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MARINETTI AND THE EMERGENCE OF FUTURISM*

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Pauvre Sagesse!... Oh, l'allégresse de se sentir absurde!...¹

This is one of the somewhat boisterous and at the same time deeply pathetic exclamations of Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, in one of his early "pre-futurist" volumes, *Destruction*, published in French in Paris, 1904. It is often maintained that Marinetti's early poetry has little to do with Futurism; Marinetti himself contributed to this opinion by pronouncing afterwards his early writings, especially his first volume, *La Conquête des étoiles* (Paris 1902) as not being written in the modern idiom and "far removed from reality". Indeed, most of the formal means of expression in *La Conquête des étoiles* are traditional; indeed, some of the poetic figures must strike us today as somewhat conventional, as more or less typical exercises in sentimental descriptive lyrics:

tandis que des vaguettes, plus souples que des chats
taquinent à coups de patte des pelotes d'écume².

Nevertheless, in his first anthology of futurist poetry, *I poeti futuristi* (Milano 1912), Marinetti included two short fragments from *La Conquête des étoiles* (*Contre les syllogismes* and *La Fanfare des vagues*).

In the volumes *Destruction* (Paris 1904) and *La Ville charnelle* (Paris 1908) there are already clear signs of the approaching storm of Futurism in the poet's keen cult of violence, danger, destruction and revulsion against the stagnation, against the tradition, the living in the past. Even though the imagery, diction and syntax are still mostly bound to the conventional poetics, already here and there, words and sounds are freed from their fixed grammatical slots (unconnected infinitives, exclamations).

* Fragment from a study (in preparation) on the role of Futurism in the development of modern poetry.

¹ F. T. Marinetti, *Destruction*, Paris 1904, p. 99.

² F. T. Marinetti, *La Conquête des étoiles*, Paris 1902, p. 6.

mations) and the feeling of spontaneous force and of awakening anti-traditionalism is present. The main difference in comparison to the later period is that here the poet calls on the forces of nature, while later he will develop the cult of the machine and of the collective strength of *homo mechanicus*. In this earlier poetry the need of the victory over the past though strongly felt is still phrased in Romantic imagery in which nature is glorified as opposed to the degenerating civilization:

Écrase les cités et leurs couloirs de catacombe,
écrase encore sans cesse le peuple des goitreux
et des abstèmes, fauche d'un coup
des moissons rabougries de plantes échines!³

This quality of spontaneous lyricism, paired with a high degree of artistry in the traditional sense, won the poet high praise of such influential French and Italian critics as Jean Dornis, Gustave Kahn, G.S. Gargano *et al.* They did not read all the signs of the revolution, although they were there. Indeed, Marinetti, who as a young student of 21 was applauded for his poem, *Les Vieux marines*, published in the "Anthologie-Revue" (Sept. 20, 1898) and awarded with a first prize at one of the celebrated *Samedis Populaires* in Sarah Bernhardt's Theatre (and recited by the great actress), became one of the very few poets in world literature "immortalized" at the age of 30 by a special monograph devoted to his still rather scant production. In 1908 a book by Tullio Panteo entitled *Il poeta Marinetti* appeared in his country, in Milano.

To be sure, Panteo's book is not so much a critical analysis of the poet's work as a collection of highly praising exclamations. Its main purpose was to assert Marinetti's position in the eyes of the Italian readers as a poet of international stature. The book's value today is thus historical, especially in view of the fact that about one third of it consists of quotations from various sources. The quotations are indiscriminately chosen, but their wide range shows the undeniable fact of a wide resonance of Marinetti's poetry and of his activities as the editor of the periodical "Poesia", which was to sponsor a number of innovative attempts.

One of the more interesting passages in Panteo's book is the opinion of the French painter and writer Emile Bernard from his review "Rénovation Esthétique"; quite keenly and appropriately Bernard observes and stresses those features of Marinetti's poetry which can be regarded as anticonventional. He speaks of the poet's "désinvolture toute naïve et toute grandiose. D'aucuns lui font le reproche d'écrire à la diable sous le fouet de sa violente improvisation[...]"⁴. It is perhaps not much of an aesthetic analysis, but it is a pertinent detail in the history of the movement *in statu nascendi*.

