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# The Periodical as a Playhouse: Wyndham Lewis's 'Enemy of the Stars' in *Blast* (1914)

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## ABSTRACT

Modernist plays in the early twentieth century often resisted the theatre. Many circulated in print, in 'little magazines' dedicated to literature and the arts. Using Wyndham Lewis's 'Enemy of the Stars' (1914) as a case study, this article considers what the medium of the little magazine offered modernist playwrights. The article first engages with some of Lewis's earlier periodical publications and his interest in contemporary crowd theory, to trace how his attitude towards performance and the masses developed. Comparing the periodical publication of Lewis's experimental play to a 1932 revision in book form then reveals that it is precisely the magazine's dramatic potential that allowed Lewis to stage a closet play to be read by the individual, instead of watched by the masses that he despised. This article thereby argues for an understanding of the modernist periodical as a highly performative medium, and acknowledges its vital role in shaping modernist aesthetics.

## KEYWORDS

little magazines, modernist drama, closet drama, Wyndham Lewis

In 1937, modernist poet and critic Ezra Pound published an essay in the literary magazine *Criterion*, in which he reflected on the work of Wyndham Lewis. The two had collaborated on *Blast* (1914), a short-lived little magazine of only two editions, which featured as its central contribution a play by Lewis entitled 'Enemy of the Stars'. Pound commends the 'vividness' of the play, noting that '[w]hen Lewis writes for the eye, he is visible'. Despite this visual dimension, Pound claims that 'Enemy of the Stars' was a radio drama before the radio: it was 'printed in 1914, impossible of presentation by any medium save the human voice carried through the black air', and certainly unsuited to the 'material theatre'. According to him, '[t]he play has waited a technique for its presentation'.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Pound was concerned about the most suitable medium for this unconventional modernist drama, dismissing both print and the theatre. This article argues for a reevaluation of the dramatic potential of its original medium of publication: the modernist little magazine.

Although others have agreed that 'Enemy of the Stars' was unstageable, Pound had a more general distaste for the theatre, which he claimed was an improper medium for modernist art — including drama.<sup>2</sup> He was not alone in this: a significant tradition in modernism actively defined itself against theatre.<sup>3</sup> This is typically attributed to modernism's fear of mass culture and the public sphere: in *After the Great Divide*, one of the seminal works on the relationship between modernism and mass culture, Andreas Huyssen writes that '[m]odernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture'. Modernism's resistance of the theatre is often seen as just another facet of this.<sup>4</sup>

Theatre was firmly associated with both commerce and mass audiences. Theatre managers were known to be 'proportionally the most active advertisers in any given community', and advertising was seen by some as a menace to literary standards.<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu notes that the theatre was associated in the late nineteenth century with 'the representatives of "bourgeois art"', assuring writers 'significant material benefits (the theater was by far the most remunerative literary activity), but also all the tokens of success in the bourgeois world'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, professional performers were often an important tool for advertisers, regularly appearing in testimonials.<sup>7</sup> The perceived affinity between theatre, commercialism, and the public sphere was key within the resistance of some modernists to the stage. Authors like T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence,

1 Ezra Pound, 'D'Artagnan Twenty Years After', in *Selected Prose, 1909–1965*, ed. by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973 [1937]), pp. 422–30 (p. 424).

2 See e.g. Anthony Paraskeva, *The Speech-Gesture Complex: Modernism, Theatre, Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 89. For Pound's views on theatre, see e.g. a letter to James Joyce, 6–12? September 1915, in Ezra Pound, *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 46.

3 Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 2–3. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, trans. by Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Dover Pub, 1995 [1872]); Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217–51.

4 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (London: Palgrave, 1986), p. vii. See also Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, 'Introduction: Modernism and Anti-Theatricality', in *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, ed. by Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1–17 (p. 2); Stefan Hulfeld, 'Modernist Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, ed. by David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 15–32 (p. 25).

5 "Should the Advertiser Be the Author's Paymaster?", *Advertiser's Weekly*, 61 (1929), 440–41, 466–67 (p. 440); see e.g. Pound, 'Patria Mia' (1913), in *Patria Mia and the Treatise on Harmony* (London: Peter Owen, 1962), pp. 8–37 (p. 29).

6 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Flaubert's Point of View', *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), 539–62 (p. 550).

7 Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 101–02.

and Pound were also highly critical of having to rely on (potentially mediocre) actors, contributing to their distrust of theatre.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some modernists believed that serious art was best consumed in private, preferably in the study, and certainly not as part of a crowd in the theatre.<sup>9</sup> The demands of High Modernism and theatre were, seemingly, at odds with each other, contributing to persistent displays of anti-theatricality.

It is, then, perhaps unsurprising that many modernist plays in the early twentieth century circulated in print, often in so-called little magazines (non-commercial periodicals dedicated to literature and the arts). Modernist works of ‘closet drama’ actively resisted the stage, and, according to drama scholar Martin Puchner, sought to ‘de-imagine, de-visualize, and de-theatricalize the act of reading drama’.<sup>10</sup> Puchner argues that closet dramas previously relied on the imagination of audiences, whereas modernist closet plays deliberately challenged it due to their aversion towards audiences and performers. Without necessarily contesting this argument, this article aims to expand it by looking beyond anti-theatricality as an explanation for plays published in print, considering instead what the medium of the little magazine offered modernist playwrights.<sup>11</sup> It aims, in other words, to find what drama in periodicals might have helped authors *achieve*, instead of focusing on what it helped them *avoid*. After all, with their time-bound publication and ‘virtually instant obsolescence’, periodicals themselves are perhaps closer to performances than to the book.<sup>12</sup> I argue that little magazines themselves had enormous performative potential, which contributed to the artistic aims of those modernist authors who published print drama.

