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Nietzsche among the Modernists: The Case of Wyndham Lewis

Shane Weller

Lewis and Nietzsche: Antithetical Views

The first phase of Nietzsche's influence on European philosophy, politics, and literature began in earnest only in the last decade of the nineteenth century, gathering considerable momentum in the early decades of the twentieth century, and reaching a height, in Germany, in the early 1930s, when his thought was effectively appropriated by the ideologues of the Nazi Party, principally through the stewardship of Alfred Baeumler, professor of philosophy in Berlin from 1933 to 1945 and author of *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker* (*Nietzsche the Philosopher and Politician* [1931]).¹ Reacting against Baeumler's reading of Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger delivered a major series of lectures on the philosopher between 1936 and 1940 at the University of Freiburg, culminating in a critical analysis of Nietzsche's conception of "European nihilism." Within the ambit of English literature, however, perhaps no writer of the first half of the twentieth century has more often been seen as under the influence of both Nietzsche's thought and his style than Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957). Indeed, for almost all commentators on Lewis's oeuvre, Nietzsche remains an absolutely decisive figure, although the precise nature of Nietzsche's influence on Lewis has tended to be conceived in two, more or less diametrically opposed, ways.

On the one hand, there is the position exemplified by John Carey in his 1992 book *The Intellectuals and the Masses*. Here, in a chapter provocatively entitled "Wyndham Lewis and Hitler," Carey identifies Lewis as essentially Nietzschean in order

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626 simply to dismiss him out of hand. In an act of radical literary decanonization, Carey claims that in his early career Lewis “greatly admired” Nietzsche, an admiration unreservedly reflected in Lewis’s 1917 essay “The Code of a Herdsman,” at the heart of which is a distinction between “the herd” and “the mountain people,” the latter being called upon to “mock the herd perpetually with the grimace of its own garrulity or deadness” and to “eschew all clichés implying a herd personality.”² In the briefest of analyses, Carey argues that in “The Code of a Herdsman” Lewis simply “adopts the familiar Nietzschean symbolic landscape.”³ There is much in Lewis’s oeuvre to support Carey’s claim that Lewis remains an essentially Nietzschean thinker: in addition to his privileging of an intellectual élite over the many, there is his early rejection of democracy, his celebration of what in the first issue of *Blast* (June 1914) he terms the “proud, handsome and predatory,” his Vorticist conception of the “northern”—“We assert that the art for these climates, then, must be a northern flower”; “Tragic humour is the birthright of the North”—his unremitting polemicism, and, perhaps above all, his foundational distinction between the artist or, more precisely, the artist-intellectual and the “average” or “common” man.⁴

What Carey leaves out of account, however, no doubt because it does not fit quite so neatly into his own polemical discourse on the modern, is the host of complications that render any simple connection between the “Nietzschean symbolic landscape,” Lewis, and Nazism decidedly problematical. For instance, even in “The Code of a Herdsman” Lewis is already barring the “mountain people” from the realm of the political: “Do not play with political notions, aristocratisms or the reverse, for that is a compromise with the herd” (*EWL*, 27). We shall have reason to return to this banning of the artist-intellectual from the political, and indeed the possibility of an art that would be free of any political position. Secondly, and no less significantly, point 16 of “The Code” reads: “Contradict yourself. In order to live, you must remain broken up” (*EWL*, 29). It is contradiction, polemical energy turned back on the self and on the coherence of that self’s work, that is one of the structuring-destructuring principles of Lewis’s entire oeuvre. Indeed, the very repetitiveness of that oeuvre, upon which Carey remarks so dismissively, is arguably the repetitiveness of an iteration that, paradoxically, both reinforces and weakens its argument.

Furthermore, in order to reduce the early Lewis to no more than an acolyte of Nietzsche, Carey has to give the shortest of shrifts to the almost unremitting critique of Nietzsche that is to be found in Lewis’s major works of the 1920s and 1930s. Of this critique, to which I shall turn shortly, Carey declares that it is to be explained as a typically Nietzschean élitist reaction on Lewis’s part to the increasing popularity of Nietzsche in intellectual and artistic circles in the 1920s, and that, despite the “reservations” expressed by Lewis regarding Nietzsche in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) and elsewhere, Nietzsche “continued to be a potent influence on Lewis.”⁵ One of the ironies of Carey’s summary analysis of Lewis’s relation to Nietzsche, an irony of which Carey himself shows not the least awareness, is that it repeats Lewis’s own polemicism, leaving us not with an answer to Lewis’s relation to Nietzsche but rather with the task of tracing, with considerably more attention to the textual details of the case, the history

of Lewis's response to Nietzsche, particularly during the two crucial decades leading up to the outbreak of war with Nazi Germany in 1939 and Lewis's own attempt to think Nietzsche's relation to fascism in *The Hitler Cult* (1939).

Before beginning that analysis, however, it is first necessary to consider the other way in which Lewis's relation to Nietzsche has been read in recent years. For, radically opposed to Carey's strategy of tarring Lewis with Nietzscheanism (as a kind of proto-fascism or proto-Nazism), there is the position taken by more theoretically informed commentators such as Toby Foshay, Paul Edwards, and Andrzej Gąsiorek. Whereas Carey identifies Lewis as Nietzschean in order to dismiss him, both Foshay and Gąsiorek identify Lewis as Nietzschean in order to save him, not least from his association with fascism. Crucially, however, they would save him not as a modernist but rather as a postmodernist. This reading depends not only upon a reinterpretation of Lewis, but also upon a reinterpretation of Nietzsche, a reinterpretation that ironically finds its specific point of origin in Fredric Jameson's 1979 monograph on Lewis, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis: The Modernist as Fascist*. The Lewis that Jameson presents to us is characterized by a "consistent perversity"; Lewis becomes an antinomic figure at the very heart of the modernist movement, "at one and the same time the exemplary practitioner of one of the most powerful of all modernistic styles and an aggressive ideological critic and adversary of modernism itself in all its forms."⁶ Commentators following Jameson's lead on Lewis, while trying to free him (as Lewis would try to free himself) from the "modernist as fascist" label, have sought to identify in this "consistent perversity" not a self-contradictory, self-defeating, or incoherent modernism, but rather a fully-fledged postmodernism at the heart of modernism. The central thesis of Foshay's 1992 monograph on Lewis, for instance, is that he "represents a strain of post-aestheticist writing that differs significantly from what has come to be defined as 'modernist'."⁷ Paul Edwards, in his magisterial *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000), claims that Lewis's work offers "the most comprehensive critique we have of the modernist urge to overcome our dereliction by violently breaking through to a realm of authenticity, a reality transcending our divided condition."⁸ Lewis's critique of the dream of transcendence would extend not only to his familiar *bête noire*, Henri Bergson, but also to Nietzsche and in particular his theory of the "Overman" ("Übermensch"). If, as early as 1912, Lewis is "freeing himself from the confines of Bergson and Nietzsche," he is, according to Edwards, never simply Nietzschean in his outlook: "he always mistrusted the slightly hysterical optimism of Bergson and Nietzsche, with their unrealistic visions of transcendence."⁹

