Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature
ISSN: 2732-4605
Global Talent Academy

The Fascist Politics and Literary Criticism in Wyndham Lewis's *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936)

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Received: 23/09/2024
Accepted: 24/02/2025
Published: 01/03/2025

Volume: 6 Issue: 2

How to cite this paper: Gholami, M. (2025). The Fascist Politics and Literary Criticism in Wyndham Lewis's Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing (1936). *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, *6*(2), 47-56
DOI: https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsll.v6i2.336

Abstract

The current paper aims to examine Wyndham Lewis's provocative work entitled *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), through the lens of fascist politics and literary criticism. Not only does this paper analyze the pre-war hysteria prevalent in England at the time, but also emphasizes the importance of understanding the true nature of fascism and argues that efforts to achieve widespread recognition of this reality could prevent the World War II. In *Left Wings Over Europe*, Lewis portrays leftist ideologies as immobilizing forces responsible for initiating high political tension and navigating Europe toward gratuitous violence. The paper explains the ideological clashes and internal divisions among leftist groups, raising questions about the substance and effectiveness of their agendas through the dual lenses of fascist politics and literary criticism to accentuate how Lewis exploits the potentiality of literary form and rhetorical strategies to endorse his political ideology. It will also demonstrate that the discursive representation of a fascist model of authoritarian leadership and political opposition groups are inextricably bound up with each other to promote the values nationalism, the continuity and stability, and political preservation.

Keywords: Wyndham Lewis, Fascist Politics, Literary Criticism, Left Wings Over Europe

1. Introduction

Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), a Canadian-born British artist and writer, was the most valued exponent in the visual modernist art in the early twentieth century was notorious for his provocative and often controversial views on politics and art. Wyndham Lewis's political narrative *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936) develops an authentically sharp critique of left-wing ideologies and philosophies during a period of major political upheaval in Europe. Narrated in the atmosphere of heightened tension between the two parties of socialism and communism that would soon culminate in World War II, the political novel arouses Lewis's deep suspicion of leading Europe toward gratuitous conflict, but literally he states that, 'in this book I am writing against war' (Lewis, 1936). In this light, Lewis's polemic represents leftist movements not as forces for social progress, but as harbingers of doom, and war.

This is supported by the observation that various political ideologies—ranging from communism to liberalism to fascism—viewed the war as stemming from underlying political, socio-economic, and cultural factors. In *Left Wings over Europe: or,*

How to Make a War about Nothing (1936), Lewis emphasizes the importance of understanding the true nature of fascism and argues that efforts to achieve widespread recognition of this reality can prevent war. Lewis contends that in the event of a war, both the League of Nations and the Extreme Left bear responsibility for its occurrence. He suggests that France is likely to initiate the conflict by attacking Germany, prompting the Germans to hastily rearm themselves in defense against the French military (Maes-Jelinek, 2013). From 1918 to 1939, Germany engaged in a process known as German rearmament or remilitarization (Aufrüstung), which involved rebuilding its military capabilities. This action was in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, which mandated Germany's unilateral disarmament after World War I in an effort to prevent future conflicts. In March 1935, Adolf Hitler made a public declaration of his plans to revive the German air force, reintroduce conscription, and re-build the nation's military strength. He reassured other global leaders that these measures might not be deemed a breach of the Treaty of Versailles, characterizing them as purely defensive measures. In an address to the Reichstag, he emphasized, "The main consequence of every war is the destruction of the nation's finest. Germany seeks peace and desires peace." (Hitler & Baynes, 1942) He pledged that "the German government is willing to accept any restrictions that con-tribute to the elimination of the most formidable weapons, particularly those designed for aggression, such as heavy artillery and tanks." (Shirer, 1991)

And he concluded his speech, whoever ignites the flames of war in Europe seeks nothing but turmoil. However, we stand firmly convinced that our era will witness not the downfall but the revival of the West. It is our steadfast hope and unwavering belief that Germany will leave an enduring mark on this monumental endeavor. (Shirer, 1991)

The research paper, to put it into perspective, explores how Wyndham Lewis's critique of left-wing ideologies in *Left Wings Over Europe* can be understood through the lens of fascist politics and literary criticism. Needless to say, In *Left Wings over Europe: or, How to make a war about nothing* (1936), a book supposedly on 'perpetual peace' or 'indivisible peace' delves into the ideological clashes and internal divisions among leftist groups, raising questions about the substance and effectiveness of their agendas, and Lewis strongly criticizes the English government for its stance, asserting that England is opposing Germany's basic right as a sovereign state: the ability to fortify its own territory against potential attacks (Lewis, 1936). More abstractly, it can be stated that there is a welter of information on a growing antipathy towards the British government, which immobilized the state's ability to perform its vital organizing functions, in relation both to the socio-economic structure and to the larger business of maintaining cohesion in society under conditions of general crisis, such as ideological confusion, contradictions, and impracticality within certain leftist circles. In both *Left Wings over Europe* and *Count your Dead: They Are Alive!* Baldwin and the English conservatives (the "Bolsho-Tories") are pilloried by Lewis.

Therefore, this paper sets out the aims and objectives both to explore Lewis's political and literary motivations in narrating *Left Wings Over Europe*, placing emphasis on how his fascist ideology and politics put flesh on both the content and style of the text by means of analytical techniques/skills, and discursive patterns that Lewis employs, and to divulge details of socialism and communism, which is deeply intertwined with his advocacy for a fascist political alternative.