To illustrate this, I take Wyndham Lewis’s ‘Enemy of the Stars’ (1914) as a case study. The play was printed in the first (and penultimate) edition of *Blast*, which was written primarily by Lewis, but also featured contributions by Pound and avant-garde artists like Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and sculptor Jacob Epstein. Like many modernists, Lewis was suspicious of mass publics and mass culture, and *Blast* often thematizes both. Arguably its central work, ‘Enemy of the Stars’ is not a traditional playscript: besides Pound’s suggestion that it was an early radio drama, it has been variously identified as an experimental short story, a prose-poem, or as a hybrid form between closet drama and prose.<sup>13</sup> However, taking it seriously as dramatic form and performance opens up a discussion of the theatrical possibilities of the little magazine as a medium — despite Pound’s suggestion that radio would have been better-suited. In fact, by comparing the first publication of the play to a 1932 revision, I argue that it is precisely the magazine’s dramatic potential that allowed Lewis to stage a closet play to be read by the individual, instead of watched by the masses.

8 See e.g. T. S. Eliot, ‘The Possibility of a Poetic Drama’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. 60–70 (p. 69); D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 189; Ezra Pound, ‘Mr. James Joyce and the Modern Stage: A Play and Some Considerations’, in *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound’s Essays on Joyce*, ed. by Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1967), pp. 52–53.

9 See e.g. T. E. Hulme, ‘A Lecture on Modern Poetry’, in *T. E. Hulme*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Faber and Faber, 1938 [1908]), pp. 258–70 (p. 266).

10 Puchner, p. 39.

11 Little magazines were supported by patrons rather than advertising; their name refers to their limited circulation, although the magazines were typically also small in size and short in lifespan. In spite of this, they had a lasting cultural influence, and some argue that ‘modernism began in the magazines’. See Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 43.

12 Patrick Collier, *Modern Print Artefacts: Textual Materiality and Literary Value in British Print Culture, 1890–1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 15.

13 See, for instance, Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 141; David Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 57; Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, 2 vols (London: Gordon Fraser, 1975), i, p. 243; William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. 182.

## Mass Media and ‘Teaching Machines’

Before writing ‘Enemy of the Stars’, Lewis already showed an interest in forms of public entertainment, such as the circus, in both his writing and his paintings. In August 1909, his short story ‘Les Saltimbanques’ was published in the *English Review*: the title recalls Picasso’s 1905 painting *Famille de saltimbanques*, depicting six circus performers. In this short sketch, Lewis repeatedly expressed disdain for the audience of the circus: the performers ‘looked upon the public as a vast beast, with a very simple but perverse character, differing from any separate man’s, the important trait of which was an insatiable longing for their performances’.<sup>14</sup> His conceptualization of the audience — an ignorant ‘mob of people’ looking for cheap entertainment — echoes contemporary crowd theory. Gustave Le Bon’s *Psychologie des foules* (1895, translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*) was, at the time, perhaps the best-known and most-read work on the psychological characteristics of crowds.<sup>15</sup> Le Bon argued that the crowd was essentially a ‘single being’ with a ‘collective mind’ that overruled the minds of its individual members: for an individual in a crowd, ‘[t]he conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost. All feelings and thoughts are bent in the direction determined by the hypnotizer.’<sup>16</sup> He lists several principal characteristics of crowd psychology: he claims that crowds are ‘credulous and readily influenced by suggestion’; that they are easily excited; and that they are ‘instinctively hostile to changes and progress’.<sup>17</sup> The crowd was perceived as complacent, suggestible, and easy to manipulate. Lewis’s descriptions of the audience are similar: they are described as a single being that lacks discernment, expressing glee at ‘any stupid trick done by one of these accredited acrobats that they themselves could do twice as well’.<sup>18</sup> In this short story, Lewis thus criticizes the indiscriminate tastes of a mass audience, and its mindless consumption of cheap entertainment.

Mass media were essential to the development of the modern crowd. In 1914, art-historian William Martin Conway wrote that ‘[p]rinting, the telegraph, and the various modern developments and inventions which we are all familiar with, have made crowd-formation possible without personal contact’.<sup>19</sup> Lewis was often highly critical of mass media, and suspicious of its producers and consumers alike, partly because he believed that (mass) media could shape the (destiny of the) public. In 1967, media-theorist Marshall McLuhan stated that Lewis introduced him to the idea of ‘the man-made environment’ as a ‘programmed teaching machine’ and ‘a mechanism for shaping sensibility’.<sup>20</sup> However, if media could function as a teaching machine for the population, it was necessary to expose people to the right materials. Lewis was concerned that the public ‘has been degraded by commercial standards’ and that ‘the artist has been [...] kept away from them’.<sup>21</sup> In his writing, he worries about the manipulation of the susceptible mass public by second-rate commercial artists and

14 Wyndham Lewis, ‘Les Saltimbanques’, *English Review*, 3 (1909), 76–78 (pp. 76–77).

15 Robert Nye, ‘Savage Crowds, Modernism and Modern Politics’, in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. by Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 42–55.

16 Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002 [1895]), p. 7.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

19 William Martin Conway, *The Crowd in Peace and War* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), p. 15.

20 Marshall McLuhan, ‘Wyndham Lewis Recalled’, flexi-disc, 33 1/3 r.p.m, incl. in *Artscanada*, 114 (1967) (audio recording).

21 Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: A Narrative of My Career Up-to-Date* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), p. 24.

entertainers. In *Blast* 2 (1915), he proclaimed that ‘if Tube Posters, Magazine Covers, Advertisement and Commercial Art generally, were ABSTRACT, in the sense that our paintings at present are, they would be far less harmful to the EYE, and thence to the minds, of the Public’.<sup>22</sup> He also announced that ‘[t]here should be a Bill passed in Parliament at once FORBIDDING ANY IMAGE OR RECOGNIZABLE SHAPE TO BE STUCK UP IN ANY PUBLIC PLACE; or as advertisement or what-not, to be used in any way publicly’.<sup>23</sup> His problem was not with advertising, commercial art, and cinema as such, but rather with their form: in Lewis’s view, media shaped the public, so the public should be exposed to media produced by (Vorticist or abstract) artists, instead of men of commerce.

