“Mercenaries Were Always the Best Troops”: Examining the Production of Wyndham Lewis’ *Blast* (1914)

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Vortex 1: Introduction

In its review of Wyndham Lewis' *Blast*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* drew attention to the Vorticist magazine's cover of "chill flannelette pink… [that] recalls the catalogue of some cheap Eastern draper, and its contents [that] are of the shoddy sort that constitutes the Eastend draper's stock."[1] This comparison of the magazine to the "shoddy" collections of wholesale cloth gives insight as to *Blast*'s existence as an object. Readers and scholars of modernism know *Blast* as a bold and short-lived literary magazine–a unique object serving as a rare instance of British avant-garde provocation boldly put forth by an auteur. Wyndham Lewis, the reputed mastermind behind *Blast*, consumes the attention of historians much in the same way he consumed the attention of those in his circles when he was alive. Quick-witted, bombastic, and alarmingly passionate, Lewis' magnetic, muscular voice as a painter, author, and critic drew nearly equal amounts of attraction and scorn. By 1914, he had established much of this reputation, making both friends and enemies in the London artistic and literary scene. While he is not popularly known as a leading modernist today, the last half century has seen a slow recuperation of his importance in the literary world. The scholarly focus on Lewis' role as editor, contributor, and principal player in the production of *Blast* and its Vorticist commitments is, through this push, historically accurate and well-documented.

Zeroing in on Lewis' contributions, however, tends to privilege an origin story that highlights his volatile relationship with other movement leaders like Roger Fry and Filippo Marinetti. Other author-centered narratives consider the contributions of *Blast's* various contributors who played a role in the content and execution of the magazine, including Ezra Pound, C.R.W. Nevinson, and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. While each made sizable contributions to

[1] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 157.

the magazine, this authorial lens tends to overlook the rich and unique materiality of the text. The physical novelty of *Blast* that dominates the *Pall Mall Gazette* review, a novelty that perhaps rivals the magazine's artistic and literary innovations, calls attention to where one must look to get a fuller picture: the print production. In looking to this side of the magazine, key players such as William Leveridge and John Lane come into the spotlight. A chronology of their activity will give us a fuller understanding of the magazine as a physical object, necessarily tied to its literary and artistic content. In this paper, I isolate aspects of *Blast*'s production that are not literary but are instead tied to the decisions that were made about its form (or extra-literary textual features). This perspective allows for a reevaluation of Wyndham Lewis' manifestos and Ezra Pound's poems in their relationship to the material form of the magazine.

The contemporary description of the magazine in the *Pall Mall Gazette* sheds light on its critical and popular reception. The reviewer foregrounds the color and the materiality of the magazine's cover, likening it to a very specific shade of textile ("flannelette"). Acknowledging the magazine as an object in this way distracts from its status as literature. To speak of it as a catalogue, a list of wares for sale, gets to the heart of the advertising nature of the literature in *Blast*. What is a manifesto but a sales pitch, a proof of concept for a new kind of literature? In this move of making the literary-artistic the material, the content of the magazine–the written word–becomes material as well. The magazine's typographical self-stylization in turn envelops its content. As the *Gazette* notes, the "shoddy"-ness of the words represent a physical (lack of) quality–a comparison to the "Eastend draper's stock" references the weaving and industrial traditions in the impoverished East End of London, exaggerating the mass-produced physicality of the magazine further. From this reception, we can identify *Blast* as a uniquely material document and justify an investigation of its materiality and participation in a consumer market.

Previous historians of *Blast* neglect the material production history of the magazine in favor of a simultaneous history of the international and London-based avant-garde scene that centers Wyndham Lewis' interaction with each. Paul O'Keeffe's excellent biography of Wyndham Lewis features a chapter on *Blast* which begins with the opening lines of Marinetti's sound poem *Zang Tumb Tumb*, bolded and in a large font.[2] These lines linger over the rest of the chapter, and in O'Keeffe's account the Futurists haunt the production of the Vorticist magazine. *Blast*'s story becomes that of the Vorticists defining themselves against the influences of Marinetti and Fry, and finds its penultimate moment in the confrontation between Nevinson and Gaudier-Brzeska at a Marinetti lecture.[3] Other narratives of the period rely on the same framework–Jeffery Meyers' biography of Lewis describes Futurism as "the strongest influence" on Vorticism and on *Blast*.[4] Reed Way Dasenbrock's book on Vorticism couches its discussion of the Vorticist review in a chapter titled "Vorticism among the Isms."[5]

This style of reading modernist coteries is countered by newer scholars, such as Jerome McGann. In his materially and formally focused analysis of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, McGann envisions a possible critique of his method from the viewpoint of traditional scholars:

> -Mallarme's experiments with the spatial form of the page are surely more to the point, don't you think?
> -That's been the view of our traditional literary histories. But it's a narrow view, despite its apparent internationalism. We aren't discounting modernism's French connections by calling connection to others that were equally, and perhaps even more, significant. Kelmscott Press and Bodley Head locate historical relations that have largely been forgotten.[6]

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[2] Ibid., 139
[3] Ibid., 154
[4] Jeffery Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (Boston: Routledge, 1980), 60
[5] Reed Way Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), 13
[6] Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton, 1993), 81

This imagined interaction embodies the spirit of this paper. The traditional literary history of *Blast* characterizes the magazine's content as a reaction to Marinetti's Futurists and Fry's Post-Impressionists. While both of these framings are accurate, they obscure a historical framing that is based on production processes and is "perhaps even more significant."

Vortex 2: Actors, or the other Ls

Both the printer and publisher for *Blast*–William Leveridge and John Lane–were secured by Wyndham Lewis' literary connections. First came Leveridge & Co. and its eponymous founder. Leveridge was put in touch with Lewis through Douglas Goldring, a minorly successful modernist novelist, poet, and journalist who was close friends with Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt. However, Goldring occupied himself not just as a fellow writer, but as an editor as well. He previously edited *The Tramp*, a "literary, outdoors-focused magazine" that had published both Lewis and Marinetti before ending its one year run in 1911.[7]

In his memoir of the early twentieth century English literary scene, Goldring recounts that his business-side appealed to Lewis: "I was roped into the early proceedings because Lewis insisted on regarding me (rather to my annoyance) as a kind of useful businessman, or at least an expert on printing and production."[8] Goldring viewed himself as a literary asset, and notably resented being relied upon for his business expertise. Lewis himself showed a similar streak–he also obscured his association with the business world, desiring to be seen as a purely artistic man. In a letter to Alick Schepeler, Lewis writes, "It is an awful business to get [*Blast*] out. I am not a businessman…. Hence the delays in getting the paper out."[9] As literary auteurs, both men spurned the commerce of aesthetic production and resented being tasked with the logistical side

[7] Helen Southworth, "Douglas Goldring's *The Tramp: An Open Air Magazine* (1910-1911) and Modernist Geographies" (Sage Publishing, Vol 18 Issue 1, 2009), 35
[8] Douglas Goldring, *The South Lodge* (London: Constable, 1943), 67
[9] Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen, 1963), ed. W.K. Rose, 61

of producing a journal. Perhaps this resentment was correctly felt, as each of the reviews Goldring and Lewis edited only lasted around a year, ultimately failing financially.

However, it was precisely in the role of securing practical connections that Goldring made his greatest contribution to *Blast*. As Goldring frames it, Lewis' publication, due to its unprecedented typography and layout, "required a printer humble enough blindly to carry out his instructions."[10] Whether or not this is an accurate depiction of the relationship between Lewis and Leveridge (a claim we will investigate later in Vortex 4), it illustrates how essential the printer was to the new style put forth by the periodical. Through Goldring's professional networking–not his literary talent–he secured this resource for the magazine. Traditional histories of *Blast* do not ascribe the proper weight to this contribution; without the work of securing the specific talent of Leveridge & Co., the magazine would have taken on a much different spirit in both form and content. Goldring's material contributions therefore sit on equal footing with the literary contributions of other players that, in traditional histories, receive more acclaim.

William Leveridge established his small printing firm, Leveridge & Co., in 1903 in Harlesden, London.[11] Their work encompassed that of a general commercial printing firm, working in small scale documents as well as street posters. The firm moved to another location in the same neighborhood in 1906, the same year they published the Harlesden Public Library's annual report, the earliest identified example of the firm's printing that showed "William's ability to use a variety of typefaces in an effective, asymmetrical design."[12] This skill of asymmetrical design would later come in handy for Lewis' needs and shows Leveridge's skill as more than just a blind toiler.

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[10] Goldring, *The South Lodge*, 67
[11] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of BLAST," *Wyndham Lewis Annual* (Vol. 7, 2000), 20
[12] Ibid.

