

Italian Futurist Women

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Introduction

The study of Italian Futurist women was ignored in writings about Futurism, until feminism brought a new focus in the Italian Futurist women. Italian Futurist women are remarkable in history, because they rejected the traditional perceptions of women in Italian society. They denied the household image of women and participated in the movement of Futurism. Futurist Women participated in poetry, painting, cinema and dance. Some of these women were Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, Maria Goretti, Dina Cucinni, Maria Franca Cornelli, Valentine De Saint-Point, and Sibilla Allera. ¹ They wrote abstract novels, expressed their free spirit in paintings, embraced “avant-garde” technology and made important contributions to Futurism. De Saint-Point deserves special mention for having written two of the famous Futurist manifestos: *Manifesto of Futurist Women* 1912 and *Manifesto of Lust* 1913.

The historian Franca Zoccoli has argued that: “All women Futurists rejected simple imitation of their male counterparts....This is so evident in Italian futurism, that its entire history should be re-examined in the light of the works created by the female contingent.”²

My aim is to examine the evolution of Futurist women by studying directly the literature written by Futurist women. I intend to show that Italian futurist women were a significant force in the movement of Futurism. They were able to shake up masculine- centered Italian society and challenge traditional perceptions of gender roles.

Theory and Context

Futurism was a movement that began in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century. It flourished between 1909 and 1918 and continued into the early 1940s. Futurism developed primarily in Italy, Russia and France, where it fed on the dynamic and rapidly changing social and political situations of twentieth century life. Reinforced by new technology and its applications to industry, agriculture and war, Futurism aimed at radical change by destroying the cultural and political traditions of the past. The movement included different genres in literature

¹ Detailed evidence about these women can be found in Franca Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, Queen of Futurism* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2003); Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F.T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); See Blum's notes about female writers on p. 193; Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism: Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Art Press, 1997); Fiora Bassanese, “Sibilla Aleramo: Writing a Personal Myth,” in the *Mothers of Invention Women, Italian Fascism and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and London, 1995): 137-159.

² Franca Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, Queen of Futurism* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2003), p. 1.

such novels, poems and lyrics and such forms of fine art such as paintings, drawings, and graphics.

One central figure who led the entire Futurist movement was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti was a lawyer, but he had an interest in reforming the arts. Gradually, Marinetti began publishing a controversial literary magazine, *Poesia*. The magazine called for a new active city life, denouncing the past and the old structure of belief. Italian Futurism officially began when Marinetti published *Fondazione Manifesto del Futurismo*, (*Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*) in a French newspaper. Marinetti expressed the light of the new future and the departure from the darkness of the past at the beginning of his manifesto: “We had stayed up all night, my friends and I, under hanging mosque lamps with domes of filigreed brass, domes starred like our spirits, shining like them with the prisoned radiance of electric hearts. For hours we had trampled our atavistic ennui into rich oriental rugs, arguing up to the last confines of logic and blackening many reams of paper with our frenzied scribbling.”³ This is a powerful beginning for a manifesto filled with metaphors of “electric hearts” and “hanging lamps” which provide the new lighted atmosphere, to create “frenzied scribbling.” Marinetti called for the destruction of the traditional arts, and implementation of dynamism, art and literature, noise, speed, and sounds. He used these technologies in his manifesto: “Suddenly we jumped, hearing the mighty noise of the huge double-decker trams...”⁴ Marinetti sought to explain the future as his friends “jumped hearing the mighty noise” of the cars passing by outside. Italian Futurism was characterized by other manifestos which aimed to transmit to the society poetry, cinema, music, paintings, “dynamism and speed,” new ways of cooking and new technology.

Despite the developments, the world of women was noted for its weaknesses, and ties to domestic and family based traditions. In Italy, Mussolini stated: “War is to men as motherhood is to women.”⁵ However, in the pre-Fascist agenda of the Futurist movement, there were many women who rejected the notion of “motherhood” and searched for identity, self-construction and emancipation. It is important to note that women Futurists came from the middle and upper Italian classes. The expression of free words in literature could not have begun without these women’s awareness of the limitations of patriarchal, bourgeois and Catholic life in Fascist Italy. Thus, when analysing women Futurists’ literature, it is evident that some of the major themes are related to daily patriarchal life. Moreover, some of the themes evident in the literature are maternal self-sacrifice, women’s lack of power and male supremacy, the struggle for self-

³ “Avevamo vegliato tutta notte’ i miei amici ed io’ sotto lampade do moschea dalle cupole di ottone traforato, stellate come le nostre anime, perche’ come queste irradiate dal chiuso fulgore di un cuore elettric. Avevamo lungamente calpestata su opulenti tappeti orientali la nostra atavica accidia, discutendo davanti ai confini estremi della logica ed annerendo molta carta di frenetiche scritture.” F.T. Marinetti, *Fondazione del Futurismo*, 20 Febbraio 1909 (Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1919), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT;

⁴ Sussultamo ad un tratto, all’udire il rumore formidabile degli enormi tramvai a due piani...F.T. Marinetti, *Fondazione del Futurismo*, 20 Febbraio 1909 (Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1919), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵ La Guerra sta all’uomo come la maternita sta alla donna,” Mussolini quoted in Maria Sara Goretti, *La donna a il futurismo* (Verona: Chiodo, 1941), p. 1, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

determination and the search for a satisfying life. For instance, Sibilla Aleramo escaped the norms of the bourgeois life and redefined gender discourses and definitions. Her self-sacrifice in the novel *Una Donna, A Woman* provides the important message that although oppressed in an abusive marriage, she was capable of discovering her own self and controlling her own destiny.⁶ In doing so she challenged traditional perceptions of women.

