

**CHAPTER FIVE – POETIC DEVELOPMENTS: AEROPOESIA DI GUERRA, POESIA VISUALE AND
PAROLE MUSICALI**

It was earlier noted that whilst a favourable critical appraisal of Futurist *aeropittura di guerra* remains uncommon, the poetry produced by Marinetti's movement during its final phase has received a comparatively positive response from scholars. D'Ambrosio has remarked that 'the conclusion of the Futurist adventure was [...] marked by the most radical poetic experimentation', pointing out how the movement 'supplied the poetic avant-gardes of the later twentieth century with [fruitful] indications, projects and avenues of research, particularly in the fields of concrete poetry and phonetic or sound poetry'.¹ Claudia Salaris has likewise commented on the 'surprising modernity' of certain ideas explored during these years.²

After a somewhat inauspicious start, the movement's poets were to create a number of invigorating works that imparted a dramatic forward momentum to Futurism, sweeping aside the 'presentist' concerns of the inter-war years. All of these built on existing conventions of Futurist literature, although individual works pushed particular ideas to such extremes that their ancestry was almost unrecognisable, so unprecedented and uncompromising was their new guise. The roots of other experiments were more immediately identifiable. However, the revival of certain ideas and approaches at this specific moment is illuminating in terms of the new character, direction and scope of Futurist ambitions as the war drew to a close. On this basis alone, such works are equally significant and fascinating.

¹ 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', in Pedullà, *Il futurismo nelle avanguardie*, cit., pp. 204, 189.

² *Futurismo. L'avanguardia delle avanguardie* (Florence: Giunti, 2009), p. 211.

The most radical formal experimentation occurred following the collapse of the Fascist regime. This was no coincidence, although it appears to have had little or nothing to do with any subsequent increase in the freedom of expression granted to poets. In fact, the most interesting works of late Futurist poetry were composed (and in some cases published) within the brutal, repressive and claustrophobic atmosphere of the Nazi-controlled Italian Social Republic – a striking fact, which renders their increasing disengagement from the themes of official propaganda particularly noteworthy. Rather, this outburst of creativity would appear to have been stimulated by the Futurists' apprehension of an as yet inchoate 'new world' being forged by contemporary events, a world whose expressive and communicative needs would be markedly different from the prevailing one.

Literature was therefore destined to be the conduit for a belated explosion of authentically 'futurist' aspirations. It is unclear why this should have been so, although poetry's resurgence during the years 1943-45 was undoubtedly a consequence, in part, of the fact that opportunities to create and exhibit works of visual art rapidly evaporated following Italy's descent into chaos upon the signing of the armistice in September 1943.

The disengagement of Futurism and Fascism in the creative sphere (if not necessarily in terms of the lingering ideological affiliations of the movement's individual members) is undoubtedly one of the most surprising, yet least commented upon, aspects of late Futurist poetry. The 'verbal architecture' of Carlo Belloli's *poesia visuale* and the abstract soundscapes of Tullio Crali's *parole musicali* eschewed Fascist content, and reflected a more ambiguous attitude to the war and to nationalism than one might anticipate. In fact, the distinctive formal qualities of such compositions precluded any real possibility of their being manipulated to political ends. By

contrast, between 1940 and early 1943 Futurist poetry was 'mobilised in the service of the war',³ not simply by means of the increased patriotic fervour of its verse, but also through the movement's participation in a range of public events⁴ and initiatives organised to emphasise this commitment. Some of these were coordinated by individual Futurist associations (such as the 'Savarè' Group's Futurist Centre for the Distribution of Aeropoetry of War to the Soldiers of Landseasky),⁵ while others were promoted by official bodies such as the National Union of Authors and Writers, which organised poetry readings 'in schools in barracks and wherever else necessary to stimulate indispensable Italian pride with beautiful musical images'.⁶ In his introduction to Piero Bellanova's 1943 volume *Bombarded Naples Sings*, Marinetti insisted on the ability of literature to raise morale, claiming that in addition to Italy's military defences it was necessary to marshal 'the arms and munitions of poetry of sentiment [and] of passion'.⁷

³ See F. T. Marinetti, 'La poesia mobilitata a servizio della guerra', *Autori e Scrittori*, February 1943 (Cra.3.17).

⁴ See F. T. Marinetti, '56 aeropoetiche aeropittoriche esaltazioni della nostra guerra', *Autori e Scrittori*, February 1941, in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 303. According to Marinetti these patriotic manifestations took place in Rome, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Bologna, Modena, Ferrara, Monselice, Padua, Trieste, Gorizia, Pula, Turin, Naples, Palermo and Messina between October 1940 and February 1941. By the following year, he was able to report that the number of such events had increased to 'more than two hundred', despite only adding Reggio Calabria, Venice, Verona, Savona and Massa Marittima to the list of locations. See his 'Collaudo dell'aeropoema', in *Canto eroi e macchine della guerra mussoliniana*, cit., pp. 15-28 (pp. 17-18).

⁵ Founded on 23 June 1942, the Centrale Futurista per la Distribuzione di Aeropoesia di Guerra ai Combattenti di Terramarecielo sought to emulate the practice 'of distributing printed material among the trenches of the First World War, and offered the Futurists a means of disseminating [...] those concepts dear to the movement that were finding expression in the ongoing conflict, such as *amor patrio*, fearlessness, and the synergy existing between man and machine'. See Cibi, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 209-16 (p. 209); my italics.

⁶ Marinetti, 'La poesia mobilitata', cit. These events were designated *dinamismi propagandistici di poesia guerriera*.

⁷ 'Aeropoema-collaudo scritto dal poeta F. T. Marinetti', in Piero Bellanova, *Bombardata Napoli canta* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia'), pp. 7-21 (p. 9).

Such convictions lay at the heart of much *aeropoesia di guerra* – the first, and undoubtedly the least experimental, of the three poetic forms considered in this chapter.

I. FROM AEROPOESIA TO AEROPOESIA DI GUERRA

Just as aeropainting continued to dominate Futurist art of the 1940s, so too ‘aeropoetry’ remained a key genre within Futurist literature during this period. These expressions of the ‘aerial’ sensibility had followed a similar trajectory over the course of the preceding decade, when the movement’s poets interpreted the concept of terrestrial transcendence in both a literal and a ‘spiritual’ sense, just like their colleagues working in the sphere of the visual arts. As Pino Masnata observed, aeropoetry ‘initially emerged in the form of verse inspired by aviation but quickly became synonymous with soaring poetry that broke away from the earth regardless of its specific theme’.⁸ During the 1940s, the concerns of *aeropoesia* and *aeropittura* continued to parallel one another. Yet whilst poets proved themselves ready to tackle military themes, the principles of an *aeropoesia di guerra* never received definition in a dedicated manifesto, despite the Futurist leader’s repeated references to this new literary genre in statements and articles published at this time. Marinetti’s ‘New Aesthetic of War’ had addressed itself to poets, as we have seen, yet the recommendations of this document were broad and thematic in nature, and gave no indication that this *nuova estetica* would inspire stylistic innovations of any kind. In a text of 1941, Marinetti claimed that the ‘intense [...] patriotic sentiments’ being experienced by Futurist poets at this moment would ‘demand new virile poetic forms’, but again failed to

⁸ ‘Parole in libertà e distruzione della punteggiatura’, *Stile Futurista*, vol. 2, nos 11-12, September 1935, pp. 38-39 (p. 38). For an excellent general introduction to aeropoetry, see Willard Bohn, ‘The Poetics of Flight: Futurist “Aeropoesia”’, *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 121, no. 1, January 2006, pp. 207-24.

specify, or even to suggest, what these might be.⁹ Consequently, beyond its stress on war-related subject matter – including the ongoing struggle for autarky, which had been a concern of Futurist poetry since the late 1930s, and was explored through the so-called ‘poetry of technicisms’ on into the 1940s¹⁰ – there is often little to distinguish so-called *aeropoesia di guerra* from *aeropoesia* proper.¹¹

Inspiring the creation of many striking, beautiful and lyrical works – from Marinetti’s ‘Spiralling above the “Biancamano”’ of 1933¹² to Gaetano Pattarozzi’s *Futurist Aeropoem of Sardinia*¹³ – the 1931 manifesto of aeropoetry¹⁴ had itself relied heavily on technical recommendations set out in a number of the movement’s earlier theoretical statements. In 1935 it was incorporated into the Futurist leader’s introduction to his *Aeropoem of the Gulf of La Spezia*¹⁵ where, in a

⁹ ‘Ennio de Concini nell’Estetica futurista della guerra’, in Ennio De Concini, *Aeropoesie futuriste di bombardamenti* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia’, 1941), pp. 5-12 (p. 11).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Eugenio Caracciolo’s poem eulogising the Sardinian mining industry, *Il poema del tecnicismo del basso Sulcis* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia’, 1941). In his 1938 manifesto on the subject, Marinetti declared that the celebration of work of all kinds (‘intellectual administrative manual [or] mechanical’) was the ‘new task of poetry and of the arts in Imperial Fascist Italy’ (‘La poesia dei tecnicismi. Manifesto futurista’, in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 291). Such aims were consistent with, and fed into, the ‘home front’ dimension of Marinetti’s subsequent ‘new aesthetic of war’ (see above, Chapter Four).

¹¹ As D’Ambrosio has observed, ‘the final variant of aeropoetry, that “of war”, [...] essentially involved [...] only a change of emphasis in terms of content’. ‘Marinetti al fronte russo’, in D’Ambrosio, *Futurismo e altre avanguardie*, cit., pp. 39-69 (p. 57). Again, as with aeropainting, works of aeropoetry continued to be produced at this time that contained no references whatsoever to the war. See, for example, the poems by Maria Goretti and Dina Cucini in Bohn, *Italian Futurist Poetry*, cit., pp. 286-93.

¹² In Sergio Lambiase, ed., *Poemi, arcipoemi, aeropoemi futuristi del Golfo di Napoli* (Capri: La Conchiglia, 1995), pp. 17-18.

¹³ *Aeropoesia futurista della Sardegna* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia’, 1939).

¹⁴ F. T. Marinetti, ‘L’aeropoesia. Manifesto futurista ai poeti e agli aviatori’, first published in *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, 22 October 1931. All subsequent references to this document are taken from the version published under the same title in *Futurismo* on 2 October 1932 (Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. II, no. 218).

¹⁵ ‘Decollaggio’, in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, cit., pp. 1095-1104.

preamble to the manifesto itself, the importance of eradicating full stops and commas from works of aeropoeetry was emphasised¹⁶ (as Masnata wryly observed: ‘in an aeroplane it is not possible to stop in the sky’).¹⁷ However, the abolition of punctuation, with its ‘foolish pauses’,¹⁸ had already been recommended in the groundbreaking ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature’ written over two decades earlier, in 1912. Marinetti’s manifesto of aeropoeetry also asserted the inability of free verse to express the intoxicating sensations and emotions experienced in flight, being fatally ‘oppressed by syntax and logic’ unlike his own, totally unconstrained, *parole in libertà*. Yet the ‘death of free verse’ had likewise already been proclaimed in a text of 1913,¹⁹ with a comparison of its strictures to the banks of a watercourse similar to that which one finds in the 1931 manifesto. Furthermore, Marinetti’s insistence that Futurist poets be attentive to ‘the whisperings and suggestions of the aircraft’s [...] particles’ was essentially a reformulation of the concept of an ‘*intuitive psychology of matter*’,²⁰ initially proposed in 1912,²¹ while his assertion as to the importance of the infinitive verb was also familiar from earlier programmatic texts, where it had been described as constituting ‘*the very movement of the new lyricism*, having the fluency of a train’s wheel or an airplane’s propeller’.²²

Whilst resembling earlier Futurist experimentation in these respects, *aeropoesia* differed from it

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1099.

¹⁷ ‘Parole in libertà’, cit., p. 38.

¹⁸ Marinetti, ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature’, in Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 93.

¹⁹ Marinetti, ‘Destruction of Syntax’, in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., p. 99.

²⁰ Marinetti, ‘Technical Manifesto’, cit., p. 96; original emphasis.

²¹ ‘We want to make literature out of the life of a motor, a new instinctive animal whose general instincts we will know when we have learned the instincts of the different forces that make it up’ (ibid., p. 95).

²² Marinetti, ‘Geometric and Mechanical Splendor’, in Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 107; original emphasis. Bohn also notes how the importance of the infinitive had been ‘drilled into’ Futurist poets over the years, but fails to comment on the 1931 manifesto’s repetition of the other points noted above (‘The Poetics of Flight’, cit., p. 210).

in other, equally significant, ways. For instance, the use of a single typeface and the arrangement of text within the traditional linear page grid – both of which had been swept aside by Marinetti's 'typographical revolution' of 1913²³ – were fully reinstated by the early 1930s (Figs 74, 75). Additionally, the radical linguistic fragmentation of authentic *parole in libertà* was significantly tempered in the *parole più o meno in libertà*²⁴ of aeropoetry, which often resembled 'a form of poetic prose'²⁵ where 'syntactical infraction and free-wordism [were] attenuated by means of more flowing narrative cadences'.²⁶ Marinetti himself defined aeropoetry as 'a sequence of brief essential synthetic verbalisations of different states of mind words in freedom that without punctuation and with a marked contrast of tenses attain the maximum polyphonic dynamism while remaining comprehensible and able to be recited'.²⁷ All this might appear to suggest the existence of marked regressive tendencies within Futurist poetic theory during the 1930s, reflecting a natural – and perhaps inevitable – waning of the movement's creative energies. However, the relative lack of attention given to the visual dimension of *aeropoesia* might more accurately be accounted for in terms of the fact that it was intended to be heard rather than seen ('aeropoems find their natural vehicle in the Radio').²⁸

²³ See Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., pp. 104-05.

²⁴ 'Words more-or-less in freedom': a description used by Giacomo Debenedetti in writing of one of Marinetti's late works. 'Il Poema africano di Marinetti', in Giacomo Debenedetti, *Saggi critici. Seconda serie* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1971), pp. 225-33 (p. 226).

