Trouble was their Business:
Wyndham Lewis, Raymond Chandler
and the ‘Generation of 1914’

Philip Head

_Hamlet:_ Has the fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?
_Horatio:_ Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness. (V, i)

No established author had more in common with Wyndham Lewis in earlier life than Raymond Chandler. Born in North America in the same decade, the 1880s, each the son of an American father and a British mother, they suffered the early separation of their parents, migration to England in the care of their mother, straitened but not penurious circumstances which gave them an English public school education and subsequent experience in France and Germany, imperfectly realised literary aspirations in Edwardian London, traumatic experiences on the Western Front in the 1914-18 war, and demobilisation in 1919 with no firmly settled career, although both were by then over thirty years old.

Between these (and other) resemblances an important distinction intrudes. Lewis had trained to be a painter. Although he hesitated between painterly and literary careers, in this respect he stands apart from Chandler, who evidenced no strong affinity for the plastic arts (and had, as a young man, interested himself more in comparative philology). But in the period between 1908 and 1911, when Lewis’s recognized achievements lay in his writing rather than in his painting, their careers did run in a kind of parallel, though there is no evidence that they ever met. Chandler, after a short spell as a Civil Servant (made possible by his dual nationality) eked a bare living from journalism and more serious writing that included some twenty-seven poems, published mainly in the _Westminster Gazette_, and some essays, published mainly in _The Academy_. Chandler later described his poems as ‘Grade B Georgian’, a reasonable self-appraisal. In the same period Lewis’s first important published writings appeared, in the _English Review_ in 1909 and _The Tramp_ in 1910.

In 1912, disillusioned by his lack of literary success in London, Chandler returned to America, where he took up various incidental jobs until, in the 1920s, he became an executive in the burgeoning Californian oil industry. The essays he published in 1911-12 remain of interest because they examined themes, in a rather self-consciously ‘literary’ way, that resurface in the novels that he wrote some thirty years later in a revived literary career, for which he is best known, the series of detective stories created round the Los Angeles private eye, Philip Marlowe.

‘The Genteel Artist’ (August 1911) mocked the dilettante artist or writer comfortable ‘in his expensive study or studio’, the kind of ‘bourgeois bohemian’ Lewis was later to satirise in _The Apes of God_ (and other works) as ‘moneyed middle-class descendants of Victorian literary splendour’ whose ‘substitution of money for talent’ characterised their ‘society’. For Chandler these ‘prosperous ladies and gentlemen’ saw art as ‘scarcely even a profession; it is merely an excuse’ to enjoy themselves, unlike the purposes of the ‘serious artist’. In ‘The Literary Fop’, also from 1911, he describes a similar type of person, with ‘no real connection with the business of a laborious world’, who concerns himself, or herself, with matters ‘accidental to Art, and not of its true spirit’. ‘But such persons dominate the world of letters, their “work” is all around us’. In fiction the literary fop is ‘powerful, in “belles lettres” he is all but supreme. We can see the touch of his hand in half the output of eclectic journalism’. Chandler (who resided in
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Bloomsbury) thus identified in 1911 the spirit of that place which had just begun to represent the literary ‘establishment’ of the next two decades, with whose apologists Lewis had not yet crossed swords as he was to do after 1913.2

These matters of individual biography flow into the more fundamental matters of generational culture, and those in turn embody aspects of creativity that at times convey and at other times obscure the main currents of historical development. Behind the title of his 1980 book The Generation of 1914 Robert Wohl saw ‘a privileged place in our conception of the early twentieth century’. For him what distinguished the ‘generation of 1914’ (a generation born in, or adjacent to, the 1880s) was ‘the fact that they grew up and formulated their first ideas of the world’ in that dynamic period ‘framed by the dates 1900 and 1914’. But, he asked, ‘how many of us could even identify with any degree of certainty the so-called “men of 1914”?’

