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KATE LECHMERE'S "WYNDHAM LEWIS FROM 1912"

INTRODUCTION

Kate Lechmere—born in 1887, raised in Herefordshire, and educated at Clifton College in Bristol—studied at the Atelier La Palette in Paris and under Walter Sickert at the Westminster School of Art. She was introduced to Wyndham Lewis in 1912 and found him exciting, witty, responsive. He thought she was extremely attractive and wrote, "I

⁶ "London Editor Guilty of 'Obscene Criticism.'"

⁷ "London Editor Gets 130 Days for American Libel," *New York Tribune* (23 November 1923), p. 5.

⁸ "We Didn't Mind It Much," *New York Times* (24 November 1923), p. 12.

have as many kisses as the envelope will hold. The rest I keep in my mouth for you."¹

After Lewis' bitter quarrel with Roger Fry, who had stolen an important commission intended for Lewis,² he and Kate Lechmere founded the Rebel Art Centre. Lewis' younger colleagues—Edward Wadsworth, Frederick Etchells, and Cuthbert Hamilton—followed him out of Fry's Omega Workshops in October 1913, joined the rival establishment, and formed the nucleus of the Vorticist group.

The Centre started rather tamely in March 1914 with Helen Saunders and Jessica Dismorr making fans and screens in tepid competition with the Omega and Lechmere pouring tea and handing out cakes at the Saturday afternoon gatherings. Lectures were announced by Pound on Imagism and by Schoenberg and Scriabin on music, and talks were actually given by the Futurist Marinetti and by Ford Madox Hueffer.

Lewis kept an empty room to represent the impending arrival of the latest art movement and planned to hold exhibitions and give classes. The rather ironic and "progressive" prospectus announced the "starting point and alphabet of the teaching" will be the "principles underlying the movements in Painting, known as Cubist, Futurist and Expressionist." Pupils will not be forced to follow any "particular artist's idiosyncrasy": "The principal object of this school will be to help any student to do what he wants to do. If he prefers to play the fiddle to drawing he can do that, so long as he does not annoy his neighbor. The academic basis of drawing will not be neglected. But those who are evidently meant for a child's paradise will be left with their wit, skill and ingeniousness. Instruction will approach them on tip-toe."³

But, Lechmere recalled, the only students who appeared were far from promising: "one young man who wanted to design modern gas decorations and a girl who claimed her drawings were so erotic she couldn't show me. Lewis had to go and look at them behind a door."⁴ Lewis was often suspicious and antagonistic. He cautiously locked in a buyer with his pictures when called away during a sale and showed his confidence in Pound by inviting him to see his latest paintings, which were hidden away from imitators in a secret back room.

The dissolution of the Centre was hastened if not precipitated by Lechmere's friendship with the critic and philosopher T. E. Hulme, a powerful and aggressive Yorkshireman with an agile and stimulating mind. Lewis sympathetically described him as "a very large and imposing man, well over six foot, broad-shouldered, and with legs like a racing cyclist. . . . He was very fond of the girls. His conversation mostly bore upon that subject."⁵ One day Lewis brought Hulme to the Centre, thinking Lechmere had gone out to lunch. But when she came back she met Hulme, who was very attractive to women, and eventually became engaged to him.

Lewis felt his artistic pre-eminence, his leadership of the Vorticist painters, his emotional relationship with Lechmere, and her support of the Rebel Art Centre were all threatened by Hulme, who had criticized the lack of cohesion and unity in Lewis'

¹ Letter of 5 December 1912, quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 1980), p. 52.

² For a detailed discussion of the Lewis-Fry quarrel, see *The Enemy*, pp. 39–50.

³ Quoted in William Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Toronto, 1972), p. 70.

⁴ Quoted in Della Denman, "Kate Lechmere: Recollections of Vorticism," *Apollo*, XCIII (January 1971), 52.

⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London, 1967), p. 105.

paintings, passionately praised the work of Jacob Epstein and David Bomberg, swept away Kate Lechmere, and virtually extinguished her sexual and financial interest in Lewis' life and work.

