

1. INTRODUCTION

Few concepts have had a more fascinating trajectory than right-wing ideology. Officially born as a political concept in the wake of the French Revolution, it grew with renewed force in the beginning of the twentieth century, reaching its climax in the fascist regimes. The story many democratic Western nations like to tell about themselves is that after the defeat of the Axis forces, right-wing ideology and many of its radical proponents went into hiding. During the Cold War for many Western states the enemy was lurking on the Left. And while in several countries the conservative democratic Right were in charge, they usually distanced themselves from the more radical right-wing elements that dwelled on society's fringes. Sometimes, these radical elements violently forced their way into the heart of society, as evidenced by racist violence in the U.S. as a reaction against the Civil Rights movement, the British race riots, and specific right-wing motivated attacks such as the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, the Bologna massacre in 1980, the Oktoberfest bombing in 1980, the Norway attacks in 2011, and the Christchurch massacre in 2019 to list only the deadliest. Yet overall, it seemed that radical right-wing ideas had lost their relevance, when suddenly a few years ago the far right made its surprising comeback. Today we have relapsed, some would say, into the politically unstable times of the 1930s.

This story is not entirely true. Not only does it leave out the perspective of many marginalised groups, who have continually lived under consistent threat from right-wing forces, it also glosses over the complicity between political mainstream and right-wing ideology and its advocates. The Allied forces in the Second World War may have triumphed over the fascist regimes, but they have not defeated these regimes' underlying ideology. Right-wing ideology, even its more radical and extreme forms, did not merely dwell on the margins of societies, but had a powerful influence on political discourse and political practice. What is noteworthy is that very often the far right were used by the political mainstream as 'imaginary antagonists', useful tools to sway public opinion and to paint the political mainstream forces in a more positive light. Right-wing ideology is not as marginalised as it is sometimes presented. This holds especially true for the first decade of the 20th century. While in hindsight fascism is usually considered the evil other, fascist and other extreme right-wing ideas circulated widely in all western democratic societies. Looking back at the crucial decades that paved the way for the right-wing dictatorships and the Second World War it becomes clear that the unprecedented rise of fascist movements cannot be considered a historic aberration at

odds with the progressive developments of Western democracies in the 20th century, but that it was in fact deeply rooted in those same developments. A realm that illustrates these complicated dynamics is that of Modernist literature. It is especially here that retrospective views ignore the rich reservoir of right-wing ideas in favour of highlighting the stylistic innovations many Modernist artists and movements created. In fact, radical stylistic innovation is often equated or confused with a progressive world-view. This has led to an invisibility or understatement of the importance of right-wing ideology in and for Modernism: not because the authors concerned are no longer read but because their political allegiances remain – deliberately or not – unmentioned, downplayed or distorted. Yet what cannot be disputed is that almost all Western countries boasted a great number of artists, writers, and intellectuals who positioned themselves somewhere on the Right.

Listing the many artists and writers of the Right reads like a who-is-who of 20th century Modernism. In Italy the Futurists wholeheartedly flung themselves into the camp of the Fascists and advocated for Futurism to become the official state art of Mussolini's Italy. Many prominent Futurists like F. T. Marinetti, Mario Carli, Carlo Carrà, Bruno Corra, and Mario Sironi among others got actively involved in or supported fascist politics.¹ Yet Futurism's allegiance to fascism does not seem to have tarnished the legacy of Futurist artists too much. The situation in Germany offers a more complex picture. While 'official' National Socialist writers like Josef Magnus Wehner, Hans Zöberlein, Edwin Erich Dwinger and Eberhard Wolfgang Möller wrote to great acclaim during their time, they are virtually unknown in Germany today.² In contrast, the reception of more prominent writers shows the conflicting dynamics of honouring artists and intellectual talent while coming to terms with the politics that might have influenced the works of these authors. Ernst Jünger, whose famous Great War memoir *In Stahlgewittern* today seems to be a lot more popular in Britain than in Germany, was firmly at home in the circles of the Konservative Revolution in Germany,³ yet he remained a life-long critic of the National Socialists. Jünger is a good example of why it is important to see the Right, in particular the far right, as a heterogeneous spectrum if we want to illustrate intra-right-wing allegiances and strife. Today Jünger is still popular on the Right but he is by no means only read by the Right. Another writer, Gottfried Benn is widely known to have had sympathies with the ideas of the Konservative Revolution, and initially collaborated with the National Socialists, a stance which he later repudiated. Yet his works remain popular. It even seems that his literature, which feasts on disgust and other deliberately dark and ugly matters is strangely more palatable to many than Jünger's vitalism and heroism. Less well known seems to be the affinity some leading Expressionists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde had