2. Literature Review

Wyndham Lewis's Left Wings Over Europe (1936) occupies a paradoxical space within the political discourse of 1930s Britain, reflecting his complex engagement with fascist ideology while simultaneously positioning himself as an independent critic of political extremism. Scholars have debated whether this work represents an outright endorsement of fascist politics or a contrarian critique of both leftist and right-wing dogma. While some, such as Paul Edwards, view it as part of Lewis's broader trajectory of reactionary politics (Edwards, 2000), others, like Alan Munton, suggest that Lewis's engagement with fascism was more opportunistic than ideological, making his position difficult to categorize (Munton,1976).

One of the key debates in the scholarship on Left Wings Over Europe concerns Lewis's rhetorical strategy. Nathan Waddell argues that Lewis employs a satirical mode that critiques both political extremes, particularly what he saw as the warmongering tendencies of left-wing intellectuals who, in his view, exaggerated the fascist threat to justify military intervention (Waddell, 2016). This aligns with Andrzej Gasiorek's interpretation, which situates Lewis within a broader tradition of modernist reactionaries who rejected mass politics while simultaneously benefiting from the authoritarian structures they critiqued (Gasiorek & Isobel, 2004). Moreover, Jeffrey Meyers highlights Lewis's polemical style, arguing that Left Wings Over Europe blurs the boundaries between political pamphlet and literary critique. Meyers contends that Lewis's attacks on leftist intellectuals and his defense of authoritarianism reflect his broader concerns about the erosion of artistic standards in the face of politicized mass culture. This perspective underscores the interplay between Lewis's literary aesthetics and his political ideology (Meyers, 2021).

My own reading builds upon this by arguing that Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing (1936) is best understood as an example of Lewis's politics of provocation—a strategy through which he deliberately positioned himself against dominant narratives, even if that meant flirting with fascist sympathies. His scathing critique of democracy, his dismissive attitude toward anti-fascist activism, and his insistence that war could be avoided if Britain and France were less antagonistic toward Hitler, all indicate that Lewis was less concerned with the moral implications of fascism than with opposing what he saw as a left-liberal consensus. This suggests that Lewis was not a fascist in the traditional sense but rather a reactionary elitist who found aspects of fascist governance appealing, particularly its authoritarian structure and disdain for mass culture.

Lewis's critique of leftist interventionism in Left Wings Over Europe extends beyond politics into the realm of literary criticism. He portrays left-wing intellectuals as sensationalists and propagandists, accusing them of using literature as a weapon

to stoke anti-fascist hysteria. In this regard, scholars like Trotter have suggested that Lewis saw himself as a "pure" literary critic, above the political fray, despite the overt political implications of his work (Trotter, 2003). However, I contend that Lewis's stance is inherently contradictory—his critique of leftist intellectuals mirrors fascist attacks on "degenerate" modernism and liberalism, even as he claims to oppose authoritarianism. His preference for order, hierarchy, and elite control over cultural production aligns with fascist aesthetic principles, raising the question of whether his criticism was truly neutral or whether it was shaped by an implicit ideological bias.

3. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework outlines the critical approaches employed to analyze Wyndham Lewis's *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), situating it within the intersections of fascist politics and literary modernism. The study engages with key theories in political philosophy, modernist aesthetics, and cultural critique to explore the complexities of Lewis's ideological positions and their impact on his literary production.

The analysis draws upon Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as a "palingenetic ultranationalism" to frame Lewis's engagement with authoritarian politics. Griffin's emphasis on the mythic and aesthetic dimensions of fascism provides a lens to examine Lewis's use of artistic and rhetorical strategies to critique and, at times, align with fascist ideals. In other terms, Roger Griffin's concept of "palingenetic ultranationalism" is pivotal for understanding the interplay of fascist politics in Wyndham Lewis's *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936). Griffin defines fascism as a political ideology rooted in a mythic vision of national rebirth (palingenesis), combined with an ultranationalist agenda that seeks to reconstruct the nation through radical transformation. This concept emphasizes the psychological and aesthetic appeal of fascism, which promises not only political rejuvenation but also cultural and spiritual renewal. As Griffin asserts that,

> It proposes that it is the modernist revolt against Modernity that provides the historical context and causal explanation for the palingenetic aspect of fascism's ideology, policies, and praxis – its drive to construct a new type of society and a new type of national character ('Man'). (Griffin, 2007, p. 348)

In the context of *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936), Griffin's theory sheds light on Lewis's engagement with the themes of decline, renewal, and the crises of modernity. Lewis's critique of leftist politics and his ambivalence toward liberal democracy resonate with the palingenetic narrative of fascism, which frames the existing socio-political order as degenerate and in need of heroic revitalization. Through Griffin's lens, Lewis's rhetorical strategies can be seen as aligning with the broader ideological motifs of fascist discourse, even as his work resists straightforward classification as fascist propaganda.

Furthermore, Griffin's emphasis on the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of fascism provides a valuable framework for analyzing Lewis's literary style. The use of satire, irony, and modernist aesthetics in *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936) reflects the functional duality of Lewis's position—both critiquing and echoing the cultural dynamics of his era. The palingenetic impulse, with its emphasis on heroic individualism and mythic regeneration, is mirrored in Lewis's portrayal of political figures and movements, as well as in his exploration of the artist's role in shaping societal transformation.

By applying Griffin's theory, this analysis uncovers the nuanced and often contradictory ways in which Lewis's modernist sensibilities intersect with the ideological undercurrents of fascism. It highlights how Lewis navigates the tensions between his avant-garde literary ambitions and the authoritarian narratives of his time, offering a complex portrait of a writer deeply entangled in the cultural and political debates of the 1930s.

