

UCLA

Carte Italiane

Title

Autobiographical Seduction and Futurism

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2j07p1md>

Journal

Carte Italiane, 1(13)

ISSN

0737-9412

Author

Bridges, Andrew

Publication Date

1994

DOI

10.5070/C9113011293

Copyright Information

Copyright 1994 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Autobiographical Seduction and Futurism

1. Introduction

This paper concerns itself with autobiographical accounts of seduction within Futurist literature. Although often dismissed as trivial, irrelevantly misogynist, incongruous, or banal, the issue of seduction lies at the heart of Futurism's program both as an artistic and later as a political movement—and as such deserves the further attention of scholars.

Seduction as a theme was present at the birth of Futurism: what its recognizance depends on, however, is the reader's awareness of the peculiarity of the Futurist use of the term. Seduction equals—unequivocally throughout the Futurist period—violence. Even when not explicitly violent, Futurist seductions occur, at the very least, dressed in the language of violence, of war, of rape. Thus, we read in the founding *Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909) that “La poesia deve essere concepita come un violento assalto contro le forze ignote, per ridurle a prostrarsi davanti all'uomo.”¹ Although perhaps seduction itself is not the true means by which the deliberately vague “forze ignote” are to be reined in, that there exists a strong similarity between the purposes of poetry for the Futurists and the purpose of seduction as commonly defined—i.e. both seek the prostration of an object *at the feet of man* (following a very male discourse)—indicates a collusion of the significances of the seemingly disparate acts of “assault” and seduction. From this very early stage of Futurism, the equation: seduction = violence, is posited as central to the entire Futurist program. In seeking so tenaciously to expand itself through the propagation of its ideals, tenets and energy, the movement systematically availed itself of the powers of seduction. Only seduction, and prostration at the feet of Futurism, could ensure the growth and perpetuation of Futurism as a movement.

In terms of the self-consciously aggressive and militaristic heterosexual logic of Futurism, then, it should follow that the object of a program of seduction that emphasizes to such an extent the power of the male would be none other than woman. It seems that she would fit most neatly in the role of that object which man wishes to have prostrated before him. How, then, can we explain within the founding *Manifesto*, merely several articles after the aforementioned desire for seduction, the expression of a “disprezzo della donna” and the desire to

“combattere contro . . . il femminismo,” aimed at eradicating the very idea of femininity itself? This seemingly incongruent duplicity within the *Manifesto* allows us to begin to define what woman represented for the Futurists. The contrast between the expression of both a desire for seduction in the heterodoxical/heterosexual sense—of women by men, as is demonstrated in Futurist literature—and a declaration of disdain for women and femininity could not have escaped Marinetti’s eye, nor was it intended to. Women were of two sorts for the Futurists, either *passatista*, or Futurist. The *passatista* woman, the *femme fatale* of *fin de siècle* Europe, was the enemy of Futurism, as she embodied, quite literally, all that the movement scorned. The *donna* that Futurism disdained used her “sentimental superstructures” to keep man entrapped, past-loving and passive.² According to his friends, Marinetti’s disdain for women was not universal, but rather directed against that segment of the female gender characterized by its “senso simbolista e dannunziano.”³ In fact, Settimelli and Corra assert, in their introduction to *Come si seducono le donne*, the quasi-political tract on Futurist seduction, that

Nessuno più di Marinetti **apprezza** le donne e noi amici possiamo testimoniarlo: egli combatte la donna non quale è veramente ma quale prodotto della passionalità egoistica del maschio orientale e della letteratura romantica. (CSD 23, emphasis mine)

Thus, the positing of a tenuous distinction between “apprezzo” and “disprezzo”—appreciation and disdain—marks the beginning of the reformation of the proper role for women within Futurist society.

The Futurist desire to displace the *femme fatale* of Romantic and decadent literature is, in effect, the desire to **replace** her in her role of agent of seduction. Furthermore, the very proximity of the *femme fatale* to the Futurist man could be potentially emasculating for him, as the woman as seductress leaves the man stripped of the opportunity to prove his masculinity (which can be accomplished only by having the object prostrate itself *through an act of violence* at the man’s feet, and not vice-versa).⁴ The sexual rapport between man and woman as characterized by the *passatista* model, in which the Futurists saw man first enveloped and then drained by the negative forces of an over-burdened nostalgic femininity, would do nothing other than hinder the male in his realization of the goal of Futurism—the extension of itself as a (primarily) masculine movement.

Thus, seduction for the Futurists occurs only of women by men, within a context of violence, and as the exterior manifestation of an ulterior motive. This “ulterior motive” shall remain at this point as unnamed, as were the “forze ignote” in the founding *Manifesto*, as the true purpose of seduction for the Futurists remained deliberately undefined throughout their literature. This

paper shall seek to pinpoint a definition of what Futurism would have intended seduction to mean, had the Futurists sought to furnish an unequivocal definition of it. Given the peculiar nature of autobiographical writing, autobiographical accounts of seduction are the best place to look for precisely such a definition.