The invocation to the absurdity quoted above was not accidental. In the introduction to the *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909 we again encounter this notion of the significance of the absurd only even more intensely expressed:

³ Marinetti, *Destruction*, p. 227.

⁴ Cf. T. Panteo, *Il poeta Marinetti*, Milano 1908, p. 152.

Donnons-nous à manger a l'Inconnu, non par despoir,
mais simplement pour enrichir les insondables
reservoirs de l'Absurde!⁵

Marinetti's preoccupation with "the Unknown" and "the absurd" — long before the advent of Existentialism, the Theater of the Absurd and other phenomena of the last decades — shows the poet's intuitive grasp of the dramatic changes that the twentieth century and especially the two world wars were to bring about.

While the Italian Futurism was later to develop into a strongly nationalistic movement, its inception, and its prolegomena were highly international. It is nothing unusual that the movement, initiated by a group of Italian artists was born in Paris. It was the same with Picasso, Chagall or Kandinsky in the field of painting, as it was later with Beckett or Ionesco, etc., in the field of theatre.

The climate of intellectual freedom and the cosmopolitan aura of the artistic activities in Paris were combined in Marinetti's case with the clash between the symbolist and the impressionist aesthetics, with the search for new means of expression in the face of the mounting signs of a general crisis of the existing conventions. Conventions, tradition, the entire established world are felt as something oppressive, something that should be taken apart and viewed from various angles, taken apart and re-arranged. This was the anticipation of Cubism with its fragmentation of the artistic vision and of Futurism with a similar emphasis on the notion of *simultaneità*, the destruction of syntax and the "liberation" of words.

The keen notion of the contradictions of modern life, of nonsense, of absurd, is a common feature of many artists of that time. It is interesting to see that in the field of theatre, long before the proclamation of the Futurist synthetic play, there are experiments based on the antitraditional notion of effect by seeming absurd and nonsense.

Marinetti's play, *Le Roi Bombance* (Paris 1905), emphasizes the preoccupation with nonsense and paradox which can be seen even in the oxymoronic subtitle, *A hilarious [...] tragedy*. It belongs to a long line of plays in which the anachronistic vocabulary (often of royalty and oligarchy) is utilized to demonstrate the oddities and absurdities of contemporary society. Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (Paris 1896), with its sequel *Ubu Enchaîné* (1900), is probably the beginning of this genre of Rabelaisian grotesque mixed with the modern idiom of self-irony and cruel humor, exploding the myth of the established laws of progress by evolution. Through works of such different character and quality as Guillaume Apollinaire, *Le Roi Lune*, Marinetti, *Le Roi Bombance*, George Ribemont-Dessaignes, *L'Empereur de Chine* to Witold Gombrowicz, *Iwona, The Princess of Burgundy* the line continues to the contemporary Theatre of the Absurd.

In *Le Roi Bombance* Marinetti operates with the element of shock which later becomes a part of the Futurist program. The shock, somewhat like in Jarry's *Ubu*

⁵ Cf. F. T. Marinetti, *Le Futurisme*, "Le Figaro", Febr. 20, 1909.

Roi is achieved by mixing the levels of vulgar jest and cruel seriousness (e. g. toilet brush serving as the king's sceptre) and by ignoring not only the convention but any semblance of logic.

A group of rebels eating up the king and his ministers and then vomiting them out for the rebirth of the kingdom in *Le Roi Bombance* is only a mild example of this idiom. Reducing the structure to a few primitive devices is certainly an anticipation of the synthetic play later proclaimed in Marinetti's Manifesto *Teatro Sintetico Futurista* of 1916. It may be mentioned here that the very term synthetic play was applied *ex post* to Jarry's *Ubu Roi*⁶.