It is less clear how John Lane came to serve as publisher for *Blast*. Finding a publisher–needed merely for advertising and distribution purposes in the case of *Blast*–required a bit more searching than finding a printer did.[13] First, Lewis relied upon C.R.W. Nevinson's father, H.W. Nevinson, to use his connections as a well-known journalist to find a publisher. When this did not work, T.E. Hulme (unsuccessfully) attempted to interest Harold Latimer, publisher of *New Statesman*.[14] John Lane came on board as publisher quite late in production, as "he was not mentioned in the advertisements for *Blast* published in April, nor had he mentioned *Blast* in his own advertisements in *The Spectator* in April and May."[15] Some evidence suggests that a later letter by C.R.W. Nevinson convinced Lane to publish the journal,[16] but this is contested.[17]

While it is difficult to pin down *how* Lane entered the picture, it might be easier to address the question of *why* he did. In the early 1910s, he had a reputation for being "a man for [publishing] novelties,"[18] and was in talks with other Vorticists, such as Ezra Pound, to publish full books.[19] To better understand Lane's entrance into the picture, however, let us look more at his historical role in the English publishing industry. John Lane, a man as disliked as he was enterprising, served as joint proprietor of the Bodley Head more than twenty years prior to the publishing of *BLAST*. "A fat white frog" of a man, generally disliked by his authors and business partners, Lane was infamous for his fast tempo business mind that rubbed the more literary-minded, including his partner Elkin Matthews, the wrong way.[20] The Bodley Head was a prestige

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[13] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972), 158
[14] Ibid.
[15] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of BLAST," 23-25
[16] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 158
[17] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 151
[18] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 158
[19] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of BLAST," 30
[20] R. D. Brown, "The Bodley Head Press: Some Bibliographic Extrapolations," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* (Vol. 61 No. 1 1967), 43

publishing house in England most prolific in the early 1890s, coming out of a brief period of fruitful collaboration of Lane and Matthews. While it was an equal collaboration in name, "it was not long after Lane entered the business full time that Elkin Matthews seemed to be relegated to what Lane considered a secondary function of the firm… while Lane, himself, moved swiftly to take over and expand the publishing."[21] The activity of the publishing house was almost completely the activity spearheaded by Lane, with Matthews attached merely in name (and in check-book). In this arrangement, Matthews, Lane, and a team of book designers produced "a number of books which in subject matter, typography, title page, binding, and general design set them apart from the cheap commonplace books which poured by the thousands from the large commercial publishing houses of Britain."[22] Two such designers employed in making this new, modern, well-made book were Walter Blaikie and Charles de Sousy Ricketts. Both brought a scientific, calculating eye to the publishing house that avoided the "tasteless, often vulgar bindings, designless title pages, and ugly typography" common at the time.[23] Formerly an engineer, Blaikie brought a thoroughness of design and construction to all elements of the book, but was especially known for his excellent type and title pages.[24] He split his focus between creating a sound object and an artistic complement to the content of the book; he is quoted as saying, a "book must have a character of its own, corresponding to its author's ideas."[25] Ricketts, in his design for Oscar Wilde's *The Sphinx*, not only prefigured *Blast*, but also modern innovations in book aesthetics on a larger scale. *The Sphinx* was the first book of the modern printing revival in Britain to be printed in three colors and was printed entirely in

[21] James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1971), 268
[22] Ibid., 36
[23] Ibid., 37
[24] Ibid., 38
[25] Ibid.

capitals; he spoke of this uniform capitalization as "an effort away from the Renaissance towards a book marked by surviving classical traits."[26]

Other aspects besides workmanship and inventiveness also led to the Bodley Head book being an original product. Tasked with more than just purveying literary merit in England, the Bodley Head also had to make money. Luckily, however, this balancing act was not a problem– as is recorded in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* "if the artist in John Lane had cause for pride in being the means of giving good poetry to the world, the man-of-business in him had no less reason to be contented, because poetry paid."[27]

The Bodley Head established their reputation as a publisher of quality avant-garde books that would attract consumers. As their operation was smaller in scale than commercial publishers and had less broad commercial appeal, they also had to keep costs down. The three principal costs for book publishers of the time were author, design, and manufacture.[28] Because the Bodley Head focused on young, unpublished poets, and hired young, unknown book designers, they were able to save money in the first two areas of spending. However, they also had to find ways of making their manufacturing cheaper.[29] One such method of keeping costs down was born out of the same design ingenuity that gave their books a distinct look: they employed larger type sizes and left more blank space on the page. The use of very little actual text per book reduced their printing costs. Additionally, they would use the "remainders" of fine paper, therefore retaining quality while saving money.[30]

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[26] Ibid., 45
[27] R. D. Brown, "The Bodley Head Press: Some Bibliographic Extrapolations," 40
[28] Ibid., 41
[29] Ibid., 43
[30] James G. Nelson, "James Joyce's First Publisher: Elkin Mathews and the Advent of 'Chamber Music, '" *James Joyce Quarterly* (Vol 23 No 1, 1985), 12

Their size as a publisher also helped their profit margins. Their business model was unlike bigger presses of the time, as they did not depend on a mass audience to consume their work, but they instead "could adopt many small economies which larger firms, dependent upon a larger number of sales, could not."[31] Oftentimes the Bodley Head published their books in batches of merely 300-600 copies,[32] sometimes as low as 150 copies.[33] Lane's business cunning and aesthetic sensibility thus established the Bodley Head as a small publishing powerhouse. This effort towards a better book object that is distinctly of the moment and untethered by an economy of scale and Victorian aesthetic conventions foreshadows and informs the execution of *Blast*. The man for oddities, Lane shows through the Bodley Head his tendency towards innovative publishing early in his career.

While the Bodley Head dissolved before the end of the 19th century, Elkin Matthews and John Lane remained in publishing, both taking clients of their own from the breakup. Lane, known as the more modern and enterprising partner, had pushed the firm into dealings with more risqué authors and thus secured their contracts for himself in the dissolution, while the more conservative-leaning, less involved Matthews retained those who could not stomach Lane's personality. Close readers of *Blast* will see on its title page not only the name of John Lane, but also that of the Bodley Head. Though the firm had officially broken up nearly twenty years prior out of a messy professional parting (the culminating episode involved Lane failing to invite Matthews to a company dinner party), Lane was awarded the Bodley Head name and logo to continue doing business under, while Matthews was awarded the premises on which the Bodley

[31] R.D. Brown, "The Bodley Head Press: Some Bibliographic Extrapolations," 41
[32] James G. Nelson, "James Joyce's First Publisher: Elkin Mathews and the Advent of 'Chamber Music,'" 12
[33] R.D. Brown, "The Bodley Head Press: Some Bibliographic Extrapolations," 42

Head offices stood to begin independent publishing endeavors of his own.[34] Lane then set up shop across the street from Matthews' office, consequently funneling much of Matthews business to himself, causing friends and associates to ridicule Matthews for his lack of business acumen.[35] In a move of professional genius, Lane tied himself to the Bodley Head tradition. This allowed him not only to keep the reading public that associated the Bodley Head name with quality content and printing practices, but also to attract young authors–a demographic he often courted–to the legacy publisher.

This idea of legacy publishing was important to young authors in the Vorticist circle. Pound's deep knowledge of and appreciation for the late 19th century renaissance of printing is evident in his immediate seeking out of Elkin Matthews as a possible publisher of his work upon arriving in London in 1908.[36] Therefore we see not only the particular imprint that the Bodley Head legacy left upon the Vorticist cohort but also the larger prominence of the publishing world in the minds of the literary avant-garde in England in the aughts and early teens. In addition to their literary-artistic relationships, material and business relationships also informed their choices and what could be printed. They turned to publishers consciously, focused on which publishers would likely be hospitable to their evolving brand of avant-garde aesthetics. Pound and Matthews' relationship ended up being a fruitful one, as Matthews became Pound's principal publisher between 1909 and 1916.[37] Matthews–as well as the Bodley Head and 19th century printing revolution writ large–thus made a large impact on the minds of the Vorticist cohort. Their vision of the literary avant-garde scene was defined in part by the print revolution that came before them. The typographic imagination for *Blast*–the formal sparsity, the low-budget

[34] James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head*, 273
[35] Ibid., 272
[36] Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*, 78
[37] Ibid.

production of a niche high quality product, the uniform capitalization–comes out of the cultural and visual landscape put in place by products such as the Bodley Head book. Ultimately, Lane's contractual involvement in *Blast* was limited to a deal in which he would spend £50 on advertising in exchange for 1,000 copies of the magazine.[38] More significant than this official role, however, is the bold act of brandishing both John Lane and the Bodley Head's name on the title page of *Blast.*

Lane and the Bodley Head's presence serves as both a tie and allusion to the forerunners of *Blast.* How he came into the role of publisher of the magazine is unclear, but using Ezra Pound's seeking out of Matthews as a model, it is easy to see the appeal that a name like John Lane would have to Wyndham Lewis and his peers. Additionally, Lane's historical knack for inventive, cheap printing and handling younger authors makes him a perfect candidate for the publishing of *Blast.*

The networks involved in *Blast*'s production extend beyond contributing writers, their influences, and their grudges. John Lane and William Leveridge represent a side of *Blast*'s production that is absent from purely literary accounts. These two sides of the magazine, though, are obviously linked, as we can see in the double role of Douglas Goldring. A fruitful analysis of *Blast* accounts not just for the literary-artistic history, but the material one as well.

Vortex 3: Chronology

Now that we have sketched a picture of the major nonliterary players, we can produce a chronology of *Blast'*s production that gives proper space to each. In the interest of focusing on the material, let us begin our chronology of the production of *Blast* in the spring 1914 publication of the prospectus for the Rebel Art Centre.