2. Autobiografia, Autobiografismo and Seduction

The three works I intend to examine in detail include two by Marinetti himself, *Elettricità Sessuale* (1909), a play; and *Come si seducono le donne* (1918), variously described as self-help manual, novel, and *volume vissuto*; and a third written by the female Futurist writer Enif Robert—with Marinetti's collaboration—*Un ventre di donna* (1919). Although none of the three works purport to be strictly autobiographical—with the possible exception of *Come si seducono le donne*, which in its *proemio* (if not only there) defines itself as a “lived work,” thus at least claiming to be true—all three are characterized by that literary trait known as *autobiografismo*. *Autobiografismo*, or in English, autobiographism, is in the definition of Fido “the tendency to write about oneself in any kind of work.”⁵ All three works contain, for one reason or another, which shall be explored later, an element of the autobiographical.

Granted the nature of autobiography, in which the author's intent (if one may speak of such a thing) seeks to portray none other than an image of the self, “a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition,” that, through the selectivity with which elements are either included within, or excluded from, the text, speaks of a meaning that no longer makes reference to actual facts or objects, but rather to their intended significance in relation to the life as a whole.⁶ Whereas signification is eternally postponed, as Lyotard would put it, within works characterized by *autobiografismo*, it becomes clear that the referent is a purely metalinguistic one; it deals with metaphors and not facts of “self.”⁷

Thus, close readings of autobiographical accounts of seduction, highly metaphoric as such, should reveal to the scrutinizing eye elements pertinent to their social and political relevance, scope, aim and so forth, as the selectivity with which the “truths” portrayed within the text cannot help but be indicative of where the text itself wishes to go—towards what metaphoric meaning it strives to reach. Furthermore, autobiographical accounts of seduction can have hidden within themselves an agenda, easily insinuated into the minds of those who read them; texts of seduction are seductive texts.

3. Seduction, Violence and Homosocial/sexual Desire

To recall briefly the original *Manifesto* of Futurism, even here, at Futurism's birth, violence, or at least aggression and/or speed, is present in all eleven

articles, indicative of its crucial importance for the movement as a whole. Why, however, did the Futurists feel such a pressing need to extend violence to seduction and to the sexual act itself? *Come si seducono le donne*, let us recall, is a book that “non poteva nascere che in un’epoca di guerra” (CSD 21). Thus we read its chronicles of seduction as though we were reading an account of the war that frames the text; the sexual and the bellicose meld together upon the written page. Indeed, the lexicon of seduction employed by Marinetti within the text coincides exactly with that of war: seduction is portrayed in three moments, 1. *strategia . . . tattica . . . lancio . . . attacco . . . agguato . . . bombardamento*; 2. *contrattacco . . . ostacolo . . . difendere . . . resistere*; 3. *vittoria . . . vincere . . . liberatore*, in which man is pitted against woman, with victory ensuing upon the “liberation” of the object of conquest (CSD 39-49). Indeed, sexual victory itself, portrayed by the language of war, concerns the prostration of woman before man, facilitating the final conquest—the male carnal possession of the female: as we read in *Abasso il tango e Parsifal!*, “Possedee una donna, non è strofinarsi contro di essa, ma penetrarla” (TIF 95). But the converse also exists, the sexualization of war/violence, as we see in the following example from *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!*:

Ecco la furibonda copula della battaglia, vulva gigantesca irritata dalla foia del coraggio, vulva informe che si squarcia per offrirsi meglio al terrifico spasimo della vittoria imminente! (TIF 26)

The Futurist’s indefatigable lust for war—their Nietzschean will to power—permeates all of their art, regardless of medium. However, when no longer viewed in a simplistic way as a juvenile predilection, albeit incurable, the urge to mix violence with sex, and sex with violence appears indicative of another motive. According to Sedgwick, “to sexualize violence or an image of violence is simply to extend, unchanged, its reach and force.”⁸ Therefore, the driving motive behind the sexualization of violence for the Futurists is precisely the extension of its influence beyond the level of the personal (or the international, as there exists in Futurism the equating of the female body to the battlefield, and of the difference between genders to the difference between nations) to the level of their nationalistic discourse.⁹ Seduction, as sexualized violent encounters, and violent sexual encounters, can be read within the Futurist context as being indicative of an entire symbolic and ideological system, in that the potential extent of its influence reaches far beyond its immediate implications. Dreams of penetration are prevalent in a movement that exalts imperialism and the violence of war, as it is not terribly difficult to compare the metaphoric significance of *jouissance* within the sexual act for the male with the thrill of victory upon the battlefield, nor to understand the equivalence between

vanquishing an enemy and vanquishing the enemy woman. As Valentine St. Point writes in her *Manifesto futurista della lussuria*, “È NORMALE CHE I VINCITORI, SELEZIONATI DALLA GUERRA, GIUNGANO FINO ALLO STUPRO, NEL PAESE CONQUISTATO, PER RICREARE DELLA VITA”; what is still unclear is why seduction is made into such a spectacle, and if it is indeed representative of a system, what constitutes such a system?¹⁰

