

“Beautiful Ideas Worth Dying For and Scorn For Woman.” An Analysis of Gender in Male and
Female Authored Futurist Texts

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ABSTRACT

The Italian Futurist Movement, founded in 1909 by F.T. Marinetti, represents a key moment in the history of the European avant-garde. The movement's obsession with technology and the future necessitated an approach that demanded the complete destruction of the past. Their proclamation "scorn for woman" in the founding manifesto, as well as its brief association with Mussolini's fascist party has coloured much of the historiography of the movement. The tendency to brand the Futurists as misogynists and fascist has led many historians to overlook the wider implications the Futurist movement's founding principles had for early twentieth century European culture.

One area of this historiography that has only recently garnered attention from historians and critics is the Futurist movement's reciprocal relationship with women. In both inspiring female artists to become and write like Futurists, as well as applying their founding tenet of "destruction of the past" to bourgeois gender roles, the Futurist movement's implications for gender were far-reaching and complex.

This project will examine the arc of the Futurists' critical approach to women over four primary texts, while comparing their conclusions to the writings of two female Futurists, Valentine de Saint-Point and Mina Loy. De Saint-Point and Loy's texts were written as a direct response to Marinetti's declaration in the founding manifesto of "scorn for woman." Their mobilization of the Futurist framework in their own examination of gender and the female is representative of how widely applicable the founding principles of Futurism were. By examining the work of these three authors together it is possible to create a nuanced portrayal of how gender was conceived during a critical moment not only in the history of the European avant-garde, but also in the history of women.

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INTRODUCTION

Situating the Italian Futurist Movement's Approach to Gender Within the Early Twentieth Century Cultural Milieu

From the late nineteenth century until the First World War numerous technological and cultural changes took place which had a profound impact on individuals' perception of their place in the world.¹ The years 1880-1914 are those discussed by Stephen Kern in his book *The Culture of Time and Space* as the most intensive years of experimentation and innovation which, he argues, had a definitive impact on the way individuals experienced time and space. Kern argues that technological innovations such as the telephone, cinema, automobile, and airplane, as well as cultural developments such as literary stream of consciousness, psychoanalysis, and Albert Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" as having a profound impact on human consciousness. This project will examine the Italian Futurist movement as an expression of and response to this cultural climate. Though the Futurists extended their critical gaze to nearly every aspect of life and art, it is their approach to gender that is most revelatory in terms of the way in which they perceived technology, masculinity, femininity, reproduction, and bourgeois social roles. The declaration of "scorn for woman" in the "Founding Manifesto of Futurism" not only illuminated the Futurists' stance on all things feminine, but also provoked rebuttal by female critics from within the movement itself. This prompted clarifications of that statement by the movement's founder, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. These three stages of criticism reveal much about the place of women and femininity in early twentieth century European culture. By examining the place of women in Italian culture during this time period it is possible to examine multiple approaches to gender in flux. Though it was generally agreed upon by both the male and female

¹See also, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983).; See also Vaclav Smil, *Creating the Twentieth Century: Technical Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

members of the Futurist movement that an antiquated bourgeois approach to the feminine which situated women firmly in the realm of the wife and mother needed to be destroyed, competing narratives about women's roles in the new century emerged. This desire to situate both women and the notion of femininity within a rapidly changing culture resulted in a variety of approaches to solving this problem. This project aims to examine Marinetti's statement "scorn for woman" within the context of his own approach to the feminine. The juxtaposition of women's response to this declaration reveals not only alternative methods for defining the feminine, but also demonstrates the increasing number of intellectual women who defined femininity from their own perspective.

The Italian Futurist movement was arguably the first avant-garde movement to emerge in twentieth century Europe. Avant-garde is a term that distinguishes intellectual and cultural movements which pushed the boundaries of what was considered normative. The nineteenth-century recognition of "art for art's sake" (*l'art pour l'art*) influenced the avant-garde's concept of what Peter Burger calls "the autonomy of art" or "art's independence from society."² Focusing on experimentation and innovation, avant-garde movements strove for originality and a new mode of expression. The Futurists exercised this mode of expression through a variety of media. Initially a literary movement, Futurism expanded its critical scope to include painting, sculpture, theatre, architecture, fashion, and even gastronomy. With the publication of the "Founding Manifesto of Futurism" on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (February 20, 1909), the Futurists declared their program for a Futurist refashioning of the

²Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 35.; See also, Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).; The concept *l'art pour l'art* or "art for art's sake" refers to the nineteenth-century philosophy of the value of art in and of itself, regardless of any moral, utilitarian or didactic function. See Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Volume IV: Naturalism, Impressionism, the Film Age* (London: Routledge, 1999).

universe. In the years that followed, the Futurist movement spread across Europe, most notably in Russia. In 1912 the Russian Futurists David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Victor Khlebnikov published their founding manifesto “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste.” The Russian Futurist movement, however, was short lived. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1919, the movement faced the harsh criticism by Soviet authorities, as avant-garde forms of artistic expression were replaced by the more idealized style of Socialist Realism.

The overarching goal of the Futurist movement, as stated in the founding manifesto, was the destruction of the past. Characterized by language that indicated their desire for violence and revolution, the founding manifesto valorized technology and expressed a desire to destroy antiquated approaches to art and literature, to glorify war, and to animate life with the dynamism that they perceived characterized the moment in which they lived. While many, if not all, of the beliefs expounded by the founding manifesto were highly controversial, it is necessary to read these statements as a product of their cultural climate. Combined with the overwhelming technological, social, and cultural changes that were taking place, it is possible to understand the Futurist movement as a radical response to modernity. As such, its image of the future called for a complete cultural transformation. The Futurists viewed such a transformation as a natural extension of the pervasive change already underway.

Another group that desired a complete transformation of Italian culture to emerge in the early twentieth century were Mussolini’s Fascist. Critic Stanley G. Payne argues that most of the elements of Italian Fascism could be found in the founding manifesto of Futurism ten years before the movement was founded.³ Futurism’s aforementioned glorification of violence and dynamism, combined with their vociferous nationalism attracted veterans of the First World War

³Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 62.

who found it difficult to adjust both to demobilization and post-war culture.⁴ Philosophically, the foundations of the Futurist movement provided some of the foundation for the Fascist movement, however, the interaction of the two groups was short-lived. As Mussolini became more pragmatic with his politics, abandoning, for example, his denunciation of the church and the monarchy, Marinetti withdrew his support from the fascist party. He regarded Mussolini's opportunistic politicking as a betrayal of what he described as the Futurists' "disinterested, ardent, antisocialist, anticlerical, antimonarchical" philosophy.⁵ One major point of departure for the Futurists and the Fascist was their approach to women. As we shall see, the Futurists aimed to destroy the traditional bourgeois conception of women, while conversely the Fascists considered the woman's place to be firmly within the domestic sphere. Moreover, the Fascists did not encourage women's participation in the avant-garde, as the Futurists did.

Woman, as a cultural construct, not simply as a sex, was the real object of scorn for the Futurists. Though the ambiguous nature of this statement has led to numerous prima facie characterizations of the movement as blatantly anti-feminine, without consideration of what was meant at this time by anti-feminine. Though the statement "scorn for woman" seems rather straightforwardly misogynistic, it should be read within the context of the culture which the Futurists desired to destroy. That Marinetti declares scorn for "woman" and not "women" emphasizes that it is not merely females who are the object of scorn. Essentially, by targeting "woman" as a concept, Marinetti attacked the cultural institutions that were responsible for the defining characteristics applied to women and the feminine – not women themselves. This is evidenced by the fact that he encouraged female participation in the Futurist movement, and nurtured the artistic careers of many of his female colleagues.

⁴Michael Mann, *Fascist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152.

⁵Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 240.

F.T. Marinetti was born December 22, 1876 in Alexandria, Egypt. The son of a lawyer, Marinetti was afforded the best education, and during his school years developed a love of literature. Like his father, Marinetti also obtained his baccalaureate in law, though he never went on to practise, choosing to become a writer. Marinetti belonged to the bourgeois class that he so wished to destroy, with his wealth affording him the opportunity to indulge his creativity.

In 1908 Marinetti was involved in a minor car accident which served as the catalyst for the founding manifesto of Futurism. The incident is described in the preamble before the eleven founding points of Futurism are laid out, representing the moment that Futurism was born:

And so, faces smeared with good factory muck – plastered with metallic waste, with senseless sweat, with celestial soot – we, bruised, our arms in slings, but unafraid, declared our high intentions to all the *living* of the earth.⁶

This passage indicates a commingling of numerous Futurist themes: technophilia, fearlessness, dynamism, destruction, and rebirth. The principles laid out in the founding manifesto animate all further discussions of Futurist texts, as they provided the framework through which other Futurist work is to be considered. However, it is essential that the principles of the founding manifesto do not serve to immobilize interpretations of Futurism. Throughout an examination of Marinetti's writings in the first chapter we will see, not how Marinetti reverses his stance on the subject of gender, but rather how his approach evolves over a few key texts.

The first chapter of this project examines four texts in which Marinetti elucidates his position on gender over the course of the first phase of Futurism, roughly the first ten years. A close reading of several key points of the founding manifesto is essential, since this document

⁶F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Futurist Manifestoes* Umberto Appolonio, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 21.; "Alors, le visage masqué de la bonne boue des usines, pleine de scories de métal, de sueurs inutiles et de suie céleste, portant nos bras foulés en écharpe, parmi la complainte des sages pêcheurs à la ligne et des naturalistes navrés, nous dictâmes nos premières volontés à tous hommes *vivants* de la terre."; F.T. Marinetti "Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme," in *Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme : Édition critique avec, en fac-similé, le manuscrit original de F.T. Marinetti* Jean Pierre à de Villiers, ed. (Ottawa : Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1986), 45.

provides the theoretical framework for all subsequent Futurist writings. The valorization of technology, the desire to destroy the past, the celebration of war, virility, dynamism, as well as scorn for woman are the main themes of Marinetti's novel *Mafarka*. Also published in 1909, the novel was accused of being obscene due to its graphic violent and sexual imagery, though a subsequent trial cleared Marinetti of any charges. *Mafarka* is the story of an African warrior of the same name, who is meant to represent the ideal Futurist man. It was essential for Marinetti to imagine a way for his protagonist to become the ideal; the ultimate goal was the perpetuation and perfection of the species. In keeping with his rhetoric of scorn for woman, or more broadly the characteristics of woman, Marinetti created a fantasy whereby his ideal Futurist man discovers a way to create life without resorting to "the stinking collusion of the woman's womb."⁷ This fantasy of male parthenogenesis encapsulates a number of Futurist themes.⁸ Given Marinetti's faith in both technology and the future, inspired by the innovation of the previous few decades, it is possible that Marinetti sincerely believed that one day men would be able to create life without resorting to female reproductive capabilities. More importantly for this discussion, the desire to do away with the female role in reproduction indicates a larger desire to eliminate the possibility of passing on female characteristics to offspring. It is in *Mafarka* that Marinetti's "scorn for woman" may be most broadly interpreted.

Marinetti addressed the gender dynamic in relations between men and women as the essential locus to the liberation of women from the oppression of a male dominated culture. He argued that, "We want a woman to love a man and give herself to him for as long as she likes;

⁷Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*, trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), 145.