*Blast*’s opening piece, ‘Long Live the Vortex’, clarifies what kind of public *Blast* intended to create. Part of its aim was to distinguish Vorticism from Futurism: C. R. W. Nevinson, initially a contributor to *Blast*, had signed Lewis’s name under a Futurist manifesto, but Lewis ‘was far too ambitious to settle for recruitment under another man’s aesthetic banner’ and founded a movement of his own.<sup>24</sup> Lewis wrote that ‘*Blast* set out to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way’.<sup>25</sup> He aimed for the magazine to ‘be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instinct in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL, [...] this timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody’.<sup>26</sup> This suggests a desire to appeal to a large and varied audience, but not *as* mass audience. Similarly, Lewis’s dismissal of the public in the circus is not necessarily grounded in classism, but rather in a criticism of the mindset of masses (rather than ‘the masses’). In ‘Long Live the Vortex’, Lewis dismisses class formation: ‘The Man in the Street and the Gentlemen are equally ignored’. Vorticism is ‘against the glorification of “the People”, as we are against snobbery’: it is intended to be neither elitist nor populist. Instead, *Blast* is for ‘those simple and great people found everywhere. *Blast* presents an art of Individuals’.<sup>27</sup>

The little magazine was, perhaps, an ideal medium for this because unlike commercial art and advertising, it did not reach a mass public. A limited number of copies of *Blast* were distributed, and Andrzej Gasiorek notes that ‘anecdotal evidence suggests that [distribution] centred mainly on London, with various Vorticists and their allies wandering around with copies for sale tucked under their arms or deposited under restaurant seats on the off-chance that someone might show an interest’.<sup>28</sup> If this is accurate, this haphazard approach to distribution outside usual communication channels arguably served *Blast*’s aim ‘to make individuals, *wherever found*’, rather than reaching a large collective.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Blast*: Theatrics in Print**

The claim that *Blast* presented ‘an art of Individuals’ applies not only to its intended public but also to its production: many contributors were involved in making *Blast*, and as Gasiorek points out, ‘Vorticism comprised a diverse set of practices and was not

22 Wyndham Lewis, ‘A Review of Contemporary Art’, *Blast: A Review of the Great English Vortex*, 2 (1915), 38–47 (p. 47).

23 Ibid.

24 Andrzej Gasiorek, ‘The “Little Magazine” as Weapon: *Blast* (1914–15)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1: Britain and Ireland 1880–1955*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 290–19 (p. 293).

25 Lewis, ‘Long Live the Vortex’, *Blast* (1914), n.p.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Gasiorek, p. 293.

29 Lewis, ‘Long Live the Vortex’, n.p. My emphasis.

a tight-knit movement'.<sup>30</sup> Reviewer J. C. Squire (under pen name 'Solomon Eagle') notably dismissed *Blast's* Vorticists as 'a heterogenous mob', and believed Vorticism was therefore not a movement at all.<sup>31</sup> This heterogeneity dovetails with the aims outlined in *Blast's* manifestoes; it might even be read as a *performance* of its manifestoes. *Blast* was a magazine of varied artistic personalities and aesthetics that persistently advocated for artistic independence and pronounced a suspicion of collectives and (other) movements. Again, this is in line with Le Bon's argument in *The Crowd*, where he writes that '[t]o belong to a school is necessarily to espouse its prejudices and preconceived opinions'.<sup>32</sup>

In advocating against the crowd mindset, Lewis was not averse to the strategies of commercial mass media. He acknowledged that if the artist's aim was to reshape public consciousness, '[a] necessary part of this work was of course propaganda: without that the public would merely conclude that a few artists had gone mad, and take no further notice of what they did'.<sup>33</sup> He relied on the typography of mainstream commercial advertising to market *Blast*, publishing a full-page advertisement with a screaming headline in the *Egoist* in April 1914 (Fig. 1). It pushed aside the other adverts in the magazine ('conservative notices for books and journals featuring traditional typography, complete sentences, and abstemious claims') and demanded the reader's attention with its large, boldface type, use of capitalization for emphasis, and exaggerated white spaces.<sup>34</sup> The advert is visually striking compared to those usually placed in *The Egoist* and 'invoked the sensational language, the telegraphic messages, and the outlandish promises of commercial advertising', promising the potential readers 'NO Pornography', 'NO Old Pulp', and, in all capitals, the 'END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA'.<sup>35</sup> *Blast's* marketing relied on the aesthetics and discourse of contemporary advertising, 'which insisted that advertising was a shocking, invasive, distinctly modern, and visceral — rather than simply intellectual — cultural form'.<sup>36</sup>

Aesthetics of advertising are also echoed in *Blast* itself. It was, in Lewis's words, 'the hugest and pinkest of all magazines', a large, rectangular magazine of one hundred and sixty-one pages with a bright pink cover, with '*BLAST*' printed diagonally across the front in bold, black, capital letters (Fig. 2).<sup>37</sup> This made it stand out from other magazines and, instead, made it resemble contemporary street posters, illuminating signs, and front-page adverts. The cover was followed by equally loud contents: the 'layout and typography shouted at [the reader] like penny press headlines and advertising posters', relying heavily on bold and upper case. Its manifestoes consisted of formal, abstract designs with text blocks that varied in size, spacing, and line length, often composed on the page according to abstract shapes with diverse vertical and horizontal elements. *Blast* has a palpable spatial sense, and Lewis's own contributions in particular explored the visual possibilities offered by print as a medium, using techniques of mass media in its design.

Lewis writes in *Blast* that the successful artist today aspires to a complicated 'orchestra of media', commenting that the 'preparation for this taking-in of other media has for effect a breaking up of the values of beauty, etc., in contemporary painting' and that '[t]he possibilities of colour, exploitation of discords, odious combinations, etc.,

30 Gasiorek, p. 301.

31 Solomon Eagle, 'Current Literature: Books in General', *New Statesman*, 3.65 (1914), 406.

32 Le Bon, p. iii.

33 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 125.

34 Paige Reynolds, "Chaos Invading Concept": *Blast* as Native Theory of Promotional Culture', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46 (2000), 238–68, (p. 238).

35 Reynolds, p. 240; *Egoist*, 1.7 (1914).

36 Reynolds, p. 246.

37 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 125.

140 THE EGOIST April 1st, 1914

READY APRIL.

# BLAST

EDITED BY  
WYNDHAM LEWIS.

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To be published Quarterly. First Number will contain

## MANIFESTO

Story by Wyndham Lewis.  
Poems by Ezra Pound.

Reproductions of Drawings, Paintings, and Sculpture  
by  
Etchells, Nevinson, Lewis, Hamilton, Brzeska,  
Wadsworth, Epstein, Roberts, etc., etc.