At the most basic level, it becomes clear that the system is none other than the Italian patriarchal political ideology of this period. For all of Futurism’s pretenses of radical change and rejection of this past, it remains largely anchored to this reactionary and traditional ideology. Within patriarchies, according to Sedgwick, heterosexuality is practically obligatory—as is, it appears, homophobia.¹¹ Indeed, a text such as *Come si seducono le donne* strives to prove the virility of its author obsessively, even to the point of being pathological, all the while vilifying homosexuality.¹² We read in Corra and Settimelli’s preface to *Come si seducono le donne* a frank testimony to Marinetti’s prowess as a male; even after a fifty hour journey to Palermo, Marinetti, rather than take his rest, bounds off “da una donna,” whose anonymity indicates her function solely as proof of his heterosexuality (*CSD* 10). As befits the logic of all patriarchal systems, the textual woman serves only as the guarantor of male virility, as the vouchsafe of male heterosexual identity. The socio-political bonds that arise between men within the patriarchal system are therefore touched by the sexualization of violence/the violence of sexuality—**seduction** in Futurist terms—since the *topos* upon which the whole spectacle plays itself out, the female body, serves no other purpose than that of cementing the bonds between men. These homosocial bonds, the supposed polar opposite of homosexual bonds, between men are kept as such precisely because of the mediating role played by the woman, since they are “proof” of non-homosexuality and furthermore “offer” themselves as the proving grounds for the hypervirile Futurist male.¹³

Within the scheme of Futurist seduction the role played by women, posited as the supposed object of seduction, is often no more than that of a contractual term. True to Sedgwick’s definition of homosocial desire, in which men actively seek to promote the interest of other men, seduction for the Futurists proves itself to be exactly that: a structure that permits the play of homosocial **desire**, while ensuring that the homosocial-homosexual continuum remains broken, thus eliminating the potential threat to the hypervirile Futurist male that desire regress to practice.¹⁴ Therefore, the true partners for the male within this system of sexualized politics are other men; women are relegated to the position of controlling the heterosexual legitimacy of such arrangements.

The seductiveness of such autobiographical texts of seduction lies chiefly in their textual manifestation of a profound belief in the system which we have just

delineated. As Nazzaro writes,

La scrittura diviene, così, un *progetto* concettuale, astratto e *persuasivo*, entro cui potersi calare e riconoscersi, onde poter postulare, sul piano delle trasparenze intellettive e con la complicità dell'interlocutore, delle modificazioni parametriche che, a loro volta, determinano la durata del piano programmato come *immediato intervento nella vita*.¹⁵

Thus the autobiographical text now serves three purposes: as a metaphor of the entire project, of the entire system; as a device to prove the virility of its author, thus completing a second seduction, that of its readers (presumably male, the true objects of the Futurist male's seductive endeavor); and as a means to ensure the participation of other males within the system—that *immediato intervento*.

Regardless of how effectively women play their role within this triangle there still exists the distinct danger that men will be overactive in their seeking the homosocial bond, and thus risk being effeminate in their desire for closeness to other men. The strictness with which the three points of this triangular relationship must be separated for the Futurists can be easily demonstrated, as the proximity of the male to the male within the context of homosociality gives rise to doubt about the virility of the male in question. Exaggeration of the male-male bond would allow the question of effeminacy to emerge. Ironically enough, an exaggeration of the male-female bond would accomplish the same, as it seems to bring on the languid decadence of the dannunzian model of the *femme fatale*-male relationship. Futurism sought to avoid movement along the homosocial-homosexual axis, as the taking of an overly extreme position on either end of it would mark a threat to the Futurist male. As Marinetti writes in *Contro il matrimonio*, in *Democrazia futurista*, "Sarà finalmente abolita la mescolanza di maschi e femmine che—nella prima età—produce una dannosa effeminazione dei maschi" (*TIF* 370). Although Marinetti claims to speak of only the tender *prima età* here, all stages of heterosexual male development and existence are implied, for the lingering male who remains with the female risks emasculation, regardless of age. Even during and after the sexual act, contact with the woman should be kept to the bare minimum: "Bisogna dunque velocizzare e sintetizzare anche l'amore!" as Marinetti claims (*CSD* 60).

The fear of not occupying one's correct station along the homosocial-homosexual continuum represented the threat to the virility of the Futurists. In fact, so tenuous was their idea of masculinity, so prone were they to incessant affirmations of their own unshakable virility, that it becomes clear that masculinity and virility had ceased to be perceived as a birthright, but rather have become a construct, a work in progress. As Gilmore writes of the construction of sexual

roles in Victorian England, "Boys . . . had to be made masculine; otherwise there was doubt."¹⁶ Homophobia ("doubt"), hand in hand with disdain for the overly feminine woman, kept the Futurist male in check.

Regardless of the distances kept between the points of the triangle—especially between men—the broad insistence on the model of seduction that can be found throughout Futurist writing requires that the male as Futurist play what was traditionally a very feminine role. The Futurist ideal of seduction by the "hypervirile" male, when stripped of its (necessary) element of violence, does little more than invert the *fin de siècle* idea of the female seductress. Again, what prevents the exposure of the male as an essentially "female" character is the ever present role of the female object, the vouchsafe, whose presence as the ostensibly "true" object of seduction relieves any *Angst* or phobia that may accompany the active searching out of the true partner, other males.