4. Discussion

4.1. Fascism as an Offshoot of Socialism

Achieving lasting peace does not require radical social, economic, or cultural changes. Instead, it necessitates the discontinuation of nationalist competitions and the acknowledgment of valid national aspirations. Extreme conservatives such as Charles Maurras (the leading figure in the French nationalist movement Action Française, often considered to be a precursor of interwar fascism), Benito Mussolini (Founder of Italian Fascism and head of the Italian government from October 1922 until July 194), and Adolf Hitler (Leader of the Nazi Party and Reich chancellor between 1933 and 1945) (Blamires, 2006) tend to aggravate national opponents by asserting the unchallenged supremacy of their own association and union. Consequently, they glorify armed conflicts, whether in heroic defense of their homeland (Maurras) or in the conquest of "inferior" peoples and societies (Mussolini and Hitler) (Surette, 1994). In this fashion, the emergence of fascism as an offshoot of socialism in Europe—and generally equated with its Russian counterpart, Sovietism (Bridson, 2013)—prompted Lewis to narrate political commentaries of the existing political power in comparison with democratic systems, whose administration officials claimed to represent as a viable alternative, 'while in fact comprehensively and surreptitiously exploiting their citizens.' (Waddell, 2016, p. 88) While it is accurate that Fascism held significant influence in several European countries, its rise to power was facilitated, in part, by preceding campaigns advocating for Communist dictatorship. These campaigns effectively divided the working-class movements, making their overthrow feasible. Nazi doctrine and communist doctrine, in some respects, are akin to each other, as the Manchester Guardian (a 'Left Wing' British daily newspaper) characterized the society in Germany as 'a classless society' due largely to the 'authoritarianism of the government of Germany. But according to Lewis, 'the undeniable benefits of such an 'authoritarian' regime as that of Hitler or Mussolini can be secured without anyone being aware of the change!' He comments on the fact that fascism is a social revolution in contradistinction to a war as the Popular Front (French: *Front*

Populaire) and the socialists in England widely regard it as the beginning of a 'world revolution' going into action, i.e., a fascist war. In a general sense, Wyndham Lewis remarks that the denunciation of the Holy War against dictatorship is "not against all dictatorship; only against 'fascist' dictatorship" in order to adduce facts or reasons for the 'danger' and 'menace' of a 'fascist' regime to make war in which the Anglosaxony countries displayed the demented hostility. To resuscitate this preconceived notion of fascism, the principle of dictatorship, or of 'despotism' is meant to concentrate in the hands of one 'Despot', or 'tyrant' as much power as possible (Lewis, 1936).

In broad terms, Wyndham Lewis presents a world conspiracy theory of capital, predominantly Jewish and largely directed by Jews, in his work *The Doom of Youth* (1932). He criticizes the elevation of "Youth" to a singular value, asserting that the class struggle is supplanted by an age-based conflict. This transformation turns youth activism, economics, and politics into a political ideology, creating two opposing parties: the aged and the juvenile. The youth demographic in the Anglo-Saxon world has been politically manipulated. "Youth-politics" refers to the administration of this system of education and propaganda, wherein the average individuals are depict-ed as childish figures, akin to Ma and Pa Everyman (Lewis, 1932). More significantly, Lewis endeavors to delineate which references are specifically relevant to Big Business and Capitalism. He argues that there are two types of capital: one, characterized by individualism, termed "Conservativism," and the other, termed "Labour." (Constable, 2013) Stanley Baldwin[1] refers to it as "an insolent plutocracy": "The alternative form of capitalism, which opposes this individualistic capitalism of figures like Baldwin, Coty, and Ford, is international or imperialist in nature, and tends towards dictatorship. It emerges from the same era as Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini." (Lewis, 1932)

To clarify this point, in Lewis's work *The Doom of Youth* (1932), the Nazis are portrayed as a distinct entity, rejected by both forms of capitalism. Despite employing similar methods to seize political control, they are compelled to protect themselves against the dictatorial tendencies of capitalism, exemplified by Baldwin's brand of individualism, which Lewis critiques as "so hopelessly incompetent that it would be unwise to rely too much upon it." In this manner, both traditional capitalism, characterized by individualism that merely facilitates mediocrity rising to the top, and the new style, marked by "oppressive dictatorship that wages war on all individuals irrespective of their significance to society, are critiqued." It is crucial to highlight the interdependence between the new brand of capitalism, which through its political radicalism con-tributes significantly to the destabilization and paralysis of European societies and their social structures, and the traditional form represented by figures like Baldwin and Henry Ford. This dynamic underscores the emergence of anti-capitalist industrialism (Constable, 2013). The general principles of the old and the new Capitalism are more likely to express an ideological confrontation with each other in Germany (Lewis suggests that Hitlerism can be observed as a type of revolutionary capitalism.) However, Wyndham Lewis is drawing attention to the differences in national temperament and political inclinations between England and Germany, particularly in relation to authoritarian leadership. He suggests that while a "clever citizen" in England might have a slight inclination toward dictatorial governance, their preference would likely be tempered by a more pragmatic or restrained approach to authority. In contrast, he posits that a similar individual in Germany might be more drawn to the "passion and energy" of the Nazi movement—what he refers to as the "fine dictator-mindedness" of the Hitlerists (Lewis, 1932).

