

The Problem of Romanticism in Wyndham Lewis

DAVID DWAN

In 1918, as the book version of Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* went to press, the young Carl Schmitt was putting the finishing touches to his *Political Romanticism* (1919). Schmitt would later develop a keen interest in Lewis, wondering in his diaries if he were not a 'related soul'.¹ Lewis never reciprocated the interest, but it is understandable why Schmitt may have felt a strong sense of kinship: both stressed the value of enmity; both directed their animus at representative democracy and liberalism; both had very public trysts with Hitler; and, most important for my purposes here, they had a mutual loathing of romanticism. Their polemics may have been set against a romanticism built largely of straw, but they nevertheless raise important and difficult questions about the meaning and possibility of freedom.

Schmitt eschewed many of the usual definitions of romanticism, all of which he took to be symptoms of an underlying metaphysics – namely, a 'subjectified occasionalism'.² The association of romanticism with an ill-conceived model of subjective freedom was hardly new – Hegel, for instance, had repeatedly criticised it upon these lines – but the invocation of occasionalism was an enterprising form of re-branding. In the seventeenth century, occasionalists such as Malebranche had denied that there was any real causality within the world – God was the only true casual agent. Romantics, according to Schmitt, also believed that there were no real, mundane causes: the romantic ego had

supplanted the occasionalists' God as the sole cause of everything. The result was both a massive inflation and impoverishment of human agency. All events were merely existential events – or mere 'occasions' for the ego's correspondence with itself.

For Lewis, and for those that influenced his campaign against romantic decadence (Nietzsche, Lasserre, Maurras and Hulme) 'romanticism' was a catch-all for all kinds of unpleasantness. In 1927, he defined '*the "romantic"* [as] *the opposite of the real*', but this meant that 'romanticism' could stand for virtually anything that Lewis regarded as fanciful or untrue.³ Irving Babbitt had presented a slightly more circumscribed account of romanticism in 1919, defining it as an 'emotional naturalism', and Lewis also castigated romanticism as form of 'nature-sentiment'.⁴ Romantics made nature the source and criterion of value; they also assumed that humanity's connection to nature was constituted through emotion. But, partly because of this emphasis on feeling, Lewis also equated romanticism with an extreme subjectivism. 'By definition,' he explained, 'romance is always inside and not outside. It is as we say subjective. It is the material of magic. It partakes of the action of a drug'.⁵ Romantic inwardness appears as a type of psychosis in 'Franciscan Adventures' (1927). The tramp in this story – 'a sickly figure of early republican romance' – literally wrestles with his own imagination, fighting fictitious antagonists and other phantoms of the mind, whilst remaining ostentatiously unmoved by his real circumstances.⁶ Spellbound by his own inner music, he loses touch 'more and more with unlyricized reality' (WB, p. 171). Yet romantic solipsism, though easily satirised, is not so easily escaped. Schmitt gestured at the underlying

difficulty in a footnote on the philosopher Arnold Ruge: 'the longing to get over romanticism is still romanticism' (*PR*, p. 164).

Such a contradiction may reflect the overgeneral nature of Lewis's attack on romanticism: it is extremely hard to escape an evil that incorporates so much. But the issue is also connected to a more interesting difficulty: namely, 'the complexity of the problem of human freedom' for Lewis.⁷ The issue of freedom lays at the heart of Lewis's quarrel with romanticism, a problem that is too easily transcended by broad assessments of Lewis's 'anti-individualism' or 'post-individualistic' narratives, in which the individual's 'illusion of freedom' is tirelessly exposed.⁸ In *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), Lewis certainly wondered if the concept of liberty was not dead for most people; as he paradoxically puts it, 'the enemy of the human race, "liberty," is dead – and men are free once more!'.⁹ It is difficult to tell if Lewis disparages the masses for turning their backs on liberty or for entertaining such illusions in the first place. 'We each possess a sort of bogus "free will"', he insisted in 1939, thus confirming, it may seem, his deep-seated hostility to a naïve voluntarism.¹⁰ Yet freedom is only '*sort of bogus*'. If it is an illusion, then it is one that is constitutive of humanity: however unverifiable, a belief in liberty makes humans what they are. As he put it in 1927, 'the instinct for freedom' is something 'we all have' (*Time*, p. 297). For all the talk of Lewis's 'antihumanism',¹¹ he was reluctant to retire a normative conception of humanity in which freedom was a fundamental value (even his disastrous support for Hitler was cast, however opportunistically, as a fight 'for the sake of freedom').¹²

But if a belief in freedom was a basic condition of humanity, it can never be properly shown to exist. This conundrum of liberty cuts across Lewis's entire oeuvre and forms the enabling problem of *Tarr*. However liberty is interpreted (as independence or spontaneity or as a more demanding form of self-rule) it remains a highly ambiguous value in the novel: cherished as an ideal it is also disparaged as an illusion, so yielding an ambivalence that is never ultimately resolved. This irresolution is bound up with the novel's use of irony – an irony that is itself expressive of the problem of freedom. Irony distances individuals from their world, affording them some transcendence or liberty of assent over their circumstances, but the same ironic distance impedes individuals from becoming practical agents within the world: it is an impotent or practically inefficacious form of freedom. Such irony was one of the hallmarks of the romantic for Schmitt, and it partly explains why 'political romanticism' is virtually an oxymoron for him: irony precludes genuine decision and decisive action – in other words, it forfeits from the start the basic pre-requisites of the political. However, *Tarr* also critiques the idea of the groundless decision or decisive deed which was later championed by Schmitt as an alternative to romantic indecision and liberal paralysis. The modern 'romance of action' – as Lewis later identified it – was a surrender of freedom not a bold assertion of agency (*Time*, p. 20).

