

THE DOOM OF YOUTH:
WYNDHAM LEWIS' CONSPIRACY THEORY

*This paper was written in 1995,
but no attempt was made at publication.*

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As early as September 1927 Lewis had been planning *Giovanezza*, “notes towards a philosophical study of ‘Youth Movements,’ respectively in Italy, France, Germany and Soviet Russia,”¹ which he planned to publish in *The Enemy*. Other business intervened, and it was only in 1928 that he appears to have begun collecting material for the book, finally issued as *The Doom of Youth* in 1932.² In fact the majority of the dated newspaper clippings used in the study come from two periods, that between 17 March to 20 November 1929, and from 1 May 1930 to 10 April 1931, facts which can be easily explained in the light of Lewis’s other activities. The youth book was set aside in 1927 to make way for the completion of the *Childermass*, and subsequent to that Lewis was occupied with the revisions to *Tarr*, and then with a detailed reply to Parisian criticism of his revolutionary credentials, which, as “The Diabolical Principle”, occupied the third number of the *Enemy*. It was not until these tasks were accomplished, sometime in March 1929 when the last issue of the *Enemy* appeared, that he was able to turn back to the necessary research. However, Lewis was also working on the *Apes of God* at this time, and towards the end of the year he again interrupted his study towards *Giovanezza*, and instead concentrated on his major work of fiction, which was expected to establish his position in the international literary world. He was free by the beginning of May 1930, the *Apes* being now completed and in the process of printing and binding, and once again occupied himself with the collection of “youth cult” absurdities from the daily press. Aside from the distractions of assembling *Satire and Fiction*, and visiting Germany and writing *Hitler*, work now proceeded rapidly, the bulk of the manuscript being ready by April 1931, when it was submitted to Charles Prentice at Chatto and Windus.³ However the book was still without a title on 8 June, when Prentice cabled Lewis, who was then in Morocco, asking him to supply this lack so that the printers could proceed towards the final stages of production. For reasons which are not yet clear to me, Lewis had already decided to break with Chatto, and had signed a contract with Cassell for a work of fiction of 80,000 words, and was promising Nash and Grayson, who were to publish the trade edition of the *Apes*, a work of fiction under the title the “Great Blank Bunk.”⁴ His divided commitments resulted in desultory handling of the proofs, and indeed little enthusiasm in completing the text, which was still lacking chapter headings as late as March 1932.⁵

1 “Notes Regarding Details of Publication and Distribution”, *The Enemy*, No. 2 (Sep. 1927), viii.

2 In *Doom of Youth* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1932), 196, Lewis remarks that “None of the cuttings are earlier in date than 1928”.

3 See Bradford Morrow and Bernard Lafourcade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis* (Black Sparrow: Santa Barbara, 1978), 65.

4 Contracts held by Cornell University Library. Some guess may be made at the content of this work, since a proposed title for *The Old Gang and the New Gang* (Harmsworth: London, 1933), was “The Old Gang and the New Gang, or the Great Blank of the Missing Generation” (see Harmsworth circular, held in Cornell University Library, Lewis Collection, 4612, box 162).

5 See C. H. Prentice to Lewis, 31 Mar. 1932, in the Chatto and Windus letter-books held by Reading University Library.

Since Lewis was not similarly inhibited in dealing with the American publisher, McBride, who published their version on 30 March, it seems reasonable to assume that it was with Chatto, and specifically with Charles Prentice, that Lewis was dissatisfied, and not with the content of his book.

This long delay between the inception of the work and its publication has made it difficult for commentators to relate its thesis to the current of Lewis's thought, and consequently they have tended to neglect it, or to misattribute its connections. Although it is clear that Lewis was interested in the question of youth politics as early as 1927, it is of importance to notice that this interest arises after the writing of *Time and Western Man*, which represents a turning point in his attitude to the period of transition. Moreover, most of the research, and all of the composition is subsequent to "Paleface", both in its *Enemy* and volume forms, and also to *The Childermass*, where Lewis first made his interests in race and conspiracy clear. And just as its contemporaries, *The Apes of God* and *Hitler*, can be explicated in terms of these earlier works, so *The Doom of Youth* must be understood as a detailed discussion of a world conspiracy. In fact, Lewis's views on this matter are in some senses clearer in this book than in any other work, since *Time and Western Man* is so much an adaptation of earlier material, and *The Childermass* is so riddling in its references, so apparently ambivalent in its Olympian handling of the main speakers.

