

Marinetti Dines
with the
High Command

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A MANIFESTO AND FIVE AEROPOEMS



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High Command



A MANIFESTO AND FIVE AEROPOEMS



With An Afterword
Marinetti and the Invention of the Future



RICHARD CAVELL



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in memory of
Luigi Cavallo



Note

This is a work of fiction. Although historical figures and situations are represented, the content and context of this work is a product of the author's imagination.



Contents



Characters in the performance	.....	<i>xi</i>
The Scenes of the Performance	.....	<i>xiii</i>
The Sound	.....	<i>xv</i>
A Note on Staging	.....	<i>xvii</i>
Prologue	.....	<i>xix</i>
The Manifesto	.....	<i>1</i>
AeroPoem #1: Tumultuous Assembly / Numerical Sensibility	.....	<i>9</i>
AeroPoem #2: Moonshine Ices	.....	<i>17</i>
AeroPoem #3: The Futurist Artocracy	.....	<i>25</i>
AeroPoem #4: ElectroSexRobots	.....	<i>31</i>
AeroPoem #5: Zang Tumb Tuuum	.....	<i>43</i>
Afterword:	.....	<i>51</i>
Inventing the Future	.....	<i>55</i>
Inventing the Performance Piece	.....	<i>69</i>
Illustrations	.....	<i>81</i>
Notes	.....	<i>83</i>
Acknowledgements	.....	<i>95</i>
About The Author	.....	<i>97</i>
About The Book	.....	<i>99</i>

Characters in the performance



F.T. Marinetti: inventor and tireless promoter of Futurism; in the course of the performance he ages from the youthful author of the *Manifesto* to the deluded but still iconic representative of the avant-garde who so dramatically confronts the High Command in Berlin. It is important to keep in mind that Marinetti performs his own life here; he is both inside and outside the performance and sometimes both inside it and outside it at the same time. You can imagine Marinetti speaking throughout in the theatrical voice of declamation, even when speaking about himself; his English would be lightly accented with Italian; his speech would be ebullient but never ridiculous — there is always a serious side to Marinetti, as the recital of his last AeroPoem reminds us.

Futurist Chef

John and Mary Wilson: characters in *ElectroSexRobots* (a play within the performance)



The ElectroSexRobots themselves, Robots #1 & 2

Members of the German High Command

Various Futurists and 'Audience' members

And, as always when radical art is being performed: Police

The Scenes of the Performance



A bar in Paris;
the *Teatro Lirico* in Milan;
a Futurist Kitchen ;
a political meeting room in Rome;
a theatre-set drawing room for the play within the play;
and the dining room of the Hotel Adlon in Berlin.

You should imagine the scene becoming more “Futuristic” as the performance progresses, with the exception of the last scene, in the hotel, which will be dark and heavy, returning us to the visual affect of the opening scene in the Paris bar.

The Sound



You should imagine Marinetti's speeches accompanied by a stylized version of *musique concrète*, a form of music that makes use of the ambient noises the Futurists were so fond of, and which Futurist composer Luigi Russolo produced with instruments he called *intonarumori*, or "noise makers."

A Note on Staging



The play can be staged such that its “realistic” elements contrast with its “futuristic” aspects to produce a source of dramatic tension that heightens that of the plot. It would also be possible to reference characters (*maschere*) of the *commedia dell’arte* in the staging. The anarchic qualities of the *commedia* can be understood as a distant precursor of the Futurists’ antics, and at least one Futurist — Anton Giulio Bragaglia — was taken enough with the *commedia* to produce an anthology of previously unpublished *scenari* (*Commedia dell’Arte: Canovacci della gloriosa commedia dell’arte* [Torino: Edizioni del drama, 1943]).

Masks were also a prevalent motif in 1930s art in Italy, as the 2012 exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, demonstrated (*Anni 30: Arti in Italia oltre il fascismo*). Marinetti is the obvious Harlequin figure. This could be referenced by a multi-coloured waistcoat, with the black half-mask optional. At the end of the play, mask off,



Marinetti would then appear with a waistcoat recalling the costume of Pierrot — large black dots on a white background (as illustrated in Maurice Sand, *The History of the Harlequinade* [2 vols. London: Martin Secker, 1915]). The chef in the manic kitchen sequence would appear as Columbina. John and Mary Wilson's costumes would reflect those of Isabella and Scapino. In this staging, it would be especially effective to have members of the High Command each wearing the mask of Pantalone, with its grotesque distortions. The Police would be dressed as *zanni*.