It would be idle to try to establish the priority between Cubism and Futurism. As was pointed out above, the necessity of revising the established conventions has been felt for some time in many areas of artistic and intellectual endeavour. The freeing of the atom in science was just as much in coming by the end of the nineteenth century as was the freeing of structural elements in painting and in poetry. The putting in motion of the atoms and the dynamization of the static structure of paintings and of the descriptive character of poetry was simply a necessity of the new century. Whether in France or in the distant Russia, whether in one group of people or another, the need of new dimensions and perspectives was a common phenomenon and it resulted in similar developments sometimes independently of any so-called influences. Naturally Apollinaire must have exerted influence on Marinetti; and we know that Marinetti's theoretical and artistic fervor influenced Apollinaire. Almost immediately after Apollinaire quite naughtily rebuffed the Futurists' claim to leadership and assured that Marinetti, this *Italien gallicisant*, was simply feeding on the French ideas, he wrote his *Antitradition futuriste*.

Apollinaire wrote most of his celebrated "jerky and disjointed"⁷ stories and poems, later published in the volumes *L'Hérésiarque et Cie* (1910) and *Alcools* (1913) in the early years of the first decade of 1900, i. e. at the same time as Marinetti's early works calling for a revolt of the elements against the stagnation of the world.

The term "Cubism" was first applied in 1908 by Henri Matisse⁸, and, as we know, the term "Futurism" emerged in 1909. The Russian "Cubo-Futurists" combined the two terms in one, as they concentrated on those tendencies which indeed make the two trends complementary.

The important fact is that the most vital issues of what can be generally termed as modern artistic idiom were most aggressively stated and most fully developed in the Futurist manifestoes. Independently of the absolute value of the Futurist theory and practice, this was the most provocative and undoubtedly most trend-setting "doctrine" in modern art.

⁶ Cf. J. Copeau, *L'Art du théâtre*, Montreal 1944, p. 149.

⁷ Cf. Ch. Gray, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories*, Baltimore 1953, p. 33.

⁸ Cf. G. Lemaitre, *From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature*, Harvard 1941, p. 78.

When the *Futurist Manifesto* appeared in "Le Figaro" on February 20, 1909, it may indeed have sounded like the "explosion of a bomb-shell" to some, though it may have been so for the wrong reasons.

It was its overly aggressive tone and a number of purposefully provoking slogans that created the intended effect. The real significance of the thus launched program did not become clear until later, when an avalanche of Futurist publications and other activities rolled over Italy and when it was demonstrated that some of the seemingly preposterous claims were not idle "threats" but a result of a more serious reflection, an agonizing re-appraisal of the traditional views on art and its function in modern life.

As was pointed out earlier, many features of the Futurist poetics can be found in the writings of both Marinetti himself and other artists long before the publication of the *Manifesto* of 1909.

After all, the reaction against the Symbolist poetics was voiced by the Symbolists themselves and the reaction against the artistic and ideological ferment in Italian poetry came long before Marinetti from such divergent quarters as, for example, the "Scapigliati" with their strongly antitraditionalist protest on the one hand and the intense lyrical emotionalism of Gabriele D'Annunzio on the other.

In many respects Futurism fits in the formula subscribed to by some scholars and writers, according to which all modern poetry can be divided into two main categories: one following the heritage of Stéphane Mallarmé's reflective, intellectual perception as the underlying foundation of poetic theory; the other born out of the emotional "anti-intellectual" protest as heard in the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud or Count de Lautréamont.

Of course, all such formulas and labels, put in absolute terms, are inadequate and often misleading, but most of the "programmatic" works of Futurism leave little doubt as to their classification in the second category. Both the Italian Futurism, especially the theory and practice of Marinetti and the Russian brand as epitomized by Vladimir Mayakovsky are striking examples of the "terrorist" line, if one wants to apply the formula of "la terreur dans les lettres" proposed by Jean Paulhan in his book *Les Fleurs de Tarbes* (Paris 1971).

