And I, returned, who hang
these blanched sheets to the moon,
feet tangling in wet grass?
I think three weeks back to

that girl in the Penge Chinese:
'They send you anywhere,
I see it all, meet friends.
But you know how it is.

It's like you're in the dark,
and strike match after match.
I could chuck the agency
I know... But it's not that...

And so, I wait for dawn's
pure green and silver, sea
calmed by soft arms of coast;
Portstewart clarifying

around me, white and frail
as shells these houses clasped
to rock, so rootless might
be gone with the next tide;
as when, in skins, men first
leant upon spears to see
dream-clear Donegal,

sunlit across the water.

ALAN MUNTON

THE POLITICS OF WYNDHAM LEWIS

'In 1926 I began writing about politics... And I've got so be-politicized myself in the process that in order to get at me, today, you have to get the politics off me first... That was when politics began for me in earnest. I've never had a moment's peace since'. This half-apology was written in 1937, (1) in a decade when Wyndham Lewis's political writings had provoked a dramatic decline in his reputation, and given W. H. Auden good cause to describe him as 'That lonely old volcano of the Right'. He has now been dead for nearly twenty years, and still no peace has settled over his reputation—if he can be said to have a reputation at all. It is his politics which have interfered with the discussion of Lewis's fiction and criticism, because he is thought of as a political figure first, a satirist second. But what if those politics can be scraped off, as Lewis seems to have thought they could be?

There has been no lack of straightforward language about Lewis's beliefs. F. R. Leavis, also writing in 1937, preferred D. H. Lawrence's intelligence to that of 'a Wyndham Lewis who comes out for Hitler'. Northrop Frye later described him as 'pro-fascist'. Walter Allen found him 'authoritarian', guessing that had he been a Frenchman, 'his fate would have been to find himself alongside Maurras advising Pétain at Vichy'. Philip Rahv has no doubt that Lewis 'supported the fascist cause', though later changing his mind 'perhaps for the wrong reasons'. William Empson, prefacing John R. Harrison's The Reactionaries (which is about Lewis, Yeats, Pound, Eliot and D. H. Lawrence) speaks of 'the political scandal of their weakness for Fascism'. Behind much of this criticism lies the assumption that there is a direct relationship between Lewis's politics and his creative work; Alastair Hamilton has summarized this view: 'In politics, as in art, Lewis sought something permanent, and permanence could only be achieved by the enforcement of rigid hierarchy'. John Harrison writes that because the same principles govern his social and literary criticism, Lewis was led to support the fascist cause 'directly'. (2)

Such a consensus as this ought to settle the question. Yet there is something vulgar in this monolithic condemnation; Lewis is made to sound so like every authoritarian intellectual, to epitomize so many limitations, that the particular man is lost. It is because it seems to me that Lewis did not believe in a rigid hierarchy, would not have advised anybody on practical matters, and was not 'pro-fascist', that it means that he supported the particular programmes of British, German or Italian fascism, that I want to reopen the question of Lewis's politics. I shall try to make a rather more exact definition of his position, and show how he reached it. I shall concentrate on the inter-war years, because that period is at the centre of the controversy; none of these critics has objected to Lewis's post-1945 internationalism.

It must be immediately acknowledged that Lewis was politically on the right during the 1930s (we are dealing with an authoritarian temperament); he approved the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and he took up the non-interventionist pro-Rebel position in Spain. He was an arch-appeaser, and vigorously anti-Communist and anti-Soviet. (3) However, Lewis's political writing began, not with Hitler in 1931 (which initiated the decline in his reputation) but, as my opening quotation indicates, in 1926. His book of political theory, The Art of Being Ruled, was published that year, and will be my

Andrew Waterman's first collection of poems, Living Room, was published by the Marvell Press and was a Poetry Book Society Choice. His second collection, From the Other Country will be published in the Spring of 1977 by Carcanet.
primary source for an examination of his political theory. In this we shall encounter a tendency quite different from that of the works of the 1930s: a variety of political criticism that is profoundly humane, committed to the needs of the ruled against the rulers, and which provides a radical method of identifying modes of oppression that is still of value today. The case for the separation of Lewis's politics from his imaginative work has been most persuasively put by Frederic Jameson, who argues that while the politics are elitist, the fiction has a quite different inner logic about it, and one which contradicts the spirit of his ideology. (4) This separation is at the basis of the following discussion, which concentrates on the politics themselves, but without accepting Professor Jameson's further remark, that Lewis was 'an adherent of the genius or great-man theory of history'. If this means that Lewis thought that history was shaped by men like Hitler and Mussolini, then it is wrong. If it is derived from an interpretation of his fiction, then it is a misunderstanding of the role Lewis attributed to the intellectual.