*Twenty Illustrations.*

*Price 2s. 6d. Annual Subscription 10s. 6d.*  
*America 65 cents. „ \$2.50.*

Discussion of Cubism, Futurism, Imagisme and all  
Vital Forms of Modern Art.

THE CUBE. THE PYRAMID.

Putrification of Guffaws Slain by Appearance of  
BLAST.

NO Pornography. NO Old Pulp.

### END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

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*All Subscriptions should be addressed to BLAST, Newman St., W.C.*  
*Cheques payable to "Blast."*

Printed by ROBERT JOHNSON & CO., LTD., 28, Tulketh Street, Southport, and published by the Proprietors,  
THE NEW FREEWOMAN, LTD., at Oakley House, Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.

Fig. 1 Advertisement for Blast in the *Egoist*, 1.7 (1914) [The Modernist Journals Project](#).

have been little exploited. [...] [T]here are fields of discord untouched.<sup>38</sup> Lewis aimed for iconoclasm in the magazine, disrupting the dividing lines between the techniques of art and mass culture. Although advertising and cheap newspapers were the obvious media of influence, Lewis later claimed that the first issue of *Blast* was ‘not unlike a telephone book’: indeed, its blocky letters and ‘the free-floating lists of names and

38 Wyndham Lewis, ‘Orchestra of Media’, *Blast*, 1 (1914), 142.

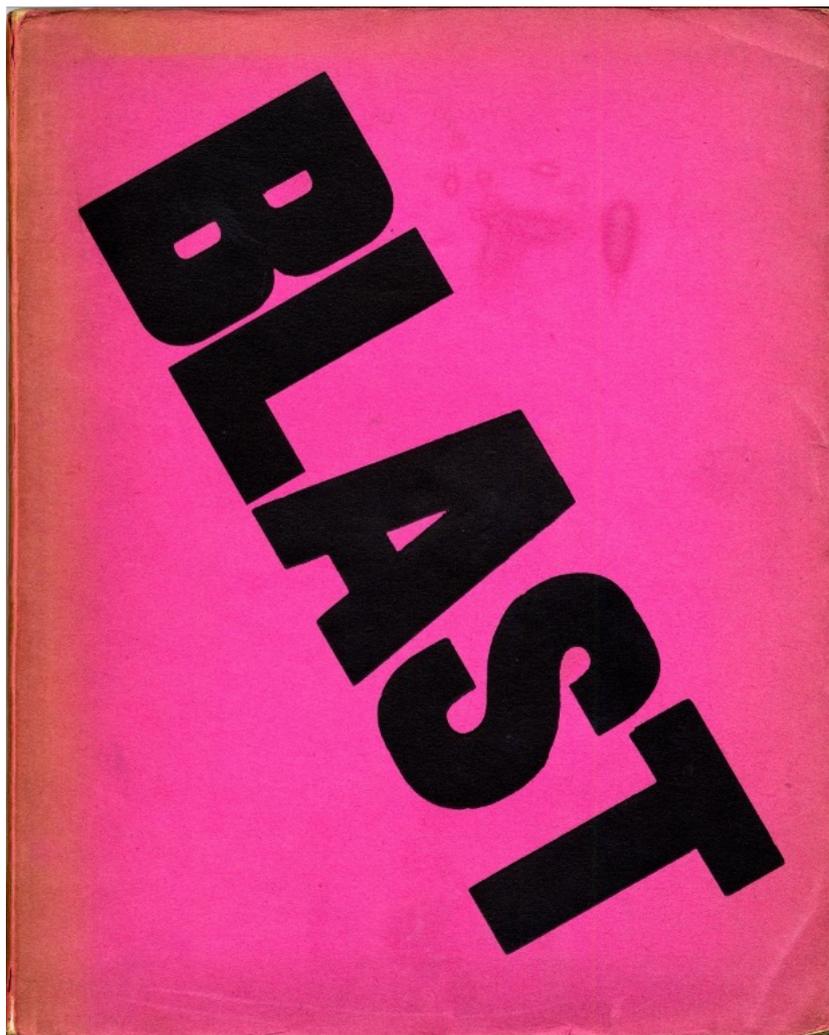


Fig. 2 Cover of *Blast*, 1 (1914), The Modernist Journals Project.

numbered clauses printed on heavy brown paper' might evoke this connection, thereby connecting the magazine to another technological medium of communication.<sup>39</sup> By adopting stylistic conventions of phone books, newspapers, front-page adverts, and other types of commercial print, Lewis 'signals *Blast's* connectedness to the channels of mass communication'.<sup>40</sup>

Similarities between *Blast* and mass communication do not stop at visual resemblances. The magazine's numerous manifestoes also relied on techniques of (self-)promotion. In the first manifesto, Lewis 'blasts' and 'blesses' numerous countries, institutions, public figures, and even time periods: he BLASTS England; France (for its 'sentimental gallic gush', 'sensationalism', and 'fussiness'); and the years 1837-1900. He blasts humour, 'arch enemy of REAL'; sport, 'humour's first cousin and accomplice'; and the 'gloomy Victorian circus'.<sup>41</sup> The manifesto resembles the contemporary advertising technique of celebrity endorsements: in the late nineteenth and early

39 Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering: Autobiography, 1914-1926* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1992 [1937]), p. 41; Tom Holland, 'Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and the Crowd' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2004), p. 84.

40 Holland, p. 84.

41 Wyndham Lewis, 'Manifesto I', *Blast*, 1 (1914), 11-29 (pp. 11, 13, 17, 18, 19).

twentieth century, testimonials were at the heart of modern advertising, and product endorsements would ‘both derive from and confer the prestige and authority of those who testify to the worthiness’ of a brand, product, or experience.<sup>42</sup> In other words, testimonials helped promote both the endorsed product and the endorser. In the case of *Blast*, the manifesto presumed the authority of Lewis and his fellow Vorticists to judge those who were blasted and blessed.