Marinetti's Views on Women

I would like to begin my analyses by examining Marinetti's views about women presented in his work *Come si seducono le donne, As the Women Are Seduced* F.T. Marinetti, *Fondazione del Futurismo*.

“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.

We will destroy the museums, libraries, academics of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.”⁷

In the manifesto of *Fondazione del Futurismo*, Marinetti takes a violent position and implies an opposition to the ways of women. He indicates that women are passively bound to tradition and that they lack the “militaristic” strength and courage needed to participate meaningfully in the avant-garde quest. Marinetti also refers to the need to destroy all traditional forms of culture, museums, and libraries. Feminism is included on the list of things needing to be destroyed, which again shows the view, that the world of women is hopelessly tied to traditional values. It is also significant that the concept of “feminism” is linked to terms such as “moralism” and “cowardice.” However, it should be noted that the historical evidence does not show Marinetti to be a sexist, as such. He was supportive of the women in the Futurist movement. Nonetheless, Marinetti's influential manifesto expresses the idea that women and feminine traditions are responsible for holding back progress. In fact, in *Come si seducono le donne, As the Women Are Seduced*, Marinetti's representation of women is different from his previous “scorn of women” that appeared in his *Fondazione del Futurismo*. In *Come si seducono le donne*, woman is “mangiata,” (food]) and “coraggio (courage.)

“Sagacious conductor + direct train + August night + absence of travelers in the compartment x seducer = beautiful eaten and drunk Bolognese woman.”⁸ According to Marinetti, woman is

⁶ Fiora Bassanese, “Sibilla Aleramo: Writing a Personal Myth,” *Mothers of Invention Women, Italian Fascism and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp.137-159.

⁷ Noi vogliamo glorificare la guerra' sola igiene del mondo' il militarismo, il patriottismo, il gesto distruttore dei libertari, le belle idee per cui si muore e il disprezzo della donna.

Noi vogliamo distruggere I muse, le biblioteche, le accademie d'ogni specie, e combattere contro il femminismo e contro ogni vilta' opportunistica o utilitarian. F.T. Marinetti, *Fondazione del Futurismo*, 20 Febbraio 1909 (Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1919), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

⁸ Controllore sagace + treno direttissimo + notte d'agosto + assenza di viaggiatori nello scompartimento x seduttore = bellissima Bolognese mangiata e bevuta. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “La donna e la velocità- pericolo,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p. 76.

desirable, wanted. Woman is like food that gives energy. In *Come si seducono le donne*, woman is presented as offering eroticism and “varietà” variety in love. Marinetti says: “Every woman is a special case, or better a thousand special and different cases; according to a thousand different cases of love that are offered to her by the life. Every woman depends on the man she loves and on the atmosphere in which she loves him.”⁹ Marinetti claims that every woman is special in her own way, and every woman can be different depending on the man she loves. Woman also can be different depending on the environment or atmosphere of love. Thus, every woman offers a variety of her own, but she must be accepted as she is. For instance he says: “Consider the woman as the sister of the sea, of the wind, of the clouds, of the torchlights, of the tigresses, of the sheep, of the geese, of the carpets, of the sails.”¹⁰ It is evident that Marinetti indicates the acceptance of the woman as a source of spiritual power, even though “la donna è la complicazione.” (woman is the complication.) Woman can be quiet and obedient like the “sheep;” strong and wild like the “tiger;” fast like the “wind;” sometimes just a thing as the “carpet;” or like the “sea” with waves. On the other hand, Marinetti shows male supremacy as he writes: “But never consider her as the sister of the stars...”¹¹ Marinetti’s metaphor of “stars” which are bright and shiny stands for gender inferiority, especially when he says “never consider her as the star.”

However it is important to note that Marinetti’s *Come si seducono le donne* is a book that reflects its own contradictions.¹² Marinetti’s writing is erotic and spiritual on the one hand, but seductive and ironic on the other. For example, Marinetti writes: “The naked woman is loyal. The dressed woman is always a bit false....The spirit of the woman extends to the wickedness and the perfidy.”¹³ Marinetti considers the naked woman as loyal, but the “spirit extends to wickedness and the perfidy.” So, erotic woman is like the “food” that gives energy, but on the other side she possesses a wicked spirit. *Come si seducono le donne*, was a very popular book when first published in 1917. Above all, in this book, Marinetti indicated gender reconstruction, liberation and emancipation in the Futurist age. In reference to this emancipation Marinetti writes: “We, futurists want to offer you (women): directly the vote: (the right to vote) Abolition of the marital

⁹ Ogni donna è un caso speciale o meglio mille casi speciali e diversissimi, secondo i mille casi diversissimi d’amore che le sono offerti dalla vita. Ogni donna dipende dall’uomo che ama e dall’ambiente nel quale lo ama. Marinetti Filippo Tommaso, “La donna e la varietà,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p. 32.

¹⁰ Considerate la donna come una sorella del mare, del vento, delle nuvole, delle pile elettriche, delle tigri, delle pecore, delle oche, dei tappeti, delle vele. Marinetti Filippo Tommaso, “La donna e il futurismo,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p.140.

¹¹ I Non mai considerarla come sorella delle stele.

