

LEWIS LETTER

INTERNATIONAL NEWS FROM THE
WYNDHAM LEWIS SOCIETY AUTUMN 2024

40



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FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

INTERNATIONAL NEWS FROM THE WYNDHAM LEWIS SOCIETY
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Edited by Robert Murray
36 Station Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS2 5ED
robertedmurray@gmail.com

Society Secretary
Jo Cottrell
wyndhamlewisociety@gmail.com

The Wyndham Lewis Society publishes *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, a peer-reviewed, open-access academic journal, and the *Lewisletter*, a yearly bulletin.

The *Lewisletter* is the mouthpiece of the Wyndham Lewis Society and the companion publication to *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*. Appearing annually, the *Lewisletter* informs Society members about matters concerning Lewis and the increasing interest in his work. It attempts to provide a continuing record of publications and media references relevant to him, and to publish newly discovered and previously unseen pictures and texts.

Society members receive a copy of the *Lewisletter* as part of their annual subscription package.

www.wyndhamlewisociety.org

EDITORIAL

ROBERT MURRAY

This issue is a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Wyndham Lewis Society. It is also one for the newsletter, variously called *Enemy News* and *Lewisletter*, having reached, in total, its seventy-seventh issue. This offers the opportunity to consider how far the Society has come since the publication of its first newsletter in 1974.

What exactly is a 'literary society'? That great fount of knowledge, Wikipedia, tells us that 'Modern literary societies typically promote research, publish newsletters, and hold meetings where findings can be presented and discussed'. The WLS is guilty on all these charges, perhaps some more than others, but it is so much more than the sum of such activities.

Under the umbrella of The Alliance of Literary Societies (allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com) over a hundred such groups exist. This raises the question as to whether these organisations aspire to have some cultural import, such as the Royal Society of Literature (also an ALS member), or are they mere fan-clubs for individual authors whose work runs the risk of being ignored if there were no-one to keep the flame alive?

On a few occasions in the past, the Society was close to disbanding, through lack of members and money. Thanks to the generosity of its members, responding to pleas for donations, the threat of closure is now a distant memory, although membership remains frustratingly low, staying at around a hundred. We must thank the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust for its continuing support, handling the issues regarding copyright permissions, as well as its invaluable backing exhibitions and academic conferences. and the Courtauld Institute, which provides a permanent home for a selection of Lewis's paintings and drawings.

The WLS does not exist in a vacuum of mere fandom. The Society's project of promoting Lewis and his work – and defending his reputation from usually lazy and misinformed slurs in the press – continues apace. Its academic wing, in the form of, first, the *Annual*, later the *Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, and various conferences held over the years, has resulted in raising the profile of Lewis, as seen in the Oxford University Press programme of issuing his Collected Works. There have been various exhibitions, including two major retrospectives, of his paintings and drawings both here and abroad.

Lewisletter provides a bridge between the 'official' face of Lewis through exhibitions and re-issues of his work, as well as academic appraisals of it (as exclusively dealt with by the *Journal*), and what goes on underneath the surface of scholarly inquiry – gossip, speculation, the occasional scurrility (as seen in David Wragg's article below) and playing a seemingly never-ending game of catch-up regarding what are often significant mentions of Lewis in past publications.

The internet has revolutionised the world of literary research (and literary gossip, which could be said to be the very life-blood of the WLS). It is an inexhaustible source of new information and has helped to make *Lewisletter* more of a magazine than a mere newsletter. Online book merchants have revealed a wealth of bibliographical information, as well as details of previously overlooked exhibitions featuring works by Lewis. There is an underlying fear that the sport of cultural mud-larking may have passed its zenith, but there is always the chance of stumbling across something new.

The job of editing depends on trial and error, but the newsletter has now grown into a settled format. The main peril is forgetting to credit sources – apologies to those contributors who I have failed to credit in the past. So I would like to thank David Wragg, John Benson, Robin Healey and Christopher Martin (three times!) for their contributions to the current issue and, as ever Jo Cottrell and David Stoker, for their proofreading duties.

Details of the previous incarnations of the newsletter and its editors follow on from this editorial. I came in as editor for no. 31 (which appeared before no. 30),

Below is a drawing of the actress Marie Ney (M 775), as included in the *Thirty Personalities and a Self-Portrait* portfolio, published in 1932. It contradicts the common belief that Lewis could not draw the human hand; although the fingers of the left-hand displayed here may seem to be too long, they complement her rather small head. In any case, as seen in online photos, she did have long fingers.



assembled after a brief hiatus. We also had a new designer, Pete Rozycki, who later suggested the change of title to *Lewisletter: International News from the Wyndham Lewis Society*, reflecting the Society's broader appeal, this echoed in the lively Wyndham Lewis Reading Group, which gives the Society an added dimension through placing Lewis's work into different cultural contexts.

Altogether this adds up to a very successful 'literary society'. Long may it continue.

ROBERT MURRAY

The first issue of the original *Lewisletter* appeared in December 1974, edited by Robert Cowan, who was also Society Secretary. He continued in the joint role as for the next two issues, until Frank Fitzpatrick, who was also the Society Secretary since 1976, took over until issue five, when another of the Society's co-founders, Tom Kinninmont, succeeded in October 1977.

By August 1978, the redoubtable CJ Fox began the first of his tenures as editor. Number eight was the only issue to be entitled *The Lewisletter*, as number nine was the first manifestation of *Enemy News*. The journal was expanded in content and now included illustrations, which gave it an appeal that extended beyond initial mimeographed missives and started to include a regular media news section, as Lewis's work started to receive more attention through sporadic programmes of republication, attracting the usual misinformed opinions, but more consistent praise. There was also the appearance of previously unpublished and little seen material, which complemented that made available through various literary magazines, such as *Agenda*.

Enemy News ran until the 37th issue, in Winter 1993. After Cy left after the first number (13), there was a joint editorship between Paul Edwards and Mick Durman, until no. 19, when Paul took over individually. Then Paul O'Keefe took over until the final issue, no. 37 (Winter 1993). Secretarial duties continued to be carried out by Frank Fitzpatrick, until he finally retired after such long and dedicated service.

1994 saw the biggest change in the format of the journal, with the division between the newsletter and a dedicated academic outlet, initially called *The Wyndham Lewis Annual*, then *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, initially under the editorship of Paul Edwards. The newsletter now reverted to the title of *Lewisletter*, Cy Fox recommencing his editorship from his new base in Ontario. It was now a three-times yearly news-sheet (no.s 1 to 14) and Anthony Wilcock was the new Secretary. However, from issue no. 15, *Lewisletter* became bigger, with regular features, reflecting the increased interest in Lewis in the wider world. Sam Brown took over as the new Secretary, from Summer 1996 to the end of 2004.

Sam was succeeded by Alan Munton, interspersed with brief tenures by James Selby, then Alan again, Anna Burrells, Nathan Waddell, Karen Hedger-Breeds, until 2017, when Jo Cottrell took over.

Lewisletter no. 19 saw a new editor, Robin Healey (now the editor of the Alliance of Literary Societies newsletter and a contributor to this issue). The newsletter was now sported a new visual appeal, courtesy of the designer, Andrew T. Short. After issue no. 22, Alan Munton took over as Secretary (and co-editor for no. 29, editor for no. 30; Anna Burrells again held the fort as Secretary). I came in as editor for no. 31 (which actually appeared before no. 30), assembled after a brief hiatus. We also had a new designer, Pete Rozycki, who later suggested the change of title to *Lewisletter: International News from the Wyndham Lewis Society*, reflecting the Society's broader appeal, as seen in the lively Wyndham Lewis Reading Group, which gives the Society an added dimension through placing his work into different cultural contexts.



Biggest-ever Lewis show for Madrid

Alan Munton

The largest exhibition of Wyndham Lewis is ever held opens in Madrid in February. It will be at the Fundación Juan March from February 5 until May 16, 2016. Co-curators Paul Edwards and Richard Humphreys promise the most comprehensive and memorable exhibition of the Enceya's art 'seen for sixty years'.

The organisers are Manuel Ferrás del Junco, the Director of Exhibitions at the Foundation, and his colleague María Zúñiga. Humphreys speaks of their 'shared enthusiasm' for Lewis's work.

The show will be 140 paintings and drawings, and over 60 books, magazines, and catalogues. Particularly strong is the section of early work from 1906 to 1913, as are the imaginative fantasies of 1933-1938. The group of works from 1928-29 - which the curators have thought of as 'Synthetic Abstraction', without actually imposing that title on them in the catalogue - will emerge as particularly important. The period is as severely repressed as might be expected.

The imaginative work that Lewis produced during his Second World War 'wild' mission is due for the first ever this side of the Atlantic, creative myth, Copacabana urban on war, and adulatory building scenes will all be shown.

Many 'historic' works have disappeared over the years, and the show is to be shown in Madrid as well as a group as we are likely to see. Alongside them will be the 'Times' portfolio, and other work from the war period, such as *Reveries*, *Tales* and *Groups*.



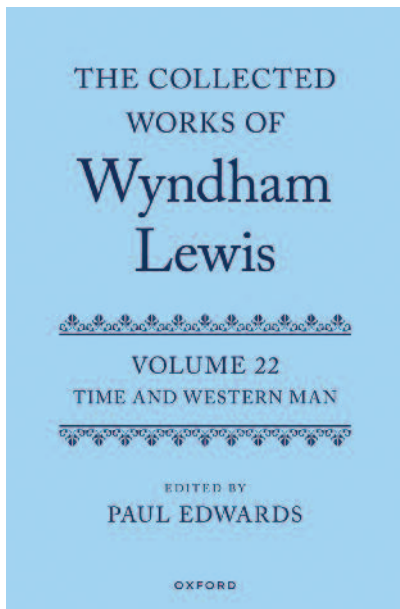
A comprehensive illustrated catalogue of the exhibit will include essays by leading Lewis scholars, and an anthology of Lewis's writing. There is to be a bilingual edition of *Times* of photos which will bring Shakespeare's text and Lewis's design together in an affordable edition for the first time. And there will be a Spanish translation of that by Maria Alvarez, award-winning translator of *Blazing and Blooded*.

"The signs are that the Spanish audience are eager to see Lewis's forgotten modernist," says Dick Humphreys. He adds: "It is fitting that Madrid should be the scene, because Lewis was a student there in the years of the first century looking for a more painting; more for the development of his ideas than London. *This is change!*"

The catalogue, the Spanish film, and the edition of *Times* will add three significant publications to the recent spate of interest in Lewis. *Blaze* and *Times* will be published by Espasa Calpe, a major academic publisher in Madrid. Lewis's new reputation has been particularly apparent in Spain in recent years. ■

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MEDIA NEWS



Time and Western Man

At the time of printing, there is no recent news from the Trust, however, the Oxford University Press edition of Lewis works continues and has now reached Volume 22 with *Time and Western Man*, edited by Paul Edwards.

The Letters of Wyndham Lewis

The Letters of Wyndham Lewis, edited by WK Rose, has been republished by Taylor and Francis and is available online through their site and for free.

Wyndham Lewis and British Art Rock

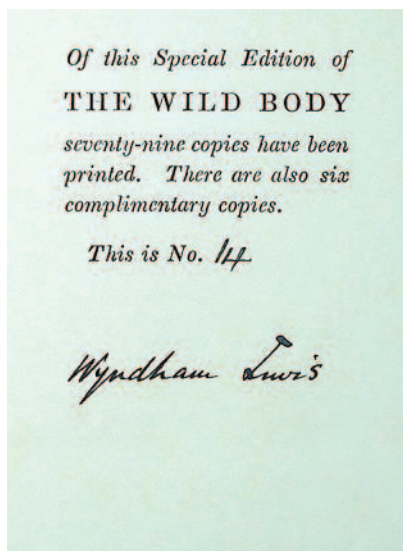
A real curate's egg of a book is the Swiss scholar Thomas Keller's *Wyndham Lewis and British Art Rock* (2024, Bonn, A. Francke Verlag). This is the publisher's blurb:

This study connects the idiosyncratic modernism of Wyndham Lewis, co-founder of the Vorticist art movement, with works of several artists from the British art rock tradition, among them Bryan Ferry, David Bowie, art-punk pioneers Wire and electronic pop musician John Foxx. By taking a transdisciplinary and intermedial [sic] approach to texts from two fields normally studied in isolation and staking out the elements of a shared modernist ethos, the book presents a new perspective on both fields relevant to scholars of literature, popular culture, and the visual arts alike. While the book rests on sound research from the fields of literary criticism, art history, and pop theory, the structure and writing of the book is fundamentally designed to be accessible and comprehensible to non-scholarly readers.