There are at least two kinds of politics in Lewis's work: the politics which led him to discussions of Hitler, Mussolini and fascism; and the politics of his fiction. Before we discuss the former, a glance at the ways in which politics gets into the fiction will illustrate the intellectual's position. In the final chapter of *The Apes of God*, entitled 'The General Strike', the stupid 'genius'-poet Dan Boyleyn wanders through central London on the first day of the strike, unable to understand why men in cars offer him lifts. Lewis's point here is that Dan, like the other apes inhabiting the book, does not understand what is happening around him. This inability to analyse and understand is a failure of the special power of the intellect. Lewis is not suggesting that the corruption of the literary world is consistent with such events as the General Strike (which Lewis himself does not oppose in the novel, and appears to have favoured at the time), but that to be unconscious of the forces which actually shape social and political life, is to be as stupid as Dan.

The intellectual is a central figure in Lewis's thought because he possesses the potential capacity for a detached and dispassionate analysis of his society. The intellectual engages in what Lewis called 'the politics of the intellect', as distinct from the politics of power. The intellectual is the source of suggestions and definitions of human possibility, and he is therefore the source of political change if the political structure is changed to realize such possibilities. Such intellectuals as Marx, Proudhon, and Rousseau are meant. These 'men of words' are 'possessed of a power to shake the earth from one pole to another. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with his books ... tore up society by the roots'. (5)

Lewis gives the intellectual a predominant position partly (and perhaps naturally) out of self-interest. However, the 'politics of the intellect' embodies a principle that became deeply established in Lewis's thought as a result of his experience at the western front during the First World War. This was a period of intense suffering for Lewis, and provoked him to ask where power was really located in society, and how it was exercised. The principle was that 'Truth has no place in action': (6) that no truly detached consideration can be given to a problem when the need to act is paramount. This principle was responsible for the attitude of contemplative detachment which is Lewis's most persistent response to a complex reality. Although the principle was constantly prone to breakdown (as in the 1930s political books), his work cannot be understood without reference to it.

Politics, in Lewis's view, is a form of action which corrupts works of art; it must be part of the critical process to identify the presence of such political influences. *Time and Western Man* (1927) set out to do this: 'In stepping directly into the world of art we shall fall upon a great deal of politics . . . or the reflection of politics. To attempt to get rid of these politics . . . is one of my reasons for undertaking this difficult analysis'. (7) Lewis is not concerned here with party politics. By the 'reflection' of politics he meant the way in which concealed ideological assumptions enter into works of literature, philosophy and criticism. These works therefore come to justify the same political and social forces that are at work in the more directly political world.

It is in the often-quoted (but little understood) phrase 'Men of 1914' that the origin of this impulse to get politics out of literature can be found. In saying that Joyce, Pound, Eliot and he himself belonged to this group, and that they were 'the first men of a Future that has not materialized' (*Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 258), Lewis meant that they were an avant-garde whose continuation into the future was prevented by the outbreak of war. Lewis did not unite their names because they happened to be writing their early works at a certain time, but because postwar conditions gradually forced the suspension of their prewar literary radicalism, and 1914 was the last year in which conditions were entirely propitious for them. *Tarr, The Portrait of the Artist, Ulysses and The Waste Land* represented an attitude of mind, and its persistence; these, Lewis argued, were objective, detached, 'classical' works. Unlike the work of the earlier generation of Shaw and Wells, and the later generation of Auden and Spender, this literature was devoid of political propaganda. From the end of the war conditions favourable for works having 'the detachment of true literature' progressively ceased to exist; the politicization of all aspects of reality, including literature, meant that 'the attempt at objectivity has failed' (p. 252). The 'Men of 1914' can be seen as an avant-garde abandoned by events; or events can be seen to have corrupted the conditions most suitable for avant-garde art. Lewis took the latter view.