The affinity between *Blast* and commercial print goes beyond aesthetic resemblances and operates on the level of form as well as content. Lewis was evidently willing to adopt advertising techniques to get the attention of the public, and he later made it clear that he likewise wanted advertising to adopt Vorticist techniques, so that the public would no longer be exposed to substandard visual materials. Integrating the techniques of mass print and avant-garde aesthetics was meant to teach the public ‘[t]o be of the Crowd and individually conscious’.<sup>43</sup>

### Starring Roles

Of course, *Blast* did not reach ‘the Crowd’: only 1700 copies were planned.<sup>44</sup> The magazine relied on the aesthetics of commercial advertising not to sell or to appeal to a mass audience, but to provoke. In this, it certainly succeeded: *the Little Review* described the cover of *Blast* as ‘the color of an acute sick-headache’; in *Poetry*, it was described as ‘a bright cerise cover that makes one feel as if the outer cuticle had been removed’.<sup>45</sup> With its loud cover, daring typography, and a title that might be interpreted as a curse, *Blast* was aggressive, designed to attract attention and jolt people out of complacency.

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the centerpiece of *Blast* was called ‘Enemy of the Stars’, a play that thematizes conflict. The plot of ‘Enemy of the Stars’ can be briefly summarized as follows: Arghol is beaten each night by a mysterious uncle; Hanp is Arghol’s disciple who tries to convince him to fight back. One night, Arghol beats Hanp in a fight, after which Hanp stabs him to death in his sleep and proceeds to drown himself in a canal. This play is framed as *Blast*’s most important work. It is first mentioned in the ‘Errata’ even before the table of contents. Page 51 of the issue is blank except for the title of the play, printed in capitals and in bold in the centre of the page. Page 53, similarly, is blank except for the title (this time underlined), and below, a note: ‘synopsis in programme’. The play is difficult to overlook or gloss over because the issue persistently draws attention to it. Its title indicates struggle, echoing *Blast*’s thematic and aesthetic preoccupation with provocation and discord.

The play continued to be significant to Lewis, who released a revised version of it in 1932. Materially, the two editions are very different: the 1914 original was part of *Blast*, while the 1932 revision was published on its own, in a red cloth-backed edition, and is almost twice as long as the original. According to Modernist expert Hugh Kenner, the revised version was ‘issued in a luxurious, elaborate, but less intelligible form’.<sup>46</sup> Of course, the original was not wholly intelligible either: scholarship finds it difficult to agree on what, exactly, the form of ‘Enemy of the Stars’ is. Although the text is explicitly described as a play, the 1914 edition does not follow the conventions

42 Marlis Schweitzer and Marina Moskowitz, ‘Introduction’, in *Testimonial Advertising in the American Marketplace: Emulation, Identity, Community*, ed. by Marlis Schweitzer and Marina Moskowitz (New York: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 1–22 (p. 5).

43 Wyndham Lewis, ‘The Crowd Master’, *Blast*, 2 (1915), 94–104 (p. 99); cf. Holland, p. 87.

44 Wees, p. 160.

45 ‘E. T.’, ‘Blast’, *Little Review*, 1 (1914), 33; ‘Our Contemporaries’, *Poetry*, 1 (1914), 33–34 (p. 44).

46 Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen & Co, 1954), p. 91.

of a script. There are no visual distinctions between speech and stage directions, and speakers are not indicated for dialogue; the text on the page resembles the conventions of prose more than those of drama. Additionally — as an editorial in *The Little Review* pointed out — [s]even-tenth of it consists of stage directions.<sup>47</sup>

In practice, most of these are not directions in the conventional sense at all — that is, they do not convey to actors or designers how the play might be performed on stage. Instead, they are prose descriptions that would not transfer into performance: for instance, when Lewis describes Arghol's relief at hearing Hanp's voice, '[t]he strain of this mock life, or real life, rather, was tremendous on his underworld of energy and rebellious muscles. This cold outburst was not commensurate with it.'<sup>48</sup> This is not an instruction for those involved in the staging, but a narrative comment on the protagonist's experience. As I mentioned previously, several scholars have therefore suggested that 'Enemy of the Stars' is not really a play, but merely *claims* to be drama. However, refusing to read 'Enemy of the Stars' as a play means neglecting interpretations that emerge if the work is taken seriously as a dramatic text — and perhaps it should be, since *Blast* repeatedly announces it as such, and the text itself explicitly mentions theatrical elements such as scenes, stage descriptions, and actors. The 'Errata', described as '(Mistakes in "ENEMY OF STARS," etc.)', already warns readers to 'note the wrong placing of Page "The Play", which should come between Pages 60 and 61'.<sup>49</sup> Whether this was a genuine printing error or a performative effort to alert the reader to the dramatic form of 'Enemy of the Stars' is unclear, but either way, *Blast* continually draws attention to the play as a play from the first pages of the issue.

There is a clear shift in Lewis's approach to dramatic form from the 1914 to the 1932 edition. On its opening pages, the 1932 revision of 'Enemy of the Stars' still resembles a short story, but once 'THE DIALOGUE BEGINS', it mostly follows the conventions of a playscript, clearly distinguishing between stage directions and speech. Moreover, the stage directions in the revision are often performance instructions instead of narrative interruptions: they indicate movement ('Arghol sits up'; 'Hanp crawls forward') or tone (Hanp speaks 'in a violent snarl' or is described as 'jeering'; Arghol speaks 'mournfully').<sup>50</sup> Although the 1932 revision still contains lengthy prose-style interludes, much of it could be used as a playscript (and has been, in later adaptations). Meanwhile, the 1914 version has been described as 'strictly unperformable'.<sup>51</sup>

Arguably, however, the less performable edition is more theatrical. As previously mentioned, the 1914 edition is framed as *Blast's* most important work, its title appearing several times in the early pages of the issue. Before the play opens, it is announced in an ADVERTISEMENT (Fig. 3). Arguably, this integration of an ad into the play is just another example of *Blast's* iconoclastic integration of avant-garde art and mass media. However, there is a logic of genre behind its inclusion: playbills in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often carried advertising, so *Blast*, by adding the advertisement, adheres to contemporary practices of the theatre (though not of the play text). The 1932 revision, on the other hand, more closely follows the conventional

47 'E. T.', p. 34.

48 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', *Blast*, 1 (1914), 51–85 (p. 74).

49 'Errata', *Blast*, 1 (1914), 4.

50 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars', in *Wyndham Lewis: Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. by Alan Munton (New York: Persea Books, 1979 [1932]), pp. 141–91 (p. 152).

