

LEWISLETTER 26 *Spring 2008*

News from the Wyndham Lewis Society

Lewis show at National Portrait Gallery opens 3 July

A major exhibition of fifty-nine portraits by Wyndham Lewis opens at the National Portrait Gallery on 3 July. Amongst them is the painting of T. S. Eliot from Durban, and the portrait of Chancellor Capen, from Buffalo. The Eliot was last seen here in 1979, while the Capen has never before been seen in this country. The exhibition is curated by Paul Edwards and Richard Humphreys, with a catalogue essay by Edwards. In the show's first room are eight Lewis self-portraits.

The 1920s are represented in a section entitled 'Apes and Familiars', which includes portraits of the Sitwell family. Section three, 'Men of 1914' shows Joyce and Eliot, and several versions of Ezra Pound. 'The New Zeitgeist' of the 1930s includes Stephen Spender and Naomi Mitchison, amongst other personalities of the decade, and is followed by a section dedicated to Lewis's wife, Froanna, of whom there are several intense and moving representations. The exhibition concludes as the light began to fade – 'The Sea-Mists of the Winter: North America and Blindness' includes the 1939 Capen painting, the 1945 drawing of Malcolm MacDonald, and Lewis's last completed portrait, the T.S. Eliot of 1949.

This exhibition follows the cancellation of a comprehensive exhibition of works on themes of creation and imagination planned, but not announced, by Tate Modern. The two shows would have run concurrently during the summer, and would have amounted virtually to a combined retrospective. Now it seems unlikely that there will be a full Lewis retrospective in London. The NPG exhibition closes on 19 October. Tickets can be booked at www.npg.org.uk

A large-format illustrated catalogue written by Edwards, with contributions from Humphreys, is being published to accompany the exhibition. ■

Cancelled Tate show: both sides offer their views

R.M.Healey

While Lewisians cannot conceal their disappointment at the cancellation of the planned large exhibition of work by Wyndham Lewis projected to open at Tate Britain this summer, many will look forward to seeing a selection of the artist's portraits at the forthcoming National Portrait Gallery exhibition.

Both shows were to have been curated by Paul Edwards and Richard Humphreys, and Tate planned to focus on his imaginative, rather than his figurative, work. However, when plans were fairly

advanced, the Tate announced their withdrawal, citing a review of their exhibition programme, and finance. Tate gave no assurance that they would consider doing a Lewis show at a future date.

According to a disappointed Paul Edwards, although he and Richard Humphreys had made several attempts in the past to interest Tate in a large Lewis exhibition that would cover the full range of his work, 'it has always been difficult to get any precise explanation for their decisions not to mount such a show'. ■

'Only after the NPG decided to run an exhibition did the Tate change its mind', Edwards continued, 'and they were evidently never very committed, or they would not have dropped it so readily in order to balance the programme elsewhere with a previously unplanned show on the Camden Town Group. The Tate always puts its faith in Sickert'.

Edwards feels that there is little likelihood that the Tate will 'change its attitude' to Lewis in the foreseeable future, and takes some consolation from the fact that Lewis 'is not the only major British artist of the first half of the twentieth century that they have neglected'.

When asked for an explanation of the cancellation, Tate's Chief Curator, Judith Nesbitt, offered crumbs of comfort to Lewisians:

'Though our programme, like other major institutions, is planned several years in advance', she maintained, 'it is nonetheless subject to change. Our exhibition programme seeks to illuminate British art across six centuries, and this historical coverage has to be balanced out across several years of scheduling. We try to offer a varied programme for the widest possible range of visitors. We also aim to balance different sizes and types of shows – monographic, thematic and survey shows – and to do this within the available resources for each successive year'.

'A review of the 2008 programme led us to consider first of all the opportunity of mounting a Vorticism exhibition in the Spring; our final decision was to present the Camden Town Group exhibition at this time. This change meant that it was not possible to proceed with our original plan to present a Wyndham Lewis show this summer, due to consideration of overall programme balance and resources, as outlined'.

'We have now embarked on planning an ambitious Vorticism exhibition for 2011 in partnership with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice and the Nasher Museum in North Carolina'. The show is curated by Mark Antliff, a professor of Art History at Duke University, where the Nasher gallery is situated. Antliff has written well on Bergson, and is interested in fascism and art. With British specialists on Lewis excluded, we await his interpretation of Lewis.