It was because it countenanced the politicization of art and thought that Lewis objected to capitalist liberal democracy. Not only does liberal democracy prevent the intellectual from functioning freely, by forcing him to submit to the market ('any valuable discovery has to fight its way in the marketplace' [8]), but democracy refuses to allow itself to be influenced by philosophic or reflective minds. Liberal-democratic 'freedom' is only the expression of the individualism of the man of action. The colonization of the world by the western European nations has meant that 'the white man', in his 'exclusive reliance on the physical' (i.e., useful science) 'has not in his imagination been able to look all around the world and see it as one large mud-ball with certain possibilities. Its possibilities of unification have escaped him. . . . So he has made a better . . . buccaneer than . . . civilizer' (*The Art of Being Ruled*, p. 67). Unlike the philosophical intelligence, which sees the possibilities of civilized unification, the 'western democratic principle' associated with this individualism 'sees life in pieces'. This form of democracy is institutionalized in the parliamentary system, and 'parliamentary rule is finished' (p. 68).

Lewis's argument now moves away from an insistence upon the central position of the intellectual. Liberal democracy and revolutionary doctrines both direct their attention upon what Lewis calls the 'Small Man', whose chaotic and disorganized life they attempt to organize. The 'Small Man' is the object of the multiplicity of deceptions which democratic states use
to justify themselves and maintain their power. Liberal democracy creates, for example, the doctrine of 'What the Public Wants' in order to define, in its own interests, the aspirations and needs of its subjects. The use of the undifferentiating term 'Mankind' as part of this doctrine absolves the ruler from the responsibility for the choices he has made for those he rules: 'Everything that abstraction "Mankind" is made to do himself he is (since he "democratically" rules himself, does he not?) responsible for; it is be who has willed it!' (p. 83). In this way, concrete and varied 'mankind', in fact 'mutilated, bankrupt, and brutalized' (by the First World War) is the victim of the 'enlightened, despairing, liberal intelligence of our time', which is 'futile' (p. 84).

The 'Small Man' is the victim of all the corrupt techniques available to a democratic state to render him passive and maintain the illusion of a functioning democracy. The press, cinema, radio and theatre are all agents of this deception (p. 87), as is education (pp. 110-12). Politics and cultural life are related because 'the capitalist state ... is an educationalist state' (p. 111), and what is taught promulgates the ideology of liberal-democratic capitalism. It is the success of such methods that makes the use of force in a democracy unnecessary: 'Force is a passing and precarious thing, whereas to get inside a person's mind and change his very personality is the effective way of reducing him and making him yours' (p. 98). Culturally, such methods produce nothing but 'something inconceivably common and barren' (p. 88), while democratic rulers come to hate the stupidity they have themselves induced in the masses, which must lead to 'the most diabolical results' (p. 90), in war and cultural disintegration.

It is in this way that politics enters into cultural life. Lewis makes a double response. The ways in which literary works incorporate assumptions deriving from the ideologically-based deceptions necessary for the maintenance of capitalism, can be identified and attacked. It is to this process that Lewis refers when he says that he is attempting to 'get rid of these politics' in Time and Western Man—and indeed elsewhere, for this is the primary purpose of his work. By 'politics', in this sense, Lewis means the romantic attitude to time to be found in Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein's pretence that she possesses the mind of a child, the 'Dumb Ox' figure 'to whom things happen' (9) in Hemingway, 'the radical conventionality of outlook implied throughout Ulysses' (10). All these attitudes suggest a subjugation of the willing to forces standing for the negation of the powerful potential possessed by the intellect and the imagination; all imply a refusal to act and choose freely in the world. It is these questions—"art-politics"—which make up the substance of Lewis's criticism and satire. That criticism is primarily oppositional, and does not itself contain any positive statements defining possible courses of action.

Here, however, we are concerned with the positive political statement which constitutes Lewis's second response to the problem of the relation of culture to politics. In The Art of Being Ruled he puts forward tentative proposals for a form of political organization in which there would be no necessity to control men by the deceptive methods of the 'educationalist state'.

