

Classic Poetry Series

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti
- poems -

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Filippo Tommaso Marinetti(22 December 1876 – 2 December 1944)

Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti was an Italian poet and editor, the founder of the Futurist movement, and a fascist ideologue.

Childhood and Adolescence

Emilio Angelo Carlo Marinetti (some documents give his name as "Filippo Achille Emilio Marinetti") spent the first years of his life in Alexandria, Egypt, where his father (Enrico Marinetti) and his mother (Amalia Grolli) lived together more uxorio (as if married).

His love for literature developed during his school years. At age seventeen he started his first school magazine, Papyrus; the Jesuits threatened to expel him for publicizing Emile Zola's scandalous novels in the school.

He studied in Egypt and Paris, where he obtained a baccalaureat degree in 1894 at the Sorbonne. He obtained a degree in law at Pavia University, graduating in 1899.

He decided not to be a lawyer but to develop a literary career. He experimented with every type of literature (poetry, narrative, theatre, words in liberty), signing everything "Filippo Tommaso Marinetti".

Futurism

Marinetti is known best as the author of the Futurist Manifesto, which he wrote in 1908. It was published in French on the front page of the most prestigious French daily newspaper, *Le Figaro*, on 20 February 1909. In *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, Marinetti declared that "Art [...] can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice." Since that text proclaims the unity of life and art, Marinetti understood violence not only as a means of producing an aesthetic effect, but also as being inherent to life itself.[citation needed] George Sorel, who influenced the entire political spectrum from anarchism to Fascism, also argued for the importance of violence. Futurism had both anarchist and Fascist elements; Marinetti later became an active supporter of Benito Mussolini.

A lover of speed, Marinetti had a minor car accident outside Milan in 1908 when he veered into a ditch to avoid two cyclists. He referred to the accident in the

Futurist Manifesto: the Marinetti who was helped out of the ditch was a new man, determined to end the pretense and decadence of the prevailing Liberty style. He discussed a new and strongly revolutionary programme with his friends, in which they should end every artistic relationship with the past, "destroy the museums, the libraries, every type of academy". Together, he wrote, "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman".

The Futurist Manifesto was read and debated all across Europe, but Marinetti's first 'Futurist' works were not as successful. In April, the opening night of his drama *Le Roi Bombance* (The Feasting King), written in 1905, was interrupted by loud, derisive whistling by the audience... and by Marinetti himself, who thus introduced another element of Futurism, "the desire to be heckled". Marinetti did, however, fight a duel with a critic he considered too harsh.

His drama *La donna è mobile* (Poupées électriques), presented in Turin was also not successful. Nowadays, the play is remembered mainly through a later version, named *Elettricità sessuale* (Sexual Electricity), and mainly for the appearance onstage of humanoid automatons, ten years before the Czech novelist Josef Capek would invent the term "robot".

In 1910, his first novel *Mafarka il futurista* was cleared of all charges by an obscenity trial. That year, Marinetti discovered some allies in three young painters, (Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo), who adopted Futurist philosophy. Together with them (and with poets such as Aldo Palazzeschi), Marinetti began a series of Futurist Evenings, theatrical spectacles in which Futurists declaimed their manifestos in front of a crowd that, some of whom attended the performances in order to throw vegetables at them.

The most successful "happening" of that period was the publicization of the "Manifesto Against Past-Loving Venice" in Venice. In the flier, Marinetti demands "fill(ing) the small, stinking canals with the rubble from the old, collapsing and leprous palaces" to "prepare for the birth of an industrial and militarized Venice, capable of dominating the great Adriatic, a great Italian lake".

In 1911, the Italo-Turkish War began and Marinetti departed for Libya as war correspondent for a French newspaper. His articles were eventually collected and published in *The Battle Of Tripoli*. He also made a number of visits to London, which he considered 'the Futurist city par excellence', and where a number of exhibitions, lectures and demonstrations of Futurist music were staged. However, although a number of artists, including Wyndham Lewis, were interested in the new movement, only one British convert was made, the young artist C.R.W.

Nevinson. Nevertheless, Futurism was an important influence upon Lewis's Vorticist philosophy.

