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Aryanism and Anti-Semitism: An Overview of Wyndham Lewis's *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939)

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Abstract

This paper examines Wyndham Lewis's critical engagement with race politics in his 1939 polemical texts *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?*, with particular focus on the themes of Aryanism and anti-Semitism. Written at the height of Nazi influence, Lewis's works reflect a complex interaction with the racial ideologies of the period. In *The Hitler Cult*, Lewis analyzes the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi movement, shedding light on how the doctrine of Aryan supremacy was employed to legitimize a radical reordering of society and the conceptualization of a "new human." In *The Jews, Are They Human?*, Lewis turns his attention to the pervasive anti-Semitism of the era, interrogating the prejudices that underpinned Nazi rhetoric and policy. This paper explores how Lewis, through irony and critical distance, exposes the contradictions and dangers embedded in fascist racial doctrines.

Keywords: Race Politics, Racial Ideologies, Adolf Hitler, Aryan Supremacy, New Human

1. Introduction

Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) was the most valued exponent in the visual modernist art and literary movement known as "Vorticism." Notorious for his role as a polemical avant-garde advocate of fascism and modernism, Wyndham Lewis later sought to revise his earlier political views, particularly in light of his growing isolation. As the risk of World War II became increasingly certain by 1939, Lewis endeavoured to distance himself from his controversial past life by publishing two significant works, *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and *The Jews: Are They Human?* (1939), respectively. The former was a rejection of Hitler that began to mitigate his tarnished reputation, while the latter acted as a satire on anti-Semitism, further illustrating his effort to break from prior associations. Narrated on the threshold of the war, these polemical books reveal Lewis's critique of the dominant ideologies of his time, particularly Nazi Aryanism and anti-Semitism, which would ultimately contribute to the horrors of the Holocaust.

In this fashion, in *The Hitler Cult*, Wyndham Lewis develops a scathing critique of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime of the elimination of the Jews and the purification and even the salvation of the German people. Initially, Lewis had expressed some level of ambivalence towards Hitler in his earlier work, *Hitler* (1931), where he explored Hitler's potential as a political leader amidst the uncertainties of the early 1930s. However, by 1939, Lewis's views, despite this forward-oriented revolutionary agenda, had significantly shifted, influenced by the Nazi regime's increasingly aggressive policies and actions towards the vehement anti-Semitic Aryan myth, the adoption of anti-Semitic Blood and Soil (German: *Blut und Boden*)[1] within the National

Socialist program, and the expansive territorial ambitions (Griffin, 2008). According to this perspective, Lewis condemns the totalitarian nature of Nazi dictatorial rule, highlighting the cult-like worship of Hitler and the dangers it poses to individual freedom and democratic values to found not only a new society but also a new type of human being (Bendersky, 2020).

In stark contrast to his conception of the Aryan *Herrenvolk* (master race) in *The Hitler Cult*, Lewis's *The Jews, Are They Human?* Wrestles with the issue of anti-Semitism head-on. This political writing challenges the pervasive antisemitic attitudes of the time, advocating the humanity and rights of Jewish people. Lewis's argument is a direct response to the dehumanizing propaganda spread by the Nazis and other antisemitic groups. In fact, Lewis scrutinizes the roots of anti-Semitism, debunking common myths and stereotypes that fueled hostility against Jews. He advocates for tolerance and understanding, highlighting the shared humanity between Jews and non-Jews. This work is notable for its empathetic stance and its call for a more just and humane society, standing in opposition to the racist ideologies promoted by the Nazis.

To fulfill this dual purpose, the present paper aims at highlighting the complexities and contradictions within Lewis's engagement with, and eventual rejection of, Aryan supremacist and anti-Semitic ideologies. On one hand, *The Hitler Cult* (1939) portrays a total critique of the accession of Adolf Hitler to power and the Nazi regime towards the eradication of the Jews as the 'destroyer of the Aryan ethos' (Lewis, 1939a, p. 18), which shows a clear departure from Lewis earlier unwavering loyalty to Hitler, Nazi racial theories, and German Nazism. On the other hand, *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) reveals Lewis's strong opposition to anti-Semitism, advocating for the recognition of Jewish humanity and rights.