From the very beginning to the very end the note of anti-traditionalism "anti-philosophical, anticultural, sportive and warlike" force resounds in the almost innumerable manifestoes and poetic works of Marinetti and his associates:

Affermare, slanciarsi, battersi, resistere,
riataccare! Indietreggiare mai!
Marciare, non Marcire!⁹

⁹ Quoted here from F. T. Marinetti, *Marinetti e il futurismo*, Roma 1929, p. 37.

We said earlier that Futurism in Italy led straight to the nationalistic hysteria of Fascism. Actually, though, the process was not so straight and simple, and an elaboration of the statement should be given. Some of the Italian scholars point out that the ground for the Futurist movement had been prepared by earlier demands that Italian culture should free itself from national and regional confines if it was to keep pace with the international developments. It was especially in the journal "Il Leonardo", established in Florence in 1903 by Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, that these sentiments were voiced. We thus face a paradox that what started with striving for freedom from the burden of nationalism ended in even more nationalistic frenzy.

The role of such different and important writers and artists as Papini, Soffici, Palazzeschi (and also Apollinaire) in the turbulent history of Futurism is very interesting and instructive. Each one of them showed at one time or another a considerable skepticism and even animosity towards the boisterous slogans and fanfares of the Futurists. And yet, each one of them could not escape fascination with at least certain features of the program, and each one of them felt obliged to lend it his support and pay it his tribute, even though in each case the "romance" was short-lived. Especially important was the role of Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici. Both were genuinely interested in the problems of the renovation of artistic forms. After having shied away from Futurism, and actually voicing their skepticism during their collaboration with Prezzolini's "La Voce" they both decided to lend the program their support. It was probably one of the greatest victories of Futurism when the periodical "Lacerba", founded by Papini and Soffici, in January, 1913, publicly acknowledged the importance of Futurism as a genuine artistic program and opened its pages for the Futurist writers.

Papini contributed a number of warm articles in support of Futurism's struggle against the tradition and against stagnation (e. g. *Il significato del futurismo*, February 1, 1913, or *Perchè sono futurista*, December 1, 1913) before he finally again cooled towards the movement, which, he felt, was becoming too dogmatic and not gaining in the true understanding of its own potential.

As for Soffici, he had never identified himself with Futurism, but he too, found its program to contain ingredients worthy of support. Although he did not consider himself a futurist, he espoused those features which he felt were giving art a new life. In his book, *I primi principi di una estetica futurista*, published in Florence in 1920 he gathered a large number of important thoughts on modern art in general, some of them still in agreement with Marinetti's Futurism, some very critical of its primitivistic understanding of art's character and philosophy. He agreed, for example, with the Futurists' desire to get away from the artificiality of the traditional aesthetics and to discover art in all forms of modern life. Yet he saw the danger of this stand in that equating life and art points towards art's ultimate dissolution¹⁰.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Soffici, *I primi principi di una estetica futurista*, Firenze 1920, p. 57.

But Marinetti was from the beginning more than a primitive "loudmouth" and "clown" as some more rigid critics came to call him. His skills as a successful editor, and his public relations talent, were demonstrated in a brilliant way in his publishing venture when he, together with Sem Benelli and Vitaliano Ponti, started in 1905 in Milano a literary journal appropriately called "Poesia". It was partly his public relations talent, but at the same time without doubt his understanding of true poetry, whether old or new that made it possible for "Poesia" to bring together on the one hand a number of chiefly Symbolist French writers: Gustave Kahn (known i. a. for his interest in *Vers libre*), Catulle Mendès, a distinguished Parnassian poet, Paul Adam, Henri de Régnier, Camille Mauclair, alongside with such recognized international names in poetry as Emile Verhaeren, William Yeates, Charles Swinburne, Paul Fort, Stuart Merrill, etc., and at the same time to devote most of its space to the group of young Italian poets, Paolo Buzzi, Luciano Folgore, Corrado Govoni, Aldo Palzeschi *et alii*, poets who at first did not seem to have much in common in their search for new themes and new means of expression, but who eventually developed into a formidable avant-garde force of the new aesthetics, aesthetics of Futurism.