Lewis, for one, can be so identified. He placed himself firmly among them, in 1937, as ‘the first men of a Future that has not materialized’.4 Other names – Pound, Eliot, Lawrence – come readily to mind, but Chandler’s probably would not, although his attributions, his growing up and formation of ideas in the period 1900-1914, and his war service in 1914-18 (in a Canadian infantry regiment) sufficiently qualify him. That he did not make his mark as an author of significance until after 1939, when he had passed the age of fifty, denies him an assured place. The point is not in itself important; the nature of the exception may be. Although Chandler did not lack admirers among ‘serious’ writers – especially in England – those who analysed his work seriously were not, generally, those who devoted major critical attention to such acknowledged ‘men of 1914’ as Lewis. One exception, Julian Symons, knew both men (Chandler less well) and thought highly of both.5

Among the ‘Generation of 1914’ as identified by Wohl, the Spanish philosopher and essayist Jose Ortega y Gasset, born in 1883, hence a near-equal of Lewis, stands out as an articulate exponent, of international standing, of that generational perspective summarised by Wohl as ‘a self-image produced by a clearly defined group within the educated classes at a particular moment in the evolution of European society’.6 Ortega developed a comprehensive argument behind this ‘self-image’ in his book El tema de nuestro tempo (1923; trans. as The Modern Theme), which sets out a reasoning in many ways paralleling – though quite independently – Lewis’s own political formulations of the mid-twenties. Like Lewis, Ortega stood apart from the herd-mind, and Guillermo Morón later observed of him that he ‘showed the path and no one wanted to follow it’.7 Nevertheless we can establish a thematic comparison with Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit of 1927 as well as with Lewis’s Time and Western Man of the same year. In 1932 Ortega contended, in a long footnote to an essay on Goethe, that Heidegger’s ‘admirable book … arrives at a definition of life not far from’ his own. ‘But I am obliged to say that I owe Heidegger very little. Of Heidegger’s important concepts, but one or two at most have not previously been expressed in one of my books, sometimes thirteen years earlier’ (that is, in 1914 in his Meditaciones del Quijote [Meditations on Quixote]).8 Wohl notes in his book that ‘a feature of his [Ortega’s] approach to the generation problem … had figured prominently in his thought ever since 1905’.9

In the present context it is less Ortega’s elaborated social philosophy than his challenging ‘Notes on the Novel’ (which reflect that philosophy) that demand attention, especially his belief that ‘a purely aesthetic necessity’ requires a novel (of any merit) to ‘possess the power of forming a precinct, hermetically closed to all actual reality’. While a novel ‘can contain as much sociology as it desires … the novel itself cannot be sociological’. It can be ‘nothing beyond a novel … incompatible with outer reality. In order to establish its own inner world it must dislodge and abolish the surrounding one’.10
Had Lewis died in 1930, in the same year as another member of the ‘generation of 1914’, D.H. Lawrence, he would – as a novelist – be remembered for one innovatory, but fairly conventionally-structured, work, *Tarr* (rewritten in 1928, ten years after its initial publication), one incomplete imaginative fantasy (also published in 1928) *The Childermass*, and, appearing in the year of his postulated death, the satirical grotesquerie of *The Apes of God*. Thus, as an author of superficially ‘conventional’ novels (excepting the 1928 *Tarr*) all Lewis’s published oeuvre belongs to the 1930s or later. Like Chandler, he was by then over fifty and, ‘in terms of plot’, Julian Symons points out, these ‘conventional’ novels are ‘thrillers’, and so reasonably comparable in structure with Chandler’s ‘Marlowe’ novels.\(^{11}\)

Even in *The Apes of God*, far removed from the structure of a conventional novel, Lewis explored satirically the world of the detective story. At Lord Osmund’s Lenten Party the enigmatic Horace Zagreus proclaims that the ‘Detective Story and the Dime Novel are the same thing – both are children’s reading’ in a world where ‘the anglo-saxon infant-mind has always resembled the inside of a criminal madhouse ... full of drugged potions, sawn-off shot-guns, arsenic, hairbreadth escapes, blackmail, armed warders ...’. Latterly ‘the schoolboy mind’ had become ‘that of the anglo-saxon adult ... a boy with a tin pistol’. From being merely the ‘favourite reading’ of Cabinet Ministers, bishops and captains of industry, popular crime novelists like Phillips Oppenheim now influenced – he asserted – the taste of ‘outstanding people, of so-called education’ more widely, while the ‘great average of the electorate’ were ‘the time-honoured patrons of the Dime Novelist’.\(^{12}\)

