions were dangerous not only because they eroded the "just and civil morality of a rationalized world," but also because they irrationally—and even "satanically"—opposed liberal values and scientific reason. In place of these values, they promoted a "pseudo-nation" and a "pseudo-science" that reinforced the irrationality of their mythological worldview (Collingwood, cited in Gilman, 2007, p. 169).

Enlightenment crisis of values. As Griffin (2007) and Gentile (1994) argue, reactionary modernism—whether political ('programmatic') or artistic ('epiphanic')—sought to fill the spiritual and psychological void left by the loss of the religious impulse. For Collingwood, these re-mythologising attempts by fascist modernism—what the modernist Franz Werfel (1946, p. 84) termed "ersatz religions"—merely served to unleash the spiritual and psychological forces sublimated by secularisation; forces that reasserted themselves with such savagery they imperilled the "very foundations" of civilisation (Gilman, 2007, p. 175).

The "salvationist passion" of Fascism, Father Ryan concludes, is "only of use destructively" (Lewis, 1955, p. 256). Rather than creating enduring values, Father Ryan concludes that Fascism exists only for "the glorification" of a "Mr Smith… Mr Jones, or of Mr Hitler" and "ultimately" for "the glorification… of (the state)" (p. 257). For this reason, Eliot maintained no compromise was feasible between a Christian community and a 'pagan' society that replaces a theological understanding of existence (premised on a transcendent God) with an 'anti-transcendent' one that esteems the community as the absolute value—i.e., the *Volkstaate* or "divinely ordained ancestral community" (Collingwood, cited in Gilman, 2007, p. 171). Opposing this politicisation of the Absolute, Father Ryan insists that "those of us who are Catholic know… it is only for the greater glory of God that any great action can be undertaken" (Lewis, 1955, p. 257)—not for power. On hearing these words, Pullman "turned sadly away", recognising that:

> ……he himself should have turned his back on the world when he was on the earth, instead of bending himself to attract the gifts of the world, which at last had led him to the diabolic filth of that screaming puppet over there (Lewis, 1955)

Having reached this "point of enlightenment", Pullman asks: "Am I now to continue in my earthly role, wherever it may lead me—and find myself in the end consorting with Lucifer in person"—as, of course, he does— "or am I to go to Father Ryan, to fall upon my knees, ask for forgiveness, and inquire what atonement I can make?' (pp. 265-266). Alas, Pullman's devotion to the 'politics of the intellect' overrules his correct intuition (Lafferty, 2015). Like his author, Pullman regards all variants of ethical orthodoxy as fatal to the integrity of the intellect: human intelligence alone matters to him, and orthodoxy suffocates this precious faculty, which is innately "unstable and heterodox" (Lafferty, 2015, p. 4). Ethics, Lewis argued in *Men Without Art* (1964, p. 192), subjects us to the arbitrary judgment of the crowd, which expects the artist to be its "servant" and express its "will … ethical or otherwise".[349] But ethics are too subjective, too "ill-defined", volatile and "esoteric" (p. 136) for anything to be built on them; worse, when untied from a "theological system", as in today's "great chaos of values", they become "absurd" (p. 209). For Pullman, as for Lewis (1989a, p. 374), "the life of the intelligence is the very incarnation of freedom", and hence, rather than submit to the ethical option of the angelic Padishah, he follows the Bailiff—the leader he finds less dogmatic than those of the other factions—into Hell.

6.1.3 Self-condemning the 'Politics of the Intellect'?

The narrative logic of Pullman's decision and subsequent fate implies a criticism, or at least a re-evaluation, of Lewis's earlier valuation of the intellect over eternal values. However, we must be cautious not to assume—as one contemporary reviewer did—that the novel

[349] Or, as Lewis (1964, p.291) elsewhere puts it, ethics subject the artist to the "values of the parish-pump."

represents Lewis's "journey into orthodoxy" (Coulson, 1956).[350] For one, Lewis never actually converted, just as Harding didn't. His "restless intelligence" was also "too dynamic", and his reason too "bitterly bruised" for such "static bliss" (1965a, p. 320). Similarly, Lewis's only completed novel after *The Human Age*, 1956's *The Red Priest* reaffirmed his lifelong scepticism toward organised religion.

Nonetheless, in the face of desacralisation, *The Human Age* does suggest a reconciliation with orthodoxy and eternal values on behalf of both protagonist and author, as well as a recognition of the limitations of the 'politics of the intellect'. As such, Pullman's journey reflects a broader shift towards religious orthodoxy among modernist intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s. For instance, Tonning (2014)—refining Griffin's overly prescriptive argument that modernism was a political and artistic substitute for lost Christianity— asserts that Christianity remained a viable alternative to secularised liberalism following the rise of political religions and was increasingly perceived as such by modernists who reverted to orthodoxy, notably Eliot (Mead, 2015, p. 232). 351

Despite dismissing Eliot's endorsement of orthodoxy and tradition as an "elaborate system of dogmatic insincerity" (1964, p. 88), Lewis—in challenging other modernists' valuation of the subjective, the flux, and fascination with the fragmented self—frequently drew on similar neo-scholastic critiques of theological modernism to support his arguments (Rzepa, 2019, p. 158). Lewis has often been referred to as a "Thomist in all but name" (Wagner,

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[350] Focussing specifically on Pullman's spiritual conflict in the Piazza scene, Coulson (1956, p. 612) observes that "previous reviewers, in treating of Pullman's dilemma, have shifted the emphasis away from Pullman's repressed Catholicism and have failed to record how close to orthodoxy Mr. Lewis appears to be willing to go."

1957, p. 202), and in the 1920s, neo-Thomist rationalism was the 'doctrine' ideologically closest to the secular 'spatial philosophy' espoused in *Time and Western Man*.[351] Lewis (1927, p. 388) designated Thomism a 'non-religious' position, for Thomism—a Catholic development of Aristotelian realism—relies on the everyday experience of the external world and emphasises reason's capacity to infer from this "solid ground" to God, without the help of revelation additional to nature (Vainio, 2016, p. 21).[352] Contrarily, Lewis's rival modernists sought to access God not "through the world" but "through the ego" (Sheen, 1930, p. 31), i.e., in the realms of inner experience.[353] Modernism's "inward turning" into the self (see Chapter Three) aimed to remove cognitive obstacles and attain a nothingness, a void or a 'zero' that establishes the ground for experiencing divine energies (Mouzelis, 2021, p. 60). [354]

While Lewis (1927, p. 386) admits scholastic-Thomist thought "says many shrewd and damaging things about modernism", he nevertheless distanced himself from the "tyrannic

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[351] Lewis adheres to Fulton J. Sheen's Thomist principle that "God was not given in the world. He had to be sought by means of the world" (Sheen, 1930, p. 31). Sheen asserts that the intellectual pursuit of God occurs "through a reasoning process built on the world of reality… between the apprehension of the external world and of God there intervened necessarily a logical process; the bridge between the two was built by the reasoning" (Sheen, 1931, p. 31).

[352] Hence the "paradox" (Lewis, 1927, p. 389) that Catholicism is more secular or "irreligious" in nature compared to Protestantism, which seeks a mystical union between the human and the divine—a union that dissolves the identities of both man and God.

[353] For Lewis, the God that is reached through this modern "non-intellectual approach" (Sheen, 1930, p. 31) turns out to be the "evolutionist God in-the-making: and is ultimately "nothing but the Subject experiencing Him in his "religious' moment" (Lewis, 1927, p. 390).

[354] For example, Bergson (in Lewis's view) reasoned that art's function is to "send to sleep" the "resistance of the active personality" (Lewis, 1927, p. 192) to facilitate such a process.

orthodoxy" and "herd-discipline" of neo-Thomism. But strategically, Lewis (p. 255) realised that when faced with a "Catholic opposition, " proponents of the "'modernist' disorder of "romantic, 'revolutionary,' European thought" would be forced to contend a critic more refined than the typical Tory (Lafferty, 2009). Lewis's idealised vision of this "equilibrium"— the desired outcome of his tactical endorsement of Catholicism (Lafferty, 2009, p. 85)— is encapsulated in a revealing sentence from *Time and Western Man*:

> But strategically, Lewis (p. 255) realised that faced with a "Catholic opposition, " proponents of the "'modernist' disorder of "romantic, 'revolutionary,' European thought" would have to contend with a critic far more sophisticated than the average Tory (Lafferty, 2009). Lewis's idealised vision of this equilibrium— the desired outcome of his tactical support for Catholicism (Lafferty, 2009)— is encapsulated in a single sentence from *Time and Western Man*:
>
> > We should support the catholic church… more than any other visible institution: but we should make a new world of Reason for ourselves, more elastic than the Roman cult is in a position to supply and employing all the resources of the new world to build with (Lewis, 1927, p. 391).

In short, Lewis's strategic or 'mercenary'[355] embrace of orthodoxy remained wholly in service to his "politics of the intellect," a concept aimed at countering the "politics of power"

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[355] In *BLAST* (1914, p. 30), Lewis characterised Vorticist artists as "Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World," fighting "first on one side, then on the other," but always for the "SAME cause, which is neither side nor both sides and ours."

(Munton, 1976, p. 35) by enhancing the "life of the intelligence" (Lewis, 1989a, p. 374) and promoting the welfare of intellectuals. Lewis consistently upheld the intellectual as the source of suggestions and definitions of "human possibility" and believed that changing the power structure could enable him to realise these possibilities (Munton, 1976, p. 35). [356]

In *The Human Age*, Lewis's ethical allegiance to the intellect and the implied belief that creative intelligence guides the world manifest in Pullman's resistance to moral and intellectual orthodoxies. Yet self-determination and self-awareness do not automatically lead to liberty—as Pullman's evolution from the Bailiff's puppet in 1928 to a self-reflective 'nature' who consciously accepts the Bailiff's patronage illustrates. Intellectuals remain pawns in political power struggles—a tragedy compounded by their awareness of the moral dilemmas they face (Frisch, 2019). Whether interpreted as Lewis's surrogate or as a representative of the modernist intellectual trapped in the political arena, Pullman's eventual breakdown and plea for "mercy and forgiveness" (1955, p. 351) indicates Lewis's concession that the politics of power cannot be solved by earthly politics alone—not even by the intellect (Frisch, 2019).

God ultimately grants Pullman's request, and in the unwritten fourth volume—the Miltonically titled *The Trial of Man*—he was to be acculturated into the divine (as opposed to the divine being assimilated to the human, as was Sammael's project) (Edwards, 2015, p. 228).

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[356] The term 'politics of the intellect' is not explicitly mentioned in ***The Human Age*** but it is fundamental to the narrative and to Lewis's thought in general (Lafferty, 2009): as previously quoted, Lewis asserts, "my interests, in the first place, have been those of the civilised intelligence" (1984, p. 154). According to Wagner (1957, p. 92), what Lewis refers to as "the politics of the intellect" is essentially the formation of an intellectual elite, the "ideal giant" or brain of society. It is not dissimilar from the extended appeal for a "creative minority" expressed in ***Self Condemned*** during the discussion of Harding's philosophy.

"He is for the Divine," Lewis (1963, p. 562) wrote of Pullman's proposed fate, "I am for the Divine."[357] Against the politicisation of the Absolute, Lewis—who is too often taken as simply a "champion of the intellect" (Holloway, 1957, p. 185)—thus begins to articulate a system of positive theological values, or what Edwards (1975, p. 247) terms "active value."

This returns us to the initial questions of this chapter: What significance should we attribute to the "heterodox" Christian theology emerging in the work? Can Lewis's increasing emphasis on ethical values enhance our understanding of his "insider-critique" of reactionary modernism's response to desacralisation? Moreover, how does examining this development in the context of the NRR's comparable reaction to desacralisation redefine our interpretation of Lewis's original meaning?

6.2 Lewis's Heterodox Theology

Numerous scholars have attempted to resolve (or dismiss) questions about Lewis's theology and their challenges to conventional interpretations of him as a reactionary modernist by denying the religious content of *The Human Age* outright. Jameson (1979, p. 150) influentially remarked that Lewis's afterlife was "utterly lacking in transcendence" compared to theoretical

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[357] According to Lafferty (2009, 2015), this implies that if Lewis had lived long enough to adjust his 'politics of intellect', they would have been oriented towards advancing the interests of divine intelligence instead of the human intellect he so skilfully defended throughout much of his tumultuous career. In essence, Lewis realised that even if the intellectual domain transcends the political domain, ***both*** are ultimately transcended by the religious domain. As Schenker (1992, p. 17) points out, this development parallels the one outlined by Kierkegaard, i.e., from the aesthetic to the ethical to the religious. This evolution from self to other, attended by a paradoxical increase in self-awareness, is evident throughout literature as a whole.

science fictions by C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and even David Lindsay,[358] a stance shaping subsequent studies like Murray's (1980) and Foshay's (1992). Even before these studies, Tomlin (1969a, p. 26) observed a similar trend in Lewisian criticism, noting the supernatural judgment depicted in *The Human Age* was often dismissed as meaningless, devoid of even "acrostic meaning."[359]

Jameson (1979, p. 150) himself acknowledges the significance of Lewis's apocalyptic fiction but maintains it presents a "resolutely materialistic" vision, citing Sammael's claim that "'there is no such thing as the supernatural'". Given how closely Lewis's modernised purgatory embodies the post-WWII international order, Jameson claims the "conflicts" in Lewis's allegorical post-life are merely a "little more moral (but no less ideological) than those of the Cold War" and that Lewis's "God" is but "one powerful angel among many". This view implies Lewis created his abstract afterworld as a "chilly laboratory" (Ayers, 1992, p. 126) wherein to scrutinise the zeitgeist outside the confusions of ordinary space and time, or—more nihilistically—that he constructed this theological framework only to dismantle it, thereby

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[358] Lindsay's unjustly neglected masterpiece, *A Voyage to Arcturus (*1920), displays clear parallels with *The Human Age,* as Caracciolo (1996, p. 277) also observes. Two mismatched characters, Nightspore and Maskull, embark on a journey to Arcturus, after which Nightspore travels with Krag (representing God) into the void of space to confront a pervasive, corrupting pseudo-spirituality emerging from Crystalman (i.e., Satan).

[359] Tomlin (1969a, p. 26) rightly points out that a careful study of the work reveals that meaning *is* present, only that Lewis, as a creative artist, does not disrupt the imaginative spell by overtly imposing it. He is not writing crude allegory or delivering a veiled sermon as Charles Williams or C.S. Lewis might.

validating Sammael's thesis that the supernatural is another "customary illusion" (Lewis, 1955, p. 378).

Interpreting *The Human Age* this way suggests Lewis's use of the apocalypse genre is ironic and subsumes the apocalyptic under the satirical (Lafferty, 2015). Conversely, if (like Kenner and Dasenbrock) we subsume the satirical under the apocalyptic, then *The Human Age* can be read as introducing something new to Lewis's writings: an "endorsement of the absolute" and a "call to partisan action on behalf of God" (Lafferty, 2009, p. 192). While Lewis distances himself by featuring Pullman as his surrogate,[360] the narrative ultimately presents the presence of the Christian God as a tangible reality, confronting the narrator (and author) with the realisation that, in such a situation, there is no room for compromise or intellectual agnosticism. Through Pullman's response to this situation, Lewis critiques his earlier intellectual detachment—his doctrine of moral neutrality and ideal of the artist guided solely by reason (Lafferty 2009)—leading to a yet deeper questioning of his modernist idealism and Cartesian 'theology of imperfection'.

6.2.1 Modernist vs. eternal values

Monstre Gai's effectiveness in exploring these developments stems not only from Pullman's enhanced role as an author surrogate but also his emergence as a new type of character in Lewis's fiction. Pullman makes and executes genuine decisions and interacts dynamically with his environment, unlike previous protagonists (even Harding). Pritchard (1968, p. 161), however, claimed Pullman lacked "individuality" compared to Harding, arguing

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[360] *The Human Age* is atypical in apocalypse literature for featuring a third rather than a first-person perspective.

the former's "intellectual construings" did not "spring from any individual complexity or psychology," rendering him "little more" than a "convenient zone" within which Lewis's theological perceptions could fall. Pritchard's remarks are just (if exaggerated) but miss a crucial point: it is precisely *because* Pullman's decisions are important and have real consequences that he is not allowed to become an eccentric or psychologically exciting character (Edwards, 1975). His decisions must be rational, not arbitrary or capricious, to ensure the reader's necessary (partial) identification with him and the dilemmas he confronts. He might lack distinctive character, but his decisions and rationale matter all the more because he is a representative figure of modernist-Enlightenment values, confronting genuine dilemmas in a theological context and responding as he deems best (Edwards, 2000, p. 535).

Nowhere is Pullman's 'non-puppet' status more significant than in the Piazza debate scene. In the Bailiff-Hyperides debates of 1928, Pullman was a peripheral figure, a chorus in an extended Platonic dialogue.[361] In *Monstre Gai*, this situation reverses, and the debates become important as a function of Pullman's personal 'crisis of values'. If we look beyond pragmatic self-preservation as an 'excuse' for Pullman's 'non-ethical' alliance with the Bailiff—considering that the Catholic faction comprises over "fifty per-cent" of Third City (Lewis, 1955, p. 99)—then this scene suggests more critical ideological factors led Pullman to shun the church and the angelic Padishah; the narrative's implied critique of which suggests an evolution in Lewis's value system.

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[361] *The Childermass* exemplifies what Northrop Frye (1967) referred to as 'Menippean satire', a type of work where the primary dramatic interest lies in a conflict of ideas rather than in character development.

In this pivotal scene, as throughout *The Human Age,* Lewis subjects his ideas to the fundamental narrative test, and few were more critical than his emphasis on the individual 'classical' intellect and the aesthetic—rather than subjective intuition or the 'ethical'— as man's pathway to the Absolute. This conviction underpinned Lewis's alliance with the neo-Thomist Aristotelianism and his defence of an "aesthetic… not moral" (Paulson 1971, p.xi) satire— his "external approach" that "belongs to the 'classical' manner of apprehending". His classicism rested on this defence of the aesthetic and the superior intellect's rational powers, which, according to Maes-Jelinek (1970, p. 178), were "about the only elements" he recognised in Greek Classicism.[362] Lewis's classicism thus diverged from other neo-classicists—whose aim was "not to resuscitate Aristotelianism and Thomism artificially, but to revive the Thomist spirit that created them" (Curtius, 1927, p. 396)—and from his anti-romantic but *humanist* contemporaries, like Irving Babbit. Babbit, whom Eliot (1926, p. 757) described as also "being on the side of… 'the intelligence,'"[363] asserted that classical art is not unique but rather representative of a class and that, crucially, the classical imagination operates from an "ethical centre" (Maes-Jelinek, 1970, p. 179)—a view at odds with Lewis's (1927, p. 38) insistence that the classical intellect "works alone".

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[362] In ***Paleface***, Lewis (1929, p. 255) maintained that the "Hellenic age" had "no monopoly of those qualities generally catalogued as 'classical'", which he defined as: "anything which is nobly defined and exact, as opposed to that which is fluid–of the Flux–without outline, romantically 'dark', vague, 'mysterious,' stormy, uncertain".

[363] In ***Men Without Art*** (1964, p. 84), Lewis wrote that Eliot wanted to "have his apple and eat it too–to be 'a humanist 'and 'not a humanist'–to be free to criticize the 'humanism' of Babbitt and yet to practise it on the sly."

Pullman shares many of these Lewisianly unorthodox views on individuality and the Absolute. He is sceptical of ethics and prefers rational intelligence. In particular, Pullman shares Lewis's valuation of man's imperfection, which suggests that angels, as adherents to eternal and absolute ethical principles, do not require the critical intelligence humans were compelled to develop (Lafferty, 2015). Simply 'being' suffices for the angels, but Pullman values knowing "immeasurably more" than 'being', as self-knowledge guarantees his intelligence (Lewis, 1955, p. 166). A by-product of this belief is that 'God,' perfect and self-sufficient in His 'Apollonian' being, neither needs nor is interested in imperfect man; thus, when Pullman first encounters perfection in the Padisah, he assumes everything related to man "clearly filled" the archangel with "immense fatigue" (p. 154).

In Pullman's condescending 'Enlightened' view of the supernatural, the angels lead Hollywood-esque lives in Frank Lloyd Wright houses, vastly indifferent to man, morally perfect but essentially 'stupid' (Kenner, 1958, p. 235). By 'stupid', Pullman refers not to their lack of intellect but to their lacking 'consciousness of self': perfection entails an exclusivity of purpose that leaves little room for the self-knowledge which, in Lewis's schema, is the cornerstone of intelligence, i.e., the highest value (Kenner, 1958). While Pullman admires the "faultless" perfection of the angels— bred to be as "noble and beautiful" as the queen or a swan—he regards such perfection as incompatible with self-consciousness:

> The essence of the queen, or the essence of the swan, is that they possess no critical objective intelligence. They have to be perfectly stupid… to be a real angel, and, just on the same principle, to be God, you must be entirely stupid (Lewis, 1955, p. 163)[364]

Pullman's rationale summarises the Cartesian and Enlightenment perspectives this thesis has highlighted as central to Lewis's thinking.[365] According to Pullman, angels, being perfect, lack 'consciousness of self', while humans are imperfect precisely *because* of their Cartesian self-consciousness. This constitutes a fundamental departure from the traditionalist view of human perfectibility discussed in Chapter Four. Lewis's belief that "human fallibility" renders man "superior" to the "mindless perfection" of machines (1969b, p. 204) is echoed in Pullman's description of the angels as "tall white *mechanical* creatures" (Lewis, 1955, p. 555), and by his conclusion that:

> Perfection repels me: it is (it must be) so colossally stupid… we are frail, puny, short-lived, ridiculous, but we are **superior**, preferable to the Immortals with whom we come in contact. (Lewis, 1955, p. 165) [366]

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[364] Pullman's view intentionally contrasts with the "Thomist' notion that angels were "spiritual intellectual substances" (Lewis, 1955, p. 164)

[365] Hence Schenker's argument that Lewis's view of imperfection amounts to a "theological doctrine": man should be valued ***not*** because he can be godlike but—on the contrary—because he is imperfect (Schenker, 1992, p. 174).