with National Socialist ideology.⁴ Although their art was beloved by a number of high-ranking National Socialists, Expressionism was officially classified as *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art). For many Expressionist artists this verdict proved disastrous, for some, like Nolde, it was mixed with feelings of disappointment. His (published) writings testify to his allegiance to official race policies and he tried many times – to no avail – to be granted to work as an artist again. This setback proved beneficial after the demise of Nazi Germany, as it helped Nolde to pose as a victim and adversary of National Socialism.⁵ The case of Martin Heidegger illustrates the complicated attempts of coming to terms with an influential and respected philosopher who was deeply embroiled in National Socialist ideology. The debate, newly triggered by the publication of his *Schwarze Hefte* as well as selected letters, which testify to the deep influence National Socialist ideology had on his thinking and philosophy, also revealed how long Heidegger's allegiance to National Socialism had been excused and downplayed.⁶ A similar case can be made for Paul de Man, the Belgian-born literary critic, whose 'fascist roots' only became widely known posthumously, at a time when de Man had made a name for himself as a greatly acclaimed theorist in the U.S.⁷ Heidegger and de Man perfectly illustrate the complexity of the debate: both were influential for many thinkers on the Left and yet they are inextricably linked to the extreme Right. It shows that the history of ideas has always been subject to political cross-pollination.⁸

Another country that had a strong right-wing intellectual circle was France.⁹ Thinkers like Charles Maurras or Georges Sorel, whose *Reflections on Violence* offered a powerful theoretical underpinning for the creation of fascism, were influential in and outside of France. Moreover, the so-called second generation of right-wing writers, men like Robert Brasillach, Lucien Rebatet, Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline produced works that were read by readers from across the political spectrum. It is noteworthy that French right-wing writers faced the direst consequences for their political allegiance, possibly a testimony to France being torn by Nazi occupation. Brasillach was sentenced to death, while Drieu de la Rochelle committed suicide in prison to escape his potential execution. Rebatet and Céline left the country to avoid a similar fate. Although they received a trial *in absentia* they could return to France after some years had elapsed and could spend the rest of their lives there without further prosecution. This short overview is by no means exhaustive. One could list many more countries and writers, from Nobel prize winners like W.B. Yeats and Knut Hamsun to pioneers of popular new genres like H. P. Lovecraft or Henry Williamson. This book will focus on three writers: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis. As the 'Men of 1914' they stylised themselves as the harbingers of a

new Modernist art. All three of them were at the forefront of artistic innovation, but crucially also in allegiance with different right-wing ideologies forming in the 20th century. Both of these facts are seldom disputed. What this book wants to show is how inextricably bound their artistic creation was with their ideological allegiance.

Approaching this topic, one has to confront two popular misconceptions. The first very persistent misconception is that the far right lacks an intellectual tradition; their members are often imagined as unintelligent and uneducated in the general discourse. This usually correlates with the assumption that members of, or people with sympathies for, the far right stem predominantly from the lower classes. Despite contrary evidence, the image of the aggressive uneducated right-winger endures. This stereotype stands in stark contrast to the many right-wing writers and thinkers, who play a crucial role in the cultural history of the West, and who are also essential elements in an imagined counter culture that opposed such fundamental values as democracy, liberalism, and equality. For too long this dilemma of canonising and honouring those voices, who spoke for the reactionary and authoritarian movements has not been adequately addressed. Thus, it is no surprise that right-wing Modernist writers have also drawn an explicitly right-wing readership, not only from the conservative Right, but also more crucially from the far right. The right-wing revival of 'their' intellectual tradition is made doubly productive for the Right as it legitimates their ideological undertaking and, moreover, it persuasively asserts their place in the creative history of the Western World. While the far right's claim to respectability seems somewhat outrageous, the core of their argument has some validity: namely the paradox of right-wing artists who are both part and opponents of the imagined trajectory of progressive modernity.

