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Wyndham Lewis's Cosmopolitanism: On Historicity and Modernist Studies

Cosmopolitanism and Modernism

Given that it has been applied in so many different contexts, cosmopolitanism remains an imprecise term, and contemporary accounts of it diverge in significant ways: Kwame Anthony Appiah, for example, argues that philosophical cosmopolitanism entails both a "universal concern" for humanity and a "respect for legitimate difference"[1]; David Held views cosmopolitanism as a necessary third term required to navigate the impasse between notions of democracy and globalism[2]; Nikos Papastergiadis seeks to keep open politically radical (or at least non-liberal) conceptions of cosmopolitanism, while simultaneously agreeing with Appiah that cosmopolitanism constitutes an "imaginative engagement" with the other.[3] As these three representative examples suggest, there is significant disagreement about both the meaning of cosmopolitanism and its relationship to existing political and economic regimes. And yet, while all three accounts of cosmopolitanism differ, they all owe clear debts to what Rebecca Walkowitz has termed "the philosophical tradition" of cosmopolitanism that "derives its view from Enlightenment theories of culture."[4] At heart, contemporary accounts of cosmopolitanism—even those that try to

[1] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), xv.

[2] David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), x. Held nonetheless has presented one of the few exhaustive attempts to define cosmopolitanism, but even his definition consists of eight different principles, which themselves require significant further elaboration; David Held, "Principles of Cosmopolitan Order," in *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism,* ed. Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12.

[3] Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 9.

[4] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9.

engage with more radical, left-wing positions—are largely informed by liberal notions of pluralism.

Two recent, exemplary studies of modernist cosmopolitanism—Walkowitz's own *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006) and Jessica Berman's *Modernist Commitments* (2011)—have both sought to establish a historicized concept of modernist cosmopolitanism and demonstrate how modernist works have contributed to the evolution of this philosophical lineage of pluralist cosmopolitanism—albeit often in complex and critical ways. It is also worth underscoring that both authors remain sceptical of the ideological grounds of contemporary cosmopolitanism. Berman's nuanced account, for example, foregrounds liberalism's limitations as a force for genuine inclusivity. Walkowitz similarly acknowledges a counter-tradition of "anthropological and vernacular" cosmopolitanisms, producing "more transient" positions that are responsive to specific contexts over philosophical ideas.[5] Walkowitz even attempts to posit a more complicated relationship between modernism and cosmopolitanism; she insightfully argues that modernists embraced a "critical cosmopolitanism," which engages in a double movement, subjecting the Enlightenment critique that underpins cosmopolitan ethics to a further critique.

Even so, this critical cosmopolitanism still operates within the parameters of a Western post-Enlightenment philosophical tradition: it does not reject Enlightenment concepts entirely, but rather revises them by acknowledging the "contested histories of globalization" and by attempting to incorporate the multiplicity of non-Western perspectives on globalisation itself.[6] Berman signals a continuing reliance on such Western traditions by employing the Humean distinction between "ought" and "is", as well as a variety of other Enlightenment concepts, to ground her analyses of cosmopolitanism.[7] In this sense, the modernist cosmopolitanism that both authors examine extends and revises Enlightenment thought in ways that anticipate the contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism, articulated by Appiah and others.

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[5] Walkowitz, 9-10.

[6] Walkowitz, 9.

[7] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 12.

But, as I will argue, the notion of a continuity between contemporary and modernist cosmopolitanisms is problematized when considering the views of a modernist such as Wyndham Lewis, who is omitted from both Walkowitz's and Berman's studies. Lewis' views on cosmopolitanism—although they changed in significant ways over the course of his life—cannot easily be reconciled with liberal, pluralist approaches. Moreover, I will seek to demonstrate that Lewis's work cannot simply be classified as an instance of Walkowitz's critical cosmopolitanism. Although Lewis' belief in the existence of a unified world-culture is cosmopolitan, his views on race, nationhood, and the problems of liberal governance produced a very different set of commitments. Examining Lewis's views on these issues is important in three ways: 1) it serves to illustrate the breadth of modernist approaches to cosmopolitanism, many of which cannot be recuperated by contemporary understandings of the term, 2) it throws into relief the ideological, ethical, and political underpinnings of contemporary cosmopolitanism by presenting a different perspective, and 3) it recalls a continuing dispute within the field of modernist studies about the relationship between modernism and the contemporary. My point in making these claims is certainly not to argue for the validity of Lewis's political ideas, but rather to demonstrate how Lewis's positions reaffirm the complexity of both modernism and cosmopolitanism as historical and conceptual categories.