⁸Parthenogenesis is the term employed by Barbara Spackman in her book *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008). See her chapter entitled "Mafarka and Son: Marinetti's Homophobic Economics." Though the term parthenogenesis refers specifically to the asexual reproduction of certain female animal species, it is used here to refer to the character Mafarka's asexual reproduction. See also Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 190-233, cited by Spackman.

then, not chained by a contract or by moralistic tribunals, she should bear a child whom society will educate physically and intellectually to a high conception of Italian freedom.”⁹ Essential in this condemnation of marriage and society is the Futurist concept of the reproductive project, as well as an increasingly nationalistic rhetoric that would become essential to Fascist ideology, as the Futurist party was absorbed by Mussolini’s fascists. Marinetti’s association with Mussolini was brief, lasting only roughly from 1915-1919. Marinetti at first considered the Fascists a revolutionary subversive group whose ideas were “totally Futurist.” By early 1920, however, he had split with the movement which he considered too right wing and focused on past glory; consequently he became increasingly anarchist, publishing essays on anti-parliamentarianism.¹⁰

To keep the focus on the family, and familial relations, it is clear that women, as portrayed in “Marriage and the Family,” are afforded a previously unattained autonomy in a relationship. Marinetti is specifically targeting the ownership of women by men, and in doing so is attacking centuries of family structure whereby the woman was the property of the man, and ceased to be an entity unto herself. What is most important to deduce is that woman is not culpable for her own status in society. The conception of women solely as wives and mothers is a cultural construction that Marinetti blamed on decadent bourgeois attitudes, and a decidedly male influence. Consequently he argues for a woman’s right to choose her own destiny and calls for an end to the notion of women as men’s property. He avoids implying, however, that women have no reproductive duties.

⁹F.T. Marinetti, “Marriage and the Family,” in *Marinetti: Selected Writings* ed, R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 8. “Noi vogliamo che una donna ami un uomo e gli si conceda per il tempo che vuole; poi, non vincolata da contratto, nè da tribunal moralistic, metta alla luce una creatura che la società deve educare fisicamente e intellettualmente ad un’alta concezione de libertà italiana.”; F.T. Marinetti, “Contro il Matrimonio,” in *Democrazia Futurista: Dynamismo Politico* (Milan: Facchi, 1919), 63.

¹⁰ Gunter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Berhahn Books, 1996).

In two later texts, “Marriage and the Family,” (1919) and “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism” (From *Let’s Murder the Moonshine*, 1915), Marinetti elaborated most clearly his stance towards women and the feminine. In “Marriage and the Family,” Marinetti railed against the institution of marriage, which he considered detrimental to the development of either sex. In particular Marinetti targeted the concept of sentimentality, which appears throughout his texts as the one aspect of femininity most at odds with his dynamic approach to life. Sentimentality is inextricable from the feminine, and it proved difficult for Marinetti to argue for the destruction of sentimentality as a virtue without discarding females as well. It becomes increasingly apparent in this text that the real objects of Marinetti’s scorn are those characteristics associated with the feminine, the result of a decadent bourgeois society, and not women themselves. In the text “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism,” Marinetti once again targets sentimentality, the bastion of *amore*, as suffocating for both sexes. At the same time, however, Marinetti appears to argue most vociferously for the liberation of women. He ponders the inherent differences between the sexes, and allows that women have the potential to be just as powerful as men, were they nurtured to be so. These two texts provide insight into Marinetti’s gender theory. It is difficult to determine, however, whether this more generous approach to the feminine is what Marinetti intended from the moment he first declared “scorn for woman,” or whether the decision to address gender more thoroughly was inspired by the criticism Marinetti faced from two women within his own movement.

The implication that only a certain type of woman was scorned by the Futurists suggests that the Futurists did not preclude the possibility of women overcoming their sentimentality. As evidenced by the inclusion of many strong female voices such as Valentine de Saint-Point, Mina Loy, and others, into the Futurist movement. The writing of these women is utterly

unsentimental, and in many ways ideally Futurist. Merely by virtue of the fact that they were written by women, these works represent the potential for women to write and think not only like men, but like Futurists. By only scorning sentimental women, Marinetti made way in the Futurist movement for women who sought the same destruction of the past as the Futurists. In many ways women were more likely Futurists than men. It was women who were most oppressed by society, particularly in Italy, during this period and throughout history. It is little wonder that a movement expounding the destruction of the past attracted so many women. It is also little wonder that these women became some of the more radical Futurist voices.

The second chapter examines the manifestos of the first female Futurist, Valentine de Saint-Point. De Saint-Point, born February 1875 in Lyon, France, was the best known and most influential of the female Futurists. An artist in her own right before her alignment with the Futurists at the genesis of the movement, de Saint-Point had been publishing poems, as well as a trilogy of novels, since 1905. Throughout her association with the European avant-garde, she was known as a writer, playwright, journalist, painter, and choreographer. Marinetti first published poems by de Saint-Point in *Poesia* in 1906. In 1912 she read her “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman at a gathering of Futurists on June 27, 1912. Marinetti then published the manifesto throughout Italy and France.¹¹ The “Futurist Manifesto of Lust” was published the following year. Both of these manifestoes were conceived as a response to Marinetti’s founding manifesto, and specifically its declaration of “scorn for woman.” The “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman” attacked traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity. De Saint-Point argued for a new model of humanity in which masculine and feminine elements exist in each sex, a notion reminiscent both of Marinetti’s *Mafarka* and Nietzsche’s übermensch, or superman.

¹¹Günter Berghaus, ed. *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2000), 427.

In her “Futurist Manifesto of Lust,” de Saint-Point conceived of lust as a force. Lust was but another aspect of Futurist dynamism that was applied to the prescriptive approach to gender that was expounded upon by Marinetti in the founding manifesto and *Mafarka*. In valourizing lust, de Saint-Point lauded the creative power of females, overcoming Marinetti’s desire to eliminate the female in reproduction. Chapter two considers de Saint-Point’s two manifestoes against the claims made by Marinetti regarding gender, arguing that de Saint-Point offered a more realistic approach to the destruction of bourgeois gender roles. She mobilized the Futurist framework of destruction of the past by combining it with her own female perspective on femininity and women.

Although de Saint-Point was the first female invited into the Futurist movement, it is important to note that there were many others inspired by the implications of Futurism for the role of twentieth century women. Many of these women benefitted from the Futurists’ pan-European appeal, particularly in France. The juxtaposition of an oppressive bourgeois cultural milieu with new and exciting ideas expounded by various avant-garde movements, as well as the presence of notably unconventional non-Futurist female writers in Paris such as Colette and Gertrude Stein, created a breeding ground for women who desired to assert their individuality as strong, capable female artists.¹² In an attempt to affirm a position for themselves within the Futurist movement, these women provided their own interpretations of the founding manifesto’s stance on women. Early Futurist Eva Kühn Amendola, who wrote as Magamal, interpreted Futurism’s scorn for women positively in an essay of 1913. She argued that:

Futurism spells the end of the reign of the eternal feminine... The future century will speak with disgust and contempt of an age where men were allowed to exploit the feminine and in which she was his ‘slave,’ The reign of the ‘eternal feminine,’ with all its Puccinian perfumes and

¹²Re, “Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo,” 39.

softness, with woman as symbolic of mere species regeneration and motherhood, is coming to an end, and Futurism is the first political movement to have understood this and to have set as a goal the hastening of this development.”¹³

Hers was yet another generous female interpretation of the Futurist project which, like de Saint-Point's, appropriated Futurist principles for early feminism. Kühn Amendola shared Marinetti's disdain for the sentimentality and fragility associated with femininity, and considered Futurism and its principles as the method whereby the bourgeois approach to women can be overthrown.

Unfortunately the female artists of the Futurist movement did not present a cohesive female Futurist front. Lucia Re argues that the female Futurists influenced each other primarily through their texts.¹⁴ The historical work done on Futurist women has received little attention, as historians have focused on the aspects of Futurism emphasizing male virility, war, and technology. Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli's work attempts to fill this gap by examining the roles of various females in the Futurist movement. By considering the contribution of these female artists in the context of the cultural climate of the early twentieth century in which the role of the female was so firmly entrenched in the homemaking and childbearing sphere, the work being done by these female artists arguably appears more groundbreaking than that of their male counterparts.

The third chapter examines Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto." Loy, born Mina Gertrude Löwry in England, December 27, 1882, was one of the most intriguing figures of the European

¹³Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture, and Women," 103-104. Adamson notes that "Kühn Amendola took her pen name Magamal from Marinetti's novel, *Mafarka il Futurista*, where Magamal is the protagonist's brother. In the novel *Mafarka* sees Magamal as having a 'feminine sensibility.' In a letter to Giovanni Papini of 6 December 1913, held at the Fondazione Primo Conti in Fiesole, Kühn Amendola declares that she has just adhered to the Futurist movement (though she 'has always been a Futurist') but must use a penname in order to keep her identity concealed from family and friends." The original reads: "il futurismo segna la fine dell regno dell'eterno femminile. . . . Il secolo futuro parlerà con schifo e con disprezzo di una epoca dove l'uomo si ha lasciato sfruttare della femmina e ne era lo schiavo" (Magamal, "Il Futurismo--la nuova religione dell'umanità," unpublished essay dated 20-24 December 1913, in Beinecke 47:1884).

¹⁴Re "Futurism and the Feminine: New Perspectives," *The European Legacy* 14, 7 (December 2009): 879.

avant-garde. In a career that spanned several decades and three continents, Mina Loy associated with the European intellectual elite, and produced several poems and essays examining all aspects of life from her unique perspective as a woman, wife, mother, artist and intellectual. Educated as an artist in Munich at the Kunstlerin Verein, Loy spent the early part of the twentieth-century in Paris where she encountered the work of the early modernists Cézanne, Degas, Matisse, Picasso, and Renoir. In 1906 she moved to Florence with her husband and children, where she experienced bouts of “neurasthenia” and depression. During her time in Florence she had affairs with Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. In 1914 she published poems in the journals *Camera Work* and *Trend*, as well as exhibited paintings in Rome. Her identification with the principles of Futurism is revealed in a letter to her friend, American writer and photographer Carl Van Vechen, during her time as a nurse during the First World War. She wrote Van Vechen that she was “wildly happy among the blood and mess” and found “psychological inspiration in human shrieks and screams.”¹⁵ Over the next forty years Loy travelled across Europe, Mexico, and North America, continuing to write poetry and sketch, as well as designing lampshades under the patronage of Peggy Guggenheim. She finally settled in Aspen, Colorado in 1953 when she died in 1966 at the age of 83.¹⁶

The “Feminist Manifesto,” written in English in 1914 was the product of correspondence between Loy and Mabel Dodge Luhan, an American patron of the arts and friend of Loy’s. At this time Loy’s husband, Stephen Haweis had left her alone to raise their children while he traveled to Australia and Fiji giving talks on modern art. According to critic Amanda Jane Bradley “his departure seemed to signify a certain drought in her artistic pursuits,” as she has

¹⁵Roger L. Conover, ed. *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), lxvii.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, lxiii-lxxix.

relied on Haws to showcase her painting.¹⁷ It was during Haws' absence that Loy first became associated with the Futurists. Her "Aphorisms on Futurism" was first published in the journal *Camera Work* in April 1914. The "Feminist Manifesto" which followed Loy's "Aphorisms" is an extremely provocative and at times controversial document that marks the apex of Loy's association with the Futurist movement. Loy's assertion that women should strive to define their own identities, irrespective of their femininity or relationship to men, provides a remarkable window into the progressive way at least some women were beginning to conceive of their place in society at this time. Loy, like de Saint-Point, also mobilizes the Futurist framework, although her manifesto is animated by a markedly more violent approach to the destruction of gender roles. The third chapter examines Loy's feminist framework for a model of gender which allows women to be valued as a sex without having to claim their virtuous characteristics as masculine. Although the "Feminist Manifesto" was unpublished during Loy's lifetime it has been cited by several feminist scholars who have utilized it to demonstrate the influence of modernism and the avant-garde on conceptions of gender.¹⁸

By undertaking a close reading of several primary sources, this project aims to situate many of the claims made by Marinetti, de Saint-Point, and Loy within the larger cultural project of redefining gender that was underway at the turn of the century. It is impossible to consider any of these claims apart from the context of early twentieth century European culture. As Kern argues, during this period "a cultural revolution of the broadest scope was taking place, one that involved essential structures of human experience and basic forms of human expression."¹⁹ It is

¹⁷ Amanda Jane Bradley, *Mina Loy: Extravagant, Poetic, Exaggerate Life* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC, 2008), 15.

