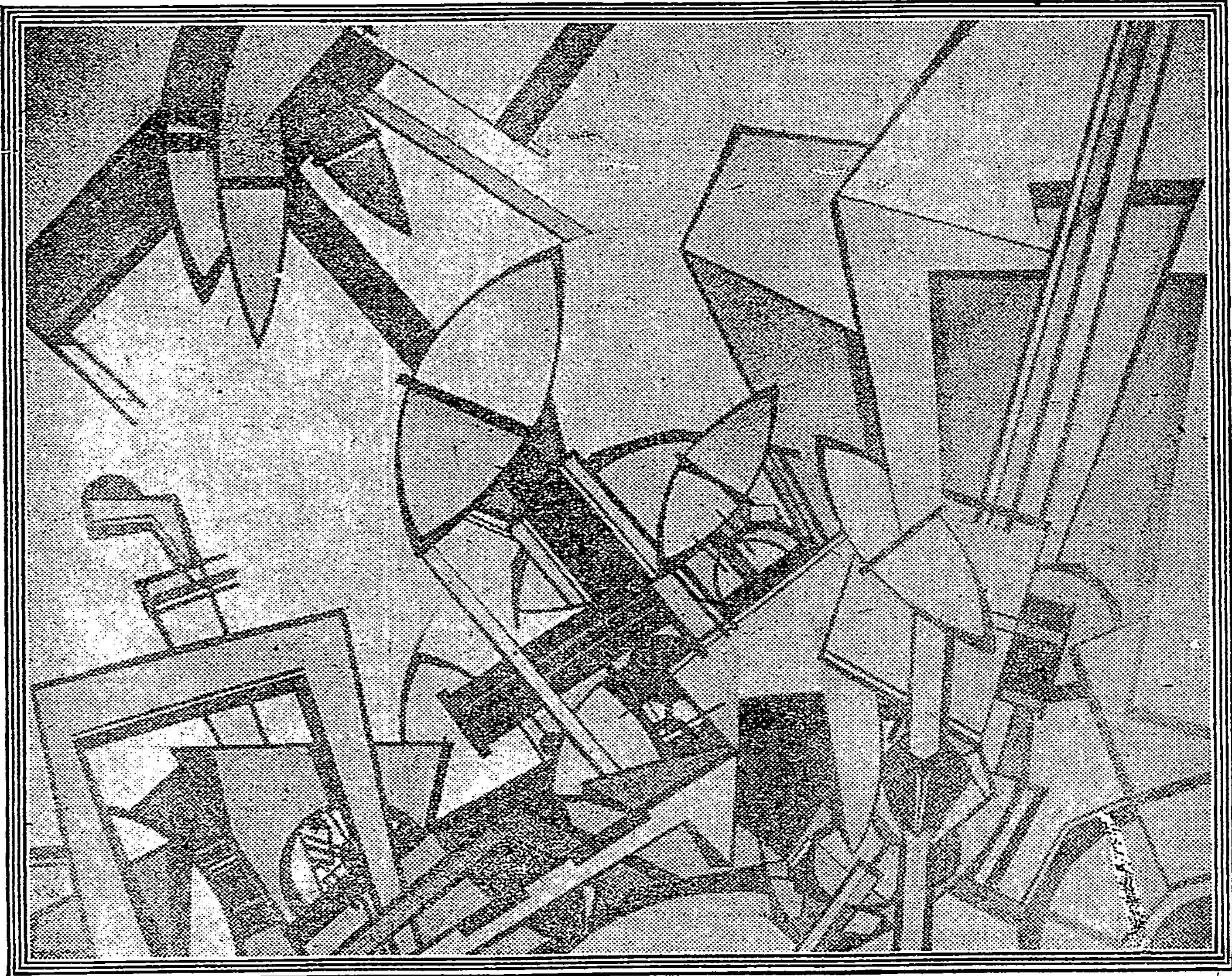


# VORTICISM THE LATEST CULT OF REBEL ARTISTS



Cape of Good Hope, by Edward Wadsworth.

**T**HE inevitable paradox has occurred. Futurism is a thing of the past. Vorticism has come.

What is Vorticism? Well, like Futurism, and Imagisme, and Cubism, essentially it is nonsense. But it is more important than these other fantastic, artistic, and literary movements because it is their sure conclusion. It is important not because it is the latest, but because it is the last phase of the ridiculous rebellion which has given the world the "Portrait of a Nude Descending the Stairs" and the writings of Gertrude Stein. It is the reductio ad absurdum of mad modernity. The symbol of the Vorticists is an inverted black funnel apparently spinning on a perpendicular rod. It looks something like an extinguisher and something like a dunce-cap, but probably it is intended to be the portrait of a Vortex.

