

LEWISLETTER 25 WINTER / SPRING 2007

NEWS FROM THE WYNDHAM LEWIS SOCIETY 50th anniversary issue
2007 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Wyndham Lewis's death

LOST LEWIS DRAWING REDISCOVERED IN THE USA

An important drawing by Lewis, thought to have been lost, has been rediscovered in a private collection in Philadelphia nearly sixty years after it was last exhibited.

A study in black chalk of a man in goggles was positively identified by Alan Munton after its owner, civil lawyer Sal Daidone, contacted him last November.

The study, made c. 1943, has been identified as *Head from the Casting Shop*, which relates to *Workman* (Michel 1033), and more distantly to Lewis's oil, *Canadian War Factory* (1943). It was given to Mr Daidone and his wife as a wedding present in 1964 by a friend of Mr Daidone's father. The work is reproduced in *The Talented Intruder: Wyndham Lewis in Canada, 1939-45* (Windsor Art Gallery, 1992), with the annotation 'present whereabouts unknown'.

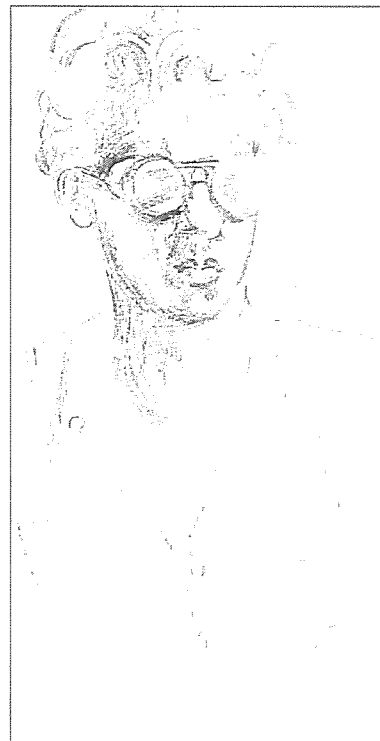
It was shown at the British Council's exhibition of British Art in 1948.

A label on the back of the picture indicates that it was sold at some time by London-based dealers Reid and Lefevre, who handled Lewis's work. It is probable that Lewis brought it to London on returning to the UK from Canada in 1945. Nothing is known of its history between 1948 and 1964.

At first, poverty did prompt Mr Daidone and his wife to consider selling the drawing, but repeated glances convinced them that the artist had a talent that couldn't be easily dismissed. 'There was something about the way the face was drawn that gave us second thoughts', admitted Mr Daidone, and the picture was kept.

Since then it has travelled with the family to all their various homes over the past 42 years, always occupying the same position close to the front door, and always retaining the role as a 'silent observer and companion'.

Now that its authenticity has been assured, Mr Daidone intends to remove the drawing from its frame and examine it more closely. The picture will remain in the family and it is hoped that whoever inherits the work will cherish it.



Head from the Casting Shop

WYNDHAM LEWIS SOCIETY RELAUNCH

The relaunch meeting of the Wyndham Lewis Society will be held at the Courtauld Institute in London on Friday 28 September at 3pm. A talk on Lewis's drawings will be given by Tom Lubbock, art critic of the *Independent*. This will be followed by an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to plan future activities of the Society.

Tom Lubbock's talk will take place in the Prints & Drawings Study Room, where space constraints mean that numbers will be limited. Please send an email to the Secretary, James Selby, to let him know that you wish to attend: james.selby@wilkinskennedy.com

Getting in: the Prints & Drawings Study Room is in the Courtauld Institute (not the Gallery). As you enter under the archway from the Strand, use the entrance to the left, where Reception will guide you to the Mezzanine floor. The meeting should be over before 6pm, when there will be drinks or a meal elsewhere.

LEWIS'S LAST LAUGH

The news that Wyndham Lewis, as ever at the vanguard of a new art form, was an early writer on rock music, has astonished many admirers, as Alan Munton reports.

Wyndham Lewis on Bill Haley and the Comets – it sounds improbable, but it's true. A brief discussion of the song *Rock Around the Clock* is a feature of Lewis's last completed article, recently published for the first time. Entitled 'Elitemindedness: a policy', it was written at the request of Henry Kissinger, then a Harvard academic and not yet Richard Nixon's Secretary of State. Kissinger edited the quarterly journal *Confluence*, which published symposia devoted to single topics. Lewis was invited to discuss 'Education Today' for the Summer 1957 number, Kissinger no doubt being under the impression that Lewis was a safe right-wing writer for what we would now call a conservative think-tank. What Kissinger did not know was that by late 1956, Lewis was seriously ill. The article he received was a strange concoction. Individual paragraphs make sense, but the whole thing barely hangs together. Kissinger didn't publish it, though he did pay Lewis the promised \$100.

