

Andrzej Gąsiorek and Nathan Waddell (eds), *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 288 pp. £24.99 (pb).

Tyrus Miller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), xvii + 182 pp. £18.99 (pb).

Wyndham Lewis is a challenging subject for the contemporary literary scholar, if for no other reason than the sheer volume of his artistic, literary, and critical output. Add to this the long duration of his career; his interest in a wide range of political, philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic topics; the way his opinions on all of the above changed over time; and his penchant for complicated rhetorical positioning and satiric inversion. In this context, two recently published critical introductions to Lewis – *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide* (EUP 2015), edited by Andrzej Gąsiorek and Nathan Waddell, and *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (CUP 2016), edited by Tyrus Miller – have the potential to do much good. These two volumes will be of use both to scholars new to Lewis as well as to those who are not intimately familiar with the nuances of his entire *oeuvre* – that is to say, to most of us.

Together, these volumes address the full scope of Lewis's expansive career. The twelve-chapter *Cambridge Companion* is organized thematically and addresses both Lewis's visual art as well as his writing. The book also includes a useful timeline of Lewis's career as well as suggested reading lists associated with each chapter. The Edinburgh volume features fifteen chapters, each focused on a topic within Lewis's writing, a period, or a text. The volume includes a set of essays devoted specifically to each of Lewis's major works of fiction, including *Tarr*, *The Apes of God*, *The Revenge for Love*, *The Human Age* trilogy, and *Self Condemned*.

The picture of Lewis that emerges from these two volumes is one of a multifaceted figure whose thinking grew and developed. Several of these essays are devoted to mapping these phases – with respect to his artistic priorities, in Richard Humphreys's essay ('Lewis as Visual Artist'), or his understanding of fascism, for example, in Nathan Waddell's essay ('Lewis and Fascism'), both in *The Cambridge Companion*. These kinds of essays, which provide a diachronic view of Lewis's positions as they changed, will be helpful for readers hoping to understand what often seem like contradictions in his thinking. For this reader, one of the most interesting aspects of these volumes is how many different varieties of Lewis appear across their pages. These scholars identify versions of Lewis that resemble a wide range of

twentieth- and twenty-first century thinkers: Gyorgy Lukàcs, Vera Brittain, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jackson Pollock, and most surprisingly, in Erin G. Carlson's essay in *The Cambridge Companion* ('Women, Masculinity, and Homosexuality in Lewis'), Judith Butler. This Lewis was a shape-shifter, and was not the lone iconoclast he is sometimes thought to be – rather, his positions and arguments can be recognized across the past century of intellectual history.

*The Cambridge Companion* begins with Sascha Bru's account of Lewis's relationship to European avant-garde movements: he did not make personal relationships with European artists, Bru points out, and wanted to forge a new, different movement in England. Yet, Bru shows, Lewis's efforts were very much noticed in Europe. In the next essay ('Lewis and the Critique of Modernism'), Gašiorek addresses Lewis's rejection of modernism after Vorticism, following the horrors of the first world war. Gašiorek traces Lewis's opposition to the inward-directed methods of Woolf and Joyce, Eliot's impersonal aesthetics, and the series of avant-garde movements invested in irrationality and the unconscious – Dada, surrealism, futurism, and primitivism.

*The Cambridge Companion* is particularly valuable for its contributions on Lewis's art. Humphreys's essay offers an engaging, readable overview of Lewis's own artistic practice and his art criticism, focusing on how both changed across Lewis's long career, ranging from his early experiences at the Slade to his support of young artists in the fifties. This piece is complemented by Paul Edwards's essay on satire and portraiture, which usefully compares Lewis's visual and literary portraits. These portraits, Edwards argues, offer surprising moments of humanism within his largely satiric body of work. Edwards contributes particularly interesting accounts of Lewis's portrait of T. S. Eliot, which was rejected by the Royal Academy, and his painting of Edith Sitwell. Humphreys's and Edwards's essays are illustrated with nine reproductions of Lewis's visual works, including *The Theater Manager*, a pen and ink and watercolor work from 1909; *The Surrender of Barcelona*, an oil painting from 1936-37; and the *Red Portrait* of his wife Froanna, from 1937.