²⁵ D'Ambrosio, 'Strategie, procedimenti e modelli testuali', in D'Ambrosio, *Futurismo e altre avanguardie*, cit., p. 33.

²⁶ Salaris, 'Il futurismo e il sacro', in Marinetti, *L'aeropoema di Gesù*, cit., p. 85. See also her essay 'Aerial Imagery in Futurist Literature', in Mantura, Rosazza-Ferraris and Velani, *Futurism in Flight*, cit., pp. 30-31. De Maria has likewise noted how 'in the transition [from *parole in libertà* to *aeropoesia*] one can identify a "return of the repressed" resulting in a broadening of subject matter and a (partial) recovery of syntax'. 'Marinetti poeta e ideologo', in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, cit., pp. xxix-c (p. xcv).

²⁷ 'Decollaggio', cit., p. 1099.

²⁸ Marinetti, 'L'aeropoesia', cit. As well as constituting an important conduit for the dissemination of Futurist ideas, the radio came increasingly to be seen as an expressive medium in its own right during the

Factors relating to the prevailing socio-political climate may also have impacted on the character of Futurist poetry during these years. In his aforementioned article of 1935, Masnata had distinguished between a 'first' and a 'second free-wordism' (that is, between *parole in libertà* proper and the more fluid, less staccato, variant typical of aeropoetry). Paraphrasing Marinetti's own description of the former, he presented its brutal dismemberment of grammar and syntax as a means by which 'to convey with rapidity and simultaneity the vortex of impressions visions sensations that assault one in a moment of intense life'.²⁹ According to Masnata, this approach 'was and still is used to convey lyrical sensations of great dramatic tumultuous intensity such as war revolution and both outer and inner turmoil'.³⁰ As such, it was a poetic form rarely called upon during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when stability and order became the watchwords of Mussolini's regime following the upheavals of the previous two decades – years which had witnessed the rapid industrialisation of Italy, its involvement in a global conflict, a traumatic post-war fall-out, marked by widespread civil and industrial unrest, the rise of Fascism through the lawless excesses of *squadristo*, and the dismantling of parliamentary democracy.³¹ That Futurist poetry exhibited a corresponding spirit of order during these comparatively uneventful years is therefore not entirely surprising.

1930s. See Claudia Salaris, *Dizionario del futurismo. Idee provocazioni e parole d'ordine di una grande avanguardia* (Rome: Riuniti, 1996), pp. 116-18.

²⁹ 'Parole in libertà', cit., p. 38. Cf. Marinetti's characterisation of words in freedom in his earlier 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., p. 98.

³⁰ 'Parole in libertà', cit., p. 38.

³¹ In a famous speech to parliament of 3 January 1925, Mussolini effectively asserted his will to rule as dictator and have done with subversion or political opposition of any kind: 'Italy, gentlemen, wants peace, wants calm, wants a stability which allows work to continue. This calm, this stability we will give her with love, and, if necessary, with force.' Reproduced as 'The End of the Liberal Regime', in Roger Griffin, ed., *Fascism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 49-50 (p. 50). Subsequently, the revolutionary origins of Fascism were emphatically historicised in the 1932 *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*.

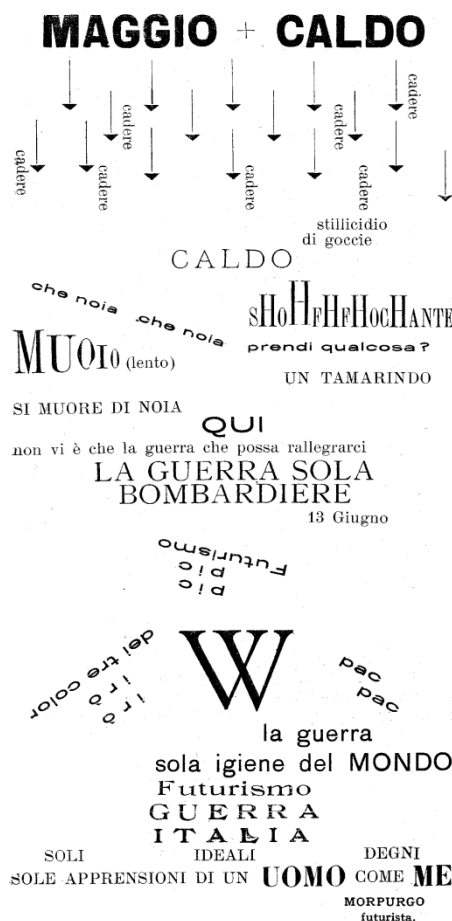


Fig. 74 Nelson Morpurgo, 'May + Heat', *L'Italia Futurista*, vol. 2, no. 24, 29 July 1917

Volando sopra piazza del Duomo (*aeropoesia*)

*Cubo sociale
bara fiorita
vischio alle mie zampe pancia di d'uccello
Tonda febbre d'acciaio rrrroteante grande aquilone a guinzaglio ah! ah! ah! finalmente con
pien polmoniiiiii albero che si sradica slanciarsi sul suo aperto fogliame stormente
turbinante matassa di radici
enorme buco nel petto aperto alla torrenziale corrente di fresca! seta azzurrrrra
finestra innamorata del sole volare via altri balconi
ubriachi di luce
avaro succo terrestre
coraggio massiccio
tutte le bravate dominare il casalingo disordine e l'utile mobilio della città
lampada accesa sulla tavola apparecchiata di Piazza del Duomo
veloce scintillio di piatti che si muovono da soli 600 metri uccello laccato rosso salire di
ramo in ramo gelato 1000 metri grigia foresta illusoria dei funi 1500 metri ricco paraven-
to giapponese del tramonto arancione con raggiera d'oro verde lilla viola violanero
Brilli e tintinniii d'altissimi bicchieri astrali scossi a sbuffetti e unghiate da lunghissime
mani nere nere ingioiellate cento mila anni luce luce*

F. T. MARINETTI

Fig. 75 F. T. Marinetti, 'Flying above Piazza del Duomo (Aeropoem)'
Futurismo, vol. 1, no. 4, 2 October 1932

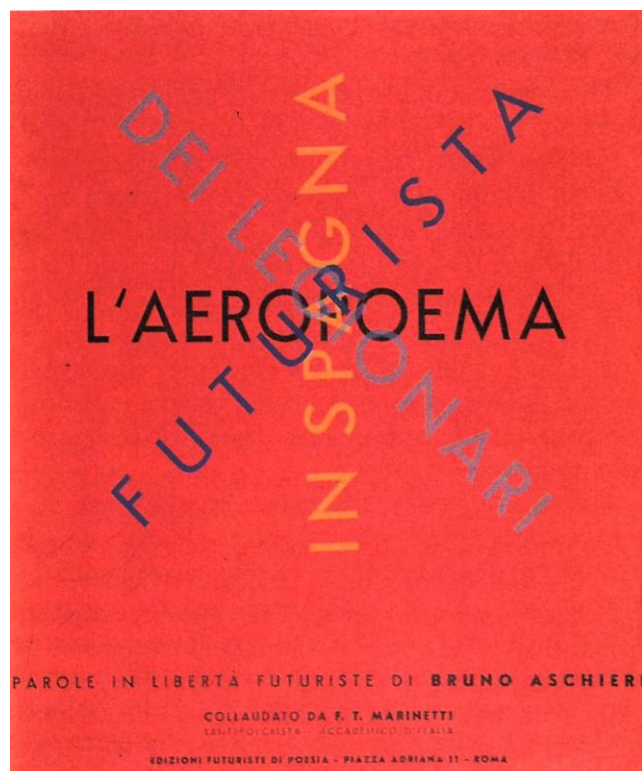


Fig. 76 Enrico Bona, cover of Bruno Aschieri's *Futurist Aeropoem of the Legionaries in Spain* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1941)



Fig. 77 Salvatore Alabiso, cover of Castrense Civello's *Aria madre* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1941)

Yet by the same token it renders the notion of an aeropoetry *of war* a somewhat problematic one. Given Masnata's assertion that extreme external situations and turbulent *stati d'animo* would naturally inspire the Futurist poet's recourse to the splintered language of *parole in libertà*, one might reasonably expect there to have been a widespread, explosive re-emergence of this earlier, more robust, genre following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia,³² intervention in Spain and declaration of war against the Western democracies. And yet, curiously, this did not happen. Neither was a renewed attention to the visual dimension of the written word apparent, despite having been demanded in a manifesto of 1942, where it was claimed: 'Given the dramatic immediacy required by the battlefield the pages of our Futurist synthetic novels and [...] newspapers [...] will be comparable to Futurist cityscapes [with] illuminated signs marching upwards'.³³ Stylistically at odds with its aggressive and violent subject matter, *aeropoesia di guerra* remains the most incongruous and least satisfying of the poetic forms proposed by the Futurist movement during the 1940s.

More jarring than any formal inconsistencies was the indulgence of many *aeropoeti di guerra* in the kind of 'grandiloquent and pompous rhetoric' that had been proscribed by Marinetti in his

³² Masnata's article appeared in *Stile Futurista* one month prior to the start of this campaign.

³³ F. T. Marinetti, and others, 'L'arte tipografica di guerra e dopoguerra. Manifesto futurista', in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 298. Despite the lack of typographical experimentation on the part of Futurist poets at this time, volumes of *aeropoesia di guerra* continued to be visually striking thanks to the involvement of such talented graphic designers as Salvatore Alabiso and Enrico Bona. The latter's work on Bruno Aschieri's *Futurist Aeropoem of the Legionaries in Spain* is a case in point. Employing a vivid red and yellow colour scheme (presumably in reference to the Spanish flag) each of its numbered sections were identified by numerals repeated in such a manner as to form a frieze-like border running down the edge of the right-hand page. The cover of the volume was emblazoned with the poem's title, divided into four parts and arranged in a star formation vividly suggestive of a whirling propeller. *L'aeropoema futurista dei legionari in Spagna* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1941). Alabiso produced a similarly striking blue and silver cover for Castrense Civello's turgid 'glorification of Italian aviation' *Aria madre* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1941) (Figs 76, 77).

manifesto of 1931³⁴ ('Legions of steel march to the beat / of the hammer which forged them')³⁵ as well as an increasing incidence of sentimentality, often in the context of the 'fallen hero' motif. One of the worst offenders in this regard was Ignazio Scurto, whose poem 'A Squadron Member Lay Dying' is a work of unabashed melodrama:

i am a squadron member and i have always dreamed of
dying like this behind the mutilated and
silent batteries
with a supine bullet-riddled companion
serving as a pillow

[...]

but he sleeps without dreaming of the
warm tears of his Rosina who prays for him every
morning
without dreaming of the beautiful curls of his kids
whose eyes are as black as our
flames and who will be without daddy this evening³⁶

Presumably, it was to guard against such mawkishness that Marinetti had exhorted Futurist poets to play down the romantic and *passéist* value of 'an individual solely human heroism' in his 'New Aesthetic of War' and instead focus on the less emotive, more anonymous, role played by the machine in modern combat. Nevertheless, this was a commandment he himself infringed

³⁴ See also Marinetti's untitled introduction to his *L'esercito italiano. Poesia armata* (Rome: Cenacolo, 1942) in which he calls for a war poetry 'free from rhetoric [...] whining and pessimism but with military precision' (n. p.).

³⁵ Ignazio Scurto, 'Poema dell'impero', in Gaetano Pattarozzi, ed., *Carlinga di aeropoeti futuristi di guerra* (Rome: Mediterraneo Futurista, [1941]), pp. 66-70 (p. 66).

³⁶ 'Uno squadrista moriva', *ibid.*, pp. 64-65 (pp. 64, 65). See also Geppo Tedeschi's 'La morte del poeta futurista Savarè comandante di ascari', *ibid.*, p. 19.

on several occasions during the 1940s, as we have seen. In fact, a creeping sentimentality had been identified in the Futurist leader's writing by the late 1930s. In reviewing Marinetti's *African Poem of the '28 October' Division* (1937), a 'poetic' account of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, Giacomo Debenedetti had observed how

it is not sufficient to define oneself as the poet of the mechanical age or of war, sole hygiene of the world, [...] to reduce to silence the ancient rights of the heart. In the domain of the human emotions Marinetti is – luckily for him and for us – a *passéist* [...]. It is enough [in this context] to read [...] his appeals to his wife and children [and] those episodes concerning the life and death of his friends and companions [...].³⁷

Despite this generally rather moribund state of affairs, works by isolated aeropoets did manage to achieve results of significant expressive power. This was either because such figures chose to focus their attention away from the theatres of conflict – rendering their continued employment of the fluent, lyrical style typical of aeropoetry less discordant – or because in the process of engaging with more charged, dramatic and aggressive subject matter, their poems incorporated a greater proportion of expressive stylistic elements. One of the suggestions made by Marinetti in his manifesto of 1931 had been to fuse words together in order to evoke the continuity of flight, or the rapid succession of images perceived when nose-diving or skimming low to the ground, as opposed to the almost imperceptible movement of terrestrial panoramas viewed from higher altitudes ('Example: battleriverbridgewood'). Isolated examples of such telescopic language, as well as other (admittedly rather rudimentary) exercises in that 'free expressive orthography' first proposed by Marinetti in 1913,³⁸ also frequently enlivened what were otherwise stylistically unremarkable compositions throughout the period under consideration here. For instance, Ennio De Concini's 'Parachute' describes the vertiginous sensation of the

³⁷ Debenedetti, 'Il *Poema africano* di Marinetti', cit., p. 232.