After a violent fight with Lewis about Hulme, Lechmere pursued him all the way through Piccadilly shouting "Please don't kill him, please don't."⁶ Lewis tracked Hulme down in Mrs. Kibblewhite's salon in Frith Street and seized him by the throat. But Hulme dragged Lewis downstairs, into Soho Square, and hung him upside down on the tall iron railings. Hulme thought himself tough—and he was.

There were also other problems. Both Lewis and Lechmere were impractical and inexperienced. Few of the proposed activities took place, and most of the time was spent preparing the first number of *Blast*, which appeared in June 1914. The cost of printing the 1700 copies was paid by Lewis' mother and by £100 from Lechmere, who took several of Lewis' paintings as collateral and ordered fifty copies of the magazine. There was no money, work, studios or important commissions to be had at the high-sounding Centre—apart from Lady Cunard's request for decorated party favors. Lewis quarreled with Lechmere about money and the Rebel Art Centre closed in June 1914.

Lechmere became a nurse during the War. When the second *Blast* appeared in July 1915 and she nagged Lewis to repay the £100 loan, he bitterly complained, "You have, as you know, vilified me in every way you could to everybody you know. Your solicitor explained his letter to me and your new claim by the fact of the reappearance of *Blast*: 'certain moneys' supposedly would 'be coming to me.' Far from this being the case, the next 2 or 3 numbers of *Blast* will be engaged in paying off the cost of the first number. I am not getting a half penny. . . . The War has stopped Art dead. I have no money at all. I am shortly going to the Front, and am meantime desperately struggling to get my immediate affairs in order."⁷

After the War Lechmere, who had made her first dress for Vanessa Bell, established a workshop in Knightsbridge and started a successful hat business called Rigolo. Her clients included Edith Sitwell and Eliot's favorite actress, Marie Tempest. Lechmere also made the headgear for plays based on the works of Arnold Bennett and Compton Mackenzie. She shared a room with Bernard Shaw's secretary and on Sundays attended meetings of the Fabian Society. Shaw invited her old friend to speak on "Modern Tendencies in Art" in October 1919 and introduced him as Wynfield Lewis.

Though the Rebel Art Centre lasted only four months, it produced *Blast* and inspired the Vorticist group, the most dynamic and innovative movement in modern English painting. It adapted and assimilated Cubism and Futurism, and provided the energetic impetus that forced Modernism into a provincial and philistine England.

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⁶ Quoted in Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (London, 1976), p. 161. See my review of Cork in *Southern Review*, XV (1979), 257–64.

⁷ The first sentence is quoted in *The Enemy*, p. 67; the rest in Wyndham Lewis, *Letters*, ed. W. K. Rose (New York, 1963), p. 69.

WYNDHAM LEWIS FROM 1912⁸

I am now aged 84⁹ and it is somewhat frustrating for an octogenarian to drift back 60 years; however, I will try to grow young again and relive some of the past.

I first met Wyndham Lewis in 1912 at a small dinner party given by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bevan of the Camden Town Group.¹⁰ I was at once impressed by this striking-looking artist, looking much like Augustus John's early portrait of him.¹¹ A few days later Lewis invited me to dinner and much to my embarrassment not a word was spoken through the meal¹² but afterwards, on our arrival at the Café Royal,¹³ he then explained he had received serious and disturbing news. He then started talking about Dostoyevsky¹⁴—had I read Gorki?—so I was fed for a time on Russian literature and later on Wyndham Lewis. I felt instinctively that here was a man of genius, a powerful but complex character, at the same time very sensitive and one who could absorb from his environment and recreate a very alive creative picture.