The ‘thriller’ genre, less satirically envisioned, evidences two major characteristics. As soon as it goes beyond crude sensationalism, its subject-matter examines wilful violations of social mores (murder, fraud, robbery and so on), providing an implicit (sometimes explicit) quasi-sociological dimension. In parallel, it confronts the interminable conflict between the restraints of authority and the unbridled expression of individual self-interest. Hence the raw material of the thriller-writer is ‘trouble’ of an implicitly (perhaps explicitly) socio-political kind, wrapped in the organised narrative that defines the essential quality of the piece.

This aspect, in the work of Chandler, Sean McCann has tackled in his study of *Gumshoe America*; he suggests that Chandler’s novels fall into two groups; the first four, published between 1939 and 1943 (and to some extent ‘cannibalising’ his earlier ‘pulp-fiction’ short stories of the mid-thirties), he sees as infused with the ethos of the ‘New Deal’, and the later three, published between 1949 and 1958 (after Chandler had worked for a time as a Hollywood script-writer) as carrying within them a critique of the ‘economic abundance of the post-war era’. But, common to both sets, he suggests that Chandler shows ‘the whole of Los Angeles as an arcane and hermetic text, always resistant to interpretation but also open to the patient and sensitive observer’.\(^{13}\) Marlowe, the ‘private eye’, and hence ‘patient observer’, carries out the ‘functional task’, as Peter Conrad calls it, of ‘unplotting or decoding’ big city life, operating as a ‘deductive technician who takes the urban machine to pieces’.\(^{14}\)

In Lewis’s novels we find both an implicit socio-political content and a deconstructionist purpose of a comparable kind, but neither the ‘New Deal ethos’ nor a ‘post-war economic abundance’ (to paraphrase McCann) has any place. The dominant literary ethos of the thirties in Britain had little of the robustness of the New Deal, and the late 1940s and early fifties, far from exhibiting ‘economic abundance’, exuded drab austerity. For Lewis’s explicit reactions to these two phases, we have two works: *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936) and *Rotting Hill* (1951). The differences between the respective milieux are stark.

Despite his evident disdain for ‘the literary flop’ and ‘the genteel artist’, the young Chandler had written, or aspired to write, within the established literary tradition prevalent in Edwardian
England (Frank MacShane suggests ‘in the manner of Saki and Henry James’). By the time he emerged after 1939 as a recognised author in his own right, an American literary vernacular had gained ground. During the 1920s a ‘Boston tea-party’ of literary independence, to which many young Americans contributed, had taken place, the most vocal part of it in Paris. One of the Paris coterie, Kay Boyle, summed it up later:

Until the Twenties, we Americans as a people had shown little, if any, interest in revolutionizing the written word. The literary critics and the academic authorities of the time, as well as the majority of discerning readers across our land, seemed to be entirely satisfied with the language we had inherited from another country .... Because our classical native writers had never so much as attempted to free themselves of the English tradition, the Paris expatriates dismissed with intolerance almost the entirety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American writing. We were going to imbue the language of our forbears with a fresh spirit, to release it from the shapes and forms in which it had solidified on the printed page.16

Lewis and Chandler both expressed admiration for the early novels of the central figure of the Paris-based element of the ‘American revolution’ of the word, Ernest Hemingway (born 1899, too young to share in full the ‘horizon of expectation’ characteristic of ‘the generation of 1914’). They also had reservations about the limitations of the technique he had developed. In well-known ‘put-downs’ Lewis portrayed Hemingway’s first-person narration as ‘the expression of the soul of the dumb ox’, and Chandler, through the voice of Marlowe, spoke of the author as ‘a guy that keeps saying the same thing over and over until you begin to believe that it must be good’. Their admiration nevertheless had equivalent substance. Lewis, in his 1934 book, Men without Art, said ‘no serious writer’ stood higher in Anglo-Saxony, and the prose style Chandler developed in the 1930s in transforming the idiom of pulp fiction into a more substantial literature owed much to Hemingway, whom he spoke of as ‘a genius’, though he became disillusioned with what he later described as Hemingway’s ‘goddamndest self-imitation’.19