Ibid., p.140.

¹² Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996).

¹³ La donna nuda è leale. La donna vestita è sempre un po’ falsa....Lo spirito della donna tende alla cattiveria e alla perfidia. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Manuale del perfetto seduttore,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p. 69.

authorization: Easy divorce: Devaluation and gradual abolition of the marriage: Devaluation of virginity...I free love.”¹⁴ In this case, Marinetti claims the destruction of patriarchal rules over women’s domestic and marital status, virginity before marriage, oppression, no right to get a divorce, and repressed on the right to be heard and the lack of the right to vote. At last, in *Come si seducono le donne* Marinetti gives a call to all Futurists for the balance of gender. “We balance so the strengths of the two sexes! All the responsibilities also to you, Italian women...”¹⁵

In Defense of Futurist Women

Women futurists asked for entry into the male dominated public sphere, and felt the conflict of resistance which they expressed in their writings. Moreover, women expressed the same level of intellect as men into the futurist literature. The themes and characters of the futurist literature provide the reader with insight into the actual lives and minds of women. Some of the themes that I have examined are: self sacrifice and abusive marriage. Redefining traditional roles such as motherhood and give them new meanings in a contemporary society. Mechanical and allegoric expressions of speed and machines allow the “creation of new woman.”

Sibilla Aleramo, Valentine de Saint-Point, Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, Maria Goretti, Dina Cucinni, and Maria Ginanni, are the major female writers whose work I seek to analyse.

Theme of Self Sacrifice and Abusive Marriage

Sibilla Aleramo

Sibilla Aleramo (name of Rina Pierangeli Faccio) is the narrator of the novel *Una Donna*, (*A Woman*) written in 1906 and translated into English several times. In *Una Donna* Aleramo’s subject is the representation of a woman’s oppression from childhood to marriage. Aleramo is the main character in the novel which “made her the symbol of emancipation.”¹⁶ She does not name the other characters in her novel. She refers to them as “my father, sister, mother and husband.” Aleramo grew up in an Italian middle-class family. “I was born in a small, impoverished town where father was a science teacher.”¹⁷ She noticed from the beginning of the writing, that her father was the main force of the family. “..it was he, not she, whose authority we children respected.”¹⁸ The mother also is presented to be oppressed, and because of the father’s affairs with other women she suffered from depression and attempted suicide. By witnessing her

¹⁴ ...noi Futuristi vogliamo offrirvi: Diritto di voto: Abolizione della autorizzazione maritale: Divorcio facile: Svalutazione e abolizione graduale del matrimonio: Svalutazione della verginità...Libero amore. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Saluto di un bombardiere futurista alla donna italiana,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p. 158.

¹⁵ Equilibriamo così le forze dei due sessi! Tutte le responsabilità anche a voi, donne italiane...Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “La donna e il futurismo,” in *Come si seducono di donne* (Edizioni Da Centomila Copie Dirette da Bruno Corra e E. Settimelli, Firenze, 1917), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, p.140.

¹⁶ Fiora A. Bassanese “Sibilla Aleramo: Writing a Personal Myth,” Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism and Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.139.

¹⁷ Sibilla Aleramo, *A Woman* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), p.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5.

mother's oppression, Aleramo becomes aware of women's condition in society. She writes that beauty and intelligence are useless to a woman.¹⁹ She questions; "Love, sacrifice yourself, and submit! Was that her destiny? Was that every woman's destiny?"²⁰ As it can be seen she is quite conscious about her life as woman, and seeks a redefinition of gender. She is the only one who seeks new life, while other women such her mother, husband's mother and sister are presented to be content with their domestic roles. As she turns sixteen, working in her father's factory, she is seduced by a young man working in the same place. Because of the patriarchal traditions she marries the man. She gives birth to their son whom she loved very much. But, she finds herself trapped in an abusive relationship. "...once again I found my self on the floor. I felt him kicking me, twice, three times. I heard him repeat his obscene insults, followed by fresh threats."²¹ Then, it is clear that Aleramo is a clever woman who is capable of finding independence and her own destiny. She starts expressing her feelings in writings: "So I wrote.....What should I expect of myself? Should I use my resources in this way to gain some peace of mind? Or should I resign myself to a life without happiness losing everything that might make my son respect and love me?"²² Forced by the desire for self-expression and freedom, she decides to leave her husband and son. She cannot get a divorce due to the patriarchal laws of the society. Also, her husband prevents her from communicating with her son and from receiving an inheritance. Thus, the self-sacrifice of the mother of her son enabled her to gain the independence she searched for. She felt very happy and free, and she wrote and published her poetry. "It was freedom I wanted...My emotional life was increasingly intense: it rose with the dawn and took wing at sunset. I felt capable of the most sublime poetry. Every thought was an eruption into brilliant sunshine...."²³ However, she could not have controlled her destiny if she had not overcome her feelings as a mother. She felt hurt inside that she could not see her child. "At night I hid my head and hands under the bedclothes, stifling my cries of pain...I didn't care so long as I could see and touch my child again....So I have written it all down here: so that one day my words will reach him."²⁴ As it can be seen through Aleramo's novel, the male supremacy is evident in the society, and women have the traditional role of bearing children in an ideal family. Aleramo's father and husband are two characters who provide the evidence of the male-centered society. On the other hand, Aleramo's depressed mother, unhappy sister, mother and sister-in-law whom seem to be fine with their domestic status, present the ideal of repressed women as national implements rather than equal beings to men. At last, Sibilla Aleramo (Rina Faccio) presents the woman who struggled between her father, mother, husband and son to obtain her freedom and identity. The story of her life provides the evidence that there were intellectual women who gained freedom and discovered themselves as important individuals. Aleramo is the "symbol of emancipation" because she was the first to write about her real life story.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.55.