2. Literature Review

The ambivalent relationship between Wyndham Lewis and fascism—particularly his engagement with Nazi ideology and Jewish identity—has long occupied a contentious place in literary and political criticism. Scholarly interest has often concentrated on the contradiction between Lewis's aesthetic modernism and his flirtation with authoritarian ideologies, especially as reflected in his 1939 pamphlets *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?*. This literature review surveys critical perspectives that investigate Lewis's views on Aryanism and anti-Semitism, framing these within broader debates about modernist politics, racial ideology, and the aesthetics of fascism.

Foundational readings such as Paul Edwards's *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000) and Andrzej Gasiorek's *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (2004) provide essential context for Lewis's intellectual evolution from Vorticist experimentations to his engagement with fascism. Edwards regards Lewis's 1939 pamphlets as strategic attempts to distance himself from National Socialism while maintaining an oppositional stance toward liberal democracy. In contrast, Gasiorek focuses on Lewis's fluctuating ideological positions, reading them as symptomatic of modernism's larger discontents.

Moreover, in the post-2010 wave of scholarship, Tyrus Miller (2015) deepens the theoretical framing of Lewis's modernism by analyzing its entanglement with authoritarian aesthetics. In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, Miller situates Lewis within the broader dynamics of fascist cultural politics, arguing that Lewis's aesthetic radicalism often parallels the structural logic of fascism despite his rhetorical denials.

Adding nuance to Lewis's racial politics, Andrew Hewitt's *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (1993) examines the aesthetics of homogeneity and purity within fascist discourse. Although Hewitt does not concentrate exclusively on Lewis, his work offers a critical vocabulary for interpreting *Aryanism* as an aestheticized racial doctrine—a concept that becomes relevant in analyzing *The Hitler Cult* (1939) (Hewitt, 1993).

Nonetheless, recent contributions since 2020 have expanded the theoretical and archival reach of Lewis studies. Nathan Waddell's *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (2020) offers a critical account of the contradictory utopianism in Lewis's thought, especially his attempts to synthesize hierarchical racial ideologies with a disdain for mob democracy. Waddell argues that Lewis's critique of both fascism and liberalism constructs a paradoxical position that is neither fully complicit nor wholly resistant. Further, Sasha Colby (2022) in her essay "Modernist Apologia: Wyndham Lewis and the Problem of Fascist Renunciation" (*Modernism/modernity*), revisits Lewis's 1939 works to assess the sincerity of his supposed ideological reversal. She notes that While Lewis appears to defend Jews, the persistent use of caricature and essentialist language often undermines this stance. His satirical tone oscillates between critique and complicity, leaving open the question of whether the reader is meant to take his defense sincerely or ironically (Colby, 2022). Colby concludes that Lewis's renunciation is more rhetorical than philosophical, driven by political expediency rather than ethical conviction.

Together, these works chart the conflicting ideological terrain of Lewis's political pamphlets, particularly his unresolved stance on Aryanism and Jewish identity. While older scholarship emphasized his turn away from fascism, recent work points toward the enduring tensions and subterranean affinities between his modernist aesthetics and authoritarian ideologies. These studies provide the necessary framework for analyzing how *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?* operate not only as political texts but as rhetorical performances of ideological contradiction.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within the broader theoretical discourse on the interconnection of modernism, fascism, and race, particularly focusing on Wyndham Lewis's ambivalent political stance in his late 1930s nonfictional works. The theoretical

framework draws from three key domains: Fascist aesthetics and ideology, Race theory and anti-Semitism in interwar Europe, and Modernist politics and self-positioning.

Central to this analysis is Andrew Hewitt's notion of *fascist modernism* as explored in *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (1993). Hewitt argues that fascism is not only a political ideology but also an aesthetic regime—one that structures political experience as form and spectacle (Hewitt, 1993). In applying Hewitt's theory, this paper reads Lewis's *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?* as attempts to navigate the aesthetic grammar of fascism without fully endorsing its ideological core. Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism* (1999) also informs this approach by emphasizing how late modernist writers oscillate between avant-garde experimentation and political conservatism. Miller's view allows for a nuanced reading of Lewis's rhetorical strategies—satirical, polemical, and self-distancing—as mechanisms of both participation in and critique of fascist discourse.

Furthermore, Nathan Waddell (2020) and Paul Edwards (2000) provide critical groundwork for understanding Lewis's shifting political affiliations and authorial self-fashioning. Waddell, in particular, reads Lewis's late works as politically ambivalent, noting how Lewis strives to maintain the image of the autonomous intellectual while reacting to the pressures of ideological polarization. Edwards, also, contributes to this analysis by mapping the trajectory of Lewis's ideological transformations across the 1930s, especially in response to the rise of Hitler and British appeasement politics. These studies support a reading of *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?* as politically motivated rhetorical interventions that both challenge and obscure fascist and anti-Semitic narratives.

Through this multi-faceted theoretical lens, the paper approaches Wyndham Lewis's 1939 pamphlets not simply as political declarations, but as ideologically and aesthetically charged texts negotiating the terrain between Aryanist mythologies and liberal anti-Semitism[2]— that is, the systemic exclusions and assumptions within liberal ideologies that marginalized Jewish identity even while professing universalist ideals— and between modernist autonomy and fascist propaganda. These frameworks enable a critical understanding of how Lewis's works participate in, resist, or reconfigure the ideological landscapes of interwar Europe.

4. Discussion

The ideological ambiguity in Wyndham Lewis's late-1930s political narratives—*The Hitler Cult* (1939) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939)—offers a compelling case for considering the tension between Aryanist idealism and anti-Semitic propaganda. While Lewis appears to critique the cult of personality (heroworship) surrounding Adolf Hitler and offers a partial defense of Jews against Nazi racism, his engagement with Aryan discourse reveals deeper ideological entanglements that resist a simple reading of either denunciation or complicity.

In fact, in *The Hitler Cult* (1939), Lewis satirically dismantles Hitler's public image as a messianic figure, aligning with what Roger Griffin refers to as the "charismatic palingenetic myth" of fascism—where leaders symbolize national rebirth through ultranationalist purification (Griffin, 2000). Lewis ridicules the mythologizing of Hitler, suggesting it is more rooted in theatrical spectacle than philosophical substance. This theatricality, as Andrew Hewitt argues, is central to fascist aesthetics, which rely not on coherent ideology but on the seduction of power through performative nationalism (Hewitt, 1993).

What complicates Lewis's case further is his own history of engagement with fascist ideologies earlier in the 1930s, most notably in *Hitler* (1931), a work that defended Hitler as a stabilizing force in Europe. By 1939, although Lewis claims to have "misjudged" Hitler, his rejection remains half-hearted and aestheticized. Tyrus Miller (2009) points out that such revisions reflect a broader modernist pattern of aesthetic distancing, wherein the horrors of political violence are refracted through irony and intellectual aloofness rather than outright condemnation.

Moreover, Lewis's references to "Aryan man" in *The Hitler Cult* demonstrate that even as he critiques Nazism, he remains entangled in the biological determinism that undergirds fascist racial theory. As Payne (1995) demonstrate, Aryanism is not simply a mythic trope but a politically mobilized pseudo-science central to fascist statecraft. "The ultimate anti-Aryan and most bitter racial foe was the Jew. Chamberlain combined Social Darwinism with racism and thus emphasized an endless racial struggle on behalf of the purity of Aryanism and against Jews and lesser peoples, virtually creating a scenario for race war." (Payne, 1995, p. 31) Lewis, by flirting with such categories—even satirically—risks reinforcing the very ideologies he appears to critique.

Finally, Lewis's oscillation between criticism and complicity mirrors the broader crisis of modernist ethics in the face of fascist ascendancy. His works from 1939 demonstrate a complex and often contradictory engagement with antisemitism and Aryanism—one that illuminates the tensions within literary modernism itself. Rather than offering a moral stance, Lewis's texts expose the difficulties of ideological disentanglement in a cultural moment where race, politics, and aesthetics were deeply entwined.

4.1. Fascist Conceptions of Nation, Society and Human Essence in Lewis's Late-1930s Political Narratives

Lewis's political writings of 1939 emerge from a German cultural landscape steeped in pan-Germanic nationalism, anti-Semitism, and myths of racial rebirth. Hitler's worldview—shaped by *völkisch* movements (a component of German ultranationalism emphasizing emotional nationalism since the late nineteenth century), the Treaty of Versailles's perceived injustices, and the concept of *Lebensraum*—drew on pseudo-scientific racial hierarchies, mystical nationalism, and Darwinian ideas of struggle to justify Nazi policies like the Nuremberg Laws and *Kristallnacht*. These beliefs fueled the Nazi vision of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a racially unified "people's community" bound by notions of Aryan supremacy and territorial expansion.

What is significant for Lewis's rhetorical strategy is not simply this historical backdrop but the way he engages it. In *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), Lewis adopts a tone of irony and aesthetic distancing that satirizes Nazi spectacle even as it reproduces some of its ideological premises. For instance, Lewis critiques Hitler's self-fashioned image as a mystical savior—highlighting, as Andrew Hewitt (1993) observes, the theatricality at the core of both fascist politics and avant-garde aesthetics—while simultaneously invoking categories like "Aryan man," which root his critique in the same racial discourse he purports to challenge.

Lewis's ambivalence also reflects his earlier flirtations with fascism in *Hitler* (1931), where he had defended Hitler as a bulwark against chaos in Europe. By the late 1930s, Lewis claims to have "misjudged" Hitler, but his irony and intellectual aloofness never fully disentangle him from the anti-Semitic rhetoric saturating German nationalism. Indeed, as Lewis himself notes, German anti-Semitism long preceded Hitler, functioning as a "necessary" condition for National Socialism—a historical force so ingrained that Hitler could not exist without it. In drawing attention to this cultural deep structure, Lewis aestheticizes fascism, treating it less as a deliberate political program than as an almost mythic expression of collective anxieties.

This rhetorical posture reveals a broader pattern in modernist responses to fascism, where irony and aesthetic detachment complicate moral clarity. Lewis exposes the seductive myths of Nazism even as he unwittingly reproduces its core assumptions, demonstrating how modernist discourse often absorbs and reflects the very ideologies it critiques. To elaborate and promote these ideologies, Hitler, viewed as a genuine socialist visionary, albeit one with militaristic inclinations, subscribed to the belief that society could be stratified into a hierarchy of distinct races and ethnicities, with some deemed superior and others considered inferior, as Lewis states, 'The form German anti-Semitism took, before the War, was much more contempt than hatred, however. The Jew was regarded as an inferior, of a clownish stamp' (Lewis, 1939a, p. 17). In this fashion, the Hitlerist Programme prominently featured radical measures targeting Jews, marking a peak in Nazi Germany's nationwide, centrally orchestrated campaign of violent anti-Semitism (Lewis, 1931, p.35). History underscores an undeniable link between anti-Semitism and right-wing ideologies, with Nazism representing its most extreme manifestation (Frisch, 2019, p. 24).

However, Lewis, in a broader context, embodied the essence of a progressive artist. His attraction to Hitlerism and advocacy for fascism delved deeper into the pursuit of novelty to uphold a sense of 'reality' sustained by belief, akin to an aesthetic discipline. Paradoxically, he argued that this relationship was a reciprocal situation, stating, 'If you do not understand the *Judenfrage*, you have not understood Hitlerism. Without the Jewish question, Hitlerism would not exist'. (Lewis, 1939a, p. 16) Furthermore, he contended that it would be nearly impossible to lead a nationalist movement in Germany without incorporating a significant degree of anti-Semitism. As Lewis claims that,

> German anti-Semitism is quite different. It would be impossible to run a nationalist movement in Germany without including a rather strong line of anti-Semitism. I saw that it was for National Socialism (unfortunately) an Agitationsmittel. But surely not an end in itself! Herr Thost, however, was adamant. No Jew--no Hitler. That was his dictum. (Lewis, 1939a, p. 16)

And later Lewis asserts that,

> when neither I nor anybody else was interested in the "Jewish question"--except of course the Jews --I had observed just as much anti-Semitism as is to be found there today. The Englishman who has never visited Germany is inclined to think that Hitler invented anti-Semitism. That is not the case. Rather (for it appears that Herr Thost was right), anti-Semitism invented him. (Lewis, 1939a, p. 17)

This progression of thought reveals how Lewis, despite his initial distancing from outright ideological endorsement, begins to frame anti-Semitism not merely as a political tool but as a formative condition of Hitlerism itself. By shifting responsibility from Hitler to a deeper, historically embedded social sentiment, Lewis essentially aestheticizes fascism, interpreting it as an inevitable cultural phenomenon rather than a consciously orchestrated political doctrine. This aligns with his broader modernist impulse to render political reality through abstract, even mythic, lenses. In doing so, Lewis not only repositions fascism within the realm of aesthetic inquiry but also absolves its central figures of full moral culpability, suggesting that ideological structures such as anti-Semitism possess a generative, almost autonomous force within the cultural psyche.

4.2. The Hitler Cult (1939): Critique of Aryanism and Totalitarianism

In *The Hitler Cult* (1939), Lewis offers a scathing critique of the deification of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi ideology of Aryanism. He dissects the ways in which Hitler was elevated to a quasi-religious status, exposing the dangers of such idolization. Lewis argues that the cult of personality surrounding Hitler was a deliberate tactic to manipulate and control the masses, employing propaganda and myth-making to enforce totalitarian rule. Indeed, Lewis's critique extends to the broader implications of Aryanism, which he sees as a pernicious and destructive ideology. He condemns the racial purity doctrines of the Nazis, highlighting their pseudoscientific basis and the brutal consequences of their implementation. By emphasizing the irrational and oppressive nature of Aryanism, Lewis underscores the threat it poses to individual freedom and social cohesion.

4.2.1. Aryanism as Ideology

Central to Nazi thought was *Aryanism*, a racial ideology that imagined a biologically and culturally superior "Aryan race," destined to dominate all other peoples. Influenced by pan-Germanism and pseudo-scientific racial myths, this doctrine cast the Aryan as the true "culture-creator," relegating Jews, Slavs, Romani, and other groups to the status of *Untermenschen*, or subhumans (Blamires, 2006, p. 61). Hitler himself, in *Mein Kampf*, framed Aryans as rooted to their land and culture, in contrast to Jews, whom he depicted as nomadic, parasitic outsiders incapable of creating civilization (Ayers & Hanna, 1992, p. 218). Underpinning these views was a belief in racial purity as the foundation of national greatness, and the conviction that Aryans were biologically predestined to lead.

In hindsight, the Nazi Party developed several pseudoscientific racial categories, racial purity and ethnic groups as part of its ideology, and espoused a variety of scientific, social and political theories on the supposed "Aryan race," lineage traced to "Aryan" origins, a superior "master race" (German: *Herrenrasse*) or "*Übermenschen*", superior to all other races, and they opined that color people, mixed-race people (non-indigenous people), Slavs, Romani people, Jewish people and other ethnic minorities were considered racially inferior or a class inferior, notably "sub-humans" or non-Aryan "*Untermenschen*", whose members were deemed suitable only for forced labor and annihilation. In the Hitlerian fashion, the Nazi Party asserted adherence to a rigid and supposedly scientific racial hierarchy, promoting the notion of an "Aryan race." Hitler held the belief that this race constituted a superior form of humanity, credited with all the advancements in technology, art, and culture that characterize civilized society. According to Nazi ideology, the purest representatives of Aryans, also known as Indo-Germans or Japhetiten, were the Nordic populations of Germany, England, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. They were considered the exclusive carriers of culture in civilized societies. In general terms, the Nazis asserted that the Germanic peoples constituted a subset of the Aryan-Nordic population, representing the most distinguished race among the German populace. Accordingly, an 'Aryan' was redefined by the Expert Advisor for populace and Racial Policy as someone with a tribal or racial connection (*stammverwandte*) to 'German blood'. (Ehrenreich, 2007, p. 10)

4.2.2. Political Implementation

These ideological claims became policy under Hitler's regime. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 codified racial hierarchies into law, forbidding sexual relations and marriages between Germans and Jews under the pretext of preserving "German blood and honor" (Burleigh & Wippermann, 1991, p. 82). They also stripped Jews of citizenship and legal protections, marking them as racial and political outsiders. This legal framework enabled further measures of persecution, from sterilization and euthanasia programs targeting those deemed "life unworthy of life," to the orchestrated violence of *Kristallnacht* and the mass exterminations that followed. Driven by these doctrines of racial "hygiene," the Nazi state constructed a totalitarian system in which Aryanism justified oppression, exclusion, and genocide (Gumkowski & Leszczyński, 1961).