My relationship with Wyndham Lewis was most amicable and he was a most amusing and entertaining friend. I wrote from France about January 1914 suggesting we start a modern art Studio in London, run on much the same lines as those in Paris, but the Rebel Art Centre became a much smarter set up. We found a charming old house at 38 Great Ormond Street,¹⁵ London, and we took the first floor and I had a small flat on the top floor back. The rooms had to be enlarged and I paid for walls to be taken down and reinstalled. The Studio walls were painted pale lemon yellow and the doors Chinese red. We had an office and an extra room for Lewis and prospective pupils to paint in. There were gatherings on Saturdays with tea and biscuits for those artists and friends interested. Lewis carefully explained to me that members would not hand round cups of tea as the Camden Town Group did. Certain artists were invited to join with Lewis and what was then called the Vorticists, a word coined by Ezra Pound.¹⁶ The group was then

⁸ Lechmere wrote on the front of the typescript: "I am not a writer. This is just a simple account from 1912–14."

⁹ Kate Lechmere was born in 1887; this memoir was written in 1971; she died, aged 89, in 1976.

¹⁰ Robert Bevan (1865–1925) was born in Sussex, studied at the Westminster School of Art and the Académie Julian in Paris, worked in Tangier and Pont Aven, where he met Gauguin. He settled in London in 1900, exhibited with the Allied Artists in 1908, and was founder member of the Camden Town Group (1911) and the London Group. The Camden Town Group, inspired by the style of Gauguin and Van Gogh, and the example of Sickert, combined strong decorative color with a realistic treatment of the contemporary North London scene. See Wendy Baron, *The Camden Town Group* (London, 1979).

¹¹ John and Lewis had been close friends since 1906, when they worked together in Paris and Brittany. The portrait, painted in 1905 and now owned by Anthony D'Offay, is reproduced in *The Enemy*, opposite a photo of the handsome Lewis in 1912.

¹² Lewis also took Rebecca West out to mysteriously silent dinners, which made her confused and uncomfortable. She later described the "patches of silence which meant something to him, apparently, for he was quite contented, but meant nothing to me." Quoted in Wees, p. 146.

¹³ Lechmere observed, "The Café Royal was the best place in those days. I'll never forget their deep plush seats. Women never went in without a man, but one was always bound to meet someone like Ezra Pound or Augustus John there." Quoted in Denman, p. 53.

¹⁴ The influence of Dostoevsky is strong in Lewis' first novel *Tarr* (1918), which he was writing when he first met Lechmere.

¹⁵ Near Queen Square, in Bloomsbury.

¹⁶ Pound first used the Cartesian and Blakean word "vortex" in his poem "Plotinus" (1908). Lewis ventured a rather abstract definition in the Vorticism exhibition catalogue of June 1915: "By Vorticism we mean (a) Activity

Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Edward Wadsworth, Christopher Nevinson, Frederick Etchells, Constant Lambert and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska.¹⁷ Lewis and I decided that I should pay for a new suit to be tailored for him. He arrived one day violently flapping the coat of his suit before me and I asked what he was doing and he replied "Women are so unobservant" —I then remembered this was THE suit which had a black and white check lining and a fold on the side of the trouser legs and a stitched band. We had a large divan bed 10 feet by 6 feet, upon which a splendid press photograph was taken of the seven male members and myself next to Lewis and for background some very effective curtains painted by Hamilton.¹⁸ Lewis started painting an abstract frieze on one wall but never finished it. Our Saturday gatherings were very lively. Ezra Pound caused a sensation one Saturday by bringing a large poster and pinning it upon the wall; it read "End of the Christian Era."¹⁹ My aunt, an orthodox Victorian Christian, was bold enough to ask Ezra Pound what it meant: his reply was "It means what it says."

I was interested so much in Lewis's work before Vorticism and it was rather a shock to harbour this very abstract and non-human art and one that I found had great limitations, so I felt frustrated and did practically no painting. After the War he said "Vorticism is out"²⁰ and his work became much more interesting and a link with his pre-War conception of art. The Rebel Art Centre had plenty of publicity from the press.²¹ Wadsworth and I were in the Studio one morning when the press representative of the Evening Standard called. I was not dressed in my Studio creation and Wadsworth had a tailored suit on and a large black hat. Wadsworth stood beside a large picture of his and I pretended to be finishing one of mine. This photograph came out in the evening paper with the caption in large letters "Artists a disappointment in real life." Velvet jackets and floppy ties were not encouraged by Lewis and we were to be anti-aesthetic.