*The Cambridge Companion* offers two essays devoted to exploring the tense topic of Lewis's politics. Nathan Waddell's even-handed account traces three distinct stages of Lewis's opinions of fascism: the approval of centralized power and critique of democracy that structured his thinking in the twenties; 'qualified sympathy' for fascism as an

alternative to democracy and a means of avoiding war between 1932 and 1938; and finally his rejection of national socialism due to its pro-war and world control agendas (89). Alan Munton's essay goes beyond what its title promises – to outline Lewis's views of anarchism and socialism – and offers a fuller account of Lewis's politics which, he argues, must be understood in terms of his changing views on whether a centralized or decentralized version of political power would be better for artists. Munton also shows that Lewis was deeply concerned with ideology, and through extended readings of *The Mysterious Mr Bull* and *America and Cosmic Man* he traces Lewis's attempt to 'dissolve' ideologies of Englishness as well as his attraction to an American ideology of rootlessness.

Another pair of essays address the other most uncomfortable topics in Lewis studies: race and gender. Lara Trubowitz explores the former, along with his views on anti-Semitism, while Erin G. Carlson surveys his views on gender and sexuality. Trubowitz and Carlson describe Lewis's attitudes in notably similar ways: both see him ultimately as an anti-essentialist who envisioned race and gender in performative terms. With readings of *Filibusters in Barbary* and *The Apes of God*, Trubowitz argues that, for Lewis, racism was a rhetorical strategy that was useful in various kinds of political situations, rather than a deeply rooted belief system. Carlson discusses Lewis's portrayal of female characters as well as his critiques of masculinity. She shows that Lewis found both homosexuality and feminism to be weapons of a destructive political system bent on destroying masculinity, and concludes with the intriguing suggestion that, in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis posited the possibility of a 'creative, new, yet-to-evolve gender' that would reboot modern subjectivity (134).

The final section explores Lewis's cultural critique, his relationship to philosophy, and his engagement with media. David Ayers approaches Lewis's critiques of culture as 'dialectically determined defense', rather than as 'authoritarian assertion' (137). Ayers cogently synthesizes Lewis's major critical works of the mid and late twenties, arguing that they are motivated by exposing how the 'individual was constantly interpellated but never empowered' (140). Erik Bachman (in 'Wyndham Lewis between Philosophy and God') explores Lewis's relationship to philosophy and religion, focusing especially on his engagement with the work of Henri Bergson and A. N. Whitehead. The volume concludes with Julien Murphet's energetic essay ('Lewis and Media') on Lewis's attempts at 'creating a vocation for art in the teeth of

its subsumption into media culture' (160). Murphet argues that Lewis's strategy was to imagine an art that took on and used characteristics of media – 'ugliness, cheapness, disposability, vulgarity' (163).

The Edinburgh *Critical Guide* begins with an essay by Louise Kane on Lewis's pre-war writing. His Brittany sketches, she shows, utilized an observational style closely related to portraiture and drew heavily on primitivist tropes that can also be traced in *BLAST*. One especially interesting feature of this essay is its discussion of Lewis's relationship to the 'little magazine' *The Tramp*, which paid better than Ford Madox Hueffer's *The English Review* and attracted Lewis with the nostalgic figure of the tramp – an alternative mode of subjectivity to that promoted by the machine age.