Of course, the Vorticists, rigorously conventional in their method of procedure as are all enemies of convention, have issued a Manifesto. It is printed in the first issue of their quarterly review, Blast, which bears the imprint of the John Lane Company. Blast is about the size of a bound volume of "Chatterbox," and its cover is a vivid cerise, bearing its name in fat black letters four inches tall. The Manifesto itself is printed in large type, and sentences considered worthy of special emphasis are set in capital letters.

The Vorticists are English, with some exceptions. Among these exceptions are the artists Gaudier Brzeska, and Jacob Epstein and the ex-American poet Ezra Pound. The leader of the movement is Wyndham Lewis, who edits Blast and offers it for sale to the trembling public at the Rebel Art Centre, 38 Great Ormond Street, Queen's Square, W. C., London, daily from 11 A. M. to 1 P. M. Also he contributes to his cerise magazine six pictures, twelve editorials, and "Enemy of the Stars," a composition which is, he insists, a play. Which brings to mind Crosby's quatrain:

The man who runs a magazine,  
Although it be unsalable,  
Will never have his manuscripts  
Returned as unavailable.

Mr. Lewis's Manifesto—there are eleven names signed to it, but the thought and style are Mr. Lewis's own—has by way of introduction a string of curses. He fills eleven pages with the names of things and persons he dislikes, including the English climate, policemen, Dady's Musical Comedy, the sky, aperitifs, Paris, the "Britannic Aesthete," fear of ridicule, journalists, humor, sport, the years 1837 to 1900, the Post Office, the Bishop of London, Bergson, Martin Harvey, George Grossmith, the Countess of Warwick, A. C. and R. H. Benson, the British Academy, and Rabin-dramath Tagore. To these he prefixes the word "Blast!" occasionally varying it with "Curse!" or "D—n!"

#### Wholesale Blessings.

Then he blesses six pages of people and things—ports, hairdressers, Swift, W. L. George, Frank Harris, the Salvation Army, and Gaby Deslys. Then there is a black-and-white drawing of broken cogwheels, called "Newcastle," by Edward Wadsworth, who made it, and then, at last, we have the Manifesto itself.

This document is divided into chapters, and each chapter consists of a number of sentences, each forming a paragraph by itself and preceded by a numeral.

Here are some of the articles of the Manifesto, without their prefatory numbers:

Between Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves. . . . We only want Humour if it has fought like Tragedy. . . . We only want Tragedy if it can bring the sun to the surface a laugh like a bomb. We hear from America and the Continent all sorts of disagreeable things about England: "the unmusical, anti-artistic, unphilosophic country." We quite agree.

Luxury, sports, the famous English "Humour," the thrilling ascendancy and ideas fixe of class, producing the most intense snobbery in the world, heavy stagnant foci of Saxon blood, incapable of anything but the song of a frog in home counties—these phenomena give England a peculiar distinction in the wrong sense, among the nations.

This is why England produces such good artists from time to time. This is also the reason why a movement toward art and imagination could burst up here, from this lump of compressed matter, with more force than any-

where else. . . . The art instinct is permanently primitive. In a chaos of imperfection, discord, &c., it finds the same stimulus as in nature.

All this, it may be observed, is merely a rather dull imitation of Signor Marinetti and his Futurists, that company of amusing young maniacs which failed to revolutionize Italian art and letters, but has succeeded in London in making its lectures and exhibitions commercially profitable. It is an echo of Signor Marinetti's Manifesto; it is a poor joke repeated. The "laugh like a bomb" is a typical Futurist expression. But the important fact about Mr. Lewis's Manifesto is that it shows, in the ensuing paragraphs, that it is more than an imitation of Futurism—it is a rebellion against Futurism, a development of Futurism to its ultimate absurdity.

#### New Revolution Made Necessary.

In the very next paragraph the Vortex cap pops out of its bag. Mr. Lewis writes:

The artist of the modern movement is a savage; this enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as Nature did more technically primitive man. . . . We have made it quite clear that there is nothing chauvinistic or picturesquely patriotic about our contentions. But there is violent boredom with that feeble Europeanism, abasement of the miserable "intellectual" before anything coming from Paris, cosmopolitan sentimentality, which prevails in so many quarters.

Just as we believe that an art must be organic with its time, so we insist that what is actual and vital for the South is ineffectual and unactual in the North.