Equally significant was the development of fascist movements, which forged inseparable connections with the emergence of powerful totalitarian regimes. This context served to historicize and contextualize fascism's mythic appeal of national rejuvenation, mass mobilization, and a radical call for a new form of modernity. This evolution uniformly played dual roles: it facilitated the metapoliticization of fascism and diversified its ideological landscape (Griffin, 2008). In the light of such considerations, the ideological core of Fascism and Nazism, therefore, not only focused on the particular socio-political and historical circumstances but also represented a cohesive fusion of two prominent currents in modern political ideology: anti-materialist socialism and nationalism. The fascist agenda aimed to establish the groundwork for a post-liberal society, often manifesting in the creation of single-party states or nations. At its essence, fascism sought to distinguish itself by combining ideologically motivated Nazi elements with more opportunistic Fascist variants, epitomizing an endeavor to achieve political change via a populist approach characterized by elitism. Evidently, the viability of Fascism and Nazism, both as regimes and as movements, hinged on a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This included the presence of paramilitary elites such as the Schutzstaffel: "Protection Squadron"; SS, and Sturmabteilung: "Assault Division"; SA or the Brownshirts), as well as the charismatic leadership figures like der Führer Hitler. These elements were seen as the driving forces behind the reinstatement of cultural and socio-political orders within their respective stratified societies (Griffin, 2008).

At the pinnacle of the political stratosphere, fascism emerged as an ideological force giving rise to various forms and adaptations, navigating the complex realm of analogical thinking to define its essence as a generic force in the thrall of modernity or the emblem of modernism amidst the socio-political upheaval of the time. Despite its diverse manifestations, the foundational structure of fascism, on closer inspection, serves as a heuristic tool, embodying a blend of the myth of ethnic or national renewal and a feeling of national crisis. This framework attempts to present a new perspective on modernity or modernism while outlining radical visions for a different future or modernity in Europe to constitute the very epitome of the mythopoeic power of a new socio-political episode in the interwar period. Examining fascism as a coherent ideological and political entity reveals its influence in shaping Europe under fascist regimes such as Fascism and Nazism. These movements advocated for a unified community grounded in national socialist principles and a fervent belief in utopian axiomatic theories, racial superiority, and the pursuit of national rejuvenation. Moreover, fascism's philosophical framework not only envisioned a revitalized Italy with its diverse cultural components but also propagated Nazism as a centralized, ideologically homogeneous society (Griffin, 2008).

However, fascism, as the foundational ideology of a regime or movement, often referred to as the "fascist minimum," (Eatwell, 1996) forged a path of revolutionary nationalism that positioned itself as a 'Third Way' between communism and liberalism. It advocated for various social and political reforms aimed at realizing an ideal society and a distinct set of values, with the aim of energizing populist sentiments and garnering support. The creation of fascism as a novel ideological structure and the emergence of populist authoritarian states involved a strategic campaign promoting fascist dynamics, youth mobilization, the enduring appeal of ultra-right palingenetic myths, ritualistic political styles, and the cult of the leader, epitomized by figures like Mussolini and Hitler. The collaboration within the fascist movement sought to evoke themes of demise and resurgence, the concept of total decline and revitalization, which were central to ultra-nationalism and underwent periodic transformations. In Europe, fascism underwent in the throes of profound ideological and tactical shifts, demonstrating its ability to adapt and evolve, leading to various forms and expressions amid the tumultuous period of the world wars (Griffin, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge the significant impact of fascist regimes in Italy (Fascism) and Germany (Nazism), which capitalized on a range of unique opportunities. These regimes not only sought to realize their vision of a post-liberal system through factors such as leadership qualities, methods and organizational approaches but also aimed to reinforce the perception of a revolutionary and consistent ultranationalist myth. Mussolini's autocratic regime aimed to address Italy's longstanding issues of economic stagnation, political unrest, and social injustice by leveraging the myth of its Roman heritage. Similarly, Hitler's leadership capitalized on the growing influence of the 'national reawakening' movement, transforming what was initially a backward-looking organization into a respected ideological force deeply rooted in ultranationalist mythologies, envisioning an ideal societal and civilizational state (Griffin, 2013). The rise of fascism in Italy and Germany heavily relied on the ideological commitment and ambitions of its founding members, offering the promise of uniting diverse elements towards a common purpose (Platt, 1980) to formulate the cultural-symbolic dimension of the movement on 'the human need for self-transcendence.' This was underscored by Arnaldo Mussolini's declaration in the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* [The People of Italy], stating that the fascist spirit represented a new civilization based on the principles of authority, order, and justice (Ledeen, 1972). The complexity of fascism lies in its multifaceted nature, deeply intertwined with social, economic, political, and cultural factors. Roger Griffin emphasizes this complexity in his work *Fascism (Key Concepts in Political Theory)* (2018), highlighting the profound socio-economic and political crises that fueled the need for populist energies of renewal, ultimately aiming for the rebirth of the ultranation.

4.2. The Integration of Fascism, Nazism and Communism

In a similar vein, Fascism, as a comprehensive term for populist palingenetic ultranationalism, emerged as the initial well-structured conceptual and theoretical framework for this novel ideological amalgamation, aiming to lay the groundwork for establishing a regime capable of orchestrating a national political transformation. Its specific goals included bridging the gap between various social relationships, from a minimalist perspective of fascism as a political ideology, and understanding fascism's complex relationship with modernity as a heuristic tool. Notably, Fascism's coexistence of nostalgia for the bygone Roman era and its embrace of mythopoeic narratives are believed to contribute to the nation's rebirth or renewal. This synthesis often highlights the deeply mythic palingenetic aspect of fascism, emphasizing the inseparable link between fascist destruction and creation. To the fascist mindset, the dialectical interplay between decay and renewal, along with the stark realities of degeneration and regeneration (including programs of euthanasia and genocide), shed light on the nation's rebirth myth projected by fascism and similar movements. Essentially, having impregnated 'the whole people' with a core of palingenetic ultranationalism and effected the Third Rome and the Third Reich, revolutionary nationalists such as Mussolini's movement and Hitler's Nazism aimed to ascend to power by addressing the historical circumstances of socio-political crisis and advocating for a radical new start, —characterized as a "new Italy" and a "new Germany"—to appeal to the masses of political and religious creeds. Moreover, the underlying relationship and fundamental worldview or 'total ideology' (German: *Weltanschauung*)[2] (Michael & Doerr, 2002) between Fascism and Nazism were emphasized through Fascist rituals and the underlying reasoning behind the ceremonial approach of Fascist politics and nationalism, aiming to instigate a collective revolution of consciousness in a new era (Griffin, 2003).