Indeed, the female serves as little more than the screen behind which the oppressed homosexual desires of the hypervirile man can redress themselves as merely homosocial. As Sedgwick states, following Freud, effeminacy within heterosexual male development is a natural stage, as in the search for a separate heterosexual identity of their own, young boys find themselves in the position of "effeminized subordination" to their fathers.¹⁷ The Futurist finds himself effeminized in the search for his own identity—and in his search to make others over in his own image. This version of the Girardian triangle functions precisely because of the male's **disdain** for the female, which keeps her at her proper distance (recall the "*disprezzo per la donna*" in the founding *Manifesto*); should she be approached any more closely, should velocity be removed from the sexual act, the element of homosocial attractiveness to other men might disappear as the male's hypervirile autonomy would disappear; should she be kept any more distant, the pretense of heterosexuality would no longer be credible. Regardless of the continuum that may exist between homosocial and homosexual desire, it must remain broken at least on the theoretical level, lest the Futurist fall prey to his own phobias.

The position of the male Girardian third within the Futurist triangle of desire points towards a conceivably broader role for the male as seducer—that of performer. In the accounts that we shall be reading the male third is cast in the only possible role exterior to the binary opposition seducer-seduced: that of audience. To maximize the legitimacy of the heterosexuality of the seductive spectacle the presence of the true object of seduction, the male, must be relegated to an external position, thus the invention of the role of spectator, of audience. Seductions can only be seductive if witnessed, thus Futurist seductions occur almost without exception within the arena of the theatrical, textual or rhetorical. As the male needs to be privy to the act itself, as voyeuristic as it may sound, in

order for the system to function properly, Futurist seduction occurs as drama. For Marinetti and the Futurists the theater of seduction and the theater of war, both public spectacles of virile prowess writ large, were one and the same, that *topos* within which the violent and the sexual can no longer be distinguished.

In conclusion to our definition of seduction for the Futurists it proves useful to affirm that the seduction of women was chronicled primarily within a variety of artistic media, most important amongst which were the printed word and the theatrical performance, both of which require an audience, a reader, a spectator, in order for them to have any sense. And, although both enjoyed female followings of their own, ultimately they targeted the male audience, in hopes of seducing them into the Futurist fold.

4. Seduction, Violence and Homophobia: Proof of System

Homophobia, too, loosely defined, was a vital component of the violence of Futurist seduction and of the Futurist patriarchal system, as it maintained the heterosexual legitimacy of the Girardian triangle, granted its implied presence in (or motivation behind) the endless bragging and parading of the **female** object of desire. Therefore, the seduction of women may be equated with homophobic violence as both actively seek within the framework of Futurist ideology to seduce men through the aggressive foregrounding of their presumably virile qualities. That violence and seduction/penetration of women were unequivocally tied together was clear to all, least not to the Futurists themselves, as can be seen in the following example from *Come si seducono le donne*, in which, one night at a *serata futurista*, according to Corra and Settimelli in the preface to the work,

Marinetti esclama: “Noi siamo per la violenza” ed uno spettatore con tutta ingenuità domanda di fondo: “Seusi, che cosa ne pensa della violenza carnale?”

Battuta di spirito? Semplicità? Non è possibile saperlo ma noi risentiamo ancora l’effetto comicissimo di quella voce cauta e discreta. (CSD 18-19)

The question itself is ingenious because it is born of simplicity: the spectator fails to grasp that for the Futurists violence is both physical and carnal; violence is both war and rape, international and personal. Homophobia, or even the mere use (seduction/penetration) of women objectively vis-à-vis the male third within the Girardian triangle, delineates a space, a mechanism of domination (but not necessarily its agency, thrust or motivation) of the bonds that structure all social form, and not just its declared, immediate objectives.¹⁸

Homophobia, as characterized by this limited definition on the Futurist political, theatrical and textual stage, has a large amount of leverage as it coerces all attendant males (the audience) into questioning—and affirming (i.e. through further acts of violence, war and seduction)—their own heterosexual, male

identity. The male Futurist audience can never be passive, since it is explicitly asked to play out in its own life, to recall Nazzaro, the seductively ideological spectacle to which it is privy. The recruitment of active male participants within the Futurist movement, seems to be at least partially the system at which seduction hints. A further elaboration of this will be conducted upon reading of the texts in question.

Therefore, prior to opening the texts themselves, I posit that in Futurist autobiographical accounts of seduction it would be practically impossible not to gain some idea of what the movement as a whole intended to be its “thrust and motivation,” as autobiography as a genre has within its scope the relation of a metaphorical meaning of, in this case, the seductive self.

5. *Elettricità sessuale: Violent Seduction and the Audience Revealed*

Elettricità sessuale, a short play in three acts, was first published in its original French under the title of *Poupées électriques* in 1909, the year of the founding of the Futurist movement. Although one cannot claim that it is strictly autobiographical in nature, *Elettricità sessuale* presents a variety of elements to its reader—to its audience—that reflect the “insistente autobiografismo” of its author, Marinetti himself.¹⁹ The story is of Riccardo Marinetti, a “ingegnere, costruttore di fantocci elettrici,” and his wife, Maria, and the former’s particular perversion of having present a number of his *fantocci* whenever he chooses to seduce his own wife.²⁰ The choice of the two very *unheimlich* mechanized dolls that appear within the play, professor *Matrimonio* and madame *Famiglia*, is striking. Both represent the normative social institutions which Marinetti the Futurist vehemently opposed. Ironically, however, Marinetti himself was married in 1909, the year that *Elettricità sessuale* was first published in Italian.²¹