4.2.3. Lewis's Engagement with Aryanism

In *The Hitler Cult* (1939), Wyndham Lewis satirizes the deification of Hitler and the myth of Aryan supremacy, presenting them as theatrical, manipulative tools of fascist propaganda. Lewis dismantles the cult of personality surrounding Hitler as a deliberate spectacle aimed at unifying the masses through pseudo-religious awe. Yet, even as he critiques Nazi ideology, Lewis cannot fully separate himself from its vocabulary. By invoking terms like "Aryan man" and acknowledging the deep cultural roots of German anti-Semitism, Lewis reveals his own entanglement in the myths of race and nation. His irony exposes the destructive power of Aryanism while also illustrating the difficulty of escaping its intellectual grip — a tension that underscores the troubling complicity of modernist discourse with the ideologies it sought to critique.

4.3. Wyndham Lewis and Anti-Semitism

Wyndham Lewis's involvement with anti-Semitism is a subject of considerable debate, highlighted by ideological shifts and later repudiations. Firstly, Lewis's narrative and public statements contained important factors that could be interpreted as sympathetic to fascist ideals, a stance common among certain avant-garde circles at the time, as he was deeply dragged to themes of authoritarianism and social order. However, by the late 1930s, his viewpoints transformed markedly, with Lewis taking an explicit stance against antisemitism, particularly in his satirical works *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) and *The Hitler Cult* (1939). These narratives show Lewis's endeavour to distance himself from the fascist sympathies he had previously entertained and to publicly address the toxic influence of Nazi ideology. As Fredric Jameson puts,

> Protofascism may be characterized as a shifting strategy of class alliances whereby an initially strong populist and anticapitalist impulse is gradually readapted to the ideological habits of a petty bourgeoisie, which can itself be displaced when, with the consolidation of the fascist state, effective power passes back into the hands of big business. (Jameson, 1981, p.15)

In this fashion, *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) was an endeavour to confront and ridicule deep-seated anti-Semitism prejudice. By means of socio-political satire, Lewis criticizes the increasing irrationality of anti-Semitism stereotypes, searching for humanizing Jewish people and expose the absurdities of dehumanizing rhetoric. This book, compiled amid rising tensions and racial hatred in Europe, has been analyzed as a public disavowal of any tolerance for antisemitic attitudes, aligning him with anti-fascist intellectuals of the time. Likewise, in *The Hitler Cult*, Lewis targets the notion of a "master race" and the personality cult surrounding Hitler, critiquing both the destructive allure of authoritarianism and the racial myths fueling Nazi ideology. As Meyers claims,

> His anti-Semitism continued well after Hitler came to power and implemented the first anti-Semitic legislation in April 1933 and the much harsher Nuremberg Laws, which dispossessed the Jews, in September 1935. In *Count Your Dead* Lewis mistakenly attributed Adler's concept to Freud and stated: "I have often felt compassion for the Jew. I have thought how bitterly unpleasant it must be to be regarded by everybody as inferior. No wonder it was a Jew, Freud, who coined the phrase 'inferiority complex.' " Lewis' anti-Semitism seemed to be more ideological than personal. (Meyers, 2021, p. 230)

In a similar vein, Paul Edwards asserts that Lewis's rejection of antisemitism was more than self-preservation; it mirrored his growing fear at the consequences of extremist ideologies. By siting through these polemical narratives, Lewis lastly puts himself in opposition to the racial and socio-political extremism that was molding Europe, distinguishing his late career as a period of moral re-assessing and intellectual independence from his earlier, more controversial days (Edwards, 2000). Indeed, in stark contrast to his critique of Aryanism, Lewis's *The Jews, Are They Human?* addresses the widespread anti-Semitism of

the time. He challenges the prejudices and stereotypes that fueled discrimination against Jews, questioning the moral and rational basis for such attitudes, as Lewis poses a question,

> How are we to treat them and regard them? This is a question to which without delay we have to find an answer. And that is what this book is about. It is not about the territorial destination of these emigrants; but the attitude of mind in which we should shoulder this particular White Man's Burden. (Lewis, 1939b, p. 7-8)