51 For a consideration of these theatrical productions, see Pei-Ying Wu, 'Visualising Wyndham Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars* as Theatrical Narrative' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Brighton, 2008). For claims that the play is 'unperformable', see Edwards, p. 142; cf. Julian Hanna, 'Vorticism and Avant-Gardism', in *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek and Nathan Waddell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 20–34 (p. 27). This view has been challenged by Wu, who has developed a model of interpretation and visual representation of the play for theatre practitioners.

## **ADVERTISEMENT**

### **THE SCENE.**

**SOME BLEAK CIRCUS, UNCOVERED,  
CAREFULLY-CHOSEN, VIVID NIGHT.  
IT IS PACKED WITH POSTERITY,  
SILENT AND EXPECTANT.  
POSTERITY IS SILENT, LIKE THE  
DEAD, AND MORE PATHETIC.**

### **CHARACTERS.**

**TWO HEATHEN CLOWNS, GRAVE BOOTH ANIMALS  
CYNICAL ATHLETES.**

### **DRESS.**

**ENORMOUS YOUNGSTERS, BURSTING EVERY-  
WHERE THROUGH HEAVY TIGHT CLOTHES,  
LABOURED IN BY DULL EXPLOSIVE MUSCLES,  
full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air,  
not sap. BLACK CLOTH CUT SOMEWHERE,  
NOWADAYS, ON THE UPPER BALTIC.**

**VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME.**

55

Fig. 3 'Advertisement', 'Enemy of the Stars', *Blast*, 1 (1914), *The Modernist Journals Project*.

form of a playscript but excludes the advertisement. Before the action of the play opens, Lewis also includes an announcement claiming that 'the box office receipts have been enormous'.<sup>52</sup> The statement insinuates that the play was a popular and commercial success in theatres — which it was not, since it was never staged — and seems to be an ironic commentary on equations between profit and value (interestingly, Lewis added this statement at a time when the reporting of box office receipts was not nearly as common as it is nowadays, although the magazine *Variety* started reporting box office grosses as early as 1925).<sup>53</sup> The 1914 play, complete with advertisement, consistently

52 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars' (1914), p. 61.

53 For a history of box office reporting, see Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing, *Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession* (New York: Hyperion, 2004).

references conventions of the theatre even though it fails to adhere to the conventions of dramatic script.<sup>54</sup>

'Enemy of the Stars', as it is presented in *Blast*, is extraordinarily visual.<sup>55</sup> Lewis claimed that with this play he was trying to 'keep pace with the visual revolution'.<sup>56</sup> The advertisement describes the scene ('some bleak circus, uncovered, carefully chosen, vivid night'), the characters ('two heathen clowns, grave booth animals cynical athletes'), and their dress ('enormous youngsters, bursting everywhere through heavy tight clothes, laboured in by dull explosive muscles, full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air').<sup>57</sup> Lewis's description resembles the one in 'Les Saltimbanques', where he comments on the circus performers' 'bulging muscles, painted faces and novel garb', and the choice of setting itself — a circus — likewise recalls some of his earlier works, including his 1913–14 painting *Circus Scene*.<sup>58</sup>

Lewis's characters, Arghol and Hanp, are described as wearing 'masks fitted with trumpets of antique theatre, with effect of two children blowing at each other with tin trumpets'.<sup>59</sup> This description recalls a reproduction of one of Lewis's paintings entitled *The Enemy of the Stars*, which follows the advertisement but precedes the action of the play (Fig. 4). *Enemy of the Stars* is one of five paintings included after the title page: Lewis's visual art works are, strictly speaking, part of the 1914 — but not the 1932 — play. Moreover, the opening pages of the 1914 play actively employ visual means by making use of evocative typography and text boxes: unlike the 1932 revision, it is textually performative, meant to be *seen* on the page.

If 'Enemy of the Stars' is not taken seriously as a play, it is a prose text that plays at being a play: it merely pretends to be a work of drama. Such an interpretation implies that the text *itself* is a performer or performance. If the text *is* read as a play, it is nevertheless clear from the text that it was not meant to be performed in theatres: the advertisement states that the play is '[v]ery well acted by you and me'.<sup>60</sup> Several years after the publication of *Blast*, Lewis would comment on the 'disappearance of the spectator' in *The Art of Being Ruled*, commenting on new Russian theatre and the breakdown of the distinction between spectator and spectacle, 'between the audience and the actor'.<sup>61</sup> In 'Enemy of the Stars', he breaks these barriers down himself: audience ('you') and author ('me') join together in performance of the play. The statement, which excludes performance in theatres, once again indicates that this is a play to be engaged with *individually* by the reader, rather than to be watched collectively. After all, Lewis claimed to be convinced that a crowd was incapable of critical engagement. This carries through into the play text itself: in 'Enemy of the Stars', Lewis's protagonist claims that '[a] thought weighs less in a million brains than in one'.<sup>62</sup> In print, on the pages of *Blast*, the play could reach a limited number of audience members as conscious individuals.

Circulation in print does not make 'Enemy of the Stars' any less theatrical. Arguably, the play is also a commentary on the performativity of the little magazine itself:

54 Cf. Anthony Paraskeva (p. 89), who notes that '[t]he play eludes the possibility of a staged production, and yet constantly refers to the performative body and the representational space of the theatre—the objects it seeks to resist'.

55 Hanna (p. 27) writes that the play attempted 'to replicate in prose [Lewis's] painterly experiments with abstraction'.

56 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 139.

57 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars' (1914), p. 55.