[366] Sammael later echoes Pullman's phraseology in a negative sense, disparaging Man as a "small scale, short-lived imitation" (Lewis, 1955, p. 431)

Pullman's argument epitomises the Lewisian critique of perfectibility and modernity's quest for "absolute utopias," which, as Lewis noted, "destroy themselves in History by the price they ultimately exact" (Camus, cited in Lewis, 1952, p. 60). This critique engages the entire anti-Enlightenment impulse discussed throughout this thesis, from Romanticism to reactionary modernism to the utopian elements of the NRR. It opposes, in essence, all irrational endeavours to surpass human limitations, as "Nietzsche and… Bergson claimed we should" (Lewis, 1927, p. 129).

Lewis never renounced this classicist argument against surpassing our imperfection; it was the foundation on which his "art impulse repose(d)" (1969b, p. 204) and by which his 'non-ethical' satire, as much as tragedy, could be a celebration of the duality of the human condition as much as a 'mockery' of its "limited transcendence" (1927, p. 463). However, in *Monstre Gai,* Pullman's 'theology of imperfection' and Enlightenment valuing of the intellect become the primary ideological justification of his alliance with the Bailiff (Edwards, 2000). Desperate and "towered over… by huge, stupid immortals," Pullman resorts to Cartesian rationalisation: since all perfection, including God's, inherently lacks critical intelligence and is content with mere 'being'—indifferent to and 'fatigued' by man's imperfection—he concludes the Bailiff must be the "supernatural element most favourable to man" (p. 267). [367] This disastrous rationale for aligning with the "monstrous" but vital figure over the "handsome, stupid" and "entirely unphilosophic" archangel (pp. 164-167) is hinted at in the book's title, which derives from a couplet attributed to the Enlightenment writer Voltaire:

[367] The Bailiff's mother is one of the Nephalim–who are part angel and part human (1955, p. 335)–hence making him technically supernatural.

Un monstre gai vaut mieux / Qu' un sentimental ennuyeux.

(Voltaire, quoted in Meyers, 2010) [368]

The 'sentimental bore' is, of course, the Padishah, and the 'gay monster' the Bailiff. Pullman's alliance with the gay monster is not solely the consequence of his Enlightenment valuation of human imperfection, but it *is* justified by it (Edwards, 2000). The Bailiff represents the "Enlightened" choice, more attuned to the human world and intellect than the Padishah, whose "passionate lack of interest" in man leaves Pullman cold (Lewis, 1955, p 154). To Pullman, the Bailiff "understood Heaven better than most people here" (p. 174).

Despite the 'Gay monster's' vices and deceptions (and despite the discrepancy between Pullman's "real prejudices" and the Bailiff's "philosophic attitudes"), this "all-powerful magistrate" (p. 174) can alone provide Pullman intellectual stimulation. He not only gifts Pullman a "wonderfully attractive" apartment at the Phanuel Hotel (p. 172) but also grants him access to a sophisticated society similar to Tarr's Paris or Lewis's London.[369] The "glamorous" party at the Bailiff's palace hosts a cosmopolitan "throng" of "unorthodox" Third City "rogues" (p. 119), and the vast hall's "metallic... geometric" décor, along with the music—a six-movement Lyric Suite by avant-garde composer Alban Berg—imbues the scene with an "icy" modernist aesthetic (pp. 122-126). Yet, by *Monstre Gai's* conclusion, Pullman must flee this "shaking palace" with the Bailiff as Third City is stormed by its angels in retaliation against

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[368] In English: "A gay monster is worth more / than a sentimental bore"

[369] Pullman's room is generously lined with the "hundred best books," from "brand new copies" of his own 'best-known' works to Lautreamont and Lucretius (Lewis, 1955, p. 172)

his corrupt practices (p. 304).[370] The ultimate consequence of Pullman's allegiance is a one-way ticket to the Bailiff's home beyond the star Canopus: Hell itself.

Satirically—and implicating Lewis more profoundly than prior satires, given Pullman's role as his surrogate—this narrative seems to condemn modern man and his 'enlightened' rationale as being just as "amoral" as the Bailiff claimed (p. 131). By sending Pullman to hell for his choices, Lewis appears to reject his 'theology of imperfection' and aesthetic idealism and deliver a scathing judgment on the Modernist culture appropriated by the Bailiff at his party. However, as Edwards (2000, p. 533) observes, what is truly unfolds in *Monstre Gai* is that Lewis's exclusively aesthetic value system is supplemented by an ethical one. Previously, Lewis (1964, p. 107) maintained that artists adhere to no idea of the good except that implicit in the practice of art; hence, his defence of "non-ethical" satire as an artistic and philosophic activity not dependent on subjective (ethical) judgements which are not of the artistic mind.[371] In short, it was Lewis's "modernist hubris" that one could instead "justify the world aesthetically" (Edwards, 2000, p.5).[372]

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[370] These corrupt practices include, but are certainly not limited to, his racketeering, his brutality, his Trotsky-like assassination of Hyperides. (Caracciolo, 1996, p. 274)

[371] Lewis (1964, p. 291). argues that the "valuing of our arts is bound up with the valuing of our life, and vice versa"– the central contention of ***Men Without Art***, starting from the "assumption that a non-material system of values attaches to the exercises of the artist", is to "denounce the various interferences, by the agency of which, at present, his activities are impaired"

[372] Lewis resultantly criticised artists like Henry James who conceived of art as a "disembodied statement" of "abstract values", rather than as a "sensuous interpretation of values, participating in a surface life" (1964, p. 153).

Through the allegory of Pullman's fate, however, Lewis acknowledges that even if life is justified and given value in aesthetics, it is ultimately *judged* in ethics. Cartesian rational intelligence was all Pullman valued, but as value seemingly held no more permanence in Third City than for Lewis in Weimar Germany, he concluded intelligence was valuable only for its utility. As the "unattached… 'lone wolf' man, of the fierce modern 'genius' type" (Lewis, 1955, p. 173), Pullman's blind pursuit of the "signs of the intellect" (Lafferty, 2009, p. 180) through the afterworld led him straight into the Bailiff's clutches and, in *Malign Fiesta*, to Satan himself.

This underlines that values, which seem 'superficial' on earth, cannot be attached to human intelligence for mere utility, as Pullman realises when not solely focussed on survival. Increasingly ominous signs from Heaven indicate to him a value system operating outside or above the physical set-up of Third City.[373] As the narrative unfolds and the inhumanity of his diabolic patrons becomes ever more evident, these signs make Pullman feel increasingly guilty: he recognises his choices will finally be judged according to an ethical standard beyond the politics of power, and this provokes a near-conversion experience. Pullman concedes there is such a thing as "Right and Wrong" and that values are absolute and eternal, not 'trivial' as the Bailiff claimed:

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[373] See, for example, the ΙΧΘΥΣ symbol of Christ, the Padishah's "air-mail" sparrows with their Franciscan overtones, or the lone dissenter at the Bailiff's party who attests that Hell is as real as it was in Dante's day (Lafferty, 2015).

> Before the modern age… back in the Age of Faith… there was a Heaven of dazzling white, and there was a good coal-black Hell… These opposites are far too near together for modern conditions (Lewis, 1955, pp. 130-131)

The Bailiff operates on the presumption nothing transcends power politics; an opinion advanced at the modernist party where he lectures his "guests" (p. 124) on contemporary morality:

> …the Good and the Bad are blurred, are they not, in the modern age? We no longer see things in stark black and white. An amoralist... such is the modern man (Lewis, 1955)[374]

This critique of eternal values belongs to the Bailiff, not to Lewis. One flaw in Jameson's claim that Lewis's afterlife lacks transcendence is that it mistakes Sammael's dismissal of the supernatural for Lewis's own. In other words, Jameson equates Lewis's viewpoint with that of a Devil who, like the Bailiff, assumes God is indifferent to right and wrong. Yet Lewis refutes this through the narrative: the Bailiff is driven from Third City by an orthodox alliance, and God defeats Sammael in his attempt to humanise—and thus annihilate—the divine. Sammael's failure and the collapse of the Bailiff's regime are *precisely* the result of their assumption that values are not absolute and are reducible to the political, i.e., the solipsistic value of power (Edwards, 2000)— the same assumption made by advocates of political religions today.

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[374] Significantly, Pullman is earlier referred to as an "'amoralist'" by Mannock, and Pullman's attitude towards others for much of novel confirms Mannock's appraisal (Lewis, 1955, p. 34).

While Lewis doubtless believed, like Harding, that force directed the course of history (Jameson, 1979), the salient point in *The Human Age* is Lewis's growing realisation that force per se is without value: a realisation his remorseful protagonist belatedly recognises. At this confessional climax of *Monstre Gai,* Pullman's actions in Third City become an allegory whose metaphysical implications finally break through the quotidian events of the plot: he sees that even if Third City is an "artificial" arena in which the values of the "life-on-Earth were dressed up in a different way", this dilapidated purgatory had been a "testing-out place for Heaven" (p. 174), a "celestial testing ground" (p. 206); and he pronounces its verdict on himself:

> He had known there was such a thing as the Right and the Wrong; that there was no such thing, for a man, as 'Beyond good and evil'. (Lewis, 1955, p. 263)

With this confession, we see the possibility of *active* values transcending the "nonmoral calculus of sheer power" Jameson (1979, p. 150) claimed governed Lewis's system and which allegedly emptied his "'theology'" of "any conceivable ethical content".

It also reveals a yet deeper significance to the book's title, given that Lewis likely encountered Voltaire's couplet in Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* (Meyers, 2010), with the 'gay monster' being a type he identified as "a man *'beyond good and evil,'* a destroying angel and cultivated Mephistopheles" (Lewis, 1989a, p. 115).[375] In this confessional moment, Pullman recognises, as Sartre and Camus did in occupied France, that modernist intellectuals after Nietzsche (e.g., *transition's* Eugene Jolas)[376] were deluding themselves by thinking they had

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[375] The chapter from *The Art of Being Ruled* that this analysis occurs in was titled 'Nietzsche as Vulgariser' (Lewis, 1989a, pp. 113-118)

[376] Jolas asserted that in the realm of the dream "we are verily beyond good and evil" (1929, p. 18)

surpassed the ancient antinomy of Good and Evil (Schenker, 1992, p. 190). Such a claim, Pullman realises, holds no value beyond the "self-advertising eccentricity of an intellectual" (p. 263).[377] Yet even if the Bailiff and Nietzsche are correct in observing that the boundaries between the two have "blurred" or become relativised in modern times, this only serves to complicate the issue, not eradicate it (Schenker, 1992). Good and evil might manifest with more "clarity" in this "sterilised medium" of the afterworld, but Pullman concludes there are "real and important values" on earth, too, and opposing spiritual forces involved in a struggle for the human soul (1955, pp. 264-266).[378] It is not simply a case, as Lewis (1964, p. 258) earlier (pessimistically) concluded, that "materialist or 'power' values" have today replaced "religious un-material values".

6.2.2 Lewis's Absentee Absolute

This clear statement of value and the active involvement of these eternal principles in human affairs marks a significant shift from *The Childermass*, which, like *Snooty Baronet*, seems intended to be read ironically, with the author's actual values lying just beyond the text (Schenker, 1992). The 1928 prequel adhered to the 'negative theology' of *Time and Western*

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[377] Lewis, in defending "non-ethical satire", had come dangerously close to this position: "What we ultimately shall arrive at, of course, in the case of the critique of the ethical judgement, is a sort of Nietzschean universe, in which 'good' signifies merely the values of the master-caste, and 'bad' the values of the servile caste" (Lewis, 1964, p. 136).

[378] It is this very distinction between good and evil that Sammael wishes to dissolve in the name of his human age– to "leave the Christian God without a Christian Devil" (1955. p. 467). He states: "I have played the villain for him, a part he cannot do without - or so he believes...No - this is the point - I wish to cease to be his Devil." (p. 466)

Man, which emphasised the non-applicability of both God and eternal values to human affairs. In the 1920s, Lewis believed in eternal "truths" (as he did in an Absolute), but, as a pragmatist, he did not share Hegel and Kant's belief that these truths are, or can be, realised within human societies—so great was his concern about their potentially corrosive impact on human individuality (Surrette, 2011, p. 271). He explained, by way of justifying his aesthetic idealism, or "philosophy of the eye" (1927, p. 418):

> We are surface-creatures, and the "truths" from beneath the surface contradict our values. It is among the flowers and leaves that our lot is cast, and the roots, however "interesting," are not so ultimate for us. For us the ultimate thing is the surface, the last-comer, and that is committed to a plurality of being (Lewis, 1955, p. 402).

So just as permanent truths 'contradict our values', Lewis reaches the pragmatic conclusion that an all-engulfing Absolute, 'chemically' applied to man's existence, would destroy man's independence, this 'plurality of being':

> So what… we have arrived at, is for practical reasons, the opposite to the conclusions of Kant's "practical reason." For the same reason we think it is most true and better to say there is no God (Lewis, 1955).

This is not to suggest that *The Childermass*—which eschews any elements of a 'humanistic narrative' for the surface world of the visually mediated (Ayers, 1992, p. 110)—denies God's existence. As a metaphysician, Lewis (1964, p. 121) still saw the need for a radically transcendent God as a 'negation' of man, a "non-human outlook" to "correct our soft conceit". Lewis's God was a "Reality" that reason dictated as necessary, but necessary only to prevent people from attributing a foundational "Reality" to anything more likely to infringe upon

freedom. While the design of *The Childermass's* heavenly city intimated the artistic—even Vorticist—spirit of the divine mind,[379] God was consequently absent from the narrative (Schenker, 1998, p. 65). God's radical transcendence secured both man's independence and His purity but also implied His (necessary) indifference to human lives, a negative thesis Lewis perhaps felt had been proved by God's non-involvement during the trenches (Caracciolo, 2010, p. 81).

Jameson's argument about the 'lack of transcendence' in Lewis's afterlife mistakes this 'negative theology' for atheism. In *The Childermass*, as in *Time and Western Man,* Lewis does not seek to deny God's existence or eternal values. Instead, he aims to separate God's existence from discourses *about* His existence, which are prone to corruption by selfish human motivations. Lewis aligns with Hulme on this point, whose emphasis on the human incomprehension of the divine distinguished his 'anti-humanist' classicism from reactionary politics that played recklessly with theological values and language, blurring religious and temporal realms.[380]

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[379] For Tomlin (1969, p. 28), the city intimates the hallucinatory world of Yeats's Byzantium and of the "City over the mountains" of Eliot's *Waste Land*.

[380] Eliot, who had initially praised Maurras's political neo-Thomism as a restorer of "social order" (2015, pp. 290, 423) and as evidence that "a political and a religious view can be harmonious," became increasingly cautious about how political religions like fascism and communism manipulated the concepts of 'order' and 'loyalty' to evoke positive emotions and attract followers (2015, p. 662). With the rise of fascism and communism, the term 'order,' a key aspect of the Maurrasian interpretation of neo-Thomist classicism, began to carry "ominous connotations" (Rzepa, 2021, p. 309). In a letter to Bonamy Dobrée in 1930, Eliot remarked that

The necessity for re-establishing this distinction became painfully evident in the twentieth century, as regimes misappropriated religious rhetoric within secular politics to achieve nationalistic "goals of power" (Gentile, 2003, p. 62). For instance, World War One was framed as an apocalyptic struggle between Good and Evil, glorifying the state and intensifying the sacralisation of politics in its romantic nationalist manifestation—a mindset that paved the way for the subsequent rise of political religions like Nazism (Gentile, 2006, p. xvii). Likewise, the Bolshevik Revolution, another outcome of the war, engendered an internationalist form of sacralisation of politics, echoed today in the NRR's visions (e.g., Neo-Eurasianism). Given these trends, it is unsurprising that Lewis (like Hulme) felt definitions of the Absolute too readily served selfish political ends and thus should be avoided.[381] Their concerns remain relevant, particularly given the NRR's 'abstract' repurposable definitions of the Absolute as a "nothingness" beyond human limitations (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012, p. 15), a principle of "broadest, most general meaning" (Dugin, 2023, p. 8) or the "highest good" within any belief system (Johnson, 2013, p. 130). This is why, in the proofs for *Time and Western Man* (2023, p. 452), Lewis urged: "If we have a God," it should not be "any Absolute" but "our own particular Unknown," not something that has been "compressed" for political purposes "into

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'"Order" and "Authority" were becoming "dangerous catchwords" and that he was as "scared of Order as of Disorder" (Eliot, 2014, pp. 375-376).

[381] Hence the overlap between Hulme's politics and Lewis's 'negative theology.' In broader philosophical terms, negative theology, also known as apophatic theology, is an approach to understanding God by emphasizing what cannot be said or known about the divine. It suggests that God is beyond all human comprehension and language, so any positive descriptions or affirmations about God's nature are inherently limited and inadequate.

a monstrous and inhuman Absolute."[382] The published text, however, for the sake of polemical directness, omitted this passage and concluded it was better to say there is "no god" (1927, p. 402)

That it is 'better' or safer to say there 'is no God' is made painfully clear in *The Childermass,* where debates at the Bailiff's court seldom reference God but repeatedly circle back to the socio-political concerns of Lewis's polemics (Frisch, 2019). Nevertheless, Lewis struggled to answer the question of what *was* to be real—what set of values should be central to European culture following the war (Schenker, 1988). Although Lewis intended the Bailiff as an object of scorn, his despair ultimately reflects Lewis's own, and one of the Hyperideans (Polemon) cries out in the book's penultimate line, "Who is to be real—this hyperbolical puppet or we? Answer, oh destiny!" (1965b, p. 399). It took Lewis over two decades to attempt an answer in *The Human Age.* Without a more positive and accessible divine principle, the dialectical battles concluding *The Childermass* could only wither in a metaphysical stalemate (Edwards, 2000). Lewis tacitly concedes this in a letter to T. Sturge Moore, where he details the proposed sequel was to "end in chaos": the Hyperideans—representatives of the radical right Lewis saw as Romantic defenders of a lost cause—were to be "disposed of" and the infant choruses "massacred" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2000, p. 529). For Lewis, at this point, the only religious myth suited to interwar Europe was a vision of Armageddon and chaos.

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[382] Perhaps Lewis (1927, p. 389) excluded this passage, with its reference to 'particularly Unknowns'; because it muddied the polemical thrust of his book against the 'god-hungry mysticism' of romantic-reactionary modernisms.

Yet, as seen in Chapter Five, Lewis's value system evolved post-1937 toward a more humane and gradualistic stance, and by *Monstre Gai*, he is prepared to integrate active ethical and eternal values into his work. In 1927 (p. 395), Lewis believed the "intellectual and artistic faculties" could alone fix for us the divine,[383] but the older Lewis considered whether we might also obtain intimations of this radically transcendent God through nature, simply through incarnation—not only via aesthetics.[384] Having rightly predicted the outbreak of another European war, Lewis may have concluded his non-religious stance on God had failed to enlighten his audience. Worse, the aesthetic detachment he once championed was being used in a spirit contrary to his own (Schenker, 1992).[385] As examined in Chapter Four, twentieth-century arts and sciences had developed abstract systems of thought behind which these regimes could pursue their self-interests with unparalleled impunity: modernism's aesthetic

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383 Lewis concurred with Fulton J. Sheen's realist Thomism (1930), which argues that God must be *mediately*, not immediately known; that is, by reason, not by intuition. Maes-Jelink (1970, p. 178) goes so far as to suggest that, for Lewis, the only acceptable form of belief is rational: the "Greek Logos" is his "true God."

384 Such a belief would have been impossible to the younger Lewis, who resisted any reconciliation between aesthetic and the natural because the aesthetic was less corruptible than the nature it intellectually 'organised'.

385 Berman (1994, p. 250) notes that while fascism shared the "early modernist's transcendentalism," it did so not as an "internationalised aesthetics" but as a "nationalised politics." He writes: "The universalisation of spirit in art is not the same as the nationalisation of spirit in culture, but the romantics themselves, at least in Germany, failed to make this discrimination. That oversight has contributed to the stupendous havoc in the twentieth century, although the romantics hardly can be blamed for all that followed—nor can the modernists, who themselves did not clearly perceive this distinction before World War Two."

impersonality not only seemed "continuous" with these broader forms of depersonalisation (Arvidson, 2018, p. 810) but seemed just another chapter in the post-Renaissance narrative of attaining, through political engineering, the perfectibility of the human condition (Oakeshott, 1962).[386]

In light of these concerning trends, Lewis wrote in 1936 (p. 264) that it was the "moment" to "reaffirm" the "specifically Christian attributes" of God and "abandon the rest to the politicians". In Lewis's art and writings, the God he initially postulated for "strictly limited" philosophical ends began to "acquire traits" of a more traditional deity (Edwards, 2015, p. 227). The post-1937 Lewis did not retract his insistence on the "intellectual approach to God" (Sheen, 1930, p. 31), but he *does* relax its extremer theological implications, like the denial of the myth of God's human shape in favour of a 'sexless image'—"In our approaches to God ... we do not need to 'magnify' a human body, but only to intensify that consciousness of a separated and transcendent life" (1927, p. 463). Lewis's "specifically Christian" God even incarnates in *The Trial of Man*, a development foreshadowed by the 'super-naturalist' 1940s watercolours such as *Jehovah the Thunderer* (1941), whose fusion of "pure abstraction" and

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[386] Lewis's insight parallels, from a different angle, Guardini's (1956) and Adorno's (1947) critique of Enlightenment reason: namely, that replacing the Christian God with abstract conceptualism fostered a belief in man's capacity to enfranchise without reference to God, leading to the uncontrollable rise of dehumanised technology and the Holocaust's means-ends rationality of bureaucratic terror (Herf, 1984, p.3). Auden unites these critiques, positing that both reactionary romanticism and rationalism emerged as offshoots of the same post-Renaissance humanism, insomuch as both attempted to establish an "absolute system" based on the "capacities of a finite creature" (Auden, cited in Boly, 1986, p. 137).