Through a series of arguments and reflections, Lewis seeks to humanize Jews and combat the dehumanizing rhetoric that had become pervasive. In this fashion, Lewis's approach in this work is both analytical and empathetic. He examines the historical and cultural roots of anti-Semitism, dissecting the various justifications used to marginalize and persecute Jews. By confronting these prejudices head-on, Lewis aims to provoke critical reflection and foster a more inclusive and humane perspective. Anti-Semitism, on the other hand, was a central element in Adolf Hitler's ideology, shaping his thoughts and policies significantly. It was a prominent feature of Nazi ideology, which had a well-defined agenda for dealing with Jews. To navigate this issue within the realm of politics, Zygmunt Bauman's explanation in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) emphasizes that anti-Semitism encompasses not only a school of thought but also a set of actions. He defines it as the resentment towards Jews, involving the perception of Jews as a foreign, antagonistic, and unwanted group, along with the behaviors that stem from and reinforce such perceptions:

> This is to a great extent because we are, to be sure, an anti-Semitic people, an anti-Semitic state, but nevertheless in all manifestations of life in the state and people anti-Semitism is as good as unexpressed ... There are still groups of Spiessern among the German people who talk about the poor Jews and who have no understanding for the anti-Semitic attitudes of the German people and who interceded for Jews at every opportunity. It should not be that only the leadership and party are anti-Semitic. (Baumann, 1989, p. 75)

Lewis's observations, though often controversial and paradoxical, gesture toward a similar tension that Bauman later articulates—the coexistence of widespread anti-Semitic sentiment with a more latent, socially repressed resistance to its overt expression. In suggesting that Hitlerism was born of anti-Semitism rather than the other way around, Lewis inadvertently exposes the structural embeddedness of this prejudice within the German national psyche. His quasi-diagnosis of anti-Semitism as a cultural inevitability—rather than as a pathological aberration—places his analysis within the orbit of Bauman's sociological critique, where modern bureaucratic systems and ideological conditioning normalize exclusionary violence. While Lewis stops short of Bauman's systemic critique, his writings reflect an uneasy recognition that modernity itself, through its rationalist and nationalist impulses, fosters conditions ripe for scapegoating and dehumanization.

5. Conclusion

In *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), Wyndham Lewis showed the turbulent ideological domain of his time, offering well-formulated and incisive criticism of both Aryanism and anti-Semitism in terms of the fascist politics. These contentious narratives have illustrated Lewis's profound involvement with the socio-political issues of the late 1930s, showcasing his ability to dissect and challenge the prevailing doctrines and prejudices. In fact, Lewis's assessment of Aryanism in *The Hitler Cult* reveals the threats of totalitarianism and the cult of personality surrounding Adolf Hitler. By pinpointing the manipulative tactics employed by the Nazis, Lewis underscored the hazards posed by authoritarian regimes that rely heavily on propaganda and myth-making to maintain control. His condemnation of the pseudoscientific basis and brutal consequences of Nazi racial purity doctrines showed his deep concern for the ethical implications of such ideologies. On the contrary, *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939) illustrated Lewis's commitment to confronting anti-Semitism and challenging the unreasonable prejudices against Jewish people. By questioning the moral and rational foundations of discriminatory attitudes, Lewis searched for humanizing Jews and foster a more inclusive and empathetic perspective. His analytical and empathetic approach underscored the importance of combating dehumanizing rhetoric and promoting social justice. To do so, the juxtaposition of these two polemical works highlighted the complexities and contradictions within Lewis's ideological perspectives. While he vehemently opposed the totalitarian and racist ideologies of the Nazis, his earlier narratives and public statements sometimes exhibited problematic attitudes, adding layers to his later critiques. This duality reflects the broader struggle of many intellectuals of the time, grappling with the rapid and disorienting political changes.

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Endnotes

[1] German peasants were considered the backbone of a pure Aryan-Nordic race. Only they had the right and duty to grow food on German soil to nourish healthy and strong Germans. (Michael & Doerr, 2002, p. 104)

[2] liberal anti-Semitism' refers to the structural exclusions and implicit cultural biases toward Jews present in mainstream liberal thought during the interwar period.