The article has now been edited by Paul O'Keeffe, to whom I owe the above information. It appears in a magazine enigmatically named *The Drouth*, published in Glasgow. Under the title 'Confluence, Kissinger, and the Blind Critic of Notting Hill', O'Keeffe introduces and edits 'Elitemindedness', adding what one might call deep research into the events occurring at the time it was written. He judges it to have been completed during the week of 22-28 October 1956. This explains the nature of the many contemporary references. The film *Rock Around the Clock* had opened in September, and caused Teddy Boy riots; Lewis thought the band was black, and evidence that the whole of Europe was rocking and rolling and 'innocently negritic'. There is no sign here of Lewis's supposed racism. Apart from its overall incoherence, there was good reason for Kissinger not to print the article – it is vigorously anti-American, and is particularly critical of higher education in the US, a system which Lewis had experienced during the 1940s. Americans like Henry James and T. S. Eliot are far more élitemented than British or European writers, Lewis argues, and he ends with an encomium for the courage of 'the unarmed working people' of Budapest who were fighting the Russian tanks as he wrote. He contrasts them with Oxford students who at the same moment (22 October) were debating the abolition of the Third Programme (now Radio 3). Lewis expects only a minority of Americans to share his humanistic views about Hungary, but hopes the élitemented there will at least hang their heads in shame. This strike against American 'democratic aristocracy' was perhaps his last substantial satiric attack.

The full reference is: Paul O'Keeffe, 'Confluence, Kissinger, and the Blind Critic of Notting Hill', *The Drouth* 16 (Summer 2005), 42-48. Unpriced, but available from PO Box 7419, Glasgow G5 9WB or at thedrouth@yahoo.co.uk

NEW LEWIS CD IS LAUNCHED

A new audio CD devoted entirely to Lewis's work was launched in April on the excellent LTM label. Devised with the full cooperation of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, *The Enemy Speaks*, features Lewis reading extracts from 'When John Bull Laughs', *One-Way Song*, 'A Crisis of Thought', and 'The Essential Purposes of Art'. There is also an extract from a 1951 BBC radio feature entitled *Novelists of the Twenties* in which brief dramatised episodes from *The Apes of God* are introduced by V.S. Pritchett. Copies of the CD are obtainable directly from James Nice at: jnice@lmpub.freemove.co.uk

A full review can be found towards the end of this *Lewisletter*: see p.18.

LEWIS PAINTING IN TOP TEN (AGAIN)

Once again *Independent* art critic Tom Lubbock has admitted a painting by Lewis into his 'alternative Top Ten' of paintings in UK art galleries. Responding to a poll in which members of the public were asked to name their favourite paintings in British galleries, Lubbock was critical of the works chosen, which included the inevitable *Haywain* and *Fighting Téméraire* but also the Renoir with the barmaid, and more surprisingly, the one with the cat by the minor salon painter, David Hockney. Lubbock offered his own selection, and *One of the Stations of the Dead* was placed at number ten. This is quite a coup for Lewis and it's heartening too that nothing by the overrated Lucien Freud or the presently overhyped Francis Bacon gets in.

CALDER QUILTS

John Calder, *enfant terrible* of avant-garde publishing in the fifties and sixties, and for many years UK publisher of Lewis, has decided to retire. Calder, who recently turned eighty, will not sell off his backlist, but instead hand over control of it to the independent Alma Books/Oneworld Classics, presently run by Alessandro Gallenzi and Elisabetta Minervini, who will preserve his eponymous imprint, Calder Publications, leaving Calder to continue to commission new titles himself. The deal will also preserve the celebrated Calder Bookshop in The Cut, near Waterloo station, where the famous monthly performances and readings will still be held.

PHILIP HEAD

Philip Head, highly esteemed by members for his excellent writings on Lewis and related subjects, is recovering from complications that followed a routine operation at his local hospital in Maidstone last November. Having contracted pneumonia there, he was found to have serious heart problems and was transferred to St Thomas's Hospital in London for heart surgery. Here he contracted MRSA and other infections, necessitating two periods in intensive care. Still very weak, he is now convalescing at home.

