As a critic Hugh Kenner is always interesting—perhaps provocative would be the better word—and he has followed his study of the poetry of Ezra Pound with a needed essay on Wyndham Lewis. Admirable in intention this essay is extremely limited, however. It considers Lewis's literary achievement—less any mention of the reception of his works (the castigations his political books got in the 1920's being dismissed as "sensationally good reviews")—and it charitably avoids reference to his comparative importance.

Lewis is the English representative of contemporary neo-classicism. Nearly all his criticism may be found in French predecessors like Massis, Seillière, Fernandez, Lasserre, to some extent Maurras, and especially Benda. What is valuable is that Lewis gives a fictional interpretation of this anti-romanticism which we do not find in France, partly because, on one hand, the great French writers of this century have raised themselves above immediate partisanship (already in Jean Barois Roger Martin du Gard shows an enviably "classical" detachment on this score), and partly because, on the other hand, the French neo-classical critics were not great writers. Benda's early novel L'Ordination, first serialized in Pégyu's Cahiers, for instance, contains that same typically neo-classical anti-feminism we find in Tarr, but in Lewis's work it is integrated in a far more fascinating way. On the creative side of the movement Lewis should be compared with three German contemporaries, Paul Ernstedt, Wilhelm von Scholz, and Samuel Lublinski, while his aesthetic derives from Worringer, Lipps, and slightly from T. E. Hulme. When one is aware of the extraordinary similarity of views in all these writers—despite their in-


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ternecine distinctions of race, religion, and so on, and despite their occasionally expressed contempt of each other—one must regard as a serious criticism of a work on Wyndham Lewis that it does not include a single one of these names in its index, while the philosophical roots of these neo-classical controversialists, in Comte, de Maistre, and Toussenel on the French side, are completely ignored.

For it is hardly in the interests of a general public that Kenner has excluded any consideration of Lewis's real position in contemporary literature. His book bristles with trouvailles of the most earnest nature; one character is "an especially schematized paradigm," another has "the four-square end-stopped nihilism of a Senecan hero," yet others are "prototypes for the bleakest of the artist-allotropes." Trouvailles these are indeed, for Kenner's prose glitters with French mots (I tremish to conceive what might happen to the style of certain avant-garde belletrists if they were made to assist at some frequentations with Shakespeare).

As a result, the best part of this study deals with Lewis's syntax; the most pretentious passages are those concerned with "Polemics." This latter section simply does not hang together—partly, one cannot help feeling, out of ignorance of the background. Lewis's fine pamphlet on art, The Caliph's Design (1919), is not quite grasped, or at least the Vorticist position is reduced to a point of naïveté in graphic matters. I do not feel that the classical principle of the Not-Self is understood via Lewis, while Kenner's two sections dealing with the attack on Time politely shelve the targets of attack. Opposing philosophies are ducked and the chapter on "Eye and Ear" seems to me to miss the burden of the Joyce-Lewis controversy. Kenner properly notes the use of the monologue intérieur in The Apes of God but appears surprised thereby, since it is "a method that Lewis has always noisily disowned." The truth is that Lewis relegates this method ("fiction from the inside") to the thought-streams of the very young, the very aged, half-wits and animals. The Apes exemplifies these strictures. Kenner gives a passing nod at Cartesian theory, as if we were all fa-
miliar with the intricacies of this, but he fails to show how close Lewis's "art of laughter" comes to Cartesian animal-automatism, especially as found in the later La Mettrie. When historical answers to the philosophical questions involved become too pressing, in fact, the critic backs into extensive quotation. But I should add that there are four brilliant pages on Lewis's recent *The Writer and the Absolute*, and that the general position is often deftly summarized: "The polemics exalt a rhetorical kind of knowing over a grasp, in depth, of what there is to know."

In analyzing the fiction Kenner seems to me far more successful, although I disagree with many of his opinions. Because of his sensitivity to the texture of prose he is able to contribute some invigorating ideas on Lewis's early play, *The Enemy of the Stars*, an English *Ubu Roi* as he suggestively depicts it (I am glad he has now dropped Lewis's own ugly notion that Joyce borrowed heavily from this play for the Circe episode of *Ulysses*). *Tarr*, a really important novel, is less adequately dealt with; it is true that the Lewisian hero excommunicates his past, but it is not true that Kreisler "arrives out of nowhere." He goes nowhere, indeed, but he is a prophetic character who should have warned his creator, as V. S. Pritchett noted, of the lethal aspect of his Teutonic roots. *The Apes of God* and the contorted fragment *The Childermass* seem to interest Kenner less than the later novels, or perhaps, as he himself puts it so well, "the brilliant accumulations of words yield glimpses of the novel Wyndham Lewis never wrote." After *The Apes* Kenner finds *Snooty Baronet* "much slicker," though the quotation adduced in support of this statement is a stylistic parody; in the same way the essential parody of Lewis's long poem *One-Way Song* is missed, for the One-Ways are "progressive" dolts who can only, like the Futurists, see forwards. For Kenner *The Revenge for Love* is Lewis's greatest work; he calls it a "masterpiece" on three occasions.

It is this critical breathing down one's neck that leads one to suspect that all the dexterous explication rests really on flimsy foundations. It would not be incumbent on one to mention this
if Kenner did not pretend so plausibly to the academic paraphernalia—he reeks of reworkings, "redactions," manuscript titles, and so on. Yet despite its air of research this study is very weak in scholarship. For example, Kenner opens by giving us Ford's account of Lewis's presentation of an early story; but surely he owes it to us to mention that Goldring, and others, give variant accounts of this visit. Biographical dates are taken from Charles Handley-Read's "Chronological Outline" in _The Art of Wyndham Lewis_. Yet, although we read in the provenance to this outline by Handley-Read that the details therein have all been "checked by reference to actual copies of the books, folios, or journals," I was able without much difficulty to note six errors in two pages. Moreover, the dates given by Handley-Read for Lewis's attendance at the Slade School of Art, no doubt taken from Lewis himself, were found on checking with that school to be totally incorrect (considerably advanced!). Exasperating as all this may be, it is not nearly so serious a critical flaw as describing, as Kenner does, Lewis's _Count Your Dead_ (1937) as a "peace pamphlet." It is, of course, exactly the term Lewis himself uses, in _Rude Assignment_ (1950), to describe this work which suggests, among other things, that English democracy is a semi-soviet tyranny, which calls Hitler's manners of the time "diplomatically impeccable," and claims that in the U.S.A. the Hearst Press alone gives the truth.

Without the smallest interest in the right or wrong of these views, the contemporary scholar must still be concerned with any attempt to falsify the documents, all the more so as this appears to be proceeding in England on a considerable scale (compare Alan Clutton-Brock's correspondence in _The Times Literary Supplement_ recently on Sir Herbert Read's reversal of opinions concerning Communism, or Spender's similar effort to rewrite his past lately). Thus Kenner shrugs off any idea of anti-Semitism in Lewis's canon and is generosity itself about _Men Without Art_, where the biliously jealous attack on T. S. Eliot was, of course, just a huge joke (for a note of dissent in this connection
read Steven Marcus, "The Highbrow Know-Nothings," Commentary, February 1953). So on page 30 Kenner tells us that he is going to quote from the rare first edition, later "reworked," of Tarr (Egoist Press, 1918). Actually he proceeds to corrupt this text throughout. On this particular page he quotes from Tarr's estimate of Hobson "He had the aplomb and absence of self-consciousness of numbers—of those who know they are not alone."

On turning up the Egoist Tarr, however, the reader finds that after "numbers" the significant words "of the herd" have been omitted. Still, it must be admitted that occasionally Kenner gives us an unconscious clue to the polemic personality of Lewis by means of these very whitewashings: "'Communism' is Lewis's label for a state of mind which may or may not be articulated as a political philosophy."