As one of the maids in the Marinetti household remarks, “Il padrone e la padrona si concedono ogni sera il lusso e l’illusione di baciucchiarsi dietro le spalle di qualcuno!”, reflecting the sense of a heightening of the pleasure of the sexual encounter through the presence of a third party (*ES* 13). Whether or not this third party is the third party of the Girardian scheme remains to be discussed. It is certain that Marinetti the character’s—and by autobiographical extension, Marinetti the man’s—performance on the sexual stage requires the presence of an audience, albeit one that is hoodwinked by what goes on behind its back. Marinetti the character derives pleasure from the act of seduction precisely because of the secretive element of it. He often has Maria play along with his fantasy of seduction, telling her,

Maria. . . Senti. . . Io non sono tuo marito. . . Tuo marito è lì, [pointing to professor *Matrimonio*] davanti a noi. . . Dorme. . . Sono io, io. . . Lo sai, chi

sono. . . .” (ES 28)

Marinetti's seduction of his own wife works because of the scripted complicity of a mechanical version of the necessary third, onto whom he projects his dreams of a system of seduction. The presence of mechanical versions of the polar opposites of Futurist “libero amore,” family and marriage, exacerbates the theatrical virility of the seducer himself, as the seductive act becomes one of great daring. However, the fact that the two *fantocci* doze throughout the whole scene of seduction in the second act—with occasional coughing spells to heighten the fear of discovery—seems to fly in the face of what we have proposed as the model of Futurist seductions: the third is present, but unaware. One must recall that the act of seduction portrayed within the text was intended to be performed on stage, thus the theater of seduction coincides perfectly with the stage of drama. The male audience—the true object of seduction—does not nap away unconsciously on stage, rather it sits rapt with attention in the theater, privy to a scene of Futurist seduction. The barrier created by the fourth wall of the play, which separates the audience from the scene on stage—and thus the male elements of the Girardian triangle—ensures that the homosocial-homosexual continuum remains broken. The theatrical or artistic performance of an autobiographical account of seduction proves to be the safest mode of relation, as it permits the unabashedly voyeuristic gaze of the male audience, without however allowing the proximity of the two elements which might prove to be effeminizing/emasculating for the seducer.

Confirmation that the seduction of his own wife within *Elettricità sessuale* was designed as little more than an overture to the male members of his audience can be found throughout the short play. Indeed, the pressing need that Marinetti the character felt to seduce his own wife, so as to lend meaning to their sexual encounter, indicates that the staging of the whole scene of seduction was intended primarily for the benefit of those onlookers who should remain in awe of such brash and unconventional sexual *mores*. Furthermore, the very present element of violence within Marinetti's seduction, again, of his very own wife, alerts us to the fact that the whole staging aims to benefit that third party removed from the events being played out on stage. The rather ludicrous, if not disturbing, need for Marinetti's introduction of violence into what should be a consensual relationship, points to his unease that somehow his seduction may not be “virile” enough. Marinetti remarks to Maria at one point,

Ma penso alla tua piccola anima senza difesa che si dà soltanto se vien presa colla violenza. . . . E il tuo corpo, lo stesso! . . . Strano! Mi pare che sia alla mercè di chiunque voglia impadronirsene brutalmente! . . . Eh, sì! . . . Tu sei e sarai sempre a disposizione dei ladri, come il pianterreno di una villa isolata nella campagna. . . In una sera di temporale, come questa, la

tua volontà non esiste più. . . . (ES 26-27)

Only in the presence of violence, and a male audience to vouch for its legitimacy, can Marinetti's seduction redeem itself as worthy of Futurism. Nor does his schematically ideal seduction stop here. *Elettricità sessuale* marks the entrance of the element of the mechanical in Futurist literature, which comes to fruition only later, with works such as *L'alcova d'acciaio* and *Mafarka*. Riccardo Marinetti states that his idea is to "frammischiare i miei fantocci alla nostra vita e al nostro amore," thereby gradually assuming the roles of the real people that surround him—"essi riassumono e sostituiscono, per me, tutta l'umanità, e ormai non desidero più vedere i miei simili, quando sono con te. . . Con loro" (ES 31, 34). The only real presences that Marinetti requires other than his own are that of the woman, now strictly an object, a prop, and the male audience to lend significance and legitimacy to the performance. As Marinetti yells at the end, casting the two dolls into the sea, "Famiglia e Matrimonio, *vlan*, dalla finestra," leaving upon the stage—and within the theater—the three basic elements of Futurist seduction: seducer, woman, and audience (ES 37).

