

Big Englander

Paul Edwards

On his blog, Dr James Fox, the writer and presenter of the television series *British Masters*, speaks of his anger at having his nation's visual art sneered at by a French art historian he overheard in a canteen queue. He relished the chance of showing in a TV series that twentieth-century British art is actually something special: one of the high points of Western culture, as he claims in the series itself. Yes, why don't these foreigners appreciate our art? Why don't they recognize that there was a resurgence of a 'British' (or was it English, Scottish and Welsh?) painting during the century?

There's a clue in Craig Raine's infamous review of 'The Vorticists' exhibition. It is the British themselves who disparage their painting as a weak echo of major European innovations and can't conceive of it as having equal value. Who think that El Lissitzky ignores Vorticism in his survey of avant-garde movements because it is minor and insignificant rather than because Lissitzky's own work too embarrassingly derives from it. Raine wasn't alone; quite a few of the bored newspaper reviewers simply dismissed the exhibition, tossing in a few words of mild praise for one or two artists who happened to catch their attention. The transatlantic curators and other foreigners asked us puzzled questions: why don't the British value their achievement in art? I was so used to this situation myself that I couldn't really answer them. It certainly goes back to the francophile snobbery of Clive Bell, for whom it was virtually inconceivable that an English painter could match a Frenchman. Fox is right that our painters are not valued highly enough. But it was the Fundación Juan March in Madrid that mounted a huge Wyndham Lewis exhibition, not the Tate. Lewis was presented there as a major European artist and thinker in continuous dialogue with the international avant-garde, and he was received as such. And now a large Stanley Spencer exhibition is in prospect in Holland. Only the British themselves aren't persuaded (or the French, of course, but what can you expect?).

Will they be persuaded by Dr Fox? Or will they just agree with the *Radio Times* that Fox is now a heavyweight contender for TV's 'top art brain' because of his panache in 'brandishing the pickled brain of fascist futurist Percy Wyndham Lewis' in the first episode? Of course,

Fox's claims for British art in *British Masters* are so extravagant as to be virtually meaningless, and he hardly tried to justify them. What he really seemed to be arguing was that English painters (for it was only English art that he was talking about) engendered (where they did not reflect) a sense of national identity, bound up mainly with a sense of place, for the British in the troubled twentieth century. Any relationship with European modernism was treated mainly as a fortunate absence. English art was a peak of Western culture *because* it largely resisted the temptation to be modernist and European. The television programme didn't ever quite say this, but it was implicit in what Fox did say about abstraction, surrealism, and expressionism. Our lot were doing something 'much more interesting'.

In other words, this was in essentials a very traditional version of English separateness. Usually, it is true, our Romantic nature tradition and our poetic visionaries are seen as a bit too 'literary' and outside the major currents of European art history except during the Romantic period itself, and this is what makes our painting 'minor'. *British Masters* presents a more chauvinist version of the thesis. Our exceptionalism makes our art major, while European painting went off into a *cul-de-sac*. (Fog in English Channel: continent isolated.) And Fox certainly had the courage of his convictions; not only does this thesis sound a bit like Munnings, it actually involved the promotion of Munnings as a major artist. Curiously, the series began with an extravagant condemnation of Alma-Tadema (producer of 'bad art' and, in a characteristic piece of historical distortion, supposedly typical of Edwardian painting). Yet surely Alma-Tadema is a far more interesting artist than Munnings? His kitsch classical scenes, flooded with brilliant Technicolor Mediterranean light and laid out on the canvas with ingenious asymmetry, are the precursors of the kind of epic sword and sandals film-making that flourishes still (*Gladiator*, *Troy*). But just place a Munnings alongside a Stubbs and you will realize which is the real thing and which is an ideological fraud cooked up to flatter a complacent plutocracy. Or if that is all that Stubbs is too (politically speaking – and I don't think it is), at least it is plain to see that he comes at the vigorous beginning of this function rather than at its spiced-up fag-end, as Munnings does.