[38] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 151

In July of 1913, Roger Fry, the leading authority of post-impressionist visual arts in England, opened the Omega Workshops, a working group designed to give employment to artists mainly in the decorative arts.[39] The necessity of this enterprise was made apparent to Roger Fry in his attempt to find Duncan Grant a sitter for a portrait. He, Grant, and the subject were all to meet at his home, but Grant failed to show. The following day, Fry learned that Grant did not have the half-crown he needed to pay for the commute to his residence. This episode made a lasting impact on Fry and led to his formulation of Omega Workshops.[40] Fry, concerned both with the welfare of his artist friends and the welfare of post-Impressionist art in England, invited many of the top avant-garde visual artists in England to join his group; Duncan Grant, Frederick Etchells, Vanessa Bell, and Wyndham Lewis were all original members.[41]

However, shortly after its inception, Lewis led an exodus from the group, citing problems with Fry's aesthetic taste (more traditional, refined, and conventional than Lewis could stomach), Omega Workshops' policy for anonymity among artists, and a specific debacle in which Lewis felt he was cheated out of a commission.[42] He announced his departure and listed his grievances in October 1913 with an inflammatory open letter, signed by fellow Omega-defectors Frederick Etchells, C.J. Hamilton, and Edward Wadsworth.[43] After leaving the group, Lewis, with Kate Lechmere as a financial backer, opened the Rebel Art Centre as a counter-force to the Omega Workshops.[44] In March of 1914, the new enterprise of the Rebel Art Centre allowed the former Omega Workshop artists to form an institution in both financial and aesthetic. Lechmere and Lewis, romantically and financially intertwined, purchased a space on Great Ormond Street and

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[39] Jeffery Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis*, 40
[40] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde,* 59
[41] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 125
[42] Jeffery Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis, 40,49*
[43] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 66
[44] Jeffery Meyers, *The Enemy A Biography of Wyndham Lewis*,49

set up an institution similar in scope to the Omega Workshops. As Meyers writes, "the centre started rather tamely 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."[45]

While this beginning seems almost uninspired, existing merely as a factory-like space in which the production of commodities would take place (Lewis once referred to the Omega Workshops as a curtain and pincushion factory), Lechmere and Lewis' plans were expansive.[46] Orignally, the centre was intended merely to house the work of artists, but this quickly expanded into a plan for a space that would serve as an artist's studio and a school, much like Omega Workshops. This aspiration can be seen in their prospectus.[47]

[45] Ibid., 52
[46] Ibid., 40
[47] Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 192

PROSPECTUS.

THE REBEL ART CENTRE.

38, GREAT ORMOND STREET,
QUEEN'S SQUARE, W.C.

Telephone: HOLBORN 457.

Fee for Membership .... £1 : 1s.

The Rebel Art Centre is under the personal management of Mr. Wyndham Lewis. The Directors are Miss Lechmere and Mr. Wyndham Lewis.

The following privileges are attached to membership:—

Free Entrance for the space of one year, from May 1st, 1914, to all Lectures, Meetings and Picture Exhibitions, or Exhibitions of Applied Art.

On payment of half the amount of the ticket for any dances or social entertainments that may be arranged.

To the Saturday afternoon meetings of artists from 4 to 6 p.m.

It is impossible at present to give a list of the Lectures for the present year, as much depends, in getting such men to lecture as we intend, on arrangements that have to fit in with their stay in London and other engagements, and can be made only a week or two ahead.

Signor Marinetti, for instance, who will probably lecture at Ormond Street, has not yet assigned a date.

Towards the end of May, Mr. Ezra Pound will speak on "Imagisme," the most vital movement in English poetry to-day, and in which he is the principal mover.

Published in early spring 1914 (sometime before May 1st), the prospectus lays the grounds for an ambitious project. The number and names of those receiving the prospectus proves its import, as revealed in a letter from Ezra Pound asking Wyndham Lewis to send, on Pound's behalf, over 70 copies of the prospectus to different literary figures of the time, including James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence.[48] This large quantity of copies distributed (likely only a small fraction of total distributed copies, due to the relatively small role Pound played in the Rebel Art Centre) is important in gauging the scale of the project, but perhaps more interesting is the amount of seemingly purely literary figures that are on the mailing list for a school concerned solely with the visual and decorative arts. This shows not only the interconnectedness of the scenes at this time, but also indicates the dual focus of Wyndham Lewis and those in his circle at the Rebel Art Centre. While *Blast* makes this focus on the literary as well as visual obvious, the prospectus' anticipated audience has already made this apparent.

But more than just whose hands it was in, the form, content, and presence of the prospectus as a material document is important to analyze. It serves as a stepping stone in the production of *Blast* and its literary. Many of the characteristic features of the magazine are present in nascent form in the prospectus. The insignia at the top, in an artistic style typical to Lewis during the period, is animated by an angular vivacity as well as caged in, nearly imitating a deer in the headlights. The insignia resembles, in subject, the drawings Lewis did only two years prior for brochures of the Cabaret Theatre Club at The Cave of the Golden Calf[49]. However, his style has subtly changed. The lines have stiffened, refusing to curve as a more representational drawing might. Additionally, cross-hatched shading has been displaced in favor

[48] Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis*, ed. Timothy Materer (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 6-7

[49] (Reproductions of which can be found in Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England,* 69, 80)

of a whole and uniform physical presence on the page. Lewis transformed the more adorning, decorative style of The Cave of the Golden Calf into a stamp-like insignia. This quality of the drawing effectively serves as a visual equivalent to the power of the statement, instead of a decoration to perhaps soften the dryness of the text.

These qualities of the insignia suggest the visual language of *Blast*. The central placement of the drawing allows it to act as an equally powerful interlocutor with the text. The vortex drawings that similarly assert themselves in *Blast* take on this same technique. Additionally, the creature in the drawing is caught in an act of total stasis–no movement is suggested, and the animal's face suggests a sort of arresting presence that it is bearing witness to. This stillness suggests a theme that would soon crystallize in the Vorticist aesthetic: the calm at the eye of the storm.

Important also to remember in the analysis of this insignia (and the rest of the prospectus) is the material limitations that would have been placed on this printed design. As Michael E. Leveridge claims, the Rebel Art Centre's "general prospectus, the prospectus of its art school, its notepaper and its envelopes were probably all printed by Leveridge & Co. They contain designs that were included in the first issue of *BLAST* or in other contemporary examples of the firm's printing."[50] While Leveridge & Co. was a skilled printing house, they were general, non-specialized printers. Complex art plates would have been outside of their production capacity. Thus, it was likely important, in order to quickly mass produce the prospectus, that the drawing be a simple arrangement in black and white without intricate details, as for more complicated plate processes Leveridge & Co. would have had to outsource production.[51] The insignia's

[50] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST,"* 20
[51] Ibid., 2

movement then becomes a culmination not just of Lewis' evolving style and aesthetics, but of the material confines placed upon the production of this style.

Furthermore, the insignia, both in its position at the top of the page and its proximity to the "REBEL ART CENTRE" name, operates as a sort of logo, a combined name and insignia, for the venture. Considered in this way, once can see the prospectus as an advertisement, which is its true form. Seeing the prospectus as an advertisement allows for its other component parts to be read in new ways. The bullet-like chunks of information work to rapidly strike, not overwhelm or bore, the reader. The short and concise organization of the page–along with the visual elements of page organization and insignia–suggests a language of brevity and attention-grabbing. This formal effect is matched in the content, which boasts of "privileges" offered by the Rebel Art Centre that one will have access to if they just pay a small supporting fee. This formal resemblance to advertising is another gesture in the eventual direction of *Blast*. The magazine works as a product one buys, and is thus different from a prospectus, but it is a product that sells another product. What *Blast*, particularly in the manifesto but also throughout, is selling is Vorticism, an alternative literary and artistic movement. The format and language of a prospectus resembles that of a manifesto, a proof of concept for Lewis' brand of avant-gardism.

The prospectus' short, bullet-like blocks of text work as advertising elements and therefore reveal the mark of the printer on the document. This is perhaps most prominent in the arrangement of the address and telephone number of the Rebel Art Centre. These two points of information come across as three separate blocks of text, none of which are centered or aligned with one another. The same font, font size, and complete capitalization are used to pull together the two separate bullets which make up the address. The telephone number both shares the area of and bifurcates the address. However, the telephone number is further left aligned, traditionally

capitalized, and in a different font size. While this organization separates the two chunks of information to the point of legibility, the abnormal setting of the text serves as a microcosm for *Blast* and enforces a new typographic aesthetic–that of subverting traditional visual organization of text while keeping linearity and legibility fully intact. Lewis penned the prospectus and likely encouraged a boundary pushing in this direction, but this style has its precursors in other, less artistically inclined texts printed by Leveridge & Co. One such example is the Harlesden Public Library report printed in 1906 which featured "a variety of typefaces in an effective, asymmetrical design."[52] Through this document, the role of the printer surfaces and shows the necessity of accounting for the Leveridge & Co. in the execution of the aesthetic of the Rebel Art Centre and Vorticism as a whole.

The content of the prospectus also hints, in a more explicit way, towards *Blast*'s production. The prospectus organizes the Rebel Art Centre "under the personal management of Mr. Wyndham Lewis," and therefore establishes a body of which Lewis has control and one that shares many members with *Blast,* which would come only a few months later. While the document speaks of "a 'Blast' evening, or meeting to celebrate the foundation and appearance of the Review of that important name," and therefore directly summons into being the magazine's eventual release, the prospectus also shows in nascent form the aesthetic ideologies and fixations that *Blast* would tackle.[53] The document boasts of an unscheduled Filippo Marinetti talk and a talk by Ezra Pound on "Imagisme… the most vital movement in English poetry today," two events that, while important in the formulation of the thinking for the magazine, would, by the time of its publication, become dated terms and affiliations. Additionally, their improvised nature–it being "impossible at present to give a list of the Lectures for the present year"–shows

[52] Ibid, 21
[53] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 70

the piecemeal nature of Lewis' direction. Ads are printed and placed while the content, or what is sold, is still being determined. This mirrors *Blast*'s eventual production–the magazine selling the Vorticist aesthetic comes as the Vorticist aesthetic solidifies, and therefore the magazine works as an advertisement for something that it itself is conjuring into being. Thus, just as the form of the prospectus serves as an informative precursor to the one executed in *Blast*, the content and ideas referenced also show the early stages of the magazine's development.