Parenthetically, in historical context, Nazism can be viewed as a variant of generic fascism, falling under the broader umbrella of political religions within the framework of 'biopolitics,' encompassing political religion and authoritarian governments like the USSR, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy. In this sense, to draw a distinction between ideologically ineliminable components of fascism– such as 'modernity', 'temporality', 'ultra-nationalism', and 'palingenesis', the Inter-War Years (1919-1938) served as the fertile ground for the emergence of various fascist movements, culminating in the emergence of fascist movements in Italy and Germany, marked by the establishment of organized, efficient, and militaristic states and extensive political propaganda efforts. This rise was fueled by a perceived crisis of modernity and a broad search for values of spirituality and organic organizational structures to counter the perceived negative impacts of rationalism and capitalism on society (Antliff, 2002). Moreover, Fascism's morphological nature, spanning social, political, and cultural dimensions, heralded a period of national rebirth characterized by a revolutionary fervor seeking to rejuvenate cultural, national, religious, or ethnic identity. This era, spanning from 1919 to 1945, represented a distinctly modern political ideology and a self-defined initiative striving to persuasively establish comprehensive utopian communities amidst a backdrop of competing values and systems (Griffin, 2008).

In effect, Fascism, characterized by its extreme nationalism rooted in a revolutionary utopian vision, is intricately linked to the notion of a robust, heroic organic entity, shaping ultranationalism or the concept of the "imagined community." With this

end in view, the evolution of fascism involved the manifestation of "palingenetic ultra-nationalism" across various forms, from cultural movements with metapolitical aspirations to revolutionary socio-political practices. Fascist movements aimed to establish a strong connection between communism and liberalism, ultimately leading to a global conflict during World War Two (from September 1939 to August 1945), which served to bolster fascism as a palingenetic ultra-nationalism, and buttress a powerful integrating ideology and its attendant tactics. The core essence of fascist ideology lies in the formation of a distinct essence, largely propagated through the political rhetoric of key fascist figures such as Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Oswald Mosley[3]. These figures formed the backbone of interwar fascist movements, committing their respective nations to the pursuit of utopian myths centered around a "regenerated" community and the establishment of a national renaissance through an "alternative modernity" distinct from that envisioned by democratic, liberal, Marxist, and communist societies/perspectives. That is to say, Fascism is perceived as a driving force in the modern world, underpinned by a global system of progressive modernization and modernity. It exploits common features gathered heuristically and presents a comprehensive solution to modernity through the gradual maturation of intellectual and social aspects, instilling a sense of assurance akin to a staged act of faith, often referred to as "political religion." (Griffin, 2008).

It is undoubtedly plausible to assert that Nazism and Fascism share significant commonalities, particularly in their mythic emphasis on palingenetic ultranationalism and a variant of generic fascism that frequently references regeneration and rebirth, often manifesting as the concept of the "revolutionary festival" (Griffin, 2013). At the heart of the palingenetic creed lies generic fascism, inherently forward-looking, invoking core national myths of cultural and political achievements from historical or mythic epochs, and entailing a protracted struggle for a new civilization, national community, and conception of humanity (Griffin, 2008). The Nazis embarked on a mission to introduce a modern concept infused with cultural renewal, heralding the birth of a new era—a "cultural revolution" that reshaped fundamental human experiences and expressions (Kern, 2003), with the aim of instituting a new epic sense of national history and bringing a sense of ecstatic rebirth into being through providing fertile ground for the widespread fascist quest to regenerate time and subsequently the nation. In line with the Fascist vision of political revolution and renewal, Joachim Fest's *Hitler* (2013) asserts that underlying such declarations was the idea of a monumental turning point in world history, marking the dawn of a new era and the recalibration of destinies (Fest, 2013). To substantiate this point, Nazism, as a distinct form of fascism, played a crucial role in revitalizing the purportedly "eternal" values of the nation or race, fueling a process of palingenesis geared towards forging an alternative modernity anchored in a mythologized Golden Age from the nation's history (Griffin, 2008).

Arguably in heuristic terms, the emerging consensus regarding generic fascism highlights its revolutionary and populist drive towards national rejuvenation and the perceived eradication of national decline—an ideological cornerstone inherently present in Nazism, a variant of fascism (Kershaw, 2015). In a general sense, economic, socio-political, and cultural concerns underpin the overarching aim of ushering in a new epoch in the history of Germany and Europe, with the ultimate utopian goal in mind. This analytical framework, centered on the ideological core of "palingenetic ultranationalism," provided an ideal environment for fascism to propagate an idealistic vision of a charismatic mass movement across Italy and Germany during the interwar period. The emergence of this new consensus, with its implications, seeks to elucidate the mystification and aestheticization of fascist ideology, portraying ultranationalism in Germany and Italy through valuable insights into the governments of Mussolini and Hitler, namely Fascism and Nazism, respectively. Thus, fascism channels its palingenetic aspirations onto the nation, depicting this ideological core as a unified or ethnic group with distinct attributes (Griffin, 2008).

