Reviews


There is no reason, in principle, why psychoanalytical methods should not be applied successfully to literature. The difficulty lies in doing it well, for it requires considerable theoretical skills. When the method is allied, as it is here, with a discussion of both feminism and anti-Semitism, then tact, insight and sensitivity are required. Andrea Freud Loewenstein does not have these virtues, and the crudity of her methods discredits the entire project. That she is an intellectual naïf, playing with ideas whose significance and difficulty she has not grasped, is apparent from her simplistic 'little me’ account of how she wrote this book. She is careful to mention a 'famous relative': the author is, indeed, a great-granddaughter of Sigmund Freud. The reader soon wishes that she had inherited some of his self-deprecation.

No reasons are given for bringing together what the author calls 'three rather unpleasant authors'. The account of her search for a psychoanalytical theory 'which would work for me' neither explains this nor inspires confidence. Nevertheless, the book begins strongly, with a disturbing account of the active anti-Semitism of British government officials during the Second World War. It is correct that there was 'British collusion in the extermination of the Jews' at that time. What is not true is the author's strange conclusion that Lewis's The Apes of God — published in 1930, conceived in the early 1920s — 'fits exactly' with the actions of these administrators. Important questions need to be answered about the relationship between authors and the State, but this is no way to do it.

The quality of Freud Loewenstein's psychoanalytical discussion can be judged by two accounts of Lewis's supposed personality structure. On page 85 the three authors' personalities are said to 'lack any secure sense of external boundaries'. But on page 92 Lewis has 'a rigid paranoid personality, and his authorial structure reflects such a paranoid system'. The page 85 quotation is taken from Klaus Theweleit's excellent Male Fantasies, his study of the disturbed psychic life of the right-wing Freikorpsmen who fought and killed the German revolutionary working-class after 1918. The suggestion that Lewis, Charles Williams and Graham Greene wrote as the Freikorpsmen killed is perhaps the most bizarre of the author's many excessive assertions; but the book is suffused with comparable non-sequiturs, abuse of history and lack of a sense of proportion.

Freud Loewenstein's claim that her own book has 'cohesiveness' is laughable. Her chosen methodology is to survey a multitude of psychoanalytical theories and apply them on a pick 'n' mix basis as it suits. Theweleit's conclusions, by her own admission, were spatchcocked into the discussion at a late stage. Struck by the similarity between her own conclusions and his, she flings them into her discussion, with the consequences I have shown.

The discussion of Williams and of Greene is as erratic as that of Lewis. Williams's All Hallows' Eve (1945) is said to be 'minimising (almost denying) the Holocaust'. How could it do so when the novel entered a second impression just as the camps were being discovered in early 1945? Graham Greene is said ('my own diagnosis') to have suffered from 'post traumatic stress disorder'. The discussion of Greene does have some interest, showing that in the 1938 edition of Brighton Rock the Colleoni gang were Jews, but become Italians in the revision published by Penguin. Otherwise, the author's highly selective quotation — only women and Jewish characters are discussed — renders these novels unrecognizable.

There are genuine problems to be confronted concerning anti-Semitism among writers in this century, but they are not posed here with any specificity. Did Lewis's anti-Semitic writing of the 1930s help facilitate the Holocaust? How would one show that it did, or did not? How culpable was his ignorance of what was happening to
Jews in Europe before 1939? Does an individual writer have greater responsibilities than politicians or the editors of The Times, the Daily Mail or the New York Times? Did Greene’s use of ‘the Jew’ to describe an important character in Stamboul Train confirm or increase anti-Semitism amongst his readers, and if so to what effect? Recent revelations about the philosopher Martin Heidegger’s attachment to the Nazi party, and the discovery that Paul de Man wrote for a collaborationist newspaper, put the activities of Freud Loewenstein’s three authors into the shade. What of Louis-Fernand Céline, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Cocteau and Ernst Jünger? These people were close to the Nazi occupiers of France. They played with power. It is because Freud Loewenstein has no perspective upon these questions that her book is of such little value.