Not that the programme was simply reactionary: one of the 'masters' featured was William Coldstream, that great celebrant of dreary worthiness. No question of ideological obfuscation in his disenchanting scenes of urban industrialism, where the role of labour in production is not occluded by any seductive façade but is itself supposed to be the chief attraction. But the kind of impartial enthusiasm that awards both

Munnings and Coldstream top marks for their 'Englishness' and leaves it at that is a bit confusing. A desire to celebrate the range of styles and subjects on offer ends up looking like theoretical incoherence.

I am being unfair. Not much more than enthusiasm can be expected from an arts documentary these days and Dr Fox, despite his academic credentials, wasn't elaborating an academic thesis but showing the public that there's a tradition in English art that precedes the YBAs, achieved more, and should be celebrated rather than forgotten. Who wouldn't agree with him? Lots of people, it would seem – but a series like this does contribute to a slow change in the public mindset. People who had never heard of Keith Vaughan will now pause a bit longer before his paintings in art galleries; curators might reconsider whether to take his works out of the cellar and put them on the wall. A simplified version of a neglected painter enters public consciousness as a new cultural meme.

Thanks to (or despite?) all the work of Wyndham Lewis scholars over the last thirty years or so, the various exhibitions of his work, and the contributions of what Lewis called vulgarizers, Lewis, unlike Vaughan or Coldstream, does have a presence among cultured folk and already exists as a meme. 'Wyndham Lewis: imitator of Futurism; extremely unpleasant man with repulsive fascist and racist views; but surprisingly good painter. Had a ridiculously inflated ambition to be a writer and intellectual.' It was up to the programme-makers either to justify this, complicate it, or refute it. Instead, they piggy-backed on it so completely that it looked as if they didn't really know anything about Lewis. Or if they did, preferred to play safe and stick to a story that kept them clear of charges of approving the badness of a bad man. For, depressingly, Lewis came out as a 'bad man' who was a 'great painter' – which is at least a much higher valuation than usual. And we didn't only get Dr Fox's voice; a small extract from an interview with Graham Lane gave an alternative view, even if not as strong an alternative as it should have been. Graham's diligent refutation of the myths about Lewis, which included reading a fascinating letter from Sir Nicholas Waterhouse to Froanna after Lewis's death, ended up on the cutting room floor. There was no Lewis as a great writer and intellectual, philosopher, or critic. And as far as the programme was concerned, he went out of existence in 1915.

The signs were bad from the start, when Lewis was introduced as 'a young devotee of Sickert' who, on his return to London from his continental travels, was 'entranced by its towering buildings' (shot of glass office-buildings at night). What buildings would these have been? And if they actually existed in 1908 why was Lewis calling for the

beginning of an inventive modernist architecture in London in 1919? A pardonable elision, maybe, and if the inaccuracies that followed had remained on this level it would hardly have mattered; Fox expressed real enthusiasm for Lewis's work from 1912 to 1915, and to some extent showed why he valued it so highly. But what the programme said about Lewis himself was (depending on your temperament) laughably melodramatic, seriously misleading, or perniciously hateful. Apparently Lewis wanted 'a new society, governed by machines' and he had 'a dream of a mechanical world order'. On the contrary, Lewis believed that modernity (including machines) was bringing about a transformation in human consciousness and that art should be changed so that it reflected this. Modernization was happening, and it should, first, be recognized in art, and second, be used not to create the 'mechanical dystopia' we were told Lewis wished to turn Britain into, but to enlarge the possibilities of human life. This may have been a questionable artistic ambition, but it was the ambition he had for his paintings and polemics of the time, and it involved far more scepticism about the effects of mechanism than Futurist enthusiasm did. Lewis was well aware of the dangers to our humanity of mechanizing ourselves: 'The danger, as it would appear at present [...] is evidently that we should become overpowered by our creation, and become as mechanical as a tremendous insect world, all our awakened reason entirely disappeared' (CD 74-76). Lewis's view was, in fact, virtually the opposite of the one attributed to him in the programme.