Wyndham Lewis was an exemplary modernist cosmopolitan: born a citizen of three nations,[8] Lewis extensively toured the artistic scenes of pre-War Europe as a young bohemian. From the beginning of his authorial career, Lewis's fiction portrays cosmopolitan subjects who operate in networks that transgress national boundaries. His early story, "The 'Pole'" (1909), for example, depicts Russian and Eastern European émigrés in rural France, and his first published novel, *Tarr* (1918), follows a cast of expatriate artists living in Paris who are described as

[8] Lewis was allegedly "born on a yacht off the Nova Scotia coast to an English mother and an American father"; "Wyndham Lewis Chronology", *Modernism/Modernity* 4.2 (1997): 3. As Alan Munton, has noted, however, this claim is almost certainly untrue, given that his father's yacht was not built until the following year; Alan Munton, "Ten Things You Thought You Knew about Wyndham Lewis," *Satire Interactive: Satire in Literature and Art* (March 2013): http://satireinteractive.tumblr.com/post/45181144406/ten-things-you-thought-you-knew-about-wyndham.

"bourgeois bohemians." [9] While these early stories evince scepticism of transnational elites, Lewis's autobiographical works emphasize his unequivocal belief in the value of cosmopolitanism. For example, he notes that living on the continent in his youth was a transformative experience, since, while living abroad, "the bad effects of [his] English education wore off" and, as a result, he ceased to be an Englishman and "became a European."[10] While the comment contains a withering sardonicism typical of Lewis' writing, his view of European cosmopolitanism as an antidote to English parochialism is nonetheless clear. And yet, Lewis's depictions of cosmopolitanism were often critical—as his earlier satirical portraits of elite bourgeois-bohemians would suggest. In fact, Lewis frequently rendered the word "cosmopolitanism" in scare quotes.[11]

Lewis's idea of cosmopolitanism is further complicated by the fact that he approached the topic in different ways during three separate phases of his career. In the 1920s, Lewis expressed sincere doubts about cosmopolitanism, preferring instead an isolationist and peaceful Europe, which might be unified through notions of race rather than nationalism. By the late 1930s, however, having witnessed the rise of Fascist parties founded on racial essentialism, Lewis revised his position and began to argue for the global spread of a Marxist-inflected "Anglo-Saxon" model of government. Lewis's changed his views again after 1949; he called for the creation of a cosmopolitan world government modelled on the United States (where Lewis had been living), and suggested that such an order was necessity to prevent global nuclear war. This essay will seek to examine these shifts in detail, and then consider their problematic relationship to contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism.

Tracking Lewis's Cosmopolitanism

While aspects of transnationalism were central to Lewis's early fictional work, he did not begin theorizing cosmopolitanism until the 1920s. During the 1920s,

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[9] Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.

[10] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: A Narrative of My Career Up-to-Date* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1950), 113.

[11] One of the most infamous examples of this is the word "genius," which Lewis uses repeatedly in *The Apes of God,* but almost always in quotations marks to indicate his suspicion of the term.

Lewis began producing polemical tracts that combined politics, art criticism, history, and philosophy—many of which had their genesis in an unpublished, sprawling treatise of nearly 500,000 words, entitled *The Man of the World,* which Lewis wrote between 1923-25. After the manuscript was rejected by a publisher, Lewis divided it up into a variety of shorter works, including, as Paul Edwards has noted, *The Lion and the Fox* (1925), *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), *Time and Western Man* (1927), and *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* (1931), among others.[12] Lewis's early interest in questions of cosmopolitanism thus cannot be separated from the political positions taken in his various writings at the time; Lewis's chief political concerns, both at this point and through most of the rest of his life, were the avoidance of further world wars and the creation of societies and governments adequate for the production of great art.