For commentators such as Foshay and Edwards, then, the postmodernity of Lewis's critique of modernism from within lies in its resistance to grand narratives, to the dream of transcendence, to the very idea of authenticity, and to the modernist surface-and-depth model, in favor of what Lewis himself terms an "externalist art"—which is to say, the art of a pure surface that hides no depth at all: in other words, a postmodern art of the simulacrum.¹⁰ Such an externalist art would be ideally suited to Lewis's conception of the human as a figure without depth or (borrowing from Artaud) a body without organs. This break with the metaphor of depth or interiority is marked as early as *The Caliph's*

628 *Design* (1919), at least with regard to the “common man”: “The life of the crowd, of the common or garden man, is exterior. He can only live through others, outside himself. He, in a sense, *is* the houses, the railings, the bunting or absence of bunting. His beauty and justification is in a superficial exterior life. His health is there.”¹¹

In his recent monograph on Lewis, Andrzej Gąsiorek follows very much in Foshay’s and Edwards’s footsteps, arguing that Lewis’s oeuvre is essentially self-deconstructive. Again, at the heart of this rereading—or, more precisely, this revaluation—of Lewis there lies the figure of Nietzsche. Agreeing with Carey’s claim that Nietzsche was “a huge early influence” on Lewis, Gąsiorek nonetheless proceeds to argue that Lewis carefully distinguishes two strands in Nietzsche’s thought. On the one hand, there is the Nietzsche who calls for a revaluation of all values (*Umwertung alle Werte*): with this Nietzsche, Lewis would be in full agreement. On the other hand, there is the Nietzsche who privileges the Dionysian over the Apollonian: with this second Nietzsche, the deconstructive Lewis will have no truck:

In common with other writers and artists, Lewis followed Nietzsche in urging the complete revaluation of European modernity and arguing for a transformative creativity capable of reimagining and reinventing the present. But he systematically rejected all arts of and philosophies of a dionysian hue, on the grounds that their search for cultural renewal entailed the collapsing of subject/object distinctions and depended on the mistaken belief that regeneration may be brought about when the intellectual is abandoned and the subject achieves union with a mystically conceived *élan vital*.¹²

If Gąsiorek appears rather unhelpfully to conflate Nietzsche with Bergson here, this is justified, at least in part, by Lewis himself doing something very similar on numerous occasions, and perhaps most insistently in *Time and Western Man* (1927). Having emphasized Lewis’s critical distance from the “Dionysian” Nietzsche, Gąsiorek proceeds to argue for a Lewis who is quite simply antithetical to Carey’s Nietzschean-fascist stooge. Gąsiorek’s Lewis is a writer and an artist whose best work is governed by a principle of heteronomy, an openness to alterity not despite, but through, its very polemicism: “in the main,” Gąsiorek concludes, Lewis “resisted the abject fantasy that one can *become* other in favour of a deconstructive strategy that sought to *reinscribe* otherness within the discourses that excluded it, thus mocking spurious conceptions of cultural homogeneity and making ‘the West’ other to itself.”¹³

So it is, then, that we now have two antithetical Lewises to contend with, both thoroughly indebted to Nietzsche, although the postmodern or deconstructive Lewis is indebted either to a Nietzsche who is already self-deconstructing or to a Nietzsche who has been split in two. For all their obvious differences, however, both of the above takes on Lewis—that is to say, the attack on and the defense of Lewis—tend to obscure the many complications and paradoxes of Lewis’s response to Nietzsche’s thought. These complications and these paradoxes are at their greatest when it comes to the question of nihilism—that “uncanniest of all guests” (“unheimlichste aller Gäste”), according to Nietzsche.¹⁴ Indeed, it is the fate of this concept in Lewis’s own work that marks an indebtedness to Nietzsche that is arguably more significant than any other.

Although the terms “nihilism,” “nihilist,” and “nihilistic” do not originate with Nietzsche, they certainly enter the main stream of modern European thought through him, and in particular through his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), which Lewis certainly read, and Book One (“European Nihilism”) of the fragments published posthumously under the title *The Will to Power* (1901). As for Lewis’s own deployment of the term “nihilism,” in his early critique of Nietzsche in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) he refers not to nihilism as such but rather to “Schopenhauerian pessimism.” In *Time and Western Man*, the terms “nihilistic” and “nihilism” each occur only once. “Nihilistic despair” is used in a section focusing on Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, from which Lewis takes the term.¹⁵ And, in his conclusion, Lewis again draws on the *Genealogy* when he claims that science is “nihilism” in that it produces an object-world that “exists” in the same sense and on the same level of reality as the image”; in other words, science produces a world that is strictly speaking “unreal” (TWM, 443). Lewis’s study of Shakespeare, *The Lion and the Fox* (1927), contains a brief chapter on “Shakespeare’s Nihilism,” and this chapter is important not least because it is the *only* occasion on which Lewis anticipates the postmodern gesture of Baudrillard or Gianni Vattimo by deploying nihilism as a value. Taking issue with A. C. Bradley’s claim that the ending of *King Lear* contains an irony that leads not to despair but to “christian optimism,” Lewis argues that the “punctual arrival of Cordelia, brought in like a Christmas present, so *narquois* and so pat, cannot be anything but what it forces us at once to see it as: an expression of the poet’s mockery at the vanity of human supplications, and notions of benevolent powers, of whom we are the cherished children.”¹⁶ According to Lewis, then, Shakespeare’s nihilism would liberate us from a childish fantasy of, and dependence upon, the divine. If Lewis’s use of the term “nihilism” is significant here precisely because nihilism is on this unique occasion presented as a liberating negation, it is only in the long essay “The Diabolical Principle,” first published in the third and, as it proved, final issue of Lewis’s review *The Enemy* (1927–29), that he addresses the question of nihilism explicitly and in detail. Here, however, he borrows the term from his own enemy, Elliot Paul, to whose essay “The New Nihilism” he is responding. It is this “new Nihilism” that Lewis proceeds to critique in “The Diabolical Principle.” Before analyzing this critique, however, it is first necessary to trace Lewis’s more general response to Nietzsche, which frames his take on nihilism.