It is important to stress that the label 'right-wing' for the artists mentioned above is not a retrospective assignment of value, applied because what they wrote is no longer part of the sayable, i.e. can not be uttered in public without repercussions. Pound, Eliot, and Lewis went beyond merely reproducing the mainstream prejudices of their times and actively promoted movements that stood in direct opposition to the general drive towards liberal democracy. The oft-repeated argument that they lived during a time when anti-Semitism and racism were the norm even in democratic societies (which, one could argue, they still are) should not serve as excuse nor as explanation. There is a double fallacy in this popular argument. Firstly, a right-wing statement does not become less right-wing if it is uttered among people who more or less agree with said statement. It would be too reductionist to read 'right-wing' as relative and to omit more important factors such as power distribution and discourse formation, which influence who is allowed to say what and

which ideas are ostracised or marginalised. Secondly, as Anthony Julius has noted: ‘Even if one conceded that the dominant literary spirit was hostile to Jews [...] it does not follow that anti-Semitism was of a strength to compel adherence’.¹⁰ In the same vein Julius remarks that it begs the question why exactly those artists who are celebrated for eschewing convention are, on the level of ideology, excused for being wholly conventional. This also holds true for racism, sexism, classism, and other ideological subsets that degrade an imagined – and subsequently real – other. Approaching the politics of writers and artists thus requires great care in assessing their politics within the framework of their respective societies.

Pound, Eliot, and Lewis, have all to varying degrees, been subject to studies that explored their ideology. All too often, however, these studies have not tackled the issue adequately. In most cases right-wing ideology is abbreviated to fascism, which produces a distorted evaluation of these writers’ ideology and of right-wing ideology in general. In some studies, using fascism as an analytical category made it possible to exculpate and exclude certain writers from scrutiny. In fact, using fascism as an analytical category for literary studies poses a number of problems, which will be discussed in chapter 2. Therefore, this study will use the more inclusive concept of ‘right-wing ideology’ as a spectrum, in which fascism occupies one end but is not the constitutive element. Moreover, when assessing writers’ politics, studies have often relegated these into the realm of the biographical, implying that artistic output is autonomous or at least has to be judged differently. This approach was supported and facilitated by critical traditions such as New Criticism, who professed to focus on the materiality of language and leave such worldly matters as ideology aside. Yet this supposed ‘ideology-free’ reading of literature should be approached with caution. In the case of New Criticism it can be demonstrated that those critics at the forefront of the movement essentially agreed with Eliot’s conservative ideology. The inherent right-wing ideology in Eliot’s poetry became an unspoken agreement and did not need to be further addressed.

The key critical tradition that brought ideology back into the debate could be said to have been the Marxist tradition. As a matter of fact, Pound, Eliot, and Lewis have already come under scrutiny from some of the Marxists’ key theorists. Frederic Jameson has written a seminal study titled *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis: The Modernist as Fascist*. Yet the book that seems to carry its damning verdict in the title does in fact exculpate Lewis almost completely. The title is a ruse and Jameson’s analysis is biased in its understanding of fascism as well as its selection of Lewis’s works. Terry Eagleton in his *Criticism and Ideology* takes a closer look at Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. While Eagleton’s analysis is generally shrewd, he further cements the common argument that

‘the ‘form’ of that poem is in contradiction with its ‘content’.¹¹ Both studies are valuable for reinserting ‘ideology’ into literary studies, but they should not be treated as the final word on the topic. First, some studies like Jameson’s seem to suffer from crucial methodological flaws, which distort the analysis. Secondly, written from a Marxist perspective these studies approach fascist and right-wing ideology respectively from a very specific ideological angle and this is rarely reflected upon. Since it is impossible, so I would argue, to approach the topic of ideology in literature from an objective, i.e. ideology-free, standpoint, there is a need for a diverse range of studies on the subject. However, despite the prominence of the writers and the significance of right-wing ideology, especially fascism, the debate seems listless and has continued to lose its drive in recent years. Some of the most productive new approaches to literary studies, such as gender, queer and postcolonial studies have in part passed over these representatives of the ‘white male heterosexual order’. While it is understandable (and undeniably relevant) that these new critical approaches have largely focussed on marginalised, oppressed, and ostracised voices, it is precisely their critical approach that is needed to dissect Eliot’s, Pound’s and Lewis’s ideology along the lines of gender, race, and sexuality, as these three categories are significant in the assessment of (especially right-wing) ideology. Another category that has been constantly overlooked, despite the Marxists’ investment in the cause, is that of class. While it is true that class is an important category in Marxist studies, this approach has often produced a simplified assessment of its role in literature with a focus on Marxist class binaries and capitalism. While this is not to suggest that the Marxist point is moot, there is an argument to be made that the category of class deserves an approach similar to other critical movements such as gender studies. This is particularly relevant for literary works that come out of a tradition and society with very rigid ideas of class and a problematic approach to the lower classes even among its left-wing authors.¹² The category of class has to be, in accordance with other categories, recognised as constructed and at the same time its very real ramifications have to be understood and made visible. This prefigures that an intersectional approach would further enhance the debate.