A remark in The Hitler Cult introduces the political philosopher most influential Lewis's political theory: 'Though favouring always Proudhon rather than Marx, as a political thinker, some species of authoritarian control, it seemed to me, some "planning" from a creative centre, were imposed upon us' (11). It was Lewis's interpretation of the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-64) the French anarchist (or, as Engels called him, socialist) that is at the root of what is most valuable in his political thinking, as well as what is most objectionable. Proudhon's influence can be seen upon a passage at the very end of The Art of Being Ruled, which describes a situation that Lewis desired:

It is easy to see how the passing of democracy and its accompanying vulgarities, owing to which any valuable discovery has to fight its way in the market-place ... must facilitate this putting of the intelligence on a new basis. The annihilation of industrial competition and the sweeping of the board of the Small Man, commercially and socially, should have as its brilliant and beneficent corollary the freeing for its great and difficult tasks of intelligence of the first order. (p. 433)

The freedom of the intellectual is Lewis's first concern; but that can only occur with the end of capitalist competition and the disappearance of the 'Small Man' as the objective and victim of the corrupt 'educationalist state'. It is only under the decentralist system advocated by Proudhon that this could occur. Lewis's theoretical political position is an attempt to reconcile decentralized organization for the ruled, with the unavoidable necessity for the exercise of power.

Lewis's fundamental proposal is for a separation of functions. The ruler should rule, but there shall be no pretence that he is not doing so. 'Such a division', Lewis writes, 'necessitates two distinct types of life: that of the ruled must be lived on one plane, that of the ruler on another' (p. 96). Lewis is arguing on behalf of the ruled, so that they may be no longer deceived: 'For the sake of the ruled—that is my argument—the ruler should be forced to rule by force, ostensibly, responsibly, as does (to the great disgust of our western liberals) the soviet or fascist government' (p. 97). Lewis's proposal for government combines, therefore, two factors: authoritarian but 'responsible' rule, and a separation of functions requiring a constant conflict between rulers and ruled. It is the principle of separation of functions that follows from his preference for Proudhon over Marx.

Proudhon's early work—such as Qu'est-ce que la Propriété (1840), which put forward his widely-known axiom 'la propriété, c'est le vol'—was directed intransigently against all forms of authority; but his later work develops a theory of federalism in which authority is allowed a place. Lewis is correct to say that Proudhon modified his earlier position: 'Anarchy is the affirmation of liberty and the negation of authority, he would tell us; whereas federation was the balancing of the two' (p. 343). Lewis was most interested in this balancing, or achievement of equilibrium, to be found in Proudhon's later work.

Equilibrium, or the struggle to maintain it, is understood by Proudhon to be the source of social change. The opposition between the antinomies of liberty and authority cannot be resolved into a third term (as in the Hegelian synthesis and the Marxism deriving from it). In Du principe fédératif (1863) Proudhon writes: 'Ces deux principes forment, pour ainsi dire, un couple dont les deux termes, indissolublement liés l'un à l'autre, son néanmoins irréductibles l'un dans l'autre, et restent, quoi que nous fissions, en lutte perpétuelle.' Neither has meaning without the other: 'Supprimez l'une des deux, l'autre n'a plus de sens: l'autorité, sans une liberté qui discute, résiste ou se soumet, est un vain mot; la liberté, sans une autorité qui lui fasse contre-poids, est un non-sens'. (12)

It is such a balancing, between the necessity of authority and the necessity of liberty, that Lewis attempts when he says that the ruler must rule by force, explicitly and without deception, but that this must be a lonely, isolated task, made unpleasant.
for him by the ruled. His life will be severe... full of incessant labour. The ruler must be completely disillusioned—a suspicion of belief and he would be lost... he will not be able to regard life as agreeable in any way... To be a true ruler he will have paid every penalty of man's aspiring lot, a pact with the Devil included'. The life of the ruled ‘will be lived concretely, stereotyped on a narrow, fashionable plan, of use for the day or time; full of kind, protective illusions... mechanical work, easy bursts of animal laughter, all tied up in a little neat bundle with a comfortable personal vanity’ (p. 96). Discussing this proposal—which is little more than a fantasy based on Proudhon's original distinction—Lewis wrote in his autobiography: Rude Assignment: 'I was wrong, I now see that people cannot live without excitement, and war gives them that: in the same way that they depend on stockmarket crashes, slumps, air and railway accidents, forest-fires... to liven things up... I was being officious' (13).