"stylised nature" (Lewis, 1963, p. 505) suggests as much God's immanence as His transcendence.

In conclusion, Lewis's supplementing of his non-ethical "aesthetic radicalism" (Normand, 1989, p. 62) and modernist theology with a heterodox Christian theology epitomises a new quality in his work, summarised by Kenner (1966, p. 240) as Lewis's late-life "preoccupation with human destiny." This marks a significant departure from the modernist idealist of the twenties, who supposedly valued perfection above all and despised humanity for tarnishing it (Schenker, 1988, p. 68).

This leads us to *Malign Fiesta* and the Janus-faced Sammael, whose scheme to inaugurate a 'Human Age' embodies the revolutionary aspirations Lewis critiqued in his 1920s polemics. Yet Sammael is also a 'diabolical personification' of the Lewis who made that critique—the "ultra-Right-wing and hierarchical" modernist portrayed by the NRR (Bowden, 2014).[387] As such, Sammael serves as the ideal propaedeutic through which we can conclude this study's analysis of Lewis's dissentient relation to reactionary modernism and the insider-critique of radical-reactionary ideology his work offers.

6.3 Malign Fiesta: Sympathy for the Devil?

Monstre Gai ends amid violent political anarchy as the "Angelic masters" reclaim Third City from its corrupt "dignitary" (1955, p. 290). Despite Pullman's growing disenchantment with the "good old Bailey" (p. 148), his choices have "implicated" him with the gay monster; as the Bailiff says: "I will have to fly; the best thing you can do will be to fly with me" (p. 291).

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[387] For Bowden (2014), Sammael is, paradoxically, a sort of reversal of the 'devil's advocate': Lewis gives "many of his best positions to Sammael" and then "argues against them in the work."

To their chagrin, the Bailiff transports them not to Heaven but to his native city in Hell, Matapolis (Bridson, 1980; Caracciolo, 1996). This Hell is not that existential hell man carries within—nor the "stupid superstition" that Pullman's "false soul-conductor" (Caracciolo, 1996, p. 272) dismissed it as—but the genuine, condign Hell dedicated to deceased sinners.[388]

Pullman's final transition to Hell (reversing the structure of the *Divine Comedy*) sharpens the moral dilemmas of Third City. As Lewis (1963, p. 562) told Kenner, the "same situation" repeats in *Malign Fiesta*, only "more tragically". Instead of dealing with a "petty Capone" (Schenker, 1992, p. 176) who claims good and evil have become passé, Pullman is drawn to the "still more compromising" patronage of the Devil (Kenner, 1966, p. 234). The Bailiff, as Lewis (1963, p. 562) explained, was "not Divine'" but his parallel figure in *Malign Fiesta* "*is* Divine, though Diabolic". Pullman is placed "within a yard or two" of the very 'incarnation of Evil', the *"spirit only second to God"* (Lewis, 1955, p. 350). Added to his tragedy is a growing awareness of the ethical implications of his actions and the "terrible ordeal" into which the "evil of his intelligence" (Holloway, 1957, p. 185) has implicated not only himself but the sinless Satters.[389]

Malign Fiesta is the most affecting book of the trilogy: Pullman is more surely implicated in evil, yet more "desirous of escape from it" (Edwards, 1975, p. 240). In Third City, there appeared a real choice between the 'monstre gai' and the Padishah; in Matapolis, the only

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[388] The Bailiff claimed Hell resembled "a very miniature bit of Birmingham painted over to resemble Le Havre (1955, p. 294)"

[389] For Holloway (1957, p. 185), the 'redeeming' side of Pullman is his obscure but growing awareness of the "evil" implications of his intelligence and his growing desire to abandon its pretensions and ask God for forgiveness.

power is the Devil, to whom Pullman sees "no alternative" but "death" (p. 373). His dilemma is more straightforward yet more terrible: he can survive only by becoming the "Machiavellian counsellor" (p. 440) to Satan in his strategising against Heaven, namely, his intent to merge the "Human and the Angelic" (Lewis, 1963. p. 562), and thus sever man from God. Pullman acknowledges his helplessness, recognising he is "absolutely in the power" of this violent creature (1955, p. 351).[390] Even the Bailiff admits himself a "pitiable worm" before "lord Sammael", whose "limitless power" is "absolute and immeasurable" (pp. 392-396).

The introduction proper of the divine into the narrative irrevocably changes the Manichean power dynamics of *The Human Age* and opens new thematic implications regarding Lewis's views on desacralisation and modernity. Indeed, the now "ex-Bailiff" has fallen from Sammael's graces for fostering "sexual vice" and "lawless debauch" in Third City, acting on the mistaken assumption that in doing so he was fulfilling the "Devil's work" (p. 393). Sammael turns out not to be the "arch-enemy of the moral" but a "very strict" puritan (p. 323), and, with satirical relish, makes the Bailiff weep "like a schoolboy" when told he should "hang by the neck" in Tenth Piazza for having "filled Third City with the imbecilic, the vapid, the homosexual" and propagated the "lowest vices, the blackest crimes of the descendants of Adam and Eve" (p. 393).[391] The allegory is clear: the Bailiff embodies Lewis's critiques of modernity's 'degeneracy', and Sammael represents Lewis's "counter-storm" (1971, p. 31)

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[390] After his initial meeting Sammael, Pullman– "for the first time since his adolescence"–prays, and prays for "mercy and forgiveness" (Lewis, 1955, p. 351).

[391] While the Bailiff denounces homosexuality in *The Childermass* (a "filthy vice" and an "outrage" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 308), he politically exploits it to the detriment of humanity, as Alectryon points out (Frisch, 2019, pp. 196-197).

against those trends, taken to their darkest extreme.[392] Through Sammael, we can thus conclude our exploration of Lewis's insider-critique not only of fascism but also of the anti-humanist classicism embedded in reactionary absolutism.

6.3.1 Sammael, Hitler, and Absolutism

One of the most immediate changes between *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta* is how strikingly the latter's 'puritanic' locale reflects its governor's traits. Instead of the "charming little burg" the Bailiff promised (p. 323), we find a "sullen, frozen city" full of "punishment-minded citizens" (pp. 350-353). Despite updated references to post-war Britain, in writing *Monstre Gai*, Lewis needed no insight greater than that he possessed in 1928; Third City typified any 'low-brow' twentieth-century urban environment, accountable for within the terms of *The Art of Being Ruled.* The atrocities of the Nazis, however, exceeded the bounds of Lewis's original social analyses, and *Malign Fiesta* strives to translate this new, violent material into fiction: there is a "Punishment Centre" (Dis), "sheds" where new "batches of Sinners" are "paraded and marched" (p. 354), and a "fully-fledged Secret Service" with "political police" (p. 489). Sammael is both the "historic arch-demon" and a modern totalitarian leader, with his puritanical Hell representing the traditional medieval Inferno of "demons with pricking pitchforks" (p. 367) *and* twentieth-century extermination camps where sadistically frivolous medical experiments were conducted with scientific detachment. This "Nazified Hell" (Caracciolo, 2010, p. 82), as the Bailiff notes, "possesses all the Inquisition machinery, plus a

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[392] Personally, and conceptually, Sammael is a revenge satirist: he harbours an abiding "abhorrence of Man" (p. 378), especially his "abominable playmate, Woman," that "nastiest innovation of my colleague 'God the Father'" (p. 431).

fine variety of Hitlerian gadgets" (p. 212). The reference to Hitler is not incidental; Hitler, like Sammael, was a "fanatical moralist."[393]

Pullman rightly fears the fate he and Satters will face from this "moralist with a knife" (p. 327), especially after his "Dantesque tour" of Sammael's punishment hospitals (p. 411). He meets the "Mengele-like" Hachilah (Lafferty, 2009, p. 188), who expects Pullman to admire his ingenuity in recreating, with modern surgical techniques, a series of Dantean *tableaux vivants* using the suspended bodies of mutilated sinners.[394] Hachilah explains that this "vast" hospital, whose cells are a "caricature of Dante's Inferno", is engaged in the "Surgery of Morals" (p. 411). "Overwhelmed" by these and other instances of Sammael's "unsurpassable

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[393] As Edwards (1975) rightly notes, one of Lewis's most signficant thematic expansions in ***Malign Fiesta*** is creating a character capable of 'representing' Hitler. As previously noted, the Bailiff 'merely' symbolises Mussolini: an unscrupulous, somewhat clownish, and vulgar demagogue full of "barbaric bombast" (Lewis, 1955, p. 11), a "Gay Monster" on a "dark-curtained puppet-stage," who dances "like a lunatic, shooting out his arms and tearing off his beard" (1955, p. 284). The Bailiff is a manipulative and murderous "puppet-master," but he lacks the austere and perverse idealism of Hitler (Edwards, 1975). Sammael, a puritanical misogynist, is "even more sinister" (Lewis, 1955, p. 517), though less 'theatrical' than the Bloody Bailie' (Lewis, 1965b, p. 233). Like Hitler, he is portrayed as a supposed 'artist' (Lewis, 1955, p. 133) and embodies the puritanism and intellectual seriousness that make him an apt fictional counterpart to the German leader (Edwards, 1975). Most chillingly, Sammael—with typical Hitlerian prissiness—repurposes the hair, nails, and "preserved skins" of tortured sinners to manufacture "clothes," "small upholsteries," "handkerchief sachets," and other "luxury articles" (Lewis, 1955, pp. 356-358).

[394] As Auden wrote: "my day turned out torturers / who read Rilke in their rest periods" (1979, p. 287)

horror", Pullman realises he faces "the same" turning point as in Third City, where he "ought to have severed his connection with that monstre gai" (pp. 371-373). Yet he "repeats the same mistakes… all over again" (Bachman, 2016, p. 157), feeling his only option is to make himself useful to the "new kind of monster," just as he had with the Mussoliniesque Bailiff. Pullman becomes a "learned captive" to Sammael's "Roman Emperor" (p. 465), assisting Satan in his plot to undermine the divine by interbreeding angels with mankind to inaugurate a 'Human Age'.

It should strike the reader how this ambition conflicts with the absolutist and puritanical nature of the 'Hitlerian' Sammael. *Malign Fiesta* seemingly presents 'two' Sammaels: a 'demon of progress' whose scheme embodies the romantic-modernist dream that transcendence can be attained via total cultural and political transformation (Griffin, 2007)—but which, in postmodernity, has degenerated into nihilism (Gray, 2007)—and the pro-Divine, traditionalist Sammael who personifies, in extremis, the theological-metaphysical critique Lewis launched of these anthropocentric aspirations.

Investigating this paradox will clarify how Lewis's heterodox Christian theology distinguishes him from *both* aspects of Sammael and, by extension, the similarly contradictory convergence of reactionaryism and traditionalism in NRR metapolitics. Lewis's late-career thought—like the Hegelian Gillian Rose—sought to navigate between the "dangers and excesses" of postmodernist relativism and modernist absolutism (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2005).

6.3.2 Sammael's 'Revolutionary' Human Age

Any analysis of Sammael can, at best, clarify the antinomies in his character but not wholly resolve them. It seems Sammael, the "greatest of archangels" (Lewis, 1955, p. 396), with his renowned "hatred of man" (p. 451), seeks to forsake his traditional role as divine punisher

and become a new kind of demiurge (Lafferty, 2009, Nath, 1990), one dedicated to making angels more corporeal and human.[395] But why would Sammael, who loathes mankind, seek to contaminate angelic perfection with a "human admixture" (Kenner, 1958, p. 235)? Surely, by marrying dark angels to female sinners, he would only replace a divine order of beings with an imperfect one antithetical to his puritanical predilections—fashioning, in short, a breed of "quasi-divine hybrid(s)" (O'Keeffe, 2001, p. 609) or "angelic mongrels"? (Bridson. 1980, p. 247).

One solution to this 'two Sammaels' problem is to deny the antimony outright. Sammael despises humanity *and* God— he merely has a two-pronged attack (Edwards, 2000). Despite his 'historical' opposition to Man, Sammael is willing to humanise his angels (and himself) to establish a new pseudo-Heaven in Hell and hence eternally separate man from God—and God from "treasured creations" (Lafferty, 2015, p. 13). This will not only "constrict humanity further in darkness" (Nath, 1996, p. 194) but undermine God's survival as an 'Almighty' Absolute. To achieve this dual aim, Sammael must modernise Hell, converting it into a desacralised 'modernity' where the differences between fallen angels and men are demolished through interbreeding. When this interbreeding has repopulated Hell—and Heaven itself—the human age will be achieved, God defeated, and Sammael will have inherited the whole (Bridson, 1980, p. 247). In this sense, Sammael is not as 'enlightened' or utopian as he seems, but still the "archdemon" of old, conforming to his description in *The Anatomie of Sorcerie* (1612), which states: "Satan's chiefest drift and maine point... is the inlargement of his owne kingdome' by acquiring more damned souls" (Mason, 1612, p. 55).

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[395] Sammael's scheme would, in Bachman's (2016, p. 157) words, invert "the humanisation of matter excoriated in Time and Western Man"

While Pullman is morally aware of his complicity with this ‘first' Sammael, God’s ancient adversary, his rational intellect is irresistibly drawn to the ambitions of the later Sammael, the 'progressive' Satan, the "Stalin" who "suddenly aspired to establish a *Sans-Souci*" (Lewis, 1955, p. 477). Sammael presents his vision of transforming himself from the supernatural into the natural as an idealistic, ‘democratic’, and enlightened objective—one that a traditionalist God would oppose since it abolishes the Devil’s role as the “official Opponent” and deprives the supernaturals of their "outdated" angel status (pp. 464-470). [396] Pullman agrees there is "lethargy in that vast stability”, and his humanistic rationale empathises with the “great revolution” Sammael plans to “explode among men and angels” and his ambition to “combine the advantages” of “angelic stability” and “human mercurialism” (pp.480-493). As such, Pullman thinks not only of self-preservation in becoming Sammael’s “counsellor” but also of the advantages this scheme might bring to mankind. He imagines that in the proposed ‘mingling’, a "little immortality" might be surrendered to tomorrow’s "Newtons and the Plancks”, who could establish a "superb Human Age" upon a "suitable planet,” a tabula rasa world where “all the high activities could blossom” (p. 480). The history of such a planet would

[396] Sammael claims that God “from the first” exhibited a desire to have “His Darkness”–to “use Byron’s expression”–to balance “His Brightness”, an “Ahriman” to his Ahura Mazda. Significantly, Sammael points out that “Iranian dualism is at the bottom of God’s mind” (1955, p. 464)–perhaps a reference to *The Art of Being Ruled’s* advocation of the 'ancient and valuable Iranian principle of duality’ (Lewis, 1989a, p. 25).

match the history Harding wanted to write for Earth: one focused solely on the creative works of creative men.[397]

Pullman's allegiance with Satan thus presents an even deeper satire on Enlightenment and modernist values than *Monstre Gai*. As director of Sammael's scheme, Pullman —like Lewis's theoretically omnipotent Caliph—can wipe everything out and fashion a world "nearer to the heart's desire" (1963, p. 274), a "new world of reason" (1927, p. 391). He proposes "building a university for angels..." to persuade these mechanically perfect "idlers" to work at "book learning"— and indeed, an "adult university" is founded in Angeltown where Pullman, naturally, becomes its director (1955, p. 491).

Pullman thus becomes a kind of Voltaire to Sammael's Frederick the Great, and he is subliminally cognisant of this (aside from the allusion to 'Sans-Souci', "Frederick the Great's drummers" are invoked on page 501).[398] He embraces his position, creating "propaganda" (p. 543) to expedite Sammael's proposal to end "what men know as Heaven" and build a "true one" in its place (p. 378). Pullman proposes inaugurating this scheme with a Fiesta, which introduces Angeltowners to the humanistic, Enlightenment culture they are to henceforth

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397 It is only half-ironic when Pullman says: "'I should not like to see my great patron executed as an advocate of Humanism.", even if the addendum "Only consider what my position would be like" (Lewis, 1955, p. 440), is scathingly self-aware.

398 Sans-Souci is the palace built by the 'intellectual' Prussian monarch, and where he infamously invited the Enlightenment philosopher to supper. That Lewis (1984, p. 177) viewed the Prussian monarch as both a "good Machiavellian" and a "perfect specimen of a power-addict" should alert the reader to the possibility that Sammael is merely a "master of intrigue" (Lewis, 1955, p. 473), and that his 'enlightened' ambitions to desacralise the afterlife are not going to "join the human ambitions" (p. 480), but spring instead from motiveless malice (Edwards, 2000).

participate in (Edwards, 2000, p. 536). The 'cultural' aspects of Pullman's "jittercracking" (p. 504) fiesta, however, are hardly the art of the 'dissident high culture' envisaged by the avant-garde elite, but the products of the degenerate mass culture that the NRR and the high modernists (the 'reactionary angels') condemn. The Fiesta degenerates into a symbol of 'decadent' post-Enlightenment modernity, an "ironic apotheosis of the banal" (Carter, 1956, p. 335). Factories mass produce masks, postiche noses, and all the machinery of carnival; "truckfuls of women" are imported from the revolutionary angel settlements; there are jazz concerts, cowboys with "firearms and spectacular knives" singing "toughly and sentimentally of the corral", and orchestras oozing out "swoony slush"—we meet Swiss yodellers, castanet-whirling Spanish dancers, and Irish and Scottish dance troupes jiving with "reckless savagery" to the "music of the Magyars" (pp. 496-529). The scene embodies Plato and Tocqueville's views on egalitarianism leading to materialism (see Chapter Four), Guénon's perspective of 'progress' as a regress into the abyss of matter, corporeality, and mechanicalness (cited in Dugin, 2019, p. 39), and Dugin's (2020) own notion of modernity as the 'reign of quantity,' characterised by the archetypal forces of the Titans and the Great Mother (Cybele), where the gods retreat and "matter" takes "possession of humanity". [399]

This dissolute mélange, however, belies the true intention of the Fiesta, which is to use the festivities as a general aphrodisiac inciting the angels to mate with human women (Schenker, 1992).[400] Sammael is to play the part of "the leading tempter" (although he will not

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[399] In *The Reign of Quantity* (1945), Guénon contended that one of the fundamental features of the Kali Yuga was the replacement of quality by quantity.

[400] This is no small task, considering that the Angel's sexual instincts have been dormant since their union with the daughters of men in Genesis 6:2.

"go through with it himself") and dance the rumba with his 'fiancée', a "young American octaroon of surpassing beauty" (p. 495). She is to "roll her hips in the most inflammatory way", to "ignite" the "rusty machine" of the "angels' genitals… extinct for so many thousands of years" and commence the inauguration of the Human Age (p. 505).

The Fiesta climaxes after midnight with an "angel Kermess" (p. 533), a term pointedly recalling Lewis's *Kermesse* drawing of 1912.[401] Edwards describes this drawing as a "Dionysiac, futurist dance of creation" (quoted in Kenner, 1997, p. 225) influenced by the Breton peasant fêtes Lewis observed in his youth.[402] The painting fixed the wild energy of Dionysian rapture into a geometric rigidity to confront the tension between Bergson's 'vital' humanism and the geometric severity of anti-humanist primitive art (Johnson, 2014, p. 151). No such Apollonian-Dionysian balance is achieved in *Malign Fiesta*, however, and the 'Satanic Kermess' terminates in an orgy of drunkenness, sex, and violence. This aligns with Dugin's (2019, p. 67) concept of the "black logos" of Cybele as the "logos of modernity", existing below the light-dark dualism of Apollo-Dionysus, where "only matter is absolute."[403] Walking home through Angelsway,

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401 "Kermesse" denotes a peasant carnival or fair in the Low Countries, known for its "boisterous merry-making" (Tickner, 1997, p. 68).

402 Tickner (1997, p. 89) describes the "raised arms, ferocious expressions, and ecstatic rhythm" of the Kermesse as invoking "something like flamenco and the patterned, almost mechanical beat of stamping feet and castanets"– again strongly foreshadowing the *Fiesta.*

403 In Dugin's philosophical framework, Cybele's "black logos" refers to logos associated with chaos, matter, and chthonic forces (as opposed to the classical and rational logos embodied by Apollo, which symbolises order, reason, and light). Significantly, Cybele's realm exists below the traditional Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, emphasising primordial chaos and matter without the transcendent qualities required for a balanced, meaningful universe.

Pullman encounters “a group of six angels,” one of whom was “quite visibly” in the act of “possessing a little female figure”. He sees “chains of drunks... stretched across the sidewalk” and one “extremely large angel” gouging out the eyes of a small one, only to be himself stabbed to death by a “bellowing crowd” (“democracy by gangs”, Pullman quips). Leaving the scene, Pullman looks back to see a vulture circling over the street where the corpse has been abandoned, “suspicious of the shining handle of the dagger” sticking out of its chest, “sculptured to represent a serpent rampant” (pp. 534-536).

Significantly, for Dugin (2018), the modern state is a “serpent” organised from below to “destroy everything” that is Absolute, unified and “sacred,” just as modernity represents the “victory of the titans, of Cybele, of *the serpent* over God”. [404] Similarly, for Edwards, this image represents Lewis's final word on the unravelling of the Enlightenment project and the modernism that emerged in its wake. The elimination of a transcendent Absolute and the relocation of its values within the stream of nature led to the debasement of mass culture and violent efforts to reattain, through nature, "values that have their grounds elsewhere" (Edwards, 2000, p. 536). As such, the Fiesta is the consummation of Lewis’s critiques of Western culture discussed throughout this thesis—the fetishisation of revolution, irrational vitalism, and deceptive forms of democracy.[405] It represents Guenon’s “dark age” (1945), Evola’s ‘kali yuga’ (1995), Burke’s (1952, p. 62) “saturnalia of destruction,” and Lewis’s (2023,

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[404] For Dugin (2018), this negative development emerged in the Renaissance with a “scientific vision” and a “completely new understanding of religion,” which holds that the modern state should be secular, with no religious connections.