This study cannot fill all the gaps that have just been enumerated. What this study is trying to do is to take the critical approaches and insights of gender, queer, and postcolonial studies, as well as bring in the category of class, and apply them to the works of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis to illustrate the significance of right-wing ideology for their literary creation. Hopefully this will also initiate a new cycle of critical studies on these writers. Additionally, this study argues for a reassessment of the role of right-wing ideology for the Modernist project in general, and these three authors in particular. The Modernism of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis did not develop in spite of their reac-

tionary politics, but in harmony with them. Contrary to what Eagleton claims, style and content do not stand in conflict with each other, but augment each other. Moreover, many of the stylistic features of their Modernist writing are directly linked to violent discursive practices such as racial and class appropriation. Crediting the literature these men have produced means coming to terms with the right-wing ideology that influenced them as well as a social context that sanctioned many of these practices and discourses. Looking at the context in which these men wrote also reveals the literary parallels between Pound's, Eliot's, and Lewis's writings and those of like-minded writers in Britain and on the continent. It would be seriously misguided to ignore the rich reservoir of prejudices, imagery, and concepts that sustained these writers, while, in turn, the manifold repetition of these elements maintained the reservoir. The right-wing elements in the literary works of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis are not accidents that can be ignored or explained away but have to be understood as central to their literary endeavour. Right-wing ideology played a crucial role in these men's literary productions and thus has to be credited, even if reluctantly, as part of the Modernist movement

While the first and major part of this book will offer a literary analysis of works by Pound, Eliot, and Lewis, the shorter second part will illuminate a hitherto neglected topic: the reception of literature by today's far right. The insufficiency of the academic debate on the topic of right-wing ideology and literature has created a vacuum the Right is eager to fill with their own narrative. Creating a counter-canon, the Right has tried to establish an alternative intellectual history, which features many notable writers and artists, who are included on account of their art as well as their politics. These developments have not yet come under scrutiny of academic studies despite the recent surge of the (far) right in the West. This oversight might be due to the still prevailing notion that the far right has no intellectual tradition. This would explain why the interdependencies of right-wing movements and pop-cultural phenomena like rock music, the metal scene, and, more recently, meme culture have been studied far more extensively. While the importance of online culture for the far right's agenda cannot be overstated, the intellectual arm of the far right increasingly relies on an image of respectability and thus high culture. The evocation of a rich intellectual heritage does not only support the claim to respectability, it also offers an ideal platform to attack liberal elites and their supposed cultural hegemony. By subverting the notion of the Left's cultural dominance while exploiting the gap left by the inadequate academic responses to the topic, the far right has found an ideal way to enter the discourse. This study will take a closer look at a number of outlets, movements, and individuals of the far right in the U.S., Britain, Germany, and Italy to show how they construct a distinctly right-wing literary tradition. What

should be added is that the intent of this study is not to celebrate the cultural legacy of right-wing ideology. On the contrary, it wants to make visible and problematize the interdependencies of right-wing ideology and cultural production in order to explain the (far) right as a phenomenon deeply rooted in Western history and cultural development. By treating (far) right-wing ideology seriously as an ideology with an intellectual tradition, this study will produce a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has all too often been simplified and distorted instead of analysed and explained.