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In the 20 February issue of "Le Figaro" of 1909 Marinetti made his first onslaught in the article entitled *Manifeste du Futurisme*. While the editors of "Le Figaro" supplied the article with a sober editorial note stating that the *Manifesto* seemed to contain a lot of prose but that it was "interesting", the author did not have any such qualms about the importance of the document or about the advisability of being modest in this unveiling of the "anti-aesthetic aesthetics".

From the very beginning, a striking feature in the Futurist movement is its all-inclusive character, the feeling of community and the close co-operation between all the forms of art: poetry, theatre, painting, sculpture, music, etc. Marinetti, who signed the *Manifesto*, was actually one of a few *par excellence* writers in the developing movement. As it was stated in the introduction to the *Manifesto*, Marinetti and some of his friends "stayed awake all through that night" during which the above quoted slogans were formulated, although apparently the *Manifesto* was conceived somewhat earlier in Milano, which was Marinetti's home, and which was to be the centre of the movement. The "friends", with whom Marinetti discussed the ideas of the *Manifesto* at that memorable sleepless night in his villa in Paris, were: Carlo Carra, painter and critic; Umberto Boccioni, sculptor and painter; and Luigi Russolo, painter and musician. Together with painters Gino Severini and Giacomo Balla, they soon followed with their own more specific technical manifestoes. It is hard to say whether the ferment was first felt in poetry or in painting. The fact is that in both areas signs of revolt can be detected long before the appearance of the various manifestoes. The additional complication is the relationship

between Futurism and Cubism referred to in Chapter I. Anyway, one cannot underestimate the role of Marinetti as a *spiritus movens*, an indefatigable inspirator and instigator of both serious and scandalous ventures and adventures; and, last but certainly not least, a rich man, without whose resources and business and publicity genius most of the innumerable publishing enterprises would have been impossible.

It is easy to see that the 1909 *Manifesto* is mainly a very broad statement of general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in poetry, just as well as in other arts. The main thought is that artists have too long been preoccupied with themes and forms which are obsolete in view of the radical changes in the surrounding reality. The most important and most pregnant discovery of the Futurists was certainly the discovery of "the new beauty": speed. Courage, audacity, revolt, city crowds, factories, railway stations, locomotives, aeroplanes and... war — all this does not go much beyond the concept of "change of themes", but the "discovery" of speed was bound to lead to much more essential consequences as this was not only a new theme; it was a new attitude, a new perception, a new vision. It, more than any other of the glorified themes, required new means of expression.

To be sure, preoccupation with speed has existed before. The steam engine and later the internal combustion engine had meant a certain change in man's perspective. Still, Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* was a "slow motion" vision and his *From the Earth to the Moon* was too "fictitious" to make a real impact. In terms of poetic idiom, the locomotive was still an "iron horse", even though its potential in covering space with speed unthinkable before certainly fascinated the imagination of many artists. Alfred Jarry's locomotive in his story, *Le Surmâle*, racing with the speed of 300 kilometers per hour was one of the early examples of the theme of speed (1902); Marinetti sings about "Le démon de la vitesse" in his *Destruction* in 1904, and devotes poems to his car racing through the space (*A mon Pégase, La Mort tient le volant*). But only with the advent of the aeroplane does the actual revolution take place as the view of the world from the high flying machine at great speed truly evokes the exclamation that "time and space are dead".

