INTRODUCTION

> There is meaning in what seems not to have any meaning,
> something enigmatic in what seems self-evident, a spark
> of thought in what appears to be an anodyne detail.
>
> —Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 2009

In a little-examined episode of the controversial 2006 novel *Les bienveillantes*, the author, Jonathan Littell, sketches a fairly accurate portrait of the French intellectual far right.[1] The episode is brief: only a few pages in this almost thousand-page novel. Yet, to most readers, it appears to offer an interesting—and informative—glimpse into the world of the French far right during the Vichy years. The novel's fictional hero, a Nazi officer named Maximilien Aue, visits occupied Paris in 1943 and socializes with two of the most famous French fascists and collaborationists, Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet. Aue, whose obsession with perversion and abjection, we learn, is matched by his love of classical literature and impeccable erudition, remembers meeting Brasillach at the École normale supérieure, and Brasillach brought him to meet the "bitter" Charles Maurras at the Action française offices, who was "always eager to pour his bile onto Marxists, bourgeois, republicans, and Jews."[2] Aue then joined the young far right, made up of Thierry Maulnier, Jean-Pierre Maxence, and Georges Blond. He also recalls going to a classical concert with Céline and "feverishly discuss[ing] whether there could be a 'fascist' literature" with those young French men late at night in student restaurants.[3]

Here, Littell's portrayal of Aue's 1943 visit veers away from careful historical accuracy, instead borrowing the tropes that have haunted depictions of the interwar intellectual far right especially since 1945, namely, the associations between fascism, masculinity, homosexuality, and perversion. Hatred of the "other"—the Jew, the Communist—is bound to a secret or shameful love of

the "same"—male homosexuality. As historian Carolyn Dean has shown, "from 1930 to 1970," there was a "stubborn" and "persistent" "association between [Nazi] fascism and homosexuality."[4] A similar phenomenon has occurred in France, especially around the figure of Robert Brasillach.[5] In the novel, Aue explains to his friend Lucien Rebatet (author of the 1942 antisemitic and far-right pamphlet *Les décombres*) that Brasillach will now refuse to acknowledge him because when both were young Parisian students, Aue had lost patience with Brasillach's inexperienced desire.[6] Littell presents us with a familiar opposition: Brasillach is the "Romantic" fascist whose love of poetry stands in for his inadequate masculinity and a desire for other men that he dare not fully consummate. He is an aspiring Nazi. In contrast, the "true" Nazi Aue embraces his own desire. He revels in bodily fluids and chance encounters with young men who are "taciturn and available."[7] During this Paris visit, Aue also goes to a "faggot bar" with Rebatet and Pierre-Antoine Cousteau, whom he has met earlier at the offices of *Je Suis Partout*, the most famous collaborationist newspaper of the Vichy years.[8] But, again, the easy homosociability of these devoted far-rightists is, through Aue's eyes, nothing more than a mask for shameful homosexual desire. Aue despises Rebatet and Cousteau because, he explains, they would "not hesitate to denounce someone as homosexual, if one could not denounce them as Jew."[9] Antisemitism, fascism, homosexuality, masculinity are woven together in this Parisian interlude.

Another opposition runs through the entire Parisian episode, just as it does the rest of the novel: the juxtaposition of pure aesthetic taste with fantasies and acts of "perversion" (as Aue recalls it). While meandering on the quays of the Seine, Aue chooses to buy not the obvious and crude pamphlet by his friend Rebatet (which had been a huge best seller), but instead the more abstract and purely literary collection of essays penned by Maurice Blanchot, a "critic whose pre-war writings [Aue] had enjoyed."[10] Rather than teasing out the meaning of the juxtaposition of the crass political and the abstract aesthetic, Littell echoes the familiar characterization of Nazi masculinity. The joining of the sublime (the aesthetic) and the abject (the bodily and the sexual) resonated in postwar fictional portrayals of Nazis.[11] In this vein, Aue describes Rebatet, the rabid antisemite and enthusiastic fascist, as a man "always afraid of his own shadow, [afraid] of men just as he was of women, [afraid] of the presence of his very flesh, [afraid] of everything except for those abstract ideas that could never offer any resistance."[12] Littell's portrayal of the French intellectual far right—like conventional historical accounts—explains these men's choices and