While Lewis and Leveridge worked on *Blast* during the time which the prospectus was printed, the public-facing advertising campaign gradually became more aggressive. On January 8th, 1914, the first printed allusion to *Blast* was published in *The New Age*, cryptically mentioning that Lewis would serve as editor and that "cubism and other aesthetic phenomena" would be discussed.[54] Months later, an April 1st ad in *The Egoist*, declared it to be a quarterly released magazine discussing "all vital forms of Modern Art," and featuring poems by Pound, a story by Lewis, and visual art by "Etchells, Nevinson, Lewis, Hamilton, Brzeska, Wadsworth, Epstein, Roberts, etc., etc."[55] In addition to these more practical points, the *Egoist* advertisement also contained brash declarations, inserted by Pound, the magazine's resident poet, such as "NO Pornography. NO Old Pulp. END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA."[56] This advertisement was likely followed quite closely by the prospectus, crystalizing the magazine's publicity campaign. Claims and promises are made, and a bold, curt language of declaration is used. The *Egoist* advertisement's use of this language shows the tone of *Blast* slowly formulating in the lead up to its release.

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[54] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 143
[55] Paige Reynolds, "'Chaos Invading Concept': Blast as a Native Theory of Promotional Culture," *Twentieth Century Literature* (Vol. 46 No. 2., 2000), 238-239
[56] Ibid, 239-240

As we saw in the prospectus though, even in April, two and a half months before the publication of *Blast,* the ideological position of the magazine was not cemented. Absent from both early advertisements is the idea of Vorticism or a vortex. This shows Lewis' artistic faction's relatively late adoption of the Vorticism label. While both "blast" and "vortex" were coined by members of the group in a two day span at the end of 1913, blast stuck much sooner than vortex or vorticism did.[57] From this we see the attachment the group has to the name *Blast*– it comes first, prior to the movement's name. The explosive term is evidently closely aligned with the thinking of the magazine at each stage, whereas vorticism perhaps only comes to match their sentiments at the end of the production process. This nuanced account of their thought process is made visible only through the close study of the advertisements placed by Lewis and his group.

The first public expression of the term Vorticist came on June 12th, 1914, merely eight days prior to the printed publication date of *Blast*, which touts itself as a Vorticist manifesto. A lecture by Marinetti and Nevinson in their attempt to co-opt Lewis and his faction as fellow travelers of the Futurist movement was the occasion of the first public usage of the word "Vorticist." Nevinson knew the word from early discussions with the group around the time Pound coined it and attempted to identify the group as "Vorticist" in his lecture. However, Nevinson showed his increasing alienation from the group, as he had apparently never heard the word aloud, for he pronounced it "Vortickist." Lewis, Gaudier-Brzeska, Wadsworth, and others had come to protest the talk, and when Nevinson slipped up, Gaudier-Brzeska erupted, loudly yelling "Vorticiste! Vorti-CCC-iste!"[58] As this event occurred in early June, it is evident that Vorticism was now a part of the vocabulary of the Vorticist group, and a term that they felt

[57] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 142
[58] Ibid., 154

comfortable organizing around. One day later, in an advertisement placed in *The Spectator*, John Lane first publicly associates "Vortex" with *Blast* in print.[59]

Wyndham Lewis' magazine spent at least four months, if not more, in production. In an April 1914 letter to Frederick Etchells, Lewis promised "in two weeks Blast will *positively* appear."[60] A month later, he made nearly the same promise to Alick Schepeler, claiming "as to *Blast*… two to three weeks will see it set up and ready to produce."[61] Just from these two samples of Lewis' correspondence we can see his confidence in the completion of the project waning–the magazine goes from positively appearing in two weeks to being "ready to produce" in a non-specific amount of time. His language becomes increasingly vague and evasive, and to Schepeler he even complains that "it is an awful business getting it out."[62] While the April 1st *Egoist* ad boasted "READY APRIL," three more months would elapse before *Blast* saw the light of day.[63]

By late April, the vast majority of *Blast* was printed, which likely gave Lewis the license to claim to friends around this time that it would "positively appear" in two or three weeks.[64] However, Lewis had multiple irons in the fire. Not only did the directorship of the Rebel Art Centre take up his time, but in early May he also traveled to Leeds to exhibit at the Leeds Art Club–this would have diverted Lewis' attention, taking him out of London and putting different work in front of him. Additionally, Leveridge & Co. were hired to make the exhibition's four page catalogue, and therefore the printer's side of the process would have also been affected.[65]

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[59] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 25
[60] Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 60
[61] Ibid., 61
[62] Ibid.
[63] Paige Reynolds, "'Chaos Invading Concept': Blast as a Native Theory of Promotional Culture," 239
[64] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 23
[65] Ibid.

This pause in printing, due to a change in task for both Leveridge and Lewis, allowed the content of *Blast* to shift and pick up new aspects. With a couple of weeks elapsing between the start of the exhibition work and the return to a sole focus on *Blast*, Lewis and the contributors had time to revise and add to the content. The last and first signatures (large papers folded into smaller pages on which books are printed) of *Blast* are thought to be the last two added.[66] This practice of producing the first signature last, common in printing, allows for both the Table of Contents to be as accurate as possible and for a list of errata to be added in after the rest of the magazine is printed and checked. These signatures are the only two to use the words "Vortex" or "Vorticism," though the image of the Vortex appears throughout.[67] This subdued presence likely shows the development in thinking of Lewis and the Vorticists. While they identified in late 1913 something within the term Vorticism that was applicable to them, they were only at the last moment hastily willing to adopt this term as a rallying point. In half-steps they seemed to adopt this term, and evidence of these steps appear in the analysis of the very process of printing. Further proof of the late printing date of the last signature comes in the ninth chapter of "Vortices and Notes," in which Lewis refers to "the present and latest exhibition of Futurists at the Doré Gallery," which only opened on April 28th.[68] Thus the completion of the Vortex signatures would have come later than when Lewis was boasting of the completion of *Blast* in early to mid-April, and the Vortex terms would have only come either immediately before or after the Leeds Art Club exhibition break in production. The piecemeal, halting publication conditions allowed for the terminology, if not the ideas, of Vorticism to ferment in the minds of those contributing to *Blast.* Had *Blast,* as promised, been published in April, the Vorticists might

[66] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 163
[67] Ibid.
[68] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 23

not have been as willing to organize around their newly coined term, which they were only ready to publicly declare in June.

The nature of this hasty publication and progression of ideas shows *Blast* to be an ultimately performative magazine. It calls itself a review by the Vorticists, but during much of its formulation the Vorticists did not exist. With the prospectus and advertising campaign, Lewis constantly referred to the magazine as being further along in production than it truly was, and the production was always tasked with catching up to the advertisements. This dynamic between the claim and the real conditions permeates the magazine's production. Even the name, *Blast*, appearing in late 1913, names a magazine that has no content, no contributors, and no unique stance. The magazine is then left to form around the claim of its own existence, and thus arrives tardy, error-ridden, and inconsistent–in a word, "shoddy." Lewis' focus is on the claim, whereas the actual magazine is secondary. Additionally, even Lewis' secondary focus on the magazine's execution and content is performative. The magazine itself operates as an advertisement for a larger collection of Vorticist art that, at the time of publication, did not exist and would only scantly come into fruition.

The magazine's production restarted after the Leeds Art Club exhibition halt and, by the middle of June, *Blast* was nearly fully printed, but still hamstrung in its release. The June 20th date that is printed on the title page was likely the day that Leveridge & Co. finished their end of the printing process. However, there was yet another delay in getting the magazine out. As a part of his publishing agreement, Lane insisted on seeing the proofs prior to publication.[69] During this process, Lane found an obscenity that he felt breached his agreement with Lewis. "It was verbally understood between us… that there would be no sexual disagreeableness or anything

[69] Ibid., 25

which could be construed into libel in it,"[70] Lane reminded Lewis in a letter likely sent on June 25th.[71] Probably correctly, Lane had taken issue with Pound's poem "Fratres Minores", in which testicles are explicitly referred to and sexual orgasm is implied. Lane was especially cautious of this indiscretion because both printer and publisher (notably not editor or author) would be held legally responsible for such explicit content.[72]

John Lane demanded that the poem's indecent lines be obscured, an arduous task that delayed release and revealed power hierarchy in the production process. As all copies were already printed at the time of his demand, he set in motion a laborious process of drawing by hand a line through each copy of the magazine. As Kate Lechmere recalls, this task was delegated to the "young maidens" of the Rebel Art Centre, namely Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders.[73] The physical, nearly decorative act of blacking out the scandalous lines mirrors Dismorr and Saunders' early roles in the Rebel Art Centre making small artisanal objects such as fans and screens. This delegation of mundane work to these two women shows both the hierarchical structure of the Rebel Art Centre and Vorticist movement (from Lane to Lewis to the female decorative artists in his centre), but also the materiality of the publication of *Blast*. By requiring the menial, factory-like labor of these two women for both Rebel Art Centre objects and *Blast*, the magazine becomes yet another decorative object produced by Lewis' avant-garde group.