¹⁸ See: Susan Gilmore, "Imna, Ova, Mongrel Spy: Anagram and Imposture in the Work of Mina Loy," in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. Maera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1998); Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism: Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, 6.

with this in mind that the topic of gender is considered, as yet another manifestation of the intense social change that was taking place. What is unique in taking these three authors together is the juxtaposition of both male and female perspectives, which provides a nuanced portrayal of not only the issues perceived with a traditional approach to gender, but also several possibilities for a new approach to what is meant by the terms female, male, feminine, and masculine.

CHAPTER ONE

“Scorn for Woman” and Its Implications: The Evolution of Marinetti’s Gender Theory

The Futurists’ approach to women, and their concept of gender, evolved greatly over the first ten years of the movement. However, in examining the role of women in Futurist works, it is apparent that their approach to the female/feminine is inextricably linked to the goals of the movement. Their call for the destruction of the past did not apply only to their disdain for museums and academies, but also to antiquated bourgeois gender roles that valued women solely for their femininity and sentimentality. In early twentieth century Europe, women were valued primarily for their roles as wives and mothers, and were expected to possess the qualities which allowed them to achieve this feminine ideal. Wives were expected to be passive, dutiful, and subservient, and mothers were expected to be gentle and nurturing. Through an examination of the approach to gender in Marinetti’s texts, one can see that while in the early texts, such as the founding manifesto and the novel *Mafarka*, women are objectified and abused; in the later texts the approach to the female becomes more nuanced and prescriptive, leading to a new model of femininity. In *Mafarka* the main character (whose name is also Mafarka) appropriates the capacity to give birth in order to create in himself the ideal Futurist man, the male mother. In doing so Marinetti intends to illustrate that by taking from women the ability to give birth it is possible to create a world where females are no longer needed. However, as we shall see the presence of the female, and feminine characteristics thought to accompany the ability to give life, are not so easily eliminated. By the end of the novel these characteristics manifest themselves in Mafarka, following his transformation into the male mother. The tension between male and female, and between masculine and feminine, characterizes the Futurists’ early writings, and

provides an interesting lens through which to study the perception of women in early twentieth-century Italy.

A misogynistic approach to women, the product of the male dominance of the workforce, as well as the increasingly domestic placement of the female over the course of the nineteenth-century, was a product of ingrained cultural beliefs regarding the fundamental differences between the sexes. Men were thought to embody all of the characteristics that made them ideal leaders, such as strength, rationality, and creativity. Women, conversely, were assigned characteristics such as weakness, frailty, and passivity. As a result of these gender classifications, men were considered to have greater value to society than women. However, by examining the writings of both the male and female Futurists, we can see that there is one female characteristic that the male envies: the ability to create life. The mother at once personifies the female characteristics of gentleness and nurturing, as well as the male characteristics of strength, virility and creativity. As a result of this conundrum, the Futurists, wishing to appropriate all characteristics of value for the male, experimented with a fantasy of a male mother. Throughout the novel *Mafarka*, the portrayal of women throughout as useless bodies on which the males perpetrated acts of violence and sexuality allows the protagonist to take the virtue of childbirth from a sex he deems undeserving of the responsibility of creating life. For Marinetti, Mafarka represents the ideal Futurist man, one who appropriates all virtuous characteristics whether culturally coded as male or female.

Marinetti's approach to gender at this time is decidedly more impulsive and emotional than his later work. This approach is clear in *Mafarka*, in which Marinetti desires to create a world without females, where masculine hyper-virility is the ultimate goal. He fails to consider the implications of an all male society, which leads to numerous criticisms of the novel by critics

such as Barbra Spackman and Lucia Re. Mainly what is revealed at the end of the novel is Marinetti's apparent concession that it is impossible to entirely escape the presence of the female, particularly in the creation of life. The failed reproductive fantasy, the criticisms levelled against Marinetti by the female Futurists covered in chapters two and three, as well as Marinetti's own maturation in the ten years between the texts considered in this chapter necessitated a new approach to the feminine. The essays "Marriage and the Family" and "Against *Amore* and Parlaimentarianism" reveal that approach. In these works it is clear that it is no longer the female sex that Marinetti wishes to do away with, but rather the sentimental characteristics applied to women, which Marinetti considers restrictive and staid. As Marinetti matured, his approach to gender targeted not the female sex, but the bourgeois decadent figure of the woman as weak, sentimental and gentle, leading to a surprisingly generous interpretation of the role of women in society, when considered against the earlier founding manifesto and *Mafarka*.

The Founding of Futurism and Marinetti's *Mafarka*

The "Founding Manifesto of Futurism," published in the French newspaper *le Figaro* in 1909, enumerated the goals that the Futurists aimed to achieve and presented a broader framework for their perception of the modern world. The Futurists made numerous declarations prescribing drastic changes to society. They believed these changes to be necessary because of technological innovations, such as improvements in travel and communications.

Among other things, the Futurists desired a new twentieth-century approach to art and literature, one that would embrace the dynamism made possible by modern technology, with all of its exhilarating pleasures and dangers. The automobile was central to this aesthetic, so it was

no surprise that Marinetti, in the Manifesto's preface, presented a recent car accident as the catalyst for the movement. Glorifying this brush with death, he wrote "When I came up—torn, filthy, and stinking—from under the capsized car, I felt the white-hot iron of joy deliciously pass through my heart!"¹ The second point of the manifesto outlined the futurists' goals for literature in particular. "Up to now," said the Manifesto, "literature has exalted pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap."² In promoting these values, Marinetti and the Futurists rejected earlier literary styles, particularly romanticism, characterizing them as boring, sentimental, and lifeless.

The ninth point of the founding Manifesto combines Marinetti's glorification of war and his scorn for woman, which become inextricable from each other throughout his subsequent works. Marinetti declares: "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."³ The inclusion of the statement "scorn for woman" within this point of the manifesto which glorifies war, violence, and destruction is indicative of the Futurists' prescribed methodology for bringing about the destruction of the past. This passage indicates that violence is a necessary element of "scorn for woman" and seems to indicate that violence must be used to counter the influence of the female. It is not until the clarification in the introduction of *Mafarka* where Marinetti insists that only a certain type of woman, the sentimental one, is to be scorned,

¹F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Futurist Manifestoes*, Umberto Appolonio, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 21. "Comme je dressai mon corps, fangeuse et malodorante vadrouille, je sentis le fer rouge de la joie me percer délicieusement le cœur."; F.T. Marinetti "Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme," in Jean Pierre à de Villiers, ed. *Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme : Édition critique avec, en fac-similé, le manuscrit original de F.T. Marinetti* (Ottawa : Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1986), 47.

²Ibid., 22. "La littérature ayant jusqu'ici magnifié l'immobilité pensive, l'extase et le sommeil, nous voulons exalter le mouvement agressif, l'insomnie fiévreuse, le pas de course, le saut mortel, la gifle et le coup de poing."; Ibid., 45.

³ Ibid. Nous voulons glorifier la guerre – seule hygiène du monde, – le militarisme, le patriotisme, le geste destructeur des anarchistes, les belles Idées qui tuent, et le mépris de la femme." Ibid.

thus allowing for this statement to be interpreted as applying to the whole female sex. The implication of the application of violent, destructive imagery to woman has resulted in the classification of the Futurists as hypermasculine misogynists who desired to rid the world of female influence. This theme is elaborated upon in Marinetti's novel *Mafarka*.

The novel *Mafarka* gave literary expression to the themes Marinetti had emphasized in the founding Manifesto: violence, virility, technology, and misogyny. The novel follows the exploits of African king and conqueror Mafarka as he deposes his uncle Boubassa to become the greatest and most feared warrior. Mafarka then goes on to give birth to his own son without engaging in intercourse with a woman. Less important than the plot of the novel are the Futurist themes found throughout, which the various characters personify. For example, the son to whom he gives birth, Gazourmah, is a technological-humanoid hybrid, rife with Futurist symbolism: a giant made of metal with wings and a huge gold phallus, representing a fusion of power, virility and technology. The Futurist celebration of violence, war, imperial conquest, misogyny, and virility is unmistakable throughout the novel.

In *Mafarka*, Marinetti created a narrative which combines an imperialist worldview with a technology-aggrandizing future in which man has found the key to perfection. Imperialism was a timely subject for the Futurists to address, as it was during this time that the Italians were expanding their colonial empire into Africa. In 1895 the Italians suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians whom they were attempting to conquer. Marinetti, born of Italian parents in Alexandria, Egypt, would have had the perspective of both the European and the African experiences of colonialism. That the novel *Mafarka* takes place in Africa and features Africans as the main characters illustrates Marinetti's unique perspective. In celebrating an African warrior in his novel he is celebrating the characteristics of the Africans which he deemed

advantageous for a Futurist man. Mafarka's strength, ruthlessness and virility are all qualities which Marinetti believed needed to be reawakened in what he viewed as the staid, decadent European conception of masculinity. The colonial conquerors, but just as importantly, the native African warriors inhabited the characteristics of Marinetti's ideal Futurist Man.

This theme and others are tied to the primary emphasis in the book on the glorification of war. The seeds of *Mafarka*'s prevailing theme of the exaltation of war are sown in the founding manifesto: "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."⁴ *Mafarka* is a chillingly violent novel, not only during the scenes of warfare, but also in terms of the sexual violence which takes place throughout the novel. This issue will be discussed in further detail as the role of women in *Mafarka* is considered. The violence that takes place in *Mafarka* demonstrates the Futurist belief that "art...can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice."⁵ *Mafarka* represents the ideal Futurist man, and it is through his relationship to both women and to war that his identity is constructed.

Although *Mafarka* privileges violence and war, above all other pursuits, least of all romantic love, he is not incapable of love. Indeed, without this capacity he would hardly represent the ideal. However *Mafarka*'s love is first directed to his brother, Magamal, and later his son Gazourmah, who replaces the deceased Magamal in *Mafarka*'s heart. The love that *Mafarka* feels for both of these characters is pure and sincere. In particular, *Mafarka*'s love for Magamal elicits a tenderness that one would expect from a romantic relationship. Marinetti describes Magamal's "slender limbs, which alternated feminine graces with the twitches of a

⁴Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," 22. "Nous voulons glorifier la guerre – seule hygiène du monde – le militarisme, le patriotisme, le geste destructeur des anarchistes, les belles idées qui tuent, et le mépris de la femme."; Marinetti, "Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme," 49.

⁵Ibid., 23. "Car l'art ne peut être que violence, cruauté et injustice."; Ibid., 61.

wild beast on the watch.” Mafarka kisses his brother to greet him when Magamal is first introduced, and Marinetti describes Magamal’s “long lashes” being lowered over his “big llama’s eyes.”⁶ These references to the beauty of Magamal are found throughout the text, and portray Magamal as a feminine version of Mafarka.

The character of Magamal serves as a counterpoint to Mafarka’s ideal Futurist man. Though Magamal is a great warrior like Mafarka, there is something in his nature which concerns Mafarka, and which causes him to feel the need to protect his beloved brother.