Is this as awkward an enterprise as it looks on paper? Unfortunately, yes. It reads like a doctoral thesis that has slipped away from the editorial attentions of its supervisor, as well as the actual editor. Despite its claims, it's often difficult to read because of its heavy use of literary theory and if you are not familiar with the work of the musical artists cited – particularly Wire, which comparatively few people are – then the whole exercise is virtually redundant. 'Virtually' is the operative word here, as it is available to read online for free (*Wyndham Lewis and British Art Rock*, oopen.org). The actual price of the 450-page book is £59.50p. It is also free on Kindle.



ABEBAY WATCH



The 'Special Edition' of the American first issue of *The Wild Body*, of which seventy-nine copies were printed, signed by Lewis.

eBay

There has been a notable decline in the number of books by Lewis on offer from the three main sites. In June 2023, eBay only had seven pages, although this has recently doubled, albeit with half the listed items by Lewis's persistent namesake, D.B., and some overpriced items. eBay generally has more realistic prices – an original copy of *Blasting and Bombardiering* was on offer for £25, but without a dust-jacket. With one it is £90 which one fancies may yet still be cheaper than the forthcoming OUP edition, but there was also a copy on offer for £747.50 (with dj – one without was £100!). A copy of *Doom of Youth* from Greece was a whopping £1,177.90p and *The Art of Being Ruled* (without dj) was a hopeful £2,500. A copy of the *Tyro 2* was £507.33, *Blast 2* was still £562.39. *Harold Gilman: An Appreciation* was £950.

Most eye-catching was a copy of *The Roaring Queen*, number 35 in a run of 130 copies, published by Secker and Warburg in 1973, signed by Mrs Wyndham Lewis, Michael Ayrton, who drew the frontispiece, and Walter Allen, who wrote the introduction. On offer for £1,450.00.

A first American edition of *The Childermass*, with a tattered dj, was on offer for £90.85 (one without dj was £106.19). Somewhat battered first American editions of *The Apes of God* (1932) and Tarr were £60.57p and £58.87 respectively. Noted in Pound and Grover (but not in Lafourcade and Morrow), is the 'Special Edition' of the American first issue of *The Wild Body*, of which seventy-nine copies were printed, signed by Lewis (plus another six complimentary copies). Number 14 is available for £769.26. Also from the US is *The Little Review* of October 1917 featuring 'Candleman's Spring-Mate' and Pound's contribution to the 'Imaginary Letters', for sale at £154.01. Recently, a copy of *The Old Gang and the New Gang* was on offer for £65.57.

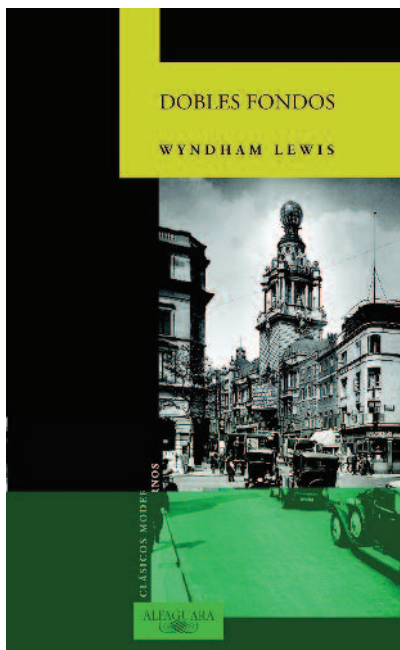
Regarding Pound and Grover, Lewis's first bibliography was on offer for £10.26 – a real bargain, considering the overall increase in prices for what were once moderately priced bargains. Morrow and Lafourcade was £18.13 – but the postage from the US is more.

A copy of the literary magazine *Voices*, mentioned in Lewis's letter to its editor Thomas Moulton, in the article by Jamie Wood in *LL* 36, was on offer for £22. The *London Magazine* of October 1957 (IV, no. 10) with Julian Symons' essay 'On Meeting Wyndham Lewis' was for sale at £11.99p. Featuring the 1921 self-portrait (M 423) on the cover and an article entitled *Der Feind*, is a German magazine, *Akzente*, of August 1985 (edited by Steve Lake and previously noted in *Enemy News*, no. 22, Spring 1986, which also features his review of the Black Sparrow Press edition of *The Vulgar Streak*). This was priced at £8.

The catalogue for the 1990 *Wild Body: The Portfolio of Fifteen Drawings Within Wyndham Lewis's Work, 1912-1919* exhibition at the Crawford Arts Centre of the University of Saint Andrews, edited by Catherine Wallace, is available for £29.99.

'The Don Carlos Coloma Memorial Lecture, 1972' was given by Michael Holroyd, and appears as 'Damn and "Blast": The Friendship of Wyndham Lewis and Augustus John', in *Essays by Divers Hands, Being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, ed. John Guest, 1974 (M and L, F1691), OUP, 1972. This was £10.

eBay still has more frivolous items on offer. From Greece, a reproduction of *Red Duet* in 'giclée [high quality digital print] fine canvas' for prices varying from £19 to £30.



Amazon

The number of items on Amazon has sixteen pages, but there is little of interest regarding Lewis, most of the books listed are either not actually for sale or have eluded the filter of 'Selected Author' (as with Sarah Wyndham-Lewis, *Cook Your Way Through Divorce!: a Recipe Guide to an Amazing New Life*). However, there is a lack of 'extra-curricular' items like bottle-openers and t-shirts, although obviously opportunistic items still exist.

Books by Lewis are highly priced – an original copy of Naomi Mitchinson's *Beyond This Limit*, illustrated by Lewis (1934), even without a cover, was £226.78.

One of these was a Kindle edition of *Blast! Into the Vortex with Wyndham Lewis* by James Longford, first published by Southgate Books, in 2019, which looks like another doctoral thesis. There are quite a few of these on offer. There is also an edition of *The Art of Being Ruled* by the self-styled Rogue Scholar Press, edited by the late right-wing provocateur Jonathan Bowden, which appeared in 2022. Another far-right outlet, Antelope Hill, has a re-issue of *Paleface* (complete with a 'pale face' on its cover) for £26.44.

A collected reprint of both issues of *Blast* and the *Tyro*, which runs to over 600 pages, was 'independently published', with a brief introduction, by Richard Kostelanatz, and is available for £27.59. There are a few reprints of Lewis – and works by Dominic Bevan – from India. S and N Books of Delhi has reprinted *America, I Presume*. The original – with dj – is available for what seems like a reasonable £51.70.

Amazon featured a translation of *The Revenge For Love* into Spanish (as *Dobles Fondos* – 'False Bottoms', the novel's original title, Toledo, Alfaguara, 2005). This was £22.71p. A slim (15-page) publication, from *l'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro* of Milam, of *un saggio e tre disegni*, which appeared in 1958 and featured an essay by Ezra Pound, as well as Lewis's 1919 drawing of Pound (M 345) on the cover, priced at £60 – but only £10 on AbeBooks!

Amazon also had an obscure item (actually mentioned in Lafourcade and Morrow) in its listings. This was a 1931 pamphlet by Cecil Frank Melville entitled (at least partly) *The Truth about the New Party, and much besides, : Concerning Sir Oswald Mosely's Political Aims, the Nazi Movement of Herr Adolf Hitler, and Adventure ... in Political Philosophy of Mr Wyndham Lewis* However, the 47-page item, published by Wishart, but its binding 'unknown', remains unpriced and currently unavailable. £36.50. The 'Wyndham Lewis Number' of *Shenandoah* (IV, Summer-Autumn, no.s 2-3, January 1953) was.

A copy of *The Bookman* (LXXXI, no. 514, July, 1934), with Lewis's article 'Art in a Machine Age', was available for £60.

A signed and numbered copy (no. 4) of Julian Symons' memoir, *Two Brothers* (1985; Edinburgh, The Tragara Press, limited to 130 copies), with Lewis's portrait of the author on the frontispiece, was £95.

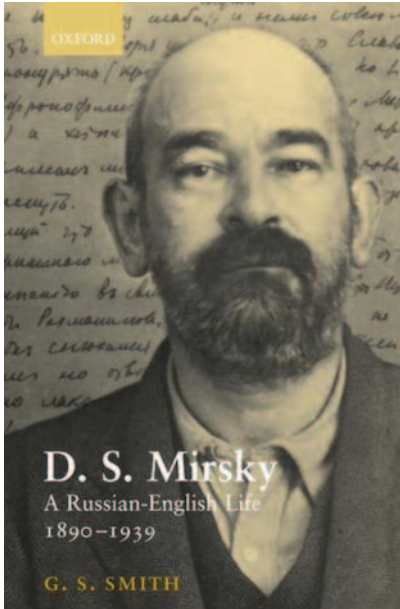
From the States, there have been two editions of the 1918 Knopf edition of *Tarr*, one for sale at £118, the other a rather battered copy at £58.84. A library-bound edition of the three issues of *The Enemy*, published by the Arthur Press in 1927-29, was £235.22; *The Enemy* no. 3, a 'voucher copy' (sent to the magazine's advertisers) was £43.27. A first edition, with dust-jacket, of *Left Wings Over Europe* was £341.68.

We have already seen one of Lewis's 1932 portraits and eBay is offering nine (less than a third of the original prints) of these for £937.32.

AbeBooks

AbeBooks had twenty pages, considerably less than previously reported, with a lack of any unique items such as signatures and obscure publicity hand-outs. Pretty ordinary fare, with seemingly even more works by the namesake. Disgracefully, there were 'rip-outs' of the story 'Pish-Tush', from *Encounter*, 1956, selling for £11, the review 'Perspectives on Lawrence' from *The Hudson Review*, also 1956, for £10, and the essay 'When John Bull Laughs', from *The Listener* of 7th July 1938, on offer for £18. However, there was a copy of *Der Mysteriöse John Bull* (M and L, E 12) from 1939, without dj, on offer for only £14.15, as well as the Dutch translation of *Tarr*, by Meulenhoff Editie of Amsterdam in 1986 for £17.69.

NOTES AND VORTECES



In the early days of the Society, there were relatively few items to report – at least the ones that were perhaps more accessible than they are today. Graham Lane, one of the Trustees, is the Society’s archivist and also contributed a series of ‘Bibliographical Notes’ for *Enemy News* between 1988 and 1993, but these have expanded exponentially. The ‘Notes and Vorteces’ section now mainly lists previously overlooked Lewis mentions in books and articles.

Embarrassingly, some of these are quite glaring, such as an essay on Lewis included in *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (1935, Gollancz), a collection by Prince Dimitri Mirsky, a now-forgotten Russian critic (in)famous for emigrating to Britain and then, in 1937, returning to the Soviet Union, whereupon he was arrested and sent to the gulag, where he died in 1939.

Mirsky’s book is not mentioned in Lafourcade and Morrow, nor anywhere else in books on Lewis. I came across a reference to it in a feature by Paul Johnson, in the ‘And Another Thing’ section of the *Spectator* of 20th November 2004, entitled ‘Dirge for the decline and fall of the Western intelligentsia’ (I initially cut this out and forgot about it for twenty years until it turned up in my garden shed).