Fox must have been aware of this, especially as he described so eloquently the figures in the *Thébaïde* plate from the *Timon of Athens* portfolio: 'violent, robotic humanoids are trapped in an angular wilderness'. The drawing shows Timon raging at his tragic downfall. It bears a great deal of commentary, but one thing that is absolutely precluded by this tragic context is the statement in the programme that, though it looks 'like a nightmare', it actually represents Lewis's ideal: 'Wyndham Lewis's dream of a mechanical world order'. Fortunately, this distortion was largely absent from Fox's comments as he stood in front of *The Crowd*; he sensed its critical power and presented it not as a representation of Lewis's supposed social ideal but a constation or prophetic diagnosis.

It was in the characterization of *BLAST* that the misrepresentation was particularly damaging. The magazine was presented as a relic accessible only through murky library microfilm readers (whereas it is available in vivid facsimile, and has been for more than twenty years – and, of course, originals survive). Fox read for us

some of the memorable phrases: ‘Bless England, industrial island machine, pyramidal workshop, its apex at Shetland, discharging itself on the sea’) but incomprehensibly commented that ‘every single word is Wyndham Lewis taking up his assault against Britain’ and that ‘he’s really attacking England’. It seemed as if he could not understand what he was reading. And what of the (omitted) next line? ‘Bless cold, magnanimous, delicate, gauche, fanciful, stupid Englishmen?’ The Vorticist manifesto, in the spirit of this elementary refusal to read, was ‘a vitriolic and incoherent rant’ that ‘stinks’ of Lewis’s personality – and according to *British Masters* it would be difficult for a personality to stink much more than Lewis’s. Actually *BLAST* is (to say the least) no more incoherent than any other avant-garde manifesto. It is playful, jokey, and inventive, deliberately deploying its self-contradictions strategically (balancing a ‘blast’ for English humour with a ‘bless humour’ on another page). The only ‘vitriol’ from Lewis in it is directed at Roger Fry. Surely it is obvious to anyone that the presence of balancing ‘blesses’ meant that something other than a vitriolic ‘assault against Britain’ was happening in this manifesto. A quick glance at some of the other texts by Lewis in the magazine would have confirmed this. But the programme was locked into a sensational narrative that took precedence over intellectual conscience – or so it seemed to me.

According to that narrative Lewis was driven by a megalomaniacal ambition to ‘turn Britain into his own mechanical dystopia’. It was a ‘diabolical plot dreamed up by one of the most poisonous minds of the twentieth century’. This puts Lewis way beyond the ‘unsuccessful rapist’ category (but Hemingway’s vengeful phrase was, predictably, thrown in for good measure). It puts him in the Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot class, and, sure enough, we learned that Lewis was a ‘misogynist, fascist and anti-semite who had the dubious honour of writing the first biography of Hitler’. He had, in fact, ‘a twisted mind’. I do not need to rebut this narrative for readers of the *Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*. I suppose I had better say that I do not accept it, but that I do see the need for a simplified black and white picture of Lewis’s work and personality in a brief section of a documentary. But it needs to be black and white, not just black, and it would be more accurate to say that Lewis was these things *but* (incomprehensibly, if you like) he was also their opposite. So:

‘Lewis was a misogynist (gynophobe, actually), *but* he produced some of the most beautiful and sympathetic portraits of women ever made. He was an anti-semite (actually not in the systematic sense the term implies, but casually and, for the culture of Britain in the time, in no way exceptionally, alas). *But* following

Kristallnacht in 1938, he composed an attack on anti-semitism and called for the admission of Jewish refugees into Britain. During the twenties he thought Bolshevism and Fascism were more up-to-date than liberal democracy, and through much of the thirties he persisted in thinking Hitler was a “man of peace”. But he loved the “rootless Elysium” of cosmopolitan New York and proposed it as a model for a global culture that would be an antidote to European nationalism. And *Tarr* (published in 1918) contains one of the most prophetic and perceptive critiques of the forces in German culture that Hitler exploited and exemplified.’