To use anti-Semitism to condemn writers wholesale is an easy way of taking the moral high ground. Who can then disagree, without seeming to justify the unjustifiable? The fabrication that Lewis was a member of a pre-Nazi secret society, the Thule Gesellschaft, has twice appeared in print. It is a measure of a slackness in academic standards at the highest level that doctorates and published books should contain such falsifications. (One wonders what concessions allowed this book to succeed as a doctorate at the University of Sussex.) Ironically, the Thule proposition says something about Lewis’s minor place in the history of fascism, for it implies that he was insufficiently involved, so that invention must supply the wickedness required. It is not a proper procedure to exaggerate wildly, as this author does, on the principle that, since an author is guilty of something, he is guilty of everything. We shall have to put up with more criticism of this kind, from writers more capable than Freud Loewenstein of handling theory, but nonetheless willing to build a reputation for confronting great issues by, in practice, demeaning them.

Alan Munton


Whatever I, for my part, say, can be traced back to . . . the eye. It is in the service of things of vision that my ideas are mobilized.7

From the time of the BLAST manifesto in 1914, in which he lambasted Marinetti’s Futurism on the grounds that its denunciation of space to a form of romantic and Bergsonian impressionism revealed its inherently passéist nature, to his vast and widely ranging critique of modern culture in the 1920s, and then on to the late fictional and critical writings of the 1950s such as Malign Fiesta, The Writer and the Absolute and The Demon of Progress in the Arts, Wyndham Lewis was perennially occupied with the questions raised by the valorization of temporality as the prior intuitive faculty of human experience. His partisan attitude towards the spatialist metaphor, the individuated eye, and the intellectually detached viewpoint, led him to identify, on numerous levels of representation, a preference for mutability over stability as an attack on the notion of personality as the source rather than the recipient of values.

For Lewis, this value-creating function essential to authentic human (and, of course, masculine) creativity could only take place as it originated from an individual divorced from both temporality and its structural (and feminine) correlative — interiority. Interiority, or depth, or inner consciousness, or intuition, or female-ness, in this sense, and whether expressed in art, literature, mass media, politics, science or philosophy, was understood by Lewis as a fundamentally prescriptive analogue of the valorization of the deliquescently temporal over his preferred spatiality. It was an asymmetry in the metaphysical underpinnings of modernity that he sought obsessively to expose through an exhaustive
proto-deconstruction of its covert formulations and representations, so as to provide the focal point for an aleatory system of critical conspiracy theory, whose overall aim was to reassert through agonistic criticism the external world of appearance as the supreme source of value. In this, and in spite of his often proclaimed antipathy to the fluxion values and puppet ‘titanism’ of the similarly gynophobic philosopher-poet to whom he owed so much, Lewis was evidently at one with Nietzsche when he wrote that:

We are surface-creatures only, and by nature are meant to be only that, if there is any meaning in nature. We are surface-creatures, and the ‘truths’ from beneath the surface contradict our values. Against this temporal-internal-identity fixation in modernity, Lewis asserted his ‘man of the future’, a plastic and achronic übermensch exemplified, for example, in the bizarre cybernetic figure from BLAST 2 in 1915:

There is yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on. You knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself. Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.

This curious topological figure is perhaps the purest expression amongst many of what Lewis constantly implied by stressing that human identity, if it is to have any authenticity at all, must be based on the cognitive arrangement and re-arrangement of elements received by or created by but certainly judged by the visual sense first and foremost. What results from Lewis’s subsequent valorization of the visual metaphor in the 1920s and beyond, through his ‘man of the future’ and its various cognates, is a positive model of self in which the subjective experience of temporality in particular, and of the notion of the Will in general, is to be understood less as a continuity or duration à la Bergson or William James or their epigones, than as an arrangement of forms in geometric space. It is a fundamentally prescriptive model, that is, in which the distance between the elements that make up those forms is to be privileged over their hypostatized connection with one another on some subsistent ontological level or ground—a spurious and metaphysical ground that he associates with the more ‘intuitive’ faculties of hearing or memory or anticipation. In this sense, and in direct contrast to an immediate contemporary such as Heidegger, for example, for whom the sense of distance generated by visual metaphor represents the profound alienation of dassein in the face of modern technology; or a predecessor such as Bergson—who, as Hannah Arendt has argued, was the first modern philosopher to denigrate the sovereignty of the visual in philosophy, thus inaugurating a tendency which has subsequently dominated twentieth century thought—Lewis is quite consciously going against the grain of the European zeitgeist in asserting a rebarbative ocularcentrism, rather than a logoscentrism or phonocentrism, or temporality or history, as the basis for the future of Western thought.