²⁰ Ibid., p.55.

²¹ Ibid., p.86.

²² Ibid., p.106.

²³ Ibid., p.195.

²⁴ Ibid., p.219.

***Theme of Gender Construction**

Valentine De Saint Point

Valentine de Saint-Point can be considered as one of the feminists who attempted to redefine the notion of motherhood and to construct woman's role into the new meanings of the modern industrialized life. Valentine de Saint-Point was born in Lyons, France in 1875. She was the great grand-daughter of the French poet de Lamartine, and she had close connections to Italian Futurism.²⁵ She was the first to respond to Marinetti's "scorn of women" in her two manifestoes: *Manifesto of Futurist Women*, (25 March 1912) and *Manifesto of Lust*, (11 January 1913.) These are only two manifestoes written by a woman. In addition, these manifestoes addressed the question of sexuality.²⁶

Saint-Point began her manifesto by concluding that genders are equal. Neither one is superior or inferior to other. She writes: "Humanity is mediocre. The majority of women are neither superior or inferior to the majority of men. They are equal. Both deserve the same contempt."²⁷ In this way she aggressively responds to Marinetti's "scorn of women." She believes that humanity should not be divided between men and women due to all humanity's mediocrity. She uses metaphors, to express that women are at the "beginning of springtime." She refers to the natural equal growth of female and male species, and she points out that more time is needed for women to flourish. However, as she says: "A male individual who is virile is nothing but a brute; an individual who is solely feminine is nothing but weakness."²⁸ Thus, she points out that being an extreme male or female should be avoided. Instead she supports an asexual model, a neutral consideration of sexes. She is influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche and she praises the concept of the "hero" or "superman." She claims that a woman can fill this role as well as a man. In this regard, she says that the ideal hero is a "complete being" "composed simultaneously of feminine and masculine elements of femininity and masculinity." Saint-Point also refers to the female warriors of history such as Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, and the Amazons. Saint-Point refers to them as symbolic heroines, who went beyond their sex and fought as men did, "warriors who fight more ferociously than man; lovers who incite; destroyers who, breaking the weak, contribute to natural selection, by means of pride or desperation, desperation which gives the heart all that it enjoys."²⁹ Her main point seems to be the destruction of the differences between female and male. She shows that women too can have "heroic" traits. She further writes: "When

²⁵ Mirella Bentivoglio, "Valentine De Saint-Point" Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism, Almost Lost to History* (Midmarch Arts Press, New York, 1997), p.7.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.163-169.

²⁷ Valentine De Saint-Point, "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman," 25 march 1912, Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism, Almost Lost to History* (Midmarch Arts Press, New York, 1997), p.163.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

you must use weapons, woman will polish them. She will contribute again to natural selection.”³⁰ Additionally, she seeks the historical progression of women from the heroines of the past. She strongly believes that woman is capable of performing acts similarly to man.

Saint-Point also presents an argument that tradition offers to female position. She offers an aggressive voice against “sentimentalism,” and she believes that women should free themselves from spiritual and sentimental feelings. The woman should not keep her man under her feet and cry.³¹ She calls upon women to destroy patriarchal morals, and return to violence. “Women for too long a time misguided by morals and prejudices, return to your sublime instinct: to violence and cruelty.”³² Here, I think her goal is the total emancipation of women, women to become more masculine by expressing “violence and cruelty.” On the other hand, she seems to redefine the traditional role of women among men in modern life. She writes: “Instead of reducing man to the servitude of detestable sentimental needs, encourage your sons and your men to surpass themselves. It is you who make them. You have complete power over them. *You owe heroes to humanity. Give them to us.*” The key point of Saint-Point in this manifesto is that no gender is superior or inferior to other. Women are equal beings to men, but they have been repressed by sentimentalism and patriarchal laws. She claims that women can be as strong as men, and can also be transformed into the new historical actuality.

In 1913, Saint-Point expanded the *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman* in the *Manifesto of Lust*. She indicates that “lust is the force” that drives life in all aspects. Saint-Point rejects the argument that lust is a “sin”, she claims that lust like pride is a “powerful source of energy” Specifically, lust is a source of creative energy. According to Saint-Point: “Flesh creates in the way that the spirit creates. In the eyes of the Universe their creation is equal. One is not superior to the other and creation of the spirit depends on that of the flesh.”³³ Again, she points out the importance of being balanced, as opposed to taking one extreme or the other. She also claims that “a strong man must realize his full carnal and spiritual potentiality,” and “people exclusively spiritual or people exclusively carnal would be condemned to the same decadence- sterility.”³⁴ Here, I think Saint- Point’s goal is the destruction of the old traditional feelings and bourgeois moralism such as sentimentality and guilt. She believes that liberation from such feelings will drive men and women to a new age. “We Must Make Lust Into A Work Of Art....Lust should be made into a work of art, formed like every work of art, instinctively and consciously.”³⁵ Above all, Saint –Point claims the emancipation of women through participation in art. She concludes that lust is a force that drives both men and women. Therefore, women are capable of being an intellectual force in culture and society just as men are.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p.165.