Certainly by the publication of the essay "A World Art in Tradition" in 1929, it was clear that Lewis believed that—as a result of technological and cultural changes—the earth had become a cosmopolis in the technical sense: "most people have not realized it, [but] the Earth has become *one* place, instead of a romantic tribal patchwork of places."[13] But this cultural unity was nonetheless "camouflaged by most existing governments" and would persist until "there is politically one world."[14] Already we can see a key tension here in Lewis's work between a *de facto* cultural cosmopolitanism and a political cosmopolitanism that would unify the world through a shared government. While here he seems to imply the desirability of unified World government, his contemporary writings usually foreground the problems of global, political unification.

For Lewis, world governance remained unlikely due to issues of nation and race. As Paul Edwards has noted, while Lewis actually argues against notions of "white racial superiority," his claims about race are deeply problematic insofar as they perpetuate an essentialist "notion of racial difference" and indirectly

[12] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 286.

[13] Wyndham Lewis, "A World Art and Tradition," in *Wyndham Lewis on Art,* ed. Walter Michael and C. J. Fox (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 259.

[14] Lewis, "World Art," 259.

"validate" racist "feelings of resentment" through the deployment of racial stereotypes.[15] While Lewis's views on race are thus unpleasant for contemporary readers, they are also essential for understanding his thought because, for Lewis, distinctions between peoples were not simply a matter of cultural or linguistic differences. At the same time, however, Lewis's conceptual deployment of race is not always clear, since he often conflates nationalized or localized "racial" markers (such as comparing Anglo-Saxons with Irish "races") with more generalized ones (such as whiteness).

The importance of race for Lewis's aesthetics and politics was already evident in the second issue of *Blast* (1915) in his essay "The Art of the Great Race," which argues that artists' dispositions reflect their national and racial background. At the same time, Lewis emphasizes the capacity of exceptional artists, such as Shakespeare, to transcend their national and racial heritage ("No country can be possessive about a man like that, although [Shakespeare] may have been a gentle Englishmen" [16]). As this early essay clarifies, race and nationality are simultaneously important and vexed qualities for Lewis; while they have a determining effect on individuals, they are also limitations that exceptional people should seek to transcend.

Nonetheless, Lewis's racial theories would bear directly on his conception of cosmopolitanism in the 1920s. In his polemical tract, *Paleface* (1929), which was prompted by a visit to the United States in the summer of 1927, Lewis critiques the "philosophy of the 'melting-pot'" in a characteristically idiosyncratic fashion, arguing that contemporary sentimental and "ethical" arguments for equality have been accompanied by "a darker and darker cloud of poison gas always gathering upon the horizon" and "aeroplanes pregnant with colossal bombs."[17] Here, Lewis suggests that contemporary, liberal arguments for equality have not been effective in stopping armed conflict—and thus need to be rejected for other strategies that will bring about global peace. While Lewis

[15] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 383.

[16] Wyndham Lewis, "The Art of the Great Race," *Blast 2* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1981), 72.

[17] Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface: The Philosophy of the "Melting-Pot"* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), 15.

vigorously critiques slavery and argues for a philosophical belief in racial equality, he nonetheless suggests that race (here a European whiteness) might be a unifying concept for "*a new West*" (by which Lewis means Europe), creating a "local Melting-pot" that would dissolve national boundaries and thus avoid the sovereign disputes that prompted WWI.[18] Put simply, Lewis thought a supranational racial identity of whiteness could unite Europe, and thereby avoid future wars: "I am heart and soul upon the side of the Melting-pot, *not* upon that of the Barbed Wire."[19]