About the same time he worked on a very anti-Roman Catholic and anti-Austrian verse-novel, *Le monoplan du Pape* (The Pope's Aeroplane, 1912) and edited an anthology of futurist poets. But his attempts to renew the style of poetry did not satisfy him. So much so that in his foreword to the anthology, he declared a new revolution: it was time to be done with traditional syntax and to use "words in freedom" (*parole in libertà*). His sound-poem *Zang Tumb Tumb* exemplifies words in freedom. Recordings can be heard of Marinetti reading some of his sound poems: *Battaglia, Peso + Odore* (1912) *Dune, parole in libertà* (1914) *La Battaglia di Adrianopoli* (1926) (recorded 1935)

Marriage

After an extended courtship, in 1926 Marinetti married Benedetta Cappa (1897–1977), a writer and painter in her own right, and a pupil of Giacomo Balla. Born in Rome, she had joined the Futurists in 1917. They'd met in 1919, moved in together in Rome by 1924, and chose to marry only to avoid legal complications on a lecture tour of Brazil. They would have three daughters: Vittoria, Ala, and Luce.

Cappa and Marinetti collaborated on a genre of mixed-media assemblages in the mid-1920s they called *tattilismo* ("Tactilism"), and she was a strong proponent and practitioner of the *aeropittura* movement after its inception in 1929. She also produced three experimental novels. Cappa's major public work is likely a series of five murals at the Palermo Post Office (1926–1934) for the Fascist public-works architect Angiolo Mazzoni.

Marinetti and Fascism

In early 1918 he founded the Partito Politico Futurista or Futurist Political Party, which only a year later was resigned to Benito Mussolini's Fasci Italiani di Combattimento. Marinetti was one of the first affiliates of the Italian Fascist Party. In 1919 he co-wrote with Alceste De Ambris the Fascist Manifesto, the original manifesto of Italian Fascism. He opposed Fascism's later exaltation of existing institutions, terming them "reactionary," and, after walking out of the 1920 Fascist party congress in disgust, withdrew from politics for three years. However, he remained a notable force in developing the party philosophy throughout the regime's existence. For example, at the end of the Congress of Fascist Culture that was held in Bologna on 30 March 1925, Giovanni Gentile addressed Sergio Panunzio on the need to define Fascism more purposefully by

way of Marinetti's opinion, stating, "Great spiritual movements make recourse to precision when their primitive inspirations—what F. T. Marinetti identified this morning as artistic, that is to say, the creative and truly innovative ideas, from which the movement derived its first and most potent impulse—have lost their force. We today find ourselves at the very beginning of a new life and we experience with joy this obscure need that fills our hearts—this need that is our inspiration, the genius that governs us and carries us with it."

During the Fascist regime Marinetti sought to make Futurism the official state art of Italy but failed to do so. Mussolini was personally uninterested in art and chose to give patronage to numerous styles in order to keep artists loyal to the regime. Opening the exhibition of art by the Novecento Italiano group in 1923, he said: "I declare that it is far from my idea to encourage anything like a state art. Art belongs to the domain of the individual. The state has only one duty: not to undermine art, to provide humane conditions for artists, to encourage them from the artistic and national point of view." Mussolini's mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, successfully promoted the rival Novecento Group, and even persuaded Marinetti to be part of its board.

In Fascist Italy, modern art was tolerated and even approved by the Fascist hierarchy. Towards the end of the 1930s, some Fascist ideologues (for example, the ex-Futurist Soffici) wished to import the concept of "degenerate art" from Germany to Italy and condemned modernism, although their demands were ignored by the regime. In 1938, hearing that Adolf Hitler wanted to include Futurism in a traveling exhibition of degenerate art, Marinetti persuaded Mussolini to refuse to let it enter Italy. During the same year he protested publicly against anti-Semitism.

Marinetti made numerous attempts to ingratiate himself with the regime, becoming less radical and avant garde with each. He relocated from Milan to Rome. He became an academician despite his condemnation of academies, saying, "It is important that Futurism be represented in the Academy."

There were other contradictions in his character: despite his nationalism, he was international, educated in Egypt and France, writing his first poems in French, publishing the Futurist Manifesto in a French newspaper and traveling to promote his ideas.

Marinetti volunteered for active service in the Second Italo-Abyssinian War and the Second World War, serving on the Eastern Front, despite his advanced age.

He died of cardiac arrest in Bellagio on 2 December 1944 while working on a

collection of poems praising the wartime achievements of the Decima Flottiglia MAS.

He was an atheist.