Mafarka warns Magamal:

Oh! I know your courage well, but I loathe that ridiculous feminine sensitivity that alternates between plunging you into mad fits of exaltation and the next minute routing you with childish weakness...Listen to me: these bouts of sudden gaiety and inexplicit sadness must be blotted out today!...O my beloved brother, I am well aware that you lack my catapult muscles, to strangle an enemy whilst feigning to embrace him. Despite all the efforts of your will, your body has remained as soft and fragile as the juicy body of young girls. Your eyes, made for kisses, are not like my own, terrors for birds of ill omen; but you must harden your eyes, arm them with barbs, like mine! Look!⁷

This brotherly warning also serves as foreshadowing. During the final battle with Boubassa, Magamal contracts rabies, but fails to acknowledge this fact. He then goes mad and tears his new bride limb from limb in a rabinous rage before dying himself. The way he dies further suggests his weakness and femininity: rabies strips him of his will, control, and restraint – in

⁶F.T.Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*, trans. Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), 15.: “Ses membres effilés qui avaient tour à tour des grâces féminines et des sursauts de fauve aux aguets.”; “ses longs cils sur ses grands yeux de lama.”; F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste: Roman Africain* (Paris: E. Sansot), 16.

⁷ Ibid., 16.; “Oh! Je connais bien ton courage, mais J’ai horreur de cette ridicule sensiblerie féminine que te lance tour à tour dans de folles exaltations et t’accable l’instant d’après sous des faiblesses enfantines...Écoute-moi bien: ces gaîtés imprévues et ces tristesses inexplicable, il faut les abolir aujourd’hui!...O mon frère bien-aimé, je sens bien que tu n’as pas mes muscles de catapulte, pour étouffer un ennemi en feignant de l’embrasser. Malgré tous les efforts de ta volonté, ton corps est resté moelleux et fragile comme le corps juteux des jeunes filles. Tes yeux, faits pour les baisers, ne sont pas, comme les miens; mais il faut durcir, tes yeux, et les armer de crocs, comme les mains! Regarde!”; Ibid., 18.

other words, of all of the qualities that a man should possess. Moreover, the fact that he denied the possibility of having contracted the disease foreclosed the implicitly masculine option of sacrificing his already jeopardized life to defeating the enemy and thus of dying in a blaze of glory. That option was in fact precisely the one chosen by another rabid soldier in the novel, presumably to emphasize the tragic consequences of Magamal's denial. Finally, since Magamal's will to live was motivated by love for his wife, his married status also contributed to his image as weak. Unlike the unmarried Mafarka, who only lives to be a warrior, Magamal is distracted, and ultimately victimized (along with his wife) by the feminine.

Complicating matters further, the love that Mafarka feels for Magamal also leads to the latter's downfall, in that it is Mafarka who, out of love for his brother, stops him from seeking the same death as the other rabid soldier. In this sense it is Mafarka who is the weak one. The whole episode indicates the destructive powers that Marinetti attributed to love. According to Marinetti, love and marriage were detrimental to the creative powers of man – and indeed of woman as well.

Mafarka's Reproductive Fantasy

In *Mafarka* woman is depicted in various ways. She is a body upon which to exercise aggression, both sexual and violent; she is a mother, a temptress, and a distraction. This theme in *Mafarka*, mirrors that of the Futurist "scorn for woman." This scorn for women is addressed by Barbara Spackman in *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*:

In *Mafarka*, as in the manifestoes, the principal limit concerns the feminine. The thematic problem posed by women is, in fact, one of proximity: get too close to them and the dreaded feminine rubs off on you. The problem is also a rhetorical one: women devirilize, they feminize, they *adjectivize*...The solution in *Mafarka* is to eliminate women as

matrice, mater, and vulva and attribute the ovary to the male, thereby producing the principal hyphallage of the novel, the male ovary.⁸

It is this approach to the female that is replayed repeatedly. For Mafarka women and femininity are dangerous. Throughout the novel women's sexual capabilities are presented almost as a weapon that needs to be countered with violence. Mafarka does not enjoy any loving sexual relations with women; for him sex always borders on rape. At one point Mafarka does become close to women, in the form of virgins who are brought to him as a reward for his military victory, but he becomes terrified and casts them away, saying "Enough, enough! Begone! Begone! You slaves there, light the torches! Fetter these women and let them be thrown to the fishes!"⁹ To avoid any female closeness, Mafarka has the women murdered. Despite the fact that the women brought to Mafarka were virgins, and therefore sexually pure, his overreaction is a result of his belief that women use their sexuality for sinister purposes and that getting too close will compromise his strength. He scolds the women "all the poison of hell is in your eyes, and the saliva on your lips shines to kill...yes to kill as well as daggers, or still better!"¹⁰ For Mafarka, women steal men's strength, and are also deadly. By ordering that the women be killed, Mafarka demonstrates his power over them.

However, there is one power that women have, and have always had over men, which is the ability to bring life into the world. There are no roles for women in *Mafarka*, other than a body to be raped, that are not ultimately filled by a man. Mafarka redirects his emotional love from women to his brother and son, the latter of whom he creates without resorting to the reproductive capabilities of women. As Mafarka represents the ideal Futurist man in the novel, it

⁸Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (University Of Minnesota Press, 1996), 73-74.

⁹Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 101-102. "Assez! Assez! Va-t-en! Va-t-en! Holà! Esclaves, allumez les torches! Enchaînez donc ses femmes, et qu'on les jette aux poisons!"; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 146-147.

¹⁰Ibid., 102. "Tout le poison de l'enfer est dans vos regards, et la salive sur vos lèvres a des reflets qui tuent...oui, oui tuent aussi bien et mieux que des poignards!"; Ibid., 147.

is he who becomes the male mother. Questions of why Mafarka reproduces, how, and in what way this affects his identity as well as his relations are all brought to the surface as Mafarka brings Gazourmah to life.

The first question to be addressed, why Mafarka gives birth to a son, has to do in many ways with the character's, and indeed the Futurists' "scorn for woman." Mafarka tells his soldiers, who have come to ask him to return and be their king, that he now has a higher calling:

For I tell you that I have given birth to my son without the help of the vulva!... You don't understand? Then listen to me... One night I suddenly asked myself: 'Does it take gnomes to run like sailors on the deck of my chest to raise my arms? Does it take a captain on the poop of my forehead to open my eyes like two compasses?'... To these two questions my infallible instinct answered: 'No!' So I concluded that without the support and stinking collusion of the woman's womb, it is possible to produce from one's flesh an immortal giant with unfailing wings!¹¹

The reference to the "stinking collusion of the woman's womb," highlights that although women possess the ability to carry life within them, Mafarka has discovered a better way of creating life. In addition, it is not just humans that Mafarka is able to create, but superhumans. If Mafarka is the ideal Futurist man, then his progeny takes the fantasy one step further, becoming the future ideal of the Futurist man. Mafarka's son Gazourmah is a cyborg who has great wings like an airplane, is immortal, and is unmatched in strength and virility. Clearly the product of one man reproducing is much more desirable than that which is produced by the muddling of the sexes. Mafarka exclaims to his son, "Oh! The joy of having given birth to you thus, handsome and pure of all the defects that come from the maleficent vulva and predispose one to decrepitude and

¹¹Ibid., 145. "Car, sachez que j'ai enfanté mon fils sans le secours de la vulve!... Vous ne me comprenez pas?... Écoute-moi donc... Un soir, brusquement, je me suis demandé: Est-il besoin de gnomes courant comme des matelots sur le point de ma poitrine pour soulever mes bras? Est-il besoin de capitaine sur la dinette de mon front pour ouvrir mes yeux comme deux boussoles?... A ces deux questions mon instinct infailible a répondu: 'No!' J'en conclu qu'il est possible de pousser hors de sa chair, sans le concours et la puante complicité de la matrice de la femme, un géant immortel aux ailes infailibles!"; Ibid., 214-215.

death!... Yes, you are immortal, my son, my sleepless hero!”¹² Mafarka clearly is pleased with what he has produced, and he asserts that all men have the power to do what he has done.

Mafarka tells his men, “In the name of the human Pride that we adore, I tell you that the hour is near when men with broad foreheads and chins of steel will give birth prodigiously, by one effort of flaring will, to giants infallible in action...I tell you that the mind of man is an unpractised ovary...It is we who are the first to impregnate it!”¹³ What is significant about this passage is that it speaks not only of the man being impregnated, but of him being the impregnator, so we can see that the man appropriates both available sexual roles in procreation. However, it is through the “mind” and their “flaring will” that men are able to create life. For Mafarka the reproductive project is wholly bound to his desire to sacrifice himself in order to achieve immortality through his son. This concept of sacrificing one’s self is articulated in the founding manifesto, where Marinetti declared: “the oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen!”¹⁴ This concept of self-sacrifice is demonstrated in *Mafarka*, as Mafarka initiates his replacement, through the creation of his son.

Mafarka’s reproductive project represents an evolution of the main character. Mafarka spends his youth becoming a fearsome warrior and ideal man. Following the death of his

¹²Ibid., 188. “Oh ! la joie de t’avoir enfanté ainsi, beau et pur de toutes les tares qui viennent de la vulve maléficiante et qui prédisposent à la décrépitude et à la more !...Oui! tu es immortel, ô mon fils, ô héros sans sommeil!”; Ibid., 282.

¹³Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 3. “Au nom de l’Orgueil humain que nous adorons, je vous annonce que l’heure est proche où des hommes aux tempes larges et au menton d’acier enfanteront prodigieusement, d’un seul effort de leur volonté exorbitée, des géants aux gestes infallibles...Je vous annonce que l’esprit de l’homme est un ovaire inexercé...C’est nous qui le fécondons pour la première fois!”; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste: Roman Africain*, xi.

¹⁴Marinetti, “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” 23. “Les plus âges d’entre nous ont trente ans; nous avons donc au moins dix ans pour accomplir notre tâche. Quand nous aurons quarante ans, que de plus jeunes et de plus vaillant que nous veuillent bien nous jeter au panier comme des manuscrits inutiles!”; Marinetti, “Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme,” 63.

brother, however, he begins to look towards the future, as he is confronted with his own mortality. When he leaves following Magamal's death, and is found by his army, who wants him to return to be their leader, Mafarka declines: "the truth is I fled for fear of growing old with that worthless sceptre in my hands!"¹⁵ Mafarka then redirects his violent creative energies into the creation of his son. The Futurist obsession with youth and death is emphasized, when Mafarka states: "I glorify violent death at the end of youth, Death that plucks us when we are worthy of her deifying passions."¹⁶ Mafarka actively seeks death through the creation of his son, and in death is able to achieve his immortality because he passes on his own undiluted genes to his son. In many ways Mafarka is representative of the Futurist fear of old age, and the inevitable uselessness and defeat associated with it. However, rather than simply being thrown in the wastebasket, as Marinetti's manifesto would have had it, Mafarka sacrifices himself to give life to his son. When he brings Gazourmah to life he exclaims "Oh, my son, one more kiss so that I can drain myself into you!"¹⁷ The undertaking of the reproductive project and the death of his beloved brother signifies the end of Mafarka's youth.

Having considered why Mafarka undertakes the reproductive project, the question remains, how is it possible that the male becomes the mother in *Mafarka*? Spackman argues that "the novel's project, in its own terms, it to bypass the 'vulva' and impregnate the 'ovary' that is the male spirit,"¹⁸ invoking Marinetti's final claim of the introduction to *Mafarka* that "the mind of a man is an unpractised ovary...It is we who are the first to impregnate it!"¹⁹ The allusions to spirit and more commonly "will" as the tool the man must employ to become the male mother is

¹⁵Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 141. En vérité, j'ai fui parce que j'ai eu peur de vieillir avec ce misérable sceptre entre les mains"; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 209.

¹⁶Ibid., 147. "Je glorifie la Mort violente au bout de la jeunesse, la Mort qui nous cueille quand nous sommes dignes de ses voluptés divinisantes."; Ibid., 217.

¹⁷Ibid., 196. "Oh! Mon fils! Encore un baiser pour que je me vide en toi!"; Ibid., 292.