There it is, you see. Signor Marinetti and his friends forced their exotic radicalism upon London, and the noses of the native revolutionists were put out of joint. What were they to do? Join the Philistines, and, forsaking "progress," uphold the established tradition? That would be



Drawing by Jacob Epstein.

a sane and unthinkable apostasy! They must create a new revolution.

It Goes a Step Further Than Cubism and Futurism, and Is Sponsored by Brzeska, Epstein and Others. Its Official Mouthpiece Is a Cerise Magazine Called Blast.

more extreme and violent than Futurism. This they have done. Futurism is Italian, Imagisme is French, but Vorticism is made in England. Support native industries! Buy British wares! Buy "Blast!" The inventor of Vorticism continues:

We assert that the art for these climates, then, must be a northern flower. . . . Tragic humor is the birth-right of the North. Any great northern art will partake of this insidious and volcanic chaos. . . . The modern world is due almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon genius—it appearance and its spirit. . . . The Latins are at present, for instance, in their "discovery" of sport, their futuristic gush over machines, aeroplanes, &c., the most romantic and sentimental "moderns" to be found.

It is only the second-rate people in France or Italy who are through revolutionsaries. In England, on the other hand, there is no vulgarity in revolt, or rather, there is no revolt; it is the normal state. So often rebels of the North and the South are diametrically opposed species. The nearest thing in England to a great traditional French artist is a great revolutionary English one.

#### Those Who Sign.

So the manifesto ends. Only a small part of it has been quoted here, only the part which refers definitely to the new movement. There are numerous passages which contain merely celebrations of machinery and other expressions of sentiment which belong as much to the Futurists as to the Vorticists.

Arbuthnot L. Atkinson, Gaudier Brzeska, J. Dismorr, C. Hamilton, E. Pound, W. Roberts, H. Sanders, E. Wadsworth, and Wyndham Lewis. It will be noticed that Ford Maddox Hueffer, Rebecca West, Frederick Etchells, and Jacob Epstein, who contribute to "Blast" and, therefore, label themselves Vorticists (the magazine has the sub-title "Review of the great English Vortex") did not sign the Manifesto. And it is also worthy of note that soon after "Blast" was published several of the people whose names were signed to the Manifesto sent a letter to a fortnightly paper, The Egoist, repudiating, not "Blast" and not Vorticism, but the Manifesto itself. Among these was Ezra Pound.

Therefore, it is well to see just what Mr. Pound's idea of Vorticism is. He has a little personal Manifesto of his own in "Blast," and it may be that from it may be gained a clearer conception of the movement than from Mr. Lewis's exposition.

Mr. Pound tells us, to begin with, that the Vortex is the point of maximum energy, that it represents in mechanics—the greatest efficiency. The Vorticist, he says, relies on the primary pigment of his art, nothing else, and he adds:

The design of the future is in the grip of the human vortex. All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is present in the vortex, now.

Whereupon he proceeds to assault Futurism. Here is something calculated to make Signor Marinetti shed purple tears:

Futurism is the disorganizing spray of a Vortex with no drive behind it, dispersal. . . . Impressionism, Futurism, which is only an accelerated sort of Impressionism, deny the Vortex. They are the corpses of Vortices. Popular beliefs, movements, &c., are the corpses of Vortices. Marinetti is a corpse.

Mr. Pound, as students of the more absurd forms of poetry are aware, is an ardent Imagiste. Perhaps the most satisfactory definition of Imagisme is that it is the sort of verse that Mr. Pound writes nowadays. Becoming a Vorticist, he is unwilling to give up Imagisme, and he brings the two movements together in these words:

The Vorticist will use only the primary media of his art. The primary pigment of poetry is the image. The Vorticist will not allow the primary expression of any concept or emotion to drag itself out into mimicry. In painting, Kandinski, Picasso. In poetry, this, by "H. D.":

Whirl up sea—  
Whirl your pointed pines,  
Splash your great pines  
On our rocks,  
Hurl your green over us,  
Cover us with your pools of fir.

#### An Eloquent Cry.

Then Gaudier Brzeska, a sculptor, gives his views of Vorticism. He writes at great length about Hamitic Semitic energies, Amen-Ra, Kholan, Shang, Chow, and the nei-Mongols, and concludes with this eloquent cry:

And we, the Moderns, Epstein, Brancusi, Archipenko, Dunikowski, Modigliani, and myself, through the incessant struggle in the complex city, have likewise to spend much energy. The knowledge of our civilization embraces the world; we have mastered the elements. We have been influenced by what we liked most, each according to his own individuality; we have crystallized the sphere into the cube; we have made a combination of all the possible shaped



masses—concentrating them to express our abstract thoughts of conscious superiority. Will and consciousness are our Vortex.