³² Ibid.

³³ Valentine De Saint-Point, “Futurist Manifesto of Lust,”1913, Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism, Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Press, 1997), p.167.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Benedetta Cappa Marinetti

Another woman who indicated the notion of the “new woman” was Benedetta Cappa Marinetti who expressed gender constructions in her writings. Benedetta was born to a conservative family on August 14, 1897. She was a student of one of the famous futurist, Giacomo Balla, and she developed artistic skills through his teachings. She married Marinetti in 1923 and with his support she began participating in two forms of futurist art: literature and paintings.³⁶ Benedetta also had correspondences with Rougena Zatkova, a female futurist from Csechoslovakia. Rougena was the lover of Arturo, Benedetta’s brother. Rougena and Benedetta shared then artistic ideas and experiences.³⁷ I have examined only the part of her literature which relates to analysis of futurist women. One of Benedetta’s novels was called *Le forze umane*, (*The Human Forces*) which includes abstract graphics. In this novel Benedetta writes about her childhood and family relationship. As she grew, she found herself challenged by artistic skills. In the *Le forze umane*, Benedetta writes about a girl named Luciana who in contrast to her mother (a house wife) receives a university education. She addresses gender differences and expresses spiritual feelings. She presents the world with contrasting forces and she tries to challenge it with her artistic spirit.

From the beginning of her writing, Benedetta expresses the male view towards females. For example as a group of play, brothers and sisters, one of the boys gets lost, and the blame falls upon his sister Luciana, who did not watch him closely. “It is Luciana’s fault she should have held Ardo more closely. Ah, women, all delicate.....they are not good at anything.”³⁸ On the other hand she indicates that the world contains contrasting forces. “They are the direct expressions of the forces of the universe without any concern for plasticity...They were not understood; they were not considered in their nature of an immediate creation.”³⁹ Here Benedetta means the two genders: masculine/feminine as opposing forces. However, she emphasizes the “immediate creation” which symbolizes female creativity that has been ignored. She rejects “nostalgia” and encourages women for paroliberà (words in freedom). The novel presents many graphics which symbolize and express her writing. These graphics are the expression of “forze dell’universo” (the forces of universe) that are imagined and presented

³⁶ “Benedetta Cappa Marinetti”, Bob Osborn, *Futurism and Futurists* www.futurism.org.uk/futurism.htm (January, 2006).

³⁷ Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, “Letters to Zatkova Rougena,” Folders 63, 66, Box 6, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers*, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscripts, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

³⁸ è la colpa di Luciana lei avrebbe dovuto tenere Ardo sotto pressione. Ah, donne del tutto debole.....lei è nessuno buono a qualsiasi cosa. Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, *Forze umane, romanzo astratta con sintesi grafiche* (Foligno, Franco Campitelli, 1924), p. 9. Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

³⁹ Loro sono l’espressione diretta delle forze dell’universo senza alcuna preoccupazione per la plasticità.....Loro non furono capiti; loro non stati considerati nella loro natura di una creazione immediata. Ibid., p.147.

“senza preoccupazione per la plasticità”⁴⁰ (without plastic concerns) Also these graphics are evident for Benedetta’s ability to connect language and image.

In the novel *Donne della patria in Guerra* (*Women of the Fatherland at War*) Benedetta denounces sexual differences and calls upon the “women of the fatherland” to contribute to the victory of war by being active participants in art. She writes: “Italian women, we are very strong and like that we can assure a tomorrow...we are the necessary strength of the earth...”⁴¹ Benedetta wants to convince Italian women that they are an important force which can “assure the future.” “Our age is one heroic age for everyone, in every field.”⁴² Similarly to Saint-Point’s equality of gender due to “humanity’s mediocrity,” Benedetta expresses that everyone, man and woman can contribute to society in the “heroic age” in every aspect of life. Women need to reconstruct the notion of motherhood (creation of lives) and take “immediate action” in the creation of art. She reminds women that “It is our fault, we mothers that carry our sons for nine months.... It is our fault when interests of family control us without the poetry of the absolute fusion. It means that we have not been inspired by a true love.”⁴³ She means that women’s life has been driven by solid family duties, without considering sensuality and art. “We have intelligence, and we lean toward art...”⁴⁴ Here, she tells the women that they are intelligent and capable of being active artists. Benedetta also was a lovely wife. She never rejected the concept of woman being the “inspiring lover.” Therefore, she was a passionate companion of Marinetti, and loved him entirely. (as a husband and an artist) Many years after marrying Marinetti, Benedetta wrote another novel: *Astra e il sottomarino: vita trasognata* (*Astra and the submarine: Daydreaming life.*) Benedetta dedicated this writing to her husband Marinetti, and she expresses her “immortal” love for him. She begins her novel: “Marinetti, I offer you ASTRA. The daring, the spiritual audacity, the intuition of mysterious forces belong to you, the leader of Futurism. I am certain that this is a futurist work, and I am proud of it.”⁴⁵ She writes about the relationship between two characters Astra, the girl and Emilio the boy. For them life is a dream. Emilio navigates in a submarine and he dies. Astra remains alone and hurt. The novel’s main subject is love. Benedetta showed her love to Marinetti even in the manuscripts written to him. “Dear, dear Marinetti. You are my great passion, the passion of our love. All my letters are dedicated to you,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Donne italiane, siamo tanto forti e così sicure del domani....siamo le forze necessarie della terra...Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, *Donne della patria in Guerra* (Istituto Nazionale Di Cultura Fascista Roma, 1941-XIX), pp.20, 24, Marinetti, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁴² Questa nostra epoca è una epoca eroica per tutti, in tutti i campi. Ibid., p. 25.