writings as the consequence of fantasies of perversion and abjection. Here, a "powerful link" is made between "a pathological politics and a pathological homosexuality," in turn tied to a pathological and improperly regulated self and deficient masculinity.[13] In this book, I argue that this characterization has obscured serious engagement with the ways in which twentieth-century far-right, antisemitic, and fascist ideologies actually mined and used a language of perversion, gender, and sexuality as foundations for their politics. Just like Littell's contemporary literary fictionalization, historians have too easily avoided interrogating those images and metaphors. But this episode—which few have commented on even though the novel was awarded two prestigious prizes—illustrates how the history of the interwar intellectual far right and of French fascism still requires our attention.[14] And the novel itself—and its attending controversy—reminds us that literature in modern France is a political matter. In order to challenge the historiographical conventions that have dominated this topic, a different reading is called for, one that pays attention to the particular vision that these far-right intellectuals articulated. For that reason, this book offers a synthetic approach that reads both literary and political writings, examining the themes they engaged and how these were expressed. Only then can we begin to develop a view that fruitfully revisits enduring interpretations of the interwar far right and French fascism.

The Aesthetics of Hate: An Intellectual Movement

"Toward a lost purity."

—Thierry Maulnier, *La crise est dans l'homme*, 1932

This intellectual far right that I examine was a small and heterogeneous group composed of men such as novelist Robert Brasillach, essayist Thierry Maulnier, music and film critic Lucien Rebatet, and editors Jean de Fabrègues and Jean-Pierre Maxence. Alongside lesser-known but no less important journalists such as Pierre-Antoine Cousteau, they were a motley collection, most of whom have traditionally been known as the Jeune Droite (or Young Right). They emerged out of the intellectual and political circles of the right-wing, nationalist, and monarchist group Action française. After 1936, they could be found in two distinct groups, each attached to a newspaper: on the one hand, Catholic neo-Maurrassian nationalists created the monthly magazine *Combat* (Struggle) while, on the other hand, a group of polemical and virulent fascist sympathizers came together in the pages of the newspaper *Je Suis Partout*

(I Am Everywhere).[15] Despite their small numbers and their avowed differences, these men had a wide intellectual and political influence and formed a loose network of like-minded, engaged intellectuals.

The two groups evolved differently in response to the events that shook the latter part of the decade. Still, both articulated a reactionary nationalist and antisemitic politics as the remedy for a contemporary world that they believed to be beset by decadence, crisis, and contamination. Despite their differences and their trajectories from the early 1930s to 1939, when some explicitly turned to fascism and others did not, I argue, this group formed an intellectual movement tied together by their definition of Frenchness through the language of gender, sexuality, and race. In order to grasp the extent of their redefinition of far-right and fascist politics, I explore the logic by which gender, sex, race, and empire structured and underscored their particular vision of the nation. They translated that vision through the rhetoric of abjection (a pervasive feeling of disgust and a state of being characterized by lack and ambivalence), in turn displaced onto figures deemed different and, ultimately, unassimilable. These figures (the Jew and colonial subjects) were imagined to threaten and contaminate self and nation. That logic helped sustain the fantasized recovery of a normative masculinity said to have been under assault. I argue that one of the distinctive features of this intellectual group is that they offered a vision in which the political, the intellectual, and the aesthetic were mutually imbricated to produce a solution to the loss and "crisis" they experienced. A different formulation of the relationship of aesthetics and politics lay at the heart of their vision of the nation and citizenship. They conceived of the aesthetic—art and literature—as a site of political expression, even claiming it as the highest form of politics. In response to abjection, they imagined the aesthetic as a site of purity and regeneration, defined through the exclusion of particular groups of people deemed foreign and unassimilable to the French nation. This is what I term the "aesthetics of hate."

