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Wyndham Lewis hits out—

# The Doom of Spoofo

By H. E. Bates



"A man with a sword"—Wyndham Lewis

FROM time to time Mr. Wyndham Lewis descends upon the literary world like a furious raider upon his enemies lying serenely asleep in the valley below, slashing and bashing them with salutary gusto and fierceness and returning to his secure intellectual heights again before they have time to reply.

On the occasion of his present descent he comes well-armed, for to the two books in this list might have been added two others which have just been published. Lewis is a storm of energy as well as of fury, completely aggressive, always hungry for adversaries, everlastingly thirsty for the blood of humbugs and impostors.

"You may not like Lewis," says Mr. Gawsworth, "his style, his pose, his manner of writing; yet if you read him you cannot but be impressed with what you learn from him. He is vital and alert. He evades no question. The more difficult it may appear the greater his determination to master its intricacies . . . in Lewis we have a Paul whose eyes are not blinded to the menaces of the day."

Doom, blast, apes, diabolical, tyro, enemy, filibuster—the very words Lewis has used in his titles warn us that he is a man who writes dangerously, humbug-thirsty, lip-smacking after every kind of spoofo, an enemy of mankind's treacherous falsities even in Barbary.

Like a true satirist he attacks where least expected, slaughtering what appear to be the innocents, the benefactors, the clothed-in-white of his time. Thus he goes to Africa, ostensibly to rest, and lays about him with the old venom, finding his enemies even there; and even more surprisingly he brings down his sword upon the head of youth—youth, the fountain-head, the worshipped Peter-Pannishness of life!

"The 'Youth' of the Anglo-Saxon sentimentalist (who dribbled at the mouth and watered at the eyes, at the sugar-sticks of Sir James Barrie's creation) is, as I see the matter, not 'Youth' at all. The figure of Peter Pan symbolises a formidable decadence—in which

'Youth' becomes a thing that-can-never-grow-up, is regarded as an end-in-itself—something entirely cut off from life: a strictly *useless beauty*."

This is his starting-point. He moves quickly, searching out the various manifestations of youth-politics, youth-consciousness, youth-movements, finding them despicable, menacing, false, belabouring them, ridiculing them, above all using them for his old purpose—perhaps his only purpose—to attack spoofo.

Spoofo, in this case, is newspaper-spoofo—the cheap, corrupt, malodorous menace of the modern daily newspaper, with its absurd inflated values, its vulgarity, its dust-throwing, its shallow shamming:—

"The art of advertisement, after the American manner, has introduced into all our life such a lavish use of superlatives, that no standard of value is intact. And the word 'genius' of our popular jargon has now become as cheap as dirt, of course, commandeered for the production of not even a respectable second-rateness, but in the service of the dullest extremity of vulgar nothingness, in order to cause that great gull, the Public, to buy, buy, buy!"

"But," goes on Lewis, "there is something that is more important still. When a bluff is pushed too far, even the very simple may cease to be taken in. And in the present case that point has been

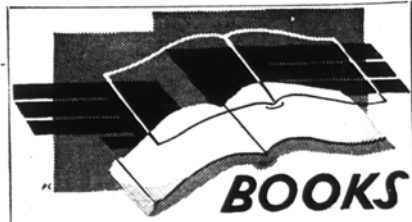
## Songs for Socialists—V

### War Song

Tune: Funiculi, Funicula

**M**Y mother told me not to join the Fabians  
And so did Dad;  
For he'd been had.  
He warned me 'gainst the Webbsians and the Shavians.  
He called them bad;  
He did, begged!  
The Webbs, he said, would weave a web about me  
To catch a fly  
(That would be I)  
And Shaw would leap upon me like a spider.  
And I should die  
In agony.  
Pling, plong, pling, plong, the Beatrice and the Shaw,  
Pling, plong, pling, plong, capacious in their maw.  
Oh law, oh law, oh law, oh law  
I say with awe  
The Fabian maw is nothing when you know the Fabian jaw.  
I never joined the Fabians 'cause of Father.  
He told me not:  
He knew a lot.  
So in deference to him I joined the Bolshies—  
The stuff that's hot.  
(I'm in the plot.)  
Now Stalin's made of me a Major-General:  
In Army Red  
I shoot 'em dead.  
I shot my father first and then my mother.  
The bourgeoisie  
Can't shoot like me.  
Whizz, Bang, Whizz, Bang, I'm making quite a haul.  
Whizz, Bang, Whizz, Bang, I'm fiercer than them all.  
My Thesis Number One  
It is my little gun.  
I convert with my six-shooter when their Marxian lectures pall.

DOUGLAS COLE.



Reviewed On This Page

DOOM OF YOUTH. By Wyndham Lewis (Chatto and Windus. 10/6).

FILIBUSTERS IN BARBARY. By Wyndham Lewis (Nash and Grayson. 12/6).

APES, JAPES AND HITLERISM: A Study in Wyndham Lewis. By John Gawsworth (Unicorn Press. 3/6).

reached. No one any longer, *in fact*, believes that the world is swarming with embryo-'geniuses.'

In order to prove all this, that youth, as according to cheap newspaper standards, is only spoofo, he has compiled a list of "exhibits" from newspapers. Youth, he rightly asserts, has been the newspapers' richest source of copy—and thus revenue—so that youth has been duped into a sense of false importance and age duped also into believing that "youth" is desirable above all other things. Lewis's extracts from newspapers show up the game even more effectively than his own arguments. They serve, incidentally, a dual purpose, for the modern newspaper is satirised out of its own mouth.

Lewis has been described as a man with a gun, but he is much more like a man with a sword—and a rusty sword at that. Sometimes, as in "Doom of Youth," the sword is two-edged, but it is a clumsy weapon wielded by clumsy, if devastating, hands. Lewis, as Mr. Gawsworth points out, is not the *greatest* satirist of our time. "It is the untiring energy, the continual zip and whirr, the terrific impetus" which is impressive.

Thus, though Lewis slaughters and maims his enemies, he does it with a crude, almost buffooning clumsiness which is often almost ludicrous. He lacks the polish of greater satirists. Scintillating wit, acid grace and bitter logic are replaced in him by scornful roars, athletic venom and intellectual thumpings. He is often cheap, and how crude he is may be seen by "Doom of Youth"; in the 300 pages of the book there is scarcely a page on which Lewis has not italicised words: hundreds of italicised words scream to be believed—a clumsy, typical piece of Lewis craftsmanship.

John Gawsworth, in his brief exposition, and Frederick Carter, the artist, in his introduction to it, are champions of Lewis, but not blind to his defects. To the "plain reader," anxious to have Lewis summarised and explained, this book will be of the greatest value. After it the reader may go on to "Filibusters in Barbary," ostensibly a travel-book but revealing Lewis, as always, the filibuster with the sword, attacking and slashing, ferreting out and pursuing the social menaces and humbugs of the day.

It is significant that Lewis has formed no "school" of criticism. He is too alarmingly individual to be imitated easily and too contemptuous a hater of cliques for one to be formed that should bear his name. Nevertheless, in an age rank with the newspaper humbug, illegitimate art and all the social rottenness that he hates we must regret the scarcity of men like him. As it is, we can only console ourselves that he uses his sword with the force of twenty men.