Prince Dimitry Mirsky was a Russian critic and historian, famous for his studies of Pushkin and Russian literature who lived for ten years in London before returning to Russia at the height of Stalin’s purges. Mirsky’s known association with the Bloomsbury Set did him no favours with his KGB interrogators, despite being an enthusiastic Communist – *The British Intelligentsia*, published in 1935 by Gollancz, is a work of Soviet propaganda; in his review of Mirsky’s biography (GS Smith, *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life 1890-1939*; 2000, OUP), Neal Ascherson disparages the book as such (www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n05/neal-ascherson-baleful-smile-of-the-crocodile).

Also, several references in novelist Anthony Powell’s *Journals, 1982-86* (London: Heinemann, 1995) offer some unique views of Lewis. He had already declared his admiration for *Tarr* in a previous memoir, *Messengers of Day* (1978). In the diary entry for Sunday, 4th March 1984, Powell writes:

Edward and Fanny Wadsworth occur in unflattering terms in Wyndham Lewis’s *Apes of God* (1930), Edward also in *Tarr*. Wyndham Lewis treated all his friends savagely, Wadsworth, as fellow Vorticist, rich (and no doubt helped Lewis out once in a way financially), particularly open to rough usage. (pp. 102-103) [This is how the entry reads]

There is a longer entry for Tuesday, 27th May 1986:

I finished [Jeffrey] Meyers’s *Wyndham Lewis*, also Lewis’s novel *Self-Condemed* [sic], never before properly read. I find difficulty in defining just how I feel about Lewis, obviously an important figure in the Arts at the beginning of the century, yet full of unsatisfactory characteristics. I was devoted to *Tarr* when young. *The Apes of God* did not really come off, in spite of brilliant passages. All the *The Apes* is still disciplined writing, which *Self-Condemed* [sic] wholly fails to be. The fact is Lewis, notwithstanding immense powers over language, did not know how to put a book together, in addition to a taste for dreadful triviality in much of the material he deals with, his subjects often taken from the popular press. He is utterly unable to grasp what is, essentially, ephemera.

This triviality is never quite so apparent in his painting, tho’ similar faults and virtues can be traced there too. Many of the pictures are without either particular interest nor charged with feeling. The two war canvasses (*Battery Shelled Canadian*, *Gun-pit*) Lewis himself called ‘dull’,



Above is Olive Constance Snell's undated portrait of portrait of Constant Lambert. Below it is Wyndham Lewis's portrait.

nonetheless a sense of violence, puppets operating automatically, seem appropriate to representing war. *Siege of Barcelona*, for instance, has real originality in design, and colour, for that matter subject, comparable with some of the early Vorticist paintings. Paradoxically, so far as portraits are concerned, Lewis is always at his best with Edith Sitwell notwithstanding Edith's and her brothers' bitter hatred, in spite of Lewis being the only man on record to make a pass at her. The Sitwells unhappily shared Lewis's inability to disregard journalists' trivia. All the same, when Osbert Sitwell remarked that Lewis's later portrait-drawings showed the influence of Olive Snell (a popular portraitist of the period depicting Stage, Society, and personalities) he spoke with touch of awful proof, even if some were goodish likenesses. The Lewis drawing of Constant Lambert, in conductor's uniform of morning coat and winged collar, which some as described as 'foppish', bears little or no resemblance to Constant, tho' Lewis was well disposed to him, even inscribing a book with admiration.

NB: Olive Constance Snell, 1888-1962, was a South African-born portrait painter, who studied under Augustus John.

Powell continues in the same entry, initially comparing Lewis with W. Somerset Maugham [who]:

... is a rare instance of a writer who spoiled material by cheap satire. He is not convincing, for instance, when he attempts upper-class characters. The last is also true of Wyndham Lewis, always harping on being himself an 'artist', while latterly lacking the discipline so essential to an artist, especially in spending time, energy, in futile vendettas instead of being industriously creative. *Self-Condemed* [sic] is mostly straight autobiographical material about Lewis's own tribulations in Canada during second war [sic], certainly awful enough, but quite shapeless, not at all convincing on the transmogrification made in representing himself as a professor rather than painter/writer. The book ends in something not much less than a virulent attack on the author's wife, who had, in fact, devoted her life to him (I believe [she?] took jobs at Woolworth's, after his death, while always active to keep his memory going). All this is without offering any real intellectual nourishment to excuse Lewis's own unpleasant behaviour. I think undoubtedly Lewis's paranoia, anyway latterly, amounted to madness, even if that had not always been so. I found him most unappealing the only time we met, but there were people who said he could be charming, intelligent, a brilliant talker. They also tended to be those against whom he turned most savagely, especially if they had also helped him with money. Constant Lambert always maintained an amused sardonic attitude, never speaking of Lewis as he spoke of his close friends, even when he laughed about their behaviour.

(pp. 240-241. There are also two more passing references on p. 248 and p. 280.)

Radio Four Extra broadcast a repeat of the programme *Conversation Extra*, with Rebecca West, originally aired in December 1972, on the occasion of the writer's 80th birthday. There was no mention of Lewis, but there was a brief reference to Pound and the Egoist scene, West being particularly impressed by Richard Aldington.

However, Lewis's 1932 'personality' portrait of Rebecca West is featured on the front cover of *The Essential Rebecca West* (Penguin, 1987). The title is a misnomer because it actually features uncollected prose works.

Two more additions to the list of overlooked books – Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (1979; Penguin edition), 1981, pp. 144-45, 166, 192, and John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life (The Authorised Biography)* (2005; OUP), p. 124, each have passing references to Lewis.

Academic papers have proliferated over the last few years. The online academic journal *Miranda* has two articles by Annelie Fitzgerald, both published in 2016 and available to read for free: "This rushing cosmos filled her with a bleak dismay": The Textual/Sexual Dynamics of Speed in *The Revenge for Love* by Wyndham Lewis, December 2016 (<https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.8626>) and 'AS – Wyndham Lewis, Pablo Picasso and the Question of Eclecticism'

Don Van Vliet
"Untitled, No.22", 1994
Oil on linen
28 x 24 inches
71 x 61 cm
VLI 173
© Michael Werner Gallery



(doi.org/10.4000/miranda.8142. It is not apparent what the 'AS' in the title means).

There are many more academic articles that are freely available online, often more recent.

Australian writer John Baxter's entertaining and informative memoir, *A Pound of Paper: Confessions of a Book Addict* (2002, London: Doubleday), complements *Lewisletter's* recent forage into the long and often bizarre history of Australian critical reviews of Lewis. Lewis is mentioned twice – in one of the end-of-book lists, *Tarr* being deemed the best novel of 1918 in Cyril Connolly's *The Modern Movement: 100 Key Books From England, France, and America, 1880–1950* (1965) and in connection with Iris Barry ('The equally socialist Iris Barry ran the [London Film] Society between bouts with the bottle and disastrous love affairs, including one with the writer Wyndham Lewis', p. 107).

Baxter also includes John Collier, mentioned in the last issue, in his lists of the best novels, for 1951 with *Fancies and Goodnights*, in [Ellery] 'Queen's Quorum'. There is also a brief mention of Michael Ayrton and E. McKnight Kauffer and their designs for the covers of fantasy books (pp. 92-93). Baxter surely has a complete, or near-complete collection of Lewis, but unfortunately doesn't mention anything of this.

Also, many thanks to John Benson for sending in this: 'Just a note to draw your attention to an interesting article on the subject of Iris Barry in the 9th December 2023 edition of the *Spectator* magazine – "First lady of film. Igor Toronyi-Lalic looks back on the remarkable life of Iris Barry, the *Spectator* critic who made cinema an art form".'

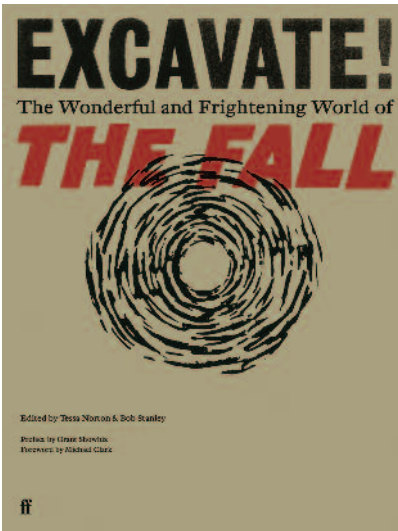
Of course, our hero gets a suitably disparaging mention: '... Barry had fallen for films years earlier, first under the guidance of Ezra Pound, then while shackled up with her on-off lover, the feral artist Wyndham Lewis, who, wanting her out of the house, encouraged her to visit the fleapit cinemas of Bloomsbury. (Their relationship was less than romantic: returning from hospital after giving birth to their second child, Barry was forced to wait at the door for Lewis to finish having sex with his latest squeeze, Nancy Cunard.)'

The New Year saw an interesting exhibition of the later paintings of major



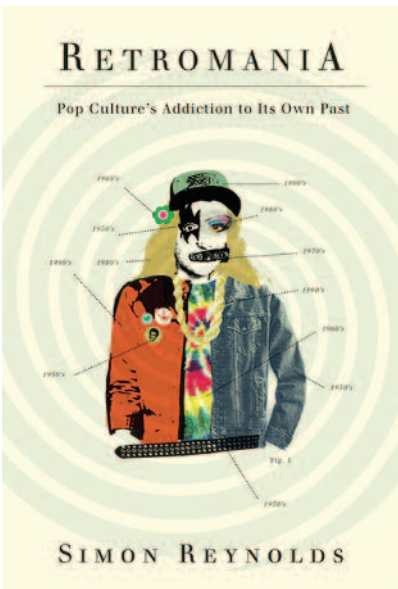
Lewis fan Don Van Vliet (see *LL* 29, Summer 2011) – aka the musician and major Lewis fan Captain Beefheart (see *LL* 29, Summer 2011) – at the Michael Werner Gallery in Mayfair. Recent accounts of the evolution of the Captain’s unique sound and his dubious working methods have somewhat tarnished his reputation as a musical innovator, but his pictures are uniquely his alone. His bold use of colour and the actual texture of the paint splashed onto the canvas (or window-blinds when he was a bit strapped for cash) confronts the viewer with the distinctly un-Lewisian notion of untrammelled spontaneous creation.

Michel Delville and Andrew Norris, *Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and the Secret History of Maximalism* (2005, Cambridge, Salt Books), pp. 144 and 177 (note) has a reference to *Tarr* and Kreisler’s mechanical urge to rape Bertha, equating it to Zappa’s portrayal of the ‘futurist eroticisation of the machine to its limits’ in his album of 1979, *Joe’s Garage*. Otherwise, the book is badly written and over-burdened with obscure cultural and theoretical references, much like Thomas Keller’s book noted above, although that did show an understanding of Lewis’s work.



According to a review on Amazon of *Excavate! The Wonderful and Frightening World of the Fall* (ed. Tessa Norton and Bob Stanley, Faber, 2021) a collection of essays on the late Mark E. Smith and his group the Fall, references to ‘M.R. James, Arthur Machen, and Percy Wyndham Lewis are all present and correct.’ A feature on Smith in the music magazine *Mojo* (no. 293, April 2018) notes ‘The influence of HP Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick and artist-poet Wyndham Lewis could be discerned as he jeered and judged, in cryptic word-blocks, all borne on a clanking Panzer of lab-stitched punk, Krautrock and country’ (p. 45 – note that in 2018 the term ‘krautrock’ was not yet deemed politically incorrect – the polite term is now *kosmische musik*). Not that MES would have been that concerned. Smith’s revelatory interview for the *NME*, previously noted, is also referred to in Simon Reynolds’s ground-breaking study *Retromania* (2011, Faber, p. 132) which gives the full cultural context to the original article.

A song entitled ‘Malign Fiesta (No Soul)’, written by the late Jeff Buckley and Gary Lucas, is included on a CD collection of pre-fame demos, called *Songs to No-One, 1990-1992* (Knitting Factory / Evolver, 2002).