The difficulty with this argument is that Lewis's view of authority is not Proudhon's. In Proudhon, the ruler does not impose his will, because the federalist system of government is intended to disintegrate all central power. The state in Proudhon is a source of ideas which are to be implemented by the self-governing system of local and communal governments: 'it should initiate, but never execute... it should think carefully through what must be done, communicate its thinking to an independent social body, and wait for the latter to act' (14). Lewis approves of the revolutionary ruler as a source of ideas—'the state of mind of the social revolutionary is the state of mind of most philosophers' (p. 99)—but to define the revolutionary ruler he abandons Proudhon in favour of Rousseau. In Proudhon, all politics are group politics and 'the individual hardly exists' (p. 361). Lewis wishes to preserve the position of the individual; that is, the artist-intellectual.

Lewis puts individual experience before the collective: 'All the intense emotions are experienced by us as individuals, and experienced for individuals. You can hardly say that you “love” the golf club... or any associational unit, in the way that you may “love” a person' (p. 363). Authority enters into Lewis's political theory through his insistence on the primacy of individual experience: 'The individualism of Rousseau relegated the political part of the animal, man, to a political machine, in order to free him for personal satisfactions' (p. 362). Proudhon's objection to Rousseau was that, in exercising his freedom by voting for a representative, the individual was alienating himself from that freedom. An elected authority could be either beneficent or oppressive; decentralized self-government would always be beneficent.

The choice between Proudhon and Rousseau, Lewis says, turns on whether we think of ourselves primarily as individuals, or as members of a group or crowd. Lewis undoubtedly thought of himself as the former.

In The Art of Being Ruled, Lewis states that the authoritarian ruler 'will not arrive for some time, if ever'; in practice, the 'educationalist state' will persist, and the business of the intellectual will be to criticize that, as Lewis continued to do in his satire and less directly political books; this concession preserved his subject-matter. However, in 1930, it appeared that 'this Timour-like figure of asiatic despotism' (p. 98) had made its appearance in western Europe. Lewis's visit to Germany in November 1930 introduced him to Hitler.

I shall summarize Lewis's somewhat astonishing conclusions with regard to Hitler before demonstrating how he reached them. Lewis believed that Hitler would initiate the decentralized state which held authority at its centre; this state would protect the interests both of those who wished to associate themselves with the crowd, and those who wished to preserve their individualism. In the European context, Germany under Hitler would initiate a defence and regeneration of western European culture. He mistook Hitler for a Proudhonian decentralist who also held a Rousseauian attitude to the state and authority. In accepting the anarchist argument that capitalist and communist states are equally objectionable because they are both centralizing states, perpetrating 'an evil—namely, the separation of man from the tools and materials which are necessary to his existence' (p. 348), Lewis believed he had found an alternative to that evil in Hitler's fascism.

In Count Your Dead: They Are Alive! (1937) Lewis gives particular examples of the centralist-decentralist problem. In the United States, Roosevelt accepts 'the monopolistic principle, of centralized control' (15), while against him stand those like the states' rights campaigner Senator Borah, opposing 'the stereotyping of life'. In Europe, Hitler is the equivalent of a supporter of states' rights: 'Hitler is, if you like, the Huey Long of Europe'. In England (which is about to join in 'upon the side of political monism'), 'it is not a matter of conservatism or of radicalism... You can be either conservatively-minded, or radically-minded, it makes no difference, and with equal fervour object to world uniformity, and cast your vote for world-diversity'. The argument between centralism and decentralism subsumes all differences of left and right; it would be meaningless to distinguish between 'communist', 'fascist' and 'democrat' if all stood for internationalism; but fascism does not. All, however, 'are so many armed ratkets, all equally having for guiding principle the philosophy of Force' (Count Your Dead, p. 354): to that philosophy, Lewis is here absolutely, and consistently, opposed.

Lewis's views are based on a form of pluralism opposed to 'the conditions imposed upon men by the technique of industry'. A pluralism which makes use of what the 'Machine Age' can offer mankind, without demanding submission to its 'mechanical dictates', is preferable to the 'sick uniformity of centrally “planned” existence', which will destroy 'everything of value in life'.