Among the differences Chandler noted between English and American styles in writing (his earlier interest in comparative philology evident), American style ‘easily takes in new words, new meanings of old words, and borrows at will and at ease from the usages of other languages’, being also ‘a language which is being molded by writers to do delicate things and yet be within the grasp of superficially educated people’. By contrast he held that ‘English has reached the Alexandrian stage of formalism and decay’ wherein ‘English tone quality makes a thinner vocabulary and more formalized use of language capable of infinite meanings .... This makes good English a class language, and that is its fatal defect’.20 Lewis had made a similar point in Men without Art: ‘English as spoken in America is more vigorous and expressive than Oxford English’. He, too, concluded that the American influence on the common language was by then ‘paramount’.21

All the Marlowe novels follow the technique of the first-person narrative, a device Lewis used only once – in Snooty Baronet – and there idiosyncratically. This difference in ‘narrational orientation’, and the thinking behind it, mark one of the major distinctions between the two authors. Lewis espoused what he called in Men Without Art ‘the external approach’ to literature, the ‘Great Without’, as opposed to the ‘Great Within’, the latter most openly represented for him by the device of the ‘internal monologue’.22 Lewis associated the external approach with a ‘classic’, as opposed to a ‘romantic’ conception of authorship, as something resting on ‘the evidence of the eye rather than of the more emotional organs of sense’. This conjugation of ideals lacks plausibility because it transfers the conceptual differences between narrative painting and portraiture to a literary medium reliant on the visual imagination of the reader. Hugh Kenner
pointed out, in his study of Lewis, that in *The Apes of God* ‘probably half the text is dialogue, and half’ the remainder is transacted inside the characters’ heads’, and ‘the book’s best effects’ were ‘intrinsically linguistic’ and not (apart from certain passages) visual. Chandler – who attached importance to the intensity of visual images within the reader’s ‘emotional imagination’ – probably achieves, through Marlowe’s first person narration, as much visual detail as Lewis; a ‘private eye’, whatever other qualities he possesses, has to exercise powers of observation.

In his ‘Twelve Notes on the Mystery Story’ (which included twenty-five items after he had revised his original list in 1948), Chandler made the point that ‘the first-person narration can always be accused of subtle dishonesty because of its appearance of candor and its ability to suppress the detective’s ratiocination while giving a clear account of his words and acts … He tells the facts but not the reaction of his mind to those facts’. In his novels Marlowe often alternates between a descriptive narrative and a more ruminative interior monologue. McCann sees here a ‘weirdly disparate diction’, where ‘the vernacular dialogue of pulp narrative and a hyperliterary internal monologue’ come together with a ‘lack of resolution between the two’.

In this context Ortega’s suggestion that ‘the world is the whole of exteriority, the absolute without, which can have no other without beyond itself’ has a particular resonance which Ortega conveys by the untranslatable ‘ensimismamiento’ [roughly, ‘within-one-self-ness’]: ‘the only possible without to this “without” is, precisely, a “within”, an “intus”, the inwardness of man, his “self”, which is principally made up of ideas’. In practice an ‘external’ approach, an ‘internal’ approach, or a hybrid, all present a technical problem of narration for the author. Any narrative, however incorporeal the narrator, will have a subjective element. (The idea that in favourable conditions ‘events seem to narrate themselves’ from a kind of ‘syntactical necessity’ parallels the idea that a camera with a delayed shutter facility ‘seems’ to take its own pictures). Conversely, setting out ‘stream of consciousness’ will not ‘really’ reproduce the mental processes of the subject, but only offer a dramatized form of them. Invariably the reader has to intuit (or ‘actualise’) more than the author offers, to provide what, in the visual arts, Sir Ernst Gombrich has called ‘the beholder’s collaboration’. The reader has in Chandler’s novels only the record of Marlowe’s inner activity to draw conclusions about the persons and events that Marlowe encounters. But so implicitly does Marlowe have only his ‘inner activity’, his ratiocination (whether or not partly ‘suppressed’ in relation to the reader), his personal ability to reason in a language (whether or not it is ‘hyperliterary’) more sophisticated than the vernacular of the people he has to deal with.