The case against romanticism in *Tarr* is largely advanced through the novel's eponymous hero. Modernists often asserted their anti-romantic credentials through intemperate attacks on Rousseau and Frederick Tarr is no exception: he boasts, for instance, that his world-view is 'the exact opposite of Jean-Jacques' –

and in Tarr's eyes, the gospel of Jean-Jacques is essentially an emotional naturalism.¹³ And yet Tarr remains a curiously Rousseauian figure. Like the author of the *Second Discourse* (1754), Tarr yearns for an unsullied independence and regards social life as a severe constraint ('we are all sicknesses for each other' (p. 63)). He believes the 'individual is rustic' and sometimes views nature as a pure space of freedom (p. 11). Indeed, the admiration is reciprocal: 'Nature', we are told (in a narrative voice that often indulges the romanticism of its subject), 'loved the genius and liberty in him' (p. 47). Tarr insists that his rallying-cry – 'Back to the Earth!' – is not a Rousseauian credo (p. 304). Rousseau 'poetized his wild nature' and sentimentalised its goodness, but nature, for Tarr, is an aggressive even malign energy (p. 228).

The ambiguity of this anti-romanticism is clearly anticipated (if not inspired) by Nietzsche, even if Tarr tends to view himself as a vast improvement on the superman (p. 304). Nietzsche had mocked Rousseau's putative belief in the recoverability of naturalness; however, on other occasions he sponsored his own 'return to nature' – a return that would nonetheless lead him away from clichés of natural goodness towards a 'high, free, even terrible nature'.¹⁴ Tarr also despairs of the conventional morality-tale that masquerades as nature, and wants to unleash a more authentic form of naturalness. He presents himself as a new type of 'animal'; in Anastasya's mocking eyes, however, he is merely Rousseau reborn (p. 304). Tarr, and perhaps the great 'orang-outang of genius', Lewis himself, suspect that their campaign against romanticism is another version of it.¹⁵ Tarr simply inverts its traditional content: instead of 'having conceived the world as more chivalrous and marvellous than it was, [he] had

conceived it as empty of all dignity, sense and generousness'. These are 'inverse illusions' – no less fantastical than the romanticism it supplants (p. 236).

Tarr's ambiguous appraisal of nature is expressive of the problem of freedom. Total liberty, for Tarr, seems to imply an absence of social determination, which is why nature, when conceived, at least, as a pre-social or asocial state, is sometimes cast as a site of freedom. Throughout the narrative he worries about the ways other people may connive against his independence. He regards love as a 'malady' (p. 62) leading to a loss of self or a bad conquest of others and he is similarly dismissive of friendship: there 'are no 'friends' in this life' (p. 15). Ironically, much of Tarr's gospel of independence is elaborated in discussion with others; in fact, a 'great many of Frederick Tarr's resolutions came from his conversation' (p. 19). But embarrassed by this social dependence, Tarr chooses to present communication, in a way that is trivially true but also deeply tendentious, as merely a public means of communing with himself. Thus, when he 'solicited advice, it was transparently a matter of form' (p. 21). Other people, he insists, are mere catalysts never a real source of good council – a fact which interlocutors like Butcher deeply resent.

The narrative voice provides a highly charitable interpretation of Tarr's spirit of independence (although here a form of free indirect discourse may be working to expose the full extent of his self-delusion): 'He was the kind of man who, if he ever should wish to influence the world, would do it so that he might touch himself more plastically through others' (p. 22). To invoke Schmitt's terminology, everything external is a mere 'occasion' for Tarr's experience of

himself. This is painfully evident in his break-up with Bertha Lunken: it is undertaken to 'to test a funny mood' – a mood of '*complete indifference*' (p. 52). Bertha is simply a setting for Tarr's own psychological drama; paradoxically, his indifference is the only true object of interest.

Predictably, Tarr disparages the herd-morality of others and gazes at them with 'autocratic scorn' – 'autocracy', literally self-government, seems to be his primary ambition (p. 11). Tarr sometimes implies, of course, that he has no self to govern or from which to govern. In a much-discussed passage, he presents himself as a series of painted mummy-cases, containing 'nothing but innumerable other painted cases inside, smaller and smaller ones.' At the bottom of this recursive series there is no 'live core', only another painting like the rest: 'His kernal was a painting' – an entirely appropriate existential state, Tarr believes, for an artist (p. 47). But this seeming disavowal of the self's underlying essence is, potentially at least, a radicalisation of the idea of freedom as self-determination. Of course, much depends on the authorship of the painting and what (if anything) it depicts; nonetheless, Tarr's inner painting raises the possibility, at least, that the self is its own work of art. The metaphor of the self as art-work gestures towards a radical form of freedom in which the project of self-determination is not constrained in advance by an essential core: even the content of the self must be self-determined if Tarr's autocratic ambitions are to be realised. Arguably, Nietzsche was an advocate of this radical form of self-creation, although the roots of the idea stretch back to Fichte's self-positing I – a key philosophical source of romantic subjectivism for Hegel and for Schmitt. As Fichte put it, 'it is the very nature of I-hood to determine itself unconditionally'.¹⁶ But Tarr finds it

difficult to secure his independence from any thing or value that is not rooted in himself. Indeed, he is 'bitterly ashamed of a slovenly, common portion of [his] life' steered by heteronymous norms and expressive of his sad dependency on others (p. 13). His desire for society and, in particular, his sexual interest in women, seduce him away from the project of total self-rule.

Tarr, as a consequence, has an almost Platonic distrust of the senses and believes that bodily desire connives against freedom. 'A man', he declares, 'is the opposite of his appetite' (p. 7). Since the appetites of the body are sensible and are subject to the laws of physical necessity, they appear to be antithetical to genuine freedom. Like his fictional hero, Lewis repeatedly disparaged 'living for sensation' as a seductive type of thralldom (*Art*, p. 136). And he championed in its stead a 'very rare freedom [. . .] possessed by the intellect alone.' This freedom 'is contingent on no physical circumstance' in a way that implies that the intellect is some noumenal entity transcending material forms of determination (*Art*, p. 135). If absolute freedom, for Lewis, implies the sovereignty of the intellect, it also seems to involve a radical type of spontaneity – a form of agency or causal power that is not subject to other causes. The determination of appetite and even emotion do not meet these conditions: they are triggered in part by internal causes that are ultimately contingent upon external factors. To make emotion or bodily desire criterial for one's action is to surrender to contingency and so to abdicate one's freedom.