6. Come si seducono le donne and Seductively True Stories of Seduction

Come si seducono le donne, first published in 1917, removes the audience of Girardian thirds one degree further away from Marinettiseduttore. The self-styled "self-help manual" recounts the exploits of the hypervirile main proponent of Futurism as told to a third, namely Bruno Corra, who transcribed the dictated text.²² The fact that the text purportedly represents a *libro vissuto*, the veracity of which is vouched for by Corra and Settimelli in their laudatory preface, lends itself quite easily to its consumption as autobiographical spectacle by an audience desirous of enfranchisement in the Futurist seductive fold. The foregrounding within the text of such boastful claims of seduction leaves little choice for those male readers who take seriously the Futurist discourse but to take up Marinetti on his challenge to prove their own virility. *Come si seducono le donne* is in many ways a co-opting text. Regardless of how it might be read by a man, the text succinctly manages to call into question the male reader's heterosexual psyche. This forces the male reader, who compares his behavior to that of the hyperbolically hypervirile Futurist male, to evaluate his own virility and, as Marinetti himself must have hoped, to contemplate future action concordant with the Futurist agenda.

Of the two instances of seduction within the text that I wish to examine in detail, the first concerns itself with all of the classically Futurist elements we have thus far uncovered. One of Marinetti's first conquests within the text is that of the young American woman, Miss Maery [sic], who Marinetti describes as being

“priva di ogni passatismo nostalgico” (CSD 54). Thus she is identifiable as a woman worthy of being Futurist prey, as she does not manifest any of the remnants of the decadent *dannunzianismo* that so imperils the Futurist seducer. Indeed, “passatismo nostalgico” can also be read more simply as being any inhibitive scruples which might complicate the velocity and high degree of synthesis of the beloved Futurist sexual encounter. However, potentially disastrous—and gravely unfortunate—an event arises, or fails to: Marinetti finds himself impotent and incapable of either rapidly or synthetically concluding the sexual act. Exasperated and “senza amore,” Marinetti, incapable of conquest, finds himself slowly being entrapped by the overly effeminate. In vain, to cure his impotence brought on by an overdose of decadent indulgence, he searches the horizon for the sight of the one thing which would restore him as a Futurist male—a machine gun (CSD 55).

Symbolic of the violence and “quel bisogno di pericolo, di agguato, di lotta” that lends legitimacy to Futurist sexual relations, the presence of a machine gun would assuage the fears of the Futurist male in crisis. Like Riccardo Marinetti’s *fantocci elettrici*, a machine gun would heighten desire (“intensificare il sapore della tua bocca”) and, more importantly, guarantee the virility of the act within the strict guidelines of the movement (CSD 38, 55). Turning the event to his own advantage, Marinetti now blames the woman for his own inability to perform, chastising Miss Maery who, in perhaps a trope on American neutrality, lies “come un Luigi dimenticato sul tappeto verde di una tavola da gioco senza giocatori e senza croupiers,” failing completely to understand what Marinetti seeks to accomplish. Marinetti in the end leaves her, the inert playing card, quite abruptly, exclaiming more to himself and to his reading audience, than to she who seems not to understand (“Je ne comprends pas,” she answers to his Futurist ranting in Italian) “Tu devi adornare la tua bellezza di guerra . . . sei incompleta” (CSD 55-56).

Interestingly enough, Corra takes leave of Marinetti at this point, perhaps disgusted with his exaggerations. Regardless of this, Marinetti perseveres in his seductive quest—“Lo saluto e me ne vado a domandar consiglio alla carne rosea di una amica olandese, sensuale, pronta. . .”—so virile is the text at this point that it proceeds autonomously (CSD 56-57). Even Corra, on the verge of relating a successful seduction of Marinetti’s, is demoted to the rank of mere spectator, of audience, as the writing proves itself capable of continuing on, even without the very necessary presence of someone to transcribe it. Marinetti prides himself on his next encounter precisely because it functions so well within the Futurist scheme of seduction. Immediately after a minimalist account of the act itself (“dopo averla presa, baciata, rovesciata, senza svestirsi”) follows a parenthetical description of its accompanying noise, to which are dedicated an

equal number of words (“al tinnire dei miei speroni di bombardiere”), thus proving the element of war within seduction to be of equal textual importance (CSD 57). The carnal assault on the Dutch woman proves to be far more complete an encounter than the previous for more than physical reasons. The jingle of Marinetti’s spurs alludes to the violence of the coupling with a married woman within the pages of a supposedly autobiographical text. This implies, for all intents and purposes, three things: the betrayal of the woman’s husband, the hoodwinked Mr. Marriage; the prostration of a woman at a Futurist’s feet; and the presence of violence so sacrosanct for the deed. It is, in brief, a perfect example of a Futurist seduction. The success of this case of seduction is far better chronicled within the pages of *Come si seducono le donne* than the previous failure, as an analysis of the seven word sexual act follows its relation, proving how well it fits into the pre-established Futurist script. “La donna senza la guerra è una rivoltella scarica,” Marinetti remarks, claiming in this manner that his impotence in the previous encounter with the American woman came about because the element of war was absent from the scene (CSD 59). Without war there can be no seduction for Futurism because there would be no **point** to it, as without war—without violence born of homophobia—a seduction would never be credible for the audience, nor would they as the Girardian third have reason to admire or emulate it.