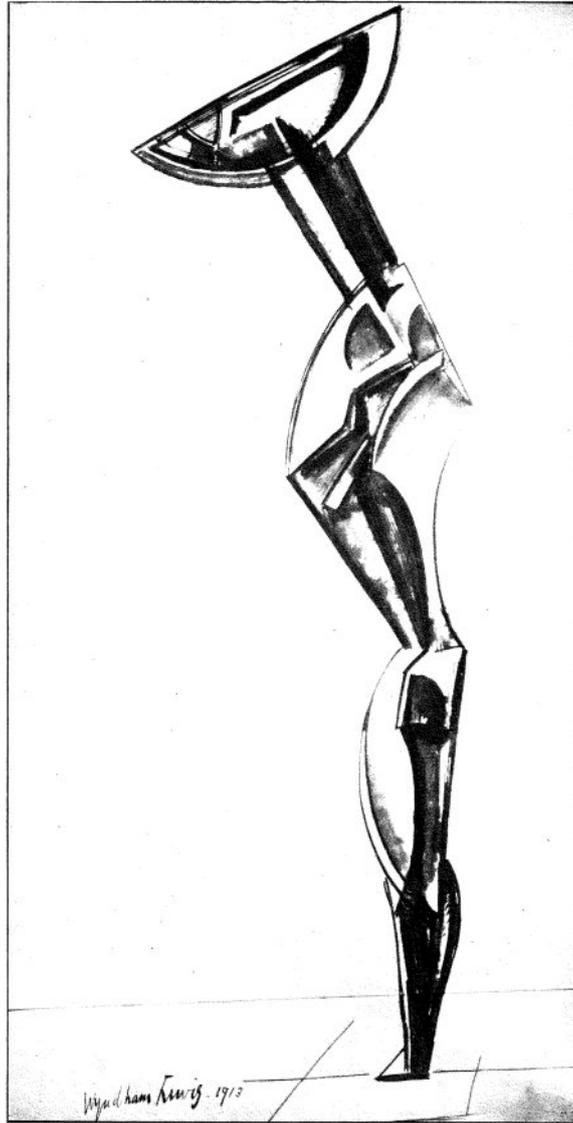
58 Lewis, 'Les Saltimbanques', p. 81. Cf. Louise Kane, 'Pre-War Writing', in *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek and Nathan Waddell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 5–19 (p. 17).

59 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars' (1914), p. 60.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

61 Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1926 [1989]), p. 158.

62 Lewis, 'Enemy of the Stars' (1914), p. 70.



The Enemy of the Stars. Wyndham Lewis.

Fig. 4 Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy of the Stars*, *Blast*, 1 (1914), [The Modernist Journals Project](#).

literary scholar Susanne Churchill convincingly argues that little magazines were, to an extent, 'more similar to theaters than books. Little magazines are intimate and social: they bring together an ensemble of writers into a small space, staging a performance for a familiar audience of likeminded people, who read each issue during the same limited time period.'<sup>63</sup> *Blast* was a collaborative endeavour by an ensemble of authors and artists, and it was visually oriented and highly dramatic. This was noted by some contemporary reviewers: Eunice Tietjens wrote for the *Little Review* that *Blast* 'makes his bow on the literary stage'.<sup>64</sup> More than merely a magazine, *Blast* is a performative event, and Lewis draws the audience into its performance space by announcing that 'Enemy of the Stars' is meant to be acted out, not by professional performers, but by

63 Suzanne W. Churchill, 'The Lying Game: *Others* and the Great Spectra Hoax of 1917', *American Periodicals*, 15 (2005), 23–41 (p. 24).

64 'E. T.', p. 34.

author and reader. Notably, the phrase — ‘very well acted by you and me’ — disappeared from the 1932 revision along with the advertisement. Once it was printed in a different medium (book instead of magazine), the performative dimension was apparently less relevant to Lewis.

The 1914 play opens with a description of one of the characters written in capitals: ‘[a] human bull rushes into the circus. This super is no more important than lounging star overhead. He is not even a “star.” He rushes off, into the earth’.<sup>65</sup> Lewis exploits the dual meaning of the word ‘star’: while its first use here likely refers to a celestial body, the second — complete with scare quotes that signal irony — seems to refer to the theatre definition of an actor or entertainer, usually one in a leading role. By pointing readers to the ambivalence of this word in the opening lines, Lewis invites them to read the title in multiple ways as well. In *Blast*, the play is highly self-referential: in many ways, the magazine was itself an enemy of ‘stars’, such as Futurism’s Filippo Marinetti. On one occasion, the play’s protagonist is described as ‘a large open book, full of truths and insults’, which could be read as a description of the magazine (*Blast* repeatedly offends the establishment, other modern movements, and numerous artists in its manifestoes).<sup>66</sup>

In this case, the play points to the insignificance of the ‘human bull’: it is made clear that he is not the story’s protagonist. However, the protagonist himself — Arghol — also ‘remains neglected, as though his two fellow actors had forgotten him’.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, no one in this cast of characters is particularly important. Arghol is described as ‘appalling “gamin,” black bourgeois aspirations undermining blatant virtuosity of self’, and his ‘[m]ask of discontent, anxious to explode, [is] restrained by qualms of vanity, and professional coyness’.<sup>68</sup> It is a mask upon a mask: the initial mask is disguised by a performance of restraint. Lewis’s characterizations, commenting on the insignificance of individuals and on social performance and, later, the characters’ attempts to get rid of the ‘self’, have provoked readings that interpret the play as an allegory of the irreconcilable conflict between the individual and society, or alternatively the struggle between the authentic self and the ‘double’ who conforms to society.<sup>69</sup>

In light of these readings, the advertisement’s claim that the play will be ‘acted by you and me’ carries another possible implication: namely that these are roles that people are *already* acting out, which are not confined to the realm of this play’s performance. By drawing the audience into the performance, the play becomes a ‘teaching machine’, showing the public how to recognize this performance for what it is. To reinforce the feeling that (social) life is already performative, ‘Enemy of the Stars’ repeatedly uses terms of theatre and circus in its imagery to describe daily life and environments: for instance, trees are ‘impassible acrobats’ and ‘Existence; loud feeble sunset, blaring like lumpish, savage clown’.<sup>70</sup> Both of these descriptions locate human existence in a realm that appears as a circus, where, after all, the play is set. By casting the reader in a play that treats individual identity as conflict, Lewis might be attempting to provide him with instructions for overcoming the contemporary crowd-mind.

Earlier, I mentioned Puchner’s argument about modernist closet drama as a way to ‘de-imagine, de-visualize, and de-theatricalize the act of reading drama’.<sup>71</sup> ‘Enemy of the Stars’ seems to have the opposite effect: if anything, it asks the reader

65 Lewis, ‘Enemy of the Stars’ (1914), p. 59.

66 Ibid., p. 71.

67 Ibid., p. 59.

68 Ibid.

69 Ayers, pp. 3, 21–24; Giovanni Cianci, ‘A Man at War: Lewis’s Vital Geometrics’, in *Volcanic Heaven: Essays on Wyndham Lewis’s Painting and Writing*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rose: Black Sparrow Press, 1996), pp. 11–24 (p. 22); Edwards, p. 145.