Seeing these intellectuals as part of an intellectual movement that emerged at a particular moment and developed a distinctive rhetoric of the nation has determined the organization of this book. This intellectual far right has usually been divided into two groups: on the one hand, those associated with *Combat*, who, on the surface, stayed close to their Maurrassian and Catholic origins (that I call the Young New Right); on the other hand, those associated with the newspaper *Je Suis Partout*, which became infamous because of its fascist and collaborationist stance during the Vichy years. This historiographical conven-

tion is largely the result of these intellectuals' portrayal of their own interwar involvement, and of an ideological "split" that occurred in 1938.[16] But even if newspapers were distinct and ideological differences did emerge around the issues of antisemitism and fascism, it does not mean that collaboration, conversations, debates, and affiliations ended. Instead, I show that these men were far more involved with one another than has been assumed and that their affinities and exchanges (around their vision of the nation) endured. Attending to these intellectuals as part of a movement requires reading some of the most famous proponents not as authors divorced from their context (as some literary scholars have done) nor as journalistic hacks with little claim to the literary (as some historians have done). Many scholars have already explored different aspects of this group and some of their writings, but I suggest here a more synthetic analysis of their ideas. I show (in Chapter 1) how these young intellectuals were very much of their time and understood their place as a political avant-garde in relation to their contemporaries, such as the surrealists. They were consumed by similar concerns but translated them differently.[17] While these far-right writers belonged to the same intellectual and political tradition (a fact that some historians have already examined), that of Maurrassian nationalism and Catholic politics, they also departed from that tradition in significant ways (Chapter 2). I analyze how each group defined its politics throughout the 1930s in relation to the others, and how those definitions evolved over time in order to highlight both affinities and divergences, especially around issues of masculinity, antisemitism, and fascism (Chapters 3 and 6).

Last, two famous figures epitomize the different political and aesthetic strategies embraced by far-right intellectuals in those years: the literary critic Maurice Blanchot and the novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline (Chapters 4 and 5). Both are celebrated representatives of the post-1945 literary canon. Yet, in the interwar era, both were involved in far-right politics, albeit in radically different ways—a fact that has been the topic of many scholarly discussions and heated polemics. Like the journalists and critics they associated with in the 1930s, Blanchot and Céline provided an answer to the supposed Jewish contamination of the nation and the self by arguing that aesthetics was not just a privileged realm for political battles but could operate *as* politics. Specifically, they called for the dehistoricization of literature. Through their embrace of the literary as an autonomous realm outside the contingencies of history and politics, both men offered particular instances of literature in order to provide a solution to a cultural and political crisis. That position also allowed them to

later refuse publicly discussing and acknowledging their interwar writings after 1945. These repudiated writings are exemplary of the "aesthetics of hate" articulated by this group of far-right intellectuals, even though they have not usually been read within the context of the far-right network in 1930s France.

Aesthetics and Politics

> Poetry brings out for us those indefinitely novel pleasures [*jouissances*] of a world that is forever virgin.
>
> —Thierry Maulnier, *Introduction à la poésie française*, 1939

I term the reflections of these far-right intellectuals the "aesthetics of hate" because they found a solution to a political crisis in the realm of aesthetics. This solution did not take the form of either an aestheticization of politics or a politicization of aesthetics—an opposition that has conventionally structured historical debates on fascism; rather, it offered aesthetics *as* politics. For them, the aesthetic—the realm of beauty, art, and literature—was the only site where the sublime could be attained. This is not to say that certain forms of art or literature can be identified as inherently reactionary, but that, for these intellectuals, only certain aesthetic forms answered their search for a political resolution. The aesthetic alone offered a resolution to the abjection of the corrupt social body, and the possibility of a simultaneous binding and transcendence that enabled the recovery of a whole bounded and normative masculine self.