[405] Progress is, of course, inimical to the Divine. As Lewis (1989b, p. 158) writes: “there is no progress for the Absolute… no temporal progression… the BEST is already there, apart in the abstraction assigned to it in the nature of things.

p. 451) “Moloch of Modern Ideas.” Above all, Sammael's scheme encompasses everything Lewis (1927, p. 192) opposed in *Time and Western Man,* which argued for the “stable” personality as a way to preserve the subject that modern ideologies were dismantling into a “bundle of faggots” (Caracciolo and Edwards, 1998 p. 128)— just as Sammael intends by ‘liquefying’ the angels:

> …their immortality will dissolve into mortality, their vast individual shapes will be cut up into thousands of facsimiles of themselves. There would be everywhere a swarming of ephemeral units in place of a world of larger and more stable things (Lewis, 1955, p. 479).

As Nath (1996, p. 164) points out, this represents nothing less than an implementation ‘of the time-philosophy' of Whitehead and Alexander: in short, Sammael is the “hypostasis” of the “Time-Cult”, and his ‘revolution’ entails the dissolution of the Subject, which Lewis saw as fatal to art. [406] Compare Sammael’s words to Lewis’s of 1927:

> Dispersal and transformation of a space-phenomenon into a time-phenomenon throughout everything that is the trick of this doctrine.... A crowd of hurrying shapes,

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[406] Pullman, in advising Sammael, even echoes one of Alexander's phrases: “What now you have to do, is to accustom yourself to take time seriously, to think in terms of time” (Lewis, 1955, p. 471). Yet more significantly, in *The Writer and the Absolute*, Lewis (1952, p. 26) includes Heidegger in this time cult: “Heidegger, having denied that man is, asserts that he is always in-the-making- by-himself (reminiscent of Alexander's 'God in the making' and much other evolutionist theory).”

> a temporal collectivity, is to be put in the place of the single object of what it hostilely indicates as the "spatialising" mind (Lewis, 1927, p. 181)

The culmination of this doctrine, according to Lewis, is that the 'human'—as idealised in humanism—is *itself* subjected to a similar critique to that which abolished the divine: our personalities will be dissolved into a swarm of "ephemerids" without higher-level cohesion (1927, p. 28). The Fiesta represents this in mass culture: society's dissolution into Bergsonian fragments and its scattering into "Democritan atoms" (Lewis, 1997c, p. 168).[407] In sum, Pullman has been intellectually drawn into a project that embodies the opposite of Lewis's 'traditionalist' critique: Sammael's scheme values the human and the natural over remote and transcendent authorities, privileges the "religion of impermanence" (Lewis, 1989a, p. 25) over eternity and space,[408] and emphasises "matter and sense experience" over "sacrality, hierarchy, appeal to God and the spirit" (Dugin, 2019, p. 38).

Pullman mentally repudiates this scheme at the Gala Luncheon celebrating the Fiesta; listening to Sammael's 'dazzling oration,' he realises the extent of the evil he has been

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[407] Dugin, who traces the crisis of European culture to "de-Apollonization and de-Platonization" (Millerman, 2018, p. 221), presents a similar diagnosis of modernity as "entropy, dispersion, and dissipation… elevated into the rank of a value and actively spread everywhere," (Dugin, 2019, p. 39) a trend he–like Lewis–metaphysically associates with the atomistic perspective of Democritus as opposed to the "philosophy of the monarchists Plato and Aristotle" (p. 17).

[408] In Dugin's model of the three Greek Logoi (Apollo, Dionysus, Cybele), the 'black logos' of modernity (Cybele) is characterised by the Titanic reign of Kronos or ***time*** against the eternal "now" of Apollo.

complicit in by reducing Angeltown to a 'comic Hollywood', a "satanic parody of Los Angeles" (Caracciolo, 2010, p. 95):

> In Sammael's heart there was no great purpose, but the old, cold pride. He was resolved to explode the supernatural, ultimately to make an end of God (Lewis, 1955, p. 511).

Pullman is "smitten with a revelation" that Sammael's 'Enlightened' project was "merely a defiance of god" and that to "save his skin", he had been "actively assisting at the annihilation of the Divine".

For Lafferty (2015), this project of self-destruction is what makes Sammael a "valueless vacuum" (Lewis, 1955, p. 528): despite his apparent liberalism, his "matchless intelligence" (p. 511), his condemnations of the Bailiff's depravity, and his professed desire to abdicate from punishing sinners on behalf of God, his real goal in his "potentially suicidal" (Lafferty, 2015, p. 13) mixing of human and divine is to undermine the True God by inducing cosmic disorder. Bridson (1980, p. 247) also interprets Sammael as a "supreme Anarchist" seeking to upset God's "wiser, authoritarian plans" for an orderly universe. These readings place Sammael in the tradition of "motiveless malevolence", which extends from Shakespeare's Iago and Milton's Satan to the protagonists of Poe, Melville, and Dostoevsky and continues through the works of Gide, Camus, and other twentieth-century writers (Bloom, 1986a, p.2). This tradition, originating with the demonic (tinged with Prometheanism), evolved in the late nineteenth century into a vitalism intertwined with the societal image of man in revolt, climaxing in Lewis's era with a violence that nevertheless affirms individual existence, thus preventing absolute despair of self—exemplified by Nietzsche's 'will to power'. This returns us to the NRR's view of Nietzsche's "metaphysics of absolute subjectivity" as the endpoint of

modernity's "descent into nihilism" (Dugin, 2014, p. 130) and recalls Guénon's (2004, pp. 262-267) depiction of modernity as a "great parody" or "degeneration" pushed to the "extreme limit" of atheism and materialism. Perhaps Sammael intended, by pushing 'degeneration' beyond its 'extreme limit' in the Fiesta, to reveal where these trends of modernity were truly leading—much like Lewis's (1987, p. 183) satire sought to bring "human life more into contempt" for a comparable purpose.

This final point is crucial. While such analysis clarifies the seemingly contradictory motives of Sammael's plan, it simultaneously deepens Lewis's association with the 'true' Sammael and, by extension, with the traditionalist absolutism reflected in the NRR's response to desacralisation. Lewis declared himself for the divine, and while the Bailiff might not be divine, *Sammael is*—and for Kenner (1966, p. 238), it is not clear Sammael's "repudiation of the human" was at odds with anything Pullman's intellect reveals. Through Pullman's renunciation of a 'Human Age' and its allusion to a philosophical critique of Modernist-Enlightenment values, Lewis seemingly embraces an orthodox opposition to the abolition of the divine and efforts to replace it with "merely political" utopias (Lewis, 1971, p. 136). This reading implies Pullman and Lewis should share Sammael's "original dislike" (1955, p. 431) for man, and especially his melodramatic contempt for "beastly" women (p. 514) as the instrument by which the Absolute is negated and transformed (Kenner, 1958). [409]

Lewis's early fictions, particularly *Tarr* and "Cantleman's Spring Mate" provide ample evidence of what Lewis (1989a, p. 244) mockingly called a "propagandist indictment of the feminine", suggesting that he, like D. H. Lawrence, saw women as enemies of the modern

[409] Sammael says: "The female of your species does really affect me as some people are affected by cats. If I could exterminate them I would" (Lewis, 1955, p. 377)

artist's transcendental aspirations (Phillips, 2011, p. 118).[410] Even in 1947, when describing the projected theme of *Self Condemned*, Lewis (1963, p. 410) described women as "the eternal enemy of the absolute" and antagonistic to his "perfectionist" protagonist. For Carlston (2018, p. 771), this "entrenched hostility" towards the feminine (and, by extension, the homosexual) underpins Lewis' conviction that "liberal values like equality and progress are a sham"—a means by which sinister political forces destabilise traditional social hegemony, consolidate power, and induce citizens to sacrifice their individuality (Frisch, 2019). The 1928 Bailiff embodies this dystopian vision: he condemns homosexuality as a "filthy" vice (Lewis, 1965b, p. 308) yet regards it as advantageous to his regime. That the puritanical Sammael castigates the Bailiff for his behaviour only reinforces the alleged parallels between him and Lewis. Kenner (1966, p. 238) memorably remarked that if the Bailiff embodied everything Lewis had opposed in the old days, then Sammael is "very nearly the Lewis who had opposed it"—see Appendix 2.

Kenner (1966, pp. 234-238) argues that much of Lewis's energy flowed into Sammael while writing *Malign Fiesta*. He is not as cheap as the Bailiff, but rather an "intelligent being and a fascinating Puritan"; Sammael and genius can "understand each other". The Bailiff was the 'man of the world", incarnating the mass ideology Lewis opposed in the interwar years

[410] The introduction of Anastasya in *Tarr*, who is both an egoist (and a female), adds a compelling complication to this reading. Emmanuel (2010, p. 192) argues that the confrontation of Tarr and Anastasya produces something "new and different" in Lewis, a "new set of ideas coming together (a 'healthy dualism' perhaps?)"

through a satire he defined as a 'metaphysical'— not a 'moral'—criticism of man. For Kenner (1958, p. 233), Sammael is this satiric impulse carried to an "Insane extreme."[411]

Yet the Bailiff, having been imprisoned by Sammael in Dis for his moral depravity, is rehabilitated as Sammael's assistant in organising the Human Age, becoming "Director" of the "secret services" necessary to execute Sammael's plan (Lewis, 1955, pp. 489-491). This again shows Sammael's Janus-faced nature: he is a 'supreme anarchist' willing to employ the Bailiff to "bring heaven crashing down" (p. 511) and an absolutist who detests the Bailiff's 'degeneracy' and "on principle" approves of "punishing Man just for being Man" (p. 377). For Kenner (1966), Sammael's misanthropy derives from the 'Lewisian' standpoint of genius, a standpoint that takes upon itself a divine perspective and finds humanity contemptibly inadequate in comparison—particularly the natural, reproductive elements symbolised by women, whom Sammael demeans as "the nursery… procreative side of Man" (p. 431).[412] This 'second' Sammael, however, deliberately imposes the 'horror' of the sexual and female on the

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411 Nath (1990) also sees Sammael as sharing traits with the pessimistic, religious-philosophical Lewis who emerges in *Men Without Art*.

412 Despite his other reservations about Sammael, Pullman disagrees with none of this. Even his confession is partly driven by remorse for facilitating the 'progressive' Sammael in "forcing" women on the divine—women "with all her sexishness, her nursery-mind, her vulgarity" (Lewis, 1955, p. 511)—words that uncomfortably echo those of his patron (1955, p. 511). Genius, Kenner (1966, p. 234) contends, is susceptible to such arguments, and the "genius of a satirist—a Lewis or Swift—is even inclined to frame them". Indeed, Sammael's aesthetic aversion to the messiness of procreation resonates in much of Lewis's fiction: "Junior" likens gestation to "the toad-life at the bottom of the tank" (1973, p. 115) and "Doppelgänger" equates the "reproductive act" with the "swallowing and evacuating processes (1973, p. 205).

angels to corrupt the divine, compromising the 'standpoint of genius' from which his misanthropy derived (Edwards, 2000). Yet there is no indication in the novel that Sammael alters or that this antinomy should be accredited to anything beyond Sammael's reputation as the "legendary Prince of Subtleties" (Lewis, 1955, p. 473). He even declares he will have his 'fiancé' "shot at once" when the "farce" of the Fiesta is over (p. 517).

The more crucial point to focus on, therefore, is *Pullman's* relationship to these deceptive antinomies in Sammael—rather than the antinomies themselves—and how the narrative apparently condemns him for aligning with the 'progressive' rather than the 'absolutist' Sammael. Pullman receives increasingly "bloodcurdling missives" from "on High" concerning his facilitation of a Human Age, as the "Lord of hosts" invades with His Heavenly Army to defeat this program (pp. 552-557). Pullman's organisation of the 'angelic orgy' (Bridson, 1980, p. 247) and its corruption of human and divine is the one thing Heaven will not tolerate (Carter, 1956, p. 336).[413] One could conclude from this, like Kenner (1966), that the narrative encourages a judgment of Pullman that renders him *uncondemned* (or less condemned) for collaborating with the pro-divine, anti-humanist Sammael (Edwards, 2000). Kenner qualifies this argument by showing this narrative logic is ultimately contradicted and surpassed by new developments in Lewis's value system, which *equally* condemn the absolutist Sammael. However, Kenner insists only traces of these developments exist in the published *Malign Fiesta*, mainly in its final pages, and would have been further explored in *The Trial of Man*.

The developments Kenner alludes to, summarised briefly, centre on Pullman's revelation that God values man for his failings: a revelation constituting a reversal of Lewis's earlier anti-

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[413] As Bridson (1980, p. 247) writes, God's invasion ensures no Human Age will emerge in Hell or anywhere else except on Earth, where it would "seem to belong."

humanism that made possible his abstraction and satire (Dasenbrock, 1985).[414] "For the conviction that man is valuable," Kenner (1966, p. 235) writes, "the satires Lewis had achieved since 1929 would seem to leave no room." If "God values Man", then to satirise Man, or to satirise particular men, is, obliquely, "an insult to God" (Nath, 1990, p. 250).[415] Kenner (1966, p. 234) views Lewis's willingness to reappraise the supremacy of the intellect over the human as "the most extraordinary deed" in his career, one challenging not only the rest of *The Human Age* but the premises underlying his entire writing life. It was this total ideological revaluation that *The Trial of Man*, through its narration of Pullman's ascension to the divine, was to have completed—had Lewis lived to write it. Nath (1990, pp. 246-247) also speculates that this *later* Pullman represents what Lewis was *becoming* but concurs with Kenner that Sammael is "what Lewis was".

We must return, then, to *The Human Age* in its final published form and examine the argument that the 'first' Sammael serves as an analogy for Lewis as an "energetic hater" (Meades, 2021). To test this claim, we must scrutinise more closely the "revenge-satirist" Sammael (Nath, 1990, p. 245) and the 'positive' judgment the narrative allegedly passes on him—a judgment that implies an endorsement of Lewis's supposed 'anti-humanist' indictment of the modernist intellectual in the text.

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414 Dasenbrock (1985, p. 188) argues that, in Lewis's work, a "theological vision of man" supersedes the satiric one, "just as it had in Eliot's."

415 Nath (1990, p. 244) speculates that Lewis, through his conception of the Punishment Centre (Dis) and, most of all, through his conceptualisation of Sammael, came to the realisation that satire was the "Devil's work."

This analysis will simultaneously conclude the thesis's objective of challenging the NRR's reception of Lewis as a reactionary modernist, demonstrating how his proximity to modernist impersonality, conservative revolutionism, and anti-humanism was the condition for his launching, in *Malign Fiesta*, one final 'insider-critique' of absolutism, scientific detachment, nihilistic violence, and the "lethal abstractionising of the machine" (McLuhan, 2010, p. 180).

6.3.3 Lewis and the "Two Sammaels"

In proceeding with this analysis of Sammael, we must consider two developments in Lewis's value system that complicate Kenner's near-identification of the Devil with his author. Firstly, as argued in Chapter Four, Lewis's metaphysical satire on humanity was double-sided; what initially seemed an 'anti-humanistic' assault by genius on contemptibly inadequate humanity increasingly intertwined with his "downright resistance" (Waddell, 2012, p. 146) to reactionary utopian schemes for human perfectibility.[416] Lewis's satire celebrated man's "mechanical imperfection" (1969b, p. 204) as a paradoxical source of divine grace, a gift of independence from a 'democratic' God, as much as it mocked man's "limited transcendence" (1927, p. 463) when compared to His divine perfection—a perfection glimpsable only through aesthetics.

Yet Phillips (2011) and Carlston (2018) argue Lewis adjudged the gender of this aesthetic to be essentially masculine, still aligning him with Sammael's view of women and nature as

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[416] In his "Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time" (1922, p. 30), Lewis acknowledged "perfect snowballs or lightning conductors" as concepts with which humans "have some commerce," but considered '"perfect" works of art or human beings as Platonic ideals which we "have not very much to do on our present road."

'enemies' of the Absolute.[417] For instance, Tarr—a "caricatural self-portrait of sorts" (Lewis, 1984, p. 165)— proclaimed God as male and woman as a "lower form of life… everything started female and most so continued: a jellyfish diffuseness spread itself and gaped upon all the beds and bas-founds of everything" (Lewis, 2010, p. 278).[418] And there is undoubtedly a Puritan ring in Tarr's subsequent attestation that "above a certain level" sex disappears, just as in "highly-organised sensualism sex vanishes", but "everything beneath that line was female'".[419] For Carlston (2018, p. 771), the female in Lewis's work is thus a "primitive,

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417 Phillips (2015, p. 118) argues that there is a "suggestive paradox, a vital inconsistency" in Lewis's attempts to elevate the "physical, classical, and masculine" while denigrating the "biological, romantic, and feminine." He suggests that the "systematic debasement of the biological human body" in Lewis's work is "impossible" to overlook and reflects a form of misogyny—or more accurately, misanthropy—closely akin to D. H. Lawrence's.

418 Dugin (2019, p. 110) presents a parallel metaphysical trajectory in *Political Platonism*, which holds that, before Heraclitus, philosophy was "in the womb," and the Logos "swam" in maternal waters, but was finally "born through the rejection of Chaos," becoming the "principle of division, hierarchy, and exclusion"; order was then "placed exclusively at the centre of the All, and the "male principle" was "essentially… elevated to the absolute".

419 Commenting on this passage, Jameson (1979) astutely notes that although women, the organic, and sexuality are all negatively mythologised, there is—notably—no corresponding glorification of the male principle. For Jameson (1979, p. 97), the peculiar aspect of Lewis's sexual ideology is that, despite its many instances of metaphysical misogyny, "it is not for all that phallocentric". Significantly, in Lewis's work, the positive counterpart to the negative female principle is not male (as it is for D.H. Lawrence), but rather art itself—something "dead" and spatial rather than temporal or existential.

undifferentiated, mushy bog", and femininity a "condition of the homogenous crowd" with no relation to transcendence.

This, however, leads to the second development that problematises identifying Lewis with Sammael. As argued in Chapter Five, post-1937, Lewis began admitting the 'natural'—particularly the feminine—as a ground of value, not just a negative principle against which positive values (the aesthetic realm of 'genius') are contrasted. This shift in sympathies is evident in the supernaturalism of Lewis's 1940s watercolours and his series of 'humanised' novels from *The Revenge for Love* to *Self Condemned*—the thematic core of the latter being Rene's reconciliation with Hester.[420] Where the aesthetic was once the 'vanishingly narrow' bridge *Time and Western Man* allowed between man and the divine, these later works (the paintings especially) speculate whether the world might reveal God's valuation of it not just "through aesthetic representation" but also simply through "life itself, through incarnation" (Edwards, 2000, p. 5). Curiously, the genesis of this development traces back to an unpublished section of *Time and Western Man*:

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[420] This contrasts with earlier paintings like ***Athanaton*** (1927), where a mother and her (presumed) child confront their reflections from another realm, striving through these reflections to access a symbolic bridge to a mystical state beyond nature. As Edwards (2015, p. 32) observes, this recalls Lewis Carroll's 'Queen of Hearts'–with hearts evoking a realm of love where "even the mother-child relationship is redeemed". The key point is that this bond ***needs*** redemption; if nature operates as a mechanism, the "mother-child relationship of a generation" is the "engine of its continuance," and Lewis remains "far from positive about it" (Edwards, 2015, p. 32).

> Nature is indeed our friend…. We worship, if we worship, still the virgin-goddess, the stars on the ocean, the break-of-day: the natural magic that inspired our earliest beliefs… (Lewis, 2023, p. 452; see Appendix 3)

Malign Fiesta works unsparingly, through Sammael, to subject these two hard-won developments in Lewis's values to the ultimate narrative test. This is evident in the "very sadistic passages" (Fraser, 1967, p. 104) of torture, which, as Edwards (2000) admits, could be misinterpreted as 'mere sadism' and an expression of authorial misanthropy indistinguishable from Sammael's. The most significant of these is when Hachilah shows Pullman his version of Paolo and Francesca from Dante's fifth Canto, which he considers a "great improvement" on the *Commedia's* "sentimental pair" (1955, p. 406). Hachilah has "strapped" the naked couple together, "indecently glued" them lips to lips, sex to sex, so they may never move a fraction from that "mockery of love" (pp. 404-407). If this recalls the narrator of "Doppelgänger" (Lewis, 1973, p. 205), who thought the "transports of the pervert" as ridiculous as those of "normal lovers"—ridiculous because natural "processes" like the "reproductive act" are "degrading"—then that 'Lewis' is here overcome by the Pullman who intuits the body in *itself* can be a vehicle for an expression of value.[421] Rather than the aesthetic and the 'natural' (feminine) being antagonistic, they are reconciled in Pullman's mind; Paolo and Francesca achieve a tragic dignity defying the

[421] This is quite a development from an author who argued in "The Meaning of the Wild Body" that we "*as bodies* are animals', and there is 'nothing that is animal… that is not absurd" (Lewis, 1982, p. 157)

intent of the 'inhuman' satirist Hachilah. Value, Lewis suggests, can be physically incarnated:

> The lips of the man and woman were in some way fastened to one another, but Pullman saw the eyes of the man alive with the dazzling colours of a diamond of great value, his mouth was drawn down at the corners in a spasm of bitterness; it was a thin but very dark bow, taut as though it might break, and curved around underneath—as if a draughtsman's pencil had got thus far in the drawing of a tense oval, and then stopped, with a sharp nick of the pencil (Lewis, 1955, p. 405).

The draughtsman is, of course, 'Wyndham Lewis', and Paulo is depicted as a creation of that detached intellect who valued the 'eye' as the source of all hypothetical value—the eye being the 'separating' organ between subject and object, the 'organiser of nothing' (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, pp. 236-237).[422] "Diamond of great value" is not Lewis's subtlest phrase, but it strives to convey Pullman's realisation that 'value' is more than hypothetical (Edwards, 1975). *Draughtsmanship*—the ability to create aesthetic work—relies quite literally upon our natural condition, on the optic organs we have in our heads, which the punishment staff so "blithely remove or roast" (Edwards, 2000, p. 542).[423]

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[422] For Lewis, the eyes represented "the crowning human sense, the visual sense" (1927, p. 418). In essence, they are the physical organs that allow us to perceive the reality of "common sense," which Lewis regarded as the reality man inherited from his "pagan antiquity" (1927, p. 18)–the "emblems of nature" we revere instead of "the swarming of Time…a God of Law or a God of Science" (Lewis, 2023, p. 452).