An event at the Workers’ Art Guild, Queen’s Square, near Russell Square, earlier this year, saw a book-launch for the sculptor and printmaker Michael Sandle. Sandle is an enthusiast for *Tarr* and *Apes* and a more complete appraisal from David Stoker, his former student, will appear in the next issue.

LEWIS DOWN UNDER (AGAIN)



Following the example of Cy Fox, a recent visit to New Zealand gave me the opportunity to seek out the existence of a forgotten outpost of Lewisland. This time I made it my intention to see what actual traces of Lewisiana, in terms of books and pictures, existed there, idly entertaining the notion that sometime someone work in the not-too-distant future will stage an exhibition of Lewis's work. Perhaps one of those billionaires seeking refuge from impending natural disaster and political turmoil by buying up large tracts of land around the country, could use it as another tax-dodge.

Christchurch

Urban New Zealand provides its own 'time-flats', with a programme of constant re-building, shifting in a Bailiff-style act of manipulation. Christchurch is the obvious example, with none of the buildings (language schools, pubs, boarding-houses) I knew there from before the earthquake, when I briefly lived there, still standing. All have been knocked down and re-orientation with the city is difficult; in fact, Christchurch was a more interesting place in its first stage of reconstruction when a makeshift centre of disused ship containers gave the place a homely ramshackle quality, rather than the faceless corporate lego-land that is now being imposed upon it. Still, there is always the art gallery, albeit somewhat reduced in capacity.

Of course, there is the natural landscape, which is stunning, but actually man-made when it is considered that most of the country was covered in forest before the colonial period. If Lewis was ever a landscape painter, he would have seen something architectural in those rolling hills, a potential Caliph's Design wrought through nature. The programme of constant re-building eliminates any sense of permanence beyond nature itself, especially as there are no buildings older than 200 years.

A major attraction of the country are its museums and galleries. Every city has a showcase for contemporary local art, as well as those that would pass for a 'classical' age, such as the paintings by Rita Angus, on display at *Te Manawa* in Palmerston North. Surprisingly, there are no works at all by Lewis in the Auckland Art Gallery, although there are some works by British modernists – an Epstein head, for instance. An ongoing exhibition, *Threads of Time*, makes use of the gallery's collection of older paintings, changing them regularly, recently adding a very wispy drawing by Austin Osmund Spare. Along with a soundtrack from Iggy Pop and the Stooges ('We Will Fall' from their first album, albeit played so low it was barely discernible), it was a show that cried out to be labelled 'Gothic'.

Dunedin

Initially I made my way down to Dunedin to see a certain 'Victorian Savage'. Michel (no picture included) no. 434 featured on the front cover of *LL 36*, the drawing was in black and white with pointillist-type lines. I was unaware that what I thought might have been Lewis experimenting with the image was actually due to a technical fault in sending a copy of the picture over. It should have been in colour (shown above). Many thanks to Genevieve Webb of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery for giving me permission to see this nevertheless curious gem.



As spotted on George Street, Dunedin



The National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa
Tongarewa

Wellington

In Wellington there was a real treat in store – literally, as the 1932 *Thirty Personalities and a Self-Portrait* portfolio cannot be properly displayed and is only accessible by appointment. The New Zealand / British actress Marie Ney donated a copy of the portfolio to the National Art Museum, which was later housed in the archive at *Te Papa* ('Our Place', The National Museum of New Zealand) in 1967. She also donated *A Shore Scene* (M 431), the other work by Lewis held there. I had always thought that New Zealand's holdings of modern British art were obtained as a job-lot in the early sixties through the agency of Tate Gallery curator Mary Chamot, but this is not always the case; apart from the gift to *Te Papa*, Dunedin's *Victorian Savage* was donated by the De Beers family in 1975.

The turn of each sheet of tissue paper revealed the incredible effect of light and shade that Lewis used to make his subjects, now mainly forgotten, seem alive. Many thanks to Amy Phillips and her assistant Lizzie for allowing me to see this treasure trove. The portfolio is reproduced on the *Te Papa* website (www.tepapa.govt.nz). There was also a small collection of newspaper reviews and a copy of *Rude Assignment*.

There are plenty of bookshops in New Zealand, but these are limited in their selection, unless you are interested in Kiwiana and science-fiction. In general, second-hand books are reasonably priced, but there are few rarities on offer. I inquired in one bookshop whether they had any books by Francis Stuart and was told they hadn't a single one in the twenty-five years they had been in business. Then again, very few UK and Irish bookshops would be selling them (I've only ever seen them online). Hard to Find Books in Dunedin (they also have a branch in Auckland, housed in an ex-convent), had a copy of the original *Rude Assignment*, with a torn cover, for only \$25 (£12.50), as well as *The Essential Rebecca West*, noted above.

Curiously, Lewis's bibliographer Bradford Morrow's novel *Giovanni's Gift* turned up a couple of times in charity ('opportunity' – 'op') shops, whereas I have never seen a copy here.

A visit to Wellington Victoria University Library in Kelburn perhaps revealed the problem with establishing a Lewisian presence in the educational field. There are no actual books by Lewis himself on the shelves, apart from a 1929 edition of *Paleface* (would anyone dare put it on a reading-list nowadays, considering Robert Caserio's comments in the Reading Group discussion?) and the Tomlin compendium. The Victoria website shows that most of the critical books on Lewis, from Pritchard to O'Donnell, are available, as well as older editions of Lewis's works, rather than the Black Sparrow, let alone the OUP, editions (there are also some Gordon Press pirate copies). Who reads these books, if they haven't read the source material?

Once again, many thanks to Daniel Scudder and the rest of the family for their kind hospitality. And I hope that Daniel's doctoral thesis on musicology has borne fruit.

THE FUCKING AVANT-GARDE: A SHORT NOTE ON SWEARING

DAVID A. WRAGG

I've heard more than once the anecdote about the person on the London Underground with a newly printed copy of *BLAST*, title visible. The title was, apparently, designed to shock.

When a friend recently gave me (I wonder why?) a copy of Emma Byrne's *Swearing is Go*d F*or You* I was disappointed to find no entry, among other well-known expletives, for 'blast'. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* provides an extensive list of meanings for the word, most of which are applicable to Lewis's publication, to include "exclamation [Brit informal]: expressing annoyance: *Blast! The car won't start!*"¹ Clearly, the word 'blast' was hardly the acme of swearing in 1914, or thereabouts, and it's hard to believe that an equivalent to the expletive Paul Fussell records in his book about World War 2 didn't exist in World War 1.² Still, the multiple meanings of **BLAST** surely include what Byrne calls 'propositional swearing', which is 'deliberately chosen for effect', as opposed to 'non-propositional swearing' as an 'unintended outburst that comes when we're surprised or hurt'.³ How else to explain the pages of *BLAST* attacking various targets?

One especially interesting dictionary meaning can be related to Lewis's idea of the vortex, where the Vorticist is at his 'maximum point of energy' (NODE: '(at) full blast: at maximum power or intensity') while somehow riding the blast at the still point. Yet as invective, Lewis's blasts surely express the creative force of an exasperation that exceeds scholarly definitions. The tension at the heart of the vortex, (whether or not one reads the thing as a deconstructive trope – a vortex) relies on the impossible balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces, in the same way that using a dictionary to define a word or phrase directs one to other words and phrases, *ad infinitum*, so that philology reflects on its own linguistic constitution.⁴ Indeed, the tension between the synchronic and the diachronic might be held to mirror the moment of a blast and its explosive effects.

Is a 'bless' the antidote to a 'blast' – the acceptable benison to some sort of denunciation? In *Blast*, some parts of England work, or can be reclaimed, while others don't, and are already redundant. Lewis's blasts do not amount to a scorched earth policy; more a 'strong gust of wind or air' and 'a severe reprimand' (NODE, definitions 2 and 4), and perhaps a tocsin for avant-garde activity in the face of artistic and social complacency. As an avant-garde swearword it could even be an oath: *I promise not to belong to Bloomsbury*, for example.

But all this semantic jollity should not be taken lightly, lest one be blasted in turn by the advocates of Lewis's importance for English modernism. The fate of the historical avant-gardes hangs heavily over modernism's historiographers. The shock of the new has been absorbed into mainstream cultures (e.g. advertising's use of Surrealist techniques; even *Blast* itself⁵) and the culturally

1. For a free look at definitions online see: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blast>

2. Paul Fussell, *Wartime*, Oxford University Press, 1989. See especially the later sections of Chapter 7, and particularly the anecdote about the airman fixing a Wellington bomber, who upon dropping his wrench exclaimed: 'Fuck, the fucking fucker's fucked.'

3. Byrne, Emma, *Swearing is Go*d F*r You, The Amazing Science of Bad Language* (Profile Books, 2017), 16-17.

4. See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton University Press, 1972)

5. Photo courtesy of Jo Cottrell



All propaganda or popularization involves a putting of the complex into the simple, but such a move is instantly deconstructive. For if the complex can be put into the simple, then it cannot be as complex as it seemed in the first place...

(Terry Eagleton)

It is the very success
of capitalism that
the chance to be
exploited in a
long-term
job is now
experienced
as a privilege.

Sławoj Ziółek



offensive value of swearwords has been scare-quoted by TV bleeps. Once things get into this kind of self-referential vortex modernism's irruptive presence becomes just another online meme, and a cause of regret that art has not changed the world via cultural criticism (see images)⁵.

Of course, blasts of one sort or another continue, but who gives a fuck? Even Lewis gave up on 'extremism' by the time he reached *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, where a return to some sort of naturalism was deemed preferable to the normalisation of modernism's *outré* aspects. Normalisation is the killer, like putting a virtual lid on real explosions for anyone to mediatise. And do we academics really want Lewis's avant-garde efforts to be on undergraduate syllabuses of a decaying HE system? Such a congruence seems antithetical to Lewis's Vorticist aims. According to Byrne, the stronger the swear word the more pain relief it provides, especially compared to those 'minced oaths' considered 'socially palatable'.⁶ Blasts were intended to shake up the inhabitants of the status quo, to include its regularised humour: 'Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness. Arch Enemy of REAL...'⁷ And this is where Lewis's blasts have **not** been remaindered, though the terms of the debate may have moved on.⁸ Outrage at injustices are blasts at vested interests, as well as 'stupidity and sleepiness', and we have plenty of art contributing to current debates about oppression, marginalisation and the making of history. To the end of his life, Lewis's category of Art seems to have been a synonym for critical activity, for the life of the imagination, and for the courage to protest against those things he considered to be wrongheaded and socially corruptive. While he may have questioned some of the premises currently on offer, he would surely have agreed with the general principle of his Vorticist manifesto: 'Stir up Civil War among peaceful Apes'.⁹ Or as Byrne puts it in her which seems to identify swearing as a resource of hope: ...

I started this book by saying that I didn't want to encourage you to swear more. Swearing is like mustard; a great ingredient but a lousy meal. [But] we need that part of our language to keep its potency, its slightly risky nature, otherwise it wouldn't be swearing. We drop those words that don't give us a sufficiently strong punch anymore and pick up words that have taken on the mantle of the unsayable... We will never know for sure where swearing came from, but we do know that we keep reinventing it, just when it seems to be losing its power. We need swearing and, however we might have invented it, I'm fucking glad that we did.¹⁰

6. Byrne, op. cit., 58.

7. BLAST, Black Sparrow facsimile, 1992, 17.

8. See, for example:

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/713300>. Bear in mind too, debates about the social acceptability of protests by climate action groups, notably Extinction Rebellion, and Just Stop Oil.