¹⁸Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 54.

¹⁹Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 3. : l'esprit de l'homme est un ovaire inexercé...C'est nous qui le fécondons pour la première fois !; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, XI.

posited repeatedly by Mafarka. He tells his men, “our will must come out of us so as to take hold of matter and change it to our fancy. So we can shape everything around us and endlessly renew the face of the earth. Soon, if you appeal to your will, you will give birth without resorting to the woman’s vulva.”²⁰ The “we” refers to men in general. Mafarka believes it possible for any man to give birth without resorting to women because of their superior will. Conversely it is unlikely that a woman would ever be able to give birth without the assistance of a man, lacking the requisite strength and will. It is not female reproductive spirit that Mafarka wishes to appropriate, merely the physical capability.

Spackman notes that “male spirit...deanimates female matter as the condition of its very existence.”²¹ Throughout *Mafarka* we see the female figures continually stripped of their identities. They cease to become sexual subjects, merely being physical bodies to be raped in the bloodlust of victory. Even when they are legitimate objects of romantic love, women are completely destroyed, as was Magamal’s wife. By treating women in this way, Marinetti juxtaposes two conceptions of the value of the female body: while the ability of giving life is so precious to the Futurists that it is appropriated by the male, intercourse, conversely, is presented as a violent act irrelevant to procreation. The dual function of the female body is something of an issue for the Futurists. It is impossible for them to conceive of a body that at once inhabits the “vices” of sexuality and seduction, as well as the virtues of nurturing and strength that is required of the mother. In every way in *Mafarka* the female is stripped of her energy or any creative power that she might have. She is not needed for pleasure for the ideal Futurist man, as Mafarka

²⁰Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 146.; “Notre volonté doit sortir de nous pour s’emparer de la matière et la modifier à notre caprice. Nous pouvons ainsi façonner tout ce qui nous entoure et rénover sans fin la face du monde. Bientôt, si vous priez votre volonté, vous enfanterez sans recourir à la vulve de la femme.”; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 215.

²¹Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 62.

considered such pursuits a sign of weakness. She is not needed for childbearing, as Mafarka also appropriates those abilities for himself.

The Futurist male view of women completely strips them of any value they may have. This is potentially an issue for the female Futurists, but more importantly, as Spackman argues, the male Futurists as well. Doing away with women altogether is not a flawless plan for creating the ideal Futurist man. Spackman argues that “the transplant of the ovary to the male spirit is necessitated by the unabashedly misogynistic desire for procreation without procreative sex.”²² This desire creates a crisis, according to Spackman, of sexuality for the male. If women are not needed in procreation any longer, and if sexual relations with them are dangerous, how then does the male assert his heterosexuality?

This problem of how the male asserts his heterosexuality becomes especially pertinent in the case of Mafarka. Spackman explores the issue of the necessity of maintaining heterosexuality in the face of the elimination of women in *Fascist Virilities*. She argues that “in acting out the fantasy of male autarky that underlies this project, an additional factor emerges, for the novel finds itself in the bonds – the double bonds – of the ‘homosexual panic’ theorized by Eve Sedgwick... Sedgwick analyzed this double bind, and resultant panic, as the product of the proscription of homosexual behaviour that characterize(s) all patriarchal, heterosexual culture.”²³ In *Mafarka* a homosocial fantasy world is created whereby women are not needed for the survival of the species. In the novel men are bound together in various ways, for example, in battle, and through familial ties. This type of relationship, while necessary to form the bonds which strengthen society, creates a crisis whereby men are in danger of crossing the boundaries into homosexuality, which is not acceptable. This is Sedgwick’s double bind – a situation in

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 60.

which “male homosociality is prescribed, but male homosexuality is proscribed.”²⁴ In an effort to avoid this crisis women are not eliminated completely in *Mafarka*. Spackman argues that “in *Mafarka* as in the manifestoes, female ‘matter’ must always be available, open to violence, in order to maintain the border between virility and what Marinetti slurringly refers to as ‘pederasty’.”²⁵

Violence and the Assertion of Male Virility

In *Mafarka* violence, particularly sexual violence, replaces romantic consent-based heterosexuality as a way in which man asserts his virility. Therefore it is through acts of war or rape that one proves his worth as a virile heterosexual man. The notoriously Futurist tendency to glorify war and violence is in many ways inextricable from their gender theory. Throughout *Mafarka*, we see violence and war as a way for men to assert their masculinity without resorting to the female to achieve that same goal. Since virility is an important characteristic for the man, it is combined with conquering in war. For example, following Mafarka’s victory over Boubassa’s forces there is a mass rape scene of the defeated population’s women. This mass rape serves both as a mode of homosocial bonding, as well as a humiliation of the defeated army. In this way the males combine the bloodlust of battle with their heightened virility, and exercise their compulsion for violence and sex.

Violence is continually asserted as a substitution for sex throughout *Mafarka*. Following the final battle Mafarka instructs Magamal to spend the night with his new bride, but Magamal responds,

Oh! Happiness can wait till tomorrow, on her lips...I don’t want you to fight without me on the ramparts, and tonight I would rather lie on my

²⁴Ibid., 59.

²⁵Ibid., 73-74.

back at the top of Gogorrou tower and keep watch on that terrible swarm of stars that would sting the dead themselves with ambition...

Mafarka replies “All praise to you brother, for speaking like this on the evening of victory... I can see you are as capable as I am of keeping a leash on your potent cock.”²⁶ For Mafarka, being a great soldier necessarily means forgoing sexual pleasure for the higher purposes of war. In this passage especially, Magamal’s masculinity is affirmed in that he forgoes passionate intercourse, not simply reproductive intercourse or violent rape. If the scene had been set in such a way that rather than going back to his wife Magamal was going to find a woman on whom to take out his sexual aggressions, Mafarka would likely have seen the outlet as a necessary one which is nearly as much a part of waging war as violence directed towards the enemy, since it is not through sex that the man asserts his virility, but through violence.

Mafarka is riddled with passages in which sexual pleasure is forsaken for war.

Spackman notes that, “though Mafarka rails against the debilitating effect of sexual relations with women, he is everywhere surrounded by scenes of rape. The ‘vulva’ must be not only everywhere present but also everywhere and always open to violence.”²⁷ Mafarka asks: “does the Sun see the pulverized hordes that our steps kick up, and the town swept away by the back of our hands?...And we forget the love and blessed lips of women!”²⁸ He also states “but for me there is nothing to match the joy of cleaving my enemy’s heart like a ripe pomegranate, and

²⁶Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 31-32. “Oh! Le bonheur peut bien m’attendre jusqu’à demain, sur ses lèvres...Je ne veux pas qu’on se batte sans moi sur les remparts, et je préfère veiller cette nuit, couché sur mon dos, au sommet de la tour de Gogorrou, se terrible guêpier d’étoiles qui piqueraient d’ambition les morts eux-mêmes”; “Frère, je te loue de parler ainsi au soir d’une bataille victorieuse...Je vois que tu sais autant que moi tenir à la chaîne ton sexe puissant...”; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 40.

²⁷Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 56.

²⁸Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 61. “le Soleil voit-il les hordes en poussière que soulèvent nos pas, et les villes balayées par le revers de nos mains?...Et nous oublions l’amour et les lèvres bénies des femmes!”; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 87.

savouring the fragments one by one! A woman's kiss is bland..."²⁹ So here we see repeatedly not only that war is sufficient to assert masculinity, but also that women are purposefully forsaken to that end. Marinetti seems to assert that there is no danger of homosexuality, that women have not been forsaken for men, but for the higher calling of war.

Women have historically been considered as one of the many spoils of war, as armies conquer territory, so too they often conquer the women of their enemies. In the first chapter of *Mafarka*, "Le Viol des Nègresses" (The rape of negresses), Africa is personified as a sexualized object to be raped.³⁰ This double allusion to conquering, both Africa and the female, is indicative of the role which women embody in the context of war-waging. Women are repeatedly introduced in *Mafarka* as bodies on which men may "take out" their sexual aggressions. *Mafarka*, however, is the exception to this rule. Upon the discovery of his defeated uncle Boubassa's generals participating in a gang rape, he taunts them "so the vulvas of fettered women are the enemies you love to fight!...You've beaten and disembowelled them, torn them open? Ah! Ah! That's truly something to be proud of now!"³¹ It is implied that Boubassa's forces met defeat because they were not able to control their sexual urges. Indeed they are weakened by such activities, which why *Mafarka* was able to conquer them so easily. If they were as *Mafarka*, the ideal Futurist men, able to direct those energies into fighting, they would have been more formidable enemies. Though women are nothing more than bodies to be raped throughout *Mafarka*, it is not the main character who partakes. Quite the contrary, it is he who looks down on such behaviour, and rarely gives in himself to his own sexual needs.

²⁹Ibid., 61-62. "mais je trouve que rien n'égale la joie de fendre le cœur de nos ennemis comme une grenade mûre et d'en savourer les grains un à un! Le baiser des femmes est bien fade..."; Ibid., 88.

³⁰Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 55.

³¹Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 28. "Des vulves de femmes enchaînées, viola donc les ennemis que vous aimez combattre!...Vous les avez battues, éviscérées, déchirées? Ah! Ah! Il y a vraiment là de quoi être fiers, allez!"; Marinetti, *Mafarka le Futuriste*, 34.

Inescapable Feminine

While the futurist manifesto advocates “scorn for woman,” and women were stripped of identity in the novel, simultaneously women represent some of the stronger characters, such as Mafarka’s mother, or his former lover Coloubbi. Marinetti counters accusations of misogyny in the introduction to *Mafarka* stating,

When I told them ‘Scorn Woman!’ they all hurled foul abuse at me like brothel-keepers after a police raid! And yet it isn’t woman’s animal value that I’m talking about, but her sentimental importance. I want to fight the gluttony of the heart, the surrender of parted lips as they drink the nostalgia of twilights, the fever of comet’s tails crushed and overlaid by distant stars, the colour of shipwreck...I want to conquer the tyranny of love, the obsession with the one and only woman, the strong Romantic moonlight bathing the front of the Brothel.³²

Marinetti feels misinterpreted regarding his stance on women; that it is not women in general that are objects of scorn, but rather the sentimentality associated with them, and the effect that this has on both of the sexes. It is possible to read *Mafarka* in two ways, confirming or contradicting this clarification of his call to scorn woman. Throughout the novel women, female characteristics are considered dangerous, undesirable, and debilitating; however following the birth of his son, the character Mafarka undergoes a drastic change, whereby those sentimental and frail characteristics scorned in females reappear in him. Though Marinetti does not provide any clear reason for this reversal, it is implied that sentimentality and affection are inescapable, at least for a motherly figure.

The last two chapters of *Mafarka* are a flurry of activity, as Mafarka not only experiences the birth of his son, but the reappearance of two influential females in his life. Ironically, rather

³²Ibid., 2. “Quand je leur ai dit: ‘Méprisez la femme!’ ils m’ont tous lancé des injures ordurières, comme des tenanciers de maisons publiques après une rafle de la police! Et pourtant ce n’est pas la valeur animale de la femme que je discute, mais son importance sentimentale.”; Ibid., viii.

than asserting his masculinity as the ideal male who has exercised his superior will by procreating without the female, when he gives birth to Gazourmah he becomes weaker and more sentimental, in other words more feminine. This shift is evidenced in his relationship with both his former lover, Coloubbi and his mother, Langourama. Coloubbi has a strange power over Mafarka in that she inspires in him nostalgia for their former love, and consequently he becomes weaker. She taunts Mafarka claiming that she is both Gazourmah's lover and mother, thus taking over at least one, but in some ways both of the roles that Mafarka desires in his relationship with his son. Similarly Mafarka's love for his mother is pure and innocent, and Mafarka demonstrates a childlike eagerness for his mother's love. The appearance of these two characters is especially significant for the understanding of Marinetti's reproductive project, in that both Coloubbi and Langourama appear without any explanation as to why or how they found Mafarka. In the case of Coloubbi, it is unclear whether or not she is actually there, or if Mafarka merely feels her presence and her taunts. Langourama is definitely imagined by Mafarka, as she is deceased, offering her kiss of life through the wood of her coffin.³³ He tells his mother:

Yes, yes, my darling mother, I shall rock you unendingly to sleep, and for the second time I'll close your eyes with long kisses! For now the time has come!...Oh, Mother, kiss me on the forehead as you used to do when you came to sit between my brother's bed and mine!...And you would hold your breath so as not to wake us!...I'm very small, Mother, and afraid, like a child when the desert wind blows open the gateway to death on stormy nights! Be happy! Forget me!³⁴

³³ Ibid., 194. "Je tends ma bouche derrière le bois du sarcophage."; Ibid., 290.