The ‘weird’ stylistic alternation between narration and interior monologue noted by McCann in fact allowed Chandler to overcome Lewis’s principal objection to Hemingway’s method, that by using as a narrator a ‘dull-witted, bovine, monosyllabic simpleton’ who employed ‘the prose of the street-car, or the provincial newspaper or the five and ten cent store’, he secured that ‘the values of life accommodate themselves, even in the mind of the author, to the limitations and particular requirements’ of the narrator. In Chandler’s novels Marlowe talks easily with other characters whose use of the vernacular displays the constricted ‘linguistic contour’ that shapes their perceptions of the world (‘I got to make lots of dough to juice the guys I got to juice in order to make lots of dough to juice the guys I got to juice’ says Menendez in *The Long Goodbye*), but he can then step away from it. Lewis does not give himself a comparable flexibility, and to compensate introduces a satirical element to make a similar transition, which at times lapses, as Timothy Mater points out, into crude denunciation (and in so doing evidently violates the Ortegan concept of the ‘closed precinct’ of the novel).

If Lewis does not meet his own criteria for literary classicism (which owe an acknowledged debt to the arguments of T.E. Hulme that man ‘is by his very nature essentially limited … He is
incapable of attaining any kind of perfection, because ... he encloses within himself certain antinomies’),30 he does not disqualify himself from all consideration of a ‘classic’ intention. He and Chandler both display a classic-romantic ambivalence. In Lewis’s case, the classic principle, in visual art as much as in writing, provided a counter-force to the pull of his own romantic sensibilities. But, in visual art, the conditions of proportional composition and the objective disciplines inherent in them provide a ‘classical’ framework near to hand. In literature the ‘classic’ (classically considered) offers not so much a set of conditions as a set of precedents.31

With respect to poetry, Mary Beard and John Henderson cover the point thus:

The poet finds modern culture littered with classical ruins, fragments and jumble. He knows, too, he is programmed to find this; and he understands that the same is true for every educated person in the West who knows that it is only the backdrop of their cultural past that can provide a frame within which they can situate and recognize themselves.32 It was in this sense that Lewis saw himself and those others who constituted the ‘Hulme tendency’ in 1914 as representing the ‘classic’ approach to literature in opposition to a less disciplined ‘romanticism’.

Julian Symons found Chandler ‘by temperament a romantic aesthete’.33 For his own part Chandler stressed how a classical education, such as he had received at Dulwich, ‘saves you from being fooled by pretentiousness, which is what most current fiction is too full of’. Such ‘pseudo-literate pretentiousness’, he said, ‘sums up everything I despise in our culture’. On another occasion he compared the aim of the Marlowe novels with those of Greek tragedy written in a language the modern public could understand.34

Among Chandler’s critics, Jerry Speir describes Marlowe’s ‘knight-errantry and related sensibilities’, as reflecting values ‘of another age, dropped down amid the relative valuelessness of the present’. This strong sense of eroded values, more than any other single factor, links the work of the two authors. It forced them, even if they were not already temperamentally inclined to the role, into the position of ‘outsiders’, who, because of their education and background, were ‘insider-outsiders’, so making their troublesomeness (not uncommon among the ‘generation of 1914’) more intense. Their arguments had two main objectives, in practice closely associated: the concealed (and largely congealed) nature of the politico-economic power-system in modern urban life, whether in Los Angeles or London, and the prevalence in both countries of a middlebrow mass-culture.35