In essence, the upshot of this research is that various core elements of fascism, characterized by its distinctiveness, coherence, and uniformity as an ideology, consistently refer to its monumental political myth of national rejuvenation, the revitalization of the national community, and the secular orientation of its political ideology. This perspective asserts that Nazism epitomizes generic fascism, highlighting fascism's capacity to conceive of a regime as a modern iteration of millenarianism—a worldview that ought to be regarded as a lasting attribute of contemporary political ethos. As a matter of fact, the term "political myth" portrays fascism's revolutionary campaign for significant restructuring of the centralized nation-state, rooted in a secular palingenetic myth, stemming from a fundamental aspect of human mythic imagination in a secular guise within the "modern age" (Griffin, 2013). Anthony D. Smith, in *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (1979), acknowledges the anti-positivist revolution of fascism is mainly viewed as a fresh strategy to address the enduring nationalist challenge of societal deterioration and decline, correlating it with the concept of the "new fascist man" (Smith, 1979). Aligning with the ethos of fascism, which encompasses a comprehensive societal vision encompassing a "revolt against bourgeois decadence" and an uprising against both the bourgeois state and established socialist parties (Sternhell, 1994), the central thrust of fascist beliefs lies in recognizing the pivotal role of the "palingenetic myth" as a revolutionary force aimed at dismantling existing "decadent" structures to establish radical new institutions diverging from liberal, socialist, conservative, and religious ideologies.

To put some points more succinctly, Fascism's fundamental characteristics, as viewed through the lens of the new ideal type, aim to align with the revitalization of longstanding national traditions (such as the Roman Empire, the Aryan heritage, and chivalric culture) and the revival of a legendary golden age with a deeply mythic essence (Blinkhorn, 2003). Thus, Fascism's essentially palingenetic nature seeks to construct a novel societal paradigm, leveraging cultural achievements to evoke a strategy for regenerative ethos, laying the groundwork for national rebirth through a literal restoration of past eras. Fascism and Nazism, however, were proactive in rallying all national energies toward shared goals, characterized by the development of new political, economic, and cultural structures propelled by Fascism's populist ultranationalism as a revolutionary force. Consequently, the primary aim of a fascist regime, within this conceptual framework, is to forge a symbiotic relationship between a robust state

as the guardian of national identity and a sense of exceptionalism (embodied in fascism's ultranationalist myth) to cultivate an "irresistible" mass movement, necessitating large-scale reeducation, propaganda, and social control measures (Griffin, 2013).

Furthermore, the protean or 'polymorphous' quality of fascist ideology is intricately intertwined with three pivotal elements: (i) the concept of rebirth, (ii) populist ultranationalism, and (iii) the notion of decadence (Griffin, 2013). These components delineate the national myth of fascism, encompassing a variety of foundational myths, intuitions, and instincts (such as the will to power and the concept of blood) expressed through a distinct national language that weaves together various strands of national history with profound symbolic significance. Within the fascist worldview, permutations of ultranationalist palingenetic myths have permeated diverse political visions, ranging from socialist to ultra-conservative, thereby irrevocably reshaping the landscape of social ideals intertwined with liberal democracy. At the vanguard of the fascist revolution, the entire 'national community' was to be culturally and socio-politically mobilized by the presence of populist support, the fascist contingent in alliance with militant ultranationalists to necessarily embrace the vision of the historic German nation-state, the supranational Nordic and Aryan race– as in the case of the 'white race' posited by Aryanism, white supremacism and Universal Nazism (Griffin, 2018). In particular, the ideology of revolutionary (palingenetic) ultranationalism and the framework for national rebirth are tailored to fill a visceral longing for instituting sweeping reforms and regeneration, enabling a fascist regime to conjure up images/thoughts of globalizing elements such as a racial wellspring of cultural creativity and heroism, the myths of imperialism of National Socialism, the architect of a vast new civilization based on race, the renewal of an ancient period of greatness, global expansion program as a framework for future wars, and spawned grandiose imaginings of the national community (Thies, 2012).

4.3. The Fascist Politics of Wyndham Lewis

In November 1930, during a trip to Germany, two months after the elections where the Nazi party garnered over six million votes (a significant increase from the May 1928 election where they received 2.6 percent of the vote, rising to 18.3 percent in the September 1930 election and securing the second highest number of seats in the Reichstag), reflections on Hitler were featured as magazine articles in Time and Tide in January and February 1931. In March 1931, a book titled *Hitler* was published, serving as a tribute to fascism and its adherents. It portrayed Adolf Hitler, the mysterious leader, as a figure of peace and exceptional organizational skills. The book emphasized the perceived threat faced by members of his party from communist street violence. It also captured the tense atmosphere of the era, akin to the charged ambiance depicted in "Babylon Berlin." Through wit and humor, it analyzed the country on the brink of what was dubbed as 'the most bloodless revolution on record':

> It may turn out to be the most bloodless colonial expedition on record —just as the recent revolution in Germany was the most bloodless revolution on record — or it may not. (The regard for human life displayed by fascist and Nazi, compared with the extreme disregard for life of the communist, from Lenin, Bela Kun, or Borodin downwards, is neither here nor there: we have not got to occupy ourselves with that.) (Lewis, 1936, p. 163)

Lewis contends in *Hitler* (1931) that his endorsement of Nazism stems from pragmatic considerations rather than ideological conviction. He suggests that under present urgent circumstances, Hitler might genuinely represent the most viable choice for the German people. Lewis expresses this viewpoint by stating:

> Really the point is, I think, that we 'Aryans,' or whatever we are, are faced with extinction. We cannot afford just now to be philosophers, nor yet humanitarians. No one will be philosophical, nor yet humanitarian, with us. Yes, the above argument of Hitler's is an argument for an emergency. Everything now almost, since the War, seems a matter of life and death. It is not an argument for the scientific mind, but for the political mind. (Lewis, 1931, p. 127)