The distinction between cosmopolitanism as a material fact and as a political reality remains a key tension in *Paleface*. Lewis states that he does not want a "race-war" and argues that "we cannot, in fact be polite enough to all those other kinds of men with whom we are called upon to pass our time upon the face of this globe."[20] At the same time, however, he suggests that a *de facto* program of racial segregation would serve as the most effective means for preventing global conflict:

> We should grow more and more polite: but, if possible, see less and less of such other kinds of men between whom and ourselves there is no practical reason for physical merging, nor for spiritual merging, or even very many reasons against both—for there are such people, too…. If the White World had kept more to itself and interfered less with other people, it would have remained politically intact, and no one would have molested it […] We could have been another China.[21]

Here, Lewis proposes a pan-European government founded on whiteness in the hopes that it might lead to a non-aggressive isolationism. This vision was meant as an alternative to the aggressive national sovereignty that prompted World War

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[18] Lewis, *Paleface,* 256. Paul Edwards describes *Paleface* as a "fantasy of a primitive authenticity in other races or cultures, romanticised as a transcendent force that might redeem the atomisation of urbanism and industrialisation of white European decadence" (*Wyndham Lewis*, 382).

[19] Lewis, *Paleface,* 276.

[20] Lewis, *Paleface,* 257-8.

[21] Lewis, *Paleface,* 258.

One, but—aside from the fact that such a suggestion is entirely repellent from a contemporary perspective—it is also profoundly ironic given the importance of notions of racial purity for German Fascism, and the role that such beliefs played in instigating World War Two. Regardless, for Lewis at this time, cosmopolitan ideals were less important than pragmatic initiatives to end nationalistic aggression.

This suspicion of cosmopolitanism is reflected in his 1928 novel, *The Childermass,* which W.B. Yeats famously described as "the most obscure piece of writing known to me."[22] The novel's language is overtly experimental and its subject matter, which is a depiction of the afterlife, requires the detailed description of a realm that operates according to a very different set of physical rules. Lewis uses the textual ambiguity generated by his rhetoric to create uncertainty about the most basic elements of the narrative. The characters, for example, do not know whether they are in heaven or somewhere else; as one character elliptically notes "it's a pretty dud heaven if it's *Heaven.* If!"[23] Even the location of the characters is ambiguous. They appear to inhabit a "camp" that is situated outside of the gates of a heavenly city, but its status remains unclear. It could be something akin to a refugee camp, and the narrator refers to it early on as a "Zoo of men."[24] Later, however, another character explicitly refers to it as a "prison camp." [25] *The Childermass* was written in 1930 and, thus, its invocation of the camp does not include the significations that the word has taken on since Germany's use of concentration and extermination camps in World War II. Nonetheless, internment camps had already been employed, especially for prisoners of war, in the first World War,[26] a fact that Lewis, himself a veteran of the conflict, would have been aware of; indeed Paul

[22] Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Afterword," in Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1989), 433.

[23] Wyndham Lewis, *The Childermass* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928), 64.

[24] Lewis, *Childermass,* 14.

[25] Lewis, *Childermass,* 292.

[26] See, for example, the account of the Ruhleben internment camp in Timothy Dowling, *Personal Perspectives: World War I* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 269.

Edwards has already argued that many aspects of *The Childermass* suggest life in the trenches during WWI.[27]

But the novel also draws on what Nikos Papastergiadis has described as a "cosmopolitan imaginary"[28] since the camp is filled with transnational subjects. As the second paragraph of the novel notes, "It is here that in a shimmering obscurity the *emigrant mass* is collected within sight of the walls of the magnetic city."[29] Here, the dead in the novel are reimagined as an "emigrant mass" and the passage from life to death is thus symbolically linked to the cosmopolitan experience of international travel. The narrator emphasizes the mixed nationalities of the camp throughout the work, elsewhere describing it by saying "New worlds for old – all is the melting-pot,"[30] a statement that both indicates a link to Lewis's ideas in *Paleface* and probably indicates the influence of his 1927 travel to the US on the novel's composition. Indeed, the cosmopolitan diversity of the camp, in certain respects, actually exceeds what is possible in normal life, since its inhabitants derive not just from different localities, but also different *times*. The two principal characters, Satters and Pullman, walk through a "frozen" miniature of 17th Century England and later see a group of what appear to be classical Greeks speaking with the camp administrator (although it is worth noting that these forms are *assumed* by the dead as an indicator of their ideological beliefs).