9. BLAST, op. cit., 31

10. Byrne, op. cit., 200-201.

LEWIS IN THE SIXTIES

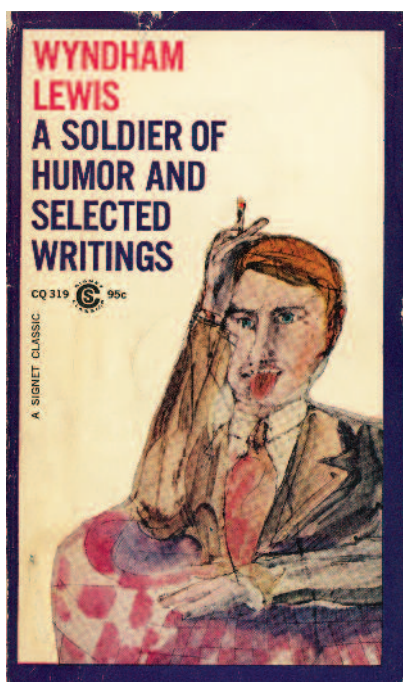
ROBERT MURRAY

At first sight, the association of Wyndham Lewis with the 1960s seems rather incongruous. In many ways, he was a figure whose reputation was re-affirmed in the previous decade, with the most comprehensive exhibition of his visual work to date with the Tate exhibition, by the publication of his last books, and by the embrace of modern media with the BBC radio adaptation and broadcast of *The Human Age*, as well as other works.

As an active writer and critic, if no longer a painter, Lewis was as much a figure of the 1950s as he was in any previous decade, still very much on the outside yet undeniably a part of the era he found himself in. Yet Lewis had a definite presence in the sixties, one that approached the condition of 'popular', or perhaps rather potentially popular, something he strived for continually when he was alive. What Thomas Keller, in his recent study referred to in the Media News section above, calls Lewis's 'cultural after-life' in the 1980s is an insubstantial claim of 'influence', especially when limited to a particular style of music. The evidence of such (sub)-cultural interplay is more tangible in Lewis's actual work and its place within the time it initially re-appeared.

Lewis's work started to re-appear sporadically throughout the sixties. *The Human Age* trilogy was published, for the first time in paperback, as three separate volumes by Calder and Boyars (under the Jupiter imprint), in 1965-66 (at 6/6 each). The Jupiter editions were not updated and are textually inaccurate, although the edition of *Malign Fiesta* does contain a brief outline, with an introduction by Hugh Kenner, of the final part of the projected tetralogy *The Trial of Man*. Yet the trilogy – along with *Tarr*, in 1969 (10/6), also published by Calder – cast Lewis in the image of a European avant-garde novelist, a contemporary of Romain Rolland, Andre Gide and Alain Robbe-Grillet and others whose work also appeared in Jupiter editions. *The Letters*, edited by WK Rose in 1963 further raised his profile, especially in the United States where his books were not always published.

The first anthology of Lewis's writing, *A Soldier of Humor and Selected Writings of Wyndham Lewis*, published in 1966 by the New American Library of New York (and Toronto), under its Signet Classics imprint. This was an unlikely source for popularisation, the firm being mainly known for pulp fiction, but according to the entry in Morrow and Lafourcade (p. 106), the print run in the US was 54,000, sold at 95 cents a copy. Confusingly, the British edition, priced at 7s 6d, was published by the subsidiary, the New English Library, of London, but retains the American spellings, so perhaps this figure includes both US and UK print-runs. This would still easily make it by far the best-selling book by Lewis, if we assume that comparatively few copies were, to use a perhaps unfortunate term, 'pulped'. Certainly, judging by the well-used state of my own second-hand (UK) copy, there is no reason to doubt that it was indeed a best-seller, despite a rather effete looking bohemian (not drawn by Lewis) depicted on the front cover.



William Roberts
The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel:
Spring, 1915
 1961-62
 © Tate, London

From left to right, seated: Cuthbert Hamilton, Ezra Pound, William Roberts, Wyndham Lewis, Frederick Etchells and Edward Wadsworth. Standing in the doorway are Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders. Joe, the waiter, and Rudolph Stulik, the proprietor of the restaurant from 1908-37, are on the right.



The New English Library was to be notorious in the sixties and seventies for its own sensationalist titles, such as the 'Skinhead' and 'Hell's Angels' series, science fiction and war stories (often from the Nazi perspective), as well as GF Newman's exposé of police corruption, *Sir, You Bastard*. Yet it also published Liam Flaherty's *The Informer* ('He Betrayed Ireland to her Enemy') Frederic Raphael's *Richard's Things* (filmed with Liv Ullman in 1980) and ER Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*. Perhaps it is not so much of a stretch of the imagination to find a link between the misadventures of skinhead Joe Hawkins and 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate', or Michael Moorcock's quintessential hippy anti-hero Jerry Cornelius (featured in NEL's *Entropy Tango*) and Thomas Rhymer, in 'The Bishop's Fool' (from *Rotting Hill*, also included in *Selected Writings*).

It was an accomplished anthology, making up 440 pages, edited by noted translator Raymond Rosenthal, who also wrote an informative introduction, along with the short introductions to each of the six thematic sections, a short bibliography and 'A Note on the Text' ('The text of this edition follows Wyndham Lewis's eccentric systems of capitalisation and punctuation, as well as his use of italics'). The first section includes six short stories, plus extracts from *The Ideal Giant*, *Enemy of the Stars*, and 'Inferior Religions'. Extracts from *Blasting and Bombardiering* follows, then extracts from *The Caliph's Design*, plus the essay 'The Objective of Art in Our Time' (omitting the additional 'Plastic' in the title that appeared in the original title in *The Tyro*, no. 2 and *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*) in the 'Art in Transition' section. 'Writers and Politics' included extracts from *Men Without Art* and *The Writer and the Absolute*, followed by a section of over fifty pages taken from *Rude Assignment*. Finally, the cleverly titled 'From Colony to Cosmos' section consists of extracts from *Filibusters in Barbary* and *America and Cosmic Man*.

Selected Writings was succeeded by *Wyndham Lewis: An Anthology of His Prose*, compiled by EWF Tomlin in 1969 (Methuen), which had a more specialised appeal, over half the book consisting of extensive extracts from *Paleface* and *The Art of Being Ruled*, complemented by a sample of *The Doom of Youth* and *America, I Presume*. Only one extract – 'Film Filibusters', from *Barbary* – was repeated from the earlier book. In turn, there were the CJ Fox anthologies *Wyndham Lewis on Art* (also published in 1969), *Unlucky For Pringle* (unpublished fiction, with Robert Chapman, 1973) and *Enemy Salvoes* (critical essays, 1976). In 1971, Walter Michel's standard work *Paintings and Drawings* appeared. In 1967 Lewis released his first record, featuring a reading from *One-Way Song*.¹

1. As detailed in Pound and Grover, p. 181. The issue of *Artscanada* (Vol. XXIV, No. 11, Issue no. 114) that featured the 33 rpm record (recorded in 1940) was a 'Wyndham Lewis' number, entitled 'The Great War, Wyndham Lewis and the underground press'. At the time, what was known as the 'underground press' was a description of specifically contemporary counter-cultural artefacts, rather than *Blast*; although I haven't ever seen a copy of *Artscanada*, I would have assumed it is the latter.



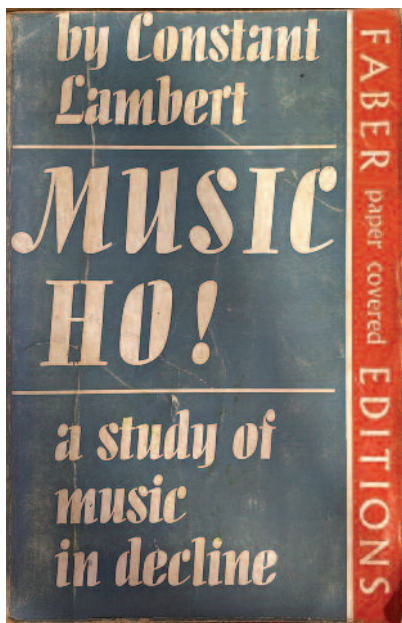
Mark Gertler
Merry-Go-Round
 1916
 © Tate, London

A decade after his death, Lewis's first autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, was republished by Methuen in a second, expanded and amended edition, with a preface by his widow, Anne Wyndham Lewis, and additional material in the form of short stories written during the 1914-18 conflict. This was an attempt to catch the wave of popularity for books about war, particularly the Great War, which was still only fifty years old in 1968, but seemed like age ago because the last war was still fresh in the popular memory. It was commemorated with a long documentary series on commercial television, featuring interviews with veterans of the conflict, but the Second World War was fought continuously in the cinema and on the tv screen, as well as with children's toys – whole armies from across the ages of military combat, in reduced plastic form, were available for a few shillings and pence. Lewis' father Charles was there in spirit upon the centenary of the American Civil War with the production of Union and Confederate toy soldiers from Brittain's, as well as a particularly gory series of bubble-gum cards (from Topps) deemed too violent to be sold in the United States, but perfectly suitable for British boys, as seen in the portrayal of two soldiers from opposite sides impaling each other with their bayonets. The popular toy, Action Man (and his British buddy Tommy Gunn) and the veritable arms-fair of weaponry intended for play, would have seemed bizarre to Lewis. Along with all the real-life conflicts that were taking place across the world, the sixties were indeed a moronic inferno. There was also the flood of comic-books and 'action' novellas – which brings us back to the New English Library and Lewis's potential popularity. *Blasting and Bombardiering* gave Lewis a foothold in the public consciousness – the book was taken out from Walthamstow Library fifteen times during 1967 and 1968, but only then a further twenty times between 1970 and 1982, according to the date stamps on a copy I borrowed.

One hopes those readers were not simply attracted to the book because of Lewis's military involvement but were intrigued by British Bohemia. The humorous tone of the book made it more readable than most war memoirs – and certainly most art ones, even though the level of humour is often of the Bairnsfather 'Find yersel' anuvver 'ole!' variety.² Campaigns promoting a certain artistic cause are often pursued in a military manner, as seen in Lewis's description of the resistance to Marinetti's attempt to take over the Vorticists. However, in the actual theatre of war, Lewis has no control over the outcome – even the desirability of, and belief in, eventual victory is absent from the general consciousness of those taking part in the absurdity, much less any sense of triumphalism. William Roberts' group painting, *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour d'Eiffel, Spring 1915*, finished in 1962, poses a conundrum that may be seen as typical of the time – a celebration of youthful exuberance that was starting to emerge and a retrospective foreboding of the horrors of a war which was to cast a shadow over so many. The painting implies much more than mere nostalgia. Mark Gertler's *Merry-Go-Round* of 1916 portrayed careless abandon as a liability, the uniformed riders being driven to their inevitable doom by mechanical horses, nothing they can have any control over. Roberts' champagne-quaffers are unaware of their fate, but the viewer is and acts as an agent that shapes our understanding of the painting as the portrayal of a future unfulfilled. That may explain Roberts' conciliatory attitude towards Lewis, whom he previously derided as the 'great whale' of Vorticism. Lewis should have been skulking in the far corner, suspicious of everybody, not the centre of attention. So to see an ebullient Lewis at centre stage may be a sign of belated forgiveness, something synonymous with the times, possibly in reciprocation to both sides of Lewis's book. The failure of Vorticism is only momentary as the movement seeks a greater realisation of its potential – if the time was appropriate.