Lewis versus Nietzsche: Limited Difference

Those commentators who insist that Lewis distinguishes clearly between two strands in Nietzsche’s thought are relying on numerous declarations of just such a distinction in Lewis’s own works. One of the last of these occurs in Lewis’s late autobiography, *Rude Assignment* (1950), in which he states:

Nietzsche was, I believe, the paramount influence, as was the case with so many people prior to world war i. . . . But for me Nietzsche was, with Schopenhauer, a thinker more immediately accessible to a Western mind than the other Germans, whose barbarous

jargon was a great barrier—Hegel, for instance, I could never read. A majority of people, I daresay, found in the author of “Zarathustra” a sort of titanic nourishment for the ego: treating in fact this great hysteric as a power-house. At present that is what I like least about Nietzsche: and I was reasonably immune then to Superman. The impulse to titanism and supernatural afflatus pervading German romanticism has never had any interest for me. On the other hand that side of his genius which expressed itself in “La Gaya Scienza,” or those admirable maxims, rather resembling Butler’s “Notebooks,” which he wrote after the breakdown in his health, were among my favourite reading in those years.¹⁷

What is not spelled out here is that by 1939 Lewis had come to see Nietzsche “the great hysteric” as the intellectual father of fascism, radically opposed to that other Nietzsche, the “good European,” the father of an internationalism with which Lewis would associate himself after his disillusionment with nationalism. As we shall see, the distinction that Lewis makes both in *Rude Assignment* and elsewhere between two strands in Nietzsche becomes a way of making sense of his own intellectual history. That the concept of nihilism will survive all these discriminations, however, is a fact that has tended to remain unremarked upon in commentaries on Lewis, be they attacks upon, or defenses of, his oeuvre. And it is in the fate of the concept of nihilism in his work, not in the distinction he makes between two strands in Nietzsche’s thought, that both Lewis’s debt to Nietzsche and the limits of his reading of Nietzsche lie.

As Paul Edwards observes, Lewis first read Nietzsche (not in the original German, but in French translation) at roughly the same time as he was reading Bergson, and was soon deploying him in his critique of Italian Futurism. In the first issue of his Vorticist review, *Blast*, for instance, Nietzsche is neither blessed nor blasted, but appears by name in an attack on Filippo Marinetti: “His war-talk, sententious elevation and much besides, Marinetti picked up from Nietzsche.”¹⁸ Nietzsche returns, ever so slightly masked, in *The Caliph’s Design* (1919) as that “German philosopher” who subscribes to the notion of an “aesthetic justification of the universe,” an idea treated, if not with mockery, at least with skepticism, by Lewis:

A German philosopher, living in the heyday of last century German music, accepted the theory of an aesthetic justification of the universe. Many people play with this notion, just as they play with Art. But we should have to disembarass “art” of a good deal of cheap adhesive matter, and cheap and pretty adhesive people, before it could appear a justification for anything at all; much less for such a gigantic and, from every point of view, dubious concern as the Universe!¹⁹

The allusion here is to the following, celebrated statement in Nietzsche’s first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872): “It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.”²⁰

The first extended analysis of Nietzsche’s thought by Lewis occurs in Part IV (“Vulgarization and Political Decay”) of *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926). Surprisingly—at least for those who consider Lewis an out-and-out Nietzschean, or who would contrast his attitude to Nietzsche with his attitude to Bergson and the other “time-philosophers”—Lewis’s reaction to Nietzsche here is scarcely less negative than his reaction

to Bergson in *Time and Western Man* (1927). Just like every other figure in the modern pantheon (including all the major literary modernists, from Pound to Eliot to Joyce to Woolf), Nietzsche is the target of polemical attack by Lewis. In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Nietzsche is identified as “the archetype of the vulgarizer.”²¹ The object of his vulgarization is “the notion of aristocracy and power,” which, Lewis argues, is “surely the most absurd, illogical, and meaningless thing that he could have chosen for that purpose” (ABR, 113). By “vulgarization” here, Lewis means at once popularization and devaluation: Nietzsche leads the populace to believe in its own aristocratic nature, thereby negating the very principle of the *aristos*. In this act of vulgarization, Nietzsche might be said to be the first properly modern philosopher. In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Nietzsche forms an unholy trinity with the two other great “vulgarizers” of the modern age: Bergson and Freud. Through an argument that is itself clearly a repetition of Nietzsche’s own strategy, Lewis turns Nietzsche back against himself, making of the self-declared anti-Christian Nietzsche a philosopher of Christian humility: “Nietzsche was in fact himself, where philosophy was concerned, a sort of Christ” (ABR, 114). What Lewis means by this is that Nietzsche preaches, self-contradictorily, an aristocratism that is open to all, the empirical proof of this being the sudden waxing of Nietzsche’s posthumous star: “A few years after his dramatic exit from the stage he became the greatest popular success of any philosopher of modern times” (ABR, 114); in this, Nietzsche anticipates the popularity of both Bergson and Freud in the early decades of the twentieth century.

However, if Lewis’s attack on the popular (because vulgarizing) Nietzsche is in fact scarcely less virulent than his attacks on Bergson, this is not because Lewis is simply opposed to Nietzsche rather than (as Carey argues) neatly aligned with him. The targets of Lewis’s polemics are precisely those figures with whom he shares something essential, and Lewis certainly finds “truths” in Nietzsche, not least the “truth” of that depthless surface which underlies Lewis’s own externalist aesthetic. Later in *The Art of Being Ruled*, for instance, Lewis declares: “that we are surface creatures, is the truth that Nietzsche insisted on so wisely” (ABR, 231). More generally, however, one might argue that Lewis’s *polemos*, a *polemos* that includes Nietzsche while being governed by him, takes the form of what Derrida in his later work terms “autoimmunization,” which is to say, a procedure whereby the self (*autos*) turns back on itself suicidally, ruining its own integrity.²² Nietzsche, then, as Lewis’s polemical other, is none other than Lewis himself, or at least a certain Lewis. And, crucially, for Lewis to constitute himself as a theorist of “Vulgarization and Political Decay”—in other words, as a theorist of what he will later term “nihilism”—he has to engage in this radical act of self-separation or self-aggression, by way of a certain Nietzsche, a Nietzsche himself split by Lewis into, on the one hand, the great vulgarizer and, on the other hand, the truth-bearer, the philosopher who articulates the truth of the depthless surface, which calls for the very externalist art that Lewis himself will aim both to theorize and to practice, most elaborately in *The Apes of God* (1930). Lewis’s *polemos* with Nietzsche, then, is not simply the expression of a rampant individualism (as Carey claims), but rather a practice of autoimmunizing self-assertion that would deconstitute the very thing it serves to constitute.