³⁸ 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., p. 106.

ground rushing up to meet the narrator in a confusion of 'housespalacescitiesmountains'.³⁹

Another employs onomatopoeia and verbal distortion to expressive ends ('UUUUUU the siren waaaails its constant alarm').⁴⁰ Certain passages within De Concini's works also temporarily abandoned conventional syntactical structure at moments of high drama; subsequently, the poet's words returned 'to their normal flow',⁴¹ in keeping with the principles of *parole in libertà* ('Attention / ready / B.R. 20 / Stukas / Diiiiiiivvvveee booom burningmotor / AAAAAAAAAA / boom boom boom boom / sh sh sh sh sh / AAAAAAAAAA / bomb bomb bomb bomb').⁴² This fusion of – or alternation between – aeropoetry and words in freedom defined the more successful examples of *aeropoesia di guerra*, but was not characteristic of the genre as a whole. None of the examples included in Pattarozzi's 1941 survey *Fuselage of Futurist Aeropoets of War* exhibited this approach, and even engaged in an unaccountable return to the principles of free verse, as Marinetti (unquestioningly) noted in his introduction.⁴³

De Concini's 'aeropoetry of bombardments' (conveniently forgotten in the post-war years, when the author became a major figure in the world of Italian cinema) also offered some of the most precise literary interpretations of Futurism's 'New Aesthetic of War'. Emblematic in this respect is his composition 'The Unfit Truck', which relates the sad tale of a vehicle that 'died of a broken heart / because it had not been requisitioned'.⁴⁴ The same may be said of the work of Ubaldo

³⁹ 'Paracadute', in *Aeropoesie futuriste di bombardamenti*, cit., pp. 43-44 (p. 43).

⁴⁰ 'Bombardamento di Londra', *ibid.*, pp. 23-26 (p. 25). A translation of this poem can be found in the appendix to this thesis.

⁴¹ Marinetti, 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendor', cit., p. 108.

⁴² 'Bombardamento di Londra', cit., p. 25.

⁴³ 'They are free-word [compositions] or [are written] in a combustible mix of free verse and words in freedom'. Untitled introduction to *Carlinga di aeropoeti futuristi di guerra*, cit., pp. 3-6 (p. 6).

⁴⁴ 'L'autocarro riformato', in *Aeropoesie futuriste di bombardamenti*, cit., pp. 33-34 (p. 33).

Serbo who, like De Concini, was among the youngest of Marinetti's new recruits.⁴⁵ The Futurist leader greatly admired Serbo's energetic verse and took the youthful poet under his wing in a paternal fashion, on one occasion personally intervening to defend him from physical assault at a Futurist *serata* held in Padua in the autumn of 1941 when his verses failed to impress some of the more reactionary local Fascists.⁴⁶ Born in 1924, Serbo discovered Futurism as an adolescent and joined the 'Boccioni' Futurist Group in Macerata when he was only fifteen years of age; moving with his family to Vicenza in 1941 he subsequently formed close ties with the 'Savarè' group. These fleeting affiliations inspired a series of *aeropoesie di bombardamenti* which, although few in number, were nevertheless strikingly mature and replete with arresting imagery.

Serbo's war poetry describes tense dramas in which machines are the true protagonists and human characters often little more than a faceless supporting cast, thereby fulfilling Marinetti's instruction to 'describe and hymn the autonomy of tri-motors which [...] although created by

⁴⁵ De Concini was just eighteen years of age when he published the above volume. With its cult of youth, Marinetti's movement had long exerted a powerful attraction over young artists and writers. One thinks of the sixteen year-old Tullio Crali's comical experimentation with home-made oil paints, born of an urgent desire to start on his Futurist journey, or the short-lived career of the poet Pasquale Cangiullo (known as 'Pasqualino 13 anni' to distinguish him from his older brother, Francesco). In fact, Pasqualino was just one of several *giovannissimi futuristi* whose literary efforts were given a regular platform in the journal *L'Italia Futurista* between 1916 and 1917. See Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', in Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., p. 145, and Luciano Caruso, ed., *L'Italia Futurista 1916-1918* (Florence: SPES, 1992).

⁴⁶ Guerri (*Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 259) states that the incident in question took place on 28 October; in fact this particular *serata* would seem to have been held on 10 November. See Cibin, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 202-03, and Roberto Floreani, 'Ubaldo Serbo: una vita lunga un giorno', in Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo*, cit., pp. 7-9 (pp. 8-9). According to Stefano Girlanda, Serbo in turn considered Marinetti a 'second father'. See his 'Postfazione: Ubaldo Serbo, aeropoeta per sempre. Sintesi di una vita futurista', *ibid.*, pp. 103-08 (p. 104).

mankind hasten to do battle on their own account not caring a rap for humanity'.⁴⁷ Other works highlight the existence of a relationship between men and machines that is entirely consistent with Marinetti's theories concerning the evolutionary benefits to be gained from an ever-closer 'identification of man with motor'.⁴⁸ His poems bring us face to face with those 'multiplied men' prophesied by the Futurist leader in a number of his early theoretical statements, engaged in 'a constant interchange of intuition, rhythm, instinct, and metallic discipline'⁴⁹ with their mechanical colleagues, to whom they are bound by a sympathy so deep that they experience a profound sense of loss at their destruction. In Serbo's strangely moving 'Death of the Aeroplane' a pilot reflects on the impending crash of his damaged aircraft while parachuting to the ground, as if mourning a fallen comrade:

the ejected pilot launched himself into the sky the
 swift impetuous soul of the aeroplane reborn as man entrusted to the
 maternal parachute

[...]

i sang with you in the skies
 escaping the weight of the earth
 on high victorious
 with your wings i embraced
 the dreams of my childhood
 with you i conquered immense spaces
 we let out a roar in our wake
 darting across the great silences⁵⁰

⁴⁷ 'Collaudo fatto da F. T. Marinetti Accademico d'Italia', in Caracciolo, *Il poema del tecnicismo del basso Sulcis*, cit., pp. 5-6 (p. 5).

⁴⁸ See Marinetti's 'Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine' (1911-15), in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 98-101 (p. 99).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ 'Morte dell'aeroplano', in Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo*, cit., pp. 26-27 (pp. 26, 27). A translation of this poem can be found in the appendix to this thesis.

At times, the identification between man and machine is so complete that it appears literally to 'conquer the seemingly unconquerable hostility that separates out human flesh from the metal of motors',⁵¹ making it impossible to distinguish between the two ('i have two wings motor heart vibrating structure that cleaves the swift air / i have a roaring voice that hymns the intoxication of speed [...] i am the pilotaeroplane').⁵² With the human element almost entirely absent – or else fused with 'consanguineous'⁵³ machines – Serbo's poetry is therefore quintessentially Futurist in its expression of that animistic 'renovated consciousness' which had long debarred the movement's adherents from considering 'man as the centre of universal life'.⁵⁴ It also clearly reflects Marinetti's belief in 'the possibility of an incalculable number of human transformations', and his assertion that 'wings are asleep in the flesh of man'.⁵⁵

From an ideological point of view, the unmistakable implication of all this is that (Fascist) men-machines such as these are destined to inherit the earth – much like Gazourmah, the mechanical son of Mafarka the Futurist in Marinetti's eponymous novel.⁵⁶ By contrast, the 'one hundred thousand people / flee[ing] crazily' from the swooping warplane and its 'belly full of bombs / BOOOMBS' in Serbo's poem 'Nose-diving on the City' evidently belong to a degenerate, all too-human, *passéist* race, doomed to extinction.⁵⁷ Such subtexts undoubtedly make for difficult reading. The temporal nature of literature further increases the reader's discomfort insofar as it

⁵¹ Marinetti, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', cit., p. 97.

⁵² 'In tuffo sulla città' ('Nose-diving on the City'), in Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo*, cit., pp. 13-19 (pp. 13, 14). This poem was dedicated to Tullio Crali, and was presumably named after the painter's work of the same name (see above, Chapter One, p. 33, n. 70).

⁵³ A term used by Marinetti in the introduction to his *Canto eroi e macchine della guerra mussoliniana*, cit., p. 28 ('O now consanguineous machines sing with us').

⁵⁴ 'The suffering of a man is of the same interest to us as the suffering of an electric lamp'. Boccioni, and others, 'Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto', in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., p. 29.

⁵⁵ 'Multiplied Man', cit., p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), pp. 185-206.

⁵⁷ 'In tuffo sulla città', cit., pp. 16, 15.



Fig. 78 Gaetano Pattarozzi, ed., *Fuselage of Futurist Aeropoets of War*
(Rome: Mediterraneo Futurista, [1941])

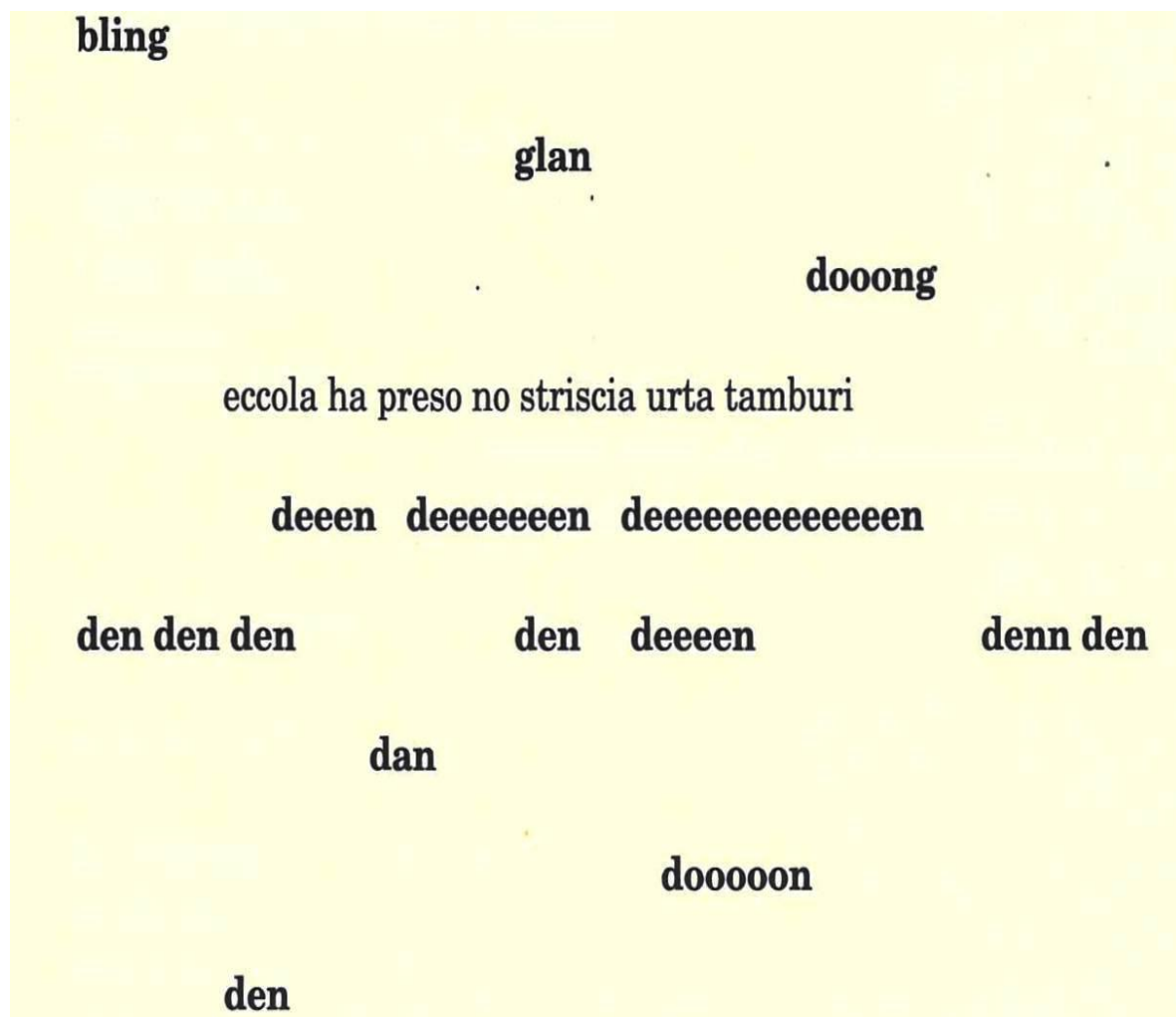


Fig. 79 Extract from Ubaldo Serbo's 'Chains of Death', in Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo aeropoeta futurista*, cit. pp. 36-38 (p. 36)

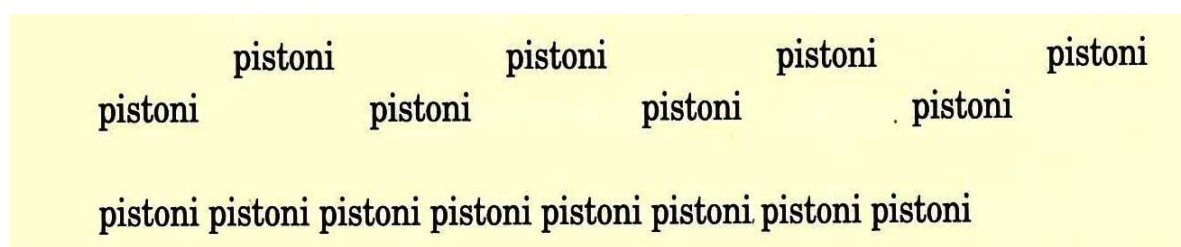


Fig. 80 Extract from Ubaldo Serbo's 'The Poem of the Submarine', in Serbo, *Ubaldo Serbo aeropoeta futurista*, cit., pp. 41-42 (p. 42)

allows for a level of description absent from many *aeropitture di bombardamenti* restricted, as they usually are, to a single moment and perspective (for the most part, one high above the carnage being unleashed far below). Nevertheless, these poems at least remain mercifully free from the toxic sentimentality, bombast and ‘rhetorical realism’⁵⁸ that poisoned the work of many of Serbo’s fellow Futurists at this time. Employing the disjointed language, ‘urgent laconism’⁵⁹ and spatial dislocations of *parole in libertà*, his compositions were also among the first to signal the re-awakening of a more vigorous and experimental approach toward poetry within the Futurist ranks (**Figs 79, 80**).

