LITERATURE, POLITICS, AND THE ENGLISH AVANT-GARDE

Accounts of the “historical avant-garde” and of “high modernism” often celebrate the former for its revolutionary aesthetics or denigrate the latter for its “proto-fascist” politics. In Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde, Paul Peppis shows how neither interpretation explains the writings of avant-gardists in early twentieth-century England. Peppis reads texts by writers like Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound alongside English political discourse between the death of Victoria and the end of the Great War. He traces the impact of nation and empire on the avant-garde, arguing that Vorticism, England’s foremost avant-garde movement, used nationalism to advance literature and avant-garde literature to advance empire. Peppis’s study demonstrates that these ambitions were enabled by the period’s conception of nationality as an essence and construct. By recovering these neglected aspects of avant-garde politics, Peppis’s book opens important new avenues for assessing modernist politics after the war.

Paul Peppis is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Oregon. He has written a range of articles and reviews on modernist authors, modernist theories of race, and modernism and the Great War, in journals such as Modernism/Modernity, Modern Philology, Twentieth-Century Literature, and the Yale Journal of Criticism.
LITERATURE, POLITICS, AND THE ENGLISH AVANT-GARDE

Nation and Empire, 1901–1918

PAUL PEPPIS
For Tess, Cole, and Libby
## Contents

*List of illustrations*  
Page viii

*Acknowledgments*  
Page ix

1. Introduction  
   Nations, empires, and the historical avant-garde  
   Page 1

      Page 20

   2. Narratives of ambition and anxiety: confronting Europe in *The New Age*  
      Page 53

   3. Advancing art and empire: Futurism in England, Italy in Libya, and the founding of Vorticism  
      Page 76

   4. “Surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts”: Vorticism and the Great War  
      Page 96

   5. Anti-Individualism and fictions of national character in Lewis’s *Tarr*  
      Page 133

2. Conclusion  
   Page 162

*Notes*  
Page 166

*Bibliography*  
Page 208

*Index*  
Page 225
Illustrations

1 Wyndham Lewis, Before Antwerp, BLAST II (July 1915), cover; (c) the Estate of Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis. By permission. page 100

2 Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942), Soldiers of King Albert the Ready (1914), oil on canvas, Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, UK / Bridgeman Art Library, London / New York 102

3 George Morrow, “How the Cubist . . .,” Punch 147 (14 October 1914): 325, reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. 104

4 Bernard Partridge, “The Triumph of ‘Culture,’” Punch 147 (23 August 1914): 185, reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. 116

5 F. H. Townsend, “The Incorrigibles,” Punch 147 (7 October 1914): 291, reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. 117

6 Bernard Partridge, “A Glorious Example,” Punch 147 (11 November 1914): 399, reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. 118

7 Frank Reynolds, “Study of a Prussian Household Having its Morning Hate,” Punch 148 (24 February 1915): 150, reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. 119

8 John Hassall, Belgian Canal Boat Fund (poster), The Imperial War Museum, London. 120

9 Christopher Nevinson, On the Way to the Trenches, BLAST II (July 1915): 89; (c) the Estate of Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis. By permission. 122

10 Jacob Kramer, Types of the Russian Army, BLAST II (July 1915): 31; (c) the Estate of Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis. By permission. 123
Acknowledgments

In writing this book my thoughts and words have benefited from the wisdom and support of many. I wish first to thank my advisors at the University of Chicago, Robert von Hallberg and Loren Kruger, for their rigorous criticism, thoughtful advice, and generous encouragement in the early stages of the project. Other colleagues at the University of Chicago aided the evolution of my argument in myriad ways, especially Wayne Booth, Jessica Burstein, Lee Garver, David Kadlec, Mark Morrison, and members of the Avant-Garde Workshop. At the University of Oregon, Ian Duncan, Karen Ford, John Gage, Dick Stein, and Richard Stevenson provided invaluable commentary and advice as I reconceived and revised the manuscript into its current form. For assistance with research, I am grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a dissertation fellowship, which assisted early on; to the librarians at the Division of Rare and Manuscripts Collections of the Carl A. Kroch Library at Cornell University for guidance and aid in the Ford Madox Ford and Wyndham Lewis Collections; and to the University of Oregon for a New Faculty Research Award, which helped bring the research to completion. My thanks to my anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press, and to my editor Ray Ryan, copy-editor Rachel Coldicutt, and publishing assistant, Jenny Landor, for their consistent aid, good humor, and hard work during the process to publication. I am especially indebted to Omar S. Pound, the Estate of Wyndham Lewis, the Estate of Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis, and the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust for their generous permission to quote from the texts of Wyndham Lewis, (c) The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust, a registered Trust in the United Kingdom and to reproduce graphics featured in BLAST, (c) the Estate of Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis, by permission. Earlier versions of two chapters have been published previously. Chapter 4 is an expanded version of “Surrounded by a Multitude of other Blasts’: Vorticism and the Great War,”
Acknowledgments


To David Thompson, heartfelt thanks for incomparable hours of comment and debate. To Alex, Anne, and Phil, much love for years of faith and support. To Susy and Jack, love and thanks for interest, openness, and generosity. My deepest gratitude and love to Tess, Cole, and, above all, my wife, Libby Wadsworth, who has, throughout this long and often arduous process, shown her characteristic good humor, common sense, and commitment. Without her faith and friendship this book would never have been conceived, much less completed.