Prologue



[Marinetti is bald, his face sculpted and angular; he is dressed in a suit, his jacket open to reveal a Futurist waistcoat.]

Ladies and Gentlemen, *Signore Signori*, Good Evening. My name is Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and on the 20th of February, 1909, in the City of Electric Light, I invented the Future.

[Marinetti stares for a moment at the audience, to let his words sink in, then lights down, followed immediately by the sound of a car (an early 20th century 4 cylinder Fiat) roaring off, then braking and crashing. As the lights go up, Marinetti reappears, dishevelled but ebullient, and enters a turn of the century bar in Paris, rather late 19th-century fussy in style — the very style that Marinetti would polemicize against for his entire career — and, to applause, begins declaiming the Futurist Manifesto.]

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Front page of Le Figaro.



The Manifesto



My dear colleagues, *chères collègues*, this evening I was out driving in my motorcar when suddenly I saw two cyclists. I swerved, and the next thing I knew, the car's wheels were in the air and we were in the ditch, covered in muddy water.

Oh maternal womb filled with amniotic fluid! Your darkness reminded me of the breast of my Sudanese nursemaid!

Fished out of the water we regained our upright status and come to you now to sing the love of danger.

Courage, audacity and rebellion will be the elements of our poetry from this point on.

Literature up to now has exalted stultified thought and the ecstasy of somnolence. We exalt aggressive activity, feverish insomnia, the *salto mortale*, and fistfights. We



affirm that the magnificence of the world will become even greater through a new beauty: the beauty of Speed.

A race car with its hood decorated by serpentine exhaust pipes is more beautiful than the Wingèd Victory of Samothrace! In the prodigy of our magnificent ardours we shall augment the enthusiastic fervour of the primordial elements!

Beauty is no more, except in violence.

Poetry must be written as an assault against forces unknown, making them prostrate before mankind. We are on the extreme edge of time. Why should we look over our shoulders if we wish to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible?

Time and Space died yesterday. We now live in the Absolute, having created eternal and omnipresent Speed. We wish to glorify war — only hygiene of the world — patriotism, the beautiful ideas for which one dies, and to disdain the Feminine. We wish to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every kind and to combat moralism and cowardice.



We sing the masses moved by passion; we sing the polyphonic marches of revolution; we sing the vibrant nocturnal fervour of arsenals and of street-corners illuminated by the violence of electric lights; we sing the train stations devouring smoking serpents; we sing the locomotives and their large breasts; we sing the airplanes whose flights play with the wind like a flag applauded by enthusiastic crowds.

We sing the Future.

[Wild applause; Marinetti bows and exits; lights down on stage].



[Lights up on Marinetti, stage left]

The Futurist *Manifesto* caused a scandal, which is how I planned it. I published it in France because French was the language of culture, and it was the encrusted culture of the past that I wanted to attack. French was spoken by the cultured classes in Prague, Krakow, Bucharest, London, Athens, Naples, Berlin, St. Petersburg and so the *Manifesto* was read around the world. Within the week there were articles about Marinetti in *The Daily Telegraph*, the *New York Sun*, the *Kölnische Zeitung*, the *Athenai*, *El Liberal* and *La Nación*. I became known as “the caffeine of Europe.” But that wasn’t enough for me. So in the spring of 1909 I staged a version of my novel *Le Roi Bombance* in Paris. Everyone came to the opening night: Fyodor Chaliapin cancelled an appearance at the *Opéra* and arrived with Ida Rubinstein; Ravel and Satie were there; Cocteau came with Anna de Noailles and the Princesse de Polignac; Odilon Redon was there along with Marcel Proust. And they all hated the play! It was through that experience that I learned the pleasure of being booed. To enhance the evening even further, the critic Hirsch told everyone during the intermission that I had plagiarized the play from Alfred Jarry.



I was in Sarah Bernhardt's box after the play was over when Hirsch came to pay his respects to the diva. Without hesitation, I planted myself in front of him and knocked him out cold. From that point on, my notoriety was assured. No one remembered the play, but that punch — that punch was talked about for months! And it didn't end there. Hirsch challenged me to a duel, choosing a sword as his weapon. We met at the *Bois de Boulogne*, assumed the *en garde*, and the action began. At the 9th lunge, Hirsch's sword broke; at the eleventh, I struck his sword arm, and the victory was mine. ... Oddly, there were 11 points in the *Manifesto*, too. ... One cartoonist depicted me as a locomotive in his vignette of the duel; this didn't hurt either. Isadora Duncan offered herself to me that very evening, and who was I to refuse? But, *infine*, it was time to return to Milan and take up my life there; I bid Isadora adieu and went off to stage my first Futurist event in Italy: a demonstration of Futurist poetry by *il dottor poeta* Marinetti. Just for fun, I staged it at the *Teatro Lirico*, that bastion of traditionalism.