It is difficult to tell when this additional editing process was completed. In this time between printing, revising, and publication, sewing, art plate inserts, and page binding had to be done. These were the job of the printer, except for in the case of the plates, Commercial Press

[70] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 155
[71] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 25
[72] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 155
[73] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 25

Co., a third party printer who would have been more capable of producing plates than Leveridge & Co., may have been brought in to assist.[74] After Lane and Lewis' interaction on June 25th, it was thus six days before the first published review of *Blast* came out in *The Egoist* by Richard Aldington; he wrote, "at the moment of going to press I have received a copy of 'Blast' – at last actually out."[75]

This rush to the finish was not without consequences. The first signature, containing the table of contents and list of errata, was published last, and with perhaps the least amount of editorial attention in the magazine, as production had already been delayed to such a great extent. Without thorough proofreading at any stage of production, "an absurdly inadequate page of errata [was] stuck in after the title page… hardly prepar[ing] readers for *Blast*'s unusually numerous misprints."[76] Additionally, on the title page of the magazine, a yearly subscription costs more than buying each quarterly publication would.[77] These errors that litter the pages of the magazine show marks of Lewis' lack of expertise and care as an editor. Lewis once recalled the nature of the products that the Omega Workshops produced: "naturally the chairs we sold stuck to the seats of peoples' trousers… when they took up an Omega candlestick they could not put it down again, they held it in a vice-like grip. It was glued to them and they to it."[78] *Blast*'s literary oversights are similar to these physical problems in the product. Made by non-practiced editors or makers of chairs/candlesticks, the objects sold by the Omega Workshops and the Rebel Art Centre are shoddy and unpolished. *Blast* comes out of this same environment, as a sort of product peddled by the Vorticists, and its defects reveal similar shortcomings. Lewis, as an

[74] Ibid., 21
[75] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 156
[76] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 163
[77] *Blast* Vol. 1 No. 1 (London: John Lane, 1914), 1
[78] Jeffery Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis*, 40

editor, was not diligent or experienced in his production of *Blast*, as he was a writer and artist by trade. In addition to his focus on ideas and hastiness in producing *Blast*, a lack of expertise in editorship is also to blame for the multitude of errors.

As it was advertised as a quarterly magazine, *Blast*'s team would have had to complete at least two more editions in 1914 to be on track with its release schedule. This would have required beginning work on the next edition of the magazine as early as July in order to release the second issue by the end of October.[79] However, even if this was legitimately in Lewis' plans, all visions of the future for *Blast* and the Vorticists were thrown out the window only a month later due to the outbreak of World War One. By the time that *Blast* published its second issue, a year had elapsed, breaking Lewis' advertising promise of a quarterly magazine that would be the journal of record for his brand of English avant-gardism. Along with this promise, the moment that birthed the Vorticists and *Blast* had passed. Thus, while the war number of the magazine exists, it comes out of drastically different material, social, and artistic conditions than *Blast 1*. The first edition of the magazine solely represents the unique interplay of Lewis, Leveridge, and Lane in pre-war Britain.

Vortex 4: *BLAST* Analysis

Reading *Blast* as an object entails not only situating it in the avant-garde cultural coteries of pre-war aesthetic experiment, as generations of scholars have done, but also examining its process of creative production as radically contingent on the conditions of collaboration. The contingent, improvisational nature of the design and publication process pervades the finished product. In this analysis, I investigate the magazine's (in)famous cover, as it is the subject of many contemporary reviews and essential to the phenomenological experience of the magazine. I

[79] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 25

also look at Wyndham Lewis' manifestos, as they provide both an insight into his literary ambitions and are used in much of the scholarship on *Blast* to tie him to other poetic traditions such as that of Marinetti and Mallarmé. They feature his most daring typographic experiments, which serve both as exploratory sites of literary avant-gardism but also developments in the relationship between printer and editor. Finally, I examine the poems of Ezra Pound that are printed in *Blast*, as it represents the only literary writing in the magazine by a manifesto-signing Vorticist (besides that of Lewis himself). Additionally, the history of Lane's revision, as well as later historians' over-attribution of *Blast* to Pound, make the poems an exemplary case-study of the tensions at play throughout the publication.

In reviewing *Blast, The Little Review* wrote,

> Let us take it as it comes. The cover–after you have seen the cover you know all–is of a peculiar brilliancy, something between magenta and lavender, about the color of an acute sick-headache. Running slantingly across both the front and the back is the single word BLAST in solid black-faced type three inches high. That is all, but it is enough.[80]

The cover manifests itself as both a penetrating alarm– ***Blast!***–and a skeleton key. As a penetrating alarm, the bombastic font matches the semantic content of the one word on the cover. In its immediate and primary context as an explosion, "BLAST!" already excites. However, in its secondary meaning as a curse, a damning, it further provokes. John Cournos recounts an episode in which he was annoyed at the hymn-singing of a non-conformist household opposite his. To voice his frustration, he put a copy of *Blast* in the window with its cover facing inwards– "miraculously the noise stopped each time [he] tried this."[81] As a skeleton key, the cover is informative; once you have seen the cover, "you know all." Through text features–page coloring, font selection, and text orientation–a tone of communication is established in the work. As this

[80] *The Little Review* (Vol. 1 No. 10 1914), 33
[81] Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, 157

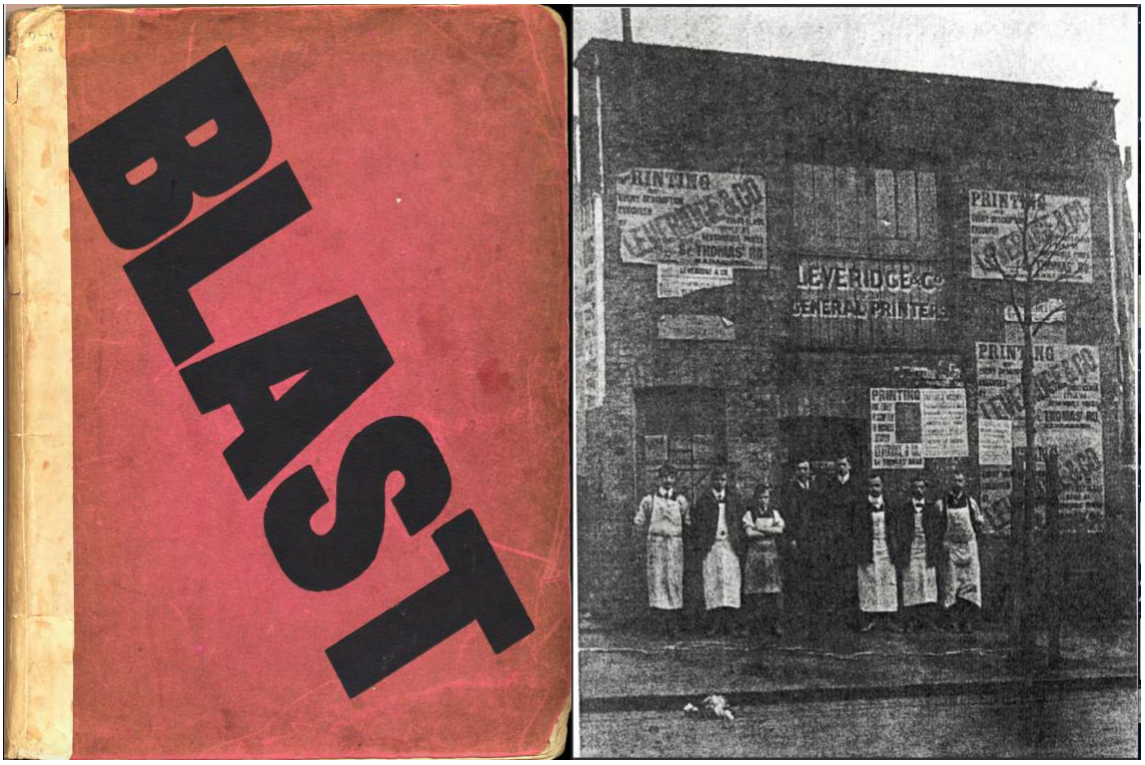
tone establishes that of the rest of the magazine, and that the editor is a visual artist, one would assume that Wyndham Lewis himself was the genius behind this aesthetic choice. However, this may not be the case. Let us look at the role William Leveridge's company would have played in the production of this cover.

Reevaluating the role of Leveridge in the production of *Blast* shows him to be a more active agent than typical auteur-style narratives of the magazine account for. Accounts of the working relationship between the editor and printer mainly come from Lewis himself, or those who heard about the relationship from Lewis. Depictions of William Leveridge range from Goldring's view of him as "a printer humble enough to blindly follow instruction"[82] to Marshall McLuhan's report that "Lewis once told us…he finally found a skid-row character who had been a typographer, and supplied him, he said, with all the gin necessary, and the chap did the job for him in thanks for the gin."[83] Neither account, nor any representation in between, is particularly favorable to Leveridge. However, this narrative does not seem all that likely. The role Leveridge & Co. likely played in the magazine's production is evident in its cover. Let us look at a side-by-side comparison of *Blast* and the building in which it was printed.

There is an undeniable similarity between the advertisements in the 1914 image of the Leveridge & Co. Harlesden office and the cover of *Blast*, printed the same year. Both use the same slanted, all capitalized, sans serif font that covers the image plane. Additionally, they are making use of this text feature for the same purpose–to arrest the passer-by, to disrupt one's day and attract attention. The building-front on which the adverts are placed also appears to be a rectangular facade made of red brick. The facade then operates like the cover of *Blast*–both

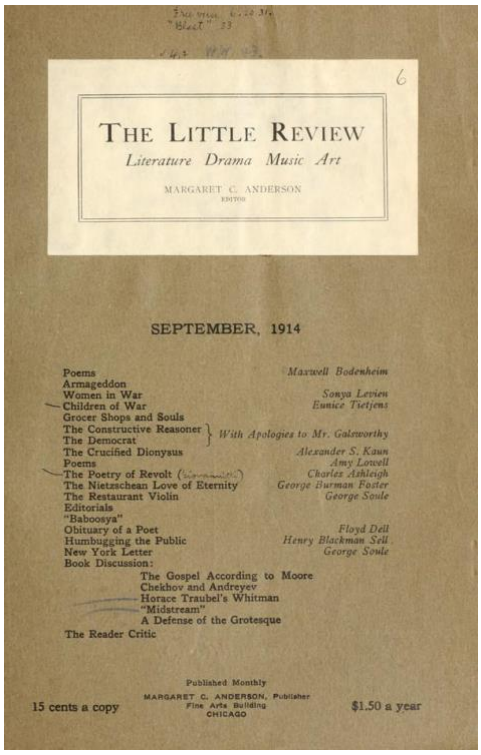
[82] Douglas Goldring, *The South Lodge,* 67
[83] Marshall McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis," *The Atlantic* (December 1969), 98

inside and outside the bounds of that which it gives a title to, similar and different from the contents inside.[84][85]