But this cosmopolis of the dead is clearly no pluralist utopia. The camp is run by the Bailiff, who appears to have the sole determining right to decide who is allowed to leave the camp and progress to the next area of the afterlife. His power is backed up by a fierce army of soldiers who behead one of the dead that refuses to submit the Bailiff's authority. The Bailiff also clarifies that the inhabitants of the camp don't have rights in any meaningful sense: "no appellant is entitled to his Habeas Corpus or to anything resembling it, [but] You can petition and petition and petition! You can do so until you are black in the face

[27] Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 334-5.

[28] Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, 103-4.

[29] Lewis, *Childermass,* 1 (my emphasis).

[30] Lewis, *Childermass,* 5.

and the worms eat you up."[31] While the Bailiff states that the lack of rights is "un-english," the novel clearly makes an implicit comparison between the authoritarian nature of the camp and contemporary England.[32] Here, *The Childermass* reflects Lewis's contemporary writings, in which he frequently suggests that liberal governance presents only a fiction of freedom that masks a deeper plutocratic control. In this sense, the critique of the cosmopolis presented in *The Childermass* cannot be separated from Lewis's larger political critique of liberal democracy as a form of governance that is both inherently undemocratic (insofar as it is easily manipulated by powerful and wealthy interests) and violent (because liberalism results in national antagonism and thus war).

But if, in the late 1920s, Lewis had rejected political cosmopolitanism as undesirable, by the late 1930s his position on cosmopolitanism began to soften, largely due to Lewis's re-evaluation of race as a political category. This transition can be seen in *The Mysterious Mr. Bull* (1938), a polemical tract that seeks to deny essentialist notions of English national identity (which Lewis differentiates from Britishness) and argues for a new mode of internationalism. Lewis continued to see race as a significant political factor, but no-longer saw it playing a pre-eminent unifying role: "For race, like family, is of importance—not so important as some people would have us believe, but more important than others would allow."[33] Lewis now argued that "[m]ost European nations are racially complex,"[34] a point he illustrates by examining the various populations who have historically inhabited England. Rather than relying on nationalistic or racial markers, Lewis instead posits Englishness as a sort of negative capability: a "minus quantity, almost bordering on negation: akin, actually, to Russian nihilism" which could also be described as "modesty" or "shyness."[35]

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[31] Lewis, *Childermass,* 208.

[32] Lewis, *Childermass,* 207. As Alan Munton has argued, "*The Childermass* shows what it is like to experience the demands of a ruler who pretends to be a democrat, but is in fact a ruthless exploiter of all the means of persuasion available to him"; Alan Munton, "A Reading of *The Childermass*," in *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation*, ed. Jeffrey Meyers (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 120.

[33] Wyndham Lewis, *The Mysterious Mr Bull* (London: Robert Hale, 1938), 25.

[34] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 39.

[35] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 128.

This non-essentialized articulation of Englishness is meant to serve as the basis for a non-patriotic nationalism, which will enable British people to view themselves as fundamentally cosmopolitan subjects:

> [The Englishman] has become irretrievably, it would appear, a Citizen of the World. For better or for worse, he is part of a great political Trust—of which the Geneva palace of the League is—or shall we say was—the headquarters. His national policy—however it may be camouflaged to look like a provocative jingo-dance by Lord Palmerston—is an international policy.[36]

Rather than advocating a racially-essentialized pan-Europeanism, Lewis proposes a non-patriotic Britain that is internationalist or cosmopolitan in its outlook. This model is a direct rejection of the belief that "the nation is an organism"—a point of view Lewis ascribes simultaneously to Hitler, Franco, Mussolini, and Stalin; he argues that organicist nationalism dangerously "tends to internationalize itself" likely resulting in war.[37]