³⁴Ibid., 194. "Oui, oui, ô ma mère adorée, je te bercerais sans fin pour t'assoupir et je fermerai pour la seconde fois tes paupières avec de longs baisers ! Car voici : l'heure est venue !...Oh ! Ma mère ! Embrasse-moi sur le front comme jadis, quand tu venais t'asseoir entre le lit de mon frère et le mien !...Et tu retenais ton haleine pour ne colorer d'une beauté plus intense, dans un seul geste. Aime-toi au point de te donner au premier spasme venue, pour tuer le passé à chaque instant et rendre inutile l'attente de l'avenir que tu dois surpasser. Fait en sorte que la réalité d'aujourd'hui soit plus belle que le rêve réalisable le demain..."; Mafarka, 292.

By appropriating the ability to create life, Marinetti's ideal Futurist man undergoes such a transformation that by the end of the novel that the character of Mafarka becomes the archetype of the sentimental mother.

Langourama's role in the birth of Gazourmah is indicative of an unresolved issue in Marinetti's gender politics. Gazourmah's birth in the novel is depicted in such a way that it seems as though Langourama's presence was the necessary catalyst for Gazourmah's birth, in some ways entirely negating the male parthenogenesis myth. Mafarka transfers a kiss from his mother to his son, which is the final step in bringing Gazourmah to life. Langourama's kiss imbues Gazourmah with the strength to be born. Mafarka tells him:

Gazourmah! Gazourmah! My mother's sacred face is close to you!...My mother, my mother is there, on the shore, looking at you! This is the virtue of your blood! This is the pure force that will balance your energy when you skim the heaving belly of the ballerina sea, without being wounded on the red daggers of her breasts, or tangled in her seaweed of tresses, and without falling into her raucous courtesan throat.³⁵

While Mafarka becomes sentimental and feminine during the birth of his son, his mother appears in order to imbue Gazourmah with the "pure force" of a Futurist superhuman. It is clear from the narrative of Gazourmah's birth that the presence of the feminine is inextricable in two ways. Not only does Mafarka take on feminine characteristics in the process of becoming the male mother, the presence of his own mother is required, not only to give Gazourmah life, but strength. The fantasy of male parthenogenesis is ultimately a failure of Marinetti and the Futurists, as demonstrated in *Mafarka*. Since Marinetti failed to create a world where women and femininity were no longer needed, he instead concentrated on redefining the way women were conceived of, granting them the potential to become Futurist mothers.

³⁵Ibid., 194. "Gazourmah! Gazourmah! Voici près de toi le visage sacré de ma mère!...Ma mère est là, sur la plage, que te contemple ! Voici la vertu de ton sang ! Voici la force pure qui équilibrera tes énergies quand tu voleras sur le ventre rebondissant de la mer ballerine, sans te blesser sur les poignards rouges de ses seins, ni t'embarrasser dans sa chevelure d'algues, et sans tomber dans sa gorge rauque de courtisane."; Ibid., 290.

The Evolution of Marinetti's Gender Theory in "Marriage and the Family" and "Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism

The project of violently discarding the past is the cornerstone upon which much of the Futurists' work is centered. In "Marriage and the Family," Marinetti railed against sentimentality which he argues is the first characteristic of modern life that needs to be discarded in order for progress to occur. Marinetti conceived of sentimentality as inextricable from the feminine, which accounts for the scorn for woman that the Futurists expounded throughout their work. Women become the innocent bystander victims of Marinetti's rallying cry against sentiment in this work. He attempts to clarify the concept of "scorn for woman," ten years after the Futurists originally proclaimed it in the founding manifesto. The association of women and sentimentality throughout this and other Futurist texts requires that women be discarded along with sentimentality merely based on the fact that women are considered to be the more sentimental of the sexes. Since the passivity and nostalgia invoked by sentimentality is contrary to the Futurist dynamic, forward-looking project the metaphorical baby is thrown out with the bathwater, and women seem to be discarded along with sentimentality, simply because they had no model for an unsentimental woman.

Marinetti describes sentiment as "a fearful divinity that must be overthrown."³⁶ By describing sentimentality as divine, a set of virtues are implied. The virtues of "divine" sentimentality are closely associated with the feminine throughout the text, and allow the Futurists an opportunity to justify the argument that female characteristics are to be scorned because they are contrary to the Futurist project by branding them as sentimental. Sentimental

³⁶F.T. Marinetti, "Marriage and the Family," in R.W. Flint, ed. *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, trans. R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 77. "una divinità spaventosa da rovesciare."; Marinetti, "Contro il Matrimonio," 63.

characteristics that were ascribed to the female sex, not just by the Futurists, but by early twentieth-century Italian culture, included a tendency towards that which was considered weak. Women as gentle, passive, and affectionate constituted an inevitable roadblock for the Futurists who lauded a model of humanity that closely resembled the machines which they worshipped: cold, strong, mechanical, unfeeling.

In keeping with this ethos of mechanical unfeeling, the Futurists demanded that women must be done away with so long as their sentimentality remained an insurmountable obstruction. This argument extends much deeper, however, than merely a devaluation of all things feminine, or sentimental. Marinetti states “We scorn woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of *Amore*, the woman-poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman obsessing and fatal, whose voice, heavy with destiny, and whose dreaming tresses reach out and mingle with the foliage of forests drenched in moonshine.”³⁷ It is clear from this passage that it is only a certain type of woman to which the Futurists were opposed. In the context of this argument it is the sentimental woman which is subject to the scorn. Aside from the obvious past/future dichotomy in which sentimentality is discarded as passéist and bourgeois, there was a more pragmatic cultural goal that the Futurists desired to achieve with the destruction of the sentimental woman as the sole ideal. What the Futurists were really aiming for with their desire to destroy the image of the sentimental woman was the destruction of gender roles that had been oppressing women for centuries. The stereotype of the strong, rational man and the flighty

³⁷F.T. Marinetti, “Against Amore and Parliamentarianism,” in R.W. Flint, ed. *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 72.; “Noi disprezziamo la donna, concepita come unico ideale, divino derbatoio d’amore, la donna veleno, la donna nunnolo tragic, la donna fragile, ossessionante e fatale, la cui voce, greve di destino, e la cui chioma sognante si prolungano e continuano nei fogliami delle foreste bagnate di chiaro di luna.”; “Contro l’Amour e il Parlamentarismo,” *Futurismo Italiano*, <http://www.futurismo.altervista.org/manifesti/controAmoreeParlamentarismo> (Accessed November 1, 2011).

sentimental woman was a vestige of the past that the Futurists perceived of as detrimental to both the sexes, another aspect of bourgeois culture that needed to be discarded.

It is possible to infer from his essays and manifestoes that Marinetti did not necessarily believe that a new approach to women would be realized before his Futurist dreams would take flight. There remains an undertone in texts such as “Against Marriage and the Family,” and “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism,” that insinuates that a woman who does not overcome her sentimentality and give herself to the Futurist movement is of no value. Again, there is a pragmatic reason that women must overcome their sentimentality according to the Futurists. The danger of the perpetuity of sentimental women and all that is associated with them is the reality that sentimental mothers raise sentimental children, and Marinetti considered the education of children to be of the utmost importance. This perceived danger fits in to a larger discussion of the woman’s role in reproduction which will shortly be examined later in this chapter.

Futurist and Feminist

Though it may seem counterintuitive to discuss Marinetti in the context of the feminist movement, it must be acknowledged that his works did contain elements of feminism in their approach to women. Whether this can be attributed to the influence the female Futurists had on Marinetti, or a general maturation of his Futurist worldview is unclear. However, it is clear that in some texts Marinetti’s approach to the female question can be regarded as proto-feminist and rather progressive for his time. Critic Lucia Re observes that feminist overtones are present in Marinetti’s “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism,” although the text simultaneously vilifies

women. Marinetti addresses what he calls the “supposed inferiority of women,” claiming that “we think that if her body and spirit had, for many generations past, been subjected to the same physical and spiritual education as man, it would perhaps be legitimate to speak of the equality of the sexes.”³⁸ This reference to the possible equality between the sexes was an important revelation, not just for the Futurist movement, which had for a decade been branded as misogynistic and brutish, but for society as a whole. It is not entirely clear what type of equality between the sexes Marinetti means given his frequently contradictory remarks. I would argue that Marinetti is referring to the inherent equality between a man and a woman, and that the biological difference between the sexes does not necessitate a strong man and a weak woman. His assertion that equality between the sexes may have been possible if women had been physically and spiritually educated the same way as men illuminates better than many of his other writings what he considers possible for the historical reconception of the sexes. However, the main impediment in the actualization of equality of the sexes remained, and until European culture was prepared to accept woman as the equal of man, the traditional, bourgeois separation of the sexes was bound to endure.

According to Marinetti as well as feminists critics at the time, one major impediment to the actualization of a more equitable approach to gender was the fact that women in Italy were not allowed to vote.³⁹ One modern critic of the Futurist movement, Cinzia Sartini Blum, has concluded that Marinetti favoured women gaining the vote because he believed that women’s natural irrationality would lead to the fall of parliament, which according to Blum was his

³⁸Ibid., 73. “Quanto alla pretesa inferiorità della donna, noi pensiamo che se il corpo e lo spirito di questa avessero subito, attraverso una lunga serie di generazioni, una educazione identica a quella ricevuta dallo spirit e dal corpo dell’uomo, sarebbe forse possibile parlare di uguaglianza fra i due sessi.”; Ibid.

³⁹ See: Teresa Labriola, *I problemi sociali della donna* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1918).

ultimate goal.⁴⁰ She quotes Marinetti in “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism” stating that “the victory of feminism and especially the influence of women on politics will end by destroying the principle of the family.”⁴¹ Blum’s interpretation seems to assume that Marinetti wanted to maintain traditional family values, but as I argue later in my examination of the family in Futurist writings that is to follow, he is not.

A more revelatory passage from this text illuminates Marinetti’s stance on women obtaining the vote, as well as supplements what has been discussed thus far about women and sentimentality. Marinetti states that, “in this campaign of ours for liberation, our best allies are the suffragettes, because the more rights and powers they win for woman, the more will she be deprived of *Amore*, and by so much will she cease to be a magnet for sentimental passion or lust.”⁴² From this passage it is possible to conclude that woman’s right to vote is necessary if women are to cease being conceived of as the sentimental ideal, which is precisely on what Marinetti bases his scorn for them. To read Marinetti’s advocacy of women’s suffrage as the first step of the descent into anarchy based on presumptions about woman’s inherent irrationality and animal nature ignores the more nuanced approach of the Futurist movement to gender politics, and misreads the Futurists’ larger goal. Above all, destruction of the past is the essential element of Futurism, and relies heavily on the annihilation of oppressive gender roles which do not allow women to escape their sentimental, gentle, and passive roles.

