

## A SCULPTOR IN WAR'S VORTEX

**T**HE PROGRESSIVE IMPOVERISHMENT imposed upon the world by the great war now includes in its toll a young sculptor—Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. He was killed on June 5, shot through the head in the trenches at Neuville-St. Vaast. One of his names seems to indicate a strain of Eastern race, but he was born in France and gave his life for the French cause, tho his active years as an artist were passed wholly in England. A writer in *The Westminster Gazette*, "J. M. M.," refers to his loss as a heavy one for English art, for in his short life he had been "rich in achievement," belonging "to a race apart from the sculptors of his generation." "His imagination was arduous," declares this writer. "No single piece that came from his chisel was trivial, and perhaps the only criticism which could be honestly made against his work was that in his devotion to his art he had surrendered himself unduly to the fascinations of abstract thought and design." His name appeared among the projectors of a new magazine named *Blast* (London), whose first number was issued almost simultaneously with the first booms of the war-guns. Their greater noise seemed to silence this one, for a year has passed before the second number, now on the news-stands, has appeared. *Blast* is the organ of the artistic cult calling itself "Vorticism"; but Vorticism, so far as Gaudier-Brzeska was concerned, declares the writer, "was only a passing phase in his development, and among the Vorticists he was always a Triton among minnows." We read further of him:

"Every inch in his own development, and every hour of his opportunities to develop freely, he had won for himself against odds. Two years before his death he was still working all day for a meager wage as a clerk in a shipping-office; and when the present writer knew him he was in the habit of rising before five in the morning and spending the hours before office-time in sketching the birds in St. James's Park. He worked on after office-hours until late in the night, modeling. His endurance, as it must needs have been, was marvelous, for these laborious days were only the comparatively easy culmination of a hard life that began when he ran away as a boy from his peasant home in middle France to be an artist at all costs. It may be said without exaggeration that he had already paid them all, tho he was still in his early twenties. He was entirely self-taught; but of the quality of that teaching and of its results there is no

room for doubt. Those who knew the man were confident: there was no need to know his work. Those who knew his work had no need to know the man. But those who had both privileges mourn, even more than the loss to English art, a friend whose only fault was the extremity of his passion for sincerity."

In a brief essay written for the first number of *Blast* discerning readers may perhaps gain some idea of what Vorticism means and be able to disentangle Gaudier-Brzeska's relation thereto. We reproduce his own style:

Sculptural energy is the mountain.

Sculptural feeling is the appreciation of masses in relation.

Sculptural ability is the defining of these masses by planes.

The PALEOLITHIC VORTEX resulted in the decoration of the Dordogne caverns.

Early stone-age man disputed the earth with animals.

His livelihood depended on the hazards of the hunt—his greatest victory the domestication of a few species.

Out of the minds primordially preoccupied with animals *Fonts-de-Guame* gained its procession of horses carved in the rock. The driving power was life in the absolute—the plastic expression the fruitful sphere.

The sphere is thrown through space; it is the soul and object of the vortex.

The intensity of existence had revealed to man a truth of form—his manhood was strained to the highest potential—his energy brutal—HIS OPULENT MATURITY WAS CONVEX.

The acute fight subsided at the birth of the three primary civilizations. It always retained more intensity East.

The HAMITE VORTEX of Egypt, the land of plenty.

Man succeeded in his far-reaching speculations—honor to the divinity!

Religion pushed him to the use of the VERTICAL which inspires awe. His gods were self-made, he built them in his image, and RETAINED AS MUCH OF THE SPHERE AS COULD ROUND THE SHARPNESS OF THE PARALLELOGRAM.

He preferred the pyramid to the mastaba.

The fair Greek felt this influence across the middle sea.

The fair Greek saw himself only. He petrified his own semblance.

HIS SCULPTURE WAS DERIVATIVE, his feeling for form secondary. The absence of direct energy lasted for a thousand years.

The Indians felt the Hamitic influence through Greek spectacles. Their extreme temperament inclined toward asceticism, admiration of non-desire as a balance against abuse produced a



"STAGS."

From a group by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. The sculptor is criticized for his excessive tendency to abstraction. This may comfort some who look in vain for the stags.

Compliments of The Chicago Art Institute



kind of sculpture without new form-perception—and which is the result of the peculiar

**VORTEX OF BLACKNESS AND SILENCE.**

**PLASTIC SOUL IS INTENSITY OF LIFE BURSTING THE PLANE.**

The Germanic barbarians were verily whirled by the mysterious need of acquiring new arable lands. They moved restlessly, like strong oxen stampeding.

The SEMITIC VORTEX was the lust of war. The men of Elam, of Assur, of Bebel, and the Kheta, the men of Armenia and those of Canaan had to slay one another cruelly for the possession of fertile valleys. Their gods sent them the vertical direction, the earth, the SPHERE.

They elevated the sphere in a splendid squatness and created the HORIZONTAL.

From Sargon to Amir-nasir-pal men built man-headed bulls in horizontal flight-walk. Men flayed their captives alive and erected howling lions: THE ELONGATED HORIZONTAL SPHERE BUTTRESSED ON FOUR COLUMNS, and their kingdoms disappeared.

Christ flourished and perished in Yudah.

Christianity gained Africa, and from the seaports of the Mediterranean it won the Roman Empire.

The stampeding Franks came into violent contact with it as well as with the Greco-Roman tradition.

They were swamped by the remote reflections of the two vortices of the West.

Gothic sculpture was but a faint echo of the HAMITO-SEMITIC energies through Roman traditions, and it lasted half a thousand years, and it wilfully divagated again into the Greek derivation from the land of Amen-Ra.

**VORTEX OF A VORTEX!**

**VORTEX IS THE POINT ONE AND INDIVISIBLE!**

**VORTEX IS ENERGY!** and it gave forth SOLID EXCREMENTS in the *quattro e cinque cento*, LIQUID until the seventeenth century, GASES whistle till now. THIS is the history of form-value in the West until the FALL OF IMPRESSIONISM.

The black-haired men who wandered through the pass of Khotan into the valley of the YELLOW RIVER lived peacefully tilling their lands, and they grew prosperous.

Their paleolithic feeling was intensified. As gods they had

themselves in the persons of their human ancestors—and of the spirits of the horse and of the land and the grain.

**THE SPHERE SWAYED.**

**THE VORTEX WAS ABSOLUTE.**

The Shang and Chow dynasties produced the convex bronze vases.

The features of Tao-t'ie were inscribed inside the square with the rounded corners—the centuple spherical frog presided over the inverted truncated cone that is the bronze war-drum.

**THE VORTEX WAS INTENSE MATURITY.** Maturity is fecundity—they grew numerous and it lasted for six thousand years.

The force relapsed and they accumulated wealth, forsook their work, and after losing their form-understanding through the Han and T'ang dynasties, they founded the Ming and found artistic ruin and sterility.

**THE SPHERE LOST SIGNIFICANCE AND THEY ADMIRER THEMSELVES.**

During their great period offshoots from their race had landed on another continent. After many wanderings some tribes settled on the highlands of Yucatan and Mexico.

When the Ming were losing their conception, these neo-Mongols had a flourishing State. Through the strain of warfare they submitted the Chinese sphere to horizontal treatment much as the Semites had done. Their cruel nature and temperament supplied them with a stimulant: **THE VORTEX OF DESTRUCTION.**

Besides these highly developed peoples there lived on the world frightened: This is the **VORTEX OF FEAR**, its mass is the **POINTED CONE**, its masterpieces the fetishes.

And WE the moderns: Epstein, Brancusi, Archipenko, Duniowski, 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.