Blasting and Bombardiering is more than a eulogy for a lost age, that of London bohemia before the Great War. The fact that it was written ten years after the events it describes lent itself to being something more than memoir. The cut-off point of 1926 omits what Froanna in her Preface described as the 'horror' of the General Strike of that year, something perceived as such by Lewis as symptomatic of the entropy of British society, but which was only briefly referred to here. *The Apes of God* in 1930 described such a collapse in greater, albeit fictional, detail, specifically what this meant socially, politically and, above all, culturally. The 1937 book implied a warning about a future that had begun to

2. A paper by Emily Anderson, 'An "Unseemly Joke": Service Author Stories and Wyndham Lewis's *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937)', was published in *The Journal of Modern Literature* by the Indiana University Press (Volume 45, Number 2, Winter 2022, pp. 34-51). It is free to view.



materialise with its re-appearance in 1967, making a sub-conscious connection between the 'jazz age' of the 1920s and the so-called 'swinging sixties'. The parallels of the 1960s with Lewis's own bohemian idyll are obvious, but the war taught him to have a more realistic view of the world. At the end of book, Lewis uses the word 'Zeitgeist' enthusiastically to describe a necessary condition of change, one that he always ready to embrace, but was wary of its pitfalls, especially the creation of pathways to totalitarianism. Lewis is mentioned in passing by Pound in his radio broadcast of 6th July 1942, the transcript of which was initially published in the second ever issue of that august journal of the British counter-culture, *International Times* (October 31st to November 13th 1966, p. 2, available online).³ There was an interest in the reactionary / revolutionary dichotomy of older (pre-Beat) writers, their revolutionary appeal overshadowing their reactionary tendencies. *IT* editor Tom McGrath justified publishing Pound's speeches 'because they are there' a stance which was seen as an extension of the revolutionary spirit that *IT* tried to engender among the hippy movement. This is indicative of the way that 'We can never know what folly and what wisdom is in the speeches unless we have had a chance to read them'. *IT* chose not to further delve into Lewis's anti-war polemics, even though they were very different from Pound's unhinged ranting. From the hippy point-of-view, there was a lot to commend his post-war 'cosmic' stance towards forging a world politics and a culture re-oriented towards classical ideals, despite his interest in Eastern philosophy. There was also the uncanny prescience of what Lewis satirised in some of his 1930s polemics - he was probably the first writer to point out such foibles of Western civilisation as slimming pills and sun-bathing, in *The Doom of Youth*, which would have placed him alongside Marshall McLuhan as a pioneer of 'media studies'.⁴

Lewis's presence in the Sixties may be described as an 'aura', in the Adornesque sense. The posthumous quest for popularity cannot be counted in terms of books sold and Lewis's paintings dipped in value a few years after the Tate exhibition, but Lewis's re-animated works were directly relevant to the time. *The Childermass*, initially published in 1928, was more suited to the sixties than the twenties, its phantasmagorical setting and inherent critique of the mass-media used to show the insidious nature of political manipulation and control that lay behind mass-culture. Lewis could be associated with the British avant-garde writers like BS Johnson, Ann Quinn, and Peter Currell-Brown, whose only novel, *Smallcreep's Day* (1966) recounts a tortuous journey through a heavily industrialised world that is continually shifting and increasingly disorienting and which surely owes something to *The Childermass*.

Yet Lewis's cultural influence was necessarily negative, being dichotomised between a natural urge to revolution, epitomised by the Vorticist movement, and a note of warning about the excesses of the age. Of course, the sixties saw the emergence of several of Lewis's bugbears - psychiatry, feminism (as a political force), 'gay power', and the wholesale embrace of 'the primitive', as well as some new ones (performance art?). Music, particularly rock music, had now superseded literature and art as the primary creative force throughout the decade and beyond and, despite the best efforts of young academics with large cd collections, Lewis had no way of anticipating this re-arrangement of cultural norms. He understood the appeal of black music in its supposedly 'primitive' form, which in *Paleface* he poignantly described as 'sorrow songs of the industrial age', but which now would become a predominant cultural force, allied with the Black liberation movement, but also a major influence on white culture and, through jazz, changed the original cultural parameters that Lewis prescribed. Constant Lambert's iconoclastic *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* of 1934 refers to Lewis's own warning that objective truth was at risk from being overwhelmed by the unbridled forces of primitivism. Referring to Stravinsky, he writes:

Le Sacre du Printemps foreshadows that modern craving - essentially a product of oversophistication - for the dark and instinctive that we find in D. H. Lawrence, and whose psychological bases have been so well summed up in Wyndham Lewis's *Paleface*. The immense prestige that this work enjoys with a certain type of intellectual is due to the fact that it is barbaric music for the supercivilized, an aphrodisiac for the jaded and surfeited. (p. 51)

3. The material was given to *IT* by William (Bill) Levy, who also published a selection of Pound's speeches - *Certain radio broadcasts broadcasts, Rome, 1941-1943* - in 1975 (origin unknown; Cold Turkey Press. The book sells around \$600 on Amazon).
(www.internationaltimes.it/archive/index)

4. McLuhan's books of the sixties, particularly *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1965), *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967) owe a lot to *The Doom of Youth* in terms of their anecdotal format, which focuses on such aspects of modern life as advertising, which was not regarded as a serious subject for academic study (some would say that it still isn't, but Lewis considered it so).

The issue of primitivism was perhaps more complex than both Lambert and Lewis gave it credit for, given that popular music did become *consciously* sophisticated the longer the decade went on, as heard in the phenomenon of 'progressive' music, whereby the tropes of classical music were often adapted to black musical styles.⁵ 'The Congo was flooding the Acropolis' indeed. Lewis's critique of the false primitivism made in *Paleface* – the first book to be featured in the Tomlin anthology, in the section on 'Sociological and Philosophical Writings' – was more relevant as popular culture, in the form of pop and later, rock, changed.

'A certain type of intellectual' could well be the thrill-seekers among the *IT* readership fascinated by Pound's fascism and it was unfortunate that Lewis's books were not easily available to those who may have learned a lot from a work like *Time and Western Man*. Lewis's presence in the Sixties is all the more remarkable given his general disapprobation by the Academy throughout the period (and beyond). John Harrison's *The Reactionaries* (1967) set the peevish tone repeated in dozens of lazy references to Lewis's own supposed fascism in overviews of the literature of the inter-war period. Had he lived, would doubtless have seen the sixties in the same way that WH Auden dismissed the 1930s as a 'dishonest, low decade' or, as that Lewis-type icon Frank Zappa, once said, 'The Sixties were really stupid'.⁶

Of course, it could be said that Lewis had a greater presence in subsequent decades, particularly the 1980s, with the Black Sparrow editions and more exposure in the galleries and auction rooms, but the foundation for this was laid during the sixties. Rosenthal makes the point in his Introduction, reflecting on Hugh Kenner's view that Lewis was a 'man from nowhere' in terms of ideological traits, that he was 'an impersonal person composed of "pure" ideas and emotions subordinated to a strict intellectual method, with none of the endearing frailties that help to make all men kin' (p 10). This is what separates Lewis from his more highly regarded contemporaries and makes him more of a free agent in terms of being able to transcend any ideological constraints that critics tried to tie him to.

5. Progressive music as in Genesis, with their very loose musical adaptation of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* (specifically 'A Game of Chess', on the album *Selling England By the Pound*, 1973). Their bass player Mike Rutherford later released a solo album, *Smallcreep's Day* (1980), the first side of which was an adaptation of Currell-Brown's novel. Lambert's son, Kit Lambert, was the manager and producer of the rock group The Who, whose guitarist and main songwriter Pete Townshend, while at art school, attended lectures by the German émigré artist Gustav Metzger, whose ideas of 'auto-destruction' maintained a Vorticist-style iconoclasm (in other words, smashing guitars on stage).

6. As heard on an extra track on the re-issue of Zappa's debut album, *Freak Out*, of 1966 (Zappa Records). Even in the 1970s, when this statement was made, the 'golden age' of the Sixties were regarded as sacrosanct in cultural (if not political) terms.

REVIEWS

RM HEALEY

A LOOK AT MY LIFE

Eileen Agar (in collaboration with Andrew Lambirth)

Thames and Hudson, 2024, pp. 320; 93 illustrations in colour and black and white, hardback, £35

Eileen Agar was a key member of the British Surrealist movement, which had included such artists as Conroy Maddox, John Banting, and Desmond Morris, but although she met many of the mainstream continental Surrealists and was familiar with their work, her own contributions to Surrealism were typically idiosyncratic and reflected other influences, including British artists like Paul Nash and Henry Moore. Given her privileged background, her love of collages, the use of natural forms, her beginnings in Abstraction and her literary tastes, this is not too surprising. This is an updated version of *A Look at My Life*, first published in 1988.

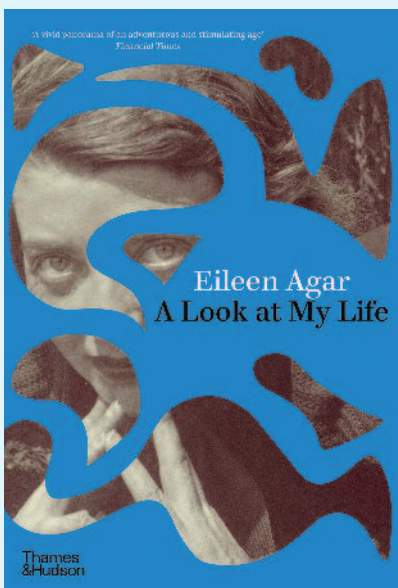
Agar was the youngest of three sisters born into great wealth in Buenos Aires, where her British father had made a fortune manufacturing agricultural machinery. Her American mother was a snob who owned a collection of forty hats and had an unhealthy predilection for the novels of Phyllis Bottome. Eventually, in 1912 the family relocated permanently to a 'sumptuous corner house' in Belgravia, equipped with a giant ballroom, a 'butler, a couple of footmen and innumerable maids'.

Among Agar's first introduction to art were the book illustrations of Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham, while at school in Surrey she was encouraged to pursue her own drawing by her art mistress, Lucy Kemp-Welch, the well-known equestrian painter. Later she was to admire the 'pale landscapes' of Paul Nash on the walls of her music teacher's home, hardly suspecting that she would later have an affair with the artist.

As well as drawing, Agar read widely and deeply in her teens, and most of her annual 'dress allowance' of £300 was spent on books and paintings. A rebellious girl intent on enjoying herself, she resisted her mother's efforts to find her a husband, although her good looks attracted plenty of eligible suitors. Proclaiming that she was determined to be a painter, she enrolled at Byam Shaw for a day a week, but on being told by someone who had been a friend of Bonnard, Renoir and Monet that she should try for the Slade, obtained an interview with Henry Tonks, who sent her to life classes at Leon Underwood's studio in Hammersmith, where she met Gertrude Hermes and Blair Hughes-Stanton, who were to become lifelong friends. She was allowed to enrol part time at the Slade in 1921 only on condition that she agreed to be dropped and collected in the family's Rolls Royce.

As one of the 'bright young things' of the early twenties, and bolstered by an annuity of £1,000, Agar was always up for having a good time in London. In 1923 she and her future husband, the painter Robin Bartlett, visited the notorious Cave of Harmony. She recalled the night club as 'a cave filled with a smoky atmosphere, mirrors and flashing lights, while anthropomorphic cornucopias decorated the walls. Sandwiches, beer, foxtrotting and couples kissing competed with a one-act play by Aldous Huxley called *The Flower in the Month*.'

The marriage to Bartlett, a good painter, according to Agar, but ultimately not the sort of intellectual she needed, was put in peril when at a party she met the impressive figure of Hungarian emigré Joseph Bard, an Anglophile lawyer and writer, then married to the pioneering American journalist Dorothy Thompson. Bard attracted Agar with his good looks and fascinated her with stories of the stimulating life he had led in Budapest and Vienna. Before too long the couple were meeting secretly. Luckily for Agar, Bard's relationship with Thompson broke down, which meant that the two lovers were free to marry but they preferred to cohabit, and in fact only tied the knot in 1940.





Eileen Agar RA
The Meeting
 1976
 © The Redfern Gallery

By the early 'thirties Agar, unashamedly 'living in sin' with Bard, was painting feverishly, and with self confidence, though she had not yet found her own style. The couple continued to meet interesting people, at home and abroad. In 1927, while sitting at a café in Rapallo, 'a red-bearded Apollo' came to their table. It was Ezra Pound, wearing, as it happened, a black corduroy suit which had once belonged to WB Yeats, who they were later introduced to. Pound took them on a tour of the town and then invited them to his flat, where Agar found 'a bookshelf with the complete works of Henry James and, on the table, 'a dedicated copy of the first edition of *Ulysses*'.