This is not as snappy as the story presented in the programme, but its paradoxes would not be difficult to put across to a TV audience, and it would have the advantage of being a lot closer to the truth. The danger of the narrative we were given, on the other hand, is that it makes Lewis into a creature who is less than human. Lewis becomes a figure about whom we are licensed, therefore, to say and think whatever we want, just as Alan Munton has pointed out in his survey of academic criticism of Lewis.¹

And so, to the accompaniment of lurid music, Lewis’s bisected brain was held up to the camera by Fox and called ‘a suitably gruesome relic of a very gruesome man’. It is ‘suitable’ that this man should have suffered a tumour in his brain, that is now held up like a trophy because the poisonous narrative that has been constructed demands it, presumably. Nowadays the human remains held in museums as anthropological specimens are treated with respect, and in some cases repatriated for proper disposal according to the rites of the cultures from which they were removed. But because of his supposed opinions and personality, Wyndham Lewis cannot be worthy of such respect, and no recognition, either, needs to be afforded to the stoicism with which he faced the extinction of his sight and the gradual loss of other aspects of consciousness over the last ten years of his life while he continued his lifelong dedication to the arts of human expression.

But it is our own humanity that is undermined when these things are not recognized. Whether this disgusting scene was the idea of the producer, director, or Fox himself I don’t know. Maybe they all got carried away. It was up to the custodians of this medical specimen in the Pathology Museum at Imperial College Medical School to make sure it did not go ahead, but they failed in their ethical duty both to the dead and to the living.

As I have said, the programme was only interested in Lewis's painting up to 1915. The First World War was the next stopping-off point, so he was obviously no longer relevant, as Paul Nash and Stanley Spencer took over. Lewis had his ten minutes of fame and was heard of no more in this or the subsequent programmes. That he was one of the greatest champions of British art and its capacity to produce work as valuable as that of its European counterparts went unnoticed. And his own later work was ignored.

A small sample of Lewis's painting was taken seriously in *British Masters* and was, in a way, celebrated and appreciated. But Lewis's views were misrepresented in a way that impeded an understanding of what is actually happening in his painting, and his personality was poisonously vilified with disturbing relish. And we never really found out what made English painting of the twentieth century into such a cultural peak. However, to make high claims for Lewis's painting and for other British art was not intrinsically ridiculous, as TV reviewers like A. A. Gill have ignorantly assumed. Graham Lane's description of the work of the YBAs as 'cold mutton' in comparison with the still vibrant avant-garde achievement of Lewis was also a moment to savour.

Note

¹ Alan Munton in "Imputing Noxiousness": Aggression and Mutilation in Recent Lewis Criticism', *Wyndham Lewis Annual* IV (1997): 5-20.

Response to Paul Edwards

James Fox

Following the transmission of *British Masters* in July 2011, I was inundated with emails, letters and reviews both from critics and viewers. The responses varied wildly. Some correspondents passionately supported the series, while others passionately disagreed with it. My most severe critics, however, originated from the archipelago of Wyndham Lewis organizations, projects, publications and websites that are thankfully now in existence. Some of these criticisms have been so severe that I have here decided to jettison the cardinal rule of 'ignoring one's critics' and to write a response to Paul Edwards's erudite review of my series. What follows is probably best read as one-part apologia, one-part apology. In the first half I shall endeavour to defend myself against the broader criticisms levelled at the programmes by Paul Edwards. In the second half I shall concentrate on the first episode's problematic sequence on Wyndham Lewis himself. But for all those who do not wish to read on (and I understand why), I will apologize now as well as later for any offence or distress that this series has caused within the Wyndham Lewis community.

Ironically, *British Masters* only ever intended to sing the praises of work by great artists like Lewis. We weren't even very subtle in doing so, as Edwards has observed. The opening claim that twentieth-century British art was a high-point in European culture was regrettably hyperbolic; undermined rather than underpinned the arguments that followed. In part it was motivated by the desire to hook and provoke an audience whose attention had to be hard-earned and could easily be lost. But it was also a response to the equally ludicrous claims that have been made *against* British art (Vorticism included) for the best part of a century. The dismissal of British painting and sculpture as an inescapably 'minor school' is an old prejudice, although I don't think anyone (bar A. A. Gill) still believes that British artists are innately inferior to their continental contemporaries. The prejudice is surely more a result of the way that twentieth-century art has been historicized, or more precisely, the way that modernism itself has been reformulated.