Julian Hanna's essay ('Vorticism and Avant-Gardism') focuses on how this significant period differed from the rest of Lewis's career. When he was in the throes of establishing Vorticism, Hanna argues, Lewis acted as a leader of a collective rather than as a lone wolf, still thought that art could actually change society, and was more open to new ideas and less aggressive. Hanna also emphasizes how different Vorticism was from related avant-garde movements because it prioritized stillness and stasis. Ann-Marie Einhaus's intriguing contribution ('Lewis and War') shows how and why Lewis's bearing changed, following the disillusionments of World War One. Einhaus describes Lewis's portrayal of shell shock as a loss of agency, and argues that his political writings in the twenties were motivated by a sense of responsibility to the war dead. Einhaus suggests that Lewis was initially attracted to Hitler as a fellow veteran, but then turned away from him after realizing that he wanted another war. She also explores war as grounds for Lewis's rejection of Bloomsbury, whose central figures maintained a level of detachment from war by not serving.

There is inevitable overlap between the two volumes: like *The Cambridge Companion*, the Edinburgh *Critical Guide* features chapters on Lewis's cultural criticism, relationship to modernism, use of satire, and views on race, gender, and politics. Yet each of the chapters on these shared topics produces a fairly distinctive view, such that readers would be well served to read both. Alan Munton's chapter on cultural criticism in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide* presents a Lewis who was centrally interested in ideology critique, a Lewis who resembles Antonio Gramsci, at times, and George Orwell, at others; Ayers's chapter in *The Cambridge Companion*, by contrast, reveals a Lewis who looks more like the Adorno and Horkheimer of *The Culture Industry*. Michael Nath's essay ('Lewis and

Modernism’) in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide* is a useful companion to Gašiorek’s essay in *The Cambridge Companion*: while Gašiorek concentrates on Lewis’s post-Vorticist rejection of many aspects of modernism, Nath instead reads Lewis as a modernist, examining *Tarr* as a sibling of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Women in Love*. Jamie Wood’s essay in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide* (‘Lewis, Satire, and Literature’) reads Lewis’s literary satire as his version of modernist classicism, while Melania Terrazas’s essay in *The Cambridge Companion* focuses primarily on the non-moral and ‘relational’ qualities of his satire. Ivan Phillips, in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide*, is less convinced than are Carlson or Trubowitz, in *The Cambridge Companion*, that Lewis’s misogyny and racism led to productive theories of gender and, especially, race; he focuses instead on the complexity of Lewis’s views of the feminine and of race. While *The Cambridge Companion* breaks out Lewis’s politics into separate chapters on fascism and on anarchism and socialism, Nathan Waddell’s essay in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide* pulls together Lewis’s varied views on contemporary politics into a single chapter, arguing that, examined together, his politics were shaped by a tension between wanting to change the masses versus rejecting and avoiding them.

Another site where the two volumes complement each other is in their chapters devoted to a crucial topic in Lewis studies – media, in *The Cambridge Companion*, and technology, in the Edinburgh *Critical Guide*. By taking up different but overlapping topics, the volumes manage to enhance each other. Julian Murphet and Andrzej Gašiorek trace similar narratives, in which media (for Murphet) and technology (for Gašiorek) are agents of ‘levelling down’ in Lewis’s view of modern culture. But while technologies such as cinema and radio were agents for spreading media culture, literature and art needed to mobilize specific responses to media versus technology. While there was no possibility of imagining a contemporary literature uncontaminated by the rhetorical strategies of mass media’s advertising world, for Lewis, many writers did produce literary texts that either simply ignored or uncritically celebrated the technological reality of modern life. But, Gašiorek shows, Lewis insisted that art must engage with technology – and it must do so carefully and consciously, in non-utopian terms. Gašiorek focuses on *The Caliph’s Design* as a text where Lewis imagines technology as a resource for a new aesthetic, provided that it is self-consciously used by the artist. Yet *The Apes of God* and *Snooty Baronet* cast doubt on the vision of *The Caliph’s Design*, with their view of modern society as a mass of lifeless automatons who let machines do their thinking.