Pound became a friend and as such encouraged Agar to pursue her art. A painter, he felt, should aim for 'clarity, structure and vital energy. Don't be a wobbly vagina', he warned, '... but look at Wyndham Lewis.' There is little evidence that Agar took this advice seriously and Lewis doesn't feature in Agar's memoir. However, in Paris she met Breton and Eluard and paid a visit with Pound to Brancusi in his studio. She also met and befriended Evelyn Waugh, who confessed that he always wanted to be an artist.

By now Bard had declared that he wanted to be a full-time writer. He had already had some success with his first novel and when Agar and he decamped to London in 1930 they set up *The Island*, a magazine dedicated to 'the plastic arts, poetry and the imagination,' with Bard as editor, Leon Underwood as art editor, and contributors who included the Imagist John Gould Fletcher, Naomi Mitchison, Henry Moore and CRW Nevinson. Unfortunately, though the critics were generally positive, the magazine folded after just four numbers, mainly due to quarrels concerning its direction.

By the mid 1930s Agar had found her true style as a Surrealist. Natural forms, notably rocks, leaves and marine life, were often an inspiration, but she also turned to archetypal images in her collages. To her great delight and surprise her lover, Paul Nash, with whom she had spent time in Swanage while he was working on the *Shell Guide to Dorset*, put her name forward as one of the possible exhibitors at the forthcoming International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936. She was accepted and for the first time she found herself mixing as a professional representative with the leading lights – Masson, Ernst, Dali – of the

continental movement, and it seems, if the many pages in the book devoted to this chapter in her life are any indication, to have been a genuine boost to her confidence.

From this point Agar's career took off. When New York's MOMA wanted to borrow her painting *Quadriga*, she felt that she had arrived, but she was determined to pursue her own route to success. Agar rejected the central idea of Surrealism which was that the stuff of dreams could inspire the artist. She also felt that the automatism so beloved of Breton and the French Surrealists was 'impracticable'. Instead, she found, like Wyndham Lewis, that a conscious state of receptivity to stimuli was often enough to produce an act of creation.

Agar continued to experiment with her own particular brand of Surrealism, which was not always what others defined as such, for the rest of her life, and even the death of her soul mate Joseph in 1975, couldn't dampen her creative energy. She died in 1991, aged 92, and these memoirs, although occasionally rambling and shamelessly name-dropping, are testament to an extraordinarily colourful career and of a life well lived.

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

BRILLIANT DESTINY: THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS JOHN

by David Boyd Haycock

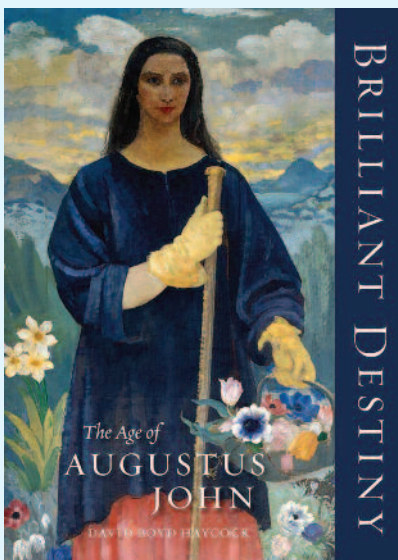
London: Lund Humphries, 2023

ISBN 9781848226579

'Wildness' is frequently used by his contemporaries to characterise Augustus John. He was impulsive and, in his mind, a free spirit, independent, and possessed of a great artistic talent, most evident in his early years, which David Boyd Haycock's book documents from his birth in Tenby, Wales, in 1878, till just after the First World War. He trains at the Slade, where he is appreciative of Henry Tonks's teaching of anatomical drawing, while looking to Whistler and Beardsley as exemplars in the art world. He makes friends with Ambrose McEvoy and the marine artist John Everett. His drawing is soon seen as quick and masterful, but he realises his painting is not keeping pace, and takes lessons from Wilson Steer, which he finds helpful. He becomes friends with William Orpen, with his 'extraordinary technical ability' and 'cheeky personality'. William Rothenstein is hugely supportive of John, and introduces him to cultural life in Paris, which includes meeting Oscar Wilde, who calls him "the charming Celtic poet in Colour". Back in London, Rothenstein is peddling John's drawings. Wyndham Lewis, four years younger than John, is a great admirer of his drawings and collects into a book he treasures his friend's torn-up drawings. The philosopher Nietzsche is an influence on both John and Lewis.

When John goes to work as a drawing instructor at Liverpool School of Art he meets the school's librarian John Sampson, an authority on gypsies, who introduces him to the seasonal gypsy camp at Cabbage Hall. John immerses himself in gypsy lore, and becomes proficient in an English version of the Romany language. He feels a kinship with such outsiders as these as well as tramps, costers and vagrants around the city's dock who become subjects for his drawing. Back from Liverpool, John makes a lifelong friend of Lewis. According to Haycock, 'Of all the colourful characters John befriended, none were more mistrustful, complex or talented than Wyndham Lewis'. John would dub Lewis 'the poet'. In the early years of their friendship, Lewis was in awe of John's talent and, as Haycock relates, 'largely confined his conversation and his letters to literature and women'. In Normandy with John, Lewis finds he cannot paint, as John's 'artistic personality is just too strong'. John's family life was complicated, with a wife Ida and a long-term partner Dorelia, children to both of them, the need to make money to support them and find places to live, which for a time included a gypsy caravan and tent on Dartmoor, and studios to work in. John was also an incorrigible womaniser which entailed further obligations and expense. Yeats is charmed by him: 'He is himself a delight, the most innocent, wicked man I have ever met ... He is a magnificent looking person, and looks the wild creature he is.' Yeats 'slowly warmed' to John's etching portrait.

Friendship with Lytton Strachey draws John and his friend Henry Lamb into the fringes of the Bloomsbury Group, and he becomes friends with Ottoline



Morrell, and may well have pointed her towards helping to found the Contemporary Art Society, to purchase outstanding works by living artists, and donate them to public collections. John also attracts the patronage of American collector John Quinn, whom he introduces to Lewis, and of the Irish collector Sir Hugh Lane, who commissions a mural, but is alarmed by John bringing gypsy models onto his London property, John has 36 works in the Armory Show, the first large exhibition of modern art in America, in New York, but just two with the Camden Town Group. His *Flute of Pan* draws a scathing attack from TE Hulme, in *The New Age* in 1914, who sees it as '... entirely a derivative conglomeration of already existing pretty ideas' and '... marks a degeneration. temporary perhaps, of a great talent.' This suggests John is not a modernist and though, unlike Lewis, he disapproves of Epstein's *The Rock Drill*, he does commission the sculptor to make a bronze head of his son Romilly, is impressed by Bomberg's *The Mud Bath*, and is the first to buy stone sculptures by Modigliani. Both Henry Tonks and the Chenil Gallery, with which John is associated, are blasted in Wyndham Lewis's *BLAST*. In the second issue of that journal Lewis calls John '...one of the most imaginative men I have met ... despite his incomparable power, had not very great control of his moyens [means], and his genius seems to prematurely exhaust him.' Lewis suggests John could save himself '...if he would only undergo a brief course of training presented by me!'

There is a huge cast of characters in this book, many friends of John's, with many fallings out, mainly due to his wildness, unreliability, or dissoluteness. He always had a high regard for his sister Gwen John's talent, which is represented by three colour plates, including a fine three-quarter portrait of a young Dorelia. There are also a number of depictions of Dorelia by John himself, including a beautifully-composed and coloured full-length portrait of Dorelia as a gardener, *La Belle Jardiniere*. There are, too, portraits of John by Orpen (characteristically bearded) and McEvoy (bearded and unbearded), and portraits by John of Epstein, William Nicholson, and Ottoline Morrell. Haycock's recounting of the first half of John's life is vivid, insightful, and packed with human entanglements and associations, not least John's friendship and rivalry with Wyndham Lewis. The tone towards the book's end is rueful, suggesting that most of the artists featured achieved markedly less after the First World War. Though he struggled, Lewis changed and diversified but, as Haycock notes; 'Though Wyndham Lewis's posthumous reputation has far eclipsed John's, his old friend and adversary's final decades were, in contrast, prosperous and illustrious - if still dominated by too much alcohol, frequent bouts of depression and numerous love affairs.' The main title 'Brilliant Destiny' proves ironic, and the subtitle 'The Age of Augustus John' is Lewis's an admiring coinage for a period in British art when John's talent was a major influence.

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

AUGUSTUS JOHN AND THE FIRST CRISIS OF BRILLIANCE

Exhibition, Piano Nobile, London

26 April – 13 July 2024

Exhibition catalogue, *Augustus John and the First Crisis of Brilliance* by David Boyd Haycock

London: Piano Nobile, 2024

ISBN 9781901192650

This exhibition, which was developed from David Boyd Haycock's book *Brilliant Destiny: The Age of Augustus John*, focuses on the early work of Augustus John and eight of his contemporaries with whom he had links: Jacob Epstein, James Dickson Innes, Gwen John, Henry Lamb, Derwent Lees, Wyndham Lewis, William Orpen and William Rothenstein. All except Epstein and Lamb, studied at the Slade. The years covered by the catalogue run from 1894, when John enters the Slade, to 1914, the year when Lewis launches his journal *BLAST* and the First World War begins. The exhibition's title comes from the Slade's art master Henry Tonks's designation of the generation of John, Orpen, Ambrose McEvoy, and Lewis, as the art school's first 'crisis of brilliance'. The second 'crisis of brilliance' would be the later generation of Bomberg, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer, Nevinson, Gertler and Carrington. Art historian David Boyd

Right and overleaf: The dressing-gown that Lewis designed for the Omega Workshops. It was previously exhibited as part of an auction at Sotheby's, but we now have the luxury of a back-view.
(Piano Nobile)



Haycock says that initial crisis was more a 'crisis of influence': the influences on John running from Botticelli, through Rembrandt, Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler to Picasso, and the influence, good and bad, John would have on his own artist contemporaries.

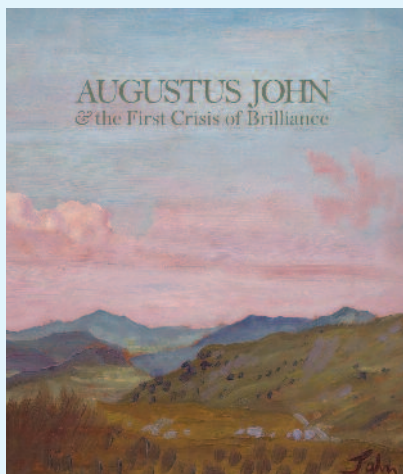
The show is largely made up of portraits and landscapes, embracing traditional, transitional, Post- Impressionist and Cubist-influenced modes.

The entrance to one half is physically dominated by a piece of decorative art by John's lifelong friend and rival Wyndham Lewis, *Robe* (c. 1913-14), which stuns with its combination of orange, green and cerise, framing human and animal forms. This embroidered silk gown would appear to derive from Lewis's work at Roger Fry's Omega Workshops. It would be interesting to know if its production met Lewis's pecuniary needs at that time. Displayed nearby is a set of nine cartoonish lampshade designs Lewis made for the Omega Workshops, where he reluctantly accepted an invitation from Fry in order to make money. John himself would not have been involved in Omega, as he always concentrated on painting and drawing.

Both Lewis and John were influenced by the large Fry-curated exhibition of 1910, Manet and the Post- Impressionists, to lean ever more towards Modernism.

Lewis's ink drawing *Portrait of Helen Saunders* (1913) shows the effect of Cubism on his art, depicting the Slade-trained artist Saunders, who was also espousing a form of Cubism, and suggesting the development into Vorticism, here signalled by sharp angles and curves, echoing machine shapes and the metallic.

Augustus John commissioned Jacob Epstein's bronze sculpture portrait of son Romilly John (conceived 1907) which is a formally perfect Modernist object, and a forerunner of similar work by Henry Moore. Epstein allied himself with the







Vorticists and Lewis considered him the greatest sculptor working in England.