Philip's latest writing on Lewis appears in the current issue of the *Lewis Annual*. Meanwhile, all Society members will want to send their very best regards to Philip with wishes for a speedy recovery, and the hope that he will be able to attend the next AGM.

SPANISH PRACTICES: LEWIS IN SPAIN

A report by Alan Munton

A striking aspect of current research into Lewis is the quality of work being done in Spain. There are individual scholars working on Lewis, and for the past five years there has been a collective research project at the University of La Rioja in Logroño. Out of this project has come the Lewis website, and 2007 will see publication of a book of ten essays by Spanish and British scholars.

Among the individual writers on Lewis is Yolanda Morató of the University of Huelva. She has published in Spanish a discussion of Vorticism entitled 'El Vorticismo: una victoria pírrica', and in English an outstanding introduction to *Time and Western Man*. The Vorticism discussion – the title translates as 'Vorticism: A Pyrrhic Victory' – is to be found in the first number of the journal *ZUT*, published from Málaga in Spring 2005. This is online at

<http://www.zutediciones.com/index.php?sec=articulo&articulo=5&ejemplar=1>.

The article on *Time and Western Man* appears in the online *Literary Encyclopedia*, which is edited at the University of East Anglia by Dr Robert Clark. To find this, go to <http://www.litencyc.com/> and type the title in "Works". (This site has an introduction to Lewis by Andrzej Gasiorek; Alan Munton will be contributing on *The Childermass* and other texts). Yolanda Morató has, astonishingly, translated *Time and Western Man* and several other books by Lewis into Spanish, and has recently found a publisher: more details in the next *Lewisletter*.

The Wyndham Lewis Project at the University of La Rioja has been active since 2002, and reaches a successful conclusion with the publication in 2007 of *Wyndham Lewis the Radical: Essays on Literature and*

Modernism. As the title indicates, the collection challenges the view, particularly widespread among critics on North America, that Lewis's work was uniformly reactionary. The editor is Carmelo Cunchillos, the much-admired professor of English at La Rioja University (he is now retired), who raised funding for the project from the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology. The UK side of the project was led by Professor Stan Smith of Nottingham Trent University. All essays are in English, and the book will be published by Peter Lang during 2007. There are five Spanish and six British contributors.

The contents are:

David A. Wragg: 'Modernity's "Reality" – Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* 1, and the Critical Historiography of Modernism';

María Jesús Hernández Lerena: 'Are Lewis's Short Stories Pathological?'

Michael Nath: '"We Are Unknown to Ourselves, We Knowers": More Thoughts on Lewis's "Paramount Influence"';

Paul Edwards: 'The Apes of God and the English Classical Tradition';

Melania Terrazas: 'Intricate Models of Conflict in Wyndham Lewis's Fiction';

Peter L. Caracciolo: 'From Signorelli to Caligari: Allusions to Paintings and Film in The Human Age and its Visual Precursors';

Alan Munton: 'From Charlie Chaplin to Bill Haley: Popular Culture and Ideology in Wyndham Lewis';

Carlos Villar Flor and Noelia Domínguez Carballo: 'Lewisian Footprints in Evelyn Waugh's Early Satires';

Stan Smith: 'Broad-minded Leftwingers and Marxian Playboys: Wyndham Lewis, W.H. Auden and the Literary Left in the 1930s';

Mar Asensio Aróstegui: 'Postmodernist (Dis)continuities: Jeanette Winterson's Silence on Wyndham Lewis'

Also published is an essay by Laurent Lepaludier, 'Visual Dynamics in "Bestre" by Wyndham Lewis', which appears in a Spanish-edited collection, *Contemporary Debates on the Short Story*, ed. José R. Ibáñez, José F. Fernández and Carmen M. Bretones, also published by Peter Lang in 2007.

AGM OF THE WYNDHAM LEWIS SOCIETY

This was held at the usual venue, Bircham Dyson Bell, at the earlier time of 4.30 pm on Friday 30 June, 2006. Full details were circulated to members after the AGM.

CAREY CORNER

The fallout from *What Good are the Arts?* by Sunday Times book reviewer and arch Lewis-baiter John Carey, continues.