It is arguable whether any one in *Tarr* is really free in this fully indeterminist sense, but the thralldom of the appetite is perhaps best captured in the risible

figure of Otto Kreisler. He remains throughout the narrative a slave to his own passions locked within the realm of physical necessity. Kreisler's subjection to the bio-chemical laws of his own nature is starkly depicted in the 1928 edition of *Tarr*. Note, for instance, the following description of his gaze: 'How could it be expected to understand? It was an eye, and it stuck – it blinked – it trembled. It signalled: the gland shot a tear into it. It clouded. It was simple though: it was amazed and did not understand'.¹⁷ This is a resolutely physical depiction: the subject of perception is simply a biological organ ('an eye'), the impersonal mechanics of which are emphasised through the repeated subject pronoun 'it', while the syntactical chain – 'it stuck – it blinked – it trembled. It signalled [. . .] It clouded' – enact a series of sensory inputs and outputs that never yield anything so spiritual as understanding. No one in Lewis is entirely exempt from this hyper-physical rendering – it is basic to his self-described 'externalist' method – but Kreisler, in particular, is ruthlessly reduced.¹⁸ In the 1928 version of the novel, he becomes 'a thing, scarcely any longer a Mensch' (p. 102). In the 1918 edition, Kreisler is already a profoundly heteronymous creature; he is 'a property of Nature, a favourite slave' (p. 75).

Kreisler's enslavement to nature points to a fundamental ambiguity in *Tarr* and the rest of Lewis's work: nature is at times a space of freedom outside social determination, but at other times it is also a prison – a causal system in which everything is subject to mechanical laws. That is why romanticism is such a disaster for Lewis: the identification with nature that it sponsors as an ideal of freedom is, in fact, freedom's opposite. Consequently, many of Lewis's heroic figures turn their backs upon nature. In the 1932 version of *The Enemy of the*

Stars, for instance, Arghol commands Hanp to return to ‘bustling Mother Nature and spit in her face’.¹⁹ As the gendering of nature suggests, Lewis’s anti-naturalism travels hand-in-hand with a fierce misogyny. Women, it would appear, are nature’s mercenaries: in ‘Cattleman’s Spring-Mate’ – one of Lewis’s most rancid short stories – all women are ‘contaminated with Nature’s hostile power and might be treated as spies or enemies’. Tarr may regard sexual congress with a woman as a bad surrender to natural determination, but Cattleman is convinced that once it is engaged in with sufficient violence that he is ‘outwitting Nature’.²⁰ Kreisler’s rape of Bertha may express the same unhinged vindictiveness, but it ultimately confirms his unfreedom as much as it may protest against it: he had ‘revenged himself as a machine might do’ (p. 187). But in the narrator’s judgement, this mechanical vengeance is entirely apt as far as Bertha is concerned. She has sentimentalised mechanism by glorifying the passions; the unfreedom she exalts is finally visited upon her as the horror of rape. Such ‘conclusive physical matters’, the narrator callously concludes, ‘were a culmination of her romance’ (p. 181). Women are thus the scapegoats as much as they are the advocates of incontinence in Lewis. ‘The Feminine Conception of Freedom’ (*Art*, p. 239) – namely, the pathology of emotion and ‘hostility to the intellect’ – is Lewis’s version of slavery (*Art*, p. 244).

Lewis may cast women as symbols of unfreedom, but this misogyny brings small comfort to his male protagonists. Freedom remains a problem for everyone in Lewis’s dark universe, and it stems from two main factors: first, the social constitution of the self and, second, its embodied nature. These facts of selfhood preclude absolute independence and spontaneity – the pre-requisites of freedom

in an indeterminist sense. The relentless use of machine-metaphors in his prose and human automata in his painting gives the lie to this model of freedom. Human beings often seem to inhabit an entirely determined cosmos: they are complex machines trapped within the larger mechanism of nature. Thus Bertha is a 'contented machine' (p. 286); Anastasya is 'larger machine of repressed, moping senses' (p. 203); Kreisler is a 'large rusty machine of a man' (p. 137), and Tarr is an unwieldy locomotive 'full of sinister piston-rods, organ-like shapes, heavy drills' (p. 4). In 1934, Lewis argued that romanticism was a desperate attempt to salvage freedom from mechanism: it attempted to 'step outside the machine' by invoking a purely personal emotion (*Creatures*, p. 225). However, by making emotion a constituent of freedom, the romantic libertarian merely capitulates to the mechanism he deplores. Perhaps so, but Lewis's own responses to mechanism were highly unstable. Anxious to resist romantic myths of escape, he often talked up, or even celebrated humanity's subjection to mechanical laws. For instance, he claimed that the central tenet of Vorticism was that "'the inner world of the imagination" was not an asylum from the brutality of mechanical life.' Vorticism, as he put it, 'identified itself with that brutality'.²¹ Yet Lewis also wished to dissociate humanity from mechanism as ardently as any so-called romantic. In fact, all art rested on the premise 'that, although helpless in the face of the material world, we are in some way superior to and independent of it'.²²

Irony was an expression of this superiority and independence for Lewis, though it turns out to be a very troubled attempt to escape the machine. Lewis's remarks on comedy provide us with an initial steer on the more general question

of irony in his work. Comedy, he claimed in 1927, arose from the disjunction between freedom and physical necessity. This incompatibility made human beings irreducibly ridiculous, 'for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*' – that is to say, as if they are free agents (*WB*, p. 158). As Lewis readily admits, his views about comedy ultimately rest on the dichotomy between mind and body and related dualisms (*WB*, p. 156). On the basis of these metaphysical assumptions human beings appear to be intrinsically absurd, because ultimately inexplicable to themselves and to others: there is no way of squaring humanity's pretension to freedom with the mechanical laws of the physical universe. Thus the 'movement or intelligent behaviour of matter, any autonomous movement of matter, is essentially comic' (*WB*, p. 159).