In his thorough and well-documented dissertation, "*Modernolatria*" et *Simultaneità* (*Recherches sur deux tendances dans l'avantgarde littéraire en Italie et en France à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*), Pär Bergman discusses at some length the undeniably important role that Mario Morasso played in propagating the cult of speed in modern literature. There cannot be any doubt that Morasso's works totally concerned with the consequences of the technical revolution in the 20th century were not without influence in the development of Marinetti's futurist ideas. Morasso collaborated with "Poesia", and his works devoted to the advent of the machine attracted a lot of attention in the artistic circles in Italy. *La nuova arma (la machina)* published in 1905 and *Il nuovo aspetto meccanico del mondo*, 1908, contain thoughts and statements which are apparently echoed in Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909. Yet, it would be an over-simplification to talk of imitation,

especially if we remember that Marinetti's hymn to "Le démon de la vitesse" preceded Morasso's above mentioned books.

The spectacular development of speedy cars, aeroplanes, electric power, wireless communication, cinema, etc., caught the imagination of the modern artist, and although there had been predecessors, notably Gabriele D'Annunzio, the Futurists were the ones who gave these phenomena the impetus by proclaiming speed, electricity and machine the centre of their interest. Marinetti was even considering for a while naming his program, "elettricismo"; however, as in the case of "dynamismo" the overriding notion was that the new art was to be the art of the FUTURE; hence FUTURISM.

Anyway, a number of single poems and whole volumes by the Futurist was devoted to these themes. From such titles as Paolo Buzzi, *Aeroplani* (Milano 1909), Luciano Folgore, *Il canto dei motori* (Milano 1912), Corrado Govoni, *Poesie elettriche* (Milano 1911), the line goes to such experiments as, for example, somewhat "regressive" exercise in modernity, *Fornicazione di automobili* by Mario de Leone¹¹ and, finally, Marinetti's own numerous tributes to the supreme status of speed, "the new religion and morality".

It was not only the speed of a racing car and the aeroplane that attracted the attention of the artists; it was a much more thoroughgoing change in looking at things, perceiving the world from the racing car and from the aeroplane. The whole perspective, the shape of things, the contours of the landscape, the canyons of the city streets, all this has acquired different proportions; the swift succession of impressions gave new impulse to imagination and the whole concept of style had to undergo radical changes. The real weight of the discovery was perhaps not grasped at once, but its essence was that the conventional syntax of descriptive, narrative poetry had to be exploded, in the same way as the normal conventional succession of the perceived impressions was replaced by the new 20th century tempo of life. This awareness of the new tempo, the new "rhythm", found its expression in the truly important concept of *Simultaneità*, which soon became one of the chief postulates of Futurism in all areas of art. It is no wonder that some of the most eager Futurists eventually began to believe that they can create a special brand of "aeropainting", "aeropoetry" etc., experiments which did not amount to much but which, nevertheless, were not without a certain rationale. The idea certainly did mark the style of a number of works in all forms of art; in literature it can be observed in prose more than in poetry.

Although the 1909 *Manifesto* was first published in French in "Le Figaro", its impact from the beginning was mainly felt in Italy. The Manifesto was almost simultaneously issued in Italian in Marinetti's "Poesia" (Nos. 3-6, 1909), and the ideas expressed in it were quickly restated and elaborated in application to other forms of art.

¹¹ "Lacerba", July 1, 1914.

On February 11, 1910 Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini and a few other artists issued the first Manifesto of Futurist painting, *Manifesto dei pittori Futuristi*; then the same group published a more specific "technical" Manifesto, *La pittura Futurista — Manifesto tecnico*, then a violent attack on the aesthetic traditionalism and stagnation of the arts in Italy, *Contro Venezia Passatista*, etc., etc.

From then on Italy was literally bombarded by salvoes of Futurist manifestoes devoted to all possible areas of art, politics, morality, "lust" (*Manifesto Futurista della Lussuria* of V. de Saint-Point) etc.

On May 11, 1912 (in spite of their cult of technology, the Futurists could not resist the fascination with cabalistic numbers, and 11 was their favourite date for various ventures), Marinetti issued the important *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*, subsequently published as an introduction to the first anthology of futurist poetry, *I poeti futuristi* (Milano 1912, Edizioni Futuriste di "Poesia").