I should say straight away that I admire modernist art as much I despise narrow-minded nationalism. I am neither a reactionary nor a chauvinist. But I do think it is time to challenge some of the

orthodoxies that accompany the modernist project. Modernist narratives have long dominated the story of twentieth-century British art. But they are only part of that story, not even a representative part of it, and I confess that my series was absolutely an attempt to provide some kind of alternative to them. This is just one of the reasons why I chose to include such unfashionable figures as William Coldstream and Alfred Munnings. Because for all their differences (and believe it or not, I am on Coldstream's side here), both artists tried to resist the unstoppable march of the modernist juggernaut. What's more, they were two highly influential figures in twentieth-century British art – the former through the (continuing) influence of his teaching methods, and the latter through his public notoriety and institutional leverage. That one even has to justify their inclusion speaks of a world in which another kind of chauvinism – a modernist chauvinism – can still pass without criticism.

But if their juxtaposition at least excuses me from allegations of Toryism, it still amounts to what Edwards has called 'theoretical incoherence'. This, I will not refute. However, I would say here that so many of the choices made in this series were dictated not by the needs of academic argument but by the needs of televisual entertainment – and many of them were not made by me. Seen from this perspective, Munnings – whether one likes him or not – offered an enormous amount of material to programme-makers: he was a bold and memorable character who would provoke discussion and disagreement; he provided a much-needed change of tone after the first episode's sombre post-war start; his story could be told through distinctive and telegenic locations (the gallops at Newmarket; his home in Dedham; the state rooms at the Royal Academy); and, in his disgraceful speech of 1949, he provided us with an utterly extraordinary slice of archive that any storyteller worth his salt would have been foolish to ignore.

In fact, countless inclusions, omissions and elisions were made for televisual rather than art-historical reasons. In the first episode, discussions of French Post-Impressionism and Italian Futurism were excluded not because we considered them unimportant but because it was feared they would overcomplicate and over-theorize a crucial early section in the series. In the second episode, a large sequence on the Mass-Observation movement (the reason Coldstream went to Bolton) was removed because it was believed to deflect attention from Coldstream's own principles. And we chose to conclude the third episode with Keith Vaughan not because he was the last great British

painter of the century (he was patently not) but because his tragic story offered an evocative and ambivalent end to the series. I should add that in all episodes, abstract painting was generally avoided not because I did not admire it or because it does not have an important place in British art, but because my previous television programme (*The Art of Cornwall*) had dealt with British abstraction at such length (if not, alas, depth) that television executives wanted to avoid duplication.

Logistical and financial considerations also played a very significant role in editorial decision-making. Many important artists were cut before, during or after filming because they could not be adequately squeezed into any of the fifty-nine minute programmes; large numbers of important pictures were removed from the final cut because copyright charges were prohibitive; and for pieces-to-camera, paintings in and around London (almost all in the Tate) were preferred because the costs involved in filming them were lower. Only once did we make a substantial journey to film paintings, and one of the two we filmed on that trip was by Wyndham Lewis. At the time of filming, *The Crowd* (1915) was on show in the Vorticist exhibition at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice. By this stage funds (as they always are with BBC Four productions) were perilously short, but the director and I considered the picture to be of such importance that we flew out alone, filmed it, and returned to London the very same day.

Let me now turn to the editorial style of the programmes. Throughout the series, as our methodological detractors have noted, biography was preferred to context, narrative was preferred to analysis, and when discussing artworks, meaning was prioritized over form. Many of these methods may appear to be unacceptably unacademic (indeed they are as far from my own academic principles as it is possible to get), but I would here remind all unimpressed art historians that *British Masters* was not an academic piece of work, nor was it even a comprehensive survey of twentieth-century British art. It was a television series, built around a series of biographies of artists. I accept that it doubtless deserves the art-historical criticism it has received. However, to judge a television programme by academic standards is like judging an academic work by the standards of television. They are different beasts altogether, as I have repeatedly learnt to my own frustration.