Quite different in tone and form is Piero Bellanova’s *Bombarded Naples Sings*, a *bona fide* masterpiece of late Futurist literature.⁶⁰ A defiant and affectionate tribute to Italy’s most heavily shelled city of World War Two, it occupies something of a crossroads in terms of both Italian history and that of Marinetti’s movement itself. Published in August 1943 (between the fall of Mussolini’s regime and the invasion of the Italian mainland by Allied troops) the volume is infused with an elegiac, melancholy mood evocative of the ‘end of an era’ – an impression strengthened by the absence of any explicit references to Fascism or expressions of lingering *fede in Mussolini*. Although intensely patriotic, nowhere does Bellanova’s text invoke the Duce as Italy’s ultimate protector or deliverer – something also characteristic of the most significant works of Futurist poetry produced thereafter, even those with a more pronounced political dimension, such as Marinetti’s *Aeropoem of Cozzarini*, which celebrated grassroots resistance against Anglo-American forces rather than eulogising the values of the RSI, or singing the virtues

⁵⁸ Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 156.

⁵⁹ Marinetti, ‘Destruction of Syntax’, cit., p. 98.

⁶⁰ Cit. All subsequent references to Bellanova’s poems are to works included in this anthology. A translation of its title poem and another composition (‘Tracer Bullets’) can be found in the appendix to this thesis.

of its impotent and demoralised puppet leader.⁶¹ The transitional nature of the times is likewise acknowledged in Marinetti's introduction to the volume, signed simply 'F. T. Marinetti Futurist aeropoet'. This was only the second text of its kind written by the Futurist leader since 1940 in which he failed to trumpet his Fascist credentials by appending the titles *Sansepolcrista* or *Accademico d'Italia* (or both) to his name;⁶² nor was he ever to do so again. The volume also marked a turning point in other respects, constituting the final chapter in the history of Futurism's illustrious publishing house Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia' which, over its thirty-eight-year lifespan, had printed some of the most significant and remarkable works in the history of the literary avant garde, including Marinetti's masterpiece *Zang Tumb Tumb*. It also effectively rang down the curtain on the somewhat dissatisfying and lacklustre episode of *aeropoesia di guerra*.

Several of Bellanova's poems describe military encounters in a manner again consistent with prevailing Futurist orthodoxy, presenting them as encounters between machines rather than men:

⁶¹ This is a notable fact, given that *L'aeropoema di Cozzarini* was issued by Edizioni ERRE: a publishing house supported by the Italian Social Republic's Ministry of Popular Culture with the aim of endowing Mussolini's new regime with 'some residual level of cultural dignity'. See Domenico Cammarota, "'Futuristi in Armi'", in Godoli, *Il dizionario del futurismo*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 501-02 (p. 501). 'Erre' is the Italian pronunciation of the letter 'R', which in this context of course stood for 'Republic'. On the movement's (and particularly Marinetti's) apparent shift toward a substantially 'de-Fascistised' form of ultra-nationalism, see the 'epilogue' to this thesis.

⁶² Viazzi identifies a total of 18 such *collaudi* written by Marinetti between 1940 and 1944 (after 1938 Marinetti preferred the more 'technical' sounding term *collaudo* – meaning 'inspection' – to that of 'introduction' or 'preface'). See Glauco Viazzi, 'F. T. Marinetti collaudatore', in F. T. Marinetti, *Collaudi futuristi*, ed. by Glauco Viazzi (Naples: Guida, 1977), pp. 5-16 (p. 7); see also pp. 293-98 in the same volume. It would appear that the only other exception in this regard prior to late 1943 (perhaps the result of an oversight) was his introduction to Tedeschi's 'synthetic novel' *Gli Adoratori della Patria*.

The torpedo-bomber has pierced
 the horizon's grey silk
 like a tiny ink blot
 on the skysea's damp paper
 ripe for love letters

Now the propeller announces
 its noisy presence
 to the beautiful steel ship
 with a roaring serenade of war⁶³

However, his most striking compositions explore the conflict from quite different perspectives, considering its impact on civilian life and the relationship between love and war. In these contexts, the flowing rhythms of Bellanova's *aeropoesia* do not strike the reader as incongruous, maintaining a greater correspondence between form and function than they do when applied to scenes of aerial battle. Yet despite the fact that these are intimate poems, clearly intended to be read and reflected upon in private (rather than declaimed to serried ranks of conscripts) Bellanova's approach remains robust and forthright, vividly evoking the claustrophobia and squalor of a besieged city without ever lapsing into sentimentality. This is also true of the 'letters' to family and friends which Bellanova intersperses between his poems, such as that addressed to a surgeon colleague of the author⁶⁴ describing an operating theatre strewn with 'war-torn flesh' and reeking with the omnipresent 'blood and stench of medicine'.⁶⁵

⁶³ 'L'aerosilurante', pp. 39-41 (p. 39); see also 'Gelosie di trimotori', *ibid.*, pp. 45-48.

⁶⁴ Bellanova studied medicine in Rome during the second half of the 1930s, when he also began to frequent Futurist circles. He graduated in 1941 and dedicated himself to surgery for a number of years, subsequently going on to become a leading authority on psychoanalysis in Italy following the war. *Bombarded Naples Sings* draws upon his experiences as a medic stationed in the city during 1943. See Vittorio Cappelli's entry on the poet in Godoli, *Il dizionario del futurismo*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 127-28.

⁶⁵ 'Caro Picardi', p. 85.

Bellanova is equally candid when dealing with carnal matters, engaging with the theme of 'war aphrodisia'.⁶⁶ The Futurists had long maintained that conflict modified traditional gender roles and impacted upon sexual mores, Marinetti's 1917 'handbook' *How to Seduce Women* asserting that 'any self-respecting young woman will have at least three lovers in wartime',⁶⁷ and claiming that the pressures and stresses of battle made it 'necessary to accelerate [...] even love'.⁶⁸ Upon the outbreak of war in 1940 these issues once again became a focus for debate. Marinetti's 'manual' was immediately reissued, but was swiftly withdrawn by the authorities in early 1941 on the basis that its bawdy content ill-befitted the dignity of a Royal Academician.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the volume's ideas were defiantly (if somewhat incongruously) revisited in the pages of *Autori e Scrittori* later that year in the form of Antonino Tullier's manifesto 'Synthetic Mediterranean Love'. Published in the journal's September edition, this document insisted that romantic encounters could still be 'of the most profound nature even if not prolonged over time giving to minutes the value of a day to a month the value of a year thereby destroying the prevailing opinion that associates much time and therefore much paralysing sentimental nostalgia with acts of love'.⁷⁰ Such 'proud brief intense profound loves' were subsequently commended by the *Amorous Bellicose Futurist Songbook*,⁷¹ a bizarre anthology of marching

⁶⁶ See Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 338-39, and John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Harper Collins, 1985).

⁶⁷ This citation is taken from the 1920 reissue of Marinetti's text, published as *Come si seducono le donne e si tradiscono gli uomini* (Milan: Sonzogno), p. 72.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶⁹ See Agnese, *Marinetti*, cit., p. 283, and Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 257. Alessandro Pavolini's instructions on the matter are contained in a telegram dated 8 May 1941: 'No. 6586 Please dispose sequestered volume "How to Seduce Women" by F T Marinetti published Sonzogno Milan stop MINISTRO PAVOLINI' (ACS SPD CO / B. 1132, F. 509.446).

⁷⁰ 'L'amore sintetico mediterraneo', in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 309.

⁷¹ F. T. Marinetti, and others, 'Collaudo di Marinetti Farfa Acquaviva Giuntini Scrivo. Canzoni passate passatiste futuriste', in F. T. Marinetti, and others, *Canzoniere futurista amoroso guerriero* (Savona: Brizio, 1943), n. p.

songs to which Bellanova himself contributed in 1943, and were the subject of his poem 'To the Soldiers' Woman' in *Bombarded Naples Sings*:

I adore violence
that shatters the universe
with a single blow
and yet I love the
voluptuous caressing languor
of your hands as long and lithe
as birch shoots

[...]

I savour the harmonious elasticity
of your ankles
while my rough hands
desire to break
your fragility
and my parched lips
gather from your mouth
kisses like blossoming almond trees
and fleshy strawberries

I want to wind
a string of dewdrops
around your graceful neck

But listen

The assault begins again

Quickly

Give me your luminous heart⁷²

An urgent need to seek love among the ruins and escape the devastation of war also characterises 'Flying over Venice', a rather more tender composition. The sheer beauty of Bellanova's intensely imagistic language in this poem highlights the qualities that elevate his work above so much other *aeropoesia di guerra* – a case in point being his comparison of the sun-drenched dome of the Venetian sky, strewn with clouds, to the sparkling cupolas of San Marco and its congregation, dressed in ceremonial attire:

Mosaic gold
gushes from the sun
in a single burst
like a sacred anthem
in this glittering cathedral
drenched in liquid blue

Madonnas' perfumes
and infinite clouds of
tender first communion veils⁷³

Rarely bombastic, *Bombarded Naples Sings* contains none of that inflated *aeropoesia di regime* justly criticised for its ponderous, rhetorical and maudlin nature, but rather represents a frequently moving attempt to 'escape from the terrible mutilation of our adored Italy through Art', as well as an expression of faith in the imminent emergence of an *Italia rinnovata*.⁷⁴ As such, it anticipates something of the spirit that was to guide Futurist poetry over the course of the following two years.

⁷² 'Alla donna dei combattenti', pp. 33-36 (pp. 34-35).

⁷³ 'Volare su Venezia', pp. 73-75 (p. 73).

⁷⁴ 'Caro Busnardo', p. 101.

II. CARLO BELLOLI, VISUAL POETRY AND 'THE FUTURE OF FUTURISM'

By mid-1943 the world from which Futurism had drawn inspiration during the inter-war years was experiencing its death throes. The *tabula rasa* created by the collapse of the Fascist regime at this time allowed a new world to be glimpsed which, if not that either foreseen or desired in June 1940, nevertheless called forth an authentically 'Futurist' response from Marinetti and his followers, whose imaginations once again began to plough that furrow between reality and fantasy which had proved so fertile during the movement's earliest years, likewise occupying the cusp of two radically different eras.

Initially, this was to consist in a rediscovery of the written word's visual power – such an important element of the movement's earlier literary innovations. This may not have been coincidental, for as Willard Bohn and others have observed: 'the crisis of the sign exemplified by visual poetry is closely linked to a crisis of culture. [...] In every instance [...] the genre has flourished at the death of one cultural epoch and the birth of another'.⁷⁵ Certainly, the revolutionary *poesia visuale* of Carlo Belloli marked a turning point in the history of avant-garde literature, laying the foundations of a new and hugely influential genre: concrete poetry.

Belloli began to associate with the Milanese 'Boccioni' group in 1943 at the age of twenty-one, becoming the last figure of major significance to join the Futurist movement. His first works of note appeared toward the end of that year, consisting of a small number of typographical compositions each titled 'multidirectional marinetti'.⁷⁶ These used the letters of the Futurist

⁷⁵ Willard Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 17.

⁷⁶ *tipogrammi per marinetti* (Milan: Mare Nostrum). Perhaps significantly, the works in this collection were dated 28 October 1943: the twenty-first anniversary of the March on Rome. Belloli never capitalised

leader's surname to form textual patterns that invaded the white space of the page in different configurations (**Figs 81, 82**). Whilst not poems in any conventional sense of the term, these 'typograms' were nevertheless intensely 'poetic' in their ability to communicate, with the utmost subtlety and concision, something of the restless energy, drive and elastic intelligence of their subject. In fact, Belloli's debut represented a precocious manifestation of his extraordinary ability to compress meaning through the visually eloquent arrangement of evocative words, an approach which was to define his entire subsequent output.⁷⁷

In March 1944, a number of Belloli's characteristically terse compositions appeared in the anthology *Mobilised Futurists*,⁷⁸ subsequently being republished in a dedicated volume under the title *words for the war*.⁷⁹ True milestones in the history of avant-garde poetry, these again illustrated Belloli's extreme sensitivity to the visually articulate dimensions of text in their employment of differently weighted typefaces and unconventional distribution of words and letters across the page. However, the greater compositional and emotional complexity of works

the initial words of either his poems or the texts in which they appeared, and I have been faithful to this convention throughout the thesis.

⁷⁷ Salaris states that this work comprised ten compositions (*Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 280), as does Cammarota in his volume *Futurismo. Bibliografia di 500 scrittori italiani* (Rovereto: Mart; Milan: Skira, 2006), p. 84. A more recent essay by D'Ambrosio suggests that there were only ever four ('La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., pp. 198, 201). Another text, by Ginevra Bria, also reproduces four of Belloli's compositions – 'the most complete' set of these *tipogrammi* extant according to the author in an e-mail to me dated 19 June 2013. See her 'Marinetti e il futuro del futurismo', in Gino Di Maggio, Daniele Lombardi and Achille Bonito Oliva, eds, *Ritratto di Marinetti* (Milan: Mudima, 2009), pp. 265-77. At the time of writing, Bria is Curator of ISISUF (Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo), an organisation co-founded by Belloli in 1960 that also houses the poet's personal archive.

⁷⁸ *Futuristi in Armi* (Milan: ERRE, 1944).

⁷⁹ *parole per la guerra* (Milan: ERRE, 1944). D'Ambrosio asserts that both volumes contained ten of Belloli's poems, although this is difficult to verify given the rarity of the texts in question ('La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., pp. 198-99).

such as 'war / land' ('guerra / terra') (**Fig. 83**) and 'black noise' represented a huge advance in comparison with the poet's initial experiments.