In spite of its rhetoric the manifesto attacks a number of very real issues. The highly metaphoric introduction may seem rather pretentious at first glance; however, there is no reason to question the sincerity of the claim that the radical rules formulated in the manifesto were directly inspired — dictated, as it were — by the flight in an aeroplane.

While the imagination of many artists in the past had been stirred by the thought of flying "like a bird" high over the world, this was the first time that the thought was the reality, that the flight was not described but experienced. This was the epitome of the new 20th-century life, and it was only natural that it resulted in the realization that the new perspective in perceiving the modern world called for the revision of the means at an artist's disposal, the refurbishing of his tools and the discarding of the obsolete techniques.

The previously static vision, which could be represented by means of conventional descriptive syntax, has now been put in motion at a speed which has changed its shape and which required new style — not descriptive but totally dynamic. Hence the natural call for the destruction of the syntax. Spontaneous responses to the rapidly changing reality could only be formulated — Marinetti meant — as a stream of words — nouns — free from the artificial bonds of grammar, put "according to their natural birth" (*a caso, come nascono*). Not surprisingly, the noun was put forward as the basic element of poetry, as the most concrete and the most "expressive" element of modern poetry. The rules of the conventional syntax had tied the nouns to the rigid pattern of descriptive narration in which their original quality was buried in a large number of grammatically determined relationships to verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. It was time to set them free, strip them of the harness of modifiers, give them back their absolute "primordial" value.

The preoccupation with the noun was not new in literature. Especially the school of Realism emphasized the importance of the presentation of the "real" world in concrete terms, and the noun was recognized as an equivalent of these concrete

elements. Marinetti was then partly following the commonly held opinion. However, in this new view the emphasis was radically shifted in that it was not the number of nouns that counted, but rather the re-discovery of their potential, "stifled" by the rigors of the traditional syntax.

Marinetti discussed the importance of the noun on various occasions. He saw the 20th-century reality as constantly changing, full of tensions and contradictions. To express it in words, he wanted to resort to nouns not bound, not governed by verbs, but alternating in a swift succession, each one reflecting a movement, a shift in meaning or connotation, a new aspect, so that the effect would be that of "simultaneity" (*simultaneità*) making the vision dynamic. From a direct analogy to the most distant association, the range was practically unlimited. The examples cited in the *Manifesto tecnico* are examples of direct, obvious analogy; the comparison: "terrier-boiling water", on the other hand is a good example of distant association. Marinetti did not go as far as some of the Russian futurists in seeking to discover semantic relationships possibly suggested by similarity of sounds, although his "abstract onomatopoeia" has some of the ingredients of their "semantic alliteration"¹². "Hurling words like torpedoes" was more than a mere figure of speech with the Futurists. In their search for words to hurl they resorted mostly to nouns.

The man who has witnessed an explosion does not stop to correct his sentences grammatically. He hurls at his listeners shrieks and substantives. Let us imitate his example¹³.

In his *Les Mots en liberté futuristes*, Marinetti tries to define the two main kinds of nouns used in their "naked" form, i. e. stripped of adjectives, adverbs, etc. and freed from verbs: 1. the basic "elementary noun" and 2. the clusters of nouns which form a synthesis of movement (*substantif synthèse-movement*)¹⁴. Thus the dynamism of the modern reality could be expressed either by single free nouns or by juxtaposing nouns, thus rapidly transferring from one semantic area to another without the obstacle of the grammatical connectors.

Adjectives, adverbs, periods, commas — all the elements of the orderly, fixed syntax — had to go, to give way to a new, free, spontaneous style.

According to the long established view, the part of speech which gives it energy is the verb. Marinetti did not outright denounce this claim, but as his view was that the laws of the traditional syntax were too rigid for the swift tempo of the new, dynamic vision of a modern artist and as the verb in its finite form was the most rigidly determined syntactic element, he challenged the status of the verb as the allegedly energy-giving element. Marinetti insisted on the elimination of the finite form of the verb. Only the infinitive, he claimed, should be used, as the least rigid,

¹² Cf. F. T. Marinetti, *Les Mots en liberté futuristes*, Milano 1919, the chapter *Onomatopées et Verbalisation abstrait*, pp. 65–67.