Futuristic Manifesto

1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of danger and of temerity.
2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, daring, and revolt.
3. Literature having up to now magnified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy, and sleep, we want to exalt the aggressive gesture, the feverish insomnia, the athletic step, the perilous leap, the box on the ear, and the fisticuff.
4. We declare that the world's wonder has been enriched by a fresh beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with its trunk adorned by great exhaust pipes like snakes with an explosive breath ... a roaring car that seems to be driving under shrapnel, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.
5. We want to sing the man who holds the steering wheel, whose ideal stem pierces the Earth, itself launched on the circuit of its orbit.
6. The poet must expend himself with warmth, refulgence, and prodigality, to increase the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.
7. There is no more beauty except in struggle. No masterpiece without an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent attack against the unknown forces, summoning them to lie down before man.
8. We stand on the far promontory of centuries!... What is the use of looking behind us, since our task is to smash the mysterious portals of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We live already in the absolute, since we have already created the eternal omnipresent speed.
9. We want to glorify war - the only hygiene of the world -

militarism, patriotism, the anarchist's destructive gesture, the fine Ideas that kill, and the scorn of woman.
10. We want to demolish museums, libraries, fight against moralism, feminism, and all opportunistic and utilitarian cowardices.
11. We shall sing the great crowds tossed about by work, by pleasure, or revolt; the many-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals; the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the yards under their violent electrical moons; the gluttonous railway stations swallowing smoky serpents; the factories

hung from the clouds by the ribbons of their smoke; the bridges leaping like athletes hurled over the diabolical cutlery of sunny rivers; the adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; the broad-chested locomotives, prancing on the rails like great steel horses curbed by long pipes, and the gliding flight of airplanes whose propellers snap like a flag in the wind, like the applause of an enthusiastic crowd.

It is in Italy that we launch this manifesto of tumbling and incendiary violence, this manifesto through which today we set up Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, of archaeologists, of guides, and of antiquarians.

Italy has been too long a great secondhand brokers' market. We want to rid it of the innumerable museums that cover it with innumerable cemeteries.

Museums, cemeteries!... Truly identical in the sinister jostling of bodies that do not know each other. Great public dormitories where one sleeps forever side by side with beings hated or unknown. Reciprocal ferocity of painters and of sculptors killing each other with line and color in the same gallery.

They can be visited once a year as the dead are visited once a year.... We can accept that much! We can even conceive that flowers may once a year be left for la Gioconda! . . . But we cannot admit that our sorrows, our fragile courage, our anxiety may be taken through there every day!... Do you want to be poisoned? Do you want to rot?

What can one find in an old painting beside the embarrassing contortions of the artist trying to break the barriers that are impassable to his desire to wholly express his dream?

To admire an old painting is to pour our sensitiveness into a funeral urn, instead of throwing it forward by violent casts of creation and action. Do you mean thus to waste the best of you in a useless admiration of the past that must necessarily leave you exhausted, lessened, trampled?

As a matter of fact the daily frequentation of museums, of libraries and of academies (those cemeteries of wasted efforts, those calvaries of crucified dreams, those catalogues of broken impulses!...) is for the artist what the prolonged tutelage of parents is for intelligent young men, drunk with their talent and their ambitious will.

For the dying, the invalid, the prisoner, it will do. Since the future is forbidden

them, there may be a salve for their wounds in the wonderful past.... But we want nothing of it - we the young, the strong, the living Futurists!

Let the good incendiaries come with their carbonized fingers!... Here they are! Here they are!... Set the library stacks on fire! Turn the canals in their course to flood the museum vaults!... There go the glorious canvases, floating adrift! Take up the picks and the hammers! Undermine the foundations of the venerable cities!

The oldest among us are not yet thirty; this means that we have at least ten years to carry out our task. When we are forty, let those younger and more valiant than we kindly throw us into the waste basket like useless manuscripts!... They will come after us from afar, from everywhere, prancing on the light rhythm of their first poems, clawing the air with their crooked fingers, sniffing at academy gates the good scent of our rotting intellects already intended for the catacombs of libraries.

But we shall not be there. They will find us at last, on some winter night, out in the country, under a sad hangar on which the monotonous rain strums, crouching by our trembling planes, warming our hands over the miserable fire of our books of today gaily blazing under the scintillating flight of their images.

They will gather in a mob around us, panting with anguish and spite, and all exasperated by our untiring courage will bound forward to kill us with the more hatred for the love and admiration in their hearts. And Injustice, strong and wholesome, will glitter radiantly in their eyes. For art can be nothing but violence, cruelty and injustice.

The oldest among us are not yet thirty and yet we have already squandered great treasures, treasures of energy, of love, of courage and eager will, hastily, deliriously, countlessly, breathlessly, with both hands.