But Lewis also seeks to differentiate his English cosmopolitanism from other, more problematic, modes of internationalism. He remains sceptical of the League of Nations as an internationalist model, because, as a post-war creation, it is more like a "hegemony than a federal assemblage of free and equal nations."[38] He also predicts a possible coming "upheaval" in Britain that "may take a socialist form"[39]—an inversion of his notorious claim in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) that "for anglo-saxon countries as they are constituted today some modified form of fascism would probably be best."[40] But Lewis's cosmopolitan England will not be Marxist in the Soviet sense: overt ideology will be eschewed, because "anything that smacks of an *idea* is so deeply repugnant to an Englishman."[41]

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[36] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 209.

[37] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 227.

[38] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 181.

[39] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 235.

[40] Lewis, *Art of Being Ruled*, 320-21.

[41] Lewis, *Mysterious Mr Bull,* 235.

Lewis extends this vision of a cosmopolitan, Marxist Britain in his 1941 wartime pamphlet, *Anglosaxony: A League That Works,* which posits Britain and U.S. democracy as a model of ideal governance in comparison to Fascist and Communist models. Lewis argues that the Anglo-Saxon reliance on the sea created a heterodox and open community inherently unlike German nationalism, which employs landed metaphors of soil and blood—a point that actually underscores Lewis's ongoing belief in national and racial difference. Lewis argues for the inherent superiority of democratic governance (although he continues to maintain that democracy is neither democratic nor representative), and then argues that "Democracy is merely a name for the Anglo-Saxon peoples and their traditional way of behaving."[42] While racial heritage remains important for Lewis, he also rejects supremacism as a dogma, which he associates with a "Fascism" that "is against racial fusion."[43]

Once again, Lewis counterpoises Fascist racial essentialism with a form of Anglo-Saxon cosmopolitanism. But this cosmopolitanism remains oddly distanced, in ways that recall the *de facto* racial segregation Lewis proposed in the 1920s:

> [The Anglo-Saxon] keeps himself to himself. He has not quite made up his mind to take the plunge, and melt into something abstract and international, something universal. But he experiences no atavistic twinges of remorse, such as the German would feel, at the spectacle of dissolving nationalities and the monster blending of human breeds. He is all for it.[44]

The contradictions within this description are evident, and at least partially intentional. On the one hand, Lewis's "Anglo-Saxon" approves of a post-racial and post-national social order; on the other hand, he both separates himself out from such cosmopolitan mixtures and describes as a "monstrous blending of human breeds" the very thing that he allegedly approves of. The result is an oddly conflicted form of cosmopolitanism in which Lewis projects a sense of

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[42] Wyndham Lewis, *Anglosaxony: A League That Works* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1941), 20.

[43] Lewis, *Anglosaxony,* 68.

[44] Lewis, *Anglosaxony,* 68.

Anglo-Saxon superiority and effectively demonizes racial "others," even if he explicitly rejects supremacist views.

In 1949, however, Lewis would finally argue for a thoroughgoing cosmopolitanism, in which he finally dispensed with race as a meaningful political category. This reconsideration of cosmopolitanism and race, which receives its fullest treatment in *America and Cosmic Man* (1949), and is reiterated in *Rude Assignment* (1950) and *The Writer and the Absolute* (1952), seems to have been prompted by Lewis' period of living in the United States and Canada and another more indirect factor: the creation of the atomic bomb. Lewis foregrounds the importance of his time in the United States, which has transformed him "from a good European into an excellent internationalist."[45] This transformation is already apparent in the titular reference to "cosmic man," who has supplanted the figure of "Western man" from Lewis's earlier *Time and Western Man* (1927).