⁴³ siamo noi colpevoli, madri che attendiamo il figlio nostro novo mesi.. Siamo noi colpevoli quando la famiglia è un controllo d’interessi senza la poesia della fusione assoluta. Vuol dire che non abbiamo ispirato l’amore vero Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁴ Abbiamo intelligenza e siamo affacciate all’arte... Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁵ Marinetti, Io gli offro ASTRA. L’intrepido, l’audacia spirituale l’intuizione di forze misteriose appartiene a lei, il leader del futurismo. Io sono certo che questo è lavoro futurista. Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, *Astra e il sottomarino: vita trasognata* (Napoli Casella 1935), Call# Marinetti M339 A, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

with no limits, with no restrictions.”⁴⁶ It is evident, that her writing also was driven by love and passion. It can also be said, that love was one of the forces that encouraged Benedetta to be an active artist.

On the other hand, it is important to note that Benedetta was a feminist futurist leader not only for Italian women futurists, but across borders as well. For example, Benedetta had correspondences with the Bohemian futurist Rougena Zatkova. Rougena took an active part in paintings and drawings which were also part of Benedetta’s type of work. She shared artistic thoughts with Rougena and kept informed about her art work. For example, Benedetta informed her about publication possibilities by Marinetti and other futurists.⁴⁷ Benedetta also kept Rougena informed about all futurist meetings and decisions.

“Dear Rougena, Marinetti likes very much your portrait (drawing) Marinetti is enthusiastic about the idea of collaboration, but he cannot find the time to write you.”⁴⁸ It is clear that Benedetta here encourages another woman to participate in art.

The theme of reconstructing and emancipating women has been expressed by important intellectual women such as Saint-Point and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti. These women denounced gender differences, constructed female notions and encouraged women to be active force in futurist movement.

Theme of The New Woman in the New Mechanical Age: Aero poetry Maria Ginanni

The “new woman” is the third theme that female futurists incorporated into their writings. Maria Ginanni assumed a leading position in this genre, focusing on shaping this new woman, and making a significant contribution to the founding of the Italian Futurist magazine *L’Italia Futurista* (1916-1918). She became editor of this magazine, and also immersed herself in the emerging Futurist literary movement by writing a number of poems and lyrics.

In 1912, Marinetti wrote the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista*. (*Manifesto of Technical Literature*). In this manifesto he directed attention towards the actual act of writing rather than the subject matter, proposing that purpose was more important than the syntax,

⁴⁶ Carò, carò Marinetti.Tu sei mio grande passione....una passione del nostro amore. Tutte le mie lettere sono dedicate a te, senza limiti e senza restrizioni. “Letters of Benedetta Cappa Marinetti to Marinetti”, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers*, (Novembre 1928), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁴⁷ Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, “Letters to Zatkova Rougena,” *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers*, Series II, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscripts, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

Information analyzed from the letters written on 11 Ottobre, 1921, 11 Marzio 1922, 6 Maggio 1922. Please note that Marinetti was the leader of Futurism, therefore he had the authority for publishing others’ work including women anywhere in Europe.

⁴⁸ Cara Rougena, Marinetti piace molto il tuo ritratto.....Marinetti è entusiaste dell’idea del libro in collaborazione ma non so quandora il tempo di scrivesti.

Ibid., 11 marzo 1922.

Please note that Benedetta wrote this letter to Rougena when she was staying in Torino at: La Cassa a Franca Rampa Rossi- Via Gioberti 85- Torino.

punctuation and other rules of literature. The literary efforts of Maria Ginanni reflect a strong influence of this theory, and she can be considered to be a practitioner of Marinetti's *Technical Literature*. Her writings include analogies that imply sensations of an imaginary universe, as in her poem *Il Poema dello spazio*, (*The poem of space*) with a focal theme of shaping the new woman through knowledge. In conjuncture with other female futurists she expressed the rejection of bourgeois morals and sex differences, but in contrast to other female writers she sought to be "the superwoman". Her desire for power drove her writings, and is evident in her statement that "We live in a different being, explore a precious spirit: Yes: but what are we? Who recognizes us?"⁴⁹ Ginanni acknowledges the weaknesses of feminism, "Esplorare un caro spirit" but who are we? Who recognizes us? She postulates that it is time for women to be conscious of who they are, and to demand the appropriate recognition from society.

In "Vivere con noi soli" (Living alone), Ginanni demonstrates that women have been isolated by society due to the traditional roles imposed on them.⁵⁰ She probes and asks questions while alternating from the infinity of space to the microscopic atoms, yet concluding that all is one:

"To invade a line
of a terribly starry night.
Yes, a hit is taken by the stopped pulse of the shock of the bewilderment.
Ann, why looking at the stars?
it is not worth of your admiration.
Why are we together and where?
I found again in that dizziness/atom among all the atoms:
its voice does not exist
but a point in that totality of vibrating points."⁵¹

The technical development of this poem demonstrates the compelling influence exerted by Marinetti's "Manifesto of Technical Literature" with an emphasis on the expression of free words, and deviating from the accepted rules of writing. As a visual writer she invokes images of atoms in her fantasy universe, and imagines herself as one of the atoms: "its voice does not exist,