Distancing themselves from these mass values, while producing publishable books, gave both authors a practical problem of securing the necessary ‘collaboration’ of sufficient readers to make publication a reasonably attractive risk. ‘You cannot have art without a public taste’, Chandler told his British publisher Hamish Hamilton, ‘and you cannot have a public without a sense of style and quality throughout the social structure’.36 He achieved his own ‘sense of style’ through the adaptation of ‘pulp fiction’ narrative, and in so doing mostly avoided the sentimentality usually hidden in ‘hard-boiled’ writing. Lewis more instinctively wrote for an élite audience and found it correspondingly difficult to avoid stylistic lapses in his attempts to reach a rapport with a wider readership. He acknowledged ‘a certain indifference to bourgeois conventions, and an unblinking disbelief in the innate goodness of human nature’ as characteristic of his first novel, Tarr, and that indifference and disbelief resurfaced in his later books.37

The ‘thriller’ form employed by both authors represented one means of coming to terms with the contemporary loss of social values. In 1948 Chandler thought it ‘just possible that the tensions in a novel of murder are the simplest and yet most complete pattern of the tensions in which we live in this generation’.38 In 1942 Lewis had drafted a letter – apparently unsent – to H.G. Wells about his own recently published novel The Vulgar Streak: ‘The time in which we
live appears to me, qua period, to be a “shocker”. A “thriller” is too mild a term for it. Well, the rather shocking nature of my book is to my mind a faithful interpretation of an epoch where violence is everywhere. 39

If the Anglo-American literary phalanx among the ‘Men of 1914’ had an identifiable central core, Lewis and Chandler may best be seen as outriders to that core. In The Generation of 1914 Wohl implies, though he is not explicit, that the most representative text among these works may be Richard Aldington’s 1929 novel Death of a Hero, of which he says: ‘anyone trying to understand the attitudes of English survivors of the war would be well advised to read it .... No other war book drew such a striking contrast between those who stayed at home or safely behind the lines – especially the women – and those at the front ... who fought and died for a cause in which they no longer believed’. 40

Americans had not generally suffered the same involvement in the war, or the subsequent disenchantment, as had the British, and the years between 1914 and 1918, whether the USA were combatants or not, had allowed the American economy to prosper while that of Europe went into relative – or absolute – decline. After 1930-31 circumstances again changed for both societies. The earlier ‘American Dream’ faded, at least for a time, and Europe started to look at the next war, more than it pondered on the previous one. This later era was that in which Chandler and, to a large degree, Lewis, constructed their ‘thrillers’ within the framework explored above.

In two of their later books, after the second war had ended, both authors provided complementary summaries of the circumstances they saw around them and, in fact, of the perennial conditions of modern urban society. At the end of his penultimate novel, The Long Goodbye, Chandler summed it up: ‘No way has yet been invented to say goodbye to [the cops]’. 41 Lewis, in his slightly earlier non-fiction book American and Cosmic Man, provided the complementary thought: ‘In a free society of men competent to govern themselves (assuming such a society to be possible) a politician would not be a person of any great importance. The machinery of justice, civil and criminal, is there functioning daily, without our taking more notice of it than we do of the dustmen who remove the rubbish’. 42 ‘Trouble’ was, of its essence, the world’s business. The two authors gave that ‘business’ a literary resonance, but not quite a ‘property of easiness’. On the contrary, in their resistance to the criteria of middlebrow mass-culture, they ran against what Paul Fussell has described as the ‘terror of ideology, opinion and sharp meaning’ embodied in that culture in the form: ‘Better for language first to ingratiate and finally, by waffling, vagueness, and evasion, to stay out of trouble altogether’. 43