According to Lewis, the absurdity of things behaving as persons, is only dispelled when the concept of a 'person', 'mind', 'self' – or whatever ghost that traditionally resides in the machine – is retired. His use of irony is often read as such a proposal; it is a systematic attack on traditional superstitions of the self.²³ Thus Lewis purportedly inverts Henri Bergson's popular theories of laughter: if comedy, for Bergson, is a reprimand to humans for behaving as automata, Lewis ridicules them for ever courting the belief that they could be otherwise. But this interpretation seems at odds with both the sense and weighting of Lewis's claim that 'the state of [. . .] the human being is more desirable than the state of the automaton'.²⁴ And while Lewis, as we have already seen, often delights in exposing the hubris and self-delusion of much of humanity's pretensions to freedom, this should not bury all evidence of his own commitment to the principle. After all, human absurdity stems from the fact that a man is 'ridiculous

because he is a man, instead of a thing (WB, 159). Lewis thus makes the positive assertion that humans are distinct from material objects and, in doing so, he seems to preserve his faith in the category of the person. He also retains the mind-body dualisms that have often accompanied metaphysical accounts of personhood: he seemingly approves of a man who dissociates himself from the 'machine' he inhabits, emphatically endorsing his conviction that 'the man's body was not him' (WB, p. 160). This may, perhaps, be a simple ventriloquisation of a vain conceit, but the vanity is constitutive: it makes humans what they are. Unlike potatoes, lamp-posts or stones (Lewis's examples), human beings claim to be free agents. They are thus irreducibly absurd, for such claims cannot be fully squared with their physical constitution.

Lewis was not the first to wrestle this seeming absurdity. The apparent contradiction between freedom and physical determinism had led figures such as Kant, for instance, to distinguish between a phenomenal world governed by iron laws of physical necessity and a noumenal realm that was independent of space and time and in which freedom was, at least, a theoretical possibility. For Kant, freedom was a necessary postulate of practical life, but it could never really be known to exist, because freedom was spontaneous or unconditioned, while knowledge of any phenomenon – according to the second analogy of the 'First Critique' – involved relating phenomena to anterior conditions and causes.²⁵ So freedom as an uncaused cause could never be known.

One might argue that the 'unknowability' of freedom made any discussion of it fundamentally ironic – ironic, that is, in the sense sketched out by Friedrich

Schlegel, according to whom the irresolvable conflict between the unconditioned and conditioned, or 'the absolute and the relative' is the constitutive feature of irony.²⁶ The ironist attempts to access the absolute, whilst simultaneously conceding that any attempt to know the unconditioned, would falsify it by reducing it to a determinate concept and making it seem conditioned or relative. Irony thus attests to both the impossibility and practical necessity of communication about unconditioned entities. If freedom is entirely unconditioned, it might be viewed as the ultimate object of irony in Schlegel's sense, but Schlegel himself did not make this connection, perhaps because he grew increasingly sceptical of Kant's indeterminist account of freedom and the dualisms that were used to sustain such an all-or-nothing liberty.²⁷ Yet, according to Hegel's uncharitable assessment (later recycled by Schmitt), Schlegel's theory of irony was an extravagant commitment to freedom in this indeterminist sense: it was an attitude adopted by an ego who regarded every condition or determining ground for the self as inimical to its freedom.

Schlegel had modelled his own conception of irony on the practice of Socrates: it was a principled scepticism operating in the service of absolute truth. But Hegel maintained that Schlegel's romantic irony was the exact opposite: it abandoned truth in the name of infinite scepticism, acknowledging no absolute apart from that great virtuoso of doubt – the ego itself. Romantic irony was thus a shallow subjectivism; here 'nothing is treated *in and for itself* and as valuable in itself, but only as produced by the subjectivity of the *ego*'.²⁸ In Hegel's eyes, this vanity was ultimately self-defeating; ascribing no intrinsic value to the world, the ego could not take itself seriously as an empirical agent within the world. Moreover,

pledged to an infinity of possibilities the ironist could never limit himself to any determinate conclusion, value or project. Schlegel, in fact, condemned people for remaining in 'possible worlds' removed from any actual existence; he also stressed the 'value & divinity of self-restriction' in the face of infinite possibilities, but these remarks were either overlooked or ignored by Hegel.²⁹ Romantic irony, Hegel insisted, repudiated all restriction and limitation: it culminated in a form of paralysis that masqueraded as freedom.

Wyndham Lewis ultimately produced a very similar indictment of irony, while remaining addicted to the empty freedom of an ironic attitude all the same. Despite what the Hegels and Schlegels of the world might profess, irony – or a particular subset of it called humour – is, for Lewis, a distinctly English trait, although he sometimes extends it into a British or even Northern characteristic. It is a trait that Lewis also attributes to himself: 'you must not think that I dissociate myself from the humourous outlook. I am terribly English: I am always laughing'.³⁰ From the outset of his career he produced diametrically opposed visions of humour: 'BLAST HUMOUR Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness'; 'BLESS ENGLISH HUMOUR it is the great barbarous weapon of the genius among races'; 'The English 'Sense of Humour' is the Great Enemy of England'; 'BLESS ALL ENGLISH EYES that grow crows-feet with their FANCY and ENERGY'.³¹ These contradictions are expressive of the humour that they simultaneously evaluate; as Lewis maintains, 'We set Humour at Humour's throat' (*Blast*1, p. 31). Schlegel said that paradox was the supreme form of irony, committed as the ironist is both to the need for, and to the impossibility of, communication about the unconditional.³² Lewis too clearly revels in the infinite

jest of paradox: 'We discharge ourselves on both sides [. . .] We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours' (*Blast 1*, p. 30).

Such extreme contrariness might be viewed as Socratic irony or even Hegelian 'dialectic' – contradiction in the service of the absolute (Lewis presented the aggressive claims and counter-claims of *The Art of Being Ruled* as a type of 'Hegelian dialectic').³³ On the other hand, Hegel might have dismissed Lewis's blasts and blessings as a belated instance of romantic irony – one that treats logic itself as a constraint on freedom: for the ironist, even the law of contradiction is one law too many. In Lewis's 'The Code of the Herdsman' (1917), for instance, contradiction certainly seems to operate as a type of liberty: 'Contradict yourself', this free spirit declares, 'In order to live, you must remain broken up'.³⁴ So irony, for Lewis, is bound up with the question of freedom. In *Blast*, humour is the guarantor of a fraught independence – it is a 'hysterical WALL built around the EGO' – allowing the ironist an anxious distance from the limited and limiting perspectives he uses to define the world and that might define him. In this context, Lewis is prepared to bless the 'separating, ungregarious BRITISH GRIN'. He also praises the 'solitude of LAUGHTER' (*Blast1*, p. 26). But the same isolating properties of humour also mean that it risks degenerating into an extreme subjectivism and consequently becoming the 'Arch enemy' of reality (*Blast1*, p. 17). Lewis outlined the hazards of this subjectivism in exacting detail in the 1927 version of 'A Soldier of Humour':

I am *never* serious about anything. I simply cannot help converting everything into burlesque patterns. And I admit that I am disposed to forget that people are real – that they are, that is, not subjective patterns belonging specifically to me, in the course of this joke-life, which indeed has for its very principle a denial of the accepted actual (*WB*, p. 6).