The Doom of Youth is divided into six sections, an unnumbered introductory preamble consisting of a foreword, an introduction, a list of contents giving a chapter by chapter summary, and five numbered parts. Part I discusses the relationship of youth agitation, economics, and politics at an abstract level, parts II and III use popular sources, newspapers and magazines, to document the activities of the youth cult in the anglo-saxon world, part IV turns to middle and high-brow literature to discuss the concomitant feminisation of the male, and part V reviews the discussion and provides further examples.

As with *Hitler* the organisation is deceptive, and Lewis's major points are disguised, perhaps in the belief that by allowing the reader to discover them for himself resistance to their adoption would be reduced. Although the volume appears to proceed cumulatively towards a "Conclusion", I suggest that in fact it is in Part I that we find Lewis's final judgments, the rest of the volume being subsidiary to this section, its evidence and commentary being marshalled in order to nudge the reader towards clarification of the darker hints of the first section. In a late 1932 article Lewis referred to his having made the important discovery that it was possible to carry on a "whispering campaign" at the top of one's voice, a "steady whisper running beneath the legs of the great bursting vocables"⁶ and it is the nature of this whispered message in *The Doom of Youth* that my discussion will attempt to sort out from the confusing babble of background noise with which Lewis overlays his more contentious claims. An understanding of Part I is equivalent to an understanding of the whole, and I shall therefore summarize and comment upon each of its fourteen chapters, bringing out the structure and interconnections which are easily missed, at least superliminally, during a reading of the book.

6 Wyndham Lewis, "Notes on the Way", *Time and Tide*, 13.41 (8 Oct. 1932), 1073.

1. “The Big Business Mind has Gazed Upon ‘Youth,’ and it has found it, not *Fair*, but *Profitable*”: The machinery of publicity, Lewis suggests, is not undirected, and its use of “‘age-old’ antagonisms”, male v female, young v old, rich v poor, is not merely an accidental choice of subject matter. There is an occulted significance which it does not occur to the average reader to speculate upon:

When a bald-headed Press Magnate bawls at him fiercely “Youth at the Helm!” it seems to Everyman a normal outburst of the “cheeky” Spirit of Youth. Never does he stop to examine the portent of the bellowing Press Magnate, never to ask himself soberly what all this can be about, and why on earth this Magnate should be shouting about that particular thing rather than another.⁷

Beyond remarking that these phenomena are revealing, and hinting that the motive is financial, Lewis says little about the forces behind the press, but one point stands out. In arguing for the obscure significance of the youth war Lewis appeals to the example of the recent Great War, and points out that even here, where things are perhaps clearer, the man in the street cannot “steadily believe” that “there is any intrigue of a mercenary or really cold-blooded political order behind such a calamity as the war”⁸

2. “‘The Power-Matter’ and ‘The Beauty-Matter’”: To brace his suggestion that the conflict between the young and old is being directed for financial purposes, Lewis proposes that the general process can be clearly observed in a war, the Sex-war, that has largely finished. Feminism was, Lewis suggests, “entirely economic and political in motive”:

“Feminism” served the double purpose of cheapening the labour of men, and of tapping an enormous, up-till-then-unused, cheap labour market.⁹

Similarly, we are led to suppose, the age-war must be serving some such intent.

These points lead, more importantly, to the suggestion that the recent Great War is a war devised to serve similar aims:

It is important to remember, in connection with “Youth-politics”, just as much as with “Feminism”, that the motives for getting up, or for encouraging, such an agitation are never stated. Scarcely are they so much as hinted at. When recruits were being called for in the War, threats could be employed as well as Flattery (even then a great deal of Flattery was used). Also, “To make the world safe for democracy” and such fulsome phrases were liberally coined.¹⁰

⁷ *Doom of Youth* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1932), 7.

⁸ *Doom of Youth*, 6.

⁹ *Doom of Youth*, 12.

¹⁰ *Doom of Youth*, 13.

The reader will perhaps be expected to connect this with the Great War reference in the previous chapter, and to make the now not unreasonable assumption that the intriguers behind these wars may in fact be the same.

3. “‘The Few May Walk Carelessly, But the Many Must Be Drilled’”: This transitional chapter draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the politicisation of the young has required mass-mobilisation, and that this results in the revealing paradox of highly regimented movements celebrating the free and careless nature of youth.
4. “‘The Exclusive Value of Youth’ in Two Continents’”: Lewis here obliquely introduces a concept that will come to be of great importance in later chapters. That youth will be exploited politically he takes for granted: “But it is equally important to grasp the fact that an evil brain will put it to evil uses (and by ‘evil’, of course, I mean again, *not useful* to human life. I do not use the term in a theological or moral sense – the ‘good’ is the ‘useful’ in my vocabulary.”¹¹ And without drawing any clear connection Lewis then notes that though the United States and the Europeans, particularly the English, have slightly different forms of the youth cult, they both lead to social corruption, and political indecision.
5. “‘Slimming’ and the ‘The Profile of Youth’”: Slimming is presented as part of the Youth war. This theme is not of itself sharply relevant, but allows Lewis to introduce the suggestion that the forces behind the evil manipulation of youth may be identified. Flippantly Lewis offers the suggestion, given to him by a friend, that slimming originated amongst Jewish women:

Who pays the piper (or dressmaker) calls the tune – and the traditional figure of Israel is on rather ample lines [...] In short it was *Israel* that was slimming! The daughters of the Gentile had to follow suit, willy-nilly, whether they needed it or not.¹²

This explanation is offered only to be rejected, Lewis preferring to see it as a result of the greatly increased competition between women for males, their ranks thinned by the war, in the post-war period. However, despite this rejection Lewis has managed to plant in the reader’s mind the suggestion that the youth cult may be in some way connected to the Jews. The Great War appears in this chapter as a simple event, or accident, accounting for another event, but the references in the earlier chapters have already made it clear that Lewis considers the 1914–1918 conflict as susceptible to explanation, as the result of financially directed conspiracy, a line of reasoning which might, or might not, lead you again to the Jews.

6. “The ‘Chronic Adolescence’ of the American’”: This short chapter puts forward the proposition that the youth agitation is “*an attack on the standards of human life*”, an attempt

¹¹ *Doom of Youth*, 20.

¹² *Doom of Youth*, 24.

to shorten the adult life to “about ten years.”¹³ The financial motives for this action are not explained, and it looms up here as unreasoned malignity, connecting it with the evil brains of Chapter 4, and thus appears as an action of an enemy of mankind. The connection here, whispered so quietly that it is barely audible, is that the Jews have often in the past been labelled as hostile to mankind, and perhaps are today. Similar opinions can be found, for example, in widely-read anti-Jewish writings such as those published in Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent*. An article for the issue of 12 June 1920, for example, reviews the Jewish question, and concludes: “From these points it goes on to others, and whether the trend becomes pro-Jewish or anti-Semitic depends on the amount of prejudice brought to the inquiry, and whether it becomes pro-Humanity depends on the amount of insight and intelligence.”¹⁴ Jewry, thus, is presented as a faction whose interests conflict with those of the rest of mankind, and so to be pro-Jewish is in some sense to be anti-humanity.

7. “An ‘Attack Upon the Standard of Life’ of Mankind”: Lewis develops his theme by accepting that there is, as the Labour press claim, a steady tendency for Capital to depress the wages of the workers, but adds that more importantly there is a “still more universal, abstract movement [...] a less superficially palpable movement) to attack the very ‘standards of life’ of mankind at large.”¹⁵ In effect this involves Lewis in extending the category of Labour to include the middle estate: “Unless you are in the Super-tax Class, therefore, it is absurd, so it seems to me, to imagine that you are not to all intents and purposes ‘Labour.’” In such a situation all industrial conflict is political, and since the Super-Class is international it must legislate not merely for an industry or a nation, but globally. And necessarily “the great international World-power of Finance is a *conscious* and intellectual power”. (It should be noted that Lewis presents these last three ideas as questions, but leaves no doubt as to his answers.)

Lewis expands his last point by explaining that he does not regard the mass of mankind as better because less far-seeing than the Big-Businessman:

Please disabuse yourself of the belief that I consider them *wicked* because they wish to organize that gigantic business concern – The Earth Ltd. – according to sound economic principles! I am explaining an especial political technique – the technique of those so-called “Youth-politics”, whereby they mobilize certain *classes* of the populations beneath their influence to acts of mutual hostility, whereby they weaken the individual resistance of these populations, and render them more easy to subjugate, one by one. Are we then so innocent of such tactics, in our small way?

¹³ *Doom of Youth*, 28.

¹⁴ “The Jewish Question – Fact or Fancy”, *Dearborn Independent*, 12 June 1920; reprinted in the anonymously edited and introduced *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion, With Preface and Explanatory Notes*, trans. Victor E. Marsden (No publisher, no place, 1934). The copy of this that I have consulted is a modern reprint, undated and without publication information.

¹⁵ *Doom of Youth*, 29.

I do not regard that little sentimentalist, Mr. Everyman, as fundamentally *better* than his boss. And as to my personal interests, they lie neither with the one nor the other.¹⁶

The strands are now beginning to come together in Lewis's argument. It has already been hinted that the war is part of the same global phenomenon as the Youth-cult, or the Sex-war, and now Lewis states directly that this so, that it is part of a concerted program of world dominion.