Lewis believed that Hitler, or indeed the British form of fascism, would initiate such a pluralist arrangement. He told the British Union of Fascists, again in 1937, that they were the political representatives of that 'Small Man' whose importance was originally established in The Art of Being Ruled:

You are a Fascist stand for the small trader against the chain-store; for the peasant against the usurer; for the nation, great or small, against the super-state; for personal business against Big Business; for the craftsman against the Machine; for the creator against the middleman; for all that prospers by individual effort and creative toil, against all that prospers in the abstract air of High Finance or of the theoretic ballyhoo of Internationalism. (16)

The same criticism can be made of Lewis's position here as has been made of Proudhon's philosophy as a whole: both reflect 'the ideals of the petite-bourgeoisie'. (17)

How did Lewis reach this position? In Hitler he begins from the same theoretical point as in The Art of Being Ruled, with the failure of the 'man of action' to civilize where he had conquered, and consequent cultural disintegration. Lewis believed in 1931, as he believed in 1937, that fascism might allow recovery from a situation of cultural decay. In Hitler he wrote: Can we any longer deny that that german belief in the necessity of a Central, Western, unified culture, and the necessity of an acuter and more jingo, if you like, race-consciousness on the part of all White Western Peoples,

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has something to be said for it?

The political and economic structure of Western Europe and of America are in a state of violent disequilibrium. Something has to be done of a most radical sort, very rapidly indeed, it seems. And I suggest that the sort of solution indicated in Hitlerism is not entirely to be despised, though not necessarily to be swallowed whole. (18) Lewis is not propounding a racist doctrine. He is referring to the argument of his own Paleface (1929), that politically all cultures have an identity which should not be weakened by importations from elsewhere; whereas culturally a 'melting-pot' was desirable if it was not repressive: D. H. Lawrence's admiration for the Mexican Indian could have no meaning for western European culture. Lewis is arguing here that the 'search for the savage and the primitive' (19) that was debilitating European culture could be reversed by Hitler's 'race-consciousness', which Lewis interpreted as a culture preserving its own identity while respecting the identity of others.

What began as a cultural analysis in 1926 became a joint critical-economic and cultural analysis in 1931, and remained so until about 1937 or 1938, when The Hitler Cult was begun. In his self-exculpation in that book Lewis spoke of authoritarian 'planning' from a creative centre, and he appears to have believed that Hitler, or the British fascists, intended a revolution that 'was on the side of philosophic thought' (The Art of Being Ruled, p. 99). Under this decentralized political system the intellectual would be able to influence the understanding of events as he could not do under the liberal-democratic state. Intellectuals would 'think carefully through what must be done', and wait for the community to act; they would constitute the creative centre of the Proudhonian state.

In the reality of the 1930s, the avoidance of action implicit in this position had quite other consequences. Lewis speaks of himself as reaching his 'objective' intellectual's position by responding to stimuli 'submitted to in isolation' (20). This is precisely the problem; it was because Lewis had no practical political experience at this period that he reached such extraordinary conclusions. The First World War had awakened his political sense, and his recognition that only a corrupt political system could cause that war and tolerate the postwar conditions of social and cultural decline, had sufficient impetus to carry through the great works of the 1920s. In them, the critic's detachment and 'objectivity' were valuable instruments of cultural criticism, and an effective basis for a political critique if 'politics' meant an analysis of the deceptions practised by a democracy. The difficulty of Lewis's position was that his consistent refusal to play the man of action's part not only prevented any commitment to a party or a specific programme, but committed him to an isolation that made his politics unrealistic.

The commentaries of the 1930s exist in a political no man's land, distorting the basis of his best work, but unable to reach any valid and compassionate political commitment. In 1931 Edgell Rickwood wrote: 'Like the rest of his generation he has no concrete political existence, and his view of world politics is a dream based on the dreams, which he dislikes, of other disenchanted intellectuals' (21). This is a fair summary; but Lewis's political irrelevance also makes him a far less dangerous figure than many critics have taken him to be. In writing for the British Union Quarterly, Lewis was used by the B. U. F., who wanted distinguished sympathizers to appear in a re-launch of the Fascist Quarterly (they got Ezra Pound and Roy Campbell as well). Lewis's assurance that they stood for the 'Small Man' was a fantasy that usefully diverted attention from the racist monopoly capitalism that their fascism actually embodied.