Tarr also worries about the solipsism of humour: 'Humour paralyses the sense of reality and wraps people in a phlegmatic and hysterical dream-world' (p. 27). He is resolved to escape these chimeras and declares a moratorium on irony, but he can never quite deliver on this resolve: 'The curse of humour was in him, anchoring him at one end of the see-saw whose movement and contradiction was life' (pp. 236-7).

Tarr, it seems, is the romantic ironist *par excellence* – particularly as this figure is represented by Hegel and by Schmitt. He regards all social forms as a limit to his freedom; yet he also recognises that he cannot subsist without these forms. So he submits to them ironically, approaching life as a farce – if not always a particularly amusing one. His relationship with Bertha is a 'weary farce' or 'silly joke' (p. 22). His dealings with Kreisler are a 'half-farce' (p. 233). Kreisler himself is 'a joke', albeit a particularly dangerous one ('Jokes [. . .] are able to make you sweat' (p. 238)). Tarr is ultimately aware that his irony is self-undermining and that his 'contempt for everyone degraded him' (p. 236). In the 1928 version of the novel, Lewis presents this as 'the Cynic's dishonourable condition', but it is also the romantic ironist's – a sceptical standpoint that yields an impaired type of agency (p. 206). Despite his autocratic ambitions, Tarr is a

curiously parasitic creature: his character lacks the power 'to initiate anything of its own accord' (p. 238) – true freedom in indeterminist philosophical schemes is a capacity for an 'absolute beginning', but Tarr is incapable of it.³⁵ We are told that he co-opts the events of other people's lives, making them elements of the drama of his own existence and while he likes to assume directorship of operations, he is cruelly embarrassed when he finds himself a performer in someone else's show. 'Tarr liked his own farces', Lewis wrote in 1928, 'but to be drawn into the service of one of Kreisler's was a humiliation' (p. 216). Thee supreme ironist becomes the plaything of others.

Given the novel's ironic treatment of its central ironist, it is difficult to determine where *Tarr* ultimately stands on the question of irony. The very articulation of this problem may seem question-begging or contradictory, since both the possibility and desirability of an ultimate stand about anything seems to be disputed by the presence of irony in the first place. The 'irony of irony', Schlegel had noted in 1800, was that it rebounded upon itself and threatened to run wild, making its meaning or function impossible to recover.³⁶ The only way out of this problem, Schlegel maintained, was through a higher irony, one that subsumed all other ironies – although it is difficult to see how this supposedly transcendent irony would not trigger yet another ironic regress. Perhaps *Tarr* represents the higher irony that Schlegel had been waiting for: by ironising romantic irony, the novel potentially wins some purchase upon this condition and its attendant vices – subjectivism, scepticism, and moral paralysis. Schmitt proposed that romantics would have escaped the dead-end of irony if they had been able to ironise themselves, but unfortunately they were incapable of this self-criticism (*PR*, pp.

72-3). Tarr, at least, is able to 'laugh at himself' and arguably the whole novel is a testament to Lewis's own capacity for self-ridicule (p. 236). Yet, the danger remains that self-irony is merely a repetition of the ironic position it ridicules. So while Tarr insists that 'the giving up of play [. . .] must take the form of play', this may be more a surrender to the problem of irony than an escape from it (p. 29). On another level, the novel's 'modernist' irony may be a simple amplification of the romantic gamesmanship condemned by Hegel, Schmitt and Lewis himself.

The comedic features of *Tarr* are, perhaps, an expression of satire rather than humour, at least as Lewis later distinguished these terms. Humour, he argued in 1938, was a tame, morally circumscribed practice that baulks from 'laughing at *everything*' (*Creatures*, p. 280). In satire, on the hand, the joke becomes absolute – it has 'no Queenberry Rules' or moral limits (*Creatures*, p. 282). If *Tarr* recognises no moral boundaries to the mechanics of its own wit, this may be because the novel has no moral foundations at all, the only certainty being its own doubt about everything; it thus embodies the extreme form of scepticism Hegel attributed to romantic irony. The novel's generic instability may be expressive of this scepticism – lurching between comedy and tragedy it resists the ethical content that are arguably latent in both genres. Of course, the coherence of such all-encompassing scepticism may ultimately be disputed: something needs to be believed for even doubt to be possible.³⁷ The idea of absolute irony is arguably at odds with itself, for even might irony require us to be serious about something. That said, it is difficult to determine what *Tarr* is ultimately serious about.

Resistance to a final standpoint or ultimate reckoning is again a 'romantic' attitude – at least in Lewis's mind. In the 'Song of the Militant Romance', for instance, the romantic mantra 'never completion' reflects a desire for life to remain an absolute possibility or infinite 'promise' (*CCP*, p. 33). From this 'romantic' perspective, closure of any kind is a problem, for it represents a sad restriction of possibilities. The question haunts the ending of *Tarr*. The novel ostensibly ends with a marriage: Tarr marries Bertha who is pregnant with Kreisler's child. Tarr initially finds it hard to explain why he has 'gone through this form' (p. 314); be that as it may, his concession to social form is also the novel's apparent settlement upon a determinate aesthetic form – *Tarr* now appears to close like a conventional comedy of manners. But the novel circles back on its own conventionalism, debating the significance of its now no longer final marriage-act. In the ensuing debate between Tarr and Anastasya, the marriage is an execution of a duty; the rhetoric of duty is cast as a species of sentimentalism; sentimentality, in turn, becomes (in a strained attempt to out-Nietzsche Nietzsche) a 'privilege' of the strong (p. 316). And so forth. The debate is never resolved; it is simply abandoned.