One of the glories of the exhibition is the array of fine portraits, in pencil or chalk or etched, many by John himself, these include his warm red chalk full face *Portrait of Percy Wyndham Lewis* (c. 1905), his assured depiction of his wife *Portrait of Ida* (c. 1901), his full-length flowing reflection of his partner Dorelia with right arm above (1907), and his *Portrait of Mary McEvoy* (1907). The latter, well-modelled, is of Mary, artist wife of John and sister Gwen's friend Ambrose McEvoy, who became a successful portrait painter. It would have been good to see some of his work alongside John's.

A number of the pencil portraits are by Henry Lamb, who attended classes at the Chelsea School of Art run by John and Orpen. It is not surprising that some of his pieces look like the work of John, such as the portrait of his wife Euphemia (1906) and that of John's young son Edwin John (c. 1912). Also included is his subtly coloured and finely textured three-quarter oil portrait Edie McNeill (1911). Euphemia is the subject of a number of portraits by other artists such as John (c. 1907), Innes (c. 1909-11) and Epstein (a bronze bust, 1911).

Orpen is not represented here by his fine portrait of a seated, in a long black coat Augustus John (1900), though it is widely reproduced. His delicate draughtsmanship and restrained colour for a group of figures is on show in his watercolour *The Yacht Race (Sighting the Boat)* (c. 1913). But, as William Rothenstein remarked, in his view, comparing Orpen with John, Orpen lacked 'the magic'. In John's oil of his three young sons bathing *Three Children Bathing* (c. 1910) there is immediacy, lyricism, and a feeling for form and colour. Rothenstein himself has a group of portraits of literary figures. It would be interesting to see his Thomas Hardy (1900) against John's (1923).

John took a long time to get to grips with using colour. A fine example of his fluidity with colour drawing is seen in his *Girl in a Blue Striped Coat* (c. 1910).

Derwent Lees, one of John's painting companions, is seen at his best in a landscape of luminous colour *Near Cassis* (1911) and John makes a finely coloured pure landscape, the pink clouds fading into blue sky, *Landscape in Wales* (c. 1911-13), which graces the cover of the exhibition catalogue.

The catalogue by David Boyd Haycock reflects on the use of the term 'genius' through time, and particularly with regard to Augustus John. Both Rothenstein and Lewis used it with reference to John, but Haycock shows its limitations, and need for qualification. Reproductions and text are exemplary. Small pictures in the exhibition not included in the catalogue include a series of etched portraits by John, including one of WB Yeats, and there are less than hand-sized drawings by Gwen John, showing she could work small and well.

The exhibition itself is illuminating and a pleasure.

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

ALEXANDER HOLLWEG: JOURNEYS IN ART

Exhibition: The Museum of Somerset, Taunton

11 November 2023 – 9 March 2024

Exhibition catalogue, edited by Sarah Cox

Taunton: South West Heritage Trust, 2023

ISBN 9781739497613

The exhibition catalogue of this retrospective of works by Alexander Hollweg (1936-2024), grandson of one-time Vorticist and lieutenant to Vorticist-in-chief Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, is beautifully produced. Hollweg's development as artist and teacher is well-documented, and supplemented by some fine colour plates and personal recollections of the man from friends, family, colleagues, former students, dealers and patrons. He comes across as ebullient, playful, attentive, curious, experimental, erudite, and multi-talented.

His artist friend Mark Harrington says, what many might echo: 'The dedication to art, music, literature and science were signatures of Alex Hollweg – and his generous probing spirit enriched the lives of those fortunate to know him, even to the slightest degree'.

There is just one work by Edward Wadsworth in the exhibition: Portrait of Barbara [known to family and friends as 'Bar'], his daughter and biographer, and Alexander Hollweg's mother, a strongly-defined face, akin to Wadsworth's own slightly austere self-portraits of the same period, c. 1938, and it is in tempera,



his favoured painting medium. By contrast, two of Hollweg's family portraits, done in acrylics, of his son Lucas (2004) and of his German father Joachim 'Mops' von Bethmann-Hollweg (2004) are warmer and brighter.

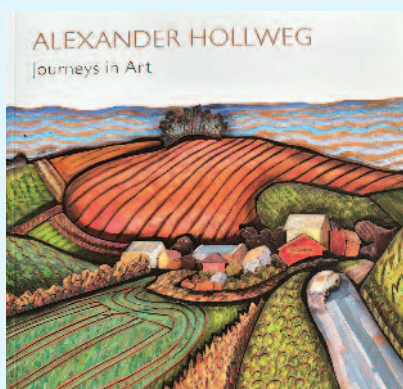
Hollweg had woodcuts by Wadsworth decorating his room at New College, Oxford, where he studied French and German. He went on to study at Camberwell School of Art, with the encouragement of his grandfather's friend Robert Medley, who impressed Hollweg with his teachings on Poussin. Early Hollweg paintings are imbued with muted colours, but his landscape painting became bolder under the influence of another Camberwell teacher, Frank Auerbach, using heavy impasto and thick layering of paint. As Hollweg would later say, Auerbach provided 'a dramatic excursion into the dynamic and physical possibilities of expression'. An example of this type of painting is Hollweg's *Pat and John Wolseley Cottage* (1965).

The mid-1960s sees Hollweg also producing, with a nod towards Pop Art, painted wood sculptures such as *Aeroplane* (1966), an assemblage which boasted a motor to spin its propeller. There are echoes in this and other pieces of early 20th century Cubist and Futurist sculptures. His passion for cars (something he shared with his grandfather), and toys, is reflected in his many (often brightly painted) wood sculptures.

Alongside this practice, he saw himself as a landscape painter, initially town-based and teaching mainly in Maidstone and Bristol. As he wrote in 1994, 'Landscape was my subject. Not the wilderness but the landscape made by man. Farm, factory, city, housing estate. the places where people live and work and play. Man and nature seemed to make a sort of comedy. Siting, scale, similarities of shape and form juxtaposed, the visual organisation of the surface of the world all made for a playful celebration of life which I expressed by an increasingly formal reduction'.

His 1971 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery gathered 40 of his carved and painted wooden objects, along with a number of preparatory drawings, paintings and maquettes. Works shown included *The Family* (1971), a line-up of coloured individual wooden figures, who represent the four members of his family, and the 3D *The Tower* (1970-71). During this period, as Sarah Cox says 'he was able to build a successful exhibiting career ... It would be the decade in which his work was seen and recognised internationally'.

By 1973, Hollweg had relocated his family to the Nettlecombe estate in West Somerset, becoming a vital part of a rural artistic community. In that year he created the illustrated book *Brick Wall*, published by Bernard Jacobson. Sarah Cox: 'This cut-out publication, illustrated with evocative watercolour drawings, depicts a London passageway through time. As you turn the pages houses disappear, then roads and factories, until all that is left is countryside, blue sky, a village church and a rural lane'. Jacobson also commissioned Hollweg's colour woodcut *Country Dance* (1975) as part of a portfolio to celebrate the



bicentenary in 1976 of John Constable's birth. In Jacobson's words, 'Alex captured the tremendous yearning to go back to the land ... He depicts a bucolic and joyful scene of identifiable artists, writers and landscape gardeners, all of whom have left the city and rediscovered nature'.

The 1980s saw Hollweg producing some of his most innovative and compelling works of painted wood landscape reliefs such as *Yarde* (1982) and *Brise Marine* (1984), the latter composed of 30 panels, a view ranging over fields, woods, town, clouds and sky. He had also stretched the term 'folly' to include smoking factories, such as in *Factory with Smoke* (1973). A sculpted and painted outpouring of factory smoke put me in mind of the sculptural quality of Wyndham Lewis's *A Battery Shelled* (1919).

Among Hollweg's portraits are two set in interiors which are given physical depth by a layering from foreground to figures to landscape seen through windows: *Mr and Mrs Holroyd at Home with Rebecca* (1996) and *Auberon Waugh* (1995). His *Kirkcudbright Docks* (2008) is, by contrast, devoid of figures, an acrylic of Wadsworthian subject matter, of marine structures atilt, in a sort of dance, with a network of facetting, drawing all elements into a shimmering whole.

Among his commissions were two murals from Firmdale Hotels. One was for the Charlotte Street Hotel, the London Life Mural in the restaurant (2000), for which the brief was to use 'Bloomsbury colours' and Omega Workshop motifs. It would be amusing to seek out traces there of the Rebel Artists: Lewis, Wadsworth and company. The second mural was for the Refuel Bar and Restaurant, the Soho Hotel (2004). In the words of Firmdale's creative director Kit Kemp: 'Alex completed a second mural for us at the Soho Hotel ... We had an idea of a Rousseau-inspired jungle scene with a wrecked car at its centre'.

Alex's initial drawings showed his originality of thought and expression. It had taken the idea to a new stage and was far better than the original thought'. A neat summation of Hollweg's art, showcased in this celebratory exhibition.

ROBERT MURRAY

VENUS

Impermanence

17 May 2023, Wilton's Music Hall

What was billed as 'A Radical Collision of politically-charged dance, theatre and music' took place in Wilton's Music Hall, tucked away in the heart of the East End, a place that Lewis was somewhat wary of since he was called out by David Bomberg (who was able to call upon the services of his professional boxer brother, Mo) for re-arranging the display at the London Group Exhibition in March 1914. It also serves as a reminder of Iain Sinclair's use of two simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic characters ('Hand' and 'Hyle') in his re-telling of the Kray Twins legend in his epic poem *Suicide Bridge* of 1974.

Wilton's is not the best venue for a dance performance as some views of the stage were restricted, but the original neo-classical frieze on the back wall and the overall vetustic ambience gave the impression of what artistic events over a hundred years ago must have felt like. One recalls Marinetti's use of the music-hall as a means of promoting the cause of Futurism. A previous production from the Impermanence Company in 2020 was entitled 'Blast'. This took 'its cue from the growth of ideologies and modern art in London in 1914' and can be seen as a five-minute film, featured online at BBC Arts – New Creatives, BLAST.

The 20-minute piece itself came after a short film, 'Feral', the title of a book by George Monbiot, which didn't fit into the art-historical context of the three dances, and 'Cosmic Yoghurt', a celebration of the work of Leonora Carrington. 'Enemy of the Stars' was as abstract a work as paintings by Lewis, Epstein, David Bomberg and others, yet it lacked an effective framework, as Lewis's words were the most significant part of the original work, an attempt to arrest the process of time rather than portray a certain historically defined period. The only sounds to be heard from the stage were the grunts and groans from the two performers who ably demonstrated the symbiotic and ultimately destructive relationship between Arghol and Hanp. The agility of these 'enormous dancers, bursting everywhere through heavy tight clothes, laboured



Impermanence's *Venus*
© Paul Blakemore

in by dull explosive muscles, full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air, not sap' (quoting from the 'Advertisement' to the first, 1914, version) gave Lewis's work a sense of alternating movement and stasis as they switched roles and drove the visual narrative to its inevitable conclusion.

This was the third attempt at realising the play, the first (the revised edition) at the Bloomsbury Theatre in 1984, then the 1914 version in Bath and Dublin in 2013. In many ways the 2023 dance version was the most effective, eschewing as it did the more conventional staging that often seemed like two actors struggling to make an audience understand a complex philosophical argument. The message was perhaps no more clear, but it was nevertheless an impressive piece of theatre. Incidentally, there was a slight mistake in the handout - 'Enemy of the Stars' was not part of the Vorticist Manifesto, but a separate text.

More impressive was the final and longest piece, 'Venus' itself, which featured additional elements of acting and music. This was the life-story of the suffragette Mary Richardson who gained notoriety for vandalising the picture of the Rokeby Venus, an incident which attracted the opprobrium of Lewis in *Blast* (one thinks of the Harry Enfield skit on 1930s Public Information films that warns 'Women! For Pity's Sake ...'). 'Slasher Mary' later became the Organising Secretary of the Women's Section of the British Union of Fascists and died in obscurity, in Hastings in 1961.

All in all, a very entertaining evening, one which made me ask myself why I haven't been to more dance performances.