[423] It is no coincidence that *The Art of Being Ruled* cast Bergson in Hachilah's role as the "enemy of the Eye… the arch enemy of every impulse having its seat in the apparatus of vision, and

As Chapter Four discussed, Lewis's draughtsmanship is often perceived as 'cold,' inhuman, or pitiless; even Edwards (2011, p. 223) contends that, in producing his wartime artworks, Lewis became an "embodiment of the machine," unveiling the "fragile imperfections of the human body in that light". Yet in *Malign Fiesta*, the tortured body of Paulo, when visually 'reorganised' by Pullman's artistic intellect, is 'redeemed' and attains a dignity transcending its initially degraded state.[424] This passage embodies what Lewis always maintained was the true purpose of his satire: that 'bringing human *life* more into contempt' was a means to evoke a 'hollow laughter', which he saw as a means for mankind to eclipse the absurdity of its animal condition and even "draw the human essence to itself" (Nath, 1990, p. 86). To clarify, the purpose of Lewis's "coolly surgical" satire (Paulson, 1971, p. xi) was not "punitive" like Hachilah or Sammael's (Nath, 1990, p. 244). Ironically, modernism's chief technician of 'inhuman laughter' (Arvidson, 2018, p. 793) turned out to be its *least* inhuman, and *Malign Fiesta* represents the definitive rejection of the 'reactionary anti-humanism' Delavenay (1969, p. 18) associated with modernists like D.H. Lawrence, and that Thomas Mann even associated with Nazism (Prater, 1995, p. 193).

In expressing these challenging conceptions, Lewis admittedly constructed these scenes with "the grimmest possible logic" (Carter, 1956, p. 334), and the effect is more disturbing

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requiring a concrete world" (Leiws, 1989a, p. 338). Equally, in *The Childermass*, Macrob—a physical specimen of nature who defended the spatial world—was dismembered (in a manner similar to Paulo and Francesca) by the Bergsonian Bailiff as punishment of his heresy.

[424] Munton (1980, p. 131) significantly notes that in *The Childermass*, the only person who is capable of reordering life at the Bailiff's court is an artist, Potter: he fixes upon 'this new object' (the Bailiff), and disembowels it, "rearranging everything in a logical order" (Lewis, 1965b, p. 203)

than anywhere else in Lewis's already violent oeuvre.[425] Perhaps, stylistically, these passages violate *The Art of Being Ruled's* dictum that "sadistic excess attempts to reach roughly and by harshness what art reaches by fineness" (1989a, p. 65). This opens them to a misreading of Lewis's literary intent, suggesting they reflect not his increasing disillusionment with satire and effort to reconcile the natural and aesthetic but rather an outpouring of Sammael-like "sheer nastiness" (Fraser, 1967, p. 104) his "failing mind, overcome by the tumour that was destroying his brain, could no longer control" (Edwards, 2000, p. 538).[426] Even Bridson, who collaborated with Lewis in adapting *The Human Age* for radio, questioned whether its "meticulous descriptions" of Sammael's "grisly punishments" revealed an author in "secret sympathy with them," citing anecdotal evidence that the tortured 'sinners' are fictional abstractions of Lewis's acquaintances (Bridson, quoted in Meyers, 1980, p. 245). [427]

Bridson's circumstantial insight aside, Edwards (2020) is right to protest that dismissing these scenes as sadistic misanthropy or attributing their inclusion to Lewis's 'sheer nastiness'

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[425] Lewis (1973, p. 13) regarded violence as intrinsic to human personality: "Within five yards of another man's eyes we are on a little crater, which, if it erupted, would split up as would a cocoa-tin of nitrogen."

[426] Additional to the debased burlesque of Paolo and Francesca, we read of a woman-sinner flung by Sammael from a car to be raped and devoured by demonic "man-goats", a female Dis doctor stabbed to death, a "Big German military sinner" slowly "burnt alive" before Pullman's eyes, and a whole "cavalcade" of other "grotesque Dantesque punishments" whose "baroque violence" defies any "paraphrase, summary, or theoretical analysis" that could do them justice (Whittier-Ferguson, 2016, p. 17).

[427] Bridson posits that Madame Carnot, whom Sammael flings to the goat-men, represents the woman who infected Lewis with venereal disease in 1915, which was purportedly the main cause of his subsequent illness and blindness later in life (Edwards, 2000).

neglects the duty of literary interpretation. Pullman's tour through the Nazified House of Dis tests not only Pullman's (and Lewis's) ideals but also serves as a polemic account of what 'coolly surgical' scientific detachment, abstract conceptualism, and misuse of the intellect led to in the twentieth century. Pullman is the Lewisian "rationalist in Hell" (Carter, 1956, p. 326), struggling to maintain his intellectual detachment, aware that exhibiting fear would constitute an affront to the intellect and endanger his position with Sammael (Lafferty, 2009, pp. 188-189). He must draw heavily on his satirical detachment,[428] as when Hachilah presents a German sinner being burnt alive and explains to silent, aghast Pullman:

> His eyes will have been burnt out of his head… and his lips must have dropped into the fire. I believe I saw the skin dropping (Lewis, 1955, p. 421)

Such a grisly spectacle can only be endured by observing it with biological detachment, as satirists view their victims (Nath, 1990, p. 248). Sammael even keeps a record collection of his victims being savaged by the goat-men: "I have a recording of it… a number of discs. If you like, I will let you hear it." Recalling Paulson's (1971, p. xi) claim that Lewis's 'surgical' satire was akin to Hulme's classicism,' which evolved (for Hulme) into outright 'antihumanism', we may infer that Sammael represents this evolution at its extremest point—see Appendix 4.

While the literary justification of *Malign Fiesta's* sadistic excess is debatable, Holloway (1960) justly contends that Lewis, throughout these scenes, is engaging in a self-reflexive critique of Sammael's violence, *not giving mere expression to it.* Jameson (1979. p. 4) critiqued Holloway's argument as 'disingenuous', but his critique is itself disingenuous: Lewis's

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[428] The 1950s Pullman is specified as a "satirist", not merely a writer as in *The Childermass* (Lewis 1955, p. 343).

proximity to modernist violence and “modernist impersonality” was a condition of his capacity to launch so “profound a critique” of it (Edwards, 2000, p. 569). Most significantly, these scenes embody Lewis's criticisms of both vitalist irrationalism and impersonality (see Chapter Four), which he believed contributed to the 'subjective temper of the present age’ and to:

> solipsistic valuations and, of course, to the blackened corpse at Gild-sur-Yvette… to the Gas-ovens at Belsen (Lewis, 1984, p. 73)

...a conviction that resonates with double significance in *Malign Fiesta*, given Pullman’s conclusion that 'the only values for Sammael are solipsistic' (i.e., power), whereas God “values man” (p. 528). Yet, whereas Lewis (1971, pp. 45-49) once proposed Tarr’s 'externalist detachment' as a counter to the “anti-human vindictiveness” of “romantic super-nihilism”, he refines this view in light of Sammael’s equally impersonal and 'detached' violence. Through Pullman's reactions to Sammael's absolutist brutality, Lewis begins articulating an *active* ethical dimension that was only implicit or assumed in his earlier work. [429]

6.3.4 Pullman and “Active value’

Given this analysis, the notion that *Malign Fiesta’s* torture scenes are expressions of Lewis’s sadism and represent his identification with Sammael is too simplistic, to say the least. These scenes are crafted to test Pullman, and it is *Sammael* who is testing him. Initially, Pullman ‘passes’ this test with a bold show of intellectual detachment ('I thought your Paolo and Francesca was a good critique of Dante’ (1955, p. 424)). But the horrors he witnesses can

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[429] One could say Sammael embodies, to the point of perversion, Lewis’s view of the human intellect in its “traditional role of the enemy of life” (Lewis, quoted in Symons, 1989c, p. 260).

only be endured by maintaining a satirical distance from the victim and the means. When Pullman's attention shifts to the torturer himself (Hachilah), this detachment "cracks" (Nath, 1990, p. 248). This provokes the first of the two pivotal revelations in *Malign Fiesta:*

> He (Pullman) could imagine, too, how the victim felt sitting there, and his eyes suddenly resting upon the man-eating eyes of Hachilah. He felt, the length of his spine, and down to the soles of his feet, what the man would feel for whom life was in the balance (Lewis, 1955, p. 422)

As Nath argues, for the first time in his work, Lewis invites the reader to look *into* the eyes of the satirist-executioner rather than *through* them. In an "astonishing access of sympathy", Pullman, and by implication Lewis, suddenly feels "what it is like to be the victim" (Nath, 1990, p. 249)—radically dissociating both from Sammael's solipsism. This triggers a "violent conflict" in Pullman's psyche' (Lewis, 1955, p. 372): unwilling to continue supporting evil, he can either denounce Sammael—risking "immediate death"—or continue relying on his "anti-humanist intellectualism" until he becomes as dehumanised as Hachilah (Lafferty, 2009, p. 189). Narratively, we might say Pullman has 'no choice' by this point— "he could not stop seeing Sammael, and live" (p. 517). But this is his trial, and it is concerned with the consequences of his actions rather than the authenticity of his regrets. Pullman reflects:

> His moral position… could not have been lower. There was blood on his hands as truly as if he had physically assisted in the vilest kind of murder (Lewis, 1955, p. 382)

Writing to Kenner, Lewis (1963, p. 562) maintained Pullman was a reluctant adjutant of Sammael in his denaturing of the Angelic: to "save his life Pullman gives it his support… but Pullman is, of course, an adherent of the Divine, not of the Diabolic". Nonetheless, we might

conclude Pullman's detachment is one that, given the circumstances, he ultimately has no right to—detachment may be necessary for survival, but Pullman knows it must come at the expense of his humanity (Edwards, 1975, p. 246). Translating this back into real life—as Lewis's 'material' afterworld seemingly encourages—Pullman's condemnation by the Angels serves as an indictment of twentieth-century intellectuals Lewis criticised for either standing by during—or worse, enabling—the "sadistic orgy of killing" that comprised the worst inhumanities of his era (Lewis, 1984, p. 105).[430]

Having himself been guilty of 'la Trahison des Clercs', Lewis was acutely aware of that temptation to become the "quisling or fellow-traveller" (Caracciolo, 1996 p. 262) that plagued his modernist peers.[431] This theme runs through the trilogy: *The Childermass* doubled as an intertextual critique of the intelligentsia's self-deception during Modernism's peak years (Caracciolo, 1996), and in *Monstre Gai* Pullman slides into the "pit dug for him" by the Bailiff in a "cigarette-blessed amnesia" (1955, p. 511) of modernist parties and private hotels. But in *Malign Fiesta* the critique cuts deepest, for Pullman is fully cognisant he is assisting "Lucifer in person" (p. 266). Worse, the security Pullman gains from his 'treason' can last only so long as his services are "pleasing" to Sammael (p. 457). The trilogy exposes the inadequacy of this purely utilitarian view of intelligence, for it contains no ethical judgment as to what intelligence should be used *for*. This was the "real problem" concerning intelligence in the

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[430] Indeed, just as Sammael reflects on Lewis's 1931 'support' of Hitler, the Bailiff may also symbolize Ezra Pound's involvement with Italian Fascism. However, as Caracciolo (1996, p. 273) notes, while Pound's engagement with the extremes of both the Right and the Left during the period depicted in *The Childermass* continued deteriorating into a dangerous alliance with Totalitarian forces in the subsequent decades, Lewis followed a different trajectory.

[431] "The artist as a rule," Lewis (1989b, p. 322) notes, "is highly influenceable."

twentieth century, fatefully demonstrated by every influential and 'humane' intellectual who, like the "pretty poor kind of clercs" Lewis (1984, p. 105) criticised, lent their support to political systems that proved the "reverse" of civilised (Edwards, 1975, p. 245).

Pullman's relationship with Sammael reinforces this message in two key ways: first, his collaboration with the absolutist Sammael underscores Lewis's notion that detachment replaces commitment in thought with practicality and is, therefore, a misuse of intellect. Pullman's second misuse of the intellect is arranging the Fiesta and furthering the 'progressive' Sammael's "denaturing of the Angelic" (Kenner, 1958, p. 239). Sammael's plan apotheosised modernist man's fantasy of rendering the world a perfect reflection of the self (Schenker, 1992, p. 182)— the "Human Dream", as Lewis nearly titled his trilogy (O'Keeffe, 2015, p. 609).[432] Of course, the 'noble' or 'utopian' idea of a cultured community of humanised angels is immediately vulgarised when enacted, and Pullman realises he has merely been a tool in Lucifer's perennial struggle for power. Once again, circumstances have manoeuvred the 'Enlightened' intellectual Pullman to facilitating crimes similar to the most inhuman of the twentieth century. And it is *because* of Pullman's intelligence that he has erred so grievously. Until his eleventh-hour redemption, the narrative 'condemns' Pullman for his collusion with the absolutist Sammael as much as with the 'supreme Anarchist' who seeks to bring heaven 'crashing down'.

As such, Lewis's critique of man and the intellect in *The Human Age* cannot be dismissed as an ageing author's "savage hatred of humanity" (Wagner, 1957, p. 304), nor as a negation of imperfect humanity in the name of a 'Nothing' Absolute. Quite the opposite: it is concerning

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[432] According to O'Keeffe (2001), Lewis abandoned this title for fear people mistakenly think he was referring to Christianity as a mere dream.

an emergent *active value* that Pullman's actions are judged, and through this 'active value' that Lewis's heterodox Christian theology most distinctly diverges from the 'resacralising' cultural-political initiatives of reactionary modernism and the NRR— as our conclusion will demonstrate.

6.4 Conclusion: Value and the Absolute

Paradoxically, it is the intellectual Pullman who clarifies this sense of value in a remarkable passage of self-examination following his witness to Petrus's execution by the S.S. agents. At this moment, Pullman realises neither his detachment nor Sammael's brutality can be rationalised away, despite initially reasoning it would be "untrue" to label Sammael cruel since true cruelty requires recognising those you destroy have feelings—a capacity Sammael lacks (p. 527). Pullman, however, decides that even if this is true, it is 'not worth saying'. It is not worth saying as the critical thing, Pullman realises, is that God—in contrast— *"values man".* This is the second and most pivotal revelation of *The Human Age*. God values man, and it is *this "valuing that is so extraordinary"* (p. 528)—especially considering that Sammael, the 'counter-God', values only power. Yet this is "absurd, because power destroys value. Value can only exist with multiplicity."

We earlier proposed Lewis's theological distinction from the NRR hinged on his acknowledgement of "multiplicity as a condition of value" and recognition that "a monstrous Unity… swallows everything up into its nothingness" (Edwards, 2000, p. 544). Pullman's remorse for aiding Sammael is intimately connected to this perspective, stemming from his recognition of two specific evils that would have resulted from the success of Sammael's scheme (Schenker, 1992).

First, the dissolution of a transcendent Absolute would *instead* subordinate the individual subject to more earthly 'principalities and powers,' as evidenced by twentieth-century political religions that "sacralised the State, made History its medium, and human beings its instruments" (Gregor, 2012, p. 24).[433] Pullman, like Lewis, sees that "Value can only exist with multiplicity," leading to his realisation that "the only value for Sammael is solipsistic. I, Pullman, am acting in a valueless vacuum called Sammael" (1955, p. 528).[434] The possibility of that multiplicity is vanquished in political or civil religions that make the state or community the highest good. Such schemes crush and are "meant to crush" the "personal life" (Lewis, 1927, p. 398).

Second, Pullman recognises that Sammael's desire to eradicate the eternal divine—to "mix it up with the pettiness and corruption of mankind"—would destroy the standard against which man is measured and invariably found wanting (p. 511). This echoes Hulme's insistence on separating the "earthly and the divine", admitting the limitations of human knowledge and submitting to faith in a "higher, unknowable power" (Mead, 2015, p. 16).[435] But while Hulme (and Eliot) insisted on a traditional Christian God to secure this standard, Lewis's (1927, p. 463)

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433 Gregor is writing specifically here of applications of Hegel's philosophy; significantly, in ***Rotting Hill,*** the narrator (Lewis himself) critiques political religions as "substituting a violent caricature of the Hegelian State for the City of God" (Lewis, 1951, p. 61).

434 It is worth noting, in terms of Lewis's revaluation of nature, then when Schlank protests "there is no such thing as a vacuum", Pullman retorts "ah yes, nature abhors… but this is not nature" (Lewis, 1955, p. 528)

435 This 'anti-humanist classicism', as discussed in Chapter Four, underpinned Vorticism's adoption of rational geometric 'Platonic' forms (Honeywell, 2011, p. 39), and Lewis's 'aesthetic… not moral" satire (Paulson, 1971, p. xi).

argument against all-engulfing monisms in *Time and Western Man* led him to posit a strictly metaphysical Absolute—the 'nothing' God whose radical transcendence was the "supreme symbol of our separation" and our "limited transcendence." This is the God suggested only by His absence in *The Childermass*—a perfect, indifferent principle necessary to "show up man's imperfection" (Schenker, 1992, p. 69). But Pullman realises that this divine 'indifference' which left him so "terribly isolated" (Edwards, 2000, p. 548), can be redefined positively: man's imperfection, measured against divine perfection, becomes an occasion for God's redeeming Grace. God *values man* despite his imperfection, an "exercise of virtue denied even to God Himself" (Schenker, 1992, p. 69). Again, it is this valuing that is 'so extraordinary.' Yet the possibility of such tragic dignity vanishes with the amalgamation of the human and the divine.

Neither of these points suggests Lewis has entirely abandoned his earlier philosophy for a traditional Christian Absolute: God is still 'man's enemy', but man *needs God* all the more for that reason—not merely for his "support and explanation" (1936, p. 261).[436]

The introductory chapter cited Empson's (1966, p. 10) characterisation of an 'absolutist Lewis' as someone whose insistence on a radically transcendent Absolute justified the most egregious inhumanities: "because all men are infinitely below God, some men ought to be free to bully others—the ones who are on God's side, like I am". Ironically—as Edwards (2015) points out—this critique echoes Lewis's (1927, p. 404) *own* critique of religious absolutes: "the true religionist is such a scourge that his God is always an engine of destruction," and "All-Fathers have always been Battle-Fathers, used to exterminate 'enemies'". Empson's

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[436] God, Lewis (1989b, p. 158) suggests, needs man too for this very reason: "Even our meanest imperfections are the advertisements, or necessary antagonists, sparring partners or what you like, of the divine principle, that keep it illustrious, bright-eyed, and fit."

interpretation of Lewis's God aligns closer to an Absolutist deity like Sammael than the non-interfering, aesthetically constructed, heterodox Christian God that Lewis finally upholds. To clarify further, Lewis's emphasis on separating divine from earthly powers—particularly political power—can be contrasted with Dugin's (2019, p. 27) argument that power is "sacral" and "ideal... all the attributes of the One apply to power, hence it must be single and monarchic". While Lewis does not entirely reject the One in favour of the Many (as modern liberalism does)—and while he personally favours the concept of a Thomistic God, a rationally conceived absolute Oneness—he ultimately insists we must have the courage to turn our backs on 'the One' in order to exist.

Yet while Lewis, like Hulme, insisted on this "absolute divide" between the temporal and religious (Mead, 2015), he *was* willing to admit the "highest" human achievements—our "greatest forms of art" (Lewis, 1927, p. 395)—as terrestrial vestiges of this radically transcendental God to which we otherwise "do not have access" (Bachman, 2016, p. 156). But it would be reductive to suggest that Lewis, like other philosophical monotheists from Plato onward,[437] saw artworks as truly 'illusions', as diverse 'forms' temporarily masking an "essential unity" (Schenker, 1992, p. 122). Lewis was too deeply enamoured with artistic creation. "Any God", Lewis (1927, p. 401) states—in a rare instance of genuine reverence—"could put His name to Oedipus or King Lear... The Sistine Chapel Ceiling is worthy of the hand of any God which we can infer, dream of, or postulate."

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[437] Plato's philosophy exhibits elements that bridge the gap between polytheism and philosophical monotheism. While he operated within the cultural context of ancient Greek polytheism, key aspects of his thought (most notably the Theory of Forms) point toward an interpretation of the divine that resembles monotheistic principles.

In contrast to the communally accessible God of scripture— and especially to political religions where the community *itself* becomes the Absolute—Lewis maintained that the only part of experience with which we may construct God is our *individual* intellectual faculty, and to this, "art has the prerogative" (Wagner, 1957, p. 202). Aligning with Aristotle in *Metaphysics*,[438] Lewis (1927, p. 394) advocates that we each *individually* construct our idea of God based on "what we possess in our experience", drawing our raw material "from the highest reaches of our contemplative states"—each person relying on the 'aristocratic power' of his imagination.[439] This 'imagination', Lewis argues, is "all we have" with which to conceive our God, but happily, it is "completely adequate," given the intimations of God provided us by great art:

> To be at once perfectly concrete, we can assert that a God that swam in such an atmosphere as is produced by the music of a Bach fugue, or the stormy grandeur of the genii in the Sistine Ceiling, or the scene of the Judgement of Signorelli at Orvieto, who moved with the grace of Mozart - anyone may for himself accumulate such

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[438] In the proofs of *Time and Western Man,* Lewis specifically cites Aristotle: "Contemplation is thus the best and happiest of activities, and if all we could say were that God's life is like our life in in the highest moments of contemplative thought, it would be worthy of our admiration" (quoted in Lewis, 2023, p. 449). This translation appears to be from Edward Caird's early 1900s work *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers.*

[439] Hence, Lewis describes his God as the "supreme symbol" of "personhood" (1927, p. 463). For Bracewell (1990, p. 148), Lewis's Aristotelian personal construction of God was "fully realised." However, in a contemporary review of *Time and Western Man*, W.A. Thorpe (1928, p. 72) maintained Lewis's Aristotelianism was sentimental, going so far as to dismiss it as "a prejudice rather than a philosophy"

> comparisons from the greatest forms of art—such a God would be the highest we could imagine; that God would be so perfect in Power and beauty that, however much people may assert they find it possible to experience a greater God… or analogically to posit one, we are entirely justified in not believing them (Lewis, 1927, pp. 394-395).