The Dutch woman represents in many ways the ideal Futurist lover: she admires male velocity and violence—“Amami pure guerrescamente e sinteticamente. Mi piace.”—and accepts readily the role assigned to her by her hypervirile partner (CSD 60). She does catch on to this; “Tu consideri le donne come delle stazioni ferroviarie,” she remarks, sparking however an even more insightful comment by Marinetti, “Talvolta non sono che dei tunnels!” (CSD 60). The idea of women as tunnels, as devices, as the *topos* of passage, fits equally well into the Futurist scheme of seduction as did that of war. A few lines below on the same page, Marinetti speaks of the expansion of Futurism as a movement, in which they, the Futurists, “Si sventrarono le montagne coi trafori spiralicci.” Again, the tunnel, **disemboweled nature**, here in the proper Italian “trafori,” as woman, serves as a means of passage through which the Futurist man can proceed in his conquest.

7. Un ventre di donna and a Final Literary Seduction

Enif Robert, who published *Un ventre di donna* with the assistance of Marinetti in 1919, responds in many ways to the seductive spectacles of Futurist literature. As she wrote in the theoretically polemic epilogue to *Come si seducono le donne*, she disagrees with Marinetti’s *passè* definition of seduction, as it excludes the possibility that a woman may give herself in of her own free

will and volition to the wants of man. Futurist seduction, as far as Robert is concerned in her *Lettera aperta a F. T. Marinetti*, is no more than a figment of the male psyche, used as an “illusione di dominio.”²³

Robert’s choice of autobiography as genre reflects in many ways her sincere desire to join the Futurist literary ranks, as it can best trace metaphorically—as indeed *Un ventre di donna* does—one’s growth and development to that point of the “summary moment of composition.” Her apparent susceptibility to being seduced, on which she prides herself, causes her to lose sight of the inherent perils of such a seduction within the greater scope of its full range of meanings for Futurism. Although naïve is far too strong a word to be used with Robert, her ardent desire to be part of the Futurist triangle of seduction—to be what Futurism wants her as a woman to be—indicates that she gave little thought to the full implications of her actions.

Un ventre di donna portrays to a large extent the irony of what role a Futurist woman’s autobiography, albeit allegorical, can play. I argue that female accounts of Futurist seduction prove little more than the effectiveness of the entrapping seductive powers of Futurist literature, and not, as Robert believes, the great liberating aspects of Futurism. Whilst reading of Robert’s self-proclaimed “CORAGGIO + VERITÀ” it is important to remember that the text itself was subject to prostration at the metaphorical feet of Marinetti-as-editor’s pen; his “Approvo incondizionatamente,” followed by his signature, at the tail-end of the introduction attests to this.²⁴

Enif Robert’s textual illness appears to center around her very own gender, as reflected in her despondent comment at the beginning of the work, “Che schifo, essere un utero sofferente, mentre tutti gli uomini si battono!” (*UVD* 25). Her illness appears to be compounded by what can only be described as gender constipation: Robert is held back in life and in health by her inability to evacuate from within her the pain and suffering she endures, most of which seems centered around her uterus—her femininity.

Despite the numerous operations she undergoes, as her female reproductive organs are slowly removed bit by bit, Robert’s condition seems to do little else but worsen. It is one of Robert’s doctors who eventually makes the correct diagnosis of her condition: “Ecco: per quanto sia difficile definirla, dirò che lei mi sembra un cervello troppo virile in un corpo troppo femminile” (*UVD* 97). Thus her sickness, that which hinders her most in life, is precisely the female vessel in which her virile—her Futurist—brain has been deposited. Her solution and definitive cure is two-fold: surgical and textual. To pass time during her long stays in the hospital, Robert begins to read Futurist books, brought by her friend Lucia. She also begins to correspond with Marinetti himself, who writes her from the front, that theater of war upon which are traced the scarred trenches,

inviting contrast with the theater of sexuality that is Robert, upon whose abdomen are traced trenches of scars. In addition, Robert keeps in frequent contact with Eleonora Duse, the *donna fatale* archenemy of Futurist sexuality, all the while fending off viral attacks from the nuns of the convent, all eager to convert her, the “atea convinta,” to Catholicism. Thus within Robert—and upon Robert the woman, *topos* of struggle and conquest—several contingents of contending forces do battle: Futurism, femininity, Catholicism, and *dannunzianismo*.

The first sign of victory comes in the form of delirium, the description of which provides for one of the most compelling portraits of Futurist seductions, if not the most scandalous. As she thinks of *Zang-tumb-tumb* lying next to *I miracoli della Madonna di Lourdes*, both on her bedside table, Robert begins to fantasize about the struggle between the two works:

Infine, nella mia fantasticheria, la dolce Madonna aveva ceduto completamente il campo al lirismo incendiario e guerresco di Marinetti, alle sue mordenti ironie. (UVD 47)

The seduction of the Madonna, and by extension of Robert herself, occurs primarily by means of the printed Futurist text, vindicating the seductive intentionality of Marinetti in writing such works. To continue along the path to recovery, Marinetti suggests that she take the “cura del desiderio,” in which incessant desire alone can cure her illness. Robert takes this Futurist cure to heart, developing a desire of her own—“il più assurdo, il più difficile, il più lontano, quello di diventare . . . una scrittrice futurista!” (UVD 134). This dream of authority, this dream of text, comes to symbolize the whole of *Un ventre di donna*, as the book can be read as nothing more than a “monument of the self as it is becoming.”²⁵ To reach this goal, as does Giorgina Rossi in *Una donna con tre anime*, Robert must undergo further operations, as her being a female still impedes her passage to authorship. Like the mountains that block the Futurist locomotive of progress, Robert, too, must be disemboweled—“sventrata”—leaving only her vagina, that crude tunnel through which Futurist man can travel, proving his virility as he proceeds towards future conquests.