Their political discourse made visible and was expressed through a "dimension of revulsion, attachment, and psychic violence" that, historian Carolyn Dean explains, has usually been "implicit in social regulation" since the late nineteenth century.[18] But the affective dimensions—always at work in portrayals of those deemed deviant and foreign in far-right politics—of this particular discourse began to function as overt political categories only when harnessed to the realm of aesthetics. Some argued that this required a different form of writing, as Blanchot suggested and Céline attempted, while others suggested that particular forms of literary production could function as a politics and thus bring about a regeneration of the nation. They hoped some form of classicism, inflected by their interest in the modern, might provide redemption. That is why, in order to understand how aesthetics served as a politics for these far-right intellectuals, we must take seriously the narrative and rhetorical strategies they developed in their journalism *and* in their literary writings.

Thinking about how they conceived of aesthetics illuminates the themes that infused their particular political vision of the nation. As critic Andrew Hewitt has reminded us in his excellent study of fascist modernism, "It is not enough simply to insist that aesthetics and politics are indistinguishable" and, subsequently, consider only the ideological work of politics.[19] Following the many incisive and illuminating works on the relation of fascism and modernism, my analysis has also been influenced by philosopher Jacques Rancière's astute and persistent engagement with politics and aesthetics.[20] For Rancière, the aesthetic should be viewed as "a mode of thought that develops with respect to things of art and that is concerned to show them to be things of thought."[21] Rancière has explained that we should leave behind the assumption that politics and aesthetics are separate realms. Instead, since politics is a form of "distribution of the sensible which define[s] the common of a community," an operation that echoes the aesthetic, then understanding that relationship means understanding the "way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distributed spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular."[22] Rancière's purpose is not to examine that intractable object of far-right or "fascist" aesthetics—the politicization of the aesthetic—nor critic Walter Benjamin's 1930s reflections on the aestheticization of the politics.[23] His interrogation suggests ways we can think about and explore how aesthetics could function as politics (since both are involved in thinking a community, its objects, and its subjects) and how these intellectuals claimed the purity of aesthetics against the abjection of the political.

This book offers a different interpretation of the French far right by attending to the question of the relationship of aesthetics and politics. On the one hand, historians have paid scant attention to the literary or aesthetic claims of the far right, or have read them as mere expressions of their politics—a politicization of the aesthetic where, ultimately, only the political matters. On the other hand, literary theorists have tended to pay little attention to the larger historical context.[24] While this work follows the insights of many literary theorists, my purpose is to historicize this intellectual movement while taking seriously its claim to be a political *and* aesthetic avant-garde.[25] If we read these intellectuals back into the 1930s, we can see how their fantasies and obsessions echoed contemporary anxieties around the self, the boundaries of the social body, and the borders of the nation. They addressed postwar modernity in order to imagine another future. They looked to Italian fascism, Nazi myth-

making, triumphant American modernization, and those considered "less civilized" in order to define their place within a European and world order. In tracing how the Young New Right and *Je Suis Partout* groups were enmeshed, we can explore how their divergences were also *both* political and aesthetic divergences. Importantly, at the center of their thought was a concern with "civilization"—an idea embedded within a colonial imaginary. Once attention is paid to their civilizational rhetoric, one can illuminate how they defined the relationships between nationalism, antisemitism, and fascism, and explain how, for them, aesthetics could act as politics.[26]

The Gender of Politics, the Sex of Race: The 1930s

> Today, we demand virility.
>
> —Thierry Maulnier, *La crise est dans l'homme*

That these intellectuals were antisemitic, fiercely nationalist, and that they came close to or embraced fascism is a well-known fact. On the surface it might not seem to warrant further analysis. But little attention has been devoted to the ways colonial racism and antisemitism were imbricated rather than parallel in this far-right discourse. Considering this larger "racial" and civilizational imaginary sheds a different light on their politics. In turn, analyzing how the categories of gender, sexuality, and race have structured their political and aesthetic vision illuminates the topic in new ways. Indeed, scholars have examined either France's colonial past or its antisemitic history, but little consideration has been given to the manner in which these functioned together at specific moments. My book addresses those gaps and suggests a different approach.