Marriage may represent, for Tarr, a rare moment of decision, but the event has no binding qualities: he insists that things remain 'exactly the same as before', allowing him to continue his affair with Anastasya (p. 314). True to his own subjectivism, Tarr's deed has only as much meaning as he is prepared to give it – in this instance very little. In a final passage, effectively an epilogue, we learn that Tarr gets divorced: his marriage was only a pseudo-ending and is not

allowed to close the narrative of his life. Indeed, the hero will go on to enjoy a long series of romantic trysts, involving a whole matrushka set of new partners from Rose Fawcett to Prism Dirkes. The structure of *Tarr* is complicit with the irony of its central protagonist, emphasising, as it does, the provisionality of all attachments. Superficially, the novel's open-ended ending appears to promote a 'romantic' conception of freedom – an absolute absence of closure in the name of infinite possibility. Yet, despite the novel's efforts to keep all options open, Tarr ultimately says goodbye to the autocracy that he had once envisioned for himself. Caught in the eternal swing of the 'pendulum' of sexual desire he becomes a symbol of the incontinence and mechanistic behaviour he once disparaged (p. 318). The great autocrat has become appetite's slave in what may be read as the novel's final irony.

But then the notion of a final irony may involve a contradiction. It is impossible to determine whether irony in *Tarr* is *ultimately* an attempt to discredit a bad type of freedom or, whether it is a capitulation to that freedom, or whether it amounts to an attack on the idea of freedom *tout court*. The problem of irony becomes re-experienced as a hermeneutic issue: the irresolution and indecision that plagued the ironist is now transferred to the reader. A way out may be to *decide* or to *resolve* upon a definitive or final interpretation for the novel, despite or perhaps because of the absence of grounds for such a surely definitive reading. However, the practical and conceptual hazards of such 'decisionism' were well known to Lewis and they too find powerful expression in *Tarr*. Once again it involves a very 'romantic' paradox: an abdication of freedom in the very pursuit of it.

In *Left Wings over Europe*, Lewis complained that the ‘words “freedom” and “democracy” are mere habits – word-habits – with the British Democracy’.³⁸ Modern Britons had no understanding of the ‘*rigours of true freedom*’ (*LW*, p. 295). They had forgotten that freedom was ‘not merely a passive affair’ (*LW*, pp. 296-7). To put the matter in more technical terms, liberty was not a mere ‘opportunity-concept’ – guaranteeing abstract possibilities for action – but an ‘exercise-concept’ demanding a strenuous practice of something.³⁹ ‘True freedom’, Lewis explained, ‘involves the full activity of the free human agent, man or woman: it requires a great deal of discipline and hard work: it entails a very great deal of discomfort and hard knocks’ (*LW*, p. 295). But this demanding conception of liberty was lost on most people: the ‘majority of men have to be persuaded or coerced into freedom.’ Indeed, they usually viewed freedom as an absence of constraint or immunity from obligation. ‘*Freedom and irresponsibility*’, Lewis, complained, ‘are commutative terms, where the average man is concerned’ (*LW*, p. 294).

How well Lewis lived up to his own strictures on freedom is a debateable matter, but his protagonist Frederick Tarr is hopelessly ill-equipped to assume the burden of freedom in an active sense. He is the quintessential romantic as Schmitt would present this figure in 1919: a man incapable of relinquishing his ‘superior irony’ in a way that would allow him to take a definitive stand on anything (*PR*, p. 100). ‘To be free’, Lewis argued, ‘you must learn *not* to smile’ (*LW*, 296). Unfortunately, Tarr cannot cease smiling. His passivity is a perverse expression of his love of freedom: any action would mean a forfeiture of other

possibilities and Tarr conflates freedom with possibility. Liberty for him is a limitless opportunity-concept, which means that no opportunity can be truly seized. Tarr, moreover, has a profound 'dislike for action' because he can never be sure that his actions are fully his own: their social situatedness and ultimately their physical character mean that actions are always liable to be determined by others or by the brute world (p. 235). He thus prefers to be a passive spectator rather than a deluded pseudo-agent. It is a passivity to which Lewis was sympathetic. 'We are not born to be *absolute observers*', he admitted; human beings were designed to be participants as much as spectators. And yet for all his commitment to active freedom, he remained convinced that without the detachment of the spectator-attitude 'men sink to the level of insects' (*WB*, p. 158). For that reason, he was highly dubious of an ethos that recommended action for the sake of action. He called this the 'romance of action' and claimed that it had wreaked havoc on the modern world. Once the detachment of the rational spectator was abandoned for the simple fact of acting, you have a species of 'undiluted sensationalism' – a surrender of autonomy only masquerading as the expression of freedom (*Time*, p. 20).

He traced modernity's cult of action to Georges Sorel. The Frenchman may have owed much to Nietzsche, but 'of all the apostles of dangerous living, pure action, "heroism", blood and iron, Georges Sorel was the worst – the most shrewd and irresponsible' (*RA*, p. 33). Lewis was clearly drawn to Sorel's celebration of the warrior virtues and his own reflections on violence could be sometimes blood-curdling.⁴⁰ Unlike Sorel, whose advocacy of martial valour sometimes read like a nostalgia for Machiavellian *virtù* – Lewis's pugilism often seemed to be removed

from any broader political objective, the pleasure of violence becoming a kind of end in itself ('Killing somebody must be the greatest pleasure in existence', *Blast* 1, 133). Lewis attacked the 'romance of war', but he also admitted to being 'half a romantic' in his susceptibility to its charms (*Blasting*, p. 195). However, in the 1920s, he distanced himself from Sorel's celebration of violence and modernity's obsession with action. His objections to the 'romance of action' were already captured in the figure of Otto Kreisler – a man who hurls himself into violent deeds, raping and murdering largely because 'the rusty machine had a thirst for action' (p. 137). Kreisler's deeds may be decisive, but they are not thereby free: to the extent that they reflect the triumph of impulse, they remain expressions of servitude.