When I started in television I believed rather naively that I, somehow, would be 'in charge' of the programmes I presented. I soon discovered that this was not how things worked. In reality, television presenters (especially minor ones like me) are just one small part of a

much larger collaborative process – one in which so many compromises are made between so many people for so many different reasons that it is ludicrous to speak of a single authorial voice lurking behind any finished product. And if there is a voice, it is absolutely not that of the presenter: the director takes charge of scripting, writing voice-over in post-production, shaping pieces-to-camera on the spot, and cutting unnecessary lines during editing; the editor fashions the mood, tone and music of the programme's constituent sequences; the executive producer decides on the content of individual episodes and the ultimate thesis of an entire series; and the channel controller more often than not decides on the title that series will take. In this complicated world, there is not much room for the presenter's views.

I would like to make clear that I am not complaining about this state of affairs. It is surely right that the production of television programmes should be left to programme-makers. If I had had my way, *British Masters* would have been a materialist social history of institutional change, consumption patterns and state funding in the twentieth-century British art-world. I would have been thoroughly proud of myself. But the series would have been watched by half a dozen people who if not already comatose, would have been sent that way by watching it – hardly licence-fee-payers' money well-spent. For this reason I think it is admirable that factual documentaries should aspire to entertain as well as to inform. Sometimes, however, the desire to amuse, surprise and provoke can have regrettable consequences, and can lead to simplifications, inaccuracies, and errors of judgement. I believe, as I am sure all of this journal's readers believe, that this is precisely what happened in our treatment of Wyndham Lewis. For this reason I want to use the remainder of this piece to respond to Paul Edwards's criticisms of the sequence, and to apologize for it as well.

Edwards criticizes the programme's misinterpretation of Lewis's overall ambitions and individual works. He is completely right. Lewis did not want to transform Britain into a world governed by machines any more than he wanted to destroy Britain altogether with *BLAST*. The origin of these errors is complicated but I can assure readers that they did not arise from ignorance on my part. Even a brief watch of my (albeit truncated) discussion of *The Crowd* reveals, I hope, that I was thoroughly aware of Lewis's ambivalence, if not antipathy, towards the mechanized world. Indeed his equivocal attitude towards machines was a crucial issue through which he distinguished himself from his Futurist

contemporaries. The programme's interpretive inconsistency was the inevitable product of collaborative voice-over writing. One of my own lines gets misremembered, a director records it, an editor crops it slightly to fit the cut, an executive asks for minor changes, and before you know it a handful of subtle tweaks can alter the meaning of a sentence altogether. This, I am afraid to say, happened throughout the series, and happens in all television programmes all of the time. It is common practice for presenters to end up recording voice-over that is not their own and that they have very little power to change. And that is what happened here.

There are other ways that a presenter's own views can become lost in the chaos of production. This is precisely what happened in my interpretation of *BLAST*. Edwards presumes that my analysis of this remarkable document reveals either an 'elementary refusal to read' or a nefarious anti-Vorticist agenda. It was neither. I spent two hours in front of that publication, describing every single page in great detail, with blasts and blesses dealt with even-handedly and sympathetically. For brevity's sake, that extended discussion had to be cut down to about a minute of script. Understandably the editor selected the most exciting and strident passages he could find, cutting them together in the most evocative fashion possible. The result, I hope people can accept, is tremendously powerful, but it does distort my own views. I will give one concrete example: in the line in which I claim that Lewis was 'attacking England' I was actually referring to the very first page of the manifesto, 'Blast First (from politeness) England', but this was presented as my summing up of the whole publication. Lewis, therefore, was not the only writer to have his ideas misrepresented here. But I can assure you that such editing was not motivated by any sinister agenda.