The similar intentions and execution of the cover of an arts and literary magazine and the street advertisement of a printer reveals *Blast*'s formal influences. The design for the cover borrows from the aesthetics of the common advertisement. It imports the proportions of the title to the page from the advertisement–the text must fill up the space and be as eye-catching as possible. Compare *Blast*'s cover to its contemporaries: *The Blue Review* (1913), *The Little Review* (1914), or *The Egoist* (1914).[86]

[84] *BLAST*, Vol. 1 No. 1
[85] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 24
[86] *The Little Review*, Vol. 1 No. 10, modjournals.com



THE LITTLE REVIEW

Literature Drama Music Art

MARGARET C. ANDERSON
EDITOR

SEPTEMBER, 1914

Poems	*Maxwell Bodenheim*
Armageddon	
Women in War	*Sonya Levien*
Children of War	*Eunice Tietjens*
Grocer Shops and Souls	
The Constructive Reasoner	*With Apologies to Mr. Galsworthy*
The Democrat	
The Crucified Dionysus	*Alexander S. Kaun*
Poems	*Amy Lowell*
The Poetry of Revolt	*Charles Ashleigh*
The Nietzschean Love of Eternity	*George Burman Foster*
The Restaurant Violin	*George Soule*
Editorials	
"Baboosya"	
Obituary of a Poet	*Floyd Dell*
Humbugging the Public	*Henry Blackman Sell*
New York Letter	*George Soule*
Book Discussion:	
The Gospel According to Moore	
Chekhov and Andreyev	
Horace Traubel's Whitman	
"Midstream"	
A Defense of the Grotesque	
The Reader Critic	

Published Monthly
MARGARET C. ANDERSON, Publisher
Fine Arts Building
CHICAGO

15 cents a copy $1.50 a year

All three of these literary magazines, which were representative of reviews at the time, featured a cover design different from *Blast*. This standard design had the review's title printed in large font at the top, taking up around a third of the page, while other information (volume number, contributors, publisher, etc.) was printed in a smaller font on the remaining two thirds. This is a design that encourages a longer look, assuming leisure to read. One is not immediately hailed by the formal elements to read or purchase the magazine. Instead, the content–an author, publisher, or interesting poem title–is meant to do the work of selling the magazine. Most of these also include a price on the cover, allowing potential readers to measure the contents against the price all while looking merely at the cover of the review.

Blast forgoes all of this. All that the cover communicates is the review's title, its own inflammatory exclamation. It encourages a potential reader, who might see it on the shelf at a bookstore, not to gaze at its cover, taking in explicit information about the magazine. Instead, it allows you to "know all" about the magazine in a different fashion–through typographic design.

The cover's blunt, laconic nature announces itself to the reader as an opposition. By denying the information a typical review's cover would offer, it offers a different kind of information. It allows the reader a visual taste of the unabashed force they are about to encounter. *The Little Review*'s review of *Blast* alludes to this connection. After declaring that the cover reveals all the magazine's content, it claims that "inside there is much food for thought. At least one feels sure that there must be much food for thought, if only one could come near enough to understanding it to think about it."[87] The cover's evasion of easily understandable meaning presents the same move that the content of the magazine makes. An interior that is "the rare-bit dream of a type-setter" is prefigured by an impenetrable cover.[88]

This choice to reveal a different sort of content in the magazine's cover has a heritage. Its heritage is not that of the literary review, but instead that of the street advertisement, of the "sensational poster board."[89] This claim is made by many critics, such as Marjorie Perloff in her analysis of early twentieth century manifestoes. She asserts that the new typographic innovations in manifestoes of the period use "a format drawn from the world of advertising posters and newspapers…. In the manifesto, the page supplants the stanza or the paragraph as the basic print unit."[90] While this innovation of borrowing advertising language and aesthetic is common among avant-gardes of the time, it is important to look at the specific innovations presented by *Blast*. While the poster is used as a blueprint in a number of publications, Lewis' review stands alone in its pink-color, in its tilted, straight, one-word declaration. What makes Lewis' cover different from that of, say, Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tumb*, is its angular, centered, laconic print. The cover

[87] *The Little Review* (Vol. 1 No. 10), 33
[88] Ibid., 34
[89] Keith Tuma, "Wyndham Lewis, Blast, and Popular Culture," *ELH* (Vol. 54 No. 2), 403
[90] Marjorie Perloff, "'Violence and Precision': The Manifesto as Art Form," *Chicago Review* (Vol 34 No 2), 75

of Marinetti's poem has seven different sets of text which are tilted at different angles, some positive and some negative. Additionally, some of the lines bend and waver. *Blast*'s cover, in comparison with both Marinetti and other English language reviews of the time, does not overload with information. Instead, it makes its one word enforce the cover's power.

This design, *Blast*'s innovation, is not merely an example of Lewis' artistic rendering of the advertising language of the time. Leveridge & Co. had been printing posters in a diagonal sans-serif font format prior to their introduction to Lewis, and Michael E. Leveridge (the grandson of William Leveridge) even speculates that Douglas Goldring was attracted to these exterior advertisements and thus put the printer in touch with Wyndham Lewis.[91] Instead of translating the general nature of advertisements of the time, Lewis is transposing a particular advertisement–the ones printed by William Leveridge. Leveridge, as evidenced in the photograph of his shop, printed street advertisements that featured horizontal, sans-serif, capitalized text that covered the image plane. Additionally, this text was the name of his shop, the title of the establishment. Lewis copies this formula exactly, having *Blast*, the review's title, horizontally span the image plane–he merely inverts the orientation. The defining elements of the cover are therefore taken from the advertising language already put into use by Leveridge & Co. Lewis then uses the commercial printer to print in the advertising language, using designs already invented by the printer.[92] The aesthetics of *Blast*, as seen in the cover, then come from the nature of Leveridge & Co. as a commercial printer, not from Lewis putting into literary practice advertising techniques.

To translate the advertisement into the cover of the review is then to reduce the image to its simplest form: merely the dominating type of the title. This differs from both Leveridge's

[91] Michael E. Leveridge, "The Printing of *BLAST*," 21
[92] Ibid., 20

advertisements and the influences of Marinetti. However, it is not clear who made this decision. As Michael E. Leveridge writes,

> As soon as the terms of the production were agreed, both editor and printer set to work. It is not now possible to determine their precise roles in the production of *BLAST*. Unless, however, Lewis frequently made the six mile journey from his home in Kensington to Harlesden, it is likely that many of the decisions about its production were made by Leveridge & Co…. Others were also involved.[93]

Even if one assumes this design choice was made by Lewis or one of the other artists working on *Blast*, which it very probably was, the role the printer plays in the design of the cover is still augmented from traditional histories of the publication. Leveridge & Co. forged the way for the review's cover, both in likely inspiring its design, and in providing the materials needed to carry out the design. The printer's influence over the publication is thus seen to be sizable, as its iconic cover is a result of typographic practices already put in use by Leveridge & Co.

In shifting our gaze to Lewis' manifestos, let us similarly analyze form and its relation to the printing process. In his excellent formal analysis of the first *Blast* manifesto, William C. Wees finds Lewis' "Vorticist picture-poems" somewhat resemble Apollinaire and Marinetti but argues the Vorticist manifesto is "more formal and abstract," keeping his organization style to that of "a few simple abstract shapes."[94] Wees continues, physically sketching out the abstract shapes of the manifesto. He finds in portions of the manifesto, such as that below, geometric organization that sorts the text, such as those beneath the excerpt from the manifesto.[95]

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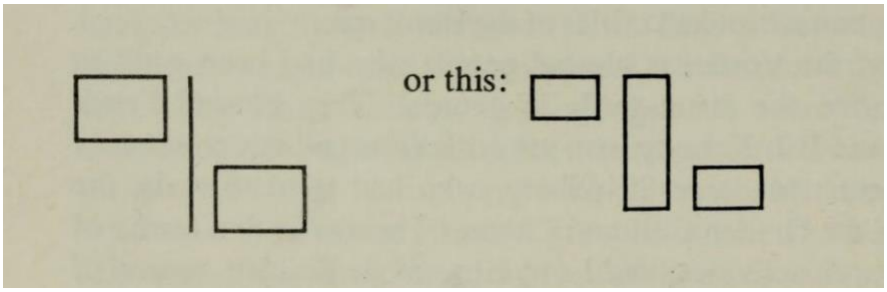
[93] Ibid., 21
[94] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 172
[95] Ibid., 172-173