The demand for woman’s suffrage was coupled in Marinetti’s thought with a call for female autonomy. He argues in “Marriage and the Family” that the Futurists “want to destroy

⁴⁰Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F.T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 84.

⁴¹Marinetti, “Against Amore and Parliamentarianism,” 75. “la vittoria del femminismo e specialmente l’influenza delle donne sulla politica finiranno di distruggere il principio della famiglia.”; Marinetti, “Contro l’Amor e il Parlamentarismo,” *Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, 73. “In questo nostro sforzo di liberazione, le suffragette sono le nostre migliori collaboratrici, poiché quanti più diritti e poteri esse otterranno alla donna, quanto più essa sarà unoiveruta d’amore, tanto più essa cesserà di essere un focolare di passion sentimentale o di lussuria.” *Ibid.*

not only the ownership of land, but also the ownership of woman. Whoever cannot work his land should be dispossessed. Whoever cannot give his woman strength and joy should never force his embrace upon her.”⁴³ As well, he argues that, “To say *my woman* can be nothing but a childish idiocy or an expression of Negroes. Today, just now, for an hour, a month, two years, according to the flight of my fancy and the power of my animal magnetism or intellectual ascendancy, the woman is as much *mine* as I am hers.”⁴⁴ These passages demonstrate an apparent *volte face* in the Futurist approach to women, but it may not have been possible, or even desirable, in the early stages of the movement when more radical, immediate change was advocated, and it was considered more dynamic to scorn women outright for their sentimentality than to work towards transforming the long-standing belief that a woman was not a man’s equal. To speak of woman as autonomous, exclusive of their relationship to men, as well to speak of the relationship as empowering both of the sexes indicates a more equitable relationship between man and woman. This is an early indication that the Futurists were reconsidering their approach to gender with regard to their larger goal. As the Futurists became more involved in politics, they adopted a more pragmatic approach to change. At this time, 1918-1919, the Futurists were beginning to form their political identity, founding a political party in which women’s rights were central. This institutional approach indicates a more realistic approach to the resolution of gender differences, where a world of equality between the sexes is firmly in the sights of those seeking change.

Sentimentality and the Destruction of the Family

⁴³Marinetti, “Marriage and the Family,” 78. “Noi vogliamo distruggere non soltanto la proprietà della terra, ma anch la proprietà della donna.”; Marinetti, “Contro il Matrimonio,” 63.

⁴⁴Ibid., 77. “Dire: *la mia donna* non può essere altro che una cretineria infantile o una espressione da negrieri. La donna è *mia* quanto io sono suo, oggi, anni, second il volo della sua fantasia e la forza del mio megnetismo animale o ascendente intellettuale.”; Ibid.

What remained central to the Futurist movement was an emphasis on virility. The concept of virility was so desirable that Marinetti thought that even women could be virile. Women, according to Marinetti, should be virile in terms of autonomous sexual subjectivity and an anti-sentimental approach to sex. The concept of female virility created a conundrum for the Futurists, however, whereby the question remained whether a virile woman would retain her femininity in order to still be attractive to men. Conversely, according to the Futurist movement the main goal of reproduction was the future of the species – a concern that had to remain central in male-female relations which was important to the Futurist project as the attainment of the perfection of the species. While *relations* are necessary for reproduction, the *relationship* has a tendency to interfere with the reproductive project. Marinetti states, “we despise horrible, dragging *Amore* that hinders that march of man, preventing him from transcending his own humanity, from redoubling himself, from going beyond himself and becoming what we call *the multiplied man*.”⁴⁵ The emphasis on reproduction here reinforces the Futurist emphasis on the perpetuation of masculine qualities. Man’s role in procreation is fulfilled simply by virtue of fact that he is a man, and thus passes on to his progeny all of the virtuous male characteristics that his sex possesses. Woman, on the other hand, by virtue of her debilitating sentimentality, which has yet to be eliminated or overcome by the Futurists, passes on her detrimental characteristics the same way the man passes on his preferable ones. The involvement of the female in reproduction resulted in an obstacle not easily overcome by the Futurists. This dynamic explains why they

⁴⁵Marinetti, “Against Amore and Parliamentarianism,” 72. “Noi disprezziamo l’orribile e pesante amore che ostacola la Marcia dell’uomo, al quale impedisce d’uscire dalla propria umanità, di raddoppiarsi, di superare e stesso, per divenire ciò noi chiamiamo l’uomo moltiplicato.”; “Contro l’Amour e il Parlamentarismo,” *Futurismo Italiano* <http://www.futurismo.altervista.org/manifesti/controAmoreeParlamentarismo>.; The concept of the *multiplied man* is elaborated upon in Marinetti’s text “Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine,” in which Marinetti expounds the beauty of the machine, particularly the automobile, as man’s new lover. The “multiplied man” refers to the fusion of men and technology and the creation of a man who is immune to lust and sentiment, who views sexual intercourse as nothing more than a bodily function “like eating or drinking.” See: Marinetti, F.T. “Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine” in *Marinetti: Selected Writings* ed., R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972).

wanted to remake women, stripping them of feminine sentimentality and conceiving of reproduction not as the outcome of love relations, but as the expression of the species' will to survive. As a result, reproduction takes on a mechanical quality that removes all elements of love or sentimentality.

The Futurists purposefully disassociated love and sex. Marinetti argued that “There is nothing natural and important except coitus, whose purpose is the futurism of the species.”⁴⁶ Marinetti thus detached the feelings of sentimentality and *amore* from the act of perpetuating the species. The ideal Futurist woman would have shared this view of the goal of reproduction, and approached procreation in the same way as a man. In doing so, she could rid herself of the sentimentality of her sex, devoting her body to being a Futurist woman; she would separate not only love from sex, but also femininity from reproduction, prioritizing the future of the species over sexual pleasure, as would the man. In considering sex without intimacy necessary, she might then create strong, virile offspring, free from any of the detrimental characteristics that the female sex otherwise contributes. Thus the ideal Futurist woman separates femininity from reproduction, overcoming her sentimentality in becoming a mother. In spite of this consideration, Marinetti still seems to be holding on to the reproductive fantasy of *Mafarka* when he ends “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism” with: “we have even dreamed one day of being able to create a mechanical son, the fruit of pure will, a synthesis of all the laws that science is on the brink of discovering.”⁴⁷ Whether we attribute this proclamation to Marinetti’s belief that technological parthenogenesis is likely to happen sooner than the emancipation of women choosing to be Futurists, or to a self-indulgent reference to his own genius, it is revelatory in terms of Marinetti’s unwavering faith in the power of the male spirit.

⁴⁶Ibid. “Non vi è di natural e d’importante che il coito il quale ha per scopo il futurism della specie.”; Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 73. “abbiamo finance sognato di poter creare, un giorno, un nostro figlio meccanico, frutto di pura volontà, sintesi di tutte le leggi di cui la scienza sta per precipitare la scoperta.”; Ibid.

The final theme of Marinetti's two essays on gender is the pervasive presence of the family as a locus for the Futurists' scorn. It is possible to consider sentimentality, feminism, and reproduction through the lens of the family. For the Futurists, the family was of course yet another institution to be subverted and overthrown; as Marinetti declares in "Marriage and the Family," "all suffer, all are deprived, exhausted, cretinized in the name of a fearful divinity that must be overthrown: family feeling." (il sentiment)⁴⁸ He depicts family feeling as dangerous to all involved; husband/father, wife/mother, and child. Perhaps using an example from his own life as the son of a wealthy lawyer, he argues that "everywhere in Italy there is the sad spectacle of the rich egotistical father who wants to force the usual *serious profession* on his poetic or artistic son."⁴⁹ Marinetti makes a thorough case against marriage on several grounds, mostly pertaining to the sentimental attachments between family members and the constrictive nature of these relationships.

Marinetti's utterly unsentimental approach to the family is revealed in the comparison of what he terms the "family lamp" to a:

luminous broody hen who hatches her rotten eggs of cowardice. Father, mother, granny, aunts, and children always end up, after a few dumb scrimmages among themselves, plotting together against holy danger and hopeless heroism. And the steaming soup bowl is the censer burning in this temple of monotony.⁵⁰

The family becomes the locus of meaningless conflict that drains life from its combatants, trapping them in the realm of the mundane. Worse, the family reinforces stereotypical gender

⁴⁸Marinetti, "Marriage and the Family," 77.; "Tutti soffrono, si deprimono, si esauriscono, incretiniscono, in nome di una divinità spaventosa da rovesciare: il sentiment."; "Marinetti, "Contro il Matrimonio," 62.; In the English translation "il sentiment" is translated as "family feeling."

⁴⁹Ibid.; "Dovunque in Italia il triste spettacolo del padre ricco egoist ache vuole imporre la solita *professione seria* al figlio poeta, artista, ecc."; 62.

⁵⁰Ibid., 76. This passage is from the English translation of "Marriage and the Family," by R.W. Flint in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, however it is not present in the original Italian text. It is unclear when or whether this was added, possibly in a subsequent edition, or taken from another text by the editor of the English edition to introduce this text.

roles, perpetuating bourgeois attitudes and harming all who enter into it. Each member's growth is stunted, when they prioritize the family over the more dynamic and praiseworthy endeavours such as art, music and poetry. Even "when the family functions well, you have the glue of sentiment, tombstone of maternal tenderness."⁵¹ Marinetti seems to suggest that marriage is most detrimental to the woman. Whereas men were the patriarchs and providers, all virtues of strength, women were trying to escape destiny by forging her way in the new Futurist world, and the family is holding her back from doing so. This detrimental concept of matrimony is perpetuated, providing an example to the children who are brought into the "family mire."

Reproduction in the context of family muddles the sexes, which was detrimental to doing away with traditional gender roles. In a Futurist world, Marinetti hopes, "The male babies should – according to us – develop far away from the little girls so that their first games can be entirely masculine, that is, free of every emotional morbidity, every womanly delicacy, so that they can be lively, pugnacious, muscular, and violently dynamic."⁵² Marinetti provides no prescriptive theory on how female children should be raised, but it is clear that he considers the family to be making male children weak and emotional, endangering the male character, who might appropriate feminine characteristics and pass them on to their children.⁵³

The implications of the family for women and feminism are elucidated convincingly by Marinetti. He argues that the effect of the family on the woman is that it "becomes a hypocritical masquerade or else the wise façade behind which one carries on a legal prostitution powdered

⁵¹Ibid., 77. "Se la famiglia funziona bene, vischio del sentiment, pietra tombale della tenerezza materna."; Ibid., 62.

⁵²Ibid., 78. "I bambini maschi devono – second noi – svlupparsi lontano dale bambine perchè i loro primi guiochi sieno nettamente maschili, cioè privy d'ogni morbosità affetiva, d'ogni delicatezza donnesca, vivaci, battaflieri, muscolari, e violentemente dinamici."; Ibid., 64.