#### Work of Vorticists.

This being the case, just what sort of work are the Vorticists producing? The first production in Blast (after the manifesto) is a poem by Mr. Pound which is called, undoubtedly for some sound reason, "Salutation the Third." It is a rebuke, it seems, to The London Times. That newspaper having in some way shown disrespect to the eminent Imagiste and Vorticist, he rebukes it in the following sonorous lines:

Let us deride the smugness of The Times:  
Guffaw!  
So much for the gagged reviewers,  
It will pay them when the worms are wriggling in their vitals;  
These were they who objected to newness.

Here are their tombstones:  
They supported the gag and the ring:  
A little black box contains them.  
So shall you be also,  
You—obstructionist,  
You sworn foe to free speech and good letters,  
You fungus, you continuous gangrene.

There is much more of the same sort. The reader is reminded of those documents called proclamations, broadsides of abuse, humorous in intent, which the sophomores in the smaller American colleges used to paste at night on trees and fences to annoy freshmen.

There are four pictures by Edward

Wadsworth—"Cape of Good Hope," "A Short Flight," "March," and "Radiation." They show a determined and successful effort on Mr. Wadsworth's part to be more incoherent than the Futurists. Compared to "Cape of Good Hope" the "Nude Descending the Stairs" is flatly photographic.

Then comes a very long play called "Enemy of the Stars." It is by the omnipresent Wyndham Lewis, who furnishes an illustration to it. The scene is described as "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." The characters are "two heathen clowns, grave both animals, cynical athletes." They are named Argol and Hanp.

It is impossible to learn what the play is about, but Hanp is apparently a more entertaining companion than Argol, (whose name, by the way, is sometimes given as Arghol.) Hanp rolls cigarettes and coughs like a goat, while Argol lies with his hands clasped around his knees, and falls into a "childish lethargy" whenever Hanp kicks him—which occurs all too infrequently.

Here is the concluding passage of the first Vorticist tragedy. It defies comment:

He (Argol) now saw Arghol clearly; knelt down beside him. . . . He long, stout, snore drove his hand back. But the next instant his hand rushed in, and the knife sliced heavily the impious meat. The blood burst out after the knife.

Arghol rose as though on a spring, his eyes glaring down on Hanp, and with an action of the head as though he were about to sneeze, Hanp shrank back on his haunches. He overbalanced and fell on his back.

He scrambled up, and Arghol lay now sleeping.

There was something incredible in the dead figure, the blood sinking down, a moist shaft, into the ground. Hanp felt friendly toward it.

There was only flesh there, and all our flesh is the same. Something distant, terrible, and eccentric, bathing in that milky snore, had been struck and banished from matter.

Hanp wiped his hands on a rag and rubbed at his clothes for a few minutes, then went out of the hut.

The night was suddenly absurdly peaceful, trying richly to please him with gracious movements of trees and gay procession of arctic clouds.

Relief of grateful universe.

A rapid despair settled down on Hanp, a galloping blackness of mood. He moved quickly to outstrip it perhaps.

Near the gate of the yard he found an idle figure. It was his master. He ground his teeth almost in this man's face, with an aggressive and furious movement toward him. The face looked shy and pleased, but civil, like a mysterious domestic.

Hanp walked slowly along the canal to a low stone bridge.

His face was wet with tears, his heart beating weakly, a boat slowed down.

A sickly flood of moonlight beat miserably on him, cutting empty shadow he could hardly drag along.

He sprang from the bridge, clumsily, too unhappy for instinctive science, and sank like lead, his heart a sagging weight of stagnant hatred.

#### Hueffer's Gentle Contribution.

Strangely enough this mad play is followed by "The Saddest Story," by Ford Maddox Hueffer, who is a "regular" novelist and essayist with nothing particularly iconoclastic about him. And "The Saddest Story" is a harmless tale, conventionally told. But Mr. Hueffer is known to be sympathetic with those whom he calls "les jeunes," and he has permitted Mr. Pound to refer to him as an Expressionist. Therefore he amiably allows himself to be dragged into the Vortex, and adds his gentle zephyr to the "Blast." "The Saddest Story" is to be continued.

This is followed by Rebecca West's story "Indissoluble Matrimony." This is an orthodox imitation-Zola type of short story, about a man who hated his wife and tried in vain to kill her. The only trace of Vorticism to be discovered is the epithet "blasphemous" applied by Miss West to Cardinal Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light." This doubtless is a Vorticist opinion.

It would appear on the whole that Vorticism is not likely to overturn the established traditions of art and letters.