70 Lewis, ‘Enemy of the Stars’ (1914), pp. 62, 67

71 Puchner, p. 39.

to *re-imagine*, *re-visualize*, and *re-theatricalize* the written play. Throughout, actions and characterizations are fragmented. The play consists, in its own words, of ‘confused struggles and vague successions of scenes’ (again, Lewis is highly self-referential).<sup>72</sup> Thoughts are often described in patterns and associations: for instance, when Arghol, ‘[p]erpetual inspector of himself’, considers leaving his present location to read more books and then ‘to come back here to take up this life again’, but dismisses the thought as ‘[c]oaxing: genuine stupefaction: reproach, a trap. [...] “I must live, like a tree, where I grow. An inch to the left or right would be too much.”’<sup>73</sup> Arghol is portrayed as machine-like and monotonous: his ‘voice had no modulations of argument. Weak now, it handled words numbly, like a tired compositor. [...] Arghol shifted his legs mechanically.’<sup>74</sup> Lewis’s writing style echoes this mechanical tone, often breaking clauses into isolated units.

This is especially clear in the fight between Arghol and Hanp, which is described in discontinuous sentences:

Mask stoic with energy: thought cleaned off slick — pure and clean with action.  
 Bodies grown brain, black octopi.  
 Flushes on silk epiderm and fierce card-play of firsts between: emptying of ‘hand’  
 on soft flesh-table.  
 Arms of grey windmills, grinding anger on stone of the new heart.  
 Messages from one another, dropped down anywhere when nobody is looking,  
 reaching brain by telegraph: most desolating and alarming messages possible.  
 The attacker rushes in with blows. They rolled, swift jagged rut, into one corner  
 of shed: large insect scuttling roughly to hiding.  
 Stopped astonished.<sup>75</sup>

This longer quotation shows how Lewis uses a sequence of images to create a narrative that is spatial, rather than linear. Notably, this is unique to the 1914 version: the 1932 revision does not contain nearly as many clipped sentences. In the magazine, Lewis’s fragmented sentences are themselves messages ‘reaching brain by telegraph’ (again connecting *Blast* to the channels of mass communication). In his review of *Blast*, Richard Aldington likewise describes its ‘hard, telegraphic sort of writing’.<sup>76</sup>

The style resembles Pound’s commandments for Imagist poetry: ‘[t]he “one image” poem is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another’.<sup>77</sup> Images are layered on top of each other and Lewis’s style, particularly his use of colons (which regularly appear throughout the play), relies on association. Aldington, himself an Imagist poet, expressed particular admiration for the ‘sudden clear images which break across [the play]’.<sup>78</sup> Lewis shows rather than tells, avoiding exposition or description and instead asking the reader to imagine the scene. Its highly visual descriptions evoke a hurried struggle and violence: as Wees points out, the style itself ‘seemed, at times, like an exchange of blows’.<sup>79</sup> When Lewis revised the play, he consistently relied on exposition, often making it part of his characters’ dialogue. The 1932 edition thus tells rather than shows, making it more stageable than the original. In *Blast*, however, the play is *self-staging*: the periodical is its playhouse.

72 Lewis, p. 80.

73 Lewis, ‘Enemy of the Stars’ (1914), p. 68.

74 Ibid., p. 66.

75 Ibid., p. 75.

76 Richard Aldington, ‘Blast’, *Egoist*, 1 (1914), 272–73 (p. 272).

77 Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1974 [1916]), p. 89.

78 Aldington, p. 272.

79 Wees, p. 183.

## Conclusion

'Enemy of the Stars' reflects some of *Blast's* primary preoccupations. Both stylistically and thematically, it is concerned with conflict, performativity, and mass media. The play, announced as 'very well acted by you and me', draws the public into its central conflict. It challenges passive consumption of the text, and, thereby, the contemporary mindset of the crowd. In *Blast*, the play includes an advertisement, several reproductions of visual art works, and experiments with typography: it is meant to be seen on the page, and it utilizes the possibilities offered by the little magazine as a medium. These features are no longer present in the reprint. The revised edition is — at least partly — a playscript; but if 'Enemy of the Stars' in *Blast* is to be read as a play, it is staged *in* the magazine, where it can 'make individuals' instead of reaching a mass audience. Taking 'Enemy of the Stars' seriously as dramatic form makes visible how Lewis, in *Blast*, experimented with form and medium to present 'an art of Individuals' (a concern he shared with many other modernists, who likewise resisted mass publics).

Largely written as prose rather than a playscript, the reader is to produce and perform the play for himself: it is an act of textual performance. Simultaneously, because of the connections between the magazine and the play's protagonist (enemies of stars, books full of insults), the play itself *stages* the magazine and its central aims. 'Enemy of the Stars' is self-dramatizing: it is, stylistically and sometimes visually, performing the script *on the page*. Rather than a text to be performed elsewhere, Lewis uses the experimental little magazine to provide readers with a play that shows how text can be theatrical.

'Enemy of the Stars' thereby provides a case for reading modernist print drama beyond 'anti-theatricality'. In Lewis scholarship, reading 'Enemy of the Stars' as something other than a play has often resulted in a neglect of the performativity of its current form, which deserves appreciation. More generally, modernist print drama has not always been taken seriously in its dramatic potential: it has often been read as a way for authors to avoid censorship, commercialism, actors, or mass audiences. I have advocated, instead, for considering the aesthetic and ideological aims that authors could accomplish through print circulation in little magazines. This (perhaps quintessentially) modernist medium had enormous (meta-)performative potential. Modernist print drama could perform aspects of modernism: 'Enemy of the Stars' exemplifies this, since the play dramatized Vorticist ideas as well as the magazine that contained them. In considering periodical publications of modernist drama, their *theatrics* — rather than their anti-theatricality — should take center stage.

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THE PERIODICAL AS A PLAYHOUSE

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