For a time all went well at the Rebel Art Centre. Needless to say both Lewis and myself were from a practical point of view very inexperienced. Lewis would advertise in The Times a lecture to be held at the Studio but failed to put the date so a second advertisement had to be made. This was a very interesting lecture given by the then-called Ford

as opposed to the tasteful *Passivity* of Picasso; (b) SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to the dull or anecdotal character to which the Naturalist is condemned; (c) ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT and ACTIVITY (such as the energy of a mind) as opposed to the imitative cinematography, the fuss and hysterics of the Futurists." *Wyndham Lewis on Art*, eds. Walter Michel and C.J. Fox (New York, 1969), p. 96.

¹⁷ Wadsworth (1889–1949) contributed translations and illustrations to *Blast 1 and 2*, signed the manifesto and appeared in the London and New York Vorticist exhibitions. Nevinson (1889–1946), son of the author H. W. Nevinson, defended Marinetti against the attacks of the Vorticists but renounced Futurism in 1918. Etchells (1886–1973) met Picasso, Braque, and Modigliani in Paris c. 1910, painted in Dieppe with Lewis and was a Vorticist. He later became a successful architect and translated Corbusier. Lambert (1905–1951) was a composer, conductor, and critic. He first met Lewis in the thirties and was portrayed in *Thirty Personalities* (1932). Since Lambert was only nine years old in 1914, Lechmere probably meant to write Cuthbert Hamilton. Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915), a brilliant French sculptor and draftsman, settled in London in 1911. He did the painting of Sophie Brzeska (now in the Tate) and the Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound. He was killed in action in 1915 and memorialized in *Blast 2*. Pound wrote a fine memoir of him in 1916.

¹⁸ This photograph of Lechmere with three (not seven) male members (Wadsworth, Lewis, and Hamilton) is reproduced in *Cork*, p. 149.

¹⁹ This Nietzschean phrase was used by Pound in the advertisement for *Blast* that appeared in the *Egoist* on 15 April 1914.

²⁰ In the Introduction to his 1949 Retrospective Exhibition catalogue, Lewis recalled that, after the Great War, "I found the abstract too empty for my taste, and saw no reason why, on reflection, I should dehumanize my vision" *Wyndham Lewis on Art*, p. 449.

²¹ *Cork*, pp. 147–48, 157, mentions seven newspaper articles.



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Madox Hueffer. At the back of the stage was a tremendously large picture by Lewis called "Plan of War."²² It had a wooden support of about 2 feet wide as a frame and in all was over 10 feet high. Just as the lecture ended this "Plan of War" fell upon Hueffer and to the audience's surprise Hueffer emerged with the canvas, both he and it undamaged, upon his back.²³

About that time two serious young women joined the Studio, Jessie Dismorr and Helen Saunders. They were both dedicated to Lewis but were both later to suffer from his indifference.²⁴ About that time the manuscript of *Blast* was brought to the Studio and I rashly said I would pay for the publication. The mornings were taken up by Lewis and Dismorr trying to translate *Blast* to a puzzled and bewildered typist. David Bomberg and William Roberts²⁵ must have become Vorticist members after Lewis had left 38 Great Ormond Street.

²² *Plan of War* is reproduced in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1971), plate 22.

²³ The lecture that the narrator Ernest Jessop gives at the Ladies Club in chapter 5 of Ford's *The Marsden Case* (1923) recalls the ludicrous *dénouement* at the Rebel Art Centre.