Too little, too late? We shall have to see. ■

Birmingham Lewis conference: tapas and debate

Nathan Waddell and Alice Reeve-Tucker

'Wyndham Lewis: Modernity & Critique', a lively, encouraging, and pleasingly well-attended international academic conference, was held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Birmingham, on 25-26 January 2008. Delegates and speakers came from Poland, America, Spain, France, and Canada, in addition to academics and postgraduates from across England.

Plenary talks were given by Paul Edwards and Alan Munton (entitled 'The Uses of Shellshock' and "Quotation", respectively), and there were presentations on topics as diverse as *Blast* and cognitive literary theory, grotesquerie, advertising culture, Lewisian anthropology, corporate patronage, John Rodker and *The Apes of God*, modern evil, autobiography, sound, fashion, Bergsonism, and cinema, among others. The conference meal took place at Café Ikon, Brindley Place, on the Friday evening, and consisted of a wide assortment of tapas and wine, ably framed and commemorated by Alan's talent for photography. To view the conference programme, a list of speakers, and the beautiful drawing of Froanna used in the conference publicity, please visit the conference website at www.wlconf2008.bham.ac.uk

The turnout from postgraduate students was particularly strong, comprising nineteen out of a total of forty-one attendees. This, if nothing else, proves that Lewis studies, far from representing a niche enterprise, are enjoying unprecedented popularity at present. We know we speak for those students when we say that exchanging thoughts and ideas with some of the world's finest Lewisians in a supportive, engaging climate represented a marvellous example of shared passions and interests between and across different age groups. Lewis would have been proud, surely, of the tremendous spirit of productive and articulate debate in evidence at the conference between established scholars and up-and-coming figures alike. ■

Preparing a new edition of *The role of line in art*

Paul W. Nash

Lewis's essay 'The role of line in art' appears to have been written in 1938,¹ at the request of George Lionel Seymour Dawson-Damer, Viscount Carlow (1907-1944). Between 1936 and 1944 one of Carlow's hobbies was the Corvinus Press, which he operated in Red Lion Court, London, printing by hand short works by his literary friends, of whom Lewis was one.² In 1939 Lewis painted Carlow's portrait, and also gave him a trunk full of manuscripts and proofs; these were later acquired by the State University of New York at Buffalo, where they are kept as the 'Carlow Collection'. When Carlow asked Lewis for something to print at his press, Lewis may well have had the essay in draft, or at least in mind, and seems to have conceived it as a commentary on a portfolio of his drawings. In January 1939 he inscribed a copy of his *Fifteen drawings* (1919) to Carlow with the words 'Our little six piece portfolio – or will it be a *book?* – will be a kind of sequel to this'.³

Hand-setting of the type probably began in early 1939. It was a slow process as there was only enough of the 18-point Corvinus Light italic type chosen for the book to set a few quarto pages at a time, so each gathering had to be set, proofed, corrected, printed and the type distributed before the next could be set; in addition, each page had to be re-imposed after the main edition of 120 copies had been struck off for printing, one page at a time, on larger paper to produce one or more special copies. The slow production was also hampered by Lewis's departure for Canada in late 1939, and by the author's indecision about how many of his drawings should be used to accompany the essay. On 11 August 1939 Carlow wrote to Lewis about the illustrations for the essay, recording that the title was 'at the present moment ... THE ROLE OF LINE IN ART, With six drawings to Illustrate the Argument'. He wondered 'whether any additional drawings, such as my Joyce

portrait etc. may *not* illustrate the argument in quite the same sense as the six you have chosen'. The title could be altered to mention further drawings 'but what I was really wondering was to what extent any additional drawings may fit in with the six coloured reproductions which you have chosen'.⁴

Carlow's unwillingness to accept further illustrations for the book may have been due, in part, to the fact that he had already printed Lewis's opening paragraphs, in which 'six drawings' are mentioned, and wanted to avoid the trouble and delay of reprinting this gathering. It seems that Lewis was keen to include at least one more image, however, and when the title-page was printed the subtitle was given as 'WITH SEVEN DRAWINGS TO ILLUSTRATE THE ARGUMENT'. Production continued through 1940, although further delays were inevitable when Carlow was posted to the Air Ministry and, from March 1940, to the British Legation at Helsinki. His press-man continued to work on printing the text, while the plates were printed by offset lithography, probably during 1940. On 26 April 1941 Carlow sent a telegram from Helsinki informing Lewis that the book was still incomplete, as there were several pages of proofs for him to correct, and the colophon to sign. These proofs had still not been returned by 10 May, when a bomb fell on the premises of Yuills Ltd (a firm owned by Carlow's family) in Fenchurch Street, where the completed sheets and plates of the book had been sent for storage. Carlow was told of the disaster, but did not realise the extent of the damage. On 16 June he wrote to Lewis, again mentioning the uncorrected proofs and unsigned colophon, adding that he feared the plates had been lost at Yuills when 'A bomb fell on the building which is now nothing more than a pile of bricks and rubble'. In fact the entire edition had been destroyed, with

1 Lewis refers in the text to Sir William Huggins (1858-1941), who retired as President of the Royal Academy in 1938, as the 'late president'. By January 1939 Lewis and Carlow were already discussing the form in which the essay would be published.

2 See Paul W. Nash and A. J. Flavell, *The Corvinus Press: a history and bibliography* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994). Item 43 is the Corvinus Press edition of *The role of line in art*.

3 Copy of *Fifteen drawings* ([London]: Ovid Press, [1919]) in the 'Carlow Collection' at Buffalo (see Omar S. Pound and Philip Grover, *Wyndham Lewis: a descriptive bibliography* (Folkestone: Dawson-Archer Books, 1978), p. 73).

4 Letter at Cornell University Library. Cornell has many of Carlow's letters to Lewis, drafts of a few of Lewis's replies and other related material (including a typescript and proofs of *The role of line in art*).

the exception of one set of large-paper sheets which had apparently been sent to Carlow's home.⁵ Carlow returned briefly to London in March 1942, when he wrote to Lewis confirming that 'Your book, Alas, was blitzed ... However, I shall do it again one day, only [with] a slightly different shaped page'. It was probably at this time that Carlow arranged for the completion and binding of the remaining special copy, which inevitably did not include all of Lewis's final corrections.⁶

A number of questions about the intended edition remain unanswered. The text is contradictory about the number of illustrations included – six are mentioned in the first paragraph, seven on the title-page, while the surviving copy contains two sets of six plates, one printed in monochrome on various papers, and the other in colour (perhaps with some hand-colouring) on Japanese paper. Whether Carlow and Lewis intended all copies to have colour illustrations is unclear. In August 1939 Carlow referred to 'coloured reproductions', although the survival of some plain copies of the plates suggests that the intention may have been to include colour only in the special copy or copies. It is also unclear where the plates were intended to be placed in relation to the text. There are some inconsistencies and minor errors in the text, and some at least of these might have been corrected if the book had been produced under easier conditions, and completed as its author and printer planned.

In 1943 Carlow and Lewis collaborated on an edition of Coleridge's *The rime of the ancient mariner*, with large-scale watercolour illustrations by Lewis. A set of text sheets was printed, but Lewis's illustrations had not been produced, and no progress appears to have been made on the planned reprint of *The role of line in art*, by the time Carlow was killed in an air crash on 17 April 1944.⁷

The essay consists of a main text concerning the historical decline of draughtsmanship, followed

by a 'Tailpiece' examining the failings of certain contemporary artists. It is written with all Lewis's usual vigour and linguistic facility, and deserves to be much better-known among his polemical writings. Although the invective of the essay is distinct from any of Lewis's other published works, it bears comparison with the three-page preface he wrote for the portfolio *Thirty personalities and self-portrait* (1932). This is perhaps hardly surprising since the present work seems to have begun life – in Lewis's mind if not in Carlow's – as a small portfolio of drawings with a supporting essay. Indeed, one of the same drawings (the portrait

of James Joyce) occurs in both works. The formats of the two publications also have some similarities. In the preface to *Thirty personalities* Lewis discusses many of the same themes found in *The role of line in art*, examining

draughtsmanship and the differences that exist between drawings and oil paintings. He marks the genius of Leonardo, Rembrandt, Goya, Dürer and the Chinese masters and notes that etching and engraving are species of drawing, allowing 'effects ... unobtainable in oil-paint'. He concludes that 'There is no occasion, I think, in this brief preliminary Note to the portfolio, to say any more'. Lewis appears to have found the occasion in the essay which he completed for Lord Carlow some six years later.

The original edition of *The role of line in art* was a casualty of the Second World War, and the text remained largely unknown until the early 1970s. In March 1975 a report by Tom Kinninmont in *Lewisletter* described the Carlow-Lewis letters at Cornell, and noted the existence of a photocopy of the surviving copy of the book at Buffalo. Letters from Bernard Lafourcade and Kinninmont, describing the proofs at Cornell, were published in

⁵ A few small-paper sheets and the proof pages which were still in Lewis's possession also survived, and are now at Cornell. Examples of the plates also appear to have survived, perhaps because they were sent to Lewis as specimens. One such is at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Texas.

⁶ This copy is now in the possession of Carlow's son, the seventh Earl of Portarlington.

⁷ See Nash and Flavell pp. xxxiv, 139.

“Carlow returned briefly to London in March 1942, when he wrote to Lewis confirming that ‘Your book, Alas, was blitzed’”

*Enemy news*⁸ in the following year. In May 1979 the main text of the essay was made public for the first time in *Enemy news*, where it was published without the ‘Tailpiece’ or illustrations, but with a short preface by Kinninmont, reprinted from his 1975 article. In 1993 a new edition of the main text was published as a pamphlet, with an introduction by Robert Stacey.⁹

My own interest in the work, and determination to reprint it in its entirety, with the original illustrations, and in a hand-printed limited edition (as originally intended by Lewis and Carlow), dates back to the early 1990s, when I was working on the bibliography of the Corvinus Press. The seventh Earl of Portarlington generously deposited his own Corvinus collection and archive at the Bodleian Library for a short period, so that I was able to examine all the books printed by his father, Lord Carlow, between 1936 and 1944, including special copies of nearly all the titles. His collection includes the only ‘complete’ copy of *The role of line in art*, and I was able both to photocopy the text, and to have high-quality photographs made of the plates. I then gained permission from Lord Portarlington, and from the Wyndham Lewis estate, to reprint the text and illustrations in a new edition. Like Carlow, I am an amateur printer, having founded the Strawberry Press in 1989, and decided to try to print the essay myself. The process took some years, chiefly because of the long hours of press-work needed, which I was not able to fit into my working life until I became freelance in 2003.

THE RÔLE OF LINE IN ART WITH SEVEN DRAWINGS TO ILLUSTRATE THE ARGUMENT BY WYNDHAM LEWIS

“The original edition of
The role of line in art was a
casualty of the Second
World War”

At this time I completed editing the text, preparing a new version based on Lord Portarlington’s copy; I incorporated the few corrections present in the proofs at Cornell, and made some minor revisions of my own, to make capitalization and spelling consistent, although I retained as far as possible Lewis’s original archaisms, peculiarities and spellings of artists’ names. I also wrote a short introduction describing the history of the edition (this article contains much of the same information). In 2006 I arranged to have the type set on the Monotype machine at the Whittington Press, using the 16-point size of Bruce Rogers’s Centaur type. Not only is this my own preferred typeface, it is also appropriate for the essay because Lord Carlow used Centaur

extensively at Corvinus (although, as mentioned above, the original edition of Lewis’s essay had been set in Corvinus Light italic). Unfortunately, the Monotype setting was flawed, and I had to undertake a good deal of resetting and revision by hand to make the text perfect before it could be printed. The printing began in January 2007 and was completed in August.

Since there was some uncertainty about the author’s intentions regarding the plates, I decided that the best course of action was to reprint those which appear in the surviving copy as exactly as possible. Therefore, I arranged to have two sets of plates printed, one in monochrome and the other in colour, reproducing all the illustrations from Lord Portarlington’s copy. The printing of the plates was undertaken by J. W. Northend of Sheffield, and the results were very pleasing, both in accuracy of reproduction and in overall visual effect. In the surviving copy, the plates appear after the text. But since the text begins with a note about the illustrations, I decided to move them to fall between this note and the main text, and think this would probably have been the arrangement had Carlow’s edition been completed as planned. In the spirit of Lord Carlow, I decided to print a number of special copies on hand-made paper, which I have had bound in full morocco, blocked with a design of my own. Creating this design, and that for the cloth bindings of the standard

⁸ *Enemy news* 4, April 1976, p. 4.

⁹ New York: Cameron McWhirter, [1993]. 300 copies were printed. This edition also lacks the ‘Tailpiece’, but has a small reproduction of the Joyce portrait on the front wrapper.