AeroPoem #1:

Tumultuous Assembly / Numerical Sensibility



[Lights dimmed on stage of Teatro Lirico; plush curtain is down so we cannot see the stage at all; curtains are lettered with "T" and "L" surrounded by the gilded laurel leaves that embodied for Marinetti the encrustations of a worn-out cultural tradition. Marinetti appears alone on stage, in a plum-coloured smoking jacket. Members of the audience begin shouting his name: "Marinetti! Viva Marinetti!" Police are evident among the audience. There is an easel on stage on which has been posed, as if it were a work of art, Marinetti's "poem in liberty." As Marinetti declaims his manifesto, he points (perhaps with a walking stick) to the poem on the easel. The audience howls at certain points, whistles at others; fistfights break out from time to time as Marinetti speaks, unfazed.]

Cari amici futuristi, my dear Futurist friends, while in Adrianopolis to report on the battle there, I was taken up in an aeroplane and, seated over the gas tank, I suddenly realized the ridiculous inanity of the outdated syntax



we have inherited from Homer. That syntax had a head, like all imbeciles, a big gut, two legs and two flat feet, but it would never have wings. So it could walk, run a bit, and stop, almost out of breath, *but it couldn't fly!* And there I was, listening to the whirring of the propellers, two hundred metres in the air, and that is when I wrote my AeroPoem, "Tumultuous Assembly / Numerical Sensibility," in order to demonstrate the following points:

1. It is necessary to destroy all syntax and allow nouns to run the risk of their birth. [*Here Marinetti uses his pointer, or perhaps his walking-stick, to gesture toward the poem.*]
2. It is necessary to use verbs in the infinitive only.
3. It is necessary to abolish the adjective. The adjective carries with it the threat of nuance and thus does not comport with our dynamic vision.
4. It is necessary to destroy the adverb and its fastidious unity of tone.
5. Each noun must be given a double, which is to say that it must be followed immediately by another noun, because air travel has speeded up our perception of



analogies. For example: man-torpedoboat; woman-gulf; piazza-funnel.

6. All punctuation must be eliminated to be substituted by mathematical symbols and musical notes.
7. There must be an ever broader use of analogy. While some might compare a fox terrier to a thoroughbred horse, others, more advanced, might compare the terrier to a Morse code transmitter. I, however, would compare the terrier to boiling water! Thus we cleanse language of stereotyped images and colourless metaphors.
8. Images should not be categorized; all images, whether noble or gross, are acceptable to art.
9. Images must be employed in networks of analogy.
10. Images must be used with a maximum of disorder.
11. The first person pronoun must be eliminated at all costs, which is to say that all pretence to psychology must end. Instead, we must cultivate a lyrical obsession with matter. The heat of a piece of iron thrills us more than the smile of a woman. Literature



must now represent the life of a motorcar and the dance of a player piano. We must invent a wireless imagination!

You will yell at me [*this is ironic, because that is what the audience is already doing*] that “Your literature will be ugly! It won’t have those harmonious curves, those tranquil cadences!” And you will be right. Instead, we will use all the brutal sounds, all the rending cries of the violent life that surrounds us. After free verse, here, finally, are free *words*!

The merely animate kingdom has ended. We bring you the mechanical kingdom. With our knowledge of matter — a knowledge unavailable to physics and chemistry — we are preparing the creation of a mechanical man who will have interchangeable parts. We liberate this man from the idea of death, which is the ultimate definition of the intelligence granted by logic.

[At this last salvo, the audience erupts in pandemonium. Marinetti, oblivious, bows and moves to stage left as the lights go down and the easel is removed, with one spot only on Marinetti.]



My first ride in an aeroplane also revealed to me that culture had a pattern and that art must be *total* to be art at all. Futurism must embrace all aspects of culture, all manifestations of life. The discovery of the Absolute did not mean a move away from life but a move deeper into it.

We must live, sleep and even *eat* Futuristically. ... It was at that point that I conceived of the Futurist cookbook. ... In it I would attack Italy *precisely* where it held everything most dear to it — its stomach.

The futurist cookbook would create a harmony between people's palates and their daily lives. Up to now, people had nourished themselves as if they were ants, mice, cats, oxen. The futurist cookbook would change that; eating would become an art. Like all art, it would exalt creative originality.