The ways in which the intellectual far right defined its "aesthetics of hate" come to light only if this movement is reinserted into the particular context of the 1930s. This demands an examination of the categories of difference—gender, sexuality, race—that historians have tended to ignore but that figured obsessively in these years and the ways in which these categories structured these writers' nationalism and antisemitism and inflected the ideological routes they took after 1938. As much excellent scholarship has shown, gender, sexuality, and race operate as privileged signifiers of difference and have provided markers for the delineation of modernity and civilization in the European context. In French history, scholars have illuminated how citizenship was constituted as normatively masculine, and how those assumptions have structured in different ways and at different times the manner in which the nation and re-

publican universalism, as well as ideas regarding the community—civilization, assimilation, immigration—were conceived.[27] Yet few have examined the ways in which the French far right defined French citizenship—and embraced antisemitism and fascism—in relation to a historically specific imagination of normative heterosexual masculinity. In fact, political and intellectual histories of the far right have remained largely immune to any consideration of how sexual difference figured in their discourse. This has been the case even of the most recent French and Anglo-American works on intellectuals and the far right that have been strikingly rigorous and yet analyzed these intellectuals within the confines of conventional political categories.[28] The few exceptions to this methodological "blindness" have mostly been the work of literary theorists and scholars who have sought to engage the manifold ways in which far-right and fascist thought was expressed in twentieth-century France.[29] Still, these analyses only punctuate the field; they have not been "absorbed" into mainstream scholarship.

That antisemitic portrayals and theories of race have been articulated through categories of gender and sexuality is a fact now commonly known. The scholarship on antisemitism has been less resistant than that of other fields to serious analysis of the ways these function as discursive categories. The rhetoric deployed in modern European history to identify, denounce, and exclude Jews has been articulated through normative ideals of gender. Historian Sander Gilman fruitfully explored how political discourse and cultural notions of European identity fantasized a Jewish body imagined to embody all that was deemed antithetical to European civilization.[30] The associations made between Jewishness and effeminacy, deviant sexuality, and perverse homosexuality, as well as a number of other non-normative practices and identities, has long infused European antisemitism, resurfacing at particular moments with great force while often forming the staple of stereotypes circulating in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.[31] That antisemitism is a gendered discourse is an assertion few would contest. But rather than tracing the ways in which these stereotypes seemed to endure despite the vagaries of history, it is especially important to examine *how* they were mobilized in specific ways and arranged so as to analyze the vision that far-right intellectuals offered.

Like many French authors and critics writing in the wake of the aftermath of World War I, the young far-right intellectuals I examine in this book were concerned with the dissolution of the boundaries of the nation, the status of the male self, and the future of French culture and civilization. The male body and

male self—imagined to be porous and under assault—figured largely in their political ideals. It is therefore important to examine how the far right imagined Frenchness through categories of difference and how it articulated fantasies of abjection in an interwar context of heightened anxieties around gender, sexuality, race, and nation.[32] For these were not rhetorical flourishes. They were part and parcel of the way these young intellectuals understood nation, self, and bodies. The constitutive role of masculinity in visions and ideals of citizenship and nationalism has a long history in modern France, dating back to the French Revolution. Similarly, gender and sexuality have often been deployed in order to map out the boundaries of inclusion, assimilation, tolerance, and equality.[33] As Robert Nye has argued, throughout the nineteenth century, the embodiment and performance of specific masculine qualities allowed bourgeois men to mark their legitimacy and superiority.[34] Yet masculinity has been an inherently unstable category, requiring normative definitions that tied manliness and virility to visions of political autonomy, citizenship, and moral superiority, especially designed in the fin-de-siècle to regulate and domesticate those who might deviate, such as the "bachelor" or the "homosexual."[35] Christopher Forth has shown how the modern antisemitism that erupted around the Dreyfus Affair must be situated within a larger normative discourse on masculinity and Jewishness and how depictions of "deficient manhood" and "effeminacy" functioned to point to the suspect origins of French Jews.[36] Similarly, the manliness of intellectuals appeared ambiguous, for some associated with effeminacy while others sought to recast it in terms of manly virility.[37] After World War I, critics, intellectuals, and journalists built upon these long-standing tropes in order to delineate the nation and the social body. Far-right intellectuals who had not experienced the war also articulated their critique through the prism of gender, race, and class.

