

## Editorial

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I noted in last year's editorial that the name 'Wyndham Lewis' has a tendency to attract controversy. This is unsurprising. Lewis was, after all, a noted controversialist, and he was committed to a view of the public intellectual as someone who should engage with the most urgent issues of the day. Above all, as close readers of Lewis's writing know, he sought to unpack the underlying ideas that informed the dominant ideologies of the period in which he lived and worked. This led him to make surprising – and often contentious – links between seemingly unconnected philosophical concepts, cultural practices, social assumptions, and political positions. The resulting controversies could be (and still are) fierce. But Lewis believed in open debate, which he saw as the life-blood of a healthy polity, and he frequently urged his interlocutors to declare their ideological interests. To be *critical* was to be socially and culturally engaged; to be engaged, in turn, was to do one's best to illuminate and call into question issues that others deemed to be settled when in Lewis's view they were anything but resolved. It was in this sense that he was willing to see himself described as an 'outsider', as he made clear in *Rude Assignment* (1950): 'Make the world too ideally safe for the politician, as formerly for the religionist, and by so doing you shut out the light and air necessary for thought and the creative arts: for he is only safe in the dark. Criticism is merely the introduction of the outside light into a dark place. *Outsideness* is to be where the light is' (RA 77).

Equally important to this conception of the intellectual was Lewis's concern with what he saw as a growing gap between two loosely identifiable groups: a privileged and educated minority, and a hard-pressed, culturally deprived majority. Lewis well knew how easy it was for the former to preen themselves on their supposed 'superiority' over the latter. In some of his work he makes statements that might be taken to imply that he is in sympathy with those who assume they are 'superior' to others, but on the whole his thought challenges such judgements as self-serving delusions. *Rude Assignment* touches on these

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questions but so, too, do works like *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) and *Time and Western Man* (1927). One thinks here of Lewis's 'Author's Preface' to the latter book and his remark that he seeks to bring into being 'a new race of philosophers, *instead* of "hurried men," speed-cranks, simpletons, or robots' (*TWM* xvi).

It should be obvious how pertinent these sentiments are to current social life. The need to think critically about the key issues of our time continues to be a pressing one, and Lewis's wide-ranging concern with the pressures on freedom of thought, education, and the abuse of power is as relevant today as it was in the 1920s and 1950s. So I am pleased that interest in Lewis's art, writing, and thinking grows apace. The funding of a yearly essay prize by The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust resulted in some strong submissions from early career researchers, and this issue of *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies* includes the winning entry, Lise Jaillant's article on 'Rewriting *Tarr* Ten Years Later: Wyndham Lewis, the Phoenix Library and the Domestication of Modernism'. Critical interest in Lewis perhaps is beginning to reach a wider audience. The new OUP edition of his works (which I mentioned in last year's editorial) will both benefit from and contribute to this burgeoning critical attention and will make a case for Lewis's canonical status, while also doing justice to his still controversial reputation. It is an exciting time in Lewis studies and one looks forward to developments over the next few years with a genuine sense of optimism. For the idea of a minority public was distasteful to Lewis. 'It is too specialised', he insisted, because it is 'an unrepresentative fraction of the whole. And it *is* the whole, in some form or other, that is required by a writer' (*RA* 18).

Andrzej Gąsiorek  
*University of Birmingham, UK*