Lewis approved of fascism not because it was hierarchical, racist and monopolist, but because it appeared to embody his own 'dreams', which originated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political theory, and were unmodified by contemporary political reality. It can be said on Lewis's behalf that his distrust of action would have ensured his absence from Pétain's side, to return to Walter Allen's speculation. Again, Lewis was not anti-Semitic (22); but it is no credit to his political sense that he thought the Judenfrage 'a mere bagatelle', and Hitler 'a man of peace' (23). Lewis suffered a massive ignorance of political realities, and his politics were subjective; but at least he was not consciously working in the interests of the forces represented by fascism. He was a deluded apologist, and Hitler and Count Your Dead are stupid books, not evil ones.

On the whole, Lewis's right-wing political commentaries can be separated from the remainder of his work; certainly the political novel of the decade, The Revenge for Love (1937), contains nothing of his distorted decentralist theory, and is a well-informed work of political realism. However, in separating them from the main body of Lewis's work, I do not mean to suggest that they can be ignored. For Lewis, they became not only a matter for regret, but his subject-matter. The postwar novel Self Condemned (1954), particularly, is a reflexive commentary on the failure of the 1930s. The primacy of the intellectual in initiating change too often issued in contempt for the passive 'mass' of people for failing to resist the tricks democracy played upon them. In 1942 Lewis wrote: 'It is now very apparent to me that I thought too much of our tribe [of artists and intellectuals]: too little of the "genre humain"' (24). René Harding in Self Condemned is a portrait of a man whose denial of the creative capacities of the genre humain reduces him to 'a glacial shell of a man' (25). This is, as Timothy Materer has described it, a book of 'remorse' (26). It was conceived out of the same wartime experience of Canadian exile which changed his politics in a crucial respect: 'All the hostility I felt for the centralizer I no longer feel', he wrote in 1941. But it is a wish for global centralization—universalism—that has made decentralization 'an absurdity'; 'universalism' will be 'much better than internationalism' (27). In 1946 Lewis looked for an universal 'earth culture', in which the painter 'is of great importance now', because he is 'the most internationalist of all artists' (28). Just as in 1926 Lewis hoped that decentralization and cultural separation would put the intelligence 'on a new basis', so he hoped that the global culture that must follow the Second World War would give the artist a further opportunity to be at the centre of cultural and political life.

Although Lewis's politics are consistently developed in the interests of the intellectual, he differed from Ezra Pound in never allowing himself to be obsessed by a single solution to political problems—in Pound's case, Social Credit; unlike T. S. Eliot, he had no backward-looking attachment to church and monarchy. His politics were potentially revolutionary; but, following Proudhon, revolutionary change meant first a change of ideas: the 'will to change or impulse to spiritual advance...is the only sensible meaning of Revolution' (29).

In making the vicissitudes of the artist his subject, Lewis is closer to James Joyce than to the 'reactionaries' he is conventionally grouped with. In another sense, they are related
opposites. Joyce's obsession with his art meant that politics only existed when they affected him personally, and this led him, out of unconcern, to deny the interests of the ordinary man. He could not identify with the oppressed rabblement anywhere, and sought either to withdraw from or soar beyond the anguish of conflict until it became a personal matter', as Philip Herring has put it (30). Lewis, by contrast, was too much concerned with the 'rabblement'; but he, too, often met it with contempt. In his criticism and fiction Lewis belongs with Joyce in the attempt to encompass and unify the whole of life and culture, while at the same time attempting to disintegrate the language and ideological bases of the bourgeois world which, at his best, he recognized as inimical to ordinary people, and which both he and Joyce recognized as destructive of the interests of the artist.

NOTES


8. Wyndham Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, London, 1926, p. 433. All page references in the text are to this work.


10. Time and Western Man, p. 102.


15. Count Your Dead. All quotations are from pp. 295-7. The work is in dialogue form, but further quotation marks are omitted.


20. 'Left Wings' and the C3 Mind', p. 30.


23. Hitler, p. 42; and title of Part II, chapter 3.


29. Time and Western Man, p. 17. cf. Proudhon's criticism of the revolutionaries of 1848: 'They have carried out a Revolution without any ideas'. (Quoted in Henri de Lubac, The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon, London, 1948, p. 9.)


Alan Munton is currently preparing The Collected Poems and Plays of Wyndham Lewis for publication by Carcanet Press.