NOTES

2 Wyndham Lewis, The Apes of God (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.131. Forty years on, in an essay on Ezra Pound, Lewis described the literary scene immediately before 1914 in terms even closer to those used by Chandler: ‘A huge rentier army of the intellectual or the artistic emerged, like a crowd of locusts, from the Victorian Age, and it covered the entire landscape, to the dismay of the authentic artist. They drifted dreamily out, paint-brush in hand, or with novelist’s notebook tucked away in their overcoat pocket, choking professional talent – drawing all the applause to themselves’. (Cited in C.K. Stead: The New Poetic [London, 1983] p. 53.)
Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937; London: Calder, 1967), p. 252. If the characteristic mind-set of the ‘Generation of 1914’ belonged to Europeans rather than Americans, it happened that several American writers of the same age-group – Chandler as one example – spent some of the critical years between 1900 and 1914 in Britain, France or Germany (or all three), and so developed their seminal ideas in the same cultural environment. Some became residents, and several Americans-by-birth (e.g. Eliot, Pound, Lewis) contributed notably towards defining the mind-set of the ‘Generation of 1914’. Pound’s ‘Ode pour l’Élection de son Sepulcre’ sums it up.


J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings* (1925; Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1956), p. 135. A ‘neutral’ during the 1914-18 hostilities, Ortega escaped the most acute stresses of the war. But Spain had endured a comparable cultural shock in 1898, when it lost much of its residual overseas empire to the United States. For Spaniards the concept of the ‘Generation of 1898’ (which included Unamuno) had a resonance as powerful as that of the ‘Generation of 1914’ had elsewhere in Europe. A younger group of Spanish writers, Ortega among them, saw themselves as a separate generation for whom, characteristically, life and circumstance were indissolubly linked. Their less ‘agonised’ intellectual position that of the ‘Generation of 1898’ locates Ortega firmly enough (as Wohl places him) among the European-wide ‘Generation of 1914’. (A younger group of Spanish authors gathered round Lorca and Alberti later spoke of themselves as the ‘Generation of 1927’, self-styled as ‘los nietos’ [grandchildren] of the 1898 generation.) That Ortega had few ‘followers’, as Morón states, reflected in part the hostility he met from both Marxists and Catholics. This absence of ‘followers’ (though not of personal admirers and ‘idea-borrowers’) became increasingly manifest after his death. Writing of Ortega in the *Spectator* of 10 September 1983, Harry Eyres spoke of ‘a fairly rapid decline into obscurity for someone who, at the time of his death in 1955, was widely saluted as one of the greatest European thinkers of the 20th Century’, and he suggested that ‘Because he insisted that everything, including philosophy, needed a context, life, circumstances, to make it mean something, Ortega is liable to make anything said about him out of context sound pointless’. Thus we see the essence – and the vulnerability – of Ortega’s ‘perspectivism’; we can perceive reality only from the perspective of our own individual lives or, as Lewis put a similar point in a different way, ‘If you cannot be “detached” with “yourself”, there is nothing you can be detached with!’ (“Detachment” and the Fictionist’ [1934], in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* [Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1989], p. 229). Further consideration of some of Ortega’s ideas in relation to those of Lewis appears in Philip Head, *Some Enemy Fight-Talk* (Borough Green: Green Knight Editions, 1999), pp.10, 34, 135. For Lewis in relation to Heidegger see Head, ‘Hurry Up Please It’s Time’, *Wyndham Lewis Annual* VI (1999), 29-35.


Ortega, *Dehumanisation of Art*, pp.87, 95. In their magisterial *Theory of Literature*, first published in 1949, Wellek and Warren specifically adopt ‘a view for which the term “Perspectivism” seems suitable’, so to avoid the unsound theses of ‘false relativism and false absolutism’ in literary theory, and they provide a short footnote: ‘This term [Perspectivism] is used, though differently, by Ortega y Gasset’. The formal correctness of the phrase ‘though differently’ doubtless protects the authors’ flanks sufficiently, but the degree of intellectual precedence (the footnote is the sole reference to Ortega) possibly gets less than its due recognition. See René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*

10 Ortega, *Dehumanisation of Art*, p. 87, p. 95.


28 Lewis, *Men Without Art*, p. 27.
31 *Men Without Art*, pp. 162-6, passim.
37 Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 88.

![Image](image_url)  
**Fig. 3. 43. Wyndham Lewis, Crucifixion Series II: Piet  
(M981; 1941) Private Collection**