²⁴ Jessica Dismorr (1885–1939) studied at the Slade and in Paris, did illustrations for Katherine Mansfield's *Rhythm*, and contributed to *Blast 1 and 2* and both Vorticist exhibitions. Helen Saunders (1885–1963), daughter of a railway director, also studied at the Slade, signed the *Blast* manifesto, contributed a poem to *Blast 2* and helped Lewis decorate the Vorticist Room at the Tour Eiffel restaurant. Lewis had sex and patronage from both women, who were rivals for his affection. But he quarreled with both of them about their possessiveness and lack of generosity.

²⁵ Bomberg (1890–1957), poor son of a Jewish immigrant, became an important Vorticist painter but was not closely associated with Lewis. After an all night conversation, he called Lewis "a Slade man honouring the same

One day Lewis brought the philosopher and poet T. E. Hulme, who was also interested in abstract art, to the studio thinking I was out at a luncheon date; this had fallen through and to his surprise I arrived back and so met Hulme. I had no idea who he was until Lewis took me out to lunch and lectured me about Hulme, and, sitting opposite me at a marble table, pointing an index finger at me he told me that Hulme was Epstein and Epstein was Hulme.²⁶ I still was bewildered as to who was this mysterious Mr. Hulme, but that evening I was dining with the dramatic critic Ashley Dukes²⁷ and I asked him "Who is this Mr. Hulme?" and he replied that he was a real philosopher and if we went to a certain restaurant we might possibly meet him. There we all met and Hulme became interested and asked me to dine with him along with some artists that gathered for dinner on Saturday evenings. I told Lewis about this and I was still warned that Hulme was Epstein and Epstein was Hulme.

Sometime later Hulme and I became engaged and expected to get married after the War but this wonderful man was killed on the parapet of his gun.²⁸

What I did not realise was that Lewis had an actual fear that he might be supplanted by another at the Rebel Art Centre. This became quite an obsession with him and nothing could convince him otherwise so in the end to safeguard his position the Rebel Art Centre had to be made into a limited company at the cost of £50. It is an old story now of Lewis rushing down Piccadilly and accosting Hulme and crying out "What are you doing to me?"; Hulme is said to have picked him up and planted him upside down on the Park railings.²⁹ Poor dear Lewis quite lost his head and when he accused me of this Hulme attachment I said he had shown little attention to me of late and his remark was that it was not good for a woman to have too much notice taken of her.³⁰ It only proved that Lewis was of a suspicious and jealous nature and certainly later developed a mild persecution mania. Although I have stated certain unpleasant and unkind actions by no means flattering to him, on his return from France after the 1914–18 War we were very good friends and he remarked to me that the one man he would have been interested to meet [again] was T. E. Hulme. I think for a time Lewis was in love with me and I was extremely fond of him and had complete belief in his talent and genius and so I was saved from many a heart-ache. During the War I received a very interesting letter

pledge to which I was staking my life—namely, a Partizan." Quoted in Cork, p. 83. Roberts (1895–1980) was still in his teens when he joined the Vorticists. He began pamphlet warfare after the blind Lewis had written a provocative Introduction to the Tate exhibition catalogue, *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* (1956). His most famous painting is *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel* (1962).

²⁶ In *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 100, Lewis wrote, Epstein "was unquestionably Hulme's man (or perhaps I should say Hulme was Epstein's man) upon the social plane. They were great friends." See T. E. Hulme, "Mr. Epstein and the Critics," *Further Speculations*, ed. Sam Hynes (Lincoln, Neb., 1962), pp. 103–12; and Jacob Epstein, "Foreword" to T. E. Hulme's *Speculations* (New York, 1924), pp. vii–viii.

²⁷ Ashley Dukes (1885–1959), dramatist, theatre manager, and drama critic for the *Star* and *Illustrated London News*, founded the Mercury Theatre in 1933.

²⁸ Hulme was killed by a direct hit from a big shell on 28 September 1915 while serving with the Royal Marines about a mile away from Lewis' battery on the Belgian front. Lewis wrote in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, "I was sorry when I heard he'd been killed that I had not made my peace with him" (147).