To understand the particular manner in which these intellectuals invested literature and politics in those years, one must understand how the major concern troubling most writers and critics across the political spectrum was none other than the question of the *self.* In the wake of the trauma of World War I, its mutilated bodies, and brutalized men, could one still think of the self and of "man" as stable, bounded, and driven by reason? The postwar decade had been not just the age of music-hall jazz, cinema, and mass newspapers, but also, for many, a time when, as Céline wrote in his celebrated 1932 novel, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, "shattered courage, demolished reflexes, and broken arms" recalled the atrocities and experience of the bloody war.[38] This revealed mascu-

linity—the unspoken and normative foundation of citizenship—to be fragile, contested, and in need of restoration.[39] The question was how best to define the boundaries of normative masculinity.

At the same time, did the turn to the question of the self, namely subjectivity—best exemplified by psychoanalysis and surrealism—not upset the self's very foundations? Had not the postwar decade unleashed the disorder of civilization? For many on the right and the far right, war, technology, mass culture, and the popularity of socialism and communism signaled a more troubling decadence than they had denounced in previous generations. If such instability was embraced and celebrated by some, it was especially troubling and unsettling to others. Since, as far-right intellectuals believed, the nation was both the expression and the foundation of the self, how could it provide substance to its citizens in the current context? The nation—a long-standing far-right obsession—required determining who was worthy of civilization, embodied the moral values of Western civilization, and could be assimilated or civilized into the imperial project. The boundaries that upheld the French (imperial) nation were now porous, or so it seemed to these men. They had been overtaken by unfettered capitalism, "internationalism," and communism, while the empire seemed under assault from within. As the far-right author Thierry Maulnier loudly proclaimed in the early 1930s, "Crisis is in *man*."[40] Those were the pressing anxieties that this generation of intellectuals had inherited from their conservative forefathers. Young far-right intellectuals manufactured a rhetoric of "crisis," which allowed them to articulate their anxieties. These young men were convinced of the need for action against the "enigma of the contemporary disorder" (as Maurice Blanchot described it in 1937) that they hoped to not only eradicate but fundamentally escape.[41] At stake was the question of French civilization and, at its heart, of the meaning of French masculinity.

This book argues that in order to apprehend the nature of the political reformulation produced by far-right intellectuals, we need to engage with their vision not in terms of the narrow political categories that have dominated histories of the French right but in terms of the ways in which their ideological commitment reflected their normative vision of the self. Race and sexual difference provided phantasmic spaces where the integrity and the boundedness of the individual could be restored. These bodies and boundaries were articulated through a discourse of nation and empire. The desire of far-right intellectuals for an undifferentiated self and a whole nation that were organically fused relied on fantasized notions of racialized and gendered Frenchness. I show how

we must take seriously this vision of the self, the nation, and Frenchness to explore how such ideas, in turn, determined the aesthetic choices and strategies these men mapped out. Such an analysis may elucidate the nature of that elusive object "French fascism," for it allows us to map the paradoxical logic as well as the fascination it held for these intellectuals (as opposed to others on the traditional far right).

The Question of French Fascism

> The young fascist [man emerges] from his race and from his nation, proud of his strong body and of his lucid mind, disdainful of what the world will think of him.
>
> —Robert Brasillach, "Introduction à l'esprit fasciste," *Je Suis Partout*, 1938

