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| Blast (1914-1915) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| *Blast* was an early modernist ‘little magazine’ edited by Wyndham Lewis. Not to be confused with Alexander Berkman’s San Francisco-based, bi-monthly anarchist newspaper *The Blast* (1916-17), *Blast* was the official organ of the British avant-garde movement Vorticism. *Blast* ran for two volumes, appearing in July 1914 and July 1915, before Lewis served in the First World War as an Artillery Officer. The magazine’s two instalments represent a key example of pre-war avant-garde periodical culture, and have become recognised as embodying, through their assortment of contributors, some of the overlapping alliances and antagonisms of London’s early modernist socio-cultural scene. In defending and promoting Vorticism, *Blast* championed a complex intellectual aesthetic based on contemplative detachment and a foregrounding of inter-subjective relations (thus opposing the egoism of *The Egoist*, a little magazine edited by Dora Marsden and Harriet Shaw Weaver between 1914 and 1919). Both volumes of *Blast* were heavily illustrated, featuring contributions from Jessica Dismorr, Jacob Epstein, Frederick Etchells, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Spencer Gore, Cuthbert Hamilton, Jacob Kramer, Lewis himself, C. R. W. Nevinson, William Roberts, Helen Saunders (listed as ‘Sanders’), Dorothy Shakespear (listed as ‘Shakespeare’), and Edward Wadsworth. |
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The first volume also contains a notice ‘To Suffragettes’ and the famous ‘Blast’ and ‘Bless’ lists, inspired in part by Guillaume Apollinaire’s *L’Antitradition futuriste* (1913), which teasingly present those individuals and tendencies the Vorticists (here mainly Lewis and Pound) deplored and admired. At the beginning of the volume is the preliminary ‘Long Live the Vortex!,’ which outlines Vorticism’s aims and objectives, and two Vorticist Manifestos, which explore, through innovatively spaced typography and occasionally esoteric language, the movement’s nuances and its opposition to Italian Futurism. The volume concludes with advertisements for the little magazines *Poetry* and *The Egoist*, as well as for publications by John Lane and for *The Yellow Book*.  File: Blast1.jpg  Figure 1 Facsimile of the cover of the first volume of *Blast*.  The second volume of *Blast* is rather different than the first. Whereas the first volume can legitimately be considered a modernist artefact in its own right, its radical posturing and pluralistic nature contributing to an idiosyncratic British avant-gardism, the second volume (the so-called ‘War Number’) is less animated and more discursive. This shift in tone was largely a product of the First World War, which had altered public attitudes to avant-garde activity and, more importantly for *Blast*, brought about the death of Gaudier-Brzeska. The front cover of the second volume, this time a whitish-cream colour (which is sometimes printed as dark brown for certain copies of the 1981 Black Sparrow Press facsimile copy), features a black-and-white illustration of a war scene by Lewis titled ‘Before Antwerp.’ The volume contains numerous contributions by Lewis, including several essays on the War and on contemporary art, and the first part of his story ‘The Crowd-Master;’ poems by T. S. Eliot, Ford, Jessica Dismorr, Pound, and Helen Saunders; another item on Vorticism by Gaudier-Brzeska, as well as a short obituary notice concerning him; and more ‘Blasts’ and ‘Blesses.’ Again, the volume concludes with advertisements (for books by Pound, publications by John Lane, and for the magazine’s 1914 volume). Whereas the first volume of *Blast* mainly targets Italian Futurist art in presenting Vorticist doctrine, the second volume features an expanded scope, incorporating ‘A Review of Contemporary Art’ in which Lewis discusses at length the differences between Vorticism and Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Impressionism.  Art- and literary-historical accounts of *Blast* have tended to prioritise the first instalment, although the second contains many useful insights into the ways in which early modernist writers and avant-gardists responded to the First World War as it was unfolding. Both instalments incorporate some of the earliest statements of ideas that Lewis would go on to articulate more fully in subsequent years, in particular in *The Caliph’s Design: Architects! Where Is Your Vortex?* (1919), which amounts to a key companion text to, and extension of, the writings of Lewis’s pre-war period. Vorticism as a whole was a movement formed by several figures, and *Blast* reflects this diversity. However, its most innovative offerings are (by general critical consent) almost certainly Lewis’s. *Enemy of the Stars* in particular represents one of the most challenging texts of early modernist literature, and the first volume’s Manifestos, which were more or less solely authored by Lewis, embody some of the most stimulating artistic re-workings of political discourse in the modernist canon. The influence of *Blast* on later writers is traceable in Marshall McLuhan’s *CounterBlast* (1954), which reproduces and extends the Vorticist journal’s typographical experiments in response to the age of electronic information, and Mick Sheridan’s *BAST* (2011), which comically adapts the rhetoric and typography of *Blast* to a twenty-first-century, and specifically Welsh, context. |
| Further reading:  (Edwards)  (Gąsiorek)  (Greenwood)  (Munton)  (Wees) |