To approach the issue in a meaningful way, this study will proceed as follows. First a detailed theory chapter will address the phenomenon of right-wing ideology. Judging from previous studies on the subject, it is uncommon for a literary study to dwell extensively on issues outside the realm of its usual subject matter. Yet, there is a danger in relying on a silent agreement over ideological terms like 'right-wing', 'fascism', and others. Crucially for a study on literature, one would lose the precision necessary for a detailed close reading. Moreover, it would obscure the fact that all of these terms are highly contested. Not only do these terms have differing definitions, but the process of defining a term like 'right-wing' or 'racism' is a highly ideological act that can reflect and/or perpetuate certain power dynamics. Addressing the complexities behind the concepts used in this study does not eradicate these problems but it makes the process transparent. Furthermore, related concepts such as fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism will be given due consideration. 'Right-wing' can have different meanings in different contexts; this will be taken into account as well as the historical trajectory of the concept. While I would argue that the core of right-wing ideology has been remarkably stable during the last two centuries, it is important not only to assess its specific permutations during the lifetimes of the three writers analysed here, but also to contextualise right-wing ideology in the power dynamics of its time. What follows are three analysis chapters, each devoted to one author. For each author I have selected one representative main text, which will be supplemented by a range of secondary texts, both literary and other. The aim of these analyses is not to pick the passages that may cause offence, but to show that a right-wing structure lies beneath the text itself, a structure that informs all of its components, with those offending passages (which are mostly very well known) only being the most crass and visible examples. The term 'right-wing structure' in this context means a system of meaning-production that relies on and promotes right-wing ideology and which influences content (what is being said?) as well as form (how is it being said?). My argument that key Modernist texts by Pound, Eliot, and Lewis are based on a right-wing structure implies that they can be read as part of a certain discourse. More crucially this would also mean that some of the stylistic innovations of Modernism can be traced back to a right-

wing structure. The Modernism of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis has to be understood not only as a reaction against older traditional modes of writing but also as a response to the political landscape they found themselves in. Thus, literature could be used to usher in a new fascist millennium, as in Pound's case, or defend established hierarchies against societal change, as in Eliot's case. The fact that this ideological baggage remains potent long past its publication will be the focus of the last part of this book. While an explicit counter-canon set by the Right is certainly not a new phenomenon, there has been an increasing return to specific 'right-wing classics' in recent years. This study is taking a closer look at the reception of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis by today's far right to assess the role of canonical literature in the ideological discourse. Curiously, although the issue of 'right-wing Modernism' would offer a fertile ground to launch an attack against the so-called liberal mainstream, writings on the topic are often marked by an inward gaze and offer little antagonistic force. Produced by the far right for the (far) right, these responses serve as 'internal validators' both upholding and creating a narrative about who the far right is or wants to be. Looking at right-wing reception of Modernist texts offers a glimpse into the potency of the ideological structure that is so often denied or overlooked by 'conventional' academic scholarship.

When I began my work on this project the topic seemed to many interesting but distant. The far right, so often back then deemed the lunatic fringe, did not appear to be a threat to the mainstream discourse. After all, a resurgence of the far right did not fit the self-image of many Western democracies. Nevertheless, in more and more Western countries the Right is on the rise again. The reasons for the resurgence of the (often populist and far) Right have often been sought in the political, economic or social realm. In this way the right-wing revival is seen as a reaction against multiple transformations that seemingly disturb traditional set-ups. The cultural realm is frequently dismissed as something that 'merely' represents and reflects its surroundings. Yet this reductive approach overlooks the capability of cultural artefacts to create knowledge, power structures, normalcy, and deviancy. One repeatedly overlooked reason for the (after all not so unsuspected) resurgence of the Right is the fact that right-wing ideas and ideals still occupy a central role in many cultural products that are consumed and revered by the mainstream and establishment of many Western societies. Looking at the interdependencies of right-wing ideology and Modernist writing does not merely reveal the reactionary politics behind the experimental façade (for this fact alone is quite well known) but addresses the impossibility of divorcing the artwork from its inherent ideology. In the case of right-wing Modernism this proves to be a boon for the (far) right but a dilemma for everyone disagreeing with right-wing politics. Yet in times of the Right's ascendancy, the response can no

longer be evasion of uncomfortable arguments. Likewise though, censoring offending material cannot be an adequate answer to the task at hand. Instead what is needed is a nuanced analysis of the role of right-wing ideology in Modernist literature and in turn an evaluation of the role of Modernist literature for today's (far) right – without censure but with critical meticulousness – and this is what this study sets out to do.