This at least is a conclusion that one might draw from Martin Jay’s stimulating survey of the denigration of vision in French—and some German—thought in his Downcast Eyes. In charting the sovereignty of vision from Plato to Descartes to the Enlightenment, and its decline through Bergson, Bataille and surrealism, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, situationism, post-structuralism and postmodernism, Jay has provided a rich and provocative portrait of the emergence of what he perceives as a new figuration of conservatism. It is a conservatism that in rejecting the dominance of vision with all its starkly empirical connotations for a more aural notion of interpretation and understanding as the measure of inner—rather than purely external ‘reality’—has created a certain dependency on metaphysical absence in certain influential thinkers. Echoing Nietzsche, Jay seems to imply at certain points in his survey that the denigration of the visual has effectively etiolated us and tied us to the authority of tradition and history, of textuality and recording, rather than liberating us from the past and allowing
us the future-directedness of spontaneous creativity and achronic self-recognition. ‘Voices’, in this understanding, are necessarily the voices of others, and thus of absence, of deferral, whereas images belong to no one in particular — they at least appear to have an unmediated presence, and that appearance is what should concern us. Accordingly, (and here I extrapolate from Jay), it is through this recognition and divestment of our textuality and embrace of the scopic drive, that our perhaps calculatedly innocent perception of images as in some way trans-historical and event-like might enable us to establish our own authority, our own (subject-less?) values, by concentrating on the immediacy of the present rather than on the continuity that our interpretations may have with those of the past.

In its general outlines — and my synopsis is necessarily inadequate to so complex and sophisticated an investigation — this is a view perhaps not too far removed from that promulgated by Lewis in his monumental works of the 1920s, where he wrote, for example, that:

*The Present can only be revealed to people when it has become Yesterday.*

... People are historically minded, and this, again and again must be stressed. It is by taking advantage of this human peculiarity that the politician invariably operates, and brings off his most tragic coups.

Although Jay concentrates mainly on the French scene, his discussion of Nietzsche (as well, of course, of Bergson), presents an intriguing moment in the genealogy of ocularcentrism from Plato to Irigaray and Lyotard which will be of great value to those attempting to disentangle Lewis’s occupational attachment to the visual from his quasi-philosophical theorizing about the socio-cultural necessity of that attachment. Readers familiar with Martin Jay’s invigorating history of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, as well as his writings on socialism and his defence of synopticism, will certainly not be disappointed by this latest volume of intellectual history.

David Michael Levin’s collection includes one of Jay’s chapters (on existentialism and phenomenology) as well as an excellent range of thought-provoking discussions on the hegemony or otherwise of vision in philosophical and socio-cultural discourse, beginning with Hans Blumenberg’s seminal article on light as a metaphor for truth from 1957. There are some impressive names here — Georgia Warnke, Andrea Nye, Gary Shapiro, Susan Buck-Morss — whose articles will delight those addicted to the density of allusion that has become the hallmark of contemporary critical theory/philosophy (particularly where the Heidegger-Derrida matrix is concerned), and possibly alienate those who have had neither the time nor inclination to familiarize themselves with such arcane matter. Nonetheless, I would recommend anyone who is concerned with the contextualization of Lewis’s chronophobia and ocularcentrism to cast their eyes over at least some of this material. Andrea Nye’s discussion of Irigaray and Wittgenstein, in particular, reminds one of the ‘lack’ of readings of Lewis from a feminist theoretical perspective. Paul Davies’s essay on Levinas could provide a useful counterpoint to Toby Foshay’s recent monograph on Lewis, and Buck-Morss on Walter Benjamin is, as always, excellent. Levin provides a useful introduction to the volume and also a continuation of his earlier and ever-expanding work on Heidegger and nihilism.