By these "people," Lewis (1927, p. 129) refers to the Romantics who believed that it is "quite sensible" to fix the 'divine' on some plane "inaccessible to their senses"—whether in the "cloudy phantasies" of the vitalist or by seeking “ultimate value” in “psychological interiors” (Stearns, 2001, p. 344). Yet this Romantic notion is far from sensible: it underpins the premise that, despite the “superficiality” of mass society, an elite might interact with and convey its essence to the masses via ritual, myth, and sacrament, i.e., a civil religion. (Surette, 2011, p. 271). And ritual, Lewis (1931, p. 234) critically observed, is “always collective.”

Many of Lewis’s reactionary contemporaries were content with this possibility of sub-conscious, sub-intellectual communication between artist and audience. Unwilling, however, to accept “quasi-mystical access” to the noumenal realm (Surrette, 2011, p. 271), Lewis (1927, p. 418) insisted that the purely aesthetic world, the ‘pure present’, the ‘surface’ life was all that existed. Against “abstraction and darkness”, his “philosophy of the eye” attaches itself to the “concrete and radiant reality of the optic sense”—the sense capacity that Hachilah so blithely destroyed in his victims.[440]

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[440] Lewis’s philosophy embodies Oscar Wilde's belief that “it is only shallow people who do not judge from appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible” (Wilde, quoted in Materer, 1980, p. 63)

Appropriately, Pullman's final realisation of value is given by something “accessible to the senses”—a “miraculously beautiful” Japanese flower (a peony) cultivated by the neglected Satters:

> It had come from the Far East of the Earth. "There physical beauty was understood. The European believed he had evolved spiritual beauty of a high order-but did the spiritual product ever come up to this physical perfection*?* (Lewis, 1955, p. 560)

The spiritual is corruptible, as the dark angels demonstrated, *and so is genius* —Pullman certainly is (Kenner, 1966). Yet the *physical*—the domain of the artist who, for half a century, was almost aggressively focussed on the exterior world—*is* capable of unambiguous perfection (Kenner, 1958). ‘Physical perfection’ would have seemed oxymoronic to the Vorticist-era Lewis, who believed art organises the “slack ways of the natural” (Kenner, 1954, p. 59) and only achieves significance through the “intellective shaping force” of genius (Klein, 1994, p. 41). Nevertheless, Pullman’s revelation aligns with an idea of aesthetic value consistent with Lewis's earlier work, particularly his valuing of the East’s pure classicism over the “vitalist naturalism” of the Greeks (Edwards, 2015, p. 26).[441] Indeed, immediately following his revelation, Pullman sees in the sky the 'aerial army' of God himself, come to prevent Sammael's denaturing of the divine, which the narrator describes in terms that quite literally embody that ‘greatest God' Lewis said we could construct from comparisons to the highest forms of art:

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[441] Lafferty (2015) says that Pullman (like Lewis) values the flower ‘only’ because it confirms his ideas regarding the superiority of the Eastern aesthetic sensibility– perhaps “especially” would be a better modifier.

> There, towards the top, was a small rather whiter figure: it was the core of the composition, for it was extraordinarily composed, this aerial army, reminiscent of the Paradiso of Tintoretto; or, better still, of a pastiche of Tintoretto painted by El Greco (Lewis, 1955, p. 561)[442]

Pullman begins to pray to the 'small white figure', who appears to be the apotheosis of the 'contemplative God' Lewis set against the 'evolutionist God of Time and Action'. In the published *Malign Fiesta,* Pullman's revelation, his recognition of value through Satters' peony means he is granted another final chance—this time in Heaven—where he is escorted by a brac of God's soldiers, who assure him—as "Mrs Lovett does Toby in Sweeney Todd" (Bridson, 1980, p. 240)—that 'no harm' will come to him.

This uncharacteristically optimistic ending, promising that Pullman might be the first character in any Lewis fiction to attain a "meaningful destiny" (Kenner, 1958, p. 240), was not, alas, the original conclusion. The initial climax of *Malign Fiesta*, broadcast as a radio adaptation in May 1955 (a few months before the book's publication), left no room for valuing or even acknowledging anything other than "gigantic manifestations of power" (Kenner, 1966, p. 235). Not even genius itself was valued; in the dramatised version, Pullman, while praying beside Satter's peony, was crushed underfoot by a giant dark angel marching to engage God's

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[442] Intriguingly, one listener of the radio adaption, the reviewer J.C. Trewin (1955, pp. 994-5), described the effect on the listener of this respective scene in the radio adaption as: "… one that describes superbly the soldiers of heaven, looking (while the trumpets sound overhead) like a pastiche of Tintoretto painted by El Greco. The ensuing scene is something that many haunt me as much as the blinding of Gloucester has done. It is a bit of supernatural Grand Guignol, loathsomely vivid."

legions. And this—both in the galley-proofs and the radio adaptation— was to have been the ending of the novel:

> At that moment he saw Satters spring back. Then a black shadow blotted out everything for a fraction of a second... Then came a bang — a terrific, world-shattering, banging blast; which blasted and banged and that was all. Nothing has no way of expressing itself, because *when there is nothing there is nothing* with which to express it. (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2000, pp. 544-545)

In the radio version, Satters realises both the peony and Pullman have been annihilated: the narrator informs us nothing remains of the protagonist except "a patchwork pancake, mostly blood… an enormous cow-patch where the body and legs had been" (Lewis, quoted in O'Keeffe, 2015 p. 614). The obliterated Pullman is absorbed into that solipsistic vacuum called Sammael: "When there is nothing, there is nothing" (Edwards, 2000, p. 545). Pullman's life, like all 'animal' lives, was to have been consumed by the "totality of *the absurd*" (Lewis, 1928, p. 245), ending in the "wanton annihilation" which terminates all Lewis's novels from "Pish-Tush" to *The Revenge for Love* (Kenner, 1966, p. 235).

But what kind of God, Edwards (2000, p. 545) asks, would allow this? What Lewisian 'Absolute' would "trouble to crush the worm" that is Pullman? Perhaps one who is no more than a solipsistic vacuum himself, an immanentised version of *Time and Western Man's* 'non-human' Absolute, described therein as nothing but a Blank. This God, as mentioned, was most perfectly expressed for Lewis (1936, p. 261) in the monotheism of Spinoza, whose God is "Everything and Nothing." The effect of this Absolute's perfection, when applied to our existence, is to "make it cancel out. It makes it Nothing". Yet, in being 'NOTHING', this is also

the “one God” who permits Satan’s dark Angels to annihilate Pullman, leaving imperfect man “plumb in the centre of Nothing” (Lewis, 1928, p. 245)

In the unfinished *Trial of Man*, however, Lewis was willing to re-evaluate this thinking and add a *Paradiso* to his human comedy (Powe, 1987). Ruthless self-analysis was vital to Lewis’s artistic renewal— crises of thought always preceding radical new releases—and the revaluations undertaken in *Malign Fiesta* were to culminate in the fourth volume with the incarnation of a God who was the “reverse of nothing” (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 237). In *Time and Western Man* (1927, p. 463), Lewis said we “do not want a God that is a kindly uncle, nor do we wish to see a God ‘in love’.” Yet, given the extensions made to his ideas in *The Human Age* and his wartime experiences with, and detestation of, nihilistic “acts of violence” (1952, p. 95), he could hardly leave Pullman to be obliterated by Spinoza's 'Nothing' God, the ‘God of Justice’, or the vengeful 'Jehovah the Thunderer'.[443]

Lewis’s eventual attachment to something approaching the Christian ‘God of Love’ seems to have caught even him by surprise, and the new ending was substituted while the book was still in proof.[444] In this revised version, the dark angel’s “enormous sandalled foot” comes crashing down as before, not on Pullman, but only on something perfect: the peony.

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[443] This would have been as untenable as Lewis continuing, as in his early satires, to consign his victims to hell, given his “spiritual resolution” that “mankind matters” and is 'valued by God' (Powe, 1987, p. 64).

[444] In *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936, pp. 262-263), Lewis dedicates an entire passage to dissecting the dualism between the ‘God of Love’ and the ‘God of Justice.’ For Auden (1994, p. 73), Romanticism still believed in these “Two Gods”, only that it substituted the “old dualism” of the natural and supernatural worlds for a “dualism of body and mind”– a dualism which Lewis seems here to be questioning.

> The glass case and the peony vanished beneath this awful tread, and when the angel's foot rose and swept onward there was nothing left but a crushed handful of glass and a meaningless mass of vegetation (Lewis, 1955, p. 562).

Man is capable of no such perfection as the peony: that, Kenner (1966, p. 236) says, appears to have been Lewis's "first working premise" as he contemplated the fourth book. Yet it is *this* perfection that the dark angel crushes underfoot, representing not so much the annihilating and violent assertion of the Absolute over the natural world as the *destruction of value itself* by evil (Lafferty, 2015). God does not intervene to save the perfect peony. Yet, despite his imperfection and corruption, Pullman is saved—carried off by the White Angels—realising that he "should never have assisted at the humanisation of the Divine" (Lewis, 1955, p. 566). Nonetheless, God, who values (we return to the mystery) the imperfect, has "forgiven him for his mistakes" (Kenner, 1966, p. 236). The dust jacket of the reissued *Childermass* elaborated on Pullman's proposed fate: he was to arrive "into the divine splendours of Heaven" and be introduced by the "Divine Power" into an area of Perfection (quoted in Edwards, 2000, p. 547).[445]

The final volume was, alas, never written; Lewis had entered his final illness, and Dante remains, of all Western poets, the only one able to write Paradise (Bloom, 2001, p. 10). Yet it is doubtful that this project could ever have been accomplished, Lewis's failing health notwithstanding. As Edwards (2015, p. 229) observed, to craft a narrative about a 'Divine Age', Lewis would have had to finally become a "dialectical writer," resolving and assimilating

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[445] Writing to Kenner, Lewis (1963, p. 562) adds that this "Celestial Camp" was to be "very much" to Pullman's "satisfaction", a place where he might fulfil his resolution at the close of ***Malign Fiesta*** to meditate on the "Human Age in contrast to the Divine Age" (Lewis, 1955, p. 566).

contradictions and antinomies in a "higher synthesis", with Pullman retaining his "free individuality" while simultaneously becoming one with the Absolute. This was "not going to happen" (p. 229).[446] "Without antinomies", Edwards writes, there would be "no progression" and "no space" for Lewis to operate in as an artist. Even with a more personalised Christian God, Lewis's heterodox theology would still have precluded the possibility of a protagonist confronting the Absolute "face-to-face" (Lewis, 2017, p. 186). Such an encounter, he explicitly states, would be averse to life:

> As we determine ourselves, we negate Perfection, understood as an absolute Unity; it is written, we cannot avoid this cancellation… we are bound to shut the door upon Mr Bradley's Absolute (Lewis, 1927, p. 397)

In 1955, however, Lewis *did* draft an opening for *The Trial of Man* where God physically manifests, incognito, in an Angeltown hospital (he is visiting Sammael, who, during the invasion of Hell, has lost a leg to amputation). The attendant nurse describes the 'Stranger' thus:

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[446] Edwards (2000, p. 548) rightly questions whether extending the narrative would have been artistically justified. Given the reader's immersion in Pullman's dilemmas and struggles throughout the entirety of *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*, any further attempt to justify the ways of God to Man would seem redundant and potentially even "impertinent". Pullman's journey itself represents a "reconciliation of love and justice," which does not require supplementary explication (Edwards, 2000, p. 548). In contrast to Harding, who, having returned to rationality, rejects religious solace—not denying the "reality of God", but merely "ceas(ing) to experience it" (1965a, 389)—Pullman ultimately submits to God.

> …the broad forehead, surmounted by heavy blue-grey hair, the light lines not seemingly drawn there by nature, but by the man himself—they had so voluntary an appearance… and as to the expression of this stately countenance, she knew that in every emotion expressed there, a vast indifference must seemingly be mixed into any expression of feeling (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 236)

This "big "machine" who was a "selfless expanse of indifference" is a first approximation to something new in the Lewis cosmos, a person (a God) who transcends the pettiness that characterises so much of human existence, a being "free of the selfish pressures emitted by all men and women"—including the Bailiff and even Pullman— who are "so unrelievedly functional" (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 237). While this gentlemanly figure suggests an attempt by Lewis at manifesting the 'personal God' he was becoming attracted to, it is no accident he rejected this draft.[447] The logic of his secular theology suggested that dramatising the Absolute in the slightly mundane and "finite form" of a hospital visitor would fatally diminish the "scope of the divinity" (Edwards, 2011, p. 239).

Furthermore, God must function in a novel, the structural demands of which necessitate conflict and opposition. This "made it impossible" for Lewis to write about the "genuinely omnipotent God" he had come to conceive (Schenker, 1995, p. 185). To fulfil the obligations of narrative, the "old magician of the cloudy wastes of Heaven" must be rendered, in Sammael's words, "no longer Almighty" (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 237). A Manichean theology was thrusting itself into a narrative meant to reject it. In other words, by involving problems of power, the draft re-introduced a schema that *Malign Fiesta* had striven to

[447] 'God is a big problem', Lewis admitted to Bridson (Lewis, quoted in O'Keeffe, 2001, p. 615)

transcend.[448] In *The Human Age*, "Hell is power and the exercise of power" (Dasenbrock, 1985, p. 186), yet Lewis had, in *Malign Fiesta*, declared a victorious source of opposition to power: the "divine". For Kenner, this rejection of power—not in favour of the 'politics of the intellect,' but for the divine—signified a "great change" in Lewis's thinking and represented a turning towards religion and the Church:

> The tragedy of Europe, he asserted, was its loss of a common religion; he spoke of his mother, a Catholic who had ceased to practice her religion, and of his growing interest in the Catholic faith… He spoke of being converted…He was no longer interested in the dozens of earlier books in which he had invested so much that was incompatible with the divinization of Pullman... (Kenner, 1958, p. 241; 1966, p. 239)

While accepting Kenner's account of Lewis's state of mind towards the end of his life—that it was "wholly taken up" with the theme of "Pullman and God"—we need not concur with his interpretation of its implications. The view that *The Trial of Man* would have been "incompatible" with his earlier work is, as Edwards (1975) argues, fundamentally mistaken. Kenner himself provides the evidence for this when explaining why Lewis was dissatisfied with the draft opening featuring an incarnate God and instead began planning the book more abstractly:

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[448] In Kenner's (1966, p. 232) reading, Lewis consistently regarded man as "insignificant" in the face of power. Kenner argues that Lewis's worldview was essentially Manichean, as he not only rejected the worship of power but also dismissed any hope for humanity's future redemption: to believe otherwise–to imply a direction for humanity–would be to "apotheosise Time."

> The theme of *The Trial of Man* was now to be Pullman's slow acclimatisation to the Celestial environment... Not even God seemed by then the book's central problem; he thought that Milton had been mistaken to introduce God in person, and rather inclined to take Milton's lapse for a warning (Kenner,1966, p. 239).[449]

Judging from these remarks, it seems the fourth volume was to remain secular in spirit and, while concerned with value, would have been primarily an attempt to construct the Just City (Edwards, 1975). [450] [451] The significant point is that God was to have again been absent, an absence that would have linked Lewis's final work to his earlier writings and the heterodox theology expressed therein. Lewis's God could never be the "genuinely omnipotent" (Schenker, 1992, p. 185) or manifest as such because, unlike Sammael (or the state in political religions), He is content not to interfere. By 'abdicating,' He granted His creatures independence, sparing us from the solipsism inherent in His position as Absolute. Lewis's transcendent God could not be "holy terror" these times "require" (as *The Magic Mountain's*

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[449] Equally, in "The Devil and Wyndham Lewis", Kenner (1958, p.241) recollects "whether God would make a personal appearance Lewis had not decided; he rather thought not, being disinclined to repeat Milton's mistake".

[450] The 'great Trial', Kenner (1958 p. 240) adds, was to be but an "episode", with the focus again on Pullman.

[451] Lewis's theology was secular as it was grounded in the Greek concept of Logos and the pagan classical world, including Aristotle's notion of a 'personal god,' rather than in traditional Christian theology. Bracewell (1990, p. 149) points this out, noting that Lewis's equation of divinity with artistic practice contradicted the evolutionary perspective that posits God as residing in man and man within God. Such a view would endorse the "amalgamating" process which Lewis consistently vilified.

Naphta demands (Mann, 1996, p. 688)), nor an Absolute that limits and is "incompatible with individuality" (Dugin, 2023, p. 7). The heterodox Christian God Lewis approaches in *The Trial of Man* ultimately accords with *Time and Western Man's* description of a God so "democratic" that He became "aristocratic again" for the sake of others, introducing us to—and leaving us free to explore—that "extraordinary Aladdin's Cave, that paradise . . . our minds":

> …when the magnificent private picture gallery of its stretched-out imagery was thrown open, and we were allowed to wander in it in any direction, and to any private ends we pleased; that was certainly, if it is the gift of a God, a highly democratic proceeding on His part: especially when you consider that this is not one picture-gallery, thronged by a swarming public, but is one-apiece for any number of individuals…each individual, however small, made into an 'aristocrat' at once where His mind's eye is concerned (Lewis, 1927, p. 401).

Galleries, pictures, stretched-out imagery: surely all these are "not a reality" but offer aesthetic "representations" of reality (Lewis, 1997c, p. 167), or at most, the "transference inwards of realities" through art? (Lewis quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 238). Exactly so: Lewis argues that it is only in the "aesthetic reality that we can live, for 'reality', if it "comes too near or becomes too real," leads us to nothing; as we see when we "flatten our noses against an object" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 238).[452] Such is Margot's fate in *The Revenge for*

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[452] While Lewis's advocacy for "illusory worlds" may appear to dovetail with the solipsism he criticised among his contemporaries, it must be tempered by his clarification in "The Critical Realists" (1924): "When we experience some great work of art, we are looking into an enclosed datum-world, or microcosm, which, despite its particularity, is very universal…. This aesthetic

Love, when she glimpses the absurdity of belonging to the "bestial life of flesh" during her encounter with the "grotesque" performing dwarf in Puigmoro (Lewis, 1972, p. 299). Her face acquires an "idiot fixity", and Victor, her alarmed husband, perceives that while his wife's grimace was directed "outward", it was nevertheless directed at "nothing… or at the "nothingness which is all that there is, *unless you conjure things up for yourself,* and furnish this white screen with your private pictures" (pp. 301-302).[453]

By making use of the "image," Lewis (1927, p. 54) argues, we keep ourselves afloat "upon the surface of nihilism"; imagination enables us to perform our several parts in "an intricate play, of doubtful merit, upon a stage the lofty and cavernous wings of which lead immediately into the darkest night" (1984, p. 43). What *The Revenge for Love* shows is that the 'images' modern culture provides Margot— an ordinary person untrained in discursive reasoning, metaphysics and art— are inadequate for this fight (Edwards, 2016, p. 109). Lewis's contention— reiterated in 1954's *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*—is that the arts must supply these images that stabilise our reality. They must provide the aesthetic representations of reality that organise and separate us from 'nothing', the primordial brutal Real that Lewis (1984, p. 43) characterises as "a chasm limitless in depth, literally with *nothing* at the bottom

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truth or reality exists when the datum-world does, in fact, grow solid, as it were (Shakespeare's datum world, for instance, is a very substantial one)" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 238).

[453] These concepts are implicit in the original title of the novel, ***False Bottoms*** (Patterson, 2015, p. 146). The phrase recurs throughout the text, and Margot is perpetually aware of "an immense false bottom underlying every seemingly solid surface, upon which it was her lot to tread" (Lewis, 1972, p. 165).

of it".[454] But if this brutal "world of scientific fact" (1927, p. 207) is ultimately more 'Real', then the "superior reality" (p. 171) that art "secures for us" becomes not so much 'truth' but an illusion, something "chosen or *willed"* (Edwards, 2016, p. 106).

Despite this seemingly postmodern conclusion that "the illusion" must be our "real" (1927, p. 403), Lewis, as we have argued, regards himself as a kind of rationalist: he values "the rational against the intuitive" (Nath, 2015, p. 184), and the "unfervid" reason against romanticism's "too indiscriminate" emotion in our modes of approaching God and reality (Lewis, 1927, pp. 389-390). Hence, he tries to frame as 'rationalist' his essentially romantic view that the "rich, qualified and significant" world of "poetry and art" is also the "common-sense" one, whereas the 'dull' and "meaningless" world of science is the "abstract" one " (p. 208).[455] Indeed, Lewis (1984, p. 166) lauds *Tarr* as "Dostoevskian" for its comprehension of that "never-failing paradox, the real," in contrast with the "monotonous self-consistency of what man invents without reference to nature, in pursuit of the ideal". [456]

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[454] For Bergson, art relieves the "oppression" of the "crushing weight of the 'stable' world (cited in Lewis, 1927, p. 191), a diagnosis that Lewis agrees with, if not Bergson's subsequent conclusions.

[455] Our 'personal' play-world, Lewis (1928, p. 240) writes, is also an "objective play-world.'

[456] The concluding chapter of ***Time and Western Man*** refers to this very paradox: "the entire physical world is strictly unreal… and the unrealist part of it we believe is that part or aspect supplied us by science" (Lewis, 1927, p. 473). Lewis contends that while the external world consists of appearances, these appearances are nevertheless real (Materer, 1980, pp. 54-55). The more we acknowledge the illusory nature of the world, the more we will cling– "with bridle and bit" (Lewis, 1927, p. 473)–to its sensuous qualities.