Look at us! We are not out of breath.... Our heart is not in the least tired! For it feeds on fire, on hatred, on speed!... You find it surprising? That is because you do not even remember having lived! - Up on the crest of the world, once more we hurl our challenge to the stars!

Your objections? Enough! Enough! I know them! Fair enough! We know well enough what our fine, false intelligence asserts. - We are only, it says, the summary and the extension of our forebears. - Perhaps! Let it be so!... What does it matter?... But we don't want to listen! Beware of repeating these infamous words! Rather, look up!

Up on the crest of the world, once more we hurl our challenge to the stars!

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

The Joy Of Mechanical Force

We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose copper domes, as open-worked as our souls, yet had electric hearts. And while we trod our native sloth into opulent Persian carpets, we carried our discussion to the farthest limits of logic and covered sheets of paper with insane scrawls.

A vast pride swelled in our breasts, to feel ourselves standing alone, like lighthouses or advanced guards, facing the army of enemy stars that camp in heavenly bivouacs. Alone with the greasers in the infernal engine-rooms of great ships, alone with the dark phantoms that rummage in the red bellies of bewitched locomotives, alone with the drunks fluttering, battering their wings against the walls!

And unexpectedly, like festive villages that the Po in flood suddenly unsettles and uproots to sweep them off, over the falls and eddies of a deluge, to the sea, we were disturbed by the rumbling of enormous double-decker trams, passing in fits and starts, streaked with lights.

Then the silence got worse. As we listened to the exhausted prayer of the old canal and heard the grating bones of palaces moribund in their greenery whiskers, all of a sudden hungry cars roared beneath our windows.

'Come,' I said, 'my friends! Let us go! At last Mythology and the mystic Ideal have been surpassed. We shall witness the birth of the Centaur and, soon, we'll see the first Angels fly! We must shake the gates of life to test the hinges and the locks! ... Let us go! This is truly the first sun that dawns above the earth! Nothing equals the splendor of our red sword battling for the first time in the millennial gloom.'

We approached the three snuffling machines to stroke their breasts. I stretched out on mine like a corpse in my coffin, but suddenly awoke beneath the steering wheel - blade of a guillotine - that threatened my stomach.

The great broom of folly tore us from ourselves and swept us through the streets, precipitous and profound like dry torrent beds. Here and there, unhappy lamps in windows taught us to despise our mathematical eyes. 'The scent,' I cried, 'the scent suffices for wild beasts!'

And we pursued, alike to young lions, Death of the dark fur spotted with pale crosses that slipped ahead of us in the vast mauve sky, palpable and alive.

And yet we had no ideal Mistress high as the clouds, no cruel Queen to whom to offer our corpses twisted into Byzantine rings! Nothing to die for besides the desire to rid ourselves of our too weighty courage!

We went on, crushing the watchdogs on the thresholds of houses, leaving them flattened under our tires like a collar under the iron. Cajoling Death preceded me on every curve, offering her pretty paw and, by turns, lying flat with a jarring clamp of jaws to throw me velvety looks from the depths of puddles.

'Let us abandon Wisdom like a hideous vein-stone and enter like pride-spiced fruit into the vast maw of the wind! Let us give ourselves to the Unknown to eat, not for despair, but simply to enrich the unplumbable wells of Absurdity!'

As I spoke these words, I veered suddenly upon myself with the drunken folly of poodles chasing their own tail and there, at once, were two disapproving cyclists, reeling before me like two persuasive and yet contradictory arguments. Their inane undulations scanned over my ground.... What a bore! Phooey!... I cup off sharply and, in disgust, I pitched - bang! - into a ditch....

Ah! motherly ditch, half full of muddy water! Factory ditch! I tasted by mouthfuls your bracing slime that recalls the saintly black breast of my Sudanese nurse!

As I rose, a shiny, stinking gadabout, I felt the red-hot iron of joy deliciously pierce my heart.

A crowd of fishermen and gouty naturalists had gathered in terror around the prodigy. Patient and meddlesome, they raised high above great iron casting nets to fish out my car that lay like a great mired shark. It emerged slowly, leaving behind in the ditch like scales, its heavy body of common sense, and its padding of comfort.

They thought my good shark dead, but I awoke it with a single caress on its all-powerful rump and there it was, revived, running full speech ahead upon its fins.

Then, face hidden by the good factory slime, covered by metal dross, by useless sweat and heavenly soot, carrying out crushed arms in a sling, amid the plaints of prudent fishermen and distressed naturalists, we dictated our first wills to all the living men on earth:

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti