

rejection of the standards of maturity—Mr. Wodehouse's humour, according to the view in question, works within the ethos of that slang: there is no criticism from outside). But Mr. Wodehouse is certainly incomparably less of an artist than the late W. W. Jacobs, whom no university would have considered honouring. Dons to-day, however, are not highbrows.

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers is also widely thought in universities to write well. Admirers of hers in the world at large are now wondering whether the well-known constitutional anti-feminism of Cambridge means that Cambridge has no chance of catching up with Oxford.

F.R.L.

## THE END OF THE 'MODERN MOVEMENT'

WYNDHAM LEWIS *THE ARTIST, From 'Blast' to Burlington House* (*Laidlaw and Laidlaw*, 15/-).

*ART LIES BLEEDING*, by Francis Watson (*Chatto and Windus*, 7/6).

It is only fitting that the most redoubtable personality in English Art should now write the concluding chapters to an epoch which is rapidly drawing to a close. An extraordinary epoch it has been, too, that began with high hopes and such a genuine revolutionary impulse, and has fizzled out in a peculiarly unimpressive splutter. For, one may as well face up to it, 'The Modern Movement in Art,' in all of its manifestations, is no longer very modern and has ceased to be a movement in any real sense. 'What has already happened,' thus Wyndham Lewis, '—that can be said at once—is that modern art of the highly experimental sort, advocated in these essays and manifestos (*Blast*, *The Tyro*, etc.), is at an end.' There is, needless to say, still a certain amount of twittering in the revolutionary dovecotes, the rear-guard struggling bravely to the fore still cuts a caper or two to prove it was there when the fight was on. In the back waters of Mayfair the little 'advanced' galleries continue to stage shows of cubists, expressionists, surrealists, of Abstract and Constructivist art, or resuscitate the

'isms' of the day before yesterday. But a forlorn atmosphere, a sense of unreality, informs them all ; it is obvious one is assisting at a parade of ghosts.

In London that was only to be expected. 'As things peter out on the continent, they come over here on tour ; that is the rule.' We are always a little slow on the uptake where the visual arts are concerned, one must allow for the regulation British time-lag, which, incidentally, seems to be operating in other departments of life as well nowadays. In Hampstead it is considered terribly 'modern' to imitate a Picasso style of a decade or so ago, and occasionally canvasses still change hands at fairly attractive prices. But that doesn't mean anything. Such collectors as still frequent the galleries for the purpose of buying pictures instead of merely hobnobbing with Bohemia, are of a peculiar breed, the sort of people who commission the most hair-raising surrealist to paint altar pieces for the village church near the country seat where they and their friends repair for the week-end cocktail party. Otherwise there is very little doing and the market is slumping badly. And if anyone is curious to know how the business is still carried on, he can read it in Mr. Francis Watson's well-documented book, which gives you all the tit-bits complete with chapter and verse. The upshot of it all is that the breach between the artist and his public is immense and apparently unbridgeable. In spite of its popularization and exploitation by the poster world and in certain spheres of industry, there is not the slightest doubt that 'modern' art, more specifically, the revolution in the Arts that began round about the turn of the century, is to-day as dead as the proverbial dodo.

In that revolution Wyndham Lewis played a conspicuous, indeed, a leading role. In fact he is the only native born artist who originated a movement on this side of the channel and became a chef d'école *at the same time* that things were happening in Paris. And although Vorticism, trumpeted by its organ *Blast*, had only a short innings and was cut short by the Great War, Mr. Lewis has nevertheless kept his finger on the pulse of the times ever since.

In the book under review Mr. Lewis has collected all his more important writings on Art and has added a long introductory essay in which the whole period is reviewed, the present situation summed up

and a possible line of attack for the future indicated. Contrary to those now 'reactionary' artists who blithely go on cubing, surrealizing and abstracting, Mr. Lewis advocates a return to Nature. In true 'enemy' fashion he plumbs for what he calls *super-naturalism*, that is, for precipitating himself on the mystery called 'nature,' and while 'burying Euclid deep in the living flesh,' never to remain unconscious 'of those underlying conceptual truths that are inherent in all appearances.' It is the only method, Mr. Lewis contends, whereby the artist stands a chance of regaining his public, of becoming 'popular' once more. The various phases of Mr. Lewis' art, from Vorticist to Burlington House (*i.e.*, the famous portrait of T. S. Eliot rejected by the Royal Academy) are well illustrated by reproductions, which include, among other things, the remarkable 'Inferno' exhibited at the Leicester Galleries a year ago.

What, then, has happened? To this question no simple answer is possible, but obviously the situation in the Arts cannot be divorced from the general cultural and social problem in Europe. In previous articles in this journal I have already discussed certain aspects of this problem in so far as it has a bearing on the Arts, so that it is unnecessary to go over the same ground again. But for all practical purposes, it may be said that the reason Art has reached a sort of dead end, and, what is equally serious, that the genuine artist has in a manner of speaking been betrayed, may be attributed directly to the excesses of Surrealism and the Abstract cult. Surrealism in particular has given Art the *coup-de-grace*. After the tedious antics of M. Breton and his travelling circus the already bemused public can hardly be blamed for feeling that it has been fooled once too often. Still, they are marvellous publicity men, these surrealists, the ordinary man at least can appreciate that, and O Boy! what business they have brought to such firms as Schiaparelli, not to mention the New York World Fair, where that skilful if rather academic painter Salvador Dali has an exhibit all to himself, full of live Venuses under water, bandaged cows, upside-down umbrellas, phallic symbols and, of course, the obligatory protruding viscera! It is all very amusing, no doubt, but for anyone who still retains a serious interest in the Arts it is sad to reflect that this is the end of it all, a few earnest but second-rate people abstracting themselves practically

speaking from life altogether, and a whole troupe of clowns exploiting their infantilisms in public to the applause of eager debutantes and the somewhat faded smart set generally.

It is with a sense of relief, therefore, that one salutes Wyndham Lewis' book, surely one of the most important publications of its kind to appear since the war. To read Mr. Lewis' vigorous and incisive writings, some of them, like the 'Notes and Vortices' from *Blast*, penned more than a quarter of a century ago, after listening to the feeble tittle-tattle of the salons and the studios (where of course the ingenuous Professor Read is always ready at a moment's notice to fit out the latest *ism* with a brand-new portentous philosophy) is an exceedingly refreshing experience. It is not surprising that in 1914 he was going a bit too fast even for the professionals, and to-day, clearly, he is again a long way ahead of our ultra-modern vanguard. In *The Caliph's Design* (1922) he accurately analysed the dilemma of Post-Impressionism and foresaw the eventual *impasse*.

'The emotional impulse of the latest phases of the movement in Paris looks to me contradictory to the creative impulse in painting. And more clearly, it seems to preclude the development of any sensibility but that of exasperated egotism. The eye becomes a little gluttonous instrument of enjoyment. Or it watches from the centre of its abstract brain-web for more flies and yet more flies. It would eventually become as mechanical and stupid as a spider, if it is not already that.'

In part IV of this fascinating pamphlet Mr. Lewis dealt with the vital question of the relation of the artist to his environment. He emphasized the difficulties of his working conditions, handicapped as he is by the absence of a coherent and generally accepted philosophy and the decaying social fabric. It is not enough, if Art is to remain in a healthy condition, to take 'a specialized visual interest in the debris on your table, or the mandoline you have just bought,' in other words, to disintegrate the visible world and build up the bits into fascinating patterns according to your private fancy.

'Your interest in the forms around you should be one liable to transfigure and constantly renew them: that would be the creative approach . . . Braque and Picasso have, indeed, changed the form content before them. Witness their little

Nature-morte concoctions. But it has only been the debris of their rooms. Had they devoted as much of their attention to changing our common life—in every way not only the bigger, but more vital and vivid, game—they would have been finer and more useful figures.'

That is all very well however. But isn't it asking rather too much of the artist? And how is this changing of our common life to be accomplished save by engaging in activities that are very apt to prove inimical to the finest effort in Artistic creation? The only life the artist can concentrate attention on and change to any purpose is the individual life. It is undeniable that a radical change is desirable before Art can be regenerated. But whatever the quality and integrity of the individual artist, the fact remains that the inner direction of what for the sake of convenience we still call Civilization is at present against him. In consequence he is driven into isolation and becomes indifferent to the life around him. By way of self-protection he begins to regard this indifference as a virtue.

'Intellectual exhaustion is the order of the day: and the work most likely to find acceptance with men in their present mood is that work that most vigorously and plainly announces the general bankruptcy and their own perdition. For the need of expression is, in a sense, never more acute than when people are imperturbably convinced of its futility. So the most alive became the most life-like wax-works of the dead.'

But in England such a state of affairs is regarded by the 'advanced' cliques as being synonymous with 'culture,' for the salvation of which everyone is now required to rush headlong into the fray.

'There is no great communal or personal force in the Western world to-day, unless some new political hegemony supply it, for Art to build on and to which to relate itself.'

That was in 1922, and certainly things look a little different to-day, but whether the changing circumstances will be accompanied by a revival in the Arts, still depends on many apparently dissociated and incalculable factors.

Mr. Watson's book is useful in so far as it dots the i's and crosses the t's of Wyndham Lewis' arguments. With epigrammatic verve it tells the bewildered layman exactly how artists nowadays live or don't live. But the underlying assumption seems to be, that if only things were managed a little more intelligently, if there were more enlightened official encouragement in this country, things needn't look so bad after all. The 60,000 young people who yearly crowd into our art schools (for reasons best known to themselves) might yet be contributing something useful. Mr. Watson gives you intriguing glimpses behind the scenes, supplies interesting information about what certain institutions do with the funds entrusted to them for the purchase of works of art, explains the attitude of town councillors towards the whole business, and in a general way succeeds in making the answer to the question, how there comes to be any art at all these days, more obscure than ever. One fact, however, to which Wyndham Lewis also draws attention, emerges quite clearly. Under present conditions professionalism in Art is on the decline. The professional artist who lives exclusively by his work and doesn't eke out a livelihood with teaching, industrial designing, etc., is becoming rarer every day. And the solemn buffoons (self-appointed protectors of the working-class, as a rule) who imagine they are fulfilling some high social purpose by encouraging miners, motor mechanics and office boys to paint pictures, and then tout round these productions as something to be gaped at admiringly by sentimental intellectuals, are only hastening his demise. It is very jolly of course for the unemployed factory hand to know that his humble dabbings are taken up by a first-class publicity racket, and that he is as good as the trained fellow who has spent a lifetime at the job any day, but that kind of thing is hardly calculated to add prestige to a great profession. There are signs, however, that this sort of nonsense at least will disappear before very long. And reading Wyndham Lewis it is possible even to be more hopeful of the future. It implies a long view no doubt and will demand great courage of the artist, a fresh attitude and a new and rigorous discipline.

RICHARD MARCH.

## RONALD BOTTRALL

*THE TURNING PATH*, by Ronald Bottrall (Barker, 5/-).

The publication of a new book of poems by Mr. Bottrall is still an important event in the literary world. When *The Loosening* first appeared, it was clear that Mr. Bottrall had, at least, a better recipe for the manufacture of verse than most others of his own generation. The rehabilitation of the Muse through a newly-awakened social consciousness had turned out to be little more than ventriloquism as the red dawn faded into clouds of Rugger Fifteen metaphysics, and even Auden's ambivalent symbols, with their inconsistently politico-Freudian interpretation, emerged (after initial promise) as too facile an attempt to short-circuit the problem of relating the difficulties of the individual consciousness to the conditions of the society in which it operated. And one didn't need to read Empson's criticism to suspect in even his very good best verse something of a technical *tour de force*.

Mr. Bottrall avoided the too easy resolution by going behind politics (the tip, of course, was Eliot's) to social anthropology. He was thus able to find terms, like the hoarding and the gramophone, which, while possible objects of immediate perception, were at the same time significant factors in the complex of social relationships. This central concern he expressed with a technical equipment which had assimilated most of the better influences of his time, utilizing the confident (and sometimes crude) run of the early Eliot satires and of the first three sections of *The Waste Land*, and the realization in muscular imagery and movement of psychological anatomization exploited by Hopkins; and occasionally the self-consciously analytical rhythms of *Maunderley*. The result was verse which, though sometimes 'slick,' was usually pointed and rarely dull. If one later found the *Festivals* somewhat pretentious, one recalled that Mr. Bottrall was still young, and the eaglet could stretch its wings without undue loss of dignity.

In the present collection Mr. Bottrall has lost none of his technical competence and certainly none of his confidence. And if nothing else raised one's suspicions, the readiness one feels to talk about 'technical competence' in abstraction in connection with the verses in this volume suggests a misdirection of interest originating with the author. The poem, *To a Chinese Girl*, by which