BLAST

THE SPECIALIST
" PROFESSIONAL "
" GOOD WORKMAN "
" GROVE-MAN "
ONE ORGAN MAN

BLAST THE

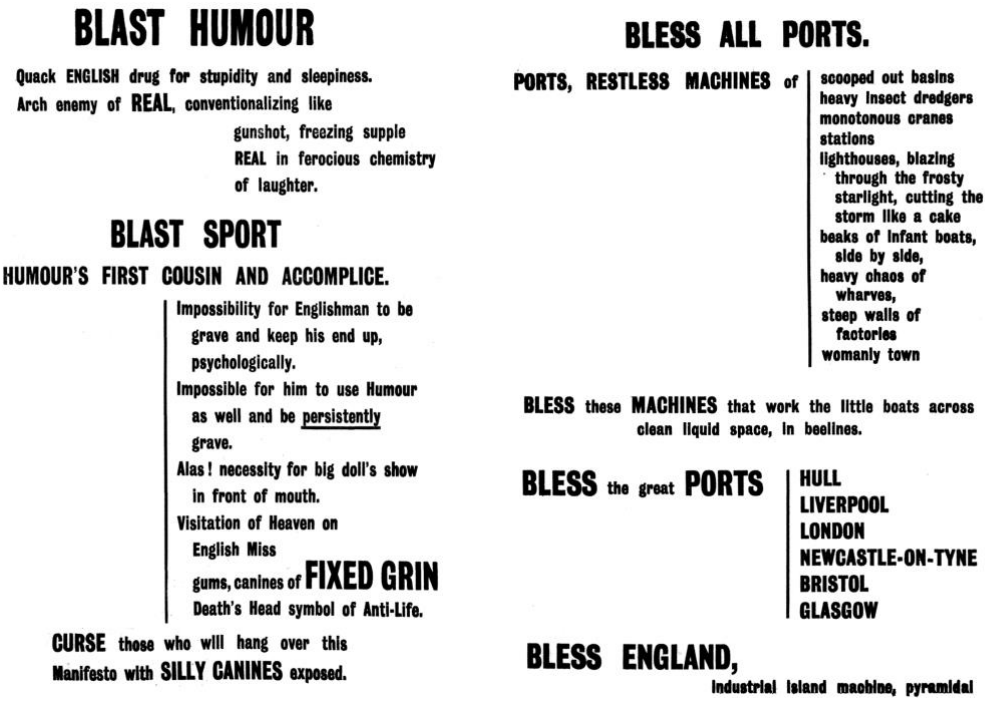
AMATEUR
SCIOLAST
ART-PIMP
JOURNALIST
SELF MAN
NO-ORGAN MAN



This analysis provides an excellent lens through which to view *Blast*. Analyzing the manifesto in terms of the geometric elements it uses for typographic construction is crucial to understanding the review's innovation. However, Wees' analysis is constricted by his commitment to analyzing the geometry of the page in terms of paragraphs, stanzas, or singular shapes. He identifies each shape in the manifesto and attempts to see through its abstraction with the help of the content of the paragraph (e.g. he finds an abstract image of a port in the paragraph blessing all ports).[96]

[96] Ibid., 175

If we take, in conjunction with Wees' analysis, Perloff's claim that the manifestos of this period abandon the paragraph in favor of the page, a different aspect of the manifesto's geometry comes into view. Let us look at a few complete pages of *Blast*'s first manifesto and conduct Wees' method on them:[97]



BLAST HUMOUR

Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness.
Arch enemy of **REAL**, conventionalizing like
gunshot, freezing supple
REAL in ferocious chemistry
of laughter.

BLAST SPORT

HUMOUR'S FIRST COUSIN AND ACCOMPLICE.

Impossibility for Englishman to be
grave and keep his end up,
psychologically.
Impossible for him to use Humour
as well and be persistently
grave.
Alas! necessity for big doll's show
in front of mouth.
Visitation of Heaven on
English Miss
gums, canines of **FIXED GRIN**
Death's Head symbol of Anti-Life.

CURSE those who will hang over this
Manifesto with **SILLY CANINES** exposed.

BLESS ALL PORTS.

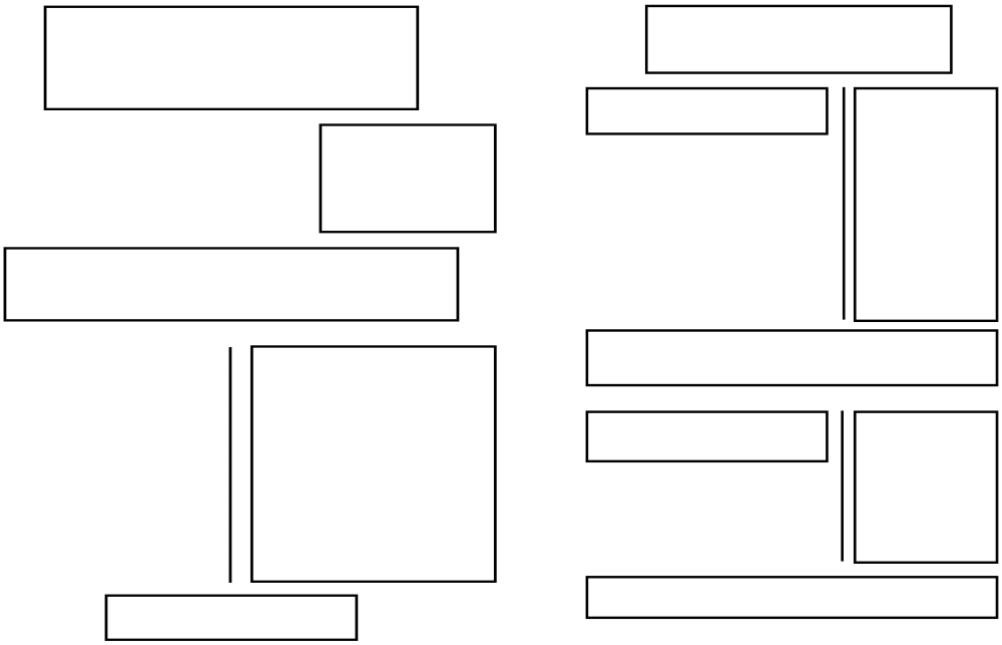
PORTS, RESTLESS MACHINES of
scooped out basins
heavy insect dredgers
monotonous cranes
stations
lighthouses, blazing
through the frosty
starlight, cutting the
storm like a cake
beaks of infant boats,
side by side,
heavy chaos of
wharves,
steep walls of
factories
womanly town

BLESS these **MACHINES** that work the little boats across
clean liquid space, in beelines.

BLESS the great **PORTS**
HULL
LIVERPOOL
LONDON
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE
BRISTOL
GLASGOW

BLESS ENGLAND,
industrial island machine, pyramidal

[97] Wyndham Lewis, "Manifesto I," *BLAST* (Vol.1 No. 1), 23, 17



Out of this process comes the above abstract compositions. The blessing of the ports does consistently represent ports throughout the page, totally keeping with its subject matter and being a prime working example of Wees' approach. However, the passage in which Lewis blesses humour and sport are in a similar, almost port-like style. This, to my eye, does not represent any common element of sport or humour, and suggests that we should look beyond representation via shape.

When looking at the above compositions as page designs, instead of paragraph-based shapes, a motivator of their organization is revealed. The block-like compositions that run down the page and are often separated by lines imitate the commercial magazines of the day, especially the advertisement sections of such magazines. For example, here is an advertising page from the September 1913 volume of *Vanity Fair*.[98]

[98] *Vanity Fair*, September 1913, 64

64

MOORHEAD & JARDINE COMPANY

Specialists in

HIGH GRADE TAILORED AND SEMI-DRESS

HATS

(WHOLESALE ONLY)

The Quality of materials used by us, perfection of style and workmanship and unusual design, insure Hats of distinction.

Our policy of not selling two dealers in a city the same styles assures absolute exclusiveness.

Reproductions of French and English Models for Fall are now on display in only the best retail establishments.

MOORHEAD & JARDINE COMPANY

22 & 24 West 38th Street

NEW YORK

Of sapphire blue cheviot this smart suit is made, price, $25. An English sailor hat of white felt, $20.

Mannish sport coat of tweed. Nattier blue wool tuhel, price, $30. Soft velours hat of matching color, price, $8.50.

shade and is fastened with buttons of lapis lazuli that harmonize. Worn with it is a soft velours hat of matching color.

Just unpacked, and much too fascinating to be overlooked, is this Georgette chemise shown on this page. It is made of finest batiste trimmed with pointed Valenciennes lace. The cut closely follows that of a peasant's blouse even to the side fastening and belt, which is of ribbon run lace.

A new brassière and one that is sure to be well liked, is made of silk tricot. It is well cut, closes in back, and gives just the proper support necessary for a slight figure. It can be bought in white for $4.50.

For a full figure, another model is shown made of elastic webbing. This is held in place by elastic shoulder bands that are daintily covered with white satin ribbon. It is closed in front with hooks and lacing and can be bought for $6.50. This brassière supports the figure, but the elastic webbing gives it a soft pliable appearance that is so deplorably lacking in many brassières of the boned varieties.

We are to have our dancing slippers and sandals not only ornamented with buckles but with an entirely new and most effective novelty, namely —jewelled eyelets, through which are to be threaded a narrow lacing ribbon. These eyelets come in sets of twelve with buckles to match and are made of rhinestones or of cut steel. One set had the eyelet ornament made of two tiny circles of rhinestones, set in aluminum.

Another novelty is a narrow bandeau for the evening coiffure consisting of colored tulle which threads rhinestone ornaments.

One of the most effective combinations of material is seen in the afternoon frock on page 60 where a plaid taffeta of cedar green and petrol blue is combined with petrol blue moiré. The under bodice sleeves, and simulated tunic, are of the plaid, while the over bodice and gracefully draped skirt are of moiré. The vest and Medici collar are of cream shadow lace and the tiny waistcoat effect is achieved by embroidering, on two pointed white tulle, Chinese motifs worked in colored worsted.

An unusual adaptation of the Spanish sailor's hat is shown with this frock. Gathered on a narrow beaded band of Indian design, is an unstiffened blue velvet tam with a soft knot in the centre through which is jauntily stuck a vulture's quill.

Ingenuously girlish is the next frock, illustrated on page 60, which is altogether lovely for dinner, or an informal dance. Over a pleated skirt of flesh colored crêpe de chine, which is pleated in clusters of three and hangs perfectly straight is worn an adorable jacket of Callot blue plush, with deep cream ruffles of lace and a fichu of cream tulle. The twice around girdle is of crêpe de chine matching the jacket in color and weighted with crystal fringe.