In conclusion, it could be said that the advantage Levin’s collection has over Jay’s volume is, perhaps, its dialogism — the contributors are in certain cases referring to one another. Nonetheless both volumes are, I would suggest, highly pertinent to future discussion of the politics of vision in the critical theory of Wyndham Lewis, as they are to the politics of vision generally.

Notes


3 In ‘Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in our
seems to entail disparagement of other people's work. It also seems to need a leap of faith or vow of allegiance. A way of saying this that is more flattering to Pound is that he effects a paradigm-shift in our idea of what a poem is, so that to value his work is inevitably to revalue everyone else's. Unfortunately, however, arguing across the gulf between the paradigms seems to lead Poundians into special pleading and ex-cathedra assertion. In this volume, the Cantosceptics, such as Warwick Gould and John Harwood, have the best of the argument, partly because of this tendency. If you have the tortuous sanctimony of Jerome McGann's Clark lectures to argue against, how can you lose? And even from within the paradigm of 'open form' that Pound represents, there are problems with The Cantos. His fanatical dogmatism was bound to lead him into literary, as well as political, trouble.

Other essays deal with Pound in relation to Browning, Ford, Joyce, and Eliot. John Harwood's on The Waste Land puts Eliot's attitude to 'his' poem in perspective, and convincingly shows the poem's dependence on Pound. The poem Pound 'rescued' from Eliot's manuscripts was not one that Eliot had envisaged at all. Pound completely remade it, so that Eliot could hardly think of it as his own; yet no trace of Pound's personality remains within the text he extracted. There could not be a better illustration of Lewis's point about Pound: 'When he can get into the skin of somebody else, of power and renown... he becomes a lion or a lynx on the spot. This sort of parasitism is with him phenomenal'.

Peter Caracciolo, in essays published in Enemy News, numbers 19 and 22, has already shown how Lewis's ambivalence about such characteristics shapes his various representations of Pound (especially in the lost 1919 portrait). His essay in this volume is centred on Horace Zagreus in The Apes of God, and links the character to Pound's Dionysian enthusiasms. The link is superficially unlikely, for the simple reason that Zagreus bears no resemblance to Pound. Lewis's satire works primarily through personal caricature: the Sitwell family.
Sidney Schiff or Richard Wyndham are easily recognisable in *The Apes*. And when Lewis satirises Pound in ‘Doppelgänger’ there is no possibility of mistake. (For the same reason I have never been — and am still not — convinced that through Ratner Lewis is satirising Joyce, or through Horry he is satirising Eliot). But by teasing out the patterns of allusion (in Zagreus’s costume, for example), Caracciolo makes a powerful case for the presence of satire operating at a quite different level. Zagreus’s enthusiasm for young ‘genius’, for example, is certainly a Poundian characteristic, and Caracciolo is able to show that the character’s South American associations are particularly appropriate for Pound in some of his more bloodthirsty utterances. These, as he notes,
put a sinister perspective on *Time and Western Man*'s description of Pound as someone who gets inside the skins of other people and takes on their vitality. Others (Dennis Brown and Antonio Feijó in particular, both of whom Caracciolo acknowledges) have discussed the Pound Zagreus connection before, but not in this detail. A very interesting Yeats–Dan Boleyn relationship is also proposed and largely substantiated in this fruitful essay.

Robert Fraser notes Lewis's indebtedness to *The Golden Bough* in the Introduction to his new abridgement. Fraser fell asleep when someone read *The Waste Land* to him; no doubt *The Childermass* would have had the same effect. But his book owes much of its fame to its literary influence – on Eliot in particular. In this abridgement we have *The Golden Bough* designed to be read as literature. The original abridgement, largely made by Fraser's wife, had no footnotes; discursive notes by the editor are now supplied. The other chief difference is that tree-worship has been sacrificed in favour of sex and violence (if I understand Fraser's Senior Common Room prose correctly). Even with these enticements, this edition faces stiff competition from the Wordsworth Classics edition, at £1.99. But Fraser has produced a more readable work, without turning it into a Condensed Book, the text remains entirely Fraser's not Fraser's.