Lewis argues that the United States is "*a new kind of country,"* which is the "Cosmopolis" that "the Greeks of antiquity only dreamed of."[46] He argues that the US model should be globalized, since "the earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to the other, and air transport, both speedy and safe."[47] Lewis emphatically rejects both nationalist and racial bases for political unity, criticising the German nationalism of the 1930s that was based "upon a blood-tie, uniting the entire *Volk,*" and instead praises the United States as an exemplary post-racial and post-national society: "the one great community in which race has been thrown out."[48] Instead, Lewis proposes a cosmopolitan "rootlessness" (picking up on a term he had first deployed in *Anglosaxony*) that would push beyond "racial doctrines, or even to thinking in terms of soil, or rootedness."[49] This doctrine of rootlessness, in which people have no political

[45] Wyndham Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1969), 12.

[46] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 18.

[47] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 21.

[48] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 30-31.

[49] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 172-3.

ties to race or even specific localities, will produce "a new kind of man": cosmic man.[50]

Driving these arguments is Lewis's desire to avoid the military conflict that had characterized the first half of the twentieth century. Lewis even argues that this new cosmopolis would not be a "utopia" but "just somewhere in which armed groups are not incessantly menacing each other, and throwing all ordered society back into a primitive savagery every few years."[51] Lewis's sudden advocacy of cosmopolitanism can be at least partially attributed to his new fears about the destructive power of nuclear weapons, which, if they "were freely used in large numbers" would wipe out "half of the population of the world" and destroy modern civilization.[52] Lewis suggests that the threat of self-destruction is what will actually impel the appearance of world government: for "the new principle of brotherhood, and the essential de-snobbing of the various racial stocks, we can depend, I suggest, upon the atom bomb."[53] In other words, Lewis suggests that the existential threat presented by nuclear weapons is so great that it will produce a world government.

While Lewis's rejection of racial difference as politically significant seem closer to contemporary pluralism, his cosmopolitan vision still differs in very important ways. For one, he retains his belief that democracies are not genuinely free societies. Moreover, Lewis does not discuss or advocate respect for cultural difference; instead he calls for a radical dissolution of cultural differences which will produce a "new man," or an entirely different mode of subjectivity. Indeed, the notion of rootlessness already implies an erasure of cultural, racial, and national differences through a program of dislocated, globalized interaction; Lewis even defines Cosmic Man as "a perfectly eclectic, non-national, internationally minded creature, whose blood is drawn—more or less—from all

[50] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 185.

[51] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 174.

[52] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 192.

[53] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 190.

corners of the earth, with no more geographical or cultural roots than a chameleon."[54]

In this sense, this program—although Lewis denies it is a utopia—seems closer to the utopian, radical politics he advocated in the 1920s, insofar as it seeks to introduce a decisive break with past forms of governance and modes of being. Indeed, this utopian tendency can be seen in the fact that Lewis believes it will require both an "authentic World Government" and "a full world society."[55] The political form of this world government is less clear: on the one hand, Lewis argues that US libertarianism is already a masked Proudhonian anarchism, but on the other he appears to reaffirm his suggestion from *The Mysterious Mr. Bull* and *Anglosaxony* that a modified socialism seems the most likely future form of governance, noting that Americans "greatly excel in what might be called the raw human material of socialism."[56] In this sense, Lewis's late avowal of cosmopolitanism also cannot be recuperated as a "critical cosmopolitanism" in that it appears to reject liberalism—or rather accepts US-style liberalism only as a symptom of a more radical underlying politics (whether socialist or anarchist).

Lewis's Cosmopolitanism and Modernist Studies

None of Lewis's views on cosmopolitanism can be easily reconciled with current pluralist accounts. Lewis would have little interest, for example, in Appiah's notion of an imaginative engagement with the other, and would prefer instead a large-scale project of social transformation, rather than focusing on transcultural respect and recognition. Although Lewis's ideas cannot be reconciled with current cosmopolitanisms, they do represent an important strand of modernist thought, which was both cosmopolitan and anti-liberal in mindset. That both Walkowitz's and Berman's monographs on modernist cosmopolitanism omit such ideas is significant because this omission represents a larger set of disagreements within the field of modernist studies that have arisen since the appearance of both the "modernisms thesis" articulated by Peter Nicholls and the "New Modernist Studies" advocated by Douglas Mao and Walkowitz herself.