Jeanette Winterson, having been labelled 'superior, elitist and barely sane' by Carey was subsequently asked by him

to deliver a lecture at Oxford entitled 'What is art for?' She got her own back in the *Times* by questioning whether the very title of Carey's book was as 'idiotic' as asking 'What Good is Food?' She maintained that, like religion, art nourishes 'the inner life' and offers 'an alternative value system', and invites us 'to see differently, think differently, challenging ourselves, and the way we live.' Carey, however, by challenging the concept of absolutes in art downgrades this experience. In democratising art by claiming that 'anything that anyone has ever considered a work of art' must be so, he is saying that *EastEnders* and Internet porn are art, as is 'the cartoon dog I drew this morning for my god-daughter'.

To Winterson:

what art does is to release and focus energy in a particular way, and what we call art objects are places where energy is especially intense. It doesn't matter whether it is a picture or a book or a piece of music, or a performance, it is a concentration of energy. This is why the arts occupy relatively timeless space, and why one of the tests of art is that it should go on working on us long after any contemporary interest in its subject matter is extinct. We don't go to Shakespeare to find out about life in Elizabethan England, we go to Shakespeare to find out about ourselves now. The energy in the plays goes on being released. This is why Carey's rubbishing of any distinctions between high art and low art is so misplaced. There is no such thing as high and low art, there is only the real thing, and it comes very differently packaged and dosed at different strengths.

Winterson does admit that 'not all art lasts forever' and challenges the 'mandarin view' that great art works are 'everlasting monuments to the human spirit', but she does seem to share some of Lewis's views on art. She particularly sees Carey's literary-focussed solipsism as 'dangerously limiting'. In her opinion, 'he will not admit that there might be other ways of approaching the arts that might yield very different results to his own'. To Winterson, art is 'something real, something beyond the ordinary. If not, well, it is fine that Rolf Harris is going to paint the Queen for her eightieth birthday. In Carey-world, there is no difference between Rolf Harris and Lucien Freud. Is there?'

She was joined by philosopher Anthony O'Hear, who also condemned Carey's relativism. In his article 'Andy Warhol, John Carey, and the Art of Celebrity' (an edited extract from his recent book, *Plato's Children*), he compares the achievement of Warhol with that of Picasso. If Picasso, O'Hear argues, 'was the last of the heroic painters, in a tradition which would include Michelangelo, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Monet, Cézanne, men whose lives were consumed by their art and whose

art involved new ways of seeing', Warhol, who did neither, 'was not an artist at all', though he succeeded in eroding 'the distinction between a high art of serious ambition and a popular art, essentially trivial and ephemeral'. O'Hear goes on to condemn Carey for subverting traditional values by affirming that a work of art can be anything if someone believes it to be so, and that 'there cannot be judgements about art or discriminations of quality which are not purely objective'. Carey is advocating the Warhol agenda in 'threadbare, academic hand-me-downs'. If there are no genuine judgements of quality in art, then 'the whole phenomenon of art, including his own field of literary criticism, is reduced to the exercise of power relations'. According to O'Hear:

Artists who count, like the celebrities who count, are those who have most power over the media and the critical elite, and who are most powerfully promoted by the most powerful promoters and publicists. Artists indeed are celebrities and, if we follow the example of Warhol, as perhaps we should, we might say that celebrities are artists. Celebrity is all. As an empirical fact, this may be true of Warhol himself and of the art world post-Warhol. Nonentities, pumped up by impenetrable pseudo-academic drivel and demonstrating over and over again that indeed anything can now be an artwork, become, for a time, the darlings of the promoters and critics.

LEWIS ON THE WEB

A PHILOSOPHER LOOKS AT LEWIS

Most blogs are reams of solipsistic blathering, but the website of 'philosopher' Jon Moore has interesting speculations on Lewis. Predictably, he has little good to say of *Tarr* and *The Apes of God*. According to him, Lewis's first novel is 'badly flawed' and 'pretentious' and the product of a precocious talent 'trying to get one up on Nietzsche'. *The Apes of God*, meanwhile, shows an outsider's envy of Bloomsbury. However, *Time and Western Man*, is analysed in some depth. Moore is impressed by 'how convincing' a lot of Lewis's material is. 'It comes alive, not just as a speculative hypothesis, but as a whole way of experience'. Worth a look, especially as Moore has clearly *read* Lewis carefully. Access his website by googling John Moore.