As Mary Ellen Solt has recognised, by late 1943 Belloli 'was making what would sixteen years later come to be called concrete poetry',⁸⁰ anticipating the ideas of the post-war Brazilian Noigandres group and the verbal 'constellations' of poets such as Eugen Gomringer (**Fig. 84**):

Despite the confusion in terminology [...] there is a fundamental requirement which the various kinds of concrete poetry meet: concentration upon the physical material from which the poem or text is made. [...] Generally speaking, the material of the concrete poem is language: words reduced to their elements of letters (to see) syllables (to hear). [...] In other words the concrete poet seeks to relieve the poem of its centuries-old burden of ideas, symbolic reference, allusion and repetitious emotional content; of its servitude to disciplines outside itself as an object in its own right for its own sake.⁸¹

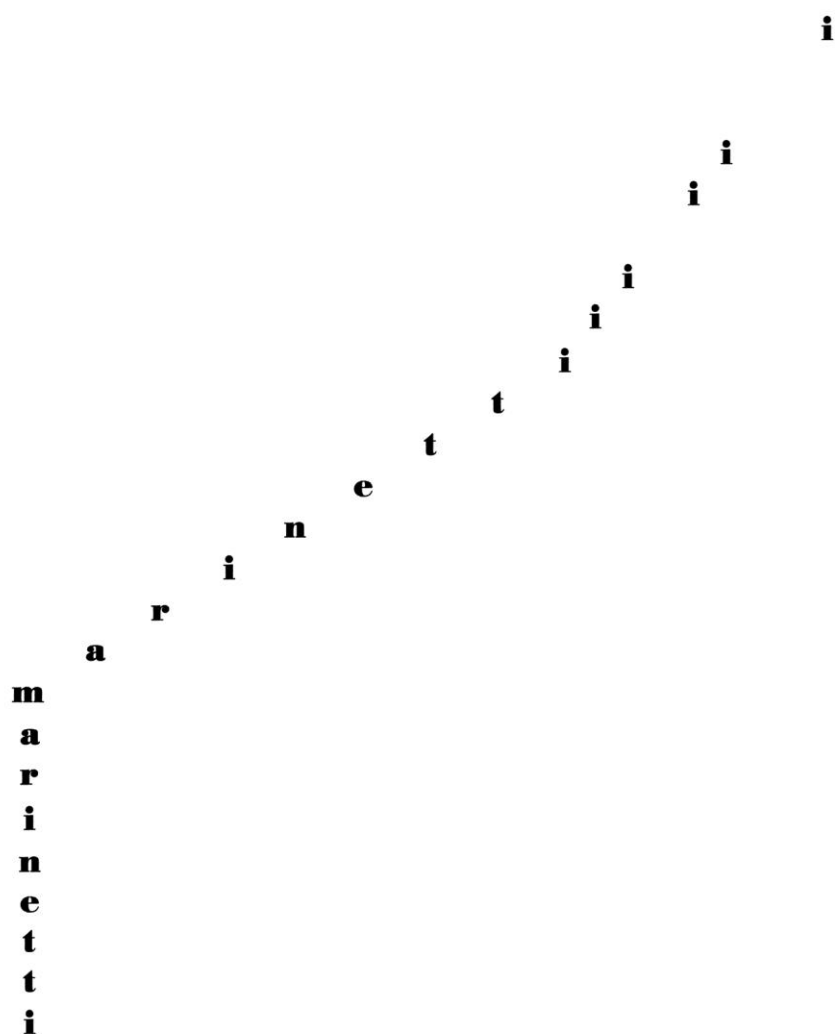
Such qualities correspond to Greenberg's definition of progressive artistic practice as that in which 'the poet or artist turns [his attention] in upon the medium of his own craft',⁸² thereby illustrating the fact that his aforementioned theory of 'kitsch' cannot be invoked as an effective means of defining the supposed 'rearguard'⁸³ character of 1940s Futurism:

⁸⁰ *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, cit., p. 37. Although not published until the following year, the first of Belloli's compositions to justify this claim do indeed bear the date 1943 (see **Fig. 83**). Interestingly, certain isolated compositions by Crali dating from the 1930s such as 'Amore' (1933) and 'Vento di nostalgia' (1934) would appear to have explored similar ideas to those contained in Belloli's works. During the post-war era Crali continued such experimentation – perhaps spurred on by the development of concrete poetry – and collected a number of works together, including those mentioned above, in a rare publication of 1983 titled *Parole nello spazio* (Milan: Edizioni Futuriste). See also Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., pp. 108-14. Crali's experimentation in the sphere of sound poetry during the 1940s is considered below.

⁸¹ Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, cit., pp. 7-8.

⁸² 'Avant-garde and Kitsch', in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, cit., pp. 532.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 533.



carlo belloli . tipogramma: marionetti multidirezionale . milano 28 ottobre 1943-XXI

Fig. 81 Carlo Belloli, 'multidirectional marionetti', in *tipogrammi per marionetti* cit., courtesy ISISUF – Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, Milan

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carlo belloli . tipogramma: marinetti multidirezionale . milano 28 ottobre 1943-XXI

Fig. 82 Carlo Belloli, 'multidirectional marinetti', in *tipogrammi per marinetti* cit., courtesy ISISUF – Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, Milan

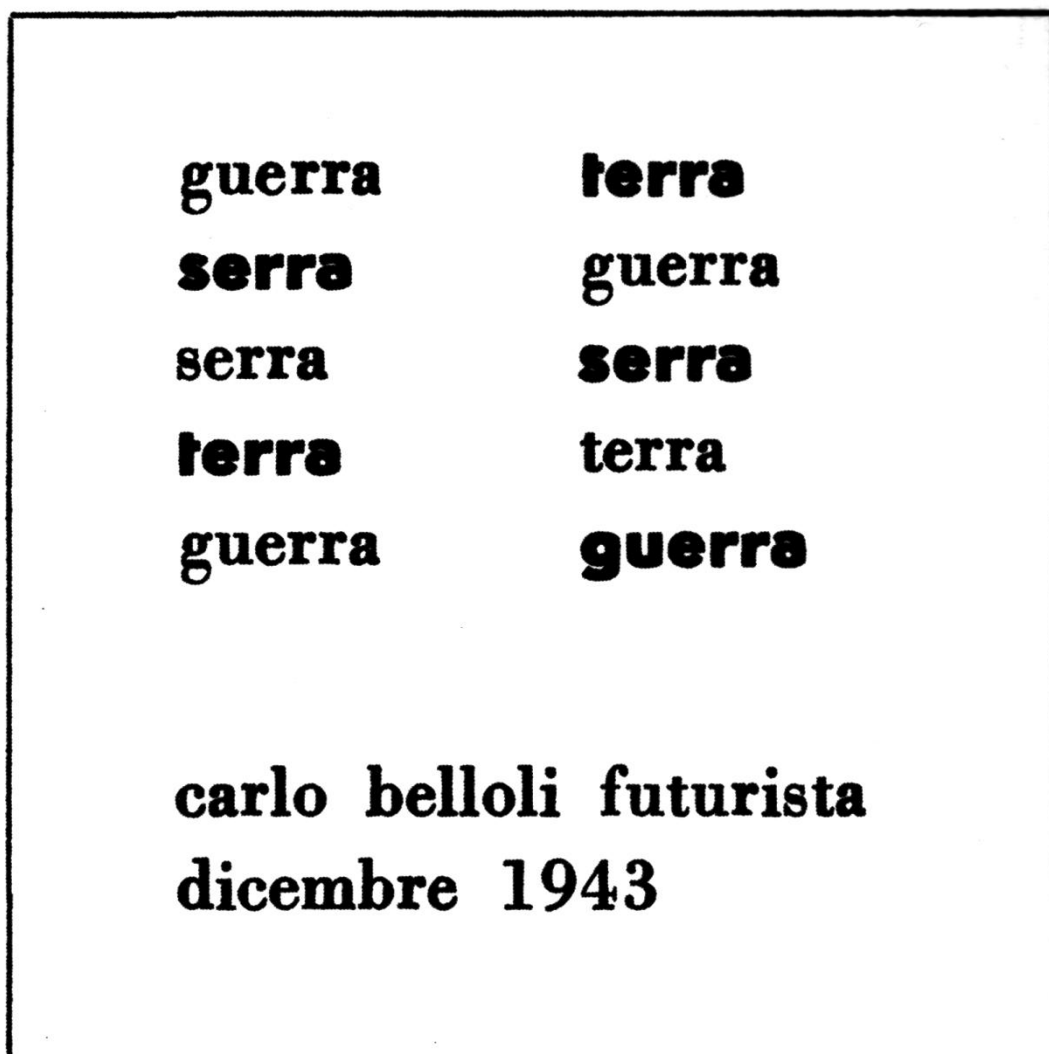


Fig. 83 Carlo Belloli, 'war / land', in *parole per la guerra*
cit., courtesy ISISUF – Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, Milan

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silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio
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silencio silencio silencio

Fig. 84 Eugen Gomringer, 'Silence', 1954

The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid [...]. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.⁸⁴

Belloli himself emphasised that his works

do not create analogies, they do not invite comparisons. my texts-poems
neither evoke a state of mind nor do they tell a story.

optimism and pessimism play no part in my quest for poetic words.

only unadorned verbal architecture, dynamic in its unfamiliar distribution, totally
optical in typographical and structural layout.⁸⁵

Solt also notes how ‘in addition to his preoccupation with the reduction of language, the concrete poet is concerned with establishing his linguistic materials in a new relationship to space (the page or its equivalent) and/or to time (abandoning the old linear measure)’.⁸⁶ Such principles are exemplified in perhaps the most famous of all Belloli’s works from this period, ‘war / land’: a poem consisting of just three words repeated several times (*guerra, terra, serra* – war, land, hothouse)⁸⁷ and arranged in two columns that are in turn tightly enclosed within the borders of a square. Belloli’s ‘framing’ of his words in this manner was perhaps intended to emphasise his intention of creating an image ‘to be visualised before being read’,⁸⁸ another

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 531-32.

⁸⁵ ‘poesia visuale’, in Carlo Belloli, *testi-poemi murali* (Milan: ERRE, 1944), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, cit., p. 7.

⁸⁷ Aiming to capture the rhythm of the poem, Bohn translates these words as ‘strife, life, knife’ in his *Italian Futurist Poetry*, cit., p. 305. My translation is more literal.

⁸⁸ Belloli, ‘poesia visuale’, cit.

ambition he shared with the concrete poets who came after him.⁸⁹ This device was used in another poem of 1943 'depicting' a landscape, in which context it was particularly effective and appropriate.⁹⁰

In composing such works Belloli evidently took specific aspects of the Futurist literary 'tradition' as his starting point, most obviously its insistence on the need for poets to 'redouble the expressive force of words'⁹¹ by means of a more creative and considered approach to typography. Marinetti's theories concerning the impact of technology on the evolution of human communication would also appear to have been decisive in relation to the specific character of Belloli's poetry. In 1913 the Futurist leader had asserted:

Futurism is grounded in the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries of science. Those people who today make use of the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the dirigible, the aeroplane, the cinema, the great newspaper (synthesis of a day in the world's life) do not realize that these various means of communication, transportation and information have a decisive influence on their psyches.⁹²

According to Marinetti, one of the key ways in which this influence manifested itself was modern society's taste for extremely rapid, distilled forms of communication and 'love of speed, abbreviation, and the summary. "Quick, give me the whole thing in two words!"'⁹³ Significantly, Marinetti emphasised the important role played by military conflict in reinforcing these new linguistic tendencies. As early as 1913 he had noted the 'economical speed that the telegraph

⁸⁹ 'The concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read' (Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, cit., p. 7).

⁹⁰ 'pianura / un albero' ('plain / a tree'), in Belloli, *testi-poemi murali*, cit., p. 19.

⁹¹ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., p. 105.

⁹² Ibid., p. 96.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 98.

imposes on reporters and war correspondents in their swift reportings',⁹⁴ an observation that was to be restated in the 1942 manifesto concerning 'The Art of Wartime and Post-war Typography', as we have seen.⁹⁵ Belloli's poetry represents the radical culmination of this long-standing Futurist emphasis on concision in its pursuit of 'the greatest possible economy of expression'.⁹⁶ After the often awkward verbosity of *aeropoesia di guerra* here, at last, was a poetic form once more in harmony with the requirements of modern life, perfectly corresponding to those 'necessities of language'⁹⁷ thrown into sharp relief by the outbreak of war.

However, it is important to note that, like the authors of the manifesto 'L'arte tipografica di guerra e dopoguerra', Belloli not only considered his approach to be attuned to prevailing circumstances, but also as meeting *future* linguistic 'necessities'. Marinetti shared this apprehension, proclaiming Belloli to be a visionary who had 'intuited the future of futurism' in his introduction to the poet's extraordinary 1944 publication *texts-poems for walls*:

the text-poem of belloli anticipates that language of words-signs located in the communicative network of a mathematical civilisation which will feel the need to express itself with economy in conversations gestures emotions.
even a monosyllable will be able to constitute a completely expressive phonetic performance.
belloli has realised a new aesthetic operation with which futurism will renew its language of poetic essentiality.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See above, p. 177.

⁹⁶ Belloli, 'poesia visuale', cit.

⁹⁷ Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, cit., p. 37.

⁹⁸ F. T. Marinetti, 'collaudo i "testi-poemi murali" di carlo belloli', in Belloli, *testi-poemi murali*, cit., p. 3. A translation of the text can be found in the appendix to this thesis.

Pared down to its bare bones, this was a condensed, synoptic language not rooted in the early twentieth century's clanking and grinding industrial past, but one that looked forward to a streamlined, technology-driven future in which communication would be rigorously reduced to its essentials: a conception that seems incredibly far-sighted in our digital world, where the constraints of electronic communication frequently limit the permitted number of typographical characters.

After years spent eulogising the creations of his poets with increasing (and increasingly tired) hyperbole, or constructing his introductions to their works by means of cutting and pasting passages from earlier texts,⁹⁹ there is a genuine and palpable sense of excitement about Marinetti's insightful *collaudo* to Belloli's volume, which anticipates the dawning of a new era of Futurist experimentation so ahead of its time that even the movement's defining *modernolatria* would appear old hat: 'belloli has no nostalgic sentiments regrets memories excesses. for belloli the eulogising of machines is already avant-garde classicism archaeology.'¹⁰⁰

Belloli's assertion that in a brave new post-war world 'to see will become more necessary than to listen'¹⁰¹ received its clearest expression in this remarkable collection, comprising ten compositions printed on loose, coarse sheets of paper measuring 50 x 35.5 cm, gathered

⁹⁹ For example, Marinetti's rather inconsequential anecdote concerning a Brazilian bus company naming their vehicles in his honour appeared in the manifesto 'Aeropainting of Bombardments' as well as in his introduction to De Concini's *Aeropoesie futuriste di bombardamenti* – a *collaudo* which also incorporated elements of the earlier 'New Aesthetic of War'. Similarly, Marinetti's introduction to Pattarozzi's *Inghilterra fogna di passatismo* (cit., pp. 7-16) was essentially a collage of his 1910 'Futurist Speech to the English' (in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 67-73) and a later text titled 'Italiani liberatevi dalle abitudini inglesi' (*Stile Futurista*, vol. 2, nos 11-12, September 1935, p. 19). In the former discourse, of 1910, Marinetti had admiringly referred to Britain's 'deep hatred for German clumsiness' (p. 72); naturally, this was removed from the version of the text printed in Pattarozzi's volume.