⁴⁹ Vivere in un altro essere, esplorare uno spirito caro: Sì: ma noi che cosa siamo? Ci conosciamo? Maria Ginanni, *Il poema dello spazio* (Facchi – Editore- Milano, 1919), p.15, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵¹ Invadere d'un tratto una notte, terribilmente stellata.
Si è presi di colpo dal battito, fermata della sorpresa, dello sbalordimento.....Anna, perchè guardare le stelle, esse non sono degne
Lo ritrovava in quella vertigine, atomo fra tutti gli atomi: la sua voce non era che un, punto in quella totalità di punti vibranti.
Ibid., pp. 57, 58, 60.

but a point in that totality of vibrating points.” This is a powerful self- analogy of Maria Ginanni, yet she does not attempt to incorporate the traditional terrestrial world, but instead expresses her spirituality through atoms and stars. She refuses to write about real woman, and places herself inside her own universal imagination. Ginanni’s woman is all powerful and controls dimensions and density, but her woman is not a heroine driven by lust, nor does her woman love, she is merely an atom in a dynamic universe. At last, Ginanni frees herself to be part of the universe, and feels like a befuddled “piccolo atomo” in the external universe. Evidently, Ginanni demonstrates her Nietzsche ideals of existence into her Futurist writing. This is the new intellectual women, and she places herself in a cultural setting, as vibrant as a rainbow: “ So, so I am picked up in this dark huge spiral of the rainbow...”⁵²

Maria Goretti

Maria Goretti also made a substantial contribution to Futurism and expressed her inner feelings via aero poetry. In *La donna e il futurismo*, she establishes the dualistic role of women in the Futurist movement by claiming “Futurism presents two things to me: one is universal, which is significant for life and art; the other presents a particular social and artistic problem.”⁵³ She expresses her personal beliefs regarding Futurism at the onset of her lyrics, and believes that artistic expression has been chained by women’s emotions. At this stage, futurist women had already made considerable contributions to the Futurist movement, and Goretti’s primary concern was the transformation of their voice and their liberation from emotions: “The woman is the moral strength or the possibility to close the torn heart in the hard circle of a heroic wish: victory against emotionalism.”⁵⁴

In *Poesia della Macchine*, Goretti predicts that new machines especially airplanes will precipitate a breakthrough from the traditional restrictions of the female role. She determines her own path of existence by giving a voice to the machine

“Now, I do not see anymore
the brutal machine, but
I see the genius creator of man
the wish of the man that
gamely, hopelessly, it has

⁵² Così, così io son[o] presa in questa immensa buia spirale di gorgheggi...

Ibid., p. 68.

⁵³ Il Futurismo presenta a me due volti: uno, universale, che dà il significato della vita e dell’arte ed è amisticaòò l’altro che risponde ad un problema particolare sociale e artistico: la posizione della donna nella vita e nell’ arte. Maria Goretti, *La donna e il futurismo* (Collaudo di F.T. Marinetti Verona, 1941), p. 20, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵⁴ La dona è forza morale o possibilità di chiudere il cuorestraziato nel duro cerchio d’una volontà eroica: vittoria contro l’emotività.

Ibid., p.143.

wanted to win the subject
therefore with the plane,
motor has wanted to win
the space and the time: has succeed?
no, because the man will find
always limits, but this
this is his tragedy, and this is
his nobility, his
greatness. This way I sang
I talk with the motor
seeing in the motor that
game is the painful wish
what the man pushes.”⁵⁵

Maria Goretti was obviously influenced by Marinetti’s *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* which as stated above, directed attention towards the actual act of writing rather than the subject matter, and she follows his directives in her writing that is free of syntax, adverbs and punctuation, making an idealistic transliteration difficult.

Dina Cucini and Franca Maria Cornelli

In 1942 Futurist Dina Cucini wrote an aeropoem that was published in a book with an introduction by Marinetti and dedicated to Siena’s towers. Her visualization included physical elements of the airplane, but her main focus is Siena’s traditional towers which she imagines sprouting wings and transforming into airplanes. This poem is very mystical, and promotes freedom in nature and a victory over physical matter.

“my my Siena
and more the soul grabs me and holds back

⁵⁵ Ora io non vedo piu della, maccina la brutta materia, ma vedo il genio creatore dell’uomo, la’ volonta’ dell’uomo, che arditamente, disperatamente, ha voluto appunto vincere la materia. Così con l’aeroplano il motore etc, ha voluto vincere lo spazio e il tempo: c’è riuscito?
No, perchè l’uomo troverà. Sempre dei limiti, ma questa è la sua tragedia, ed è questa
La sua nobiltà, la sua. Grandezza. Così io cantai’
Colloquio col motore’. Vedendo nel motore quella
Volontà ardita e dolorosa, che spinge l’uomo.

Maria Goretti, *Poesia della machine* (Roma, 1942), p. 29, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

and dripped thin sorcery
in songs rivulets of sources
and of arcs and loveliness of slender towers/in clear laughs of skies
pure bent of undulated necks/baby blue color of oil silvers you”⁵⁶

Cucini’s style of writing relies on a mechanical language similar to Goretta’s style. She attempts to be liberated of traditional purpose of poetry, and she seizes upon buildings and towers of a lived situation, “her Siena.”