8. "The Old and the New Capitalism": Lewis now attempts to clarify his references to Big Business, and claims that there are two forms of capital, one, an individualistic form, called conservatism, and naively thought to be the exclusive representative of "Capital", and another, cunningly camouflaged, sheltered behind Labour. On the one hand is Stanley Baldwin, on the other "what Mr. Baldwin calls 'an insolent plutocracy'":

Mr. Baldwin, to use, as above, the jargon of the Marxist, has the 'Kulak Soul': he stands for the "personal", the "human touch" – for the old bluff Master-and-Man, parish-pump relationship. The other Capitalism (hostile to this individualist-capitalism, of the Baldwin, Coty, Ford type) is international, or imperialist, and is *dictator-minded*. It belongs to the same epoch as Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini.¹⁷

But although Lewis grants that this force belongs to the same epoch as the Hitler movement, it is not at all like it, though old and new capital are indeed confronting each other in Germany, since the German situation is different:

Even the principles themselves are not quite the same – and whereas in England the clever citizen would be very slightly disposed in favour of the *dictator-minded*, the same clever citizen in Germany, it is quite possible, might mildly prefer the passion and energy – the fine *dictator-mindedness* – of the Hitlerists. It is possible.¹⁸

It is not initially clear what this distinction, the terms of which are not defined in preceding pages, could possibly mean, and the reader, even the "clever citizen" perhaps, is left wondering whether Lewis thinks that Hitlerism is a kind of revolutionary capital, or perhaps only resembles it in some way. To clarify this point Lewis turns to an article, by S. M'Clatchie, on the Nazis and capital. This piece is used to suggest that the German race "does not think in terms of capital and credits, but in terms of land and labour and goods", and is therefore contemptuous of the power of the banks.¹⁹ M'Clatchie is then used to offer Henry Ford as a specimen of an industrialist who does not think in terms of "capital and credits" and has had a quarrel recently with Wall Street. The whisper here is a stage-whisper, Henry Ford being famously hostile to Jewish banking, and the refer-

¹⁶ *Doom of Youth*, 32.

¹⁷ *Doom of Youth*, 33–4.

¹⁸ *Doom of Youth*, 34.

¹⁹ S. M'Clatchie, *Forum* (Apr. 1931), quoted in *Doom of Youth*, 34.

ence to the agrarianism of the Nazi party, a reference on which Lewis dwells, reminds us of his discussions, in *Hitler*, of the impoverishment of American farmers. It was also a standard element in anti-Jewish propaganda.²⁰ By piecing this muffled and discontinuous train of thought together we find that Lewis is presenting the Nazis as a third force, unfavourable to “capital” of either kind, though using similar techniques to gain political power. Together with Henry Ford they represent a more promising defence against dictator-minded capitalism than can be provided by Baldwinian individualism, which Lewis remarks is “so hopelessly incompetent that it would be unwise to rely too much upon it.”²¹ This view, Lewis claims, is “thoroughly opportunist”, and he recommends that you choose your politics not on a moral basis, whatever that might mean, but in terms of your self-interest. And for Lewis this means steering away both from the old style capitalism, whose individualism “merely conspires to put into the hands of any mediocrity opportunities for being mediocre to the top of his bent”, and the new style whose “oppressive dictatorship [...] makes war upon *all* individuals, irrespective of their importance to the species.” It is important to note here that Lewis is justifying his élitism by referring to the value of the service that such an élite may provide to the human group, in other words that he is unlike the enemies of mankind mentioned earlier, and that despite appearances he is a philanthropist.

The identity of these supporters of this new style of capitalism, whose disguised radicalism plays so great a part in the destabilising of the European societies, remain unclear. While we have Ford to stand for anti-capitalist industrialism, and Baldwin to represent old style capital, the new capitalists remain nameless, though Lewis has by now dropped enough hints for us to suppose that they are Jewish. It is open to question as to how Lewis expected these hints to work, and though it is possible that he looked for a reader who would read between the lines from the first, the care with which he had disguised the rhetorical structure of *Hitler* seems to suggest that he anticipated the reader’s resistance to his concept of a Jewish conspiracy, and built the *Doom of Youth* in such a way that these repeated indications would leave a residue behind them, and that ultimately a proposition would coalesce in the reader’s mind, thus evading any common-sense censorship. Lewis was, I suggest, attempting to transfer to his own work the techniques he believed he had observed in the popular press: “There is no *argument* now. All is done by suggestion. And that technique of suggestion is the specific technique we are studying here.”²² It is a technique that the reader, in fact, undergoes, thus confirming Lewis’s remark in the

²⁰ *Hitler*, 151, reports a near riot by Arkansas farmers: “Among these five hundred farmers it is very likely that many belong to the original White emigrant stock of the earliest colonists.” The suggestion that Jewish financiers wished to weaken the independent farmer would have been familiar to Lewis from articles in Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* (or similar sources): for example, that of 4 September 1920 discusses the use of mortgages to subordinate the rural economy (Reprinted, pp. 41–8, in *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1934)).