¹⁰⁰ Marinetti, 'collaudo i "testi-poemi murali"', cit.

¹⁰¹ 'poesia visuale', cit.

together in a folder. As the work's title makes clear, this large format was selected for the reason that Belloli intended his works to be viewed vertically, their few words being scanned and absorbed in the same rapid manner in which one gleans the information conveyed by a traffic sign or contained within a poster pinned to the wall. Belloli himself later claimed that 'poetry was bound to escape from the pages of a book',¹⁰² and considered these poster-poems as a first step along the road to the complete liberation of literature from the printed page – a goal ultimately achieved in his three-dimensional *corpi di poesia* (poetry bodies) of 1951, where disjointed words float in transparent, mobile Plexiglas forms: 'semantic structures can be prepared for the dingy rooms of motels and boarding houses, and for writing desks and office waiting rooms. Also for aunt emma's boudoir, if only to disrupt her relationship with the flowered chintz'.¹⁰³

Habitually praised solely for its formal innovations, extended consideration of Belloli's poetry reveals it to have been more than just an intellectual exercise, and to possess a strong emotional charge – despite the poet's own stress on the detached character of his work.¹⁰⁴ Steve McCaffery has asserted the same to be true of Gomringer's famous composition 'Silence' (**Fig. 84**), denying that its interest resides entirely in 'the poem's formalist ramifications' and finding a poignant significance in the fact that it 'was written within a decade of the discovery of the

¹⁰² Carlo Belloli, *corpi di poesia* (Rome and New York: Mediterranean Publishing Company, 1951); cited in Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, cit. p. 38. Belloli's earlier *tipogrammi per marinetti* had also been printed on loose leaves.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See above, p. 198.

concentration camps'.¹⁰⁵ On this basis, how much more significant might the factor of 'historical and political context'¹⁰⁶ be in relation to a full appreciation of Belloli's works, created as they were not after, but in the midst of, immense socio-political upheaval and trauma?

I would argue that the impact of these events marked Belloli's compositions deeply, yet in ways that may not be immediately apparent. For instance, many of his works incorporate seemingly insignificant details such as the date and location of their completion – information which is given the same typographical emphasis as the words forming the body of the poem itself. Seldom remarked upon, these have even been omitted entirely from translations or transcriptions of Belloli's poems over the years – surely an error of judgement, given that these lean, spare, works were evidently purged of anything considered remotely superfluous by their author.¹⁰⁷ Ostensibly adding little to one's understanding of the poems, they in fact not only serve to balance these compositions visually – in a similar manner to the painter Giorgio Morandi's judiciously placed signatures – but also make them resonate with profound historical associations and significance, anchoring them in a precise and desperate moment in the life of the Italian people.

Like that of Bellanova, Belloli's poetry expresses something of the terrible psychological impact of war on the nation's population. His composition 'black noise'¹⁰⁸ evokes the suffocating atmosphere of terror caused by the falling of projectiles that 'test life', while 'war / land' equally vividly evokes the claustrophobia of this period of civil war and violence, conveying a sense of

¹⁰⁵ 'Politics, Context and The Constellation: A Case Study of Eugen Gomringer's "Silencio"', *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2013, pp. 10-22 (p. 10).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, *Poesie futuriste* (Acquaviva delle Fonti: Acquaviva, 2009), pp. 110, 111; Bohn, *Italian Futurist Poetry*, cit., pp. 302-05.

¹⁰⁸ Repr. in Achille Bonito Oliva, *La parola totale. Una tradizione futurista 1909-1986* (Modena: Fonte d'Abisso, 1986), p. 166.



Fig. 85 Carlo Belloli, 'achtung / a smile', in Belloli, *testi-poemi murali*, cit., p. 11
courtesy ISISUF – Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, Milan



Fig. 86 Carlo Belloli, 'treni / iiiii', in Belloli, *testi-poemi murali*, cit., p. 9
courtesy ISISUF – Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo, Milan

mounting desperation in its repetitive rhythms and its allusion to stifling and oppressive environments – something reinforced visually by the way in which Belloli boxes his words in. Still more claustrophobic is ‘achtung / a smile’ (**Fig. 85**) – a work that it is tempting to interpret as a protest against the repressive atmosphere of the Salò Republic. Like Italy itself in 1944, this composition is dominated by overbearing German authoritarianism from which any glimmer of humanity – symbolised by the act of smiling – is almost entirely absent.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the most unsettling of all Belloli’s works, however, is that concerned with moving trains (**Fig. 86**). It is uncertain if the sinister connotations of this subject were deliberately invoked by Belloli in composing this poem – or indeed even apparent to him – but its shrill repetition of the letter ‘i’, like the keening of a character from Greek tragedy, cannot but now evoke the unimaginable anguish and torment of those condemned to make their final journeys at the hands of the Nazis.

III. ‘THE FIRST VOICE OF THE POET OF THE MACHINE’: *PAROLE MUSICALI*

A challenge to Belloli’s assertion that ‘to see will become more necessary than to listen’ in post-war society was mounted by one of the final Futurist manifestos, written by Crali and Marinetti. Titled *Musical Words – Alphabet in Freedom*,¹¹⁰ it noted how the expressive power of particular sounds, and combinations thereof, had initially constituted the intuitive foundations of languages, and lamented the extent to which logic had subsequently come to dominate communication. Its authors rejected the imposition of rules and regulations on humanity’s

¹⁰⁹ Practically squeezed out of the composition, the words *un sorriso* appear at its lower right-hand corner.

¹¹⁰ *Parole musicali – Alfabeto in libertà. Manifesto futurista* (Venice: Movimento Futurista Italiano, 1944). A translation of this document can be found in the appendix to this thesis, from which all following citations are taken. In a note appended to the version of the text which appears in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 322, Crali stated: ‘This manifesto, which I suggested to Marinetti and discussed with him [...] was not published [at the time] due to the poet’s move from Venice to Como and [subsequent] death.’ Accordingly, it remains unclear when the version I have consulted here was actually printed.

expression of its relationship with – and sense of wonder at – the cosmos, proposing a restoration of primordial linguistic freedom.¹¹¹ In this respect, the manifesto also represented an ‘expressionist’ counterpart to Belloli’s cerebral approach to language, with its ‘carefully considered choice[s]’,¹¹² thereby reintroducing that intuitive, irrational dimension into Futurist poetry which had long been central to the movement’s aesthetic¹¹³ as well as to other forms of early avant-garde experimentation. However, if these ‘musical words’ do not represent as radical a break with the past as Belloli’s works in terms of their formal characteristics, the manifesto nevertheless seems to express an even more intense desire to have done with all previous forms of poetic language and begin afresh, calling for a return to the very origins of human communication. Additionally, as I shall argue, it contains an implicit political dimension that seems directly to contradict prevailing Fascist ideology.

Although jointly attributed to Crali and Marinetti, the formulation of the manifesto would appear predominantly to have been the work of the former.¹¹⁴ In a letter inviting Crali to the final Futurist meeting, held toward the end of January 1944, Marinetti promised him ‘we will

¹¹¹ Crali and Marinetti articulate their theories in this text with a clarity achieved precisely by means of those grammatical regulations the manifesto sought to abolish. However, the concept of *parole musicali* related to the language of poetry, not that of everyday life or technical matters, hence the rational and conventional manner of its exposition in the manifesto. Similarly, in 1913 Marinetti had stated: ‘My Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature [...] deals exclusively with poetic inspiration. Philosophy, the exact sciences, politics, journalism, education, business, however much they may seek synthetic forms of expression, will still need to use syntax and punctuation. I am obliged, for that matter, to use them myself in order to make myself clear to you.’ ‘Destruction of Syntax’, cit., pp. 95-96.

¹¹² Marinetti, ‘collaudo i “testi-poemi murali”’, cit.

¹¹³ ‘If the characteristic trait of Classicism is moderating *reason*, and that of Romanticism *sentiment* inflamed to the point of passion, the epicentre of Futurism is *instinct* considered as an elementary cosmic force.’ Francesco Orestano, quoted in Pino Masnata, ‘Studio su la teoria delle parole in libertà’ (an essay originally included in the latter’s 1940 volume *Poesia dei ferri chirurgici*), in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 300; original emphasis.

¹¹⁴ See above, pp. 206, n. 110.

read your manifesto',¹¹⁵ a draft of which Crali carried with him to Venice¹¹⁶ where its contents were finalised and received the approval of the Futurist leader.¹¹⁷ Moreover, although Crali was a gifted writer whose style was marked by concision, clarity and wit, the distinctive verve characteristic of Marinetti's writing is absent from this text. However, the latter would seem to have been particularly enthusiastic about this form of poetry, spontaneously dictating two works to Crali in which he experimented with the new genre: 'Salon on the Grand Canal' and 'Japanese Human Missiles' (**Fig. 87**).¹¹⁸ Other compositions soon followed, and were gathered together by Crali in a unique, hand-made, mixed-media volume titled *Aeromusic of the Alphabet in Freedom. Marinetti Crali Cenisi*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Undated letter from Marinetti to Crali (Cra.3.73).

¹¹⁶ Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', cit., p. 173.

¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, Crali has indicated that further revisions to the text may have been made given more time, and that the manifesto remains in the state in which it was left at the time of Marinetti's death. See Crali, 'Crali. Scheda futurista 19 – Aeromusica d'alfabeto in libertà. Manifesto futurista', in Crali, *Crali futurista*, [1973], cit., [p. 4]. Crali would appear to have considered the term 'aeromusic' interchangeable with that of 'musical words' in defining this new poetic form, using first one then the other when reproducing the manifesto. I have preferred the term 'musical words' here, so as not to cause confusion with 'aeromusic' proper, which was a genre in its own right.

¹¹⁸ See Crali, 'Una vita per il futurismo', cit., p. 174, and 'Crali. Scheda futurista 19', cit., [p. 4]. On the typescript of another poem, titled 'La riunione dei futuristi sul Canal Grande' (Cra.3.76) Crali noted that this work was likewise 'dictated to me by Marinetti in Venice'.

¹¹⁹ This anthology includes four poems: Marinetti's 'Japanese Human Torpedoes', Crali's 'Venetian Madrigal' and 'Night Train', and a work titled 'Fight between Crabs' by a painter friend of Crali named Raoul Cenisi (**Fig. 89**). According to Crali, a fifth work was included in this volume (Marinetti's aforementioned 'Salon on the Grand Canal') although this does not appear in the volume, currently in the collection of the Wolfsonian, Miami (see 'Crali. Scheda futurista 19', cit., [p. 4]). The latter text presumably corresponds to a piece titled 'Salotto Marinetti sul Canal Grande' (**Fig. 88**), exquisitely rendered in ink and produced as an individual brochure, or 'score', by Crali in 1944 along with a version of his own 'Venetian Madrigal'. Both can be found in the Fondo Tullio Crali (Cra.3.82; Cra.3.84) alongside preliminary versions of other poems in the aforementioned anthology (Cra.3.80, Cra.3.81 and Cra.3.83). The dating of 'Japanese Human Torpedoes' (**Fig. 87**) to 22 January 1944 is a mystery, insofar as both its title and layout would seem to refer to Kamikaze attacks, which are generally held to have commenced at the Battle of Leyte in October of that year (see Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, *The Penguin History of the Second*

As stated, the manifesto proposed a form of abstract language that would be able to communicate the poet's response to external phenomena and internal emotions in the most direct and intuitive manner possible, unmediated by the strictures of reason and freed from the limitations inherent in the concept of the 'definition'. It called for the most elastic form of verse possible, grounded in neologisms 'invented and modulated by the poet', as well as the unrestrained and instinctive use of onomatopoeia:

Centuries of tradition have reduced poetry to a procession of words dragging themselves along on the crutches of orthopaedic meanings, and too many customs have tormented poets, hemming them in with sentence structure, and stifling them with the obligatory psychological chronicle and the weight of rhetoric. Finally, we have restored to the word its pure musical space.

In so doing, it was claimed, *parole musicali* would restore to the poet the same freedom of expression that his or her distant ancestors had possessed ('in issuing his first cries primitive man instinctively created certain sounds that had a direct relationship with the phenomena to which they referred'). With what the manifesto's authors described as a 'paradoxical acrobatic leap', poets would therefore find themselves transported back to the very dawn of language. Simultaneously, however, they would also be transported to a much less distant past: that of the early avant-gardes, whose exploration of 'primitivism' had been central to their search for more 'authentic' forms of expression, unshackled from restrictive conventions of any kind. As Härmänmaa has noted, this was a consistent element of Futurism's own early theory:

World War, cit., pp. 1162-63). Although Marinetti had been friendly with the Japanese Ambassador, Shinrokuro Hidaka, since November 1943 (see Agnese, *Marinetti*, cit., pp. 305-06), it seems extremely unlikely he would have received any indication that such attacks were being planned at this early date.