¹³ R. T. Clough, *Futurism*, New York 1961, p. 78.

¹⁴ Cf. Marinetti, *Les Mots en liberté futuristes*, the chapter *Le Splendeur géométrique et mécanique*, p. 57.

the most elastic, "round" form, which spontaneously adapts itself to the noun without having to reflect the viewpoint of the lyrical "I". The practical consequence of this slogan proved very important indeed, as both Marinetti himself and other modern poets were able to express the dynamism of the modern world in works which were practically devoid of verbal forms¹⁵.

This was, of course, the programme stated in categorical terms which obviously did not apply literally to the poetic practice. Yet, there are examples of Marinetti's own poetry and also the poetry of other Futurist poets in which the slogans of the *Manifesto* are actually — and not unsuccessfully — realized.

Marinetti's poem, *Zang-Tumb-Tuum* can serve as an excellent illustration of the poet's practice in regard to the principles discussed in the *Manifesto tecnico*. Attempting to convey the turmoil of the war, the rapid succession of events (especially in the part *Bombardamento*) the poet does not try to depict the action in a narrative form, feeling that the laws of the normal syntax would detract from the spontaneity of the presentation. Instead he resorts to the device of a stream of seemingly loosely assembled words, mainly nouns, which are nevertheless, bound together by either a direct analogy or at least a remote association, be it semantic or euphonic (onomatopoeia).

MARINETTI I NARODZINY FUTURYZMU

STRESZCZENIE

Powyższy artykuł jest częścią będącego w przygotowaniu studium o roli futuryzmu w rozwoju poezji współczesnej. W części tej przedstawione jest ogólne tło umysłowe i artystyczne okresu oraz pozycja literacka Marinettiego przed jego wystąpieniem w roku 1909 z głośnym *Manifestem futurystycznym*. Podkreślono tu obecność momentów protestu przeciwko konwencjom już we wczesnych utworach poety, a także analogie do objawów fermentu estetycznego u innych pisarzy i artystów w końcu XIX i na początku XX wieku.

Na tle ówczesnych prądów i ugrupowań artystycznych, takich jak zwłaszcza kubizm, z którym futuryzm jest niewątpliwie w pewnej mierze związany, za rzecz istotną należy zdaniem autora uznać, że w manifestach futurystycznych sformułowano szereg haseł, które odegrały zapładniającą rolę w kształtowaniu się nowoczesnego idiomu poetyckiego. Autor analizuje zawartość zwłaszcza dwóch głównych manifestów poetyckich Marinettiego, starając się wskazać te postulaty grupy, które można uważać za najbardziej trwale „odkrycia” futurystów. Jest to przede wszystkim zwrócenie uwagi na element szybkości, dynamizmu, nowoczesnej magii maszyn, fabryk, aeroplanów. Zjawiska te były przedmiotem zainteresowania artystów już wcześniej. Ale to futuryści zadeklarowali w przesadnej, lecz sugestywnej formie potrzebę wyciągnięcia konsekwencji z tego nowego widzenia

¹⁵ For some details concerning these problems, see Z. Folejewski, *Dynamic or Static. The Function of the Verb in Modern Poetry*, [in:] *Canadian Contributions to the Seventh International Congress of Slavists*, The Hague 1973, pp. 111–121.

świata, wizji, która nie mieściła się w ramach opisowej koncepcji stylu, która domagała się odrzucenia gramatycznych reguł składni, swobody w przekazywaniu szybko i gwałtownie zmieniającej się rzeczywistości. Powszechnie uznana za obowiązującą w poetyce XX wieku swobodna dynamiczna dykcja niewątpliwie wywodzi się przynajmniej częściowo z hasła „paroliberyzmu”, wyzwolenia słowa, zastąpienia zasady logicznej relacji koncepcją swobody impulsów, „wyobraźni bez drutu”.

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