The political landscape of 1930s Europe was highlighted by the advent of totalitarian regimes, increasing tensions between fascist and communist movements, and widespread fears of another global conflict, notably World War II. Against this backdrop, Wyndham Lewis published *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), a work that reflected his growing disillusionment with left-wing ideologies and his anxiety over the political trajectory of Europe. Lewis, a highly polemical avant-garde advocate of fascism and modernism within the literary sphere, had a complex relationship with politics, often moving between different ideological status. Initially expressing sympathetic views towards fascism, he viewed it as an indispensable part to communism, which he believed was immobilizing Europe. However, by the mid-1930s, his viewpoints became more controversial, and his criticism of both leftist and right-wing movements deepened:

> If you are a socialist, you regard the prospect of a new Great War, apparently, without misgiving — even with a certain stern anticipatory relish. But, whereas there is only one sort of communist, there are many different sorts of socialist: so this last statement has to be qualified considerably, to allow for that fact. There are many socialists who would welcome a new Great War as little as would the extremist of the 'right'. (Lewis, 1936, p. 50)

In this fashion, *Left Wings Over Europe* was a product of Lewis's anxiety that left-wing ideologies, particularly socialism and communism, were driving Europe toward gratuitous violence. His critique was not merely political but also deeply impressed by his first-hand experiences, including the trauma of World War I, which left him vehemently opposed to further conflict. In this political writing, Lewis manifests leftist movements as insensible and manipulative forces that were sowing discord across the continent. His political rhetoric is marked by a sense of paranoic fear and hatred, as he attributes vast, conspiratorial power to socialist and communist warring factions, which he asserted were orchestrating Europe's descent into chaotic and problematic situation. As Lewis asserts that Mr. Baldwin, in his speech, strongly refuted claims made by Daudet that Britain's engagement in the dispute was navigated by two main motives:

> Fear to lose the sources of the Nile, and (2) the desire to defend parliamentary government, of which Mussolini has got rid,' were the two causes actuating Mr. Baldwin in this dispute, Daudet declared. Both of these motives Mr. Baldwin hotly repudiates; but to hear the second of them mentioned particularly incenses him. 'It is spread about in some places abroad,' he told his audience, in his Bewdley speech of October 19th, 1935, 'that one of the main objects in the line of action taken up by this country is to fight and overthrow fascism in Italy. That is a lie of a dangerous kind. What government Italy has is a matter for Italy alone. (Lewis, 1936, p. 72)

In other words, Lewis's paranoic fear is conspicuous in his description of left-wing movements as the driving forces playing behind the scenes to promote governments through political manipulation, provoke wars, and destabilize Europe. He consistently casts socialism and communism as veiled threats, much larger and more insidious than they were in reality. In actual fact, One of the key elements of Lewis's critique is in the way Lewis dehumanizes the political opponents he is criticizing, as he stated in his manifesto of Vorticism', 'Dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World.' (Lewis, 1914, p. 141). Lewis's writing often attributes almost superhuman powers to left-wing movements, implying that they have control over media (propaganda), governments, and public opinion to a degree that verges on the fantastical. In *Left Wings Over Europe*, socialism and communism are described as being not only intellectually flawed but fundamentally deceptive and threatening to the very fabric of European civilization:

> But these honourable exceptions should not blind us to the fact that such 'freedom' is precarious, even as Lord Bryce pointed out …. The tendency is all in the opposite direction to this sort of competitive 'lone hand' independence. More and more a uniformity is being created in the field of journalism which must result in something almost indistinguishable from the controlled opinion of a One Man State. Only one control, in the great western democracies, when it is quite complete, will be operated in the deceptive name of traditional 'freedom'. (Lewis, 1936, p. 104)

However, Lewis's critique is also enlightened by his first-hand experiences and disillusionment with the ever-changing modern world, particularly his traumatic wartime experience from World War I as a bombardier at Royal Garrison Artillery. His fear of a second war heavily aroused his vehement opposition to left-wing political ideologies, which he witnessed as catalysts for future violence. In this literary context, Lewis's paranoia can be understood as a defensive reaction/mechanism to his own wartime experiences of violence and political instability, leading to WWII. The First World War had shattered his belief in progress, and his writings in the 1930s reflect a grim sense of foreboding of repeating the same faux pas. Lewis's anxieties about the political climate of the 1930s led him to observe the ideological/political conflicts of his time in apocalyptic terms. As Lewis directly contributed the abstract ideas of nineteenth-century liberal ideology to the current situation:

> The abstract conceptions of nineteenth-century liberalist ideology have directly led to this situation. It is a situation in which, busy with theory, we have lost touch with the concrete and the real. We have freed with one hand and enslaved with the other. We have one-sidedly, and superficially, applied our principles: to-day our principles, since we do not 'move with the times', cause us to be terribly unjust. (Lewis, 1936, p. 316)

In a similar vein, Lewis's critique of left-wing ideologies also reflects his hardened skepticism of modernity and improvement of the ever-changing world. For Lewis, socialism and communism were symbolic of a modern world/life that he believed was becoming increasingly mechanized, homogenized, and detached from individual genius and creativity. In *Left Wings Over Europe*, Lewis positions left-wing movements as part of a larger process of dehumanization, aligning them with the forces of industrialization and bureaucratization that he loathed. Interestingly enough, despite his fears of socialism and communism, Lewis's critique in *Left Wings Over Europe* is not entirely consistent, swaying from at different points in his profession, where he expressed admiration for aspects of fascism and authoritarianism, ideologies that also relied on forms of political paranoia. This inconsistency accentuates the complexity of Lewis's political thought and suggests that his critique of left-wing ideologies was driven more by personal anxieties and ideological confusion than by a coherent political philosophy.