One of the highlights of the Edinburgh volume is the series of essays devoted to particular works of fiction. In her essay on *Tarr*, Faith Binckes explores the novel's relation to the genre of the Bohemian tale and maps its extremely complicated publication history. She reads the novel's style as an almost Jamesian form of 'close observation' combined with an emphasis on confrontation, such that the novel does not just perform misogyny but instead provokes the reader with it (39). David Bradshaw's account of the famously 'unreadable' *Apes of God* maps the novel's homophobia and racism. He argues that the novel gets too entangled in documenting the culture it hates, becoming 'a fever chart of a cultural malaise rather than a detached and clinical dissection of it' (101). Ian Patterson's chapter on *The Revenge for Love* reads that novel as a drama of unmasking, centred on the difficulty of figuring out what is real – indeed the novel is not even really about the Spanish Civil War, in this account. The chapter concludes with an interesting reading of tears and laughter, suggesting that it is laughter that has the greater capacity to display pain in the world of this novel.

The volume's essays on *The Human Age* trilogy and *Self Condemned* are particular high points. Scott W. Klein writes lucidly about this very difficult series of works, and his essay will be a great help to future Lewis scholars who feel daunted by *The Childermass*. Klein situates that novel in a continuum with *The Art of Being Ruled*, reading it as centrally about the question of whether politics is just theatre, whether power is 'a matter of show rather than substance' (195). *Monstre Gai*, with its portrait of Pullman being pulled into the Balliff's world of power and prestige, is ultimately a self-critical reflection on modernism's and Lewis's own politics, a 'portrait of the satirist satirized' (200). *Malign Fiesta*, then, reveals the series' ambition to redefine the human and create a new human age. Miranda Hickman's essay on *Self Condemned* reads that novel as a deeply self-reflective work in which Lewis returns to – and rethinks – many of his familiar tropes, to reveal the consequences of his aesthetic of detachment. The novel's exaggerated display of violence toward women is, she argues, a critique of the misogyny implied in his earlier aesthetic commitments. The essay offers a particularly intriguing account of *Self Condemned* as Lewis's reply to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, featuring Lewis's own theory of the material conditions necessary for artistic practice.

The Edinburgh volume concludes, appropriately, with an essay by Paul Edwards on the history of scholarship on Lewis. Edwards provides a usefully long-range view, beginning with Lewis's influence on late

modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett. The next stage of Lewis's reception would be dominated by F. R. Leavis, whose values of 'life', 'unity', and 'community' hardly left room for Lewis's satirical vision. Hugh Kenner's *Wyndham Lewis* (1954) saw Lewis's writing before *The Revenge for Love* as 'nihilistic over-writing', but his 1972 volume *The Pound Era* led to a new series of studies of Lewis's relationships with other modernists, in Edwards's reading (223). It was Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression* that 'directly reshaped Lewis studies' by linking them to critical theory and focusing extensively on questions of style (225). Following Jameson, the next generation of scholars focused on defining 'central preoccupations and oppositions' in Lewis's work – here Edwards situates David Ayers, Vincent Sherry, and Lisa Tickner. Edwards concludes with a reflection on the contemporary moment, which is, he points out, far more conducive to essay collections than to monographs, especially those which sustain a critical focus on a single author. While the publication of this *Cambridge Companion* and *Edinburgh Critical Guide* thus represents a moment to be celebrated and savoured, Edwards suggests that there may be a hint of loss as well.

Together, these two volumes promise to assist both new and established scholars of modernist art and literature as they wrap their minds around the full extent of Lewis's achievements. The editors – Tyrus Miller, Andrzej Gąsiorek, and Nathan Waddell – are to be commended for bringing these volumes to fruition, for assembling a fairly varied group of scholars to write the essays, and, not least, for structuring these volumes to ensure wide and deep coverage with minimal repetition between them. Both texts will be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of university libraries, graduate students, and professors who teach or research modernist literature and art.

Heather Fielding  
*Purdue University Northwest, USA*