²⁹ Lewis, who was also over six feet tall, confirms this improbable story in *Blasting and Bombardiering*: "I never see the summer house in the centre [of Soho Square] without remembering how I saw it upside down" (36).

³⁰ See Wyndham Lewis, "The Code of a Herdsman" (1917): "As to women, whenever you can, substitute the society of men. Treat them kindly, for they suffer from the herd. . . . Women, and the processes for which they exist, are the arch conjuring trick: and they have the cheap mystery and a good deal of the slipperiness, of the conjuror." Quoted in *The Enemy*, pp. 70–71.

from Lewis who was then "bombardiering" in France explaining that in the pre-War years we were less mature and now we were both adults.

I will now return to the Rebel Art Centre. Lewis was busy finishing his famous *Blast*. He wanted me to do a drawing for it but at that time the atmosphere was so difficult that I was not able to do so but as a compensation I was put in the "bless" column!³¹ He suggested that I should buy 50 copies to sell at the Studio but as none sold the publishers took them back at half price.³² An interesting "Blast dinner" was held, I forget where, at the cost of 10/- per head.³³ I sat next to Gaudier-Brzeska and I think Arthur Symons. Gaudier-Brzeska arrived a little late and placed on Ezra Pound's plate one of his fawn models in return for his dinner. I asked Arthur Symons if he had read *Blast* and he said "No, I have given it to my children in the nursery to teach them their ABC."³⁴

The struggle for artists in those days and for many years was a cause of great anxiety and frustration. Sometimes I missed certain members and when I asked after Hamilton, Lewis replied he had married a rich wife, and Nevinson disappeared—he had left to join Marinetti and his Futurists who were then exhibiting in London. Marinetti came and lectured one evening and recited his poems which he acted making noises like a train and lots of hissing and whistling.³⁵ T. E. Hulme was invited to speak at a series of lectures on new developments in art and literature at the Kensington Town Hall. He was not a good lecturer but Lewis read a paper supporting Hulme and came off pretty badly himself.³⁶ Lewis explained to me that when on the stage you must not read with your head bent over the paper but hold your head up. Few understood Hulme's talk and then Lewis read rapidly in a husky voice with his face bent and hidden in the written word. The only one we could see and hear was Ezra Pound who made a very good speech and read some poetry. Lewis's comment the next day was that it was rather like clowning poetry read with a Yankee accent.³⁷ Ezra Pound had a particularly ugly accent.

During my friendship with T. E. Hulme, Lewis made himself most unpleasant. Some mornings he would arrive in a very excitable state and rapidly pace up and down the Studio calling me a "bloody bitch." This hurt and shocked me at first but as the "bloody bitch" was so often repeated I took it quite calmly which only irritated Lewis the more

³¹ See *Blast* 1, p. 28.

³² John Lane, who had brought out the *Yellow Book* in the 1890s, published the magazine.

³³ On 15 July 1914, Lewis arranged a grand dinner for his followers at the Dieudonné Restaurant on Ryder Street, St. James, to mark the June 20 publication of "the great MAGENTA cover'd opusculus."

³⁴ "Lewis promptly tapped on the table and told the guest that 'you have insulted Miss Lechmere, who paid for the magazine and is present here tonight with fifty copies piled up underneath her chair!'" Quoted in Cork, p. 237. Symons (1865–1945), a nineties poet associated with Dowson, Johnson, and Yeats in the Rhymers' Club, wrote *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).

³⁵ In *Anglosaxony: A League That Works* (Toronto, 1941), pp. 41–42, Lewis wrote, "This embryonic fascist possessed the personality of a Levantine bagman, but he put on a good act. He had been a war-correspondent in the Balkans and his 'poems' about war were full of the din of modern battle. Banging and popping, rattling and whistling—the sweat pouring from him—he grimaced and shouted at you from the platform and really made you feel you had been at the heart of a barrage."