This clarifies why Lewis's 'rationalist' objection to romanticism was only ever directed at its contemporary ideological manifestations, i.e., Bergsonian Vitalism and "destructive political revolutionary idealism" (1971, p. 140). Fundamentally, Lewis embraces the Romantic dream that the devastations of modernity can be transcended through our will and humanity placed in contact with a redemptive Absolute (Edwards, 2013)— indeed, excepting Bach and Mozart, the instances of great art Lewis cites as materials for constructing the divine are all Romantic.

Lewis almost resembles what Iris Murdoch (1953) once called Sartre—a "romantic rationalist." For Lewis (1927, p. 403), reason is not merely the "pragmatical member among our faculties" (as Bergson maintained) but the "ultimate truth-bearing vehicle". It is "only" in conjunction with our sensuous "machinery of illusion" that reason can convey the 'real,' (i.e. God) whose "machinery is pluralistic" (p. 403). The faculty Lewis describes resembles Stephen Dedalus's "intellectual imagination" (Joyce, 2017, p. 410), or what Matthew Arnold termed the "imaginative reason" (1891, p. 221): a "supreme gift" which, for A.C. Swinburne (2008, p. 131), finds it apotheosis in Shakespeare, the Lewisian hero.

Indeed, for Lewis (1927, p. 390), it is *precisely* this faculty that has been granted us as the "appointed and natural path" on which to venture approaches to God. This starkly differs from the religionist for whom the emotional may give access to the Absolute (Wagner, 1957, p. 202) and from the "lunatic and egotistic" desire of reactionary modernisms—with their violent "passion for Real" (Badiou, 2005)—to "seize and mingle with the supreme Reality" (Lewis, 1927, p. 389), a being "so much everything, that it is nothing" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 238). However, any 'anti-transcendent' conceptions of the Absolute "withdraw all individuality" from man; only with a radically "transcendent God" can he "secure a true

individualism" (1927, p. 462). Hence, Lewis (1997c, p. 168) celebrates the God who abdicated, liberating us from the strain of too much "besetting reality" [457] and enabled us to possess a "private world apiece", a "private picture gallery" of the sort that in Margot's case, alas falls apart (Edwards, 2011, p. 239):

> It is evident that… God abdicated. He apparently no longer wished to be 'the Absolute'. So he introduced us to, and made us free of, His Heavenly pictures (Lewis, 1927, p. 402)

With this "true freedom" comes the "rigours" of responsibility (Lewis, 1936, p. 295). Pullman's assimilation into 'the Divine' would necessarily be an active process, a willed one: as an 'aristocrat', he would have to be responsible for establishing his place, with no God to do it for him. This theme is consistent across Lewis's writing, from *Tarr* to *The Trial of Man*. All his works exalt the 'aristocratic' power of the imaginative intellect, which is open to everyone and can be used to create a renewed, zestful modernity (Edwards, 1975; Edwards, 2000). Similarly, they are all targeted against systems of "political or theologic manipulation" (Lewis, 1989b, p. 144) that misappropriate, reject, or would wield this power to subjugate the "rare free life"—that Renaissance individualism which today's reactionaries call rootlessness, but which Lewis, more correctly, called "freedom" (Bazelon, 1949, p. 862).

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[457] Lewis continues, in *The Anonymity of Perfection* (1997c, p. 168), to describe Life as a "sleep, and a rest from God. But the nightmares and reflections of his energy disturb and terrorise that sleep. –We are "children" with a very anxious, troubled childhood indeed"

CODA AND CONCLUSION: THE RED PRIEST

Chapter Six has shown why Lewis's insistence on a radically transcendent, heterodox Christian Absolute is the most fundamental aspect of his insider-critique of reactionary modernism and its romantic desire to reconnect with an 'abstract totality'. Lewis shared with many radical reactionaries a suspicion that modernity was a 'total nihilism' signifying 'nothing'. Rather than capitulating to this 'nothing' or seeking to violently overcome it through political resacralisation, Lewis embraces our distance from the Absolute and the onus it places on the individual imagination to access the transcendent—not to mention art's collective role in facilitating this process. In sum, Lewis's 'insider-critique' of modernism—including his own aesthetic idealism and non-ethical satire—leads him to a vision that navigates between the respective ills of postmodernist ethical relativism and modernist absolutism.

Perhaps the 'positive' side of this vision would have been further articulated in *The Trial of Man,* but Lewis's warning against modernist absolutism was nevertheless emphatically concluded in his last published novel, *The Red Priest.* Indeed, it was with characteristic "genius for disturbance" (Powe, 1987, p. 64) that Lewis postponed writing *The Trial of Man* to work on this Graham Greene-esque 'pot-boiler thriller'.[458] *The Red Priest* is a flawed and hurried book often dismissed as "trivial" (Holloway, 1957, p. 184), a final attempt to write a best-seller.[459] But its more serious intent—however imperfectly executed— was to align the

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[458] The socialist views of the titular protagonist that lead his conservative parishioners to label him as "red." As one parishioner, the Marquess, wryly remarks, he had "painted the Church red" (1956, p. 30).

[459] *Mrs. Dukes Millions* (written around 1908-1910) being the first–also unsuccessful– attempt.

themes of his political works with the *Human Age's* "uncompromising eschatology" (Kenner, 1958, p. 240). As such, this little-read work provides a suitable way to link Chapter Six's theological conclusions to the rest of the study and conclude our exploration of Lewis's and the NRR's political thought. Given Lewis's untimely death, *The Red Priest* remains his final word on modernist hubris and its aspiration to "re-enchant a fallen world" (Gąsiorek, 2015, p. 244).

This "clerical monstrosity" of a novel (Pound, 1985, p. 299) charts the self-destructive career of Father Augustine 'Teeny' Card, a "pugnacious modern clergyman" (Edwards, 2011, p. 239) seeking to rejuvenate his West End parish through an improbable fusion of Anglo-Catholicism and Communism.[460] This pugilistic and physically enormous servant of the diabolic has relations with power (i.e., Russia) that are far less "reluctant" than those of Pullman with Sammael (Kenner, 1958, p. 239). Card foresees 1950s England metamorphosing into something like Sammael's severe domain: "England is not on the way to being a second Sweden, with the beautiful houses of working men, whose rooms glow with the inside of forest trees—not that, but a sort of Methodist's model of Russia" (Lewis, 1956, pp. 42-43).[461] This being the case, Card defines his alliance:

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[460] Lewis's protagonist priest is a representative figure of the "backward epoch" (Lewis, 1956, p. 150) of modernity. Even his name, Augustine Card, suggests this, invoking the entire phase of history between the "Doctor of the Church" who initiated a new era in Western culture and the precarious "House of Cards" that this culture has now become (Holloway, 1957, p. 184).

[461] Card, a "boxer priest" (1956, p. 30), is the last in a series of Lewis's "elephantine grotesques," as Fox and Chapman (1973, pp. 14-15) observe. This dubious lineage includes Bestre and Brotcotnaz in *The Wild Body*, Kreisler, the Bailiff, Jack Cruze in *The Revenge for Love*, Charlie

> I know where power is, and power is where I must be. it is no longer a matter of waving a red flag with a schoolboy fierceness, but the necessity of getting as near as possible to a vodka-tipping diplomat near enough to the Black Throne to get a little straight news from the other side of Nowhere." (Lewis, 1956)

Grimly resigned to the irreversible democratisation (and so vulgarisation) of life in "the fangs" of a mass egalitarian state (p. 42), this "theologically Modernist" priest (Caracciolo and Edwards, 1998, p. 141) seeks to exert control over the process by mixing the human and the divine—i.e., Communism with Christianity— on his terms. Inevitably, introducing politics into religion "corrupts the absolute" (Schenker, 1992, p. 185), dissolving ethics and eternal values by grounding its authority in the here and now.[462] When Card's colleague, Father Makepeace, confronts him with the charge that the "man of God" and politics are "deadly enemies" (p. 240), Card murders him and, convicted of manslaughter, exiles himself to the Arctic as a "polar missionary" (p. 125), where he will carry his vision of a "violent Christ" to "the remotest heathen—the tough little Eskimos" (p. 292). But Card ends up strangling an Eskimo for trying to steal his wallet and, after an "obscure scuffle in an igloo" (Holloway, 1957, p. 184), is himself killed. "Missionary murdered", the papers derisively declare (Lewis, 1956, p. 293).

The predictable progression of Card's "terrible journey" (p. 292), from his "hollow assumption of power" (Wagner, 1957, p. 267) to his death, encapsulates Lewis's warnings

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the janitor in *Self Condemned,* Borzo the hotelkeeper in *Filibusters in Barbary* (1932b) and Brandleboyes in *America, I Presume* (1940).

[462] Card ends up using the divine for his selfish political ends–Jesus becoming for him "a stick of dynamite" (Lewis, 1956, p. 244).

against religious absolutism and its political messianisation.[463] Lewis (1951a, p.201) believed the Catholic absolutist metaphysics Card romanticises had been rejected in the Renaissance by a new humanism that championed the heroic individual and the "scientific spirit" of rational man—the official faith of which, Auden suggests, was Protestantism (Boly, 1986).[464] Card, however, wants to "remember as much as possible of Rome" and recapture the English church from before the Reformation of the "blackguardly king" (1956, p. 107). Indeed, the message Card sought to carry to the Eskimo was that there is "no God but God" (p. 291), and this Absolute is a "terrifying reality", a Power so "overwhelmingly great" that we must see ourselves "as a fly, or some small insect" before it (pp. 107-109). In "The Anonymity of Perfection" (1997c, p. 168), Lewis argued that the more EINZIGE (ego) or 'personality' we possess, the more we are "child-like" and happily distanced from the "besetting reality" of the Absolute—even describing our "finest art" as "abstractions" that remove us from such so-called 'reality'. [465] In contrast, Card argues that man should "step towards" this Absolute by

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[463] Card's exile in the Artic recalls the "the Polar regions of our psychic existence' Lewis mentioned in a 1914 interview (Lewis, quoted in Cork, 1985, p. 184), and indeed Card hopes there to "achieve the absolute loneliness" (Lewis, 1956, p. 291)

[464] As mentioned at the start of Part One, *The Lion and the Fox* discusses this contrast between Christianity on the one side and the "scientific spirit" of the renaissance mind and the modern world on the other (Lewis, 1951, p. 201)

[465] "Der Einzige" translates as "the unique one"—Lewis is referring to Stirner's "Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum" (The Ego and its own) (1844), continuing the dialogue with Stirner's ideas that began in the 1914 play *Enemy of the Stars* (Edwards, 2011).

shedding that ego, to “see how small” one can feel, to experience “the ultimate next thing to nothingness— to Zero” (1956, pp. 107-109).[466]

As this thesis has shown, the 'nothing that is God' was approached during Lewis’s lifetime with something akin to Father Card's messianic 'passion for the Real' by various forms of reactionary modernism in both religion and the arts (Caracciolo and Edwards, 1998, p. 141)—an effort continuing today with the NRR. Note Dugin's (2023b) claim that “the nihilism of the modern world needs… a radical overcoming in the spirit of Nietzsche, who defined the superman as the ‘victor of God and nothingness.’” As stated in the introduction, both reactionary modernism and the NRR aim, by other means, to continue this Romantic drive to connect humanity with a restorative Absolute, to find a redemptive transcendent source of value that would unify an atomised social reality, counter the Enlightenment's ‘disenchantment of the world,’ and create new forms of “collectively lived meaning” (de Benoist, 2003, p. 56). The “whole complex of ideas” we call Romanticism, as Auden (1994, p. 72) said, “is the attempt of Protestantism to find its own brand of Catholic unity”.[467] As we have discussed, Lewis took an entirely contrary view regarding this 'nothing’ God. For him, achieving metaphysical unity with an abstract totality would invalidate religion and art, which he perceived as “phenomena of separation" that emerged when the cleavage between the

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[466] Equally, when enthusing over the old faith’s traditional mass, Card extols the “pressure… of all (those) bodies, instinct with belief, all pressed together, straining towards God in one close society… a crowd experience”–a sensation he believes is only recapturable in the “twenties of this century” through Communism (Lewis, 1956, p. 107).

[467] From reactionary modernism to the NRR, this is exemplified in numerous romantic projects that reject the complexities of modern individualism in favour of either a collective subjectivity or a compensatory political or racial unity.

subject and the object, between the "inside" and "outside," widened sufficiently to necessitate them (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, p. 236). [468] In a double heresy, however, Romanticism rejects *both* the Protestant division between outer and inner man *and* the rationalist faith in the exclusive privilege of reason to govern the external world (Boly, 1986, p. 136)—rendering it doubly dangerous for Lewis.

Hence, in the 1950s, Lewis remained preoccupied with highlighting the dangers posed by his "romanticist adversaries" (1971, p. 31) who, in their drive to transcend the "conventions of the intellect" (Yeats, 1962, p. 4) and reach an "abstract spiritual absolute", risked undermining the separating function of art and religion (Caracciolo and Edwards, 1998 p. 141). Lewis (1989c, p. 175) cautions explicitly against "pure" abstract art (e.g., Kandinsky's), which, in its "randomness and casualness", denies "any role at all to the intellect."[469] This reiterates *Time and Western Man's* argument that by rejecting the 'forms and categories of the intellect' in their passion for the unifying real, romantic modernisms leave us with "nothing" but Bergsonian sensation and "eternal flux" (Yeats, 1962, p.4). "Nothing, zero," Lewis (1989c p.

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[468] This quote is taken from Criterion's galley proofs of Lewis's article, 'The Perfect Action.' For the published version of this argument by Lewis, see "The Dithyrambic Spectator" (1971, p. 204).

[469] Despite his association with abstract art, Lewis claimed he had never "never deserted the concrete for the abstract. " By contrast, Lewis saw the "energetic doctrines" of his "vitalist, or actionist" contemporaries (Lewis, 1927, p. 352) as flawed attempts to make the "REAL out of unreality, or the Truth out of an illusion"." For Lewis, they were akin to "Sisyphus rolling a ball up a hill that does not exist!" (Lewis, quoted in Edwards, 2011, pp. 237-239)

184) cautions, is "what logically you reach past a line, of some kind, laid down by nature, everywhere" —not just in art, but in everything else too.

Card's widow appropriately bestows this name, Zero, upon their posthumously born son. The choosing of this "fearful name: was "more like a branding… she could see that he would look like his terrible father", whose own aberrations, accordant with the plight of Cartesian Man, doomed him to "blast his way across space and time" (Lewis, 1956, p. 298; Kenner, 1958). Card's "fatal journey" to his "polar terminus" (p. 293)— ending with his "throat gouged out" in an Artic wilderness amid the "absolute loneliness" (p. 291) he desired— makes him, in Lewis's work, the ultimate exemplar of modernism's 'romantic nihilism' and its intoxication with Absolutes from which man was meant to be shielded (Kenner, 1958, p. 241).[470] Hence, the importance of art as a mediator: for 'zero', too, is what Lewis saw would be the endpoint of art (and ethics and politics) if art relinquished its role in providing images that stabilise our collective reality (Edwards, 2016 p. 105)—those aesthetic representations of the real or "pictures of… reality" (Lewis, 1927, p. 171) that transform and organise the 'nothing' into something outside "the real" (1969, p. 331). But in the West, this process is failing. As elaborated in Chapter Three, this is the predicament post-Enlightenment culture faces when its grand narratives disintegrate, and its images lack "grounding in any principle that transcends them" (Edwards, 2011, p. 237). An "art-less society" (Lewis, 1967, p. 257)—or indeed one that values an abstract art that disintegrates rather than secures reality—delivers us back to that incoherent 'nothing' or void with disastrous results (e.g., Card or Margot) (Edwards, 2011). Art and its cultural images are a "fragile, symbolic cobweb" (Žižek, 1991, p.

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[470] Significantly, as Lewis writes of Kreisler, the "signifying nothing!" of Shakespeare is "nearer" to this impulse than the "nihilism" of Dostoevsky's Shigalev (1984, pp. 162-63).

17) that should *separate* us from too close a contact with a primordial Real whose "characteristic quality" is "brutality" (Lewis, 1976, p. 29), and not (a la Bergson) render back to "LIFE"—that "magiscular abstraction of feverish chaos'"— all that the mind had taken from her to "build into forms and concepts" (Lewis, 1989a, p. 337).

In summary, the bizarre allegorical plot of *The Red Priest* only begins to truly make sense when paired with the heterodox theology Lewis develops through *Time and Western Man* and into *The Human Age*. For Edwards (2011, 2015), the theme of Lewis's final novel reiterates *Time and Western Man's* argument for God as nothing, a 'zero' that must remain separate from us. God and mankind must necessarily have their "backs turned to each other" (Lewis, 1927, p. 397), the divine must not be dissolved into the human, and art and religion must remain 'phenomena of separation'. Augustine Card preaches the opposite: this separation must be broken down, the limit breached, politics religionised and religion politicised; the Absolute must be violently encountered—as one collides with a "locomotive" (1956, p. 125)—so man may break through to a sphere of authenticity, to a reality transcending our "divided condition" (Edwards, 2000, p. 549). Lewis (1971, p. 123), fearing the outcome of this, devoted much of his work to criticising the modern expedients by which art's (and religion's) separating functions were betrayed—whether in service of 'diabolic' interests like fascist modernism's "aestheticisation of politics" (Benjamin, 2008, p. 41) or even Tolstoy's use of art to support his "benevolent idealism." Lewis's (1989c, p. 184) final polemic ends with the clarion call: "What every artist should try to prevent is...the exhibitionist extremist promoter driving the whole bag of tricks (civilised life)" over the "precipice" into a nihilistic nothingness or zero"—the "destructive void" of the real Žižek (2002, p. 12) warns of.

The word "zero" is repeated with "ominous regularity" in Lewis's last books (Powe, 1987, p. 40),[471] but nowhere is it used more significantly than in *The Trial of Man*, where God would appear as something which was "not zero" (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 237). It is uncertain whether Card's fate was determined before Lewis decided to write a concluding volume of *The Human Age* or whether he paused work on *The Trial of Man* to write this novel about this theologically modernist clergyman instead (Edwards, 2011, p. 239). Either way, Caracciolo and Edwards (1998) and Powe (1987) all suggest the divine 'nothing' of *Time and Western Man* is suddenly given a benign turn.

The only glimpse of this reversal occurs in the aforementioned draft of *The Trial of Man*, where God appeared in the post-apocalyptic hospital ward. It is the crippled Sammael who confirms the identity of the Stranger, in tones recalling *Time and Western Man's* descriptions of God: ''I smelled that great absence of guts—that big Nothing we call God!" (Lewis, quoted in O'Keeffe, 2015, p. 615). This renders doubly significant the reaction of the Irish nurse to the stranger:

> From her young days she remembered 'Where there is nothing there is... oh, what was it that there was? Something like this... something which was **not zero,** as she had always supposed this meant. No - that nothing of her early teachers meant somewhere where nothing oppressively human was to be found — nothing functional, that loved and hated, nothing that uncomfortably willed and wanted -

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[471] Examples include the war of "Zeros" in *Self Condemned* (Lewis, 1965a, p. 186), the philosophic "Zero" of Sartrean and Heideggerian Existentialism in *The Writer and the Absolute* (1952, p. 127), and the "blankness of the great zero" (1989c, p.177*)* in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*

> something which had everything. But that was the reverse of nothing, was it not? (Lewis, quoted in Kenner, 1966, p. 237)

The nurse is trying to recall the completion of Yeats' line used as the title of his 1896 short story 'Where There is Nothing, There is God'; a line later recycled in his play *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1953, p. 245). The speaker, Martin Hearne, is another Card-like "visionary naïf" (Ross, 2009, p. 372), a coachbuilder and Catholic mystic whose "business is not reformation but revelation" (Yeats, 1953, p. 243). Like Dan in *The Apes of God*, Martin's vision is apocalyptic; however, *unlike* Dan (and *like* the Absolutist Father Card), he embraces rebellious destruction.[472] To repurpose Lewis's (1971, p. 63) critique of *transition's* romantic nihilism, Hearne "exults in the romantic chaos" and seeks to "intensify it". The Heaven he envisions is a "continual battle"—a subjectivist vitalist vision opposed to Lewis's idealised empirical world of the senses—and only through assimilating everything into the Absolute "nothing" can desacralised modernity be transcended:

> ... we shall not come to that joy, that battle, till we have put out the senses, everything that can be seen and handled, as I put out this candle…We must put out the light of the stars and the light of the sun and the light of the moon… till we have **brought everything to nothing** once again. I saw in a broken vision, but now all is

[472] At Lord Osmund's Lenten Party, Dan–while listening to Zagreus's "Pierpointian harangue" (Edwards, 1981, p. 638)–has a vision of revolution and civil conflict: "Nothing could live thought Dan, or ***love***, thought he and sighed, where he had been looking... he had looked and seen the battle-parks and the spikes planted for trees... he would never look again!... Between as it were the flashes of their remarks, the steady quarrelling with one another–glimpses of violence that was all–nothing pleasant" (Lewis, 1981, p. 418).

clear… Where there is nothing, where there is nothing-there is God! (Yeats, 1953, p. 245)

Contrarily, for the nurse (and for Lewis), the concept of God as ‘nothing’ is redefined as a positive: his “vast indifference” becomes a benevolent “self-sufficiency” that requires nothing from you and is hence ‘not zero’ but an “indefinable something else” (Edwards, 2011, p. 239). This represents a ‘reification’ of nothing that Edwards suggests cancels out Lewis’s postmodernism, but it also negates the connection Chapter Six posited between Lewis’s 'nothing' God and the abstract Absolute of the NRR.