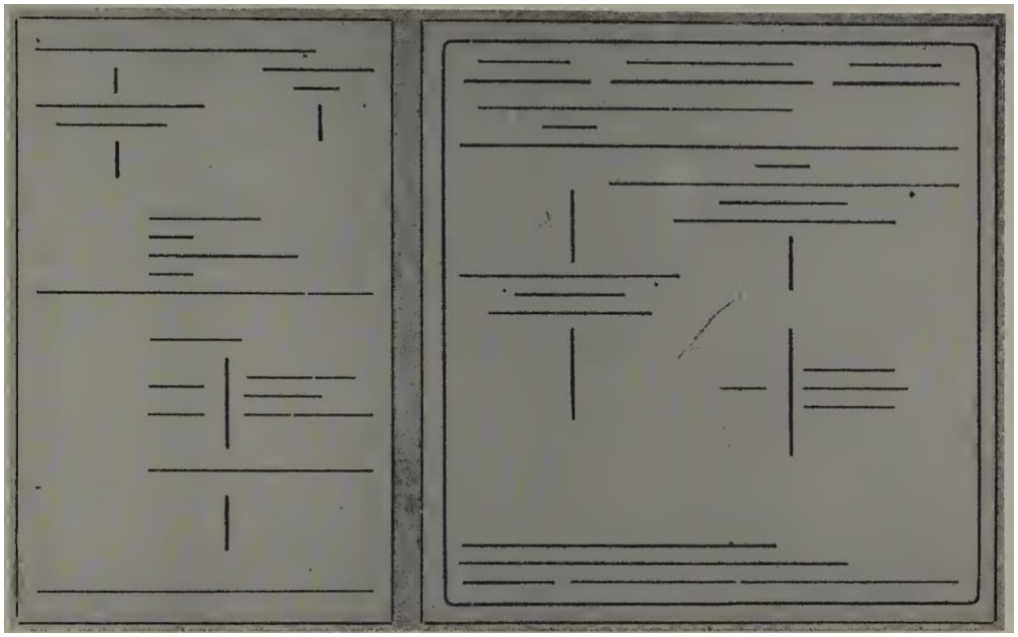
Georgette's "peasant's blouse" chemise of finest batiste trimmed with inserts of Valenciennes lace, price, $19.50.

The Shopping Service of Dress & Vanity Fair will purchase, on receipt of check or money order, any of the above articles.

DRESS & VANITY FAIR

Here, one sees a matching page layout. The *Vanity Fair* print is organized into distinct rectangular shapes, sometimes divided by lines. This sort of organization was common to mainstream magazines of the time and therefore would have been common for general printers of the day. Throughout the 1910s, this design was rapidly evolving and becoming more complex. As a result, the abstract shapes one would be able to suggest would become more complex as well. Johanna Drucker shows the advancement of magazine and newspaper printing techniques through a layout mockup for a commercial printer during the early 1920s that resembles the abstraction of an early Mondrian painting.[99]

[99] Johanna Drucker, *The Visible World: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 53-55

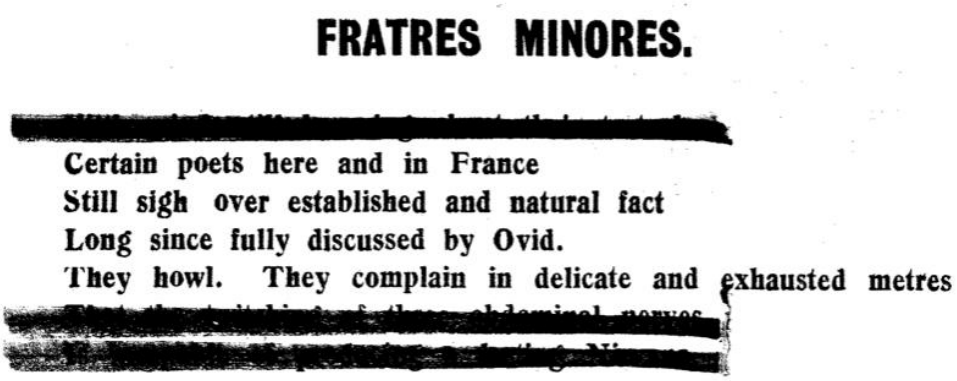


Thinking in the terms of rectangular blocks of information ordered on the page to best engage the reader would have thus been familiar to William Leveridge. While I am not asserting that Leveridge was then the main genius behind the innovative format of the *Blast* manifesto, I am asserting that the similarity between page layout for job printers of the time and the abstract shapes drawn by the manifesto suggests an element of collaboration between Leveridge and Lewis, rather than Lewis singularly taking on the task of design. It is likely, then, that *Blast*'s imitation of commercial publications and advertisements was not merely the avant-garde co-opting of these practices, but the implementation of them by a printer who would have been steeped in the practice.

Of the eleven poems featured in *Blast* written by Ezra Pound, "Fratres Minores" is the most revealing of the magazine's collaborative nature. While poems such as "Salutation the Third" and "The New Cake of Soap" show more semantic similarities with the explosiveness of the manifesto and the angularity of the plates, "Fratres Minores" exemplifies the collaborative spirit of the poetry and the geometry of the art. The poem features the aforementioned deletion,

decided by John Lane, enforced by Wyndham Lewis, and carried out by Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders. This deletion covers the actual poem of Ezra Pound, while covering the printing of William Leveridge. Here we see an ensemble of the magazine's contributors all working to create this poem on the page. No other page has this level of direct involvement among its members–even the page with the manifesto's signatures, an indirect material involvement (they did not actually sign their own names but had them printed), had a contested level of participation, as many signers were not involved or even not asked before their name was added.[100] Instead, we see here the massive number of people at work bringing the content of the page into fruition. The poem exists not just as an Ezra Pound poem in Wyndham Lewis' magazine, but as a collaborative creative and productive process between multiple parties.

In addition to collaboration, the poem also showcases the form dominating the semantic content. Let us look at how the deletion was carried out:[101]


FRATRES MINORES.

Certain poets here and in France
Still sigh over established and natural fact
Long since fully discussed by Ovid.
They howl. They complain in delicate and exhausted metres

The lines of the poem are transformed into black bars which dominate the writing. They become more ink on the page, filling the white space that would have been left by the gaps in the words. The "deletion," or absence of the semantic content, then manifests as an increased

[100] William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 178-179
[101] Ezra Pound, "Fratres Minores," *Blast* (Vol. 1 No. 1 1914), 48

presence. The black bars are fuller, more present than the lines they surround. They assert themselves, through their size and fullness, to be on the level of the bolded text that sits as the title of the poem. We see, thus, the geometric form taking precedence over the content of the poem. As they sit equal with the lines of poetry, they are incorporated into the poem, and read as if Pound were beginning the poem with a black bar and ending with two black bars. They seem to serve as a counterpoint to and final surpassing of the "exhausted metre" of which he complains in the poem.

This dominance of the geometric over the literary also shows the preference of Lewis at the time. In a 1949 letter to the editor of the *Partisan Review*, which attributed the production of *Blast* to Ezra Pound, he wrote:

> …nothing was being written just then that seemed within a million leagues of the stark radicalism of the visuals. It was with regret I included the poems of my friend Ezra Pound: they 'let down,' I felt, the radical purism of the visual contents, or the propaganda of the same…. Pound, however, cheered things up a little by a couple of 'fresh' lines: namely 'The twitching of two abdominal muscles. Cannot be a lasting nirvana.' John Lane, the publisher of Blast, asked me to come and see him, and I was obliged to allow him to black out these two lines. Happily the black bars laid across them by the printer were transparent. This helped the sales.[102]

In his send up of the "visuals" over the poems, Lewis seems to overlook the geometric nature of the black bars. He appreciates their transparency (which does not seem to be the case in the copy excerpted above, but as they were applied by hand, they are likely of varying consistency) but misses that they insert into the poem the very visual starkness he was appreciating in the visuals. The poem becomes a visual form, much in the same way that the manifesto does. By ceding the content of the poem to the geometry, Lewis' preference for the visual is exercised. Lewis' lack of intention (and even power) in executing this shows that the

[102] Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 491

harsh visuality of the poem (and of *Blast*) may have been in line with Lewis' visual agenda but did not wholly spring from it. Collaboration allowed for it to enter the page as we now read it.

From this reading of excerpts of *Blast*, we see glimpses of the truly collaborative, production-influenced nature of the content of the text. The magazine's most iconic components–the cover, the manifesto, and Pound's contributions–all exist not just as literary content determined by authors, but as material components of the page. This materiality defines one's phenomenological experience of the literary content. The contributions of Lane, Leveridge, and others thus become important to factor into a close reading of the magazine.

Vortex 5: "Long Live the Vortex!"

Out of an analysis of *Blast*'s production history and content comes a view of the magazine as a collaborative product determined by the hands of many. The contributions of those outside of the usual historical narrative of *Blast*, most prominently John Lane and William Leveridge, play a large role in how *Blast* is read, both at the time of its publication and now. Factors such as when it was published, its design, and even the content of the magazine itself were determined through the collaboration of many parties, instead of by the discretion and intention of Wyndham Lewis alone. This historical re-orientation of the narrative around the review defies an account that focuses on auteurship, or even one that focuses on the merely artistic-literary contributions of fellow writers and painters. Viewing *Blast*'s production in a scope that looks to more than its literary invention allows for it to be seen not merely as a material entity, but rather as a product for consumption. This new scope, fundamentally both material and historic, opens the door for further historical analyses and close readings of the document that would precipitate a more holistic understanding of this moment of avant-garde invention in English literature.

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