Paul Edwards


The Preface tells us that this book largely originated out of a course called 'The Modern Tradition' which the author co-taught with Richard Ellmann at Oxford; and it is an excellent guide for both staff and students engaged in 'Modernism' courses — and a useful corrective for those who think they understand what artistic modernism was from books on 'Postmodernism'. The particular virtue of the venture is that it stresses the pan-aesthetic nature of modernism ('a conversation among artists') – the 'canonisation' of an Eliot or Joyce was not merely the product of some literary 'ideology' — and that it emphasises modernism's international character (Butler seems impressively at home in major European languages). The focus is on the 'decade before the First World War' and so is able to draw out the liberational as well as apocalyptic aspects of the artistic movement. And it situates these within an intellectual climate dominated by such as Bergson, Freud, William James and Nietzsche — with some deftly-chosen quotations from both thinkers and artists which makes the book ideal for the smaller library (without, for instance, available copies of *Blaise Reiter*). It is also generously illustrated — especially so if the paperback price (currently £12.95) is borne in mind: no university library should be without.

In his bizarre notice of the book in the *London Review of Books* (8 September 1994) Peter Wollen seemed anxious to inflate the technical experimentation of the Bloomsbury group (Duncan Grant brought 'rolls of old wallpaper' to Picasso for collage-usage!) while being predictably cool about Wyndham Lewis's artistic contribution. It is a measure of Christopher Butler's critical balance that he gives Lewis the painter (though not the pioneering writer) an important place in the British contribution to European modernism. The book describes Lewis's 'own form of dynamism' and provides just enough illustration in the overall text to make Lewis's contribution stick. There is also a key Lewis quotation of 1914:

**BLAST**

**years 1837 to 1900**

Curse abysmal inexcusable middle class . . .

BLAST their weeping whiskers — hirsute

**RHETORIC OF EUNUCH and STYLIST —**

**SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS . . .** (etc)
Butler is good on Lewis’s sensitivity to the differences between, say, Kandinsky, Picasso and Marinetti, his uneasy alliance with the ideas of T.E. Hulme and his contribution (with Bomberg in particular) to actual Vorticist painting-practice; unlike Wollen’s article, *Early Modernism* is clear about what of lasting significance was going on in British modernism.

The book has six main chapters — ‘The Dynamics of Change’, ‘The Development of a Modernist Aesthetic’, ‘The Modernist Self’ (I have heard that title before somewhere), ‘The City’, ‘London and the Reception of Modernist Ideas’ and ‘Aspects of the Avant-Garde’. These implicitly register the excitement of those post-Victorian, pre-World ideals and ideas which even the mud of Flanders, the ‘reeling towards Verdun’ (Geoffrey Hill), could not wholly swamp or divert. The ‘Great Decade’ of modernism — the twenties — followed: Butler has shown how much of that flowering had its roots in an earlier, more innocent (and more aggressive) decade. Painting, music and literature are brought together and manifest the international artistic fervour of that era: architecture is scarcely mentioned. This is particularly interesting since two of the most quoted literary critics of ‘Postmodernism’ (Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon) take postmodern architecture as the benchmark of a distinction between modernism and postmodern aesthetics. Both should read this book and think again — so should their many redactors: as Butler notes, ‘our interpretation of the relationship of Modernism to Postmodernism is still a matter of dispute and probably will long continue to be so’. Modernist architecture, I suggest, was an emanation from ‘Modernity’ — like the French or Russian Revolutions — literature, music and painting in Europe, 1900–1916 was a radical critique of ‘Modernity’. In Britain, Lewis’s writings like *The Caliph’s Design*, *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man* (to stick to the ‘theory’) helped indicate issues for ‘later’ modernism fifty years before Jean-François Lyotard coined ‘la Condition postmoderne’. *Early Modernism* documents and evidences the exciting (and worrying) origins of these socio-political and aesthetic developments — which are still very much with us. Anyone interested in either modernism or the postmodern should read it.

*Dennis Brown*