In summation, Lewis never entirely abandoned the 'nothing' God of Time and Western Man for an orthodox Christian deity. Instead, that 'nothing’—a cypher of metaphysical dread throughout his early work—was finally redefined as a plenitude that guarantees our individuality, standing in opposition to the “zero” sought by today's radical-reactionary intellectuals through apocalyptic violence and the revitalisation of life via politics; desiring as they do—even more intensely than the reactionary modernists—an ‘abstract totality’ incompatible with individuality and its nature.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis has demonstrated, through Lewis’s work, how both reactionary modernism and the NRR critique the 'corrosive' objective frameworks of Enlightenment rationalism and Progress, which, like the Romantics before them, they view as the source of the West’s ‘descent into nihilism’ (Chapters One/Two)—causing a crisis in the experience of time as fragmentation (Chapter Three) and a crisis of values exacerbated by atomising individualism (Chapter Four), cosmopolitanism (Chapter Five), and secularisation (Chapter Six). As

continuations of Romanticism, both movements sought unifying values and "organic" institutions to counter these issues, whether that manifested as reactionary modernism's rebellious drive toward collective subjectivity or the communal, cultural, and racial unity envisaged in the NRR's political models for alternative modernities to be revived outside the ‘dead’ linear time of Progress.

In Part One, we examined how the modern belief in progress diverges fundamentally from the traditionalist worldview. As Tillich (1952, p. 105) clarifies, in the pre-modern world, the transition from potentiality to actuality was vertical, moving from the lower to the higher forms of being. In Enlightenment progressivism, this movement became "horizontal, temporal, and futuristic," forming the primary way in which the self-affirmation of modern Western humanity henceforth expressed itself. Like the NRR, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and other anti-Enlightenment critics, Lewis condemned the subjective and calculative domination of nature and the excessive rationalism (‘instrumental reason’) that later arose from this development. However, Lewis's theological writings imply that the original self-affirmation of the Enlightenment individual contained a positive implication—the courage to confront the growing anxiety that arose with increasing knowledge of an indifferent universe and our place within it. In Lewis’s era, the individual was decentred not only by the repercussions of the “Copernican upheaval” and the Cartesian subject-object split (Lewis, 1927, p. 336) but by the more immediate traumas of urbanisation, industrialisation, and mass death of World War One. The courage demanded of the modernist individual was no longer one of forward-looking optimism: it had to confront the loss of being in a universe without limits, without a ‘sacred canopy of meaning’ and without an accessible Absolute—the cold, impersonal urban reality depicted in the Vorticist paintings. But rather than surrendering to this nihilistic situation or

invoking the unifying power of religion or collective subjectivity as remedies to it, Lewis reifies this nothing as a positive—upholding a vision of a radically transcendent Absolute so “democratic” He became “aristocratic again” on our behalf. Lewis's emphasis on our individual responsibility to *create* meaning for ourselves—and for artists to provide the images that stabilise our collective reality—reconciles the self-affirmation of Enlightenment individualism with a universal and transcendental vision.

It is ironic that the Romantic desire to connect with an ‘abstract’ Absolute and revive 'organic' conceptions of society—recapitulated in modernism and the NRR—developed as much in response to Enlightenment secularisation and rationalisation as to the emptiness of romantic individualism. This individualism, which Lewis (1984, p. 73) argued "contributed much" to the nihilistic and "subjective temper" of the age, differed from Renaissance or Enlightenment individualism in that it denied the individual's responsibility to society (and thus tended, as Thomas Mann observed, to be politically reactionary). In other words, the inadequacy of romanticism's emphasis on self-expression and introspection as alternatives to the modern rational worldview paradoxically led to modernism’s (unfulfilled) romantic dream of integrating the individual into an "intimate unity" with an "abstract totality" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 25). Like the present-day NRR, modernism subsequently sought to challenge liberalism by either mythological efforts to revive a lost collectivism or radical utopian attempts to establish a new organic society. In contrast, Lewis's classical-romantic stance—striving to 'hold on' to rationality and individualism in the face of rationalisation—not only rescues him from reductive critical associations with reactionary modernism but also differentiates him from those in the NRR who claim alignment with him and use his modernism to legitimise their agenda.

Lewis's stance, in sum, was neither the 'excessive' liberal individualism the NRR criticises nor the purely subjective one of romanticism. As our introduction stated, his modernism was an evolution of romanticism along two vectors: 1) a 'theological-metaphysical' concern with man's necessary separation from a transcendent Absolute and 2) a 'quasi-utopian' ambition for realising a renewed, zestful culture (Edwards, 2000). This ambition took the shape of a paradoxical desire to reconnect the threads modernity had severed between social and artistic forms (and indeed between universalism and individualism) but without unifying them; instead, Lewis sought an "equilibrium between them... an unstable equilibrium that changes as society develops" (Proudhon, 1858, p. 229). Art should never serve a political agenda, but it could, Lewis (1984, p. 154) felt, advance the interests of "civilised intelligence".

This thesis aimed not only to use Lewis's insider-critique of modernism as a guide to the NRR's response to modernity—and to challenge their interpretation of him as a reactionary modernist—but also to argue for Lewis's positive value as a thinker we need *now*. As Part One showed, many citizens within contemporary liberal democracies feel that modern life is too homogenised, materialistic, rationalised, and desacralised: the environment is being decimated by 'instrumental reason,' individualism confines us in the "solitude of (our) own hearts" (Tocqueville, 1956, p. 99), and regional and cultural identity is being eroded through unfettered globalisation. In short, our 'hypermodern' conditions generate their share of cultural pessimism, even without the NRR's metapolitical influence. People are losing faith in the capacity of globalised and bureaucratised democracies to redress the convolutions of today's crises and prevent society's optimistic belief in progress from yielding to a fear of loss (Timmermans, 2022; Bar-On, 2013). While many scholars disregard the alternative modernities suggested by NRR thinkers, they nevertheless address this very genuine

disenchantment in ways mainstream liberalism struggles to (Bar-On, 2013). Hence, for those who repudiate the alternative futures the NRR offers, it is their challenge and responsibility to present other positive visions of modernity that can rival the NRR's—perhaps even to suggest a "new world of reason" (Lewis, 1927, p. 391).

Lewis's thought offers crucial insights to forming such a proposition, seeing as he did that the 'dissolution' of Western culture is being 'speeded' as much by the 'nihilistic' excesses of rationalisation, homogenisation, and secularisation as by the counter-reaction of irrationalism, ethnonationalism, and absolutism. An area of future study could indeed be how he advocates a third way, a positive rational vision—a post-liberal, post-national or post-secular vision (one in which art, not politics, serves as a new religion for post-modern man). This is where the two sides of his modernism—the desire to realise a zestful modernity and the concern with a transcendent absolute—positively combine. From the societal utopianism of *The Caliph's Design* and the cosmopolitan internationalism of *America and Cosmic Man* to the personal (almost existential) metaphysics of *The Human Age*, Lewis's modernism reflects a Renaissance-esque interplay of individualism and universalism—an "individualist universalism" (Habermas, 2001, p. 20) that today's Radical Right reject as alienation and rootlessness. But Lewis's was, crucially, never a 'political' modernism: it was a defence of the creative minority and their importance in cultivating a more zestful culture for all—recognising, as Tarr did, that there is "no alternative to creation except the second rate" (Lewis, 2010, p. 204).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Definition of Terms

Conservative Revolution: a spiritual movement that aimed "to clean the slate of the ruins of the nineteenth century and to establish a new order of life." (Locchi, 1973, p. 1). This oxymoronic term highlights a desire to fuse traditional and modernist thinking. The Conservative Revolution was hence not a reactionary movement: it presents a conservative vision of revolution—i.e., a revolution seen from the right—and a revolutionary vision of conservatism—i.e., a conservatism viewed from the left (Dugin, 1994). The Conservative Revolution manifested across Europe but most prominently in Germany: its prominent figures included Schmitt, Jünger, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, and Spengler.

Counter-Enlightenment: a term popularised by Isaiah Berlin to denote various anti-rationalist, anti-intellectualist strands of thought that reject the core conceptual pillars of liberalism: individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism (Asal, 2019; Grey, 2005, p. 200). Contrary to the Enlightenment's emphasis on progress and humanism, philosophers associated with the Counter-Enlightenment typically embrace anti-humanist (e.g., Schopenhauer) and anti-teleological positions (e.g., Heidegger).

Modernism: In the artistic domain, modernism refers to a movement that made a radical break with the past to pursue bold new modes of expression. It encompasses a range of avant-garde movements that proliferated at the turn of the twentieth century, including Imagism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Futurism, Vorticism, formalism and—in

literature—Impressionism.[1] The turmoil and disenchantment caused by World War One played a critical role in shaping the trajectory of modernist art, further driving its practitioners to reject the conventions of nineteenth-century realism in favour of experimental, rebellious and even adversarial approaches (Kuiper, 2009, p. 155). Above all, modernism represents an effort to found a “tradition of the new" (Childs, 2001, p. 14) and signifies as much the artist’s freedom from realism, materialism and traditional artistic genre/form as it does an obsession with cultural disaster and apocalypse.

Modernity: the historical period commencing in the late 15th century with the Renaissance and extending through the twentieth century, particularly up until the post-World War II era (after which the 'postmodern' era begins). Berman (1983) provides a helpful differentiation of “modernity” from “modernisation” and “modernism.” He characterises modernisation as the processes of industrialisation, democratisation, urbanisation, secularisation, and similar transformations that have intensified in the West over the previous centuries, resulting in a nebulous yet identifiable sense of "modernity." This sense of modernity is what modernism, in turn, strove to capture and express through art (Saler, 1999, p. 179)

New Radical Right (NRR): a metapolitical movement that adopts a conservative revolutionary stance in the modern world. It arose in the late twentieth century and is characterised by a critique of liberal democracy, multiculturalism, and universalisation. It is

[1] While Modernism can also include proto-modernist writers such as Flaubert, this thesis predominantly concentrates on the literary-artistic movement of 1910-1930, often regarded as the core period of Modernism, particularly in its Anglophone context (Rulo, 2021, p.1).

‘radical’ in the sense that, like the reactionary modernists, it adopts a “dialectical relationship to modernity” (Bar-On, 2013, p. 229)—seeking to "transcend" and "transform" rather than "negate" modernity (Euben, 1997, p. 429). They combine their ‘antimodern’ rebellion against a liberalised, rationalised, deterministically progressive world with aspirations toward a revolutionary, technological, and resacralised alternative future (Preston, 2011).

There is no firm terminological consensus on what constitutes the ‘radical’ element of NRR activity (Sprejer et al., 2021)—or, indeed, what constitutes ‘right.’ [2] Synthesising studies of past radical right movements, scholars such as Carter (2018) and Mudde (2009, p. 331) have, however, convincingly argued that the radical right's defining ideological principle is "natural inequality or hierarchy" rather than nationalism. Similarly, Jupskas defines right-wing radicalism as fundamentally characterised by an “illiberal opposition to equality” (Jupskas, quoted in Sprejer et al., 2021). These findings parallel the earlier research of Ernst Nolte (1966), who claimed that anti-transcendence and anti-universalism, not nationalism, marked the underlying commonality of all twentieth-century fascisms, each of which denied universalism and embraced particularist inequality (Nolte, quoted in Tucker, 1999, p. 56).

What distinguishes this iteration of the radical right as ‘new’ is its repudiation of the totalitarian legacy of fascism and the Old Right’s party-political approach (Ignazi, 1992). The

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[2] At its core, the political left-right division originates from the 1789 French Revolution. Those seated on the 'right' in the National Assembly were defenders of the monarchy and the traditional hierarchy, including the divine right of kings, while those on the 'left' championed liberal and progressive ideals, advocating for the equal political “rights of man” (Eatwell & O’Sullivan, 1989).

Old Right aimed to seize power through electioneering and armed resistance, seeking to replace liberal democracy with fascist or authoritarian regimes by force (Johnson, 2013). In contrast, the New Radical Right has developed a metapolitical approach,[3] aspiring to achieve its political objectives by transforming consciousness and culture. This means the New Right operates within the "marketplace of ideas," eschewing activist parliamentary or extra-parliamentary political strategies (Bar-On, 2013, p. 3). Although both the 'Old' and 'New' radical right are premised on an illiberal rejection of egalitarianism and universalism—and both aim to establish a hierarchically organised, resacralised, organic society within modernity—the New Radical Right focuses their efforts on the 'conquest' of civil society through cultural influence, particularly among the educated elites of society (Bar-On, 2021, p. 46; Johnson, 2013).

In its adoption of this metapolitical approach, the New Right emulates the New Left's long-term transition from political to cultural domination. Just as the New Left successfully distanced itself from the legacy of the Communist Old Left, the New Radical Right disowns the censorship, terror, political imprisonment, and mass genocide associated with fascism (Johnson, 2013). Like the New Left, it seeks to achieve a more lasting political change through establishing intellectual and cultural hegemony. Challenging and redirecting dominant cultural discourses—including those surrounding Modernism—is central to the NRR's metapolitical project. Reclaiming artists such as Lewis enhances their image as the party of the 'intellectual and artistic elites' while simultaneously undermining an academic

[3] 'Metapolitics' refers to the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for long-term political gain.

mainstream that neglects to acknowledge that the “great artists” of the twentieth century “were culturally, politically, and spiritually of the Right” (O’Meara, 2017).

Reactionary Modernism: a term coined by Herf in his landmark work of the same name (1984, p. 1) in referring to the Conservative Revolutionaries’ efforts to forge a paradoxical “reconciliation between the antimodernist, romantic, and irrationalist ideas present in German nationalism and the most apparent manifestations of means-ends rationality, namely, modern technology.” Herf regarded the Conservative Revolutionaries as ‘reactionaries’ because they represented a right-wing political tradition aiming to “vitalise the nation” (1984, p. 11). However, they were also “modernists” in the sense they pursued a vision of more—not less—industrialised Germany. Further, they embodied themes of the ‘modernist vanguard’ that crossed the right-left divide, displaying an insurgent spirit at war with tradition, the bourgeoisie, and Enlightenment reason (Bar-On, 2013, pp. 239-240).

Appendix 2: Sammael and the Young Lewis

The first description of Sammael in *Malign Fiesta* seems to support Kenner's reading of his similarities with the young Lewis. After arriving in Matapolis, the Bailiff takes Pullman in a chauffer-driven car to meet "the Devil in person". Upon entering Sammael's office, Pullman meets a

> …classically handsome, young middle-aged man, the regulation six-foot-three of the angel, heavy shoulders, of superbly athletic build. His head was thrown back; it was large, with thick, dark, well-ordered hair. His face was a pale mask, with strong black eyes which said nothing, but contained a conventionally amiable light, the lips smiled slightly (Lewis, 1955, p. 342)

Sammael's physique and deportment evoke Lewis in his early pre-Vorticist years—as seen in his portrait by Augustus John (circa 1903)—where his varying arrangements of wardrobe and coiffure convey both the aesthete and Übermensch within him.[4]

Descriptions of Sammael's mysterious foreignness ("Indian blood, perhaps")[5] and managerial status ("an American of high managerial class") (p. 342) further recall the Raza Khan of Lewis's debut novel *Mrs. Dukes' Million* who, like Sammael, had elaborate schemes for altering the rules by which humanity played the games of art and life. Indeed, Schenker (1992, p. 176) suggests that the more acquainted Pullman becomes with Sammael, the more

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[4] The central male characters in Lewis's early stories, such as "Cantleman's Spring-Mate," "The War Baby", are self-styled übermensch (Fox and Chapman, 1973, p. 13), in contrast to the later 'perfectionist' cerebral protagonists such as Harding or Pullman.

[5] Sammael later clarifies his "origins are Mazdean, or shall we say Persian" (1955, p.463)

he appears as an "accurate caricature" of the Lewis responsible for all the works extending from *Tarr* to *Snooty Baronet.*[6] Sammael chiefly occupies himself, as did Lewis in his satires, with overseeing the "Surgery of Morals" upon sinners who, not incidentally, belong "almost exclusively" to the "European and American bourgeoisie" (1955, p. 354), just as Snooty's 'victims' are the "'progressive,' popular… fashionable' persons, of topdog race and showy class" (Lewis, 1922, pp. 63-65).[7]

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[6] Sammael also protests (too much, perhaps) that he "never relished" his job "as executioner" and "administer" of "torture" (1955, p. 377, p. 461), just as Lewis (1984, p. 56) in *Rude Assignment* 'complains' that despite being "plastered" from head to foot with "slander" as consequence of executing his "time-honoured" role as satirist, it was a "duty" "incumbent" on him to administer "punitive buffets to the fatuous, the overweening… the crooked" (p. 216), to "hang" the Apes from the "nearest tree" (p. 57).

[7] Schenker (1992, p. 177) describes the Dantean burlesques "vignettes" in the Punishment Centre cells as designed to "rub the noses" of the bourgeoisie in their own materialism.

Appendix 3: Lewis and Paganism

It is no surprise this passage was exorcised from *Time and Western Man*, given the pagan overtones of its conclusion:

> It is not the moment to forget that spring of imagination and miraculous fable, pouring everywhere from the valleys of the "Celtic fringe"… if we have a God, it is not any Absolute, but is still our own particular Unknown.. We worship things, or emblems of nature, before the swarming of Time; Chance rather than a God of Law or a God of Science... (Lewis, 2023, p. 452).

It is revealing to contrast Lewis's complex views on paganism and pantheism with those of NRR thinkers like De Benoist. Rather than viewing Paganism as a path to self-realisation, de Benoist promotes it as a response to desacralisation and a means of resacralising the world. While de Benoist also sets a form of sacred pre-Christian tradition against desacralised modernity, as seen in traditionalist New Radical Right thought, de Benoist's sacred tradition is not primordial or universal but particularist (Sedgwick, 2023, p. 334).

This provides an insightful contrast to Lewis's critique of pantheism. In a characteristic Lewisian reversal, where every negation contains an affirmation (and vice versa), Lewis reinterprets positively the universalism of Spinoza's Judaic monotheism. In *Left Wings over Europe* (1936, pp. 260-261), he observes that "it is an axiom almost of Western thought that the advantages of the Judaic religion over almost all others is its primitive monotheism." By conceiving the "formidable notion of a solitary God," Lewis writes, the "rude patriarchs" transcended paganism and reached a "unique all-embracing region of thought." In summarising and dismissing pantheism, Lewis concludes that the "personality of a river, or

the personality of the sun, is… like the personality of a man… contingent on other suns and other rivers, and a multitude of other personalities… such a conception, so imperfect in power and in function, is not an adequate object for the highest human adoration" (1936, p. 261).

Appendix 4: Sammael and Satire

Like the 'reluctant' satirist, Sammael finds actually delivering a victim to their jaws somewhat of a chore (Kenner, 1958, p. 232):

> *Those animals fill me with horror, they cause me such inexpressible disgust that it is as much as I can do to go near them. But that is physical and visible, nasal and visual; and the Women-Sinners disgust me even more. I realize that that is a little obsession. But what can you expect of an angel!"* (Lewis, 1954, p. 377)

The more physical the nature of the sin, the more violent Sammael's reaction, and the greater his zealousness in seeing punishment administered (Schenker, 1992, p. 178). Such statements from Sammael again recall Hitler's fanatical puritanic idealism and throw further light on Lewis's literary intentions in these scenes, both as a critique of Nazism's romantic subjectivism and a self-reflexive critique of his intellectual beguilement by Hitler on similar grounds:

> I confess that in one respect I was badly taken in by Hitler , in 1930. What more than anything caused my judgement to trip was that unusual trinity of celibacy, teetotalism and anti-nicotine. I was cowed at the thought of such superiority to alcohol, such a contempt for tobacco, such sublime indifference to the sex-urge.... I should at once have been on my guard at the spectacle of more than two major inhumanities (Lewis, 1939, p. 37.)

Lafferty (2009) argues that Pullman's efforts to restrain his fear and outrage in the presence of this 'Hitlerian devil' reflect Lewis's doctrine of moral neutrality and the ideal of the artist guided solely by reason, but he concludes that such detachment blurs the distinction

between anti-humanist intellectualism and inhuman coldness.[1] Lewis himself shows no such intellectual agnosticism in these scenes, however, whose rejection of 'modernist impersonality' is as vigorous as in any of his works. Even read as a critique of society, Lewis's 'satire' here is not merely negative, as it once might have been, given that Matapolis functions as a contrast to the 'heaven' Lewis suggests *in America and Cosmic Man* (Edwards, 1975, p. 243).[2]

While Lewis himself stated that his classical approach, his satirist's laughter, was not inhuman but a means of transcending man's degraded condition, Nath (1990, p. 245) contends that Lewis's notion of the 'non-moralist satirist' bringing 'human life more into contempt each day' nevertheless comes uncomfortably close to this Sammael-esque attitude that made possible the "horrors of Stalinism and Nazism". Bringing life into contempt—even if, for Lewis (1964, p. 226), "other-worldliness" is its goal—is already a dubious endeavour, and it becomes an evil project should that contempt become the end in itself, with otherworldliness and existential, transcendent laughter gradually disappearing

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[1] Powe (1987) also suggested that Lewis's 'detachment'–his complete dedication to intellectual reading without emotional engagement or intuition–contributed to his troublingly imperceptive interpretation of Hitler as a possible ally against a deteriorating society. However, such critiques are justly contended by Nath (2011, p. 14), who observes that Lewis was always willing to acknowledge the challenges and, indeed, undesirability of the literary artist maintaining 'detachment' in a world rife with competing ideologies (Nath, 2011, p. 14). For further insight, see Lewis's essay, "Detachment and the Fictionist" (1934b, pp. 214-30).

[2] Caracciolo (2010, p. 104) notes that the frequent comparison of *The Human Age* with Dante's *Divine Comedy* is somewhat misleading: *America and Cosmic Man* is the nearest Lewis ever gets to envisaging his *Paradiso*.

from the satirist's scheme, as they do for Sammael (Nath, 1990). This is Sammael as Pullman first meets him: a strict being, proud in his angelic estate, who calmly punishes man for being man. His motive, as Kenner writes, is

> what Lubianka and Dachau were invented for; no crimes, nothing less than a state of being, could inspire such horrors, or justify them in the minds of those who administered them, doing, it would seem, Sammael's work on earth (Kenner, 1966, p. 234).