In fact, Wyndham Lewis's *Left Wings Over Europe* provides a blatant example of how the paranoid style in politics can mould intellectual discourse among people. Lewis's work, written in the shadow of war and political turmoil, reflects a wider cultural anxiety about the direction of Europe in the 1930s, as well as a deep-seated fear of ideological/political conflict. This analysis also underscores the importance of personal experience in shaping political paranoia, as Lewis's own wartime trauma and disillusionment played a significant role in his depiction of left-wing ideologies as malevolent forces. As he lamented the fact that,

> Is it possible that any British conservatism, however liberal, or left-wing, in its complexion, should contemplate another war to end war, in which great numbers of Englishmen would be condemned to death or mutilation in battle — apart from the spectacular slaughter to be expected on the 'home front' —all to help forward 'world-revolution' — this bloodstained 'rationalization' of human society we call communism? (Lewis, 1936, p. 191)

In the 1930s, Europe was stuck at a crossroads, with rising tensions between fascism on the right and socialism and communism on the left. For modernist intellectuals like Wyndham Lewis, the ideological and political stakes were high, and the specter of socialism and communism loomed on the horizon. These left-wing ideologies, especially communism, were perceived as veiled threats to Western civilization, national identity, and individual freedom. This fear was not unique to Lewis but was shared by many conservative and reactionary thinkers who observed communism as an international force seeking to destroy the traditional social order. According to this perspective, Communism, in particular, manifested a radical break from the past. It was closely linked with the 1917 Russian Revolution, which had ousted the tsarist regime and established the Soviet Union. To figures like Lewis, the spread of communism threatened to dismantle the nation-state and impose a collectivist,

authoritarian regime across Europe. Lewis saw communism not only as a political and economic system but as a socio-cultural threat that could erase individuality and creativity—core elements of his intellectual philosophy. As he contends that,

> If you destroy (at enormous cost in life and treasure) 'fascism' in Europe, what then? Shall we all live happily ever after? And along with that question it must be your duty to ask: 'If you are prepared to take such terrible risks to destroy "fascism", why have you worried so little about Russian communism?' For if the Germans are aiming at a totalitarian, a State Church, the communists want no Church — 'no God. (Lewis, 1936, p. 129-30)

On the other hand, socialism, although less radical than communism, was also seen by Lewis as a risky ideology. In Britain and across Europe, socialist parties were gaining influence, advocating for workers' rights, economic equality, and the expansion of the welfare state. To Lewis, these attainable goals, while ostensibly noble, were part of a broader movement that could undermine the freedom of the individual and lead to the homogenization of society:

> Now, socialism differs from communism, on this national issue, rather as the Church of England differs from the Church of Rome. Socialism, in the last analysis, must be internationalist too: it can draw no distinction between the coolie and the British Workman. But in practice it is possible to forget this too-exacting brotherhood. Some latitude is left for *Blutsgefuhl*. (Lewis, 1936, p. 244-45)

To this extent, Lewis's phobia also extended to his perception of international politics. He believed that Britain was being sucked into war by left-wing elements, who were exploiting the threat of fascism as a pretext both to advance their own agenda and fulfil their needs. Lewis's conviction that war was being orchestrated and arranged by communist and socialist pawns reflects this worldview, where every political development is interpreted through the lens of conspiracy and betrayal:

> If it were announced to-morrow on the wireless that an act of war had been committed by Italy against Great Britain, and that Great Britain was putting herself in a posture of legitimate defence, not a murmur would be raised — no questions would be asked, or, indeed, could be asked. Great Britain would be at war, and there would be an end of the matter. (Lewis, 1936, p. 106-7)

In addition to his fears of political subversion, Lewis's politics of paranoia were also driven by a deep-seated anxiety about the decline of Western culture. Like many modernist intellectuals, Lewis viewed the rise of mass culture, technology, and political collectivism as a threat to the individuality and creativity that he valued. He feared that left-wing ideologies, particularly communism, were eroding the cultural and intellectual achievements of Europe by promoting conformity and mediocrity. In the broadest sense, this fear of cultural decline is central to Lewis's critique of left-wing politics in *Left Wings Over Europe*. He saw socialism and communism not only as political threats but as existential dangers to the very fabric of Western civilization. His paranoia about cultural homogenization reflects a broader concern among modernist writers of the time, who often felt alienated by the mass politics and cultural shifts of the early 20th century.

5. Conclusion

In *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), Lewis portrayed left-wing regimes, particularly socialism and communism, as major culprits responsible for escalating tensions and crises in Europe, thereby dragging the continent toward unnecessary war. In this fashion, this work, driven by Lewis's frustration with leftist politics and democratic socialism, manifested conspiratorial forces of unreliable governments and the authorities capable of reshaping society through revolution, chaos, and manipulation. To do so, the research paper applied a dual lens of political and literary analysis to flesh out how Lewis's fascist politics permeate both the form and content of *Left Wings Over Europe* to disapprove socialism and to approve fascism as the only means of preserving national sovereignty and cultural identity.

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Endnotes

[1] Stanley Baldwin, (1867—1947), British Conservative politician, three times prime minister between 1923 and 1937; he headed the government during the General Strike of 1926, the Ethiopian crisis of 1935, and the abdication crisis of 1936.
[2] The Nazi worldview that involved race, character, and destiny (Rasse, Charakter, und Schicksal) as a value system for the German people.
[3] Oswald Mosley, in full Sir Oswald Ernald Mosley, 6th Baronet, (1896—1980), English politician who was the leader of the British Union of Fascists from 1932 to 1940 and of its successor, the Union Movement, from 1948 until his death.