Futurist primitivism [...] manifests itself in the tendency to go back in history, which Marinetti often substitutes for the 'science fiction' vision of a new world we might expect to find. [...] In its positive aspect, twentieth-century primitivism was a form of cultural revitalization, part of a search for a less intellectualized artistic energy. [...] [This] offers an explanation of Marinetti's curious choice to locate many of his works, starting from *Mafarka il futurista*, in the wild nature of Africa instead of a modern metropolis, which surely would have better corresponded to the new world made of steel and brick, glorified by Futurism.¹²⁰

In terms of its Italian antecedents, the theoretical basis of *parole musicali* was constituted from a blend of several ideas concerning onomatopoeia contained in earlier Futurist texts. The fact that the manifesto opens with a reference to Marinetti's 1913 essay 'Destruction of Syntax – Wireless Imagination – Words in Freedom' is significant in this respect. As we have seen, it was here that the Futurist leader first introduced his notion of 'free expressive orthography': a tentative first step along the road to the neologisms of *parole musicali* insofar as it pointed the way toward what he termed 'the *onomatopoetic psychic* harmony, the sonorous but abstract expression of an emotion or a pure thought'.¹²¹ D'Ambrosio has also identified the roots of *parole musicali* in earlier experiments, characterising this 'new' poetic form as the development of one of four forms of onomatopoeia detailed by Marinetti in his 1914 text 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility',¹²² namely:

Abstract onomatopoeia, noisy, unconscious expression of the most complex and mysterious motions of our sensibility. (E.g.: in my poem *Dunes*, the abstract onomatopoeia *rnn rnn rnn* corresponds to no natural or mechanical sound, but

¹²⁰ 'Beyond Anarchism: Marinetti's Futurist (anti-)Utopia of Individualism and "Artocracy"', cit., p. 862. Interestingly, however, in 1940 Alberto Viviani claimed: 'Marinetti [...] has never sought or desired any return to barbarism [*rimbarbarimento*] [or] hypothetical returns to origins'. *Il poeta Marinetti e il futurismo* (Turin: G. B. Paravia, 1940), pp. 122-23.

¹²¹ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., p. 106; original emphasis.

¹²² D'Ambrosio, 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., p. 202.

expresses a state of mind.)¹²³

Such an approach would appear to be evident in Crali's 'Venetian Madrigal' ('TARANZANZANZANZAAARA') (Fig. 90). Yet, as stated, *parole musicali* aimed not only to express internal *stati d'animo*, but dramatically to expand the poet's expressive resources in evoking external reality. Consequently, one might reasonably interpret the sound-words 'ciaf ciaff' that appear in the same poem as an example of '*direct, imitative, elementary, realistic onomatopoeia*',¹²⁴ evoking as they do the soft lapping of water against the hulls of gondolas plying through the lagoon (in fact, the final 'f' of 'ciaff' is rendered in a manner that recalls the *ferro* of a gondola, and the word itself is juxtaposed with a crescent form which simultaneously evokes the shape of a boat and a wave). By contrast, the three-tiered repetition of 'GAM GAM GAM' would seem to constitute an instance of '*indirect, complex, and analogical onomatopoeia*' similar to Marinetti's use of *dum-dum-dum-dum* to evoke 'the circling sound of the African sun and [its] orange weight',¹²⁵ in his poem *Dunes*. The hard sound here seems to be an attempt to convey the solidity of the structure – struck by the harsh moonlight – into whose silhouette the words are integrated, whilst the softer 'VUS VUS' evokes the shadowy façade of the opposite building. The phonetic distinction between these sounds may also have been intended to convey the physical distance between the two buildings – a technique employed to similar effect by Marinetti in *Zang Tumb Tumb*, where

the strident onomatopoeia *ssiiiiii* gives the whistle of a towboat on the river Meuse and is followed by the veiled onomatopoeia *ffiiii fffiiii*, echo from the opposite bank. The two onomatopoeias saved me from needing to describe the width of the river, which is defined by the contrast between the two consonants *s* and *f*.¹²⁶

¹²³ Marinetti, 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendor', cit., pp. 109-10; original emphasis.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 109; original emphasis.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; original emphasis.

¹²⁶ Ibid.; original emphasis.

SILURI UMANI GIAPPONESI
(alfabeto in libertà)

t i n ò

t i c à

t i t è

t i n à

zann

zinn

zann zann

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

vi vi vi

vi viiiiii

ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON ROON

ZUN

ZUMM

kara

ZUN

ZUN

ZUM

kara

ZUN

PRAAN

PRAANK

F.T. MARINETTI
Venezia 22 genn. 1944

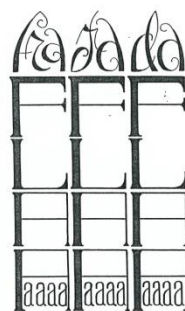
Fig. 87 F. T. Marinetti, 'Japanese Human Torpedoes (Alphabet in Freedom)', 1944 (Cra.3.81)

SALOTTO MARINETTI SUL CANAL GRANDE

PAROLE MUSICALI FUTURISTE DI

Crali

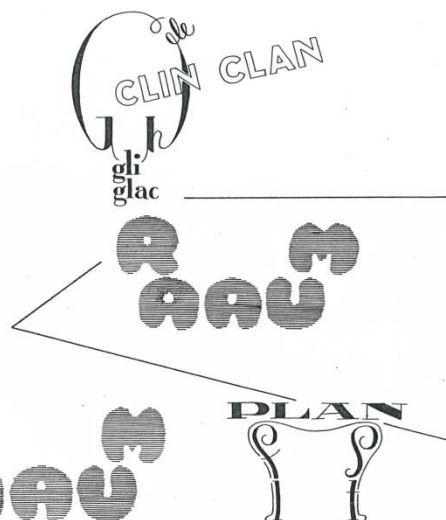
1944



GLIN GLIN
GLIN GLIN
TLAN GLIN GLAN GLAN
GLIN glin GLAN



TLAN GLIN GLIN
GLAN



...ORGOGGIO NOVATORE VELOCIZZATORE..
TATA TA TA TA TA sraaaaa a a a a
ZANG GRANG TUM..TUM

Fig. 88 Tullio Crali, 'Marinetti's Salon on the Grand Canal', 1944 (Cra.3.82)

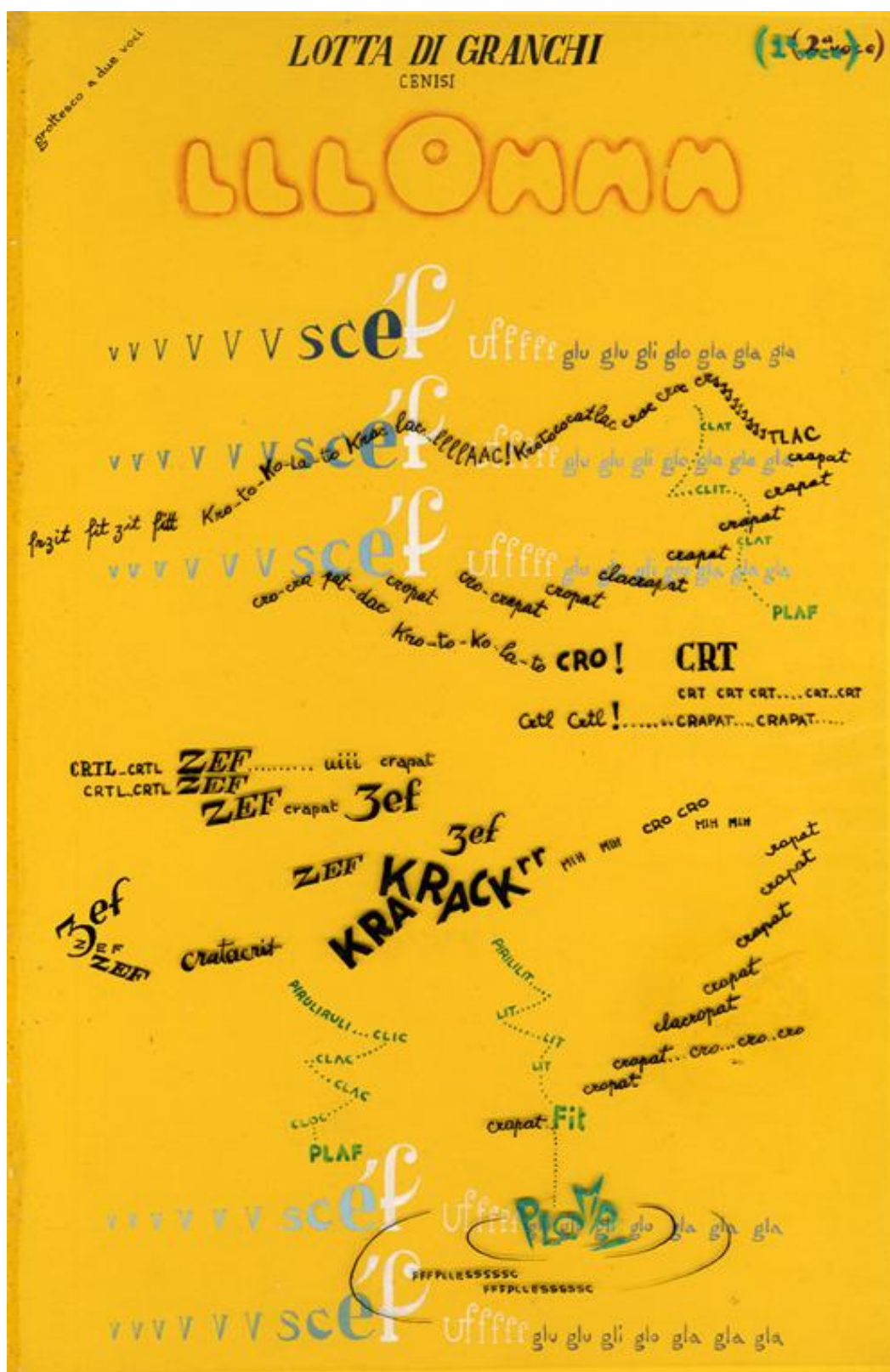


Fig. 89 Raoul Cenisi, 'Fight between Crabs', in *Aeromusiche d'alfabeto in libertà*. Marinetti Crali Cenisi (n. p.: Futurismo, 1944), [p. 6], The Wolfsonian – Florida International University

This page includes a transparent overlay

[<http://digital.wolfsonian.org/WOLF046692/00001/2j?search=cenisi>]

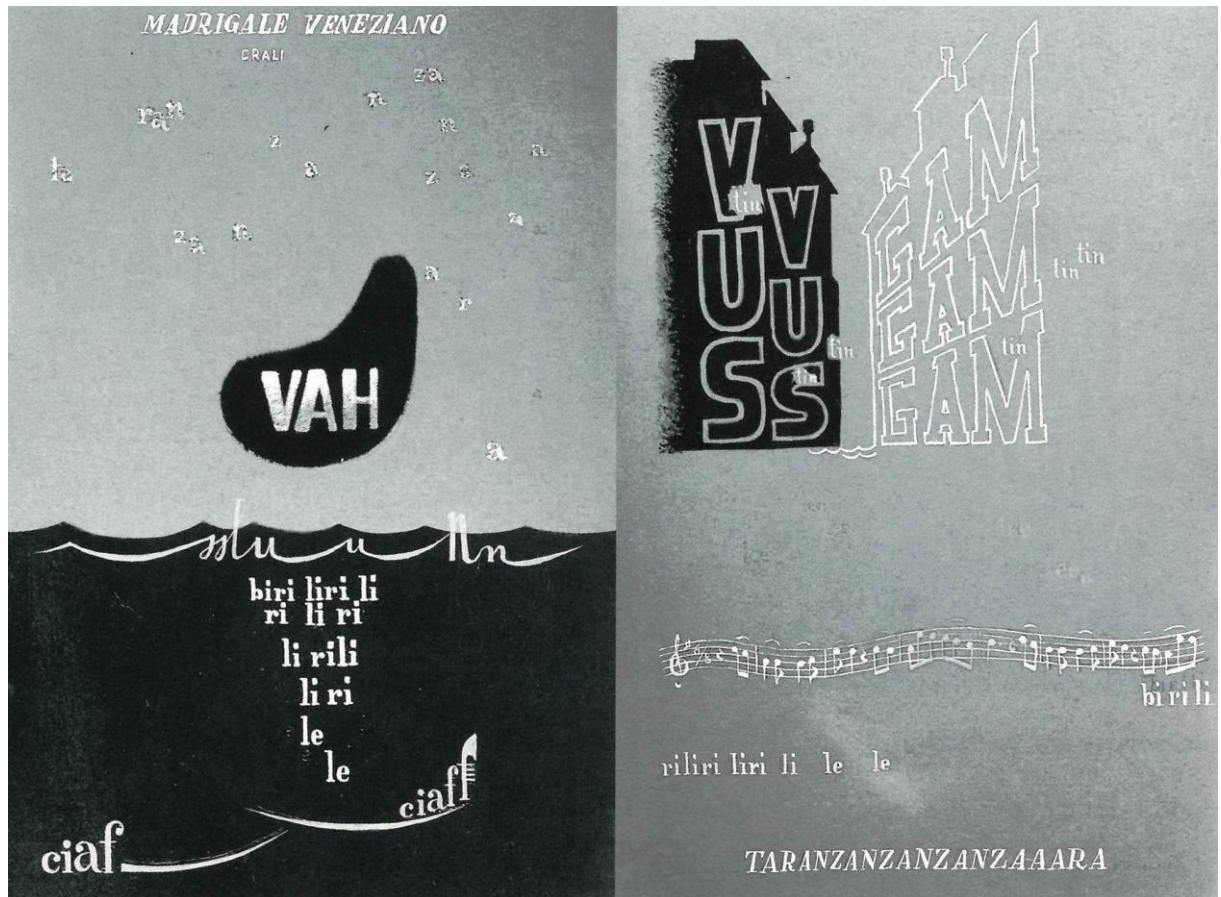


Fig. 90 Tullio Crali, 'Venetian Madrigal', in *Aeromusiche d'alfabeto in libertà. Marinetti Crali Cenisi* (n. p.: Futurismo, 1944), [pp. 3-4], The Wolfsonian – Florida International University

As Figs 87-90 illustrate, there was a strong visual aspect to 'musical words', despite the fact that they are often distinguished from Belloli's proto-concrete poetry in terms of their concentration on sound.¹²⁷ The manifesto itself emphasised the fact that *parole musicali*, like *aeropoesia*, cried out to be performed by skilled interpreters,¹²⁸ insisting that 'musical words demand

¹²⁷ See, for example, D'Ambrosio, 'Strategie, procedimenti e modelli testuali', cit., p. 36; D'Ambrosio, 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., p. 200; Salaris, *Futurismo. L'avanguardia delle avanguardie*, cit., p. 211.