³⁶ Hulme had a crabbed, harsh delivery and an odd north-country pronunciation. Lewis' reading of *One-Way Song* at Harvard in 1939 is recorded on an Audio Arts cassette, vol. 1, no. 2, 1974.

³⁷ Lewis described the early Pound as "an uncomfortably tensed, nervously straining, jerky, reddish-brown young American." Though fond of Pound, he regarded him as extraordinarily eccentric; he imitated Pound's strong American accent and mocked his virile posturings. Wyndham Lewis, "Ezra Pound," in Peter Russell, ed., *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Essays* (London, 1950), pp. 257–58.

and on one occasion when I told Lewis a Mrs X and her daughter had become members, to my astonishment this caused him to become enraged and it ended up by Lewis calling this misunderstanding a French farce. The names of these women were the same as one of Lewis's enemies no. 1.

By now my very small bit of capital was running out. No effort had been made by Lewis to get art students or members. After all the vitality and enthusiasm we had for the Rebel Art Centre it now seemed to go sour and to be arriving at nothing. I told Lewis he and his friends must carry on without me and that I could not pay the next quarter's rent. Some days later I went out in the afternoon and on returning found the Studio in confusion and denuded of most of its contents. So ended the Rebel Art Centre and the Vorticists retired to some garret.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SPURIOUS: GIDE'S "LIES," A FORGED LETTER, AND THE EMERGING WILDE BIOGRAPHY

In his furious blast at *André Gide's Wicked Lies*, Robert Harborough Sherard labels Gide "an abominable liar," and maintains that "nearly everything he has written about Oscar Wilde is pure fake."¹ Nor is Sherard alone. In 1934, in an expanded version of the *Wicked Lies*, he quotes from a letter by Lord Alfred Douglas in which the latter affirms, "André Gide's story about Oscar and myself in *Si le Grain Ne Meurt* is a mass of lies and misrepresentations."² There are, briefly, two major places in which André Gide describes his encounters with Wilde. The first is in his *Oscar Wilde: in memoriam (souvenirs)* of 1910;³ the second, the notorious Part II of his autobiography, *Si le grain ne meurt*.⁴ The former of these works has been attacked by Douglas and others for seeming to overemphasize the contrast between the highly successful *grand viveur* before his downfall, and the artistic and financial wreck that left Reading Gaol. The latter work (and most especially the account it contains of a homosexual marathon in which both Gide and Wilde figure prominently) has been labeled by many as *absolutely false*.

¹ Italics in original. Robert Harborough Sherard, *ANDRÉ GIDE'S | Wicked Lies | about the late | Mr. OSCAR WILDE | in Algiers in January, 1895 | As Translated from the French | And Broadcast by | Dr. G. J. RENIER | Minutely examined & Commented upon* (Calvi, Corsica: Vindex Publishing Company, 1933), p. 5.

² Lord Alfred Douglas, Letter to Robert Harborough Sherard, 25 May 1933, quoted in Sherard, *OSCAR WILDE | TWICE DEFENDED | from | ANDRÉ GIDE'S WICKED LIES | and | FRANK HARRIS'S CRUEL LIBELS* (Chicago: Argus Book Shop, Inc., 1934), pp. 44–45. The entire letter has been reproduced in Boris Brasol, *Oscar Wilde: The Man—The Artist, the Martyr* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 237–38.

³ André Gide, *Oscar Wilde: in memoriam (souvenirs) le « de Profundis »*, avec une héliogravure (Paris: Mercvre de France, 1910); hereafter cited as *Souvenirs*. A number of English translations are available. I use *Oscar Wilde: In Memoriam (Reminiscences), De Profundis*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Philosophical Library, 1949).

⁴ André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, nouv. éd., (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française [Gallimard], 1924), III, 115–46; hereafter cited as *Grain*. The first edition (1920) was a private printing of only twelve copies. The second edition (1924) is the first public edition. The book has been translated into English by Dorothy Bussy under the name *If It Die: An Autobiography* (Random House, 1935). All citations are to this edition.