It is no accident that this cookbook was published during a world economic crisis. To this crisis we opposed *la cucina futurista*, that is to say, an optimism of the table. That is why I subtitled my book *How a futurist dinner can save your life*.



Marinetti at dinner.



AeroPoem #2:
Moonshine Ices



I wrote an AeroPoem about the menu of our first Futurist dinner:

[Marinetti declaims each line of this poem dramatically, and pauses between lines.]

Moonshine ices

wine of divine tears *Gavi*

broth of roses and sun

Mediterranean specialities of zig plus zug plus zag

lamb roasted in the sauce of a lion

salad of daybreak

blood of Bacchus *Ricasoli*

rain of sugar mist

exhilarating foam *Cinzano*

fruit from the garden of Eve



This meal was so successful that I decided to write a manifesto ... against pasta:

[Marinetti assumes a lecturing stance.]

My fellow Italians: convinced that, in the probable future conflagration, the most agile people will taste victory, we Futurists propose that, having made world literature lighter on its feet by placing words in liberty and by making style simultaneous, having disburdened theatres of their boredom with our surprising alogical syntheses and with the drama of inanimate objects, having extended plasticity with anti-realism, having created splendiferous architectural geometries without a hint of decorative bonbons, having made photography and cinema more ethereal through abstraction, we will now establish a nutritional art adapted to lives that are lived aerially and at great speed.

To this end, we propose:

1. The abolition of pasta, absurd gastronomy of the Italian people. Why oppose any longer its gummy weight to the immense web of airwaves that the genius of another Italian has circled the globe with?



2. The abolition of traditional measurements in favour of experimentation.
3. The abolition of traditional mediocrity in making up menus.

For example, let me propose for your delectation the following Futurist recipe:

[At this point the plush, "T L," curtains part, never to be seen again, and lights go up on stage to reveal a Futurist kitchen — all wild angles — and a chef who begins to cook as Marinetti speaks. This scene, while humorous, also has the serious dimension of addressing, obliquely, the role of women in Futurism, and presages that other dinner, in Berlin.]

"Equator + North Pole"

This edible sculpture is comprised of an equatorial sea at sunset made of egg yolks mixed with oysters and dressed with pepper-salt-lemon. In the centre of this sea emerges an Arctic cone of whipped egg-whites and this cone is stuffed with orange wedges which are like juicy rays of the northern sun. The top of the cone is stormed



by black pieces of truffle cut in the form of an aeroplane conquering the zenith.

[The construction of this recipe-sculpture by the chef continues while Marinetti continues to speak, and is paced so that its completion coincides with point # 11.]

4. We also counsel the abolition of the knife and fork for sculptural implements that are able to communicate a tactile, pre-labial pleasure
5. We propose the use of perfumes to aid in degustation; electric fans will be deployed to remove the scents of a previous course

[The chef revs up some fans in the kitchen.]

6. Music should be played between courses in such a way that it does not distract from the sensibilities of tongue and palate but sets them up for the next course

[The chef turns on a recording of Futurist music.]

7. Eloquence and political talk will not be permitted at table



8. Poetry will be permitted to the extent that it intensifies the sensuality of a dish

[The chef removes a book from a shelf and opens it up on her cooking surface.]

9. In order to further excite the senses of dinner guests, dishes will be passed under their noses rapidly but not all dishes will be served, thus producing curiosity, surprise and fantasy
10. There will be little dishes that contain simultaneously 10 or 20 different flavours. These dishes will have the same function in the meal as an illustration has in a work of literature: they will intensify a lifestyle, the unfolding of a love affair, or a trip to the Far East
11. Every kitchen must be equipped with a host of scientific instruments: ozone machines; ultra-violet lights; electric extractors, used to create unique flavours; colloidal mills to create sauces; centrifuges.

[Chef turns on various pieces of equipment.]

About The Author



Richard Cavell is a Canadian of Italian heritage whose academic career has explored Italian culture through a number of vantage points, from the novels of Verga, to McLuhan's debt to Futurism, to the Italian element in Canadian literature. The first Canadian to teach our literature at the University of Padua (1979-81), Richard was instrumental to the success of Canadian Literature as an academic field in Italy. Founder of the International Canadian Studies Centre at UBC, Richard has devoted his career to an integrative approach to the study of culture. He is the author of *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (2002), editor of *Love, Hate and Fear in Canada's Cold War* (2004), and co-editor of *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (2006), as well as more than 70 chapters, articles and reviews. He is currently Professor of English at UBC.