¹²⁸ The often extreme complexity of Futurist poetry had always presented problems of interpretation, as Marinetti himself recognised: 'One may object that my words-in-freedom, my imagination without strings, demand special speakers if they are to be understood. Although I do not care for the comprehension of the multitude, I will reply that the number of Futurist public speakers is increasing and that any admired traditional poem, for that matter, requires a special speaker if it is to be understood.' 'Destruction of Syntax', cit., p. 106.

declamation'. Composed of entirely unfamiliar sounds that cannot readily be heard by our 'mind's ear', these poems certainly benefit from being read aloud. However, despite their assertions to the contrary, it would appear that Crali and Marinetti were aware that the titles of their compositions were not sufficient to unlock the significance of the mysterious neologisms and onomatopoeias from which they were constructed.¹²⁹ After all, these are not purely abstract poems in the style of Kurt Schwitters's 'Ursonate', but ones that maintain a link with, and attempt to evoke, specific situations and environments. A later version of Crali's 'Venetian Madrigal', in which the words 'CIAFF CLAF' are *not* juxtaposed with the forms whose sound they are intended to suggest, highlights the extent to which the presence of these non-verbal elements in the earlier version aids the reader's comprehension of the poem's meaning.¹³⁰

Other aspects of Futurist poetic experimentation were to receive development in *parole musicali*, such as Fortunato Depero's theory of *onomalingua*, outlined in his famous 'bolted book', *Depero futurista*. This abstract language – likewise grounded in neologisms and onomatopoeia, as its name suggests – was so attuned to the world of phenomena, its inventor asserted, that it could be used 'to speak and communicate freely with the elements of the universe, with animals and with machines', its sounds encompassing both 'the language of natural forces [...] [and] of artificial noise-making beings created by mankind'.¹³¹ Significantly, Depero went on to assert that 'onomalingua is a poetic language of universal comprehension for which translators are not necessary',¹³² a claim that Marinetti and Crali were later to make in relation to their own invention. They also shared Depero's insistence that the 'efficacy [of such

¹²⁹ See the manifesto's third point.

¹³⁰ 'Lunaria veneziana e futuristi in discussioni', in Crali, *Parole nello spazio*, cit., no. 11.

¹³¹ 'L'onomalingua. Creazione Depero – 1916. Verbalizzazione astratta', in *Depero futurista* (Milan: Dinamo Azari, 1927; repr. Florence: SPES, 1987), p. 217.

¹³² Ibid.

poems] *depends on declamation*'.¹³³ Rather than using the visual clues typical of later *parole musicali*, Depero negotiated the inherently problematic concept of an abstract language intended to evoke the concrete, objective world by identifying, in conventional language, the various phenomena to which his 'onomalinguistic' elements related. For instance, those sounds intended to evoke the 'curliness' of hair in his poem 'Abstract Verbalisation of a Woman' are clearly labelled as such; the same is true of others describing its 'mass' and 'flowing' character – all of which constitute sub-sections of the overall category 'hair'.¹³⁴

Of course, it was not only *Italian* Futurism that provided inspiration. Although Marinetti had spoken of an 'abstract' language in 1913, it was in Russia that the implications of this idea were developed most fully. Indeed, the connections between *parole musicali* and Russian Futurist poetry are clear and undeniable, despite the fact that Crali and Marinetti avoid making any references in their manifesto to the *zaum* (or 'transrational') compositions of writers such as Velimir Khlebnikov or Alexei Kruchenykh, figures whose work and ideas they would naturally have been familiar with. Only much later did Crali allude to the distinguished ancestry of *parole musicali*, recalling how the Italians had maintained their interest in Russian Futurism throughout the Fascist years – a remark surely of some significance in this context.¹³⁵ Although the Futurists were notoriously reluctant to acknowledge their artistic debts, one must perhaps take into account the fact that explicit admittance of Russian antecedence in any sphere at this time would have been extraordinary, not to say politically hazardous. Throughout these final years Russia was undoubtedly at the forefront of Marinetti's consciousness, his experience of the Axis military campaign against the Soviet Union (during which he read Graziella Lehrmann's newly-

¹³³ Fortunato Depero, *So I Think, So I Paint: Ideologies of an Italian Self-made Painter* (Trento: Mutilati e Invalidi, 1947), p. 145; original emphasis.

¹³⁴ Depero, 'Verbalizzazione astratta di signora', in Depero, *Depero futurista*, cit., p. 219.

¹³⁵ Crali, *50 anni di aeropittura futurista*, cit., [p. 5]. See also his essay 'Poesia e modo mio', in Crali *aeropittorefuturista* (Milan: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1988), pp. 69-73, where the work of Kruchenykh is cited as a precedent (p. 71).

published study *From Marinetti to Mayakovsky*¹³⁶ being the subject of his aforementioned text *Russian Originality of Masses Distances Radiohearts*. It has been pointed out how ‘no real aggression toward the Russian “enemy”’ is apparent in the latter work.¹³⁷ Indeed, Marinetti’s respect and admiration for the Russian avant-garde was sincere and enduring, even in the midst of war. In a memoir dictated to the Futurist painter Cesare Andreoni in the spring of 1944, Marinetti made reference to ‘the great Maiakovski’, and spoke warmly of ‘the characteristic and fundamental passion that [the Russian] people have always manifested for all forms of art and especially for music and theatre’. In the same text he related how – somewhat bizarrely, given the circumstances – he posed for a sculpture by ‘a friend of the leader of the Russian Futurists Maiakovski’ while at the Eastern front.¹³⁸ The relationship between Russian and Italian Futurism also received extended and affectionate consideration in a chapter of the Futurist leader’s 1944 memoir *An Italian Sensibility Born in Egypt*.¹³⁹ Marinetti’s desire to volunteer for military service in the Soviet Union would appear to fly in the face of these facts, but this was no doubt a contradiction he resolved in terms of his ideological antagonism towards Communism, his unshakeable sense of patriotic duty, and his awareness of the need to match Futurist word with deed by volunteering for active duty in what was undoubtedly one of the most extreme theatres of the entire conflict.

¹³⁶ Graziella Lehrmann, *De Marinetti a Maiakovski. Destins d’un mouvement littéraire occidental en Russie* (Fribourg: De La Gare, 1942). Marinetti mentioned this fact, and his admiration for Lehrmann’s text, on numerous occasions. See, for example, his ‘Manifesto futurista della patriarte’, in Farris, *Manifesti futuristi savonesi*, cit., pp. 78-83 (p. 78).

¹³⁷ Colucci, ‘Prefazione’, in Marinetti, *Originalità russa di masse distanze radiocuori*, cit., p. 22.

¹³⁸ ‘Dettatomi da Marinetti... Andreoni Cesare – Terragni – Pino Masnata – Emilio Boccafusca – Ignazio Scurto – Sortino – Virio – Forlin / RHO – RADICE / Poeti artisti futuristi combattenti in Russia / Futuristi creatori e combattenti in Russia / Futuristi poetano dipingono combattendo in Russia’, in *Cesare Andreoni. Artista, artigiano, protodesigner* (Bergamo: Bolis, 1992), p. 153.

¹³⁹ ‘The Birth of Russian Futurism: Milan Paris Moscow Saint Petersburg’, in Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 263-83.

The recommendations and assertions of the 1944 manifesto had been anticipated in a series of texts by Kruchenykh published in the same year as Marinetti's 'Destruction of Syntax', including the article 'The New Ways of the Word', the leaflet *Declaration of the Word as Such*, and an anthology of poems titled *Pomade*. Like *parole musicali*, *zaum* poetry was born of a conviction that 'a common language is binding; a free one allows more complete expression', and that 'meaning makes the word contract, writhe, turn to stone'.¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, Russian Futurists sought to restore a greater elasticity, emotional purity and integrity to language by means of creating entirely new words that would convey an experience of reality no longer mediated by icy rationality, but expressed directly through sounds that would have the intensity of 'glowing coal'.¹⁴¹ Like the Russian poets, it was not the intention of Marinetti or Crali to indulge in Dadaist absurdity, but to make an altogether more serious contribution to the evolution of linguistics. Rather than nihilistic *negations* of meaning, their poetry – like that of Depero – would seem to be united to *zaum* experimentation in its attempt to discover deeper meanings and more profound affinities between certain sounds and the phenomena that inspired them. In this context it is intriguing to note the similarity between Crali's evocation of the undulating surface of the lagoon in 'Venetian Madrigal' ('biri liri') and Depero's description of wavy hair in his aforementioned 'Abstract Verbalisation of a Woman' ('liri biri').

The 'primitive' associations of all this had been as central to *zaum* as they were later to be for *parole musicali*:

Words die, the world stays young forever. An artist has seen the world in a new way, and, like Adam, he gives his own names to everything. A lily is beautiful, but the word 'lily' is soiled with fingers and raped. For this reason I call a lily 'euy', and the original

¹⁴⁰ Alexei Kruchenykh, 'Declaration of Transrational Language' (1921); in Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1969), pp. 345-46 (pp. 345, 346).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

purity is reestablished.¹⁴²

What has been said of Khlebnikov's poetry also applies equally well to that of Crali and Marinetti in this respect:

Khlebnikov has been defined as 'archaic', but in fact a return to the dawn of language seemed to him a necessary condition for a new dawn of both language and humanity, finally reunited after millennia of separation. He believed the Futurist revolution could mark the beginning of the end of the era introduced by the tower of Babel.¹⁴³

From all of the foregoing, one might object that the formal and conceptual innovations of *parole musicali* were negligible, and that Crali and Marinetti simply dusted-off a number of pre-existing literary theories and experiments in composing their manifesto on the subject. However, it is in their resumption of such experimentation at this particular juncture that the interest – and importance – of this poetic technique resides. It is my contention that the emergence of *parole musicali* – like Belloli's *poesia visuale* – reflected an apprehension of the transitional nature of the war years, and a consequent awareness of the need fundamentally to rethink human communication at the dawning of a new civilisation. Although the ongoing conflict is not directly alluded to in the manifesto (making it almost unique in Futurist writings of the 1940s) its presence nevertheless looms large over this raw, windswept text. Its references to the cries of 'the new primitive man' vividly evoke the image of a post-apocalyptic world constructed on the ashes of the old.

¹⁴² From Kruchenykh's *Declaration of the Word as Such* (1913), *ibid.*, pp. 130-31 (p. 131).

¹⁴³ Vittorio Strada, 'Zaum, Zaumnyi lasyk', in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Futurism & Futurisms* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 610.

Equally significant is the implicit political dimension of the text. Although never acknowledged by Futurist scholars, this aspect of *parole musicali* is particularly fascinating, for a very different *Weltanschauung* to that of Nazi-Fascist orthodoxy emerges from the pages of the manifesto:

Musical words, liberated from every literary bureaucracy [...] will find understanding and integration within any nation of any people of any tongue, as with any other musical work. The title will be the sole guide, and will be sufficient to eliminate any misunderstandings deriving from racial and cultural differences.

Conceived in a year when the National Socialists continued their murderous prosecution of the 'Final Solution', and written within the borders of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic – itself nothing more than a puppet state of Hitler's regime, directly controlled by the SS – Futurism's proposal of a poetic theory that would celebrate diversity rather than division, internationalism rather than nationalism, and proclaim the expressive power of 'primitivism' to be superior to the artistic achievements of Western civilisation, strikes a remarkably progressive note. At the very least, the text constitutes a welcome reversal of Futurism's earlier aggressive drive for linguistic autarky in works such as the *First Italian Aerial Dictionary* and the *Futurist Cookbook*,¹⁴⁴ a campaign Marinetti had gone so far as to define as a 'holy war' in a text of 1940.¹⁴⁵ Of course, both Depero and the earlier Russian poets had also spoken of the 'universal' nature of their own sound-based languages; yet viewed against the specific historical backdrop of World War Two,

¹⁴⁴ 'Xenomanes and therefore guilty of anti-Italianism are the hoteliers and shopkeepers who ignore the prompt and effective means at their disposal to promote Italian influence in the world (by the use of Italian language in notices, on signs and on menus), forgetting that foreigners, in love with the countryside and climate of Italy, can also admire and study its language. [...] We, at the first alert, will shoot anti-Italian xenomanes.' F. T. Marinetti, 'Against Xenomania: A Futurist Manifesto Addressed to the Leaders of Society and the Intelligentsia', in Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, cit., pp. 58-62 (pp. 60, 62). See also F. T. Marinetti and Fedele Azari, *Primo dizionario aereo italiano* (Milan: Morreale, 1929).

¹⁴⁵ See his 'Prefazione' to Adelmo Cicogna, *Autarchia della lingua* (Rome: Edizione dell'Autore, 1940), pp. 7-8 (p. 8).

when the question of ‘racial and cultural differences’ was charged with greater significance than perhaps ever before or since, this aspect of the old theories takes on an entirely new dimension. It may also be significant to note here that for Khlebnikov *zaum* represented ‘a universal language that would, by itself, lead to a cessation of wars because people would understand one another, and wars would not be necessary’.¹⁴⁶ At any rate, the abstract, inherently anti-rhetorical nature of *parole musicali* meant that they were fundamentally useless to the RSI’s propaganda machine, disproving the notion that by the 1940s Futurism had long since abandoned its avant-garde roots, and was engaged solely in the production of unquestioning, warmongering propaganda written in a populist style. Indeed, I would argue that both the concept of *parole musicali* and the utopian vision of the manifesto – written in the midst of the dystopian nightmare which was Mussolini’s Republic of Salò – bears interpretation as a belated repudiation of the cultural isolationism and racism of Nazi-Fascism.

¹⁴⁶ Markov, *Russian Futurism*, cit., p. 303. D’Ambrosio has noted that Marinetti’s *Originalità russa di masse distanze radiocuari* ‘lacked a propagandising intent’ and expressed ‘the desire and the hope for peace’. ‘Marinetti al fronte russo’, cit., p. 63.