Edwards also comments unsympathetically on the director's decision to film *BLAST* in microfilm rather than hard-copy. At first I too was unconvinced by his decision (I wished to use an original in the British Library), but he assured me that the digital format would recreate much of the text's original vitality and would cut together well with scenes of city streets and lights. I now believe that he was thoroughly vindicated on this front. He captured the radicalism of *BLAST* with an electrifying energy that would have been impossible on the page itself. And this tone was something that ran through all of the Lewis section: motorcars, electric lights and office buildings were not used literally to illustrate pre-war London, as Edwards suggests, but to evoke the spirit of modernity out of which Vorticism came. At the same time, science-fiction music was deployed not to present Lewis as 'less than human'

but to indicate the cutting-edge quality of his ideas. In all cases the director's sole ambition was to reinforce the ground-breaking nature of Lewis's contribution, and to make him appear as modern to a twenty-first century audience as he was a hundred years earlier.

Many will agree, however, that the most unfortunate sequence of the programme took place in the Pathology Museum, and I accept that my characterization of Lewis there was deeply unfair. As Edwards has conceded, none of the provocative claims I made about Lewis (misogynist, fascist, anti-Semite) were demonstrably false. Nevertheless my inability to substantiate those provocative assertions, or more importantly to qualify them, was such a dramatic simplification of Lewis's views that it effectively became an inaccuracy. Television, as Edwards understands, rarely allows for exceptionally nuanced discussion – at least not in the three lines we had to introduce a singularly complicated individual. The programme-makers, however, felt that it was necessary at least to confront the controversies that continue to bedevil Lewis, and in adhering to this journalistic trope we were by no means alone. But I am an academic, and my standards should be higher, and in retrospect I regret making any claims that could not be robustly supported. That is my fault, and I apologize for it.

My greatest regret of all however is the tastelessness of that particular sequence. I do not recall how the decision to film Lewis's brain was made, although I am sure it was inspired by the illustration and extended discussion of the specimen in Paul O'Keeffe's biography. I was in the United States on research leave while those editorial decisions were taken and consequently had very little to do with them. Moreover, I claim no responsibility for the tone of the sequence as a whole (eerie music; sinister lighting; photographic montage); as the presenter I simply turned up at the location and delivered my piece-to-camera. I do confess that it felt wrong at the time, and I should not have agreed to do it. This was a major error of judgement, born out of inexperience, a hurried schedule, and the pressure the whole production was under to provoke, surprise, and thrill its viewers at every turn. It certainly did provoke and surprise them, but it was also deeply distasteful, and I shall regret my involvement in that sequence for a long time.

Nevertheless, I must now turn from apology back to apologia. Because that one sequence has caused some critics to lose sight of the many good things that were said about Lewis in the programme. I

described him as ‘a great artist’ and a ‘genius’; I described his 1912 pictures as a ‘blistering series of breakthrough works’; I described *BLAST* as ‘a work of art in its own right’; I described Vorticism as ‘producing some of the most radical artworks ever made’ (rare praise indeed); and I described *The Crowd* as ‘the greatest Vorticist painting of them all’, a ‘very special picture’, and ‘truly prophetic’ in so many ways. Now one may fairly ridicule these statements for their hyperbole (so difficult to avoid in television, alas), but one can hardly condemn them for being unfair to Lewis. Indeed, as Edwards himself admits, the programme made a ‘much higher valuation than usual’ of Lewis’s output. ‘Bad man’ but ‘great artist’: readers may disagree with one of these two conclusions, but by being unequivocal about both, my programme was as much *for* Lewis as it was *against* him.

This brings me to my conclusion. I know that many readers feel that *British Masters* did significant damage to Lewis’s reputation, and I can understand why they think that. To those individuals, I once again apologize. However, based on my own modest evidence-base, I would profoundly disagree with this evaluation. In the month following the transmission of the series I received dozens of emails and letters from viewers who had been inspired by what they had seen of Lewis’s work on the television. Many asked me for book recommendations; some went to the Vorticist exhibition at the Tate simply to learn more about him and his contemporaries; and several said that our programme had finally convinced them that early British modernism was worthy of the attention we had lavished on it. I say this not to promote myself, but simply to state that for all of our failures, we did emphatically support what so many important scholars have been arguing for years: that Lewis was a genuinely original and important artist, and as good as anyone of his generation. So while the series may not have encouraged viewers to admire Lewis the man, I genuinely do think it encouraged them to admire his magnificent work.