If the homicidal Kreisler is an indictment of Sorelian violence, he may also be viewed as a proleptic criticism of Schmitt's brand of decisionism – a contention that may seem less surprising, when one recalls Sorel's importance for Schmitt. In Schmitt's eyes, Sorel had emphatically demonstrated the limits of rationalism in politics and the consequent shortcomings of liberalism and parliamentarianism, committed, as such practices are, to the moral value and practical efficacy of rational discussion in politics. The great fetish of liberalism, for Schmitt, 'is negotiation, a cautious half-measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion'.⁴¹ Naively committed to peace as the *telos* of politics and to discussion as its ultimate form, liberals sought to avoid the essence of the political: 'the exacting moral decision' (*PT*, p. 65). In their futile chatter, liberals

were little different to political romantics – figures who stood aside from every serious ‘decision’ (*PR*, p. 124).

But dictators can at least stop talking and make decisions; the great virtue of dictatorship, for Schmitt, therefore, was that it was ‘the opposite of discussion’ (*PT*, p. 63). That rulers might make bad decisions did not seem to worry Schmitt so much; ‘as far as the most essential issues are concerned, making a decision is more important than how a decision is made’ (*PT*, pp. 55-6). In fact, there is nothing in Schmitt’s account of matters to pronounce ‘absolute’ decisions bad. Like Sorel’s revolutionary ‘myth’, Schmitt’s foundational decision is ‘independent of argumentative substantiation’ (*PT*, p. 31), a type of decision-making that has much in common with the doctrine of spontaneity which had haunted earlier romantics. The decision is utterly spontaneous and makes no appeal to prior norms or antecedent conditions for its content or legitimacy. Schmitt denounced romantics for their denial of causality, but his theory of the decision is an ambiguous assertion of the same principle: ostensibly the cause of everything, the decision itself has no cause; it is ‘created out of nothingness’ (*PT*, p. 66).⁴²

Like Schmitt, Lewis was worried that ‘the very concept of *the person* is a thing of the past, in public life’⁴³ and his initial support for dictatorship rested on the conviction that it was reinstating personality into politics (*Hitler*, p. 183). Moreover, also like Schmitt, Lewis derided parliamentarianism – ‘parliamentary rule’, he confidently declared, ‘is finished’ (*Art*, p. 70). Given that he was equally dismissive of ‘suicidal liberalism’, it is easy to understand why Schmitt viewed him as a potential kindred spirit (*Creatures*, p. 229). And yet Lewis also stands

apart from Schmitt's brand of decisionism. In *Tarr*, for instance, the enmity Kreisler feels for the man he ultimately kills might be read as an anticipation and parody of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction – the constitutive moment of political life in Schmitt's universe.⁴⁴ Of course, Schmitt distinguished between public and private animosity, so in one respect the analogy fails; however, the capricious nature of Kreisler's rancour points to a more general problem with decisionism: its conflation of arbitrariness with agency. The most disturbing feature of Kreisler's hatred for Soltyk, for instance, is its random character: sexual jealousy might be invoked as its cause, but this seems to be a weak pretext for a virtually groundless enmity. Indeed, the collective decision to embark on a murderous duel is 'a whim', 'a caprice' – even if it is pursued 'with a dogged persistency, with which our whims are often served' (p. 260).

The whimsical nature of the murderous duel may be a symbolic commentary on the way many of Lewis's contemporaries embarked on war ('as though, for instance, they had woken up in the early morning and decided to go fishing' (p. 260)), but it also emphasises the moral arbitrariness of Sorel's 'romance of action' as well as Schmitt's subsequent decisionism. The groundlessness of Kreisler's violence or the decision to embark on a duel may feel like freedom. Kreisler notes how the 'obstinacy of a caprice' awakens his will and distinguishes him from everything that is 'prearranged and unavoidable' (p. 262). His will appears to be free in that it is seemingly spontaneous, acknowledging no prior conditions or independent justification. But this merely suggests that spontaneity is an insufficient criterion of freedom; at best, it describes the 'negative' face of liberty – a necessary absence of determining causes – but it

arguably misses out on what some might call freedom's 'positive' features: namely, the ability to act on the basis of reasons, which – *qua* reasons – are defensible to oneself and to others. Bereft of grounds for his actions or of principles for his existence as a whole, he moves through life like 'a sleeper' (p. 258) or as someone who is 'practically dead' (p. 257). He is a sadly impaired agent.

Kreisler thus exposes the unfreedom of 'the romance of action'. It marks either a surrender to impulse and thus to mechanism or it pretends to escape causal determinism by glorifying arbitrariness (of course, the latter may be less of an escape from causality than a simple ignorance of its mechanics). Either way it marks the abdication of rational agency, which is repeatedly figured by Lewis as a type of death. The arbitrariness of Kreisler as a man of action may bring into relief the virtues of inaction and Tarr's type of irony. But their differences should not be exaggerated. Both are extreme egotists: Kreisler is a 'self-centred city' (p. 75); Tarr worships the 'fetish within' (p. 3). Both find it difficult to attribute meaning to the world around them; both, as a consequence, struggle to invest their own actions in the world with significance. Irony, as we have seen, is an expression of this scepticism, but so, too, is the 'romance of action': there is no authoritative principle for one's actions, the only principle is action itself. This may seem like an escape from meaninglessness, but it is arguably a surrender to it.

Throughout the 1920s and beyond Lewis continued to attack the 'romance of action' for its denigration of the intellect (*RA*, pp. 33-42). 'The life of the

intelligence', he insisted, 'is the very incarnation of freedom' (*Art*, p. 374). But he sometimes struggled to show how this freedom would operate as a practical force in the world. Given his demanding strictures about freedom – as something distinct from 'physical circumstances', removed from the mob of the senses and the pathology of emotion – it is difficult to see how freedom might act whilst remaining itself (*Art*, p. 135). Nor was it easy to gauge how it would be politically embodied: in fact, by sometimes construing freedom as an absence of social determination, Lewis suggested that the very idea of 'a society of "free men"' was a contradiction in terms (*Art*, p. 151). Thus Lewis's 'politics of the intellect' (*Art*, p. 373) seemed to imply a freedom from politics as such, even if he increasingly doubted the possibility of this independence. 'Do not play with political notions', he insisted in 1917, 'for that is a compromise with the herd' – a rule that arguably breaks its own injunction against politics in its anti-populist commitments.⁴⁵ The demand not to 'play' at politicking might be read, of course, as a plea to take it seriously and, as time went on Lewis certainly seemed to do so. According to his own assessment, he 'became a politician' after the futile brutalities of World War I (*Blasting*, p. 186).