Marinetti’s stylistic dictums are recognizable in Cucini’s writing, and like Goretta, she relies on mechanical language and images. She attempts to attain liberation from the traditionally accepted purpose of poetry, instead seizing upon buildings, in this case towers, to create a living image of “her Siena.”

The last significant female Futurist aero poet to be discussed is Franca Maria Cornelli. Her poetry can be considered as “Poesia dei Tecnicismi”, and she enthusiastically embraced elements of *Manifesto of Tactilism* written in 1932 depicting the art of women factory workers. Cornelli envisioned a “superwoman” in a similar vein to the previous three female Futurists presented above, as well as humanizing new mechanical technology. She points out how female Futurists utilized an abstract image of metal in their poetical works: “We recognize, we recognize your permitted violence of muscular wings in storm.”⁵⁷ Cornelli emphasizes the construction of metal into words, and in conjuncture with the previous female Futurists, her language is symbolically weighted.

Maria Ginanni, Maria Goretta, Dina Cucini and Franca Maria Cornelli each expressed a “humanized nature” rather than the starker less homogenous images that often portrayed Italy’s expanding industrialization.⁵⁸ Their visual approach contributed to the construction of a “superwoman” who rejected her domestic role and expressed an overwhelming desire for emancipation from their traditional socially constrained positions.

Conclusion

⁵⁶ mia Siena mia ,e più m’offerri l’anima e trattieni ,e malia fina stillata in canti rivoli di fonti
e d’archi e leggiadria di snelle torri, in chiare risolimpide di cieli
Puri incurvati d’ondulati colli. Grigiazzurri d’olivi inargentati.

Dina Cucini, *Aeropoema Futurista Delle Torri Di Siena* (Roma, 1942), p. 5, Beinecke library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵⁷ Riconosciamo riconosciamo lecitola vostra violenza di muscolose ali in tempesta. Maria Franca Cornelli, *L’aeropoema Futurista Dell’Umbria* (Roma, 1942), p. 27, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁵⁸ Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996), p.140.

The Italian Futurist movement called for radical change to traditional mores in a modernized and industrialized Italy. Futurists commended modern technologies, and wanted to destroy prevalent restrictive cultural traditions. Because of this rebellious orientation their imaginary was often violent, and the movement was dominated by men such as Marinetti, Russolo, Boccioni, Palazzeschi. Futurism emerged during the pre-fascist period, and continued to develop in the Mussolini era. The continued tolerance of overt declarations of Futurism's ideals in Italy is surprising, as they were diametrically opposed to those of Mussolini. His goal was to establish a dictatorial Fascist regime driven by nationalistic ideals. He envisioned Italian citizens as being servants of the state, and fascist ideology elevated motherhood to the highest social position to which a woman could aspire. Dena Rinetti emphasized this point when she stated Mussolini developed propaganda that "emphasized the domesticity, maternity, and self sacrifice"⁵⁹ According to fascist beliefs women should not take an active part in economic and political issues, and the most important role for women was a devotion to Mussolini and then to her husband and family.⁶⁰ Women's role in society was to raise children and serve their husbands as good "mothers and lovers".

Under fascist rule, therefore, the voices of women were buried, but some found a way to express themselves through literature. Futurism provided an outlet for women to express themselves, and many female supporters of the movement collaborated with their male counterparts as productive and intellectual equals. They demanded respect, as when Valentine De Saint-Point promptly responded to Marinetti's "scorn of women". She believed that "humanity is mediocre", and declared gender equality in *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman*. Influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche, Saint-Point praised the concept of "hero", and proclaimed that women could also be heroes. In *Manifesto of Lust* she described lust as a "force" rather than a "sin", and that it was a driving force for both the masculine and feminine. She denounced gender inequality, and called for the total emancipation of women. Benedetta Marinetti deserves recognition for the literature and art she produced. An intelligent woman, she aimed to reconstruct the role of gender through her words and images, while consistently forcing the issue of the emancipation for Italian women. Sibilla Aleramo emerged as an early advocate of women's issues, and was capable of finding her freedom through personal struggle and pain. She denounced her traditional female status, and searched for a new identity by accepting the shame of leaving her husband and son. Women like Maria Ginanni, Dina Cucini, Franca Maria Cornelli and Maria Goretti expressed their gender emancipation through their literary emancipation, and adapted Marinetti's destruction of syntax in aero poetry. They also "humanized" mechanical and architectural technologies, and utilize them to formulate a "superwoman". Perhaps in an attempt to escape their terrestrial constraints, they reconstructed images and sensations beyond their earthbound world, and depicted a diverse and dynamic universe.

⁵⁹Dena Rinetti, "How Fascist Ideology Viewed Women," *Women And Youth Under Mussolini*, <http://dickinson.edu/~history/dictators/Mussolini-womenyouth.html>, p.1. (October, 2005).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

These women were certainly an intellectual force in contemporary Italian society, and they actively challenged the old values and traditions while attempting to emancipate themselves through Futurism. They are significant because they challenged the traditional male dominated view of their social position, and demonstrated that women were capable of being a visible intellectual force in culture and society. Conversely, the Futurism movement provided women opportunities to be intellectually visible in Italian society. The full extent to which women contributed to the Futurism Movement, however, remains imprecise. Only when an exhaustive analytical research project encompassing all their literature and artwork has been conducted will their societal influence be adequately demonstrated. Italian Futurist women were indeed ahead of their time, and millions of women who now live enriched lives free of traditional male dominated societal gender roles owe a debt of gratitude to these remarkable women.

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