632 Returning to Lewis's critique of Nietzsche in *The Art of Being Ruled*, we find that the heart of that critique concerns the will to power (*Wille zur Macht*), which Lewis, anticipating Heidegger, identifies as "the central feature of his thought" (ABR, 117). Nietzsche's theory of the will to power is, he argues, inextricably rooted in the "Will-school" of philosopher, and thus can be traced back to Schopenhauer. In his attempt to overcome Schopenhauer's "pessimism of thought and knowledge," Nietzsche proposes a countering "affirmation" that is essentially the expression of a "will to action" directed against the intellect, which is to say against Lewis's own principal value. The will to power itself is simply surplus energy, above and beyond the energy required for the Darwinian "struggle for existence." In Nietzsche, this surplus (or "creative") energy is not invested in art, which is where, according to Lewis (and indeed a certain Nietzsche), it should be invested; rather, this surplus energy is reinvested in the very struggle that it exceeds. This, according to Lewis, is Nietzsche's great failing, the failing that Lewis's own work would correct:

Any criticism of Nietzsche must rest on that point: that of his suggested employment and utilization of this superfluous energy *to go on doing the same things that we should be doing without it*. . . . He was so impregnated with the pessimism of Schopenhauer, and his health was so broken by his experiences in the Franco-Prussian War, that he could not imagine, really, the mind doing anything else with itself than what it did in post-darwinian or schopenhauerian pessimism: to just go on contemplating the horrors of existence. And in reality the will to enjoy was dead in Nietzsche, much as he clamoured for latin light-heartedness. He had plenty of Will left: only, it was Will to struggle merely, not Will to live. (ABR, 118)

In other words, Nietzsche remains fixated by, and imprisoned within, the very nihilism that he was the first both to diagnose and to attempt to overcome. Lewis's Nietzsche is the first of the great reinvestors in European nihilism, the first of the great reinvestors in that greatest of devaluations, that absolute devaluation of the "highest values" which reduces existence to "horror." The ambivalence of Lewis's own relation to Nietzsche is to be understood, then, not simply in terms of an élitism that could not abide sharing its preferences, but more fundamentally in terms of a nihilism that Nietzsche diagnoses but from which he is unable to free himself. That Nietzsche himself was not unaware of this is suggested, of course, by his description of nihilism as the "uncanniest of all guests." Given such an analysis of Nietzsche, it is scarcely surprising that in his later works Lewis should repeatedly associate Nietzsche with the "time-philosophers" (above all, Bergson) and the art of music (an inward, temporal art, the very antithesis of that "externalist" art advocated by Lewis). In an irony that (as we shall see) returned to haunt Lewis himself, Nietzsche, the great diagnostician of European nihilism, is aligned with the very nihilism against which his great "affirmation" was supposed to militate.

At times, however, the autoimmunizing Nietzsche of *The Art of Being Ruled* is presented by Lewis as a rather less complicated figure. Already in *Time and Western Man* (1927), Nietzsche is being presented, like Bergson, as no more than a child of Darwin, having applied the Darwinian theory of natural selection to the political and

cultural spheres. In his critique of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918–22), Lewis is prepared to accept Spengler's identification of Nietzsche as simply Darwinian: "That Nietzsche's thundering and screaming is purely 'darwinian': that Darwin means 'Progress of the Species' (what Carlyle thundered about): that seems quite true" (*TWM*, 286).²³ Later in *Time and Western Man*, Lewis again identifies Nietzsche's failings: "Nietzsche had very little in his composition of the health, balance, measure, and fine sense of the antique world (of Spengler's 'Classical' and Goethe's before him) towards which he turned so often: he had much more of the frantic, intolerant fanaticism of a genevan reformer or an Old Testament prophet" (*TWM*, 352). Ultimately, however, it is Nietzsche's *solution* to the experience of nihilism that Lewis will reject, not his epochal diagnosis of it:

the very fundamental question of whether we should set out to transcend our human condition (as formerly Nietzsche and Bergson claimed that we should); or whether we should translate into human terms the whole of our datum. My standpoint is that we are creatures of a certain kind, with no indication that a radical change is imminent; and that the most pretentious of our present prophets is unable to do more than promise an "eternity of intoxication" to those who follow him into less physical, more "cosmic," regions; proposals made with at least equal eloquence by the contemporaries of Plato. (*TWM*, 110)

In an irony the measure of which it is far from easy to take, Nietzsche, the first great diagnostician of nihilism, becomes its very incarnation, in the very solution he proposes to it. That this notion will only reinforce itself in the course of Lewis's development is apparent from the following remark in *Rude Assignment*: "It is most necessary to make it very clear that there is not the least taint of *Uebermenschlichkeit* anywhere in my mind" (*RA*, 203). That the notion of the "Overman" would be considered a "taint" by Lewis can be explained by his own attempt to free himself from the taint of fascism. As he makes clear in *The Hitler Cult* (1939), Lewis considers the Nietzsche who theorizes the "Overman" as an "ancestor" of Nazism. Having quoted approvingly a passage on the "good European" from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882; revised edition, 1887), Lewis states:

It is mere impudence on the part of the Nazi doctrinaires to claim a man with such views as these as a precursor: though, of course, Nietzsche was a dual personality. There was a side of him that conforms to the Nazi pattern. Whereas one-half of him reviled the empty imperialism imposed by Prussia upon the rest of Germany—"that system of politics which makes the German nation barren, by making it vain"—the other half allowed itself to become intoxicated with hallucinations of power. So it was that he became the outstanding prophet of war-for-war's-sake. He gave intellectual currency to the military dictum of the Prussian—that what we call "peace" is merely intervals interrupting a state of war. As such the Nazi imperialist can claim him as an ancestor.²⁴

According to Lewis, then—whose own intoxications or hallucinations regarding Nazism he is attempting to leave behind in *The Hitler Cult*—Nietzsche anticipates Nazism precisely through his response or solution to the threat of nihilism, not through his

- 634 *diagnosis* of nihilism, and, above all, not through his *appropriation* of the concept of nihilism from the discourse of the political (that is, nineteenth-century Russian nihilism) and his redeployment of that concept within philosophy.

Lewis and the Struggle Against Modern European Nihilism

It would not be particularly difficult to demonstrate that Lewis's entire oeuvre is in fact nothing less than an unremitting critique of nihilism in one form or another. In this respect, one might argue that the influence of Nietzsche upon him remains absolute. Certainly, Lewis's critique of the "time-philosophers" and the "time-mind" in *Time and Western Man* can be read as a critique of nihilism, given that for Lewis that which is hypostatized by the modern "time-mind" is quite simply "Nothing": "Time as change was the 'Nothing' of the Greek, and it is ours. *Space* is rapidly, under the guidance of a series of Bergsons, each Time-obsessed, becoming the 'Nothing' of the modern European" (*TWM*, 418). As mentioned above, however, Lewis first devotes a sustained analysis to a phenomenon that he explicitly terms "nihilism" in the 1929 essay "The Diabolical Principle." This essay is a response to an article by Elliot Paul entitled "The New Nihilism," published in the second issue (May 1927) of the Paris-based magazine *transition*, of which Paul was, together with Eugene Jolas, the coeditor.

In "The New Nihilism," Paul claims that a new movement in the arts has finally declared itself, a "new Nihilism" that enacts a productive negation of all existing literary forms, values, and institutions. These new nihilists include Stein and Joyce, but they find their most explicit spokesperson in the French writer Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893–1945), the first chapter of whose work *Le Jeune Européen* (*The Young European*) was published in an English translation by Elliot Paul in the same issue of *transition*. For Paul, then, "nihilism" is not a pejorative term, as it is for Lewis, but rather to be associated with nineteenth-century Russian nihilism in the sense that it breaks with the existing institutions (for Russian nihilism these institutions were principally political; for the "new Nihilism" they are aesthetic, moral, and metaphysical as well). Through a productive negation, "new Nihilism" breaks with the "humanist" or "Christian" conception of man and with the literary forms that correspond to that humanism. According to Paul, Drieu La Rochelle's "young European" is nihilist in his absolute rejection of the "Christian spirit," those "old values" of universal "brotherhood" that have been exposed by the inhuman horrors of the First World War. La Rochelle's "nihilism" reflects the "perfect inhumanity" that has come to light with the war. His is a literature that is "completely dehumanized" and functions "in a sphere which knows neither morals nor compassion." This dehumanization is not to be confused, however, with the superhumanization theorized by Nietzsche: "The new hero neither feels nor shows superiority, only an utter amorality and a clear head which finds futility everywhere and accepts it as a natural law." The "new Nihilism" "renounces Christ and Nietzsche as if both were schoolboys."²⁵

The extracts from Paul's own translation of the opening chapter of Drieu La Rochelle's *Young European* that are included in Paul's essay on "The New Nihilism"

undoubtedly exhibit traits that foreshadow La Rochelle's subsequent commitment to fascism and his rejection of both liberal democracy and communism.²⁶

The violence of men. They are born only for war, as women are made to have children. All the rest is a tardy detail of the imagination which has already shot its bolt. . . . Man need never have left the forest: he is a degenerate, nostalgic animal.

It is necessary to have killed with the hands to understand life. The only life of which men are capable, I tell you again, is the spilling of blood: murder and coitus. All the rest is but the fag end of the course, decadence.

I had deceived myself. The Russian revolution was not at all as I had believed. Those Jews thought only of making themselves Americans, only, like the Germans of 1914, they went about it awkwardly.²⁷

Lewis's critique of Paul's argument in favor of a "new Nihilism" forms part of his ongoing polemic against all the major modernists, a polemic that finds its first major expression in *Time and Western Man*, which contains a long essay on *Ulysses*, and is reinforced in a sequence of essays on Hemingway, Faulkner, Pound, Eliot, James, and Woolf in *Men Without Art* (1934). There are numerous aspects to Lewis's critique, but not the least of these is his claim that the "new Nihilism" is in fact not new at all. Just as the other so-called moderns are, in Lewis's eyes, rooted in the nineteenth century and, beyond that, in the "time-philosophy" which is itself nihilist through and through, so the "new Nihilism" does not go beyond the Russian nihilism from which it borrows its name, and (within the literary) it does no more than repeat such nineteenth-century diabolists as Lautréamont and Rimbaud. Lewis places particular emphasis upon the link between Lautréamont (and the other "diabolical" writers) and Nietzsche: in both, he argues, there is a "will to power" or a "power-complex" that operates through a simple reversal of the Christian ethos, a reversal that changes nothing at all. Christian and anti-Christian are two sides of the one nihilist coin: "Such men as [Lautréamont] are in fact inverted moralists, as was well seen in the case of Nietzsche."²⁸ If the writers associated with the "revolution of the word" heralded by *transition* magazine are merely "sham revolutionaries," repeating the diabolism of Lautréamont *et alia*, then the "new Nihilists" are quite simply the old nihilists in avant-garde artists' clothing.

No less important to Lewis's critique, however, is the claim that, for all Nietzsche's appropriation of the term for a philosophical discourse, nihilism cannot in fact be freed from its roots in the political. For this reason, Paul's championing of a "new Nihilism" is quite simply a *politicization of art*, and that, for Lewis, is the most disastrously nihilistic gesture of all. Indeed, according to Lewis, the very essence of modern European nihilism lies precisely in the politicization of art, the negation of art's autonomy from the political as the discourse of the *polis*: "The *politicisation* of art is a catastrophe of the same order as the politicisation of science" (*E*, 68). According to Lewis, then, nihilism is political in its essence, and this is true not only of the "Russian Nihilism" critiqued by both Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* (1861) and Dostoevsky in *The Possessed* (1871),

636 but also of the “new Nihilism” of Drieu La Rochelle’s *Young European*. In fact, Lewis’s entire oeuvre is unified by the attempt to save art from the political, to save the creative intellect (as subject, mind, or psyche) in its freedom. As the ostensibly disparate analyses of *Time and Western Man* make clear, he sees this freedom as being threatened in the modern period by a host of mechanist theories: these include, but are certainly not limited to, Leibniz’s concept of the unconscious, Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will, Darwin’s theory of the struggle for existence, Nietzsche’s will to power, Bergson’s concept of *élan vital*, Spengler’s historicism, William James’s theory of the stream of consciousness, and behaviorist psychology. What “The Diabolical Principle” helps to clarify is that, above all, it is in the politicization of art, and of the creative intellect that finds expression in art, that modern European nihilism (as Lewis conceives of it) finds its essence, and this is because modernity is for Lewis the “political age,” while art remains (transhistorically) the purest form of expression for the intellect in its freedom. In short, the struggle against nihilism in the modern age is, for Lewis, above all the struggle—or the *polemos*—between art and politics.

Nihilism, as Lewis conceives it, then, is to be understood not as a spirit of negation directed against the Christian humanist conception of humanity as a “brotherhood,” not as amorality or lack of compassion, and not even (indeed, above all not) as the inhuman, a category that Lewis aims to recuperate for his own art of satire, together with the idea of the “non-moral,” in *Men Without Art*. Rather, nihilism will be defined by Lewis as the negation of art’s autonomy, the contamination of both art and the intellect by the political. What Lewis in “The Diabolical Principle” terms the “New Philistine,” by which he means, among others, Elliot Paul, Eugene Jolas, and those writers championed by *transition*, is, then, closely akin to the old “Philistine” of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) in that, just as the Arnoldian “Philistine” fails to achieve disinterestedness, Lewis’s “New Philistine” fails to recognize art’s necessary autonomy from the political, to recognize that “to root politics out of art is a highly necessary undertaking” (*E*, 28–29). As for Lewis’s own political position in this attack on a nihilism defined as the politicization of art, it is presented as not really a position at all, but rather as hybrid, miscegenated, or self-contradictory: “partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order” (*E*, 70).

That said, the radical distinction between art and politics, intellect and action, thought and power, upon which Lewis’s notion of modern European nihilism is founded, is a distinction that cannot be maintained, precisely because the very concept of nihilism itself cannot be freed from the political. To speak of nihilism is always to speak of the political as well as the philosophical and the aesthetic, and in Lewis this imbrication occurs principally through his reliance upon the concept of sovereignty in his thinking of both art and politics in the 1930s. His definition of nihilism as the politicization of art is proposed in the 1929 issue of *The Enemy* and published in book form (together with another essay, “The Dithyrambic Spectator”) in 1931, at the beginning of a decade that would see Lewis address contemporary politics head-on, in a sequence of works whose arguments would come to serve as the principal evidence for

the irreducible implication of his own art in the political. Those works include *Hitler* (1931), *Left Wings over Europe; or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), and *Count Your Dead: They are Alive!, or A New War in the Making* (1937). These three texts, in which (as Lewis himself later acknowledges) Hitler and Nazism are treated sympathetically, have been described by Julian Symons as “the worst of Lewis” (EWL, 124), and Lewis himself came to dismiss aspects of them. In an unpublished draft chapter of *Rude Assignment*, he claims that the Nazis’ nationalism “bored” him, their “racism” he considered a “joke,” and their militarism was “silly,” but he admits to having “felt much sympathy” (RA, 258) for both their economic program (in particular, their attack on usury, or “loan-capital” as opposed to “creative-capital”) and their social program. Crucially, Lewis relies upon the notions (and the value) of sovereignty and the nation-state in his defence of Nazism, a defence energized by his anticommunism. In *Left Wings over Europe*, for instance, which was published after German troops had entered the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, he argues that Hitler’s principal aim is simply the re-establishment of Germany as a “sovereign state, within its own frontiers, subject to its own law.”²⁹ It is just such a sovereignty that, for Lewis, is also the defining principle of the intellect or creative intelligence and the art in which it finds not only its expression but also its being as transhistorical event.

That Lewis would eventually come to realize the problems entailed by deploying the concept of sovereignty in his thinking of the political is evident from his remarks upon *Hitler* and *Left Wings over Europe* in *Rude Assignment*: he is now “in complete disagreement with much of the contents of *Left Wings*,” in particular its “support for the principle of the ‘sovereign state’” and “its antagonism to all centralization of power” (RA, 226). Lewis continues to insist, however, that neither work is political; rather, they are “anti-war” (RA, 224). What he has come to realize is that sovereignty and war are inextricable: “until the doctrine of the ‘sovereign state’ is repudiated, there must be war” (RA, 225). In fact, this rejection of sovereignty as a political principle is already apparent in *The Hitler Cult*: “The more ‘sovereign states’ that cease to be sovereign the better for all of us. And it is not perhaps too much to hope that the fact of a common tongue, English, will start the rot; disintegrate these stupid barriers” (HC, 244). And yet, far from simply abandoning the notion of the state, Lewis proceeds to universalize it: abandoning the ideal of multiple sovereign states, he comes to advocate a federalist world-state as the only solution to both the possibility of war and the dissolution of “Western culture,” that culture being something he no longer sees any reason to defend. And if the principle of sovereignty remains at the heart of any thinking of a world-state, it also remains at the heart of Lewis’s thinking of the aesthetic in its absolute autonomy from the political.

If the struggle against nihilism as Lewis conceives it calls for a rooting out of politics from art, the works of the 1930s suggest that it also calls for a rooting out of politics from the discourse of the political. In the foreword to *Left Wings over Europe*, for instance, Lewis writes: “Finally, as to the political colours under which what you are about to read sails. With regard to that I can set your mind at rest at once. I fly the flag of no party. My shirt is neither red, black, nor purple.”³⁰ And yet, Lewis’s anticommunism drives

638 him inexorably towards a position-taking that is necessarily political. *Hitler, Left Wings over Europe*, and *Count Your Dead* may be “anti-war,” but that is precisely because a European war would, according to Lewis, result in communist hegemony in Europe. In an article published in the *British Union Quarterly* in January 1937 and addressed quite directly to the British fascist, Lewis insists upon his being “objective” and “detached.” Studiously refusing to identify himself as a fascist, he nonetheless identifies Marxism as an “enormous evil” and communism as a “dark apotheosis,” whereas fascism stands for “all that prospers by individual effort and creative toil.”³¹ Ironically, the explicit connection that Lewis makes here between politics and the aesthetic (that is, “creative toil”) is a perfect reflection of their imbrication in the Marxist theory of the aesthetic. The irony only deepens when one considers the fact that, while Lewis insists in each of his “anti-war” polemics of the mid-1930s that he is remaining “objective,” his first polemic against Nazism (*The Hitler Cult*) opens with the announcement that he is finally abandoning his political neutrality (*HC*, vii).

From transition to Existentialism; or, Nihilism’s Return

For all the many, highly significant changes that occur at the end of the 1930s in Lewis’s position on democracy, fascism, the nation-state and the world-state, and even the value of Western (or at least European) civilization, the concept of nihilism that he inherits from Nietzsche, and redefines to suit his own purposes, survives intact. Over two decades after the first publication of “The Diabolical Principle,” in a chapter entitled “Twentieth Century Nihilism” in *The Writer and the Absolute* (1952), Lewis once again deploys “nihilism” as a catch-all for an entire mode of thinking, namely the existentialism of Sartre and Camus, which he rejects as one more manifestation of that “time-philosophy” which now includes Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* (1927) would have made him one of Lewis’s “most valuable exhibits,” had Lewis only read him when writing *Time and Western Man*.³² Whereas in “The Diabolical Principle” nihilism’s essence is taken to lie in the politicization of art, or the negation of art’s autonomy, in *The Writer and the Absolute* it appears at first glance to be defined in ontological terms as a philosophy that takes the ultimate ground to be the nothing (*le néant*). Lewis’s critique of Sartrean existentialism echoes his earlier critique of the “dionysian” Nietzsche. Existentialism is nihilistic in being an attack on “human reason”; reason and intellect are supplanted by the will, making of man the “acting animal” rather than the “thinking animal” (*WA*, 124). This usurpation of reason occurs through a withdrawal from objectivity into subjectivity, from the external into the internal world, a withdrawal that Lewis traces back to the *epochē* (or bracketing) at the heart of Husserl’s phenomenology. What remains after the *epochē* is, Lewis argues, not consciousness in its purity but nothing, or, more precisely, the consciousness of nothing: “So—having cut himself off from the phenomenal world outside—in this empty shell our Existentialist flings himself on the floor and contemplates this echoless vacuity” (*WA*, 126).

If Lewis’s summary of the phenomenological reduction scarcely does justice to Husserl, it nonetheless appears to enable Lewis to offer a definition of nihilism that is

no longer limited to the negation of art through its politicization. However, the more general argument of *The Writer and the Absolute* is precisely that art must remain free, and that, for all its token emphasis upon freedom, existentialism is a philosophy that conceives of the human as anything but free. As we have seen, according to Lewis, existentialism renders the human being an “acting animal,” subject to the will rather than to reason. In other words, existentialism takes its place in the tradition of philosophies of the will that can be traced back to Schopenhauer and his “pessimism.” With regard to art and literature, Sartre is of course the great champion of engaged literature (*littérature engagée*), whereas Lewis continues to maintain art’s absolute autonomy from the political: literature, he argues, should be “a kind of Switzerland; the ‘great neutral’” (WA, 54).³³ The works of Sartre and Malraux are proof that “literature is literally bedeviled by politics in the France of today” (WA, 67). If Camus is to be set apart from Sartre and Malraux as the author of novels that are “probably the best that are being written in France today” (WA, 66), then this is precisely because he is “a writer of great distinction who declares himself as not of any party: or at least desirous of being that.” And yet, Lewis continues, “there is nothing in the world so difficult today as not belonging to a party” (WA, 67).

One might well imagine that Lewis’s insistence upon the difficulty of maintaining art’s autonomy from the political is owing to his own experiences in the 1930s, and yet, once again, the act of autoimmunization that is the signature of Lewisian polemic takes place by way of another, in this instance not Nietzsche but Camus. For all the attention that Lewis pays to Sartre in his critique of existentialism, it is Camus who poses the greater threat and who serves as the figure of that self which Lewis would expel, since he bears, or is made by Lewis to bear, such a close resemblance to Lewis himself. Not only does the French-Algerian writer seek to free himself from the political, but he is presented as being, like Lewis, a “thinking animal” rather than a “man-of-action animal” (WA, 69). Ultimately, however, Camus belongs with all the other twentieth-century nihilists, although, crucially, his nihilism lies not in his rendering art political but rather in his conception of the human being as essentially irrational or absurd: in Camus, “the irrational—the Absurd—is an openly venerated principle” (WA, 131); “No work I know of is more beautifully suited to make dazzlingly clear the inner meaning of existentialism than *L’Etranger*, by Albert Camus. To the ‘Dumb Ox’ of whom I wrote must now be added the ‘Surd’” (WA, 131).

One of the ironies of launching such a critique of Camus—in which it is absurdity and not the political that renders the work nihilist—lies in the fact that in his essay on “The Meaning of the Wild Body” (1927), in which he establishes the fundamental principles for his own comic art, Lewis anticipates the postwar theory of the absurd by turning Bergson’s definition of laughter on its head, redefining laughter as a response to the absurdity of being. The absurd, as Lewis conceives it in 1927, is that for which there can be no logical explanation. Thus, not only might a given phenomenon be described as absurd, when considered from a certain point of view, but being as such is fundamentally absurd, given that there can be no logical explanation for its emergence out of non-being:

To begin to understand the totality of *the absurd*, at all, you have to assume much more than belongs to a social differentiation. There is nothing that is animal (and we as bodies are animals) that is not absurd. This sense of the absurdity, or, if you like, the madness of our life, is at the root of every true philosophy. . . . It is the chasm lying between being and non-being, over which it is impossible for logic to throw any bridge, that, in certain forms of laughter, we leap. We land plumb in the centre of Nothing.³⁴

If, from a point of philosophical vantage, being as a whole is absurd, then it goes without saying that the human being is. According to Lewis, however, the absurdity of the human lies not only in its being as such, but also in its status as a *thinking* being. If his theory of the absurd is rooted in a dualist sense of the absolute difference between being and non-being, then his theory of the comic is rooted in a no less dualist sense of the absolute distinction between action and reason, will and thought. Just as the leap from non-being to being is absurd on account of its resisting all logical explanation, so too is the leap from body to mind, from will to thought, from action to reason—in other words, the leap beyond nihilism:

The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person. But from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*. It is only when you come to deny that they are “persons,” or that there is any “mind” or “person” there at all, that the world of appearance is accepted as quite natural, and not at all ridiculous. (WB, 158)

Whether this “absurd” leap out of nihilism is to be conceived as an action or a thought, as nihilist or non-nihilist, remains in question, not least because its very absurdity lies in its not belonging properly to either category.

For the absurdity or ridiculousness of being, and of human being in particular, to become apparent, and thereby laughable, there must be a certain distance between the subject and the object of laughter. Human beings are only laughable when viewed from the outside, and indeed from an absolute outside—hence Lewis’s insistence that the comic art is necessarily purely “externalist.” Paradoxically, this absolute outside, this being-beyond-the-human, is the very essence of the human as a thinking being. That at which we laugh is the human as the properly human’s absolute other. To be properly human, then, is to be in a position to laugh at everything we spend our lives mistaking for the human, and this is, if not strictly speaking impossible, not only rare but at odds with life itself:

It is comparatively easy to see that another man, as an animal, is absurd; but it is far more difficult to observe oneself in that hard and exquisite light. But no man has ever continued to live who has observed himself in that manner for longer than a flash. Such consciousness must be of the nature of a thunderbolt. Laughter is only summer-lightning. But it occasionally takes on the dangerous form of absolute revelation. This fundamental self-observation, then, can never on the whole be absolute. We are not constructed to be *absolute observers*. Where it does not exist at all, men sink to the level of insects. (WB, 158)

Such properly human laughter is not corrective in the manner that laughter is for Bergson. It does not serve to identify and challenge departures from the normative. Rather, it is on the side of the human beyond any social, political, or normative categories. It is the experience of the human as that which transcends itself; it is a non-position, an absolute outside, the place of art, for which there is simply nothing but alterity. In short, it is life beyond nihilism. And yet, the place of such properly human laughter at the absurdity of thinking being is precisely the nothing of pure consciousness, the very nothing that Lewis will later criticize in Husserl's phenomenology and Sartre's existentialism.

At the heart of Lewis's own conception of an externalist art, then, there is a pure "nothing," and it is upon this "nothing" that his own critique of nihilism is founded. At this point, the very difference between the critique of nihilism and the nihilism that constitutes the object of that critique is subjected to a pressure that threatens to reduce it to nothing. What Nietzsche terms the "uncanniness" ("Unheimlichkeit") of nihilism would lie, then, in that nihilism's returning to haunt the very critique that Lewis would launch against it. In short, Lewis's own oeuvre would appear to serve as proof, against itself, in a *polemos* of incessantly failing autoimmunization, that there is nothing more nihilist than a critique of nihilism. If Lewis's debt to Nietzsche lies, above all, in his appropriation and redeployment of the concept of nihilism, then the limit to that debt would lie in his failure to take full account of the uncanniness of a guest that would shape his entire oeuvre while also reducing it in its turn to a very strange kind of nothing. That Heidegger exhibits a similar failure is surely rather more than an historical coincidence.

Notes

1. David Farrell Krell describes Baeumler as "One of the most influential perpetrators of the 'official' Nietzsche" in Nazi Germany. In Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 4: *Nihilism*, ed. David Farrell Krell, transl. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 269.
2. Wyndham Lewis, "The Code of a Herdsman," in *The Essential Wyndham Lewis: An Introduction to His Work*, ed. Julian Symons (London: André Deutsch, 1989), 26–27. Henceforth abbreviated EWL. "The Code of a Herdsman" was first published in the *Little Review* (July 1917) and then in *The Ideal Giant* (1917).
3. John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intellectuals, 1880–1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 184.
4. *Blast* (June 1914), 148, 36, and 38.
5. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 184.
6. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis: The Modernist as Fascist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.
7. Toby Avard Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 4.
8. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 594.
9. Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 94 and 491.
10. Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art*, ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1987 [1934]), 99.
11. Wyndham Lewis, *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow, 1986 [1919]), 30.

- 642 12. Andrzej Gąsiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2004), 122.
13. Gąsiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism*, 129–30.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, transl. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 7.
15. Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1993 [1927]), 352. Henceforth abbreviated TWM.
16. Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1966 [1927]), 180.
17. Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, ed. Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow, 1984 [1950]), 128. Henceforth abbreviated RA.
18. *Blast* (June 1914), 132. For Lewis's reading of Bergson, see Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 10.
19. Lewis, *The Caliph's Design*, 66.
20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 52 (section 5). Nietzsche's translator, Walter Kaufmann, describes this as "one of the most famous dicta" in *The Birth of Tragedy* (ibid. n. 5).
21. Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1989 [1926]), 113. Henceforth abbreviated ABR.
22. See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 45: "what I call the autoimmune consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, committing suicide or threatening to do so, but, more seriously still, and through this, in threatening the I [*moi*] or the self [*soi*], the *ego* or *autos*, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the *autos* itself Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but, more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity."
23. English translation of Spengler's text by Charles Francis Atkinson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926). Lewis's annotated copy is now at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin.
24. Wyndham Lewis, *The Hitler Cult* (London: Dent, 1939), 57–58. Henceforth abbreviated HC.
25. Elliot Paul, "The New Nihilism," in *transition* (May 1927), 166.
26. Strenuously anti-democratic, Drieu La Rochelle was espousing fascism by the mid-1930s, publishing *Socialisme fasciste* in 1934 and particularly impressed by the Nazi *Reichsparteitag* in Nuremberg in 1935, which he attended. After the German occupation of France in 1940, he succeeded Jean Paulhan as director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and thus became a major figure in French cultural collaboration with the Nazi occupation; becoming disillusioned with the new order, he turned to the study of Eastern spirituality, and after the liberation of France went into hiding, finally committing suicide in March 1945.
27. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "The Young European," transl. Elliot Paul, *transition* (May 1927), 11 and 17. The original French reads: "La violence des hommes: ils ne sont nés que pour la guerre, comme les femmes ne sont faites que pour les enfants. Tout le reste est détail tardif de l'imagination qui a déjà lancé son premier jet"; "Il faut avoir tué de sa main pour comprendre la vie. La seule vie dont les hommes sont capables, je vous le redis, c'est l'effusion du sang: meurtres et coïts. Tout le reste n'est que fin de course, décadence"; "Je m'étais gouré: ce n'était pas du tout ce que je croyais, la révolution russe. Ces hommes ne pensaient qu'à se faire Américains. Seulement, comme les Allemands, en 1914, ils allaient maladroitement à leur but." Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Le Jeune Européen* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), 15 and 27. It is perhaps worth noting that where Paul refers to "Those Jews" in the third of these extracts, the first French edition of La Rochelle's text reads: "Ces hommes" ("Those men").
28. Wyndham Lewis, "The Diabolical Principle," *The Enemy* 3 (1929), 69. Henceforth abbreviated E.
29. Wyndham Lewis, *Left Wings over Europe: or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 17.

30. Lewis, *Left Wings Over Europe*, 17.
31. Wyndham Lewis, "'Left Wings' and the C3 Mind," in *British Union Quarterly* 1:1 (January–April 1937), 22–34. (My thanks to Matthew Feldman for having brought this article to my attention.)
32. Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen, 1952), 125 n. 1. Henceforth abbreviated WA.
33. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, transl. Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 2001), *passim*.
34. Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body: "A Soldier of Humour" and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004 [1927]), 157. Henceforth abbreviated WB.