Proof that Robert is finally cured, finally hollowed of her femininity, can be found in a letter she writes to Marinetti, starkly contrasting her initial auto-diagnosis quoted earlier: “Vorrei alzarmi, andare in guerra, in trincea, sparare, uccidermi, finirla. Sono *stuuuufa!*” (CSD 192).

Robert is fully seduced by Marinetti by the end, as attested by her no longer being a woman, but merely a “tunnel,” according to the definition we read in *Come si seducono le donne*. In order to save her femininity, Enif Robert has to destroy it, lest she fail to fulfill her role as a Futurist woman. Her conscious

acquiescence to the seductive powers of Futurist literature implies her loss of identity as a woman: Enif Robert, female, writes herself out of her own femininity.

To conclude, the example of Enif Robert demonstrates the functioning of the seductive aspect of Futurist texts, as she appears anxious to join the movement based on its purely literary appeal. Perhaps unknown to Robert was the way in which the co-optive powers of Futurism worked, in that her own text stands as a monument not to any feminine aspect of Futurism, but rather to its triumph as a very virile and masculine movement. The leverage exerted by the Futurist seductive system enables the enfranchisement of even women, who seemingly have little to gain by courting the violence of the Futurist *seduttore*. The Futurist cause upon the stage of the theatre of war and sex, where such spectacles were apt to take place, even metaphoric as such, is thereby furthered. The theatrical nature of autobiographical accounts of Futurist seductions—even within works written by women—allowed Futurism to successfully define seduction as what it is even etymologically—*se + ducere*—the leading along with one's self. The ominous presence of the stem *duc-* should not be read as being coincidental, as *il Duce* himself availed himself of the Futurist idea of seduction in coming to power four years after the publication of *Come si seducono le donne*, providing perhaps the first correct critical reading of what the ulterior motives of Futurism really were: seduction and subordination within a structural rigidity.

Andrew Bridges

Department of Italian

University of California, Los Angeles

Notes

¹*Teoria e invenzione futurista* 10. All further references to this work shall be noted parenthetically within the text as *TIF*.

²Re 254.

³*Come si seducono le donne* 23. All further references to this work shall be noted parenthetically within the text as *CSD*.

⁴Spackman 92-93.

⁵Fido 168.

⁶Olney 35.

⁷Lyotard 2.

⁸Sedgwick 6.

⁹Spackman 96.

¹⁰Salaris 37.

¹¹Sedgwick 3.

¹²Spackman 86.

¹³Spackman 83.

¹⁴Sedgwick 3, 5.

¹⁵Nazzaro 100, emphasis mine.

¹⁶Gilmore 18.

¹⁷Sedgwick 23.

¹⁸Sedgwick 87.

¹⁹Nazzaro 100.

²⁰*Elettricità sessuale* 5. All further references to this work shall be noted parenthetically within the text as *ES*.

²¹According to *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, *La donna è mobile* was presented on stage in Turin that very year, a reduction of *Poupées électriques*.

²²Spackman 97.

²³*Lettera aperta a F. T. Marinetti* iii.

²⁴*Un ventre di donna* xv. All further references to this work shall be noted parenthetically within the text as *UVD*.

²⁵Olney 35.

Works Cited

- Fido, Franco. "At the Origins of Autobiography in the 18th and 19th Centuries: The Topoi of the Self." *Annali d'italianistica* 4 (1986): 168.
- Gilmore, David D. *Manhood in the Making*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Lyotard Reader*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. *Elettricità sessuale*. Milan: Facchi, 1920.
- . *Teoria e invenzione futurista*. Ed. Luciano De Maria. Milan: Mondadori, 1968.
- . *Come si seducono le donne*. Rocca San Casciano: Capp., 1918.
- Martin, Marianne W. *Futurist Art and Theory: 1909-1915*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.
- Nazzaro, G. B. "Da *Come si seducono le donne* a *Novelle colle labbra tinte*: la disfatta dell'ideologia e le nuove emergenze nel testo." *F. T. Marinetti Futurista*. Naples: Guida, 1977.
- Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *The Futurist Moment*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
- Raleigh, A. S. *Woman and Superwoman*. Chicago: Hermetic Publishing, 1916.
- Re, Lucia. "Futurism and Feminism." *Annali d'italianistica* 7 (198): 253.
- Robert, Enif. *Un ventre di donna*. Milan: Coop. Grafica degli Operai, 1919.
- Rosà, Rosa. *Una donna con tre anime*. Milan: Edizioni della Donna, 1981.
- Salaris, Claudia. *Le futuriste*. Milan: Edizioni della Donna, 1982.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

- Sexism of Social and Political Theory, The.* Eds. Lorene M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979.
- Spackman, Barbara. "The Fascist Rhetoric of Virility." *Stanford Italian Review* 8 (1990): 81.
- Tisdall, Caroline and Angelo Bozzola. *Futurism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.
- Women in Western Political Philosophy.* Eds. Ellen Kennedy and Susan Mendus. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987.