²¹ *Doom of Youth*, 86.

²² *Doom of Youth*, 39.

Art of Being Ruled that all books have their “patients”²³ Commentators on Lewis often err in imagining that he is offering a service, and that his criticism is an intervention between manipulative powers and the naive reader. But, as *Doom of Youth* shows, Lewis in fact has little interest in public freedom, and is quite prepared to emulate the powers he opposes, a point about which he is perfectly honest: “Please do not imagine that I am *accusing* these powerful Magnates of being able and far-seeing. Oddly enough I do not regard it as an insult to be called able and far-seeing!”²⁴

9. “The ‘Youths’ and ‘Has-Beens’ of Soviet Russia”: Lewis now extends his definition of revolutionary capital. He lists five salient characteristics of the “great interlocking Trusts”:
 1. They cannot be narrowly nationalist or patriotic.
 2. They are in their essence anti-individualist.
 3. They are Dictator-minded, rather than traditional and parliamentarian.
 4. Not being the ostensible and official Masters, they appear in the nature of a permanent, “irresponsible” Opposition – always “agin the Government” – they assume the character of a People’s Party – always the champion of “the People” against “Authority”.
 5. Generally they control all the organs of popular publicity, through which they rule.²⁵

Over half this chapter, despite its title, refers to the European nations, but when it turns to Russia, the connection with the preceding discussion becomes clear. Lewis finds that youth politics are if anything more developed there than in the West, and, though in a different form, the aim is the same. Lewis comments with admiration on the “intricate measures undertaken by those able sovietic rulers to set the New against the Old”²⁶ The conclusion to which we now come (Lewis himself makes no such direct statement) is that the Soviet administration is an arm of international capital:

To-day it is still of the utmost importance for the newly-born russian oligarchy to blot out the Past. Their behaviour is a masterly piece of inhuman commonsense. The rulers who came before this dynasty of Lenin and Stahlin [sic.] seem like emotional and petulant children compared to these machine-men, with their huge clock-work plans of wholesale enslavement, or to use a milder word, enregimentation.²⁷

10. “A Jesuit Maxim That Goes to the Heart of the Politics-of-Youth”: Lewis assumes that he has satisfactorily shown you that “Time is money in that Economist’s Utopia whose capital city is Moscow”, and it only remains to drop a few hints about the nature of the powers

²³ *Art of Being Ruled* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1926), xi.

²⁴ *Doom of Youth*, 31.

²⁵ *Doom of Youth*, 40.

²⁶ *Doom of Youth*, 43.

²⁷ *Doom of Youth*, 44.

who are now directing that large concern. It is somewhat surprising, he suggests, that the Russians should have been so rapidly mobilised towards the “extraordinary precocity” so useful for industrialists, and explains that the answer is probably that “the Jewish Intelligence (which plays such a preponderating part in Soviet rule) is perhaps imposing a particular racial standard” on the “backward and naturally indolent” Russians.²⁸ And in case you should fail to connect the directors of the Russian state with the evil brains directing the, somewhat differently characterised, youth politics of the Anglo-Saxon world, Lewis goes further, and claims that “in all lands to-day, the acuter, more intellectual, Jewish nature has set the pace. In many ways it has given an alien colour and tempo to this period.”²⁹ And a line or two later Lewis reproves the West for so readily accepting a “policy whose avowed aim it was to poison and destroy the tradition that was the very principle of its being.”³⁰ The use of the word “aim”, with all the planning that it implies, rather than a neutral term, such as “consequence”, should be noted.

11 and 12. These simple and direct chapters explain how it is that youth politics can be to the advantage of business, by broadening the labour market and undermining the power of the mature male.

13. “The Political Issues Inherent in Economics”: Chapters 13 and 14 are the climax of this sequence. Briefly, having outlined the economics in politics, Lewis now turns to the fundamental politics which underlies the economics. Chapter 13 discusses the threat to Europe, and Chapter 14 offers a possible remedy.

The economic advantages for international business that Lewis has remarked upon in earlier chapters as consequent on the various “wars”, of sex, race, and age, have he suggests, effects beyond their immediate consequences on domestic living, principally a weakening of the “political system of the Aryan world”, and hence European influence in the world at large: “The racial pride and self-assurance of the European was dependent upon technical superiority. That must rapidly wilt if his standards of life are thrust down beneath feminine competition.”³¹ And the same follows, Lewis suggests, from the “*Coloured-versus-White-war*”,³² and presumably the Age war. These threats to the social system of the white European are so great that Lewis can see little remedy: “The European has my best wishes – I am a European. But his helplessness is colossal. I fear he is destined to work for an anna a day.”³³ The theme of helplessness leads Lewis to consider European vulnerability further, via a passage from René Guénon’s *Orient et Occident*, which Lewis quotes in French and

28 *Doom of Youth*, 46.