And yet one might well wonder if Lewis ever succeeded in doing more than playing with politics, always approaching it with an ironic reserve. His political life may be read as an attempt to escape his own romantic irony or as an alarming instantiation in it. He maintained in 1929, for instance, that his views were 'partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in [his] marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order'.⁴⁶ Adopting the ironist's art of extreme paradox, Lewis arguably attempts to

forestall commitment to any position. Even his bolder commitments, like his atrocious decision to serve as an ‘exponent’ of the ‘austrian house-painter’ and ‘inspired *german peasant*’, Adolf Hitler, can read like a strangely tongue-in-cheek exercise (*Hitler*, p. 4, p. 7, p. 176). Hindsight may give his description of Hitler as a ‘Man of Peace’ a wildly comic aspect, even though Lewis probably was in earnest (*Hitler*, p. 32). Still, the issue may be not that Lewis took Hitler seriously, but that he never took him – or anything else – seriously enough. Schmitt called this type of unseriousness ‘political romanticism’; Lewis saw himself as its counterforce, but, if so, he was also its epitome.

Herford College, Oxford

NOTES

¹ Carl Schmitt, *Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951*, ed. Eberhard Freiherr von Medem (Berlin, 1991), p. 16.

² Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (New Brunswick and London, 2011), pp. 17-18. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *PR*.

³ Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa, 1993), p. 5. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *Time*.

⁴ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* Babbitt (Boston, 1919), p. x. Lewis, *The Enemy*, 1 (1927), p. 150.

⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombadiering* (London, 1937), p. 115. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *Blasting*.

⁶ Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body* (London, 2004), p. 131. Further references to this collection will appear in the text under the abbreviation *WB*.

⁷ Wyndham Lewis, *The Mysterious Mr Bull* (London, 1938), p. 199.

⁸ Paul Peppis, ‘Anti-Individualism and Fictions of National Character in Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr*’, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 40.2 (1994), pp. 226-55; Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (London, 2008), p. 109; Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 130.

⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa, 1989), p. 132. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *Art*.

¹⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *The Hitler Cult* (London, 1939), p. 178.

¹¹ Vincent Sherry, ‘Anatomy of Folly: Wyndham Lewis, the Body Politic, and Comedy’, *Modernism/Modernity* 4.2 (1997): 121-138, p. 123; Paul Sheehan, *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 103; Ella Zohar Ophir, ‘Towards a Pitiless Fiction: Abstraction, Comedy and Modernist Antihumanism’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 52.1 (2006): 92-120.

¹² Wyndham Lewis, *Hitler* (London, 1931), p. 202. Further references will appear in the text under *Hitler*.

¹³ See David Dwan, ‘Modernism and Rousseau’, *Textual Practice*, 27.4 (2013): 537-63. Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (London, 1918), p. 228.

- ¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kauffmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, 1968), p. 72; p. 73. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge, 2005), p. 221.
- ¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'Contemporanea', *The Egoist*, 5.6 (1918): 84.
- ¹⁶ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (1796/99)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London, 1992), p. 315.
- ¹⁷ Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr*, ed. Scott W. Klein (Oxford, 2010), p. 103.
- ¹⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society, 1914-15*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa, 1989), p. 206. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *Creatures*.
- ¹⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. Alan Munton (Manchester: Cancarnet, 1979), p. 176. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *CPP*.
- ²⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *The Little Review*, 4.6 (October, 1917): 13, 14.
- ²¹ Wyndham Lewis, *Wyndham Lewis On Art*, ed. Michel Fox and C. J. Fox (London, 1969), p. 341.
- ²² Wyndham Lewis, *Tyro*, 1.2 (1922), p. 26.
- ²³ Sherry, 'Anatomy of Folly': 123-4; Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (Oxford, 2009), p. 118.
- ²⁴ Lewis, *Tyro*, 1.2: 26.
- ²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen V. Wood (Cambridge, 1998), p. 304.
- ²⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minnesota, 1991), p. 13.
- ²⁷ See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 149-52.
- ²⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, ed. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1975), vol. 1. p. 64.
- ²⁹ Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 22; p. 4.
- ³⁰ Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull*, p. 95.
- ³¹ Lewis, *Blast*, 1 (1914): 17; *Blast*, 1: 26; *Blast*, 2 (1915): 11; *Blast*, 1: 26. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *Blast1* or *Blast 2*.
- ³² Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 6.
- ³³ Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: A Narrative of My Career Up-to-Date* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), p. 169. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *RA*.
- ³⁴ Wyndham Lewis, *The Little Review* 4.3 (July, 1917): 7.
- ³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 409; Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*, 288.
- ³⁶ J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 304.
- ³⁷ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Von Wright (New York, 1972), p. 125.
- ³⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *Left Wings over Europe, or, How to Make a War about Nothing* (London, 1936), p. 294. Further references are given in the text under the abbreviation *LW*.
- ³⁹ Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 213.
- ⁴⁰ On his early interest in Sorel, see Rod Mengham, 'From Georges Sorel to *Blast*', *The Violent Muse: Violence and the Artistic Imagination in Europe, 1910-1939*, ed. Jana Howlett and Rod Mengham (Manchester, 1994), pp. 33-44.
- ⁴¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 2005), p. 63. Further references will appear in the text under the abbreviation *PT*.
- ⁴² See Karl Löwith, 'The Occasional Decisionism of Carl Schmitt', *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner (New York, 1995), pp. 137-58. The fact that the Schmittian decision applies to public actors rather than private persons is no immunity from the charge of subjectivism, because Schmitt tried to model his conception of political agency on the individual subject, ruining the fact that the 'personal and decisionistic element in the concept of sovereignty was lost' (*PT*, p. 48).
- ⁴³ Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy*, 3 (1929), p. 78.
- ⁴⁴ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 1996), p. 26.
- ⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Little Review* 4.3 (1917): 7.
- ⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Enemy*, 3: 70