This book is not explicitly about French fascism, though some of these intellectuals have been deemed "fascist" by some historians. However, it necessarily reflects on the meaning, presence, and expression of fascism in the French interwar years, since it speaks to the understanding among these men of the relationships between civilization, nation, and the individual, and between bodies, race, and identities. I contend that we may better grasp the decision of these intellectuals to support, embrace, or refuse fascism if we pay greater attention to the complex ways in which they reimagined Frenchness and their place within it.[42] I read these writers' texts as symptomatic of a culturally fraught moment when questions of belonging, identity, and difference were being redefined with great urgency. Through the analysis of such materials as newspapers, magazines, literature, and political pamphlets, my work offers an interpretation of the traditional subject matter of political and intellectual history. It engages the essential but complex relationship of aesthetics and politics that is at stake in histories of modern antisemitism, colonialism, fascism, and Nazism. These questions still haunt the history of the modern twentieth century, for they address the particular ways aesthetics and politics were entwined—in this case, by far-right intellectuals seeking to reimagine French masculinity, nationalism, and citizenship. They have been the enduring subject of historiographical debates on the question of French fascism—a topic I return to in my conclusion.

To better understand the relationship of aesthetics and politics and the "turn to fascism," I begin with one particular theme, *abjection*, which at the time was not mere rhetoric of affect. It tied together self and bodies to the social and na-

tion in a political discourse clamoring for regeneration. I argue that we need to historicize the very meaning of abjection, which has, usually, figured until now only as a theoretical model, by Julia Kristeva especially, Judith Butler, and even tangentially by Giorgio Agamben.[43] Kristeva's work is exemplary in this respect. In her theorization, abjection helped make sense of the relation of bodies, culture, and subjectivity. It offered a vision of the self founded in a constitutive repression that always haunted it. The abject, as Kristeva defines it (in an ahistorical and purely psychoanalytic manner), is a "fallen object" and can never be fully expulsed since it is the reminder of the unstable nature of the subject "opposed to the I." As such it is both necessary to found a subject, for which "the abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture," yet always threatening as "the abject never ceases challenging its master."[44] Yet few have noted the ways in which Kristeva's use of abjection relies on a notion first delineated in the 1930s.

Abjection is itself a *historical* product that specifically emerged in the wake of World War I. It consumed many French critics and authors throughout the interwar years as they tried to find a solution to a fragmented and unstable self haunted from within by (sexual) difference. Both Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot sought in the 1930s to find a resolution to abjection, from different political vantage points. Bataille tried to tease out its meanings in an unpublished 1936 essay. While reflecting on the social order, he explained that "human abjection was the result of the material inability to avoid contact with abject 'things.'"[45] He then added—in a manner that Kristeva would echo—that these "abject things can be defined . . . as the objects of an imperative act of exclusion."[46] Bataille did not further theorize that exclusion (Kristeva did in relation to the subject), though many of his endeavors can be read as attempts to provide an answer to this issue. He produced a "literature of transgression," while Blanchot embraced "the sublime." Louis-Ferdinand Céline fictionalized abject bodies in order to restore a discourse of masterful heterosexuality (it is not a surprise that Kristeva turns to Céline as especially symptomatic of this particular functioning of abjection). Thierry Maulnier, whose obsession with decadence, depletion, and abjection infused his insurgent nationalism, found a solution in his return to a more conventional right-wing politics. The use of abjection was more than a linguistic cliché. It translated a larger concern with the relation of the self, bodies, and nation and inquiry into the very conditions of the individual.

I show that abjection and dissolution constituted pervasive cultural terms in the 1930s that allowed far-right critics to make sense of their experience. Be-

cause abjection bound together affect and bodies and gave meaning to "crisis" and decadence, it allowed these authors to provide an origin and an explanation for the problems they identified, namely the assault from within by those very bodies deemed irredeemably different and thus irreducibly foreign. (While abjection disavowed any possibility of recovery, the rhetoric of dissolution suggested a return made possible by an appeal to the law.) An attention to the manner in which abjection figured in far-right political discourse illuminates the logic of its obsession with wholeness, purity, and regeneration and how it was anchored through a grammar of sex, gender, and race and found a solution in aesthetics—the realm of the sublime. Fantasies of abjection, dissolution, and dissociation were translated in a particular aesthetics where young far-right intellectuals reimagined nation, race, and bodies articulated in a gendered and sexual discourse of male identity, citizenship, and civilization.