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[54] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 203.

[55] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 189.

[56] Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man,* 17

These two interventions, although not reducible to each other, have had the effect of opening up the field of modernist studies in ways that might have seemed unimaginable only a few decades before. In shifting from the notion of a monolithic modernism to a series of *modernisms,* Nicholls' research paved the way for studies of a wide array of authors whose work, despite clearly employing modernist aesthetic strategies, did not accord with accounts of a canonical high modernism. Indeed, Wyndham Lewis is perhaps the exemplar of such artists; despite his involvement with Vorticism and engagement with a wide array of eminent modernist artists and writers, his own stringent critiques of modernism in *Time and Western Man* resulted in his long being, as Fredric Jameson noted in 1979, the "least read and most unfamiliar of all the great modernists."[57] This extension of modernism's domain is pushed even further by Mao and Walkowitz's conception of the "New Modernist Studies," which, as they argue, encourages an "expansion" of the field by extending the temporal and geographical boundaries of modernism, eroding the distinction between high and low cultural forms of modernism, examining the role of media technologies under modernism, and applying methodologies from cultural studies, media studies, post-colonial studies, and New Historicist literary criticism to modernist art and culture.[58]

But the appearance of new methods and lines of inquiry has also resulted in an increasing uncertainty about the object of modernist studies, which is to say the meaning of modernism itself. If both the temporal and geographical boundaries of modernism are constantly expanding, then can modernism really be maintained as a coherent concept? Does modernism, as stylistic movement or conceptual category, exist, or is it essentially generated by the dynamics of the scholarly field itself? Indeed, these questions are hardly new,[59] but they seem to have taken on an increased importance within a reconfigured modernist studies.

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[57] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 1.

[58] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123.3 (2006): 737.

[59] These questions, of course, have been raised in considerable detail in Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Julian Murphet, in "On the Market and Uneven Development" (2013), has raised these issues in considerable depth, arguing that the New Modernist Studies has resulted in a diminution of postmodernism as either a conceptual or stylistic descriptor; he notes that this shift might be attributable to the fact that "the New Modernism Studies is, to a certain extent, postmodern in its underlying commitments; less a return to the things themselves than an effort to use them to think laterally about the contemporary."[60] The omission of modes of modernist cosmopolitanism, such as Lewis's, from both Berman and Walkowitz's monographs on the topic seems to confirm this suspicion. Rather than cataloguing the wide variety of modernist cosmopolitanisms, both works seem to focus on those texts that have contributed to current notions of cosmopolitanism. Lewis's cosmopolitanism has little place in such considerations precisely because it lacks obvious relevance to these current understandings of the term. While this fact does not undermine Berman's and Walkowitz's contributions to understanding the development of contemporary cosmopolitanism, it does make their value for understanding *modernism* less certain.

In particular, my concern is that—in focusing on works that articulate notions of cosmopolitanism that resonate with contemporary usages—a false homology is drawn between modernist aesthetics and politics and whatever word one chooses to describe the contemporary state of affairs. In short, this homology undermines the weirdness of modernism by suggesting that modernist writers and artists thought in more or less the same way that we do now. And, indeed, modernism is, in important ways, an essentially weird phenomenon, not only in its particularly complex depiction of and relationship with processes of literary estrangement, as Ben Highmore has noted,[61] but also, as Murphet has argued, in its insistence on "register[ing] the contradictions" of liberal capitalism itself. While understanding modernism's contributions to contemporary discourse is important, of equal importance is registering the ways that it refutes, confounds, denies, and opposes such discourses. In this sense, Wyndham Lewis's modernist cosmopolitanism not only serves as a critical reminder of the ideological

[60] Julian Murphet, "Introduction: On the Market and Uneven Development," *Affirmations* 1.1 (2013): 2.

[61] Ben Highmore, "Disdained Everyday Fields," in *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, ed. Stephen Ross (New York: Routledge, 2009), 82.

assumptions underlying contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism, but also presents a continuing challenge to the ways in which the field of modernist studies conceives of itself.