29 *Doom of Youth*, 47.

30 *Doom of Youth*, 47–8.

31 *Doom of Youth*, 60–61.

32 *Doom of Youth*, 61.

33 *Doom of Youth*, 61.

then paraphrases. The theme is the weakness of European characteristics, both racial and intellectual:

Not only are the European's racial and physical characteristics unstable and fragile – and in intermarriage, with Jew or Indian, it is the other race that absorbs the European, not the reverse – but with his borrowed religion (so ill-assorted with his aggressive personality) and his mongrel culture, a member of any race of a fixed cultural complexion and logically developed ethical purpose can “absorb” him spiritually within half an hour. And especially the democratic, americanized, european Tom Thumb of today is, over against a member of a race of fixed tradition and well-defined ethos, in the position of the average Hodge confronted with a hard-boiled and well-polished aristocrat.³⁴

If this is so, then it is very strange that Lewis does not go on to identify this race. But of course he has no need to, since he has earlier referred to the Jews as an “acuter, more intellectual” and “very ancient race”,³⁵ and whether the reader realises it or not this is the conclusion which Lewis implants by degrees, smuggling its elements one by one, and then allowing them, unassisted, to reassemble themselves.

Guénon's own remedy for the weakening of Europe, which Lewis, perhaps carelessly, perhaps cunningly, does not quote, is that the intellectuals should band together. In perhaps the most significant passage for an understanding of his politics in the late nineteen-twenties and thirties, Lewis rejects this:

it is vain [...] to play with the idea of a “European Élite” saving the situation. There is as much *esprit de corps* among the ‘Élite’ of Europe as there would be in a street where every other shop was a *cut-shop*. Each “Élite”-person allows his vanity to be mobilized against every other “Élite”-person upon the smallest provocation. Each makes himself (or allows himself to be made – still worse) into a “class” all to himself; and hence class-war is as rampant at the top as at the bottom of the scale. No, it is not the “Élite” who will save Mr. Everyman from Cooliefication.³⁶

I submit that this represents a clear withdrawal, or rather a confirmation that this withdrawal had already taken place, from the positions put forward in the *Art of Being Ruled*, where Lewis had encouraged each Élite-person to suppose themselves sole members of their own class, or at least had justified that position for himself. By the late 1920s Lewis was inclined to see the genius as having a value dependent, perhaps only in part, on his relations towards other individuals of genius within the class of the Élite. This parallels, exactly, Lewis's interest in race as a means of limiting the boundaries of moral responsibility, for as one reviewer, Alan Porter, remarked about *Paleface*, the writing of this period

³⁴ *Doom of Youth*, 62.

³⁵ *Doom of Youth*, 47.

³⁶ *Doom of Youth*, 62.

is not really about race but ‘the problem of the uneasy conscience.’³⁷ So far, this is a clearer statement of Lewis’s position, but it contains nothing strikingly novel. However, the collapse of faith in the intellectual world as an effective political resistance does represent a new development. In *The Art of Being Ruled*, it is true, Lewis states that the mind of genius has no other duties but to cling to its own values, but the proposal put forward in *The Doom of Youth*, which might seem equally despairing and stand-offish, does not represent a return to that position. Lewis now thinks that, although not a powerful force, the class of genii may have some supportive value for the effective class. One might say that it is a splitting of the difference between the passionate engagement of *Time and Western Man* and the indifference of *The Art of Being Ruled*.

Although dismissing the claims of the Élite, his own group, for political power, Lewis implies that there is some force which might perform the defensive role for which the intellectuals are inadequate. But, again, a crucial identity is left unexplained. Having said that there is, amongst persons unnamed, a conspiracy to destroy the Europeans, and that although the intellectuals can provide no defence, there is perhaps a group that can, Lewis closes his chapter with a brief repetition of his wish to “influence the integration” rather than “arrest the disintegration.”³⁸ The reader is left wondering who these integrating saviours might be, where they are to be found, and how Lewis proposes to help them.

14. “The Rage Against ‘Youth’ of a Baffled Youth-Master”: Integration is occurring, Lewis explains, in Russia, but supposes that “in the nature of things Russia cannot be a model to be slavishly followed all over the world”: “The German and the Italian, for instance, are a different *matière* to the Slav masses.”³⁹ These are significant specimens, and leave little room for speculation as to what Lewis regards as positive political developments. Italian Fascism did not interest Lewis much, and it is the German example to which he turns, explaining that he thinks Russia’s brand of new society will be reshaped, even in Russia itself, by the German variety. As yet the German political movement that interests him so much is unspecified, but we are not long titillated with this uncertainty. Announcing his intention to discuss a contemporary American response to Youth-Movements in Germany, Lewis explains that Gilbert Seldes, the author of his chosen text, is probably “dogmatically communist in sympathy” since “he displays the greatest animosity for those german revolutionaries, the Nazis or Hitlerites.”⁴⁰ Seldes’ objection is, to quote Lewis’s paraphrase,

37 ‘The Poor White’, *Spectator*, 142.5267 (8 June 1929), 904–5.

38 *Doom of Youth*, 63.

39 *Doom of Youth*, 64.

40 *Doom of Youth*, 65. Seldes’ article appears in *Harper’s Magazine* (Mar. 1930). It should be noted that in the long quotation from this piece, on pp. 67–8, Lewis alters Seldes use of the word “Fascist” to describe the Nazis and substitutes instead the word “Hitlerite”. Since literary critics, and even some historians, fail to appreciate the distinctions which contemporaries made between these movements, particularly if they were supporters of either one or the other, this point is of considerable importance. The tendency to lump Fascism and Nazism together is an unfortunate hang-over from pre-war and wartime propaganda. It should be further noted that a desire to understand this distinction in no way entails an effort to whitewash Hitler, or Mussolini, but rather a wish to remove an obstacle to understanding the effect that Hitlerism, say, had on individuals such as Lewis. As I have remarked elsewhere (“The Lewis Question”, *Essays in Criticism*, 43/3 (July

that “Youth is got hold of and inflamed to political activities”, and, as Lewis pertinently comments, the same is true in Russia, but “it is not Russia that worries Mr. Seldes”:⁴¹

“Youth” is a fine thing, in fact – a very fine thing – *but only so long* as it serves the political end you have at heart. It is a splendid notion – “Youth – it is glorious” and should be “at the Helm”. Oh yes! But the moment “Youth” – with all its natural reckless idealism – turns about and attacks the dogmas of your particular political faith – oh, then you can find no words too hot and strong to denounce “Youth” and all its works! “Youth” then becomes, upon the spot, a despicable tool of unworthy and scheming “Older men”. It is very odd, and a very significant fact, that we never hear of these “older men” when all is going well, and “Youth” behaving itself[.]⁴²

And to do justice to Lewis his own book does not make this error, though to read standard summaries of *The Doom of Youth* you would imagine that he does so. We have already observed that Lewis is not “*accusing* these powerful Magnates of being able and far-seeing”. He refuses to take an objective moral line on this matter, but simply observes that this technique is being used by forces hostile, as he supposes, to the socio-cultural grouping, Europe, to which he belongs and which he values. The Hitlerites’ use of the same technique is, from his perspective, to be applauded, since it defends those values.

Having laid out the progress and methods of the *Doom of Youth* we are now in a position to summarise, to raise the whisper to the level of normal statement. There is an international conspiracy of capital, largely Jewish, and almost entirely under Jewish direction, and this conspiracy stands behind the reorganisation of the Soviet Union, and also behind the various social phenomena which Lewis terms “wars”, Age-wars, Sex-wars, Race-wars. And indeed it is responsible for the “Great War” itself. These “wars” serve the purpose of destabilising the social structure of the European states, whose character is inconvenient for those who wish to produce maximally efficient industries. Perhaps, also, these conspirators are motivated by ancient political enmities as much as by the desire for profit. It is even possible to see the economics as the manifestation of a deeper political grudge, the anti-Aryan misanthropy of the Jew. Against this the Europeans have little defence. Their intellectuals are too short-sightedly selfish to intervene, and if there is any hope at all it is from a vulgarly populist movement, such as Hitler’s, which is prepared to use the same tools as the conspiracy to mobilise the peoples of Europe in self-defence.

1993), 265–71) Lewis was not interested in Fascism since it achieved its socialist cohesion through an appeal to national identity, whereas, Lewis believed, the Nazis, despite their name, were employing a racial socialism the extent of which more nearly followed a cultural boundary which Lewis believed worth defending. Mussolini was not, Lewis thought, as good a European as Hitler. This view may, to us, seem absurd; but it should be remembered that Hitler took pains to present his party in this light to the rest of Europe, and that Lewis’ impression of Nazi policy was probably drawn from the writings of Alfred Rosenberg, who did in fact hold the views which Lewis believed, erroneously, to characterise the entire movement.

41 *Doom of Youth*, 66.

42 *Doom of Youth*, 69–70.

Once Lewis's technique is understood the reader should experience little difficulty in matching the fragmented elements of these propositions as he comes across them in the book's subsequent chapters. When Lewis uses a Jewish proverb, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," to discuss the effects of class-wars, the significance will not escape him.⁴³ When Lewis remarks that the future rulers of the world will be "*male matriarchs* – who in fact are physiologically male, though very feminine in outlook – not warlike masters like the Normans, or Manchus, but more like a sleek and subtle theocracy";⁴⁴ the reader will recall that elsewhere in this book Lewis suggests "That the Jew, according to the standards of European masculinity – if put beside a Viking or the typical warlike types of Gaul or of Germany – is feminine – that is clear enough";⁴⁵ and that "In a non-military race, like the Jewish [...] the men are less 'manly' than the Nordic Blond, and the women are never so chocolate-boxily 'feminine' as their Anglo-Saxon sisters.)"⁴⁶ And it will come as no surprise that Lewis should pick on Michael Arlen's journalism as a specimen of agitation setting male against female, nor will Lewis's strange jibe, he calls Arlen "this tawdry gentleman sporting the Christian name of an eminent archangel", be unintelligible in the context of this essay if it is recalled that Arlen was born Dikran Kuyumjian in Bulgaria of Armenian parents.⁴⁷ But there is no need to multiply instances. The reader may find more without difficulty. I consider as proved the case for seeing *The Doom of Youth* as containing a description of a purported Jewish conspiracy. But its relative importance may be questioned, and it will be as well to show that Lewis regarded this as the central message of his work, and in fact that he says so explicitly. In the penultimate chapter, "A Community is Ruled by Snobbery", Lewis suggests that "*all government has been conducted since the world began upon a solid basis of 'inferiority-complexes', as much as upon a basis of armed force*";⁴⁸ and remarks that a history these complexes would be of great interest, since they are apparently fluid:

Until very recently there was in Europe a standing example of this *spell*, as it were, of "inferiority", namely in the spell that had been put upon the Jew. [...] This terrific superstition has been extirpated from mankind – within, as matter of fact, a very few years, almost as if by magic.⁴⁹

And though Lewis tells us that no "sooner than one superstition is overcome [...] another takes its place", he does not develop the point, leaving us to suppose for ourselves that there has been a simple reversal of positions. The remainder of the chapter, which is very brief, seems to veer

⁴³ *Doom of Youth*, 88.

⁴⁴ *Doom of Youth*, 236.

⁴⁵ *Doom of Youth*, 118.

⁴⁶ *Doom of Youth*, 210.

⁴⁷ *Doom of Youth*, 234. An interestingly similar treatment is meted out to Lionel Britton, whose *Hunger and Love* (Putnam) Lewis reviewed ("Nebulae in Brussels Sprouts", *Time and Tide*, 12/9 (28 Feb. 1931), 255–6.) while writing *Doom of Youth*. Lewis found the fact of a Jewish writer with such a name comical, and refers to him, in the space of a few lines, as "a British Lionel", "a mere Leonine Britton", "this communist cockney British Lionel", and this "peculiar hybrid, Leo the Briton".

⁴⁸ *Doom of Youth*, 259.

⁴⁹ *Doom of Youth*, 260.

away from the Jewish issue, but, as my analysis above shows, obliquity is part of book's method, and its closing two paragraphs form, in my view and despite the fact there is a further, though short and slight, chapter following them, the climax of the entire book:

It is by Snobbery, in fact, that a community is ruled: for if you say that it is by means of carefully-fostered "inferiority" and "superiority" complexes, that means the same thing. If you wish to get the better of a man in any field whatever, in whatever matter you may be competing with him, *get him feeling "inferior"* and you cannot fail to overcome him.

That, then, is the principle at the back of all "Youth-politics" – both upon the economic and upon the political side – in our Western Democracies at present. Once you have seized firmly this key to an at first sight complex situation – or once you have entered into possession of *the whole bunch of skeleton keys* with which, in fact, I have provided you in this book – why then, you will really have (mentally at all events) the freedom of this "transitional" dream-city – this paper *Scheinwelt* of ours – and go where you will. There is only one door I do not recommend you to use your skeleton keys on. But there are some things, after all, you must find out for yourself.⁵⁰

As usual the reader must put the pieces together, Lewis refusing to make the connections, even forbidding us, in those extraordinary last lines, to do so. But since the elements are so nearly juxtaposed on the page it is only a moment's work, and the prohibition is intended, of course, to make this all the more tempting. Behind that forbidden door, flush with a new and unaccustomed superiority, sits a committee of the Elders of Zion.

⁵⁰ *Doom of Youth*, 260–61.