⁵³Ibid.

over with moralism.”⁵⁴ Here Marinetti provides an interesting metaphor for gender relations by comparing marriage to legal prostitution. Many women turn to prostitution out of economic necessity. Often it is not untrue to say that a woman enters a marriage out of economic necessity. To be unmarried at this time generally meant that a young woman would have to live at home with her parents, thus potentially being an economic burden. On the other side of the gender dynamic the man, or husband, may exploit the woman, his wife, for his own pleasure, using her to prove his virility. This is a poisonous relationship that renders the concept of marriage ridiculous, opening it to criticisms such as Marinetti’s. However during the time “Marriage and the Family” was written, the post First World War era, there was a reversal of roles which was troubling for men. Many women had entered the workforce, filling jobs that men had once held, since they had gone off to war. Simultaneously men returned from the war physically, emotionally and psychologically damaged. Marinetti calls this a “complete subversion of a family in which the husband has become a useless woman with masculine vanities, and his wife has doubled her human and social value.”⁵⁵ The result of this is “inevitable clash between the two spouses; struggle and defeat of the man.”⁵⁶ The destruction of the man is the worst possible scenario, outweighing in importance any elevation of the status of females. Though the woman has “doubled her human and social value” she is still a woman, and does not possess the virtuous characteristics belonging to a man. The way in which this dynamic plays out in the family structure is that both parties are aware that this is not a natural progression that either of them has chosen and it causes guilt for the woman, who watches as her husband’s self

⁵⁴Ibid., 77. “La famiglia che nasce quasi sempre, per la donna, una legale compra-vendita d’anima e di corpo, diventa una mascherata di ipocrisie oppure la facciara saffia dietro la quale si svolge una prostituzione legale incipriata di moralismo.”; Ibid., 62.

⁵⁵Ibid., 79.; “Rovesciamento complete di una famiglia dove il marito è diventato una donna inutile con prepotenze maschili e la moglie ha raddoppiato il suo valore umane e sociale.”; Ibid., 65.

⁵⁶Ibid.; “Urto inevitabile fra due soci, conflitto e sconfitta dell’uomo.”; Ibid., 65.

worth is destroyed. The inevitable clash may be avoided if the two parties were not forced to co-exist and remain dependent on one another. Doing away with the institution of marriage would allow each party to pursue any lifestyle they chose without being concerned about society's perceptions, or the effect that men and women had on each other.

Conclusion

By considering Marinetti's approach to anti-sentimentality, hyper-virility, and the destruction of the institution of marriage, one is able to conceive of the implications of Futurism for a reconception of traditional gender roles. In both *Mafarka* and in the later texts, Marinetti is consistent in his valorization of virility. However, those later texts demonstrate that this valorization of – and the critique of sentimentality that subtended it – led him to re-imagine creatively the place of women in society, even implying that they could adopt characteristics historically categorized as masculine. His scorn for sentimentality also required a reconception of reproduction, insofar that he believed love should be completely removed from intercourse on the part of both the man and the woman. Implicit in this critique of sentimentality and *amore*, is the denunciation of marriage as an archaic and outdated institution.

CHAPTER TWO

Lust as a Force: Valentine de Saint-Point's Creation of the Superhuman

The discussion of gender found in Marinetti's various texts left room for interpretation by other Futurists such as Valentine de Saint-Point in her works the "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman" and "Futurist Manifesto of Lust." The latter manifesto offers a reconception of the power of lust for the Futurist worldview that is to a certain extent at odds with Marinetti's *Mafarka*. In *Mafarka* lust can be understood mainly in terms of its destructiveness, such as the bloodlust of victory leading to rape. Conversely in the "Manifesto of Lust," lust is depicted as a creative force that has implications for not only war and violence, but also reproduction. As well, where in *Mafarka* lust is applied to war and violence which eliminates, or at the very least marginalizes the female, de Saint-Point's manifesto reintroduces the female as a partner in lust. The issues with Marinetti's gender theory in *Mafarka* are to a certain extent exploited by de Saint-Point to allow women the same creative capabilities that Marinetti allows men. Her work thus indicates that there indeed exists a place for both the female and femininity in the Futurist worldview.

As Marinetti stated in the introduction to *Mafarka*, it was not women *as such* to whom he was opposed, but rather the sentimentality associated with them. While Marinetti failed to describe the role that the woman of the future would play, it was clear to him that, as one commentator put it, "women whose life was determined by a combination of sentimentalism and Catholic conservatism could not play a positive role in the world of tomorrow."¹ Marinetti's underdeveloped approach to the role of women in his Futurist refashioning of the universe created an opportunity where women made a unique contribution to the movement, as well as to

¹Gunter Berghaus, "Futurism and Women: A Review Article," *The Modern Language Review* 105, 2 (April 2010): 407.

provide a perspective which at once embraced and criticized the masculine platform of the Futurist movement. The place of women in society was changing in the early twentieth century, and women such as de Saint-Point shared Marinetti's contempt for the gentle and passive roles ascribed to women. The Futurist movement's emphasis on the destruction of the past created an opportunity for women to appropriate the violent, dynamic language of the founding manifesto and to apply its principles to the destruction of traditional gender roles. Those roles had come to limit the involvement of women in public life, particularly the political and artistic realms.

Marinetti and Futurist Women

When Marinetti's actions are examined alongside his writings, it becomes clear that his "scorn for women" did not prevent him from encouraging women to participate in the Futurist movement. The critic Robin Pickering-Iazzi argues that

read at face value representations of woman created by Marinetti...among others reproduce the call for 'contempt for woman' proclaimed in the founding manifesto. However, on closer scrutiny, we see that Marinetti's writings offer shifting positions on female gender roles as cultural and social formations, which create an indeterminate field.²

It was during the first stage of the Futurist movement that Marinetti's oscillating approach to the female was most pronounced, as he openly expounded "scorn for woman" while including and encouraging female Futurists.

In 1909 Marinetti founded the Futurist journal *Poesia*. Through the journal Marinetti extended creative liberties to female artists and writers who seemed not to mind the anti-

²Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press), 206.

feminine rhetoric of the founding manifesto. Italian artist and historian Mirella Bentivoglio, who had been associated with female Futurists throughout her life notes, that

the careers of these women artists would have been stillborn without Marinetti's support. When no one wanted to print their poems or exhibit their paintings, Marinetti exerted great effort to make their works known. It was therefore not surprising that these women artists cared little about his provocative rhetoric.³

To contextualize this argument it is important to note that very few women at this time found avant-garde movements, or even jobs requiring creativity, such as journalism, open to them.

Despite this fact, approximately fifty women or about fifteen percent of *Poesia's* total number of contributors were women.⁴

Women did not join the Futurist movement immediately with its founding in 1909, but in 1912 a French writer named Valentine de Saint-Point wrote her "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman" as a direct response to the founding manifesto and its proclaimed "scorn for woman."⁵ De Saint-Point was attracted to the Futurist movement's emphasis on action and change; however she was not inclined to accept all of the Futurists' founding principles. Impressed by de Saint-Point's artistic abilities and independence, Marinetti invited her to become the first Futurist woman. However, as critic Lucia Re notes, "in her letter of adhesion, Valentine claimed to have in her life and work foreshadowed futurism, but she...expressed disagreement with the futurist iconoclastic rage: past masterpieces should not be sacrificed to the new."⁶ It was this kind of independent thinking that the Futurists craved in their members, and Valentine de Saint-Point

³Berghaus, "Futurism and Women: A Review Article," 402.

⁴Walter L. Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture, and Women: The Reshaping of the Artistic Vocations, 1909-1920," *Modernism/Modernity* 4, 1 (1997):103.

⁵Laura Scuriatti, "Bodies of Discomfort: Mina Loy, the Futurists and Feminism in Italy Between the Wars," in *Women in Europe Between the Wars: Politics, Culture and Society*, Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 132.

⁶Lucia Re, "Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo," *Quaderni s'italianistica* 24, 2 (2003): 51.

would go on to author two of the seminal manifestoes of the Futurist movement. Re notes that de Saint-Point “was attracted by the violence promised by futurism and she wished to partake in it not as an object, but as a subject.”⁷

De Saint-Point’s Futurist Construction of Gender

In keeping with the Futurists’ emphasis on originality and destruction of the old, Valentine de Saint-Point’s manifestoes did not argue merely for a valuation of the female in the face of a culture that suppressed women, but rather proposed new gender models. She argued that “*it is absurd to divide humanity into women and men: it is composed only of femininity and masculinity*” (italics original).⁸ Saint-Point also invokes this notion in her conception of a Nietzschean/Futurist *übermensch*/superuomo. She argues that:

Every superman, every hero, however epic, every genius, to the degree that he is powerful, is the prodigious expression of race and of an epoch only because he is composed of feminine elements and masculine elements at the same time: he is a complete being.⁹

If we consider *Mafarka* while bearing in mind de Saint Point’s perspective on gender, then it appears as though the novel’s eponymous male protagonist corresponds better than his son Gazourmah to the “complete being” de Saint-Point had described. *Mafarka*, after all, in appropriating the female ability to bear children, embodies both the masculine and the feminine, whereas his son merely represents a kind of hypervirile fusion of technology with masculine characteristics. It is thus *Mafarka*, rather than *Gazourmah*, who transcends his sex to become a

⁷Ibid., 54.

⁸Valentine de Saint-Point, “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman 1912” in Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism: Almost Lost to History*, 163.; “*il est absurde de deviser l’humanité en femmes et en hommes. Elle n’est compose que de fémininité et de masculinité.*”; Valentine de Saint-Point “Manifeste de la Femme Futuriste” in *Manifeste de la Femme Futuriste : Suivi de Manifeste futuriste de la luxure, amour et luxure, le Théâtre de la femme, mes débuts chorégraphiques, la métachorie* (Paris : Mille et Une Nuits, 2005), 8.

⁹Ibid. “Tout surhomme, tout héros, si épique soit-il, tout génie, si puissant soit-il, n’est l’expression prodigieuse d’une race et d’une époque que parce qu’il est compose à la fois d’éléments féminins et d’éléments masculins, de féminité et de masculinité: c’est-à-dire qu’il est un être complet.”; Ibid., 8.

superhuman in the way de Saint-Point conceived that category. As opposed to Marinetti who idealized Gazourmah's unadulterated virility and sought to banish the feminine, de Saint-Point suggested that both masculinity and femininity would need to be present in the ideal being of the future.

One characteristic that de Saint-Point argued was essential for each sex was virility. She argued that "in order to bring a certain virility back to our race corrupted by its femininity, one needs to force the race to become virile, even to the point of brutality."¹⁰ To be sure, this brutal virility is reminiscent of Marinetti's tendency to conflate violence and sexuality, substituting war for sex. However, whereas Marinetti concerned himself with men, de Saint-Point called for the revirilization of both sexes. For women, revirilization would in de Saint Point's view require a valorization of female sexuality as both a creative and procreative force. In making this argument, de Saint-Point invoked the classic mother-mistress dichotomy while challenging the pejorative value traditionally placed on the mistress or lover:

Women must be mother or lover. True mothers will always be mediocre lovers, and lovers will notably be unsatisfactory as mothers. Equals in the face of life, these two women complement each other. The mother who begets a son makes a future of the past. The lover expends desire, which leads to the future.¹¹

Here, rather than seeing the mother and lover/mistress as opposites, de Saint-Point conceives of them as complementary. Her interpretation of the female as mother asserts her role as productive, rather than merely reproductive. She adopts a decidedly Futurist rhetoric, emphasizing each woman's contribution to the future. The mother of course creates future generations, but the lover is also essential, in that her mastery of her own desire and lust, as a

¹⁰Ibid. "pour redonner quelque virilité à nos races engourdis dans la féminité, il faut les entraîner à la virilité jusqu'à la brutalité."; Ibid., 9.

¹¹Ibid., 165. "La femme doit être mère ou amante. Les vraies mères seront toujours des amantes médiocre et les amantes, des mères insuffisantes, par excès. Égales devant la vie, ces deux femmes se complètent. La mère qui reçoit l'enfant, avec du passé fait de l'avenir: l'amante dispense le désir qui entraîne vers le future."; Ibid., 14.

force, creates a new type of woman who embraces all of her faculties and propels her sex into the future. Though not going so far as to assert that woman can be simultaneously lovers and mothers, she does concede that both elements can and must co-exist in society for the health of the species.

De Saint-Point provides numerous examples of strong females which she employs to illustrate that superwomen have existed. She states that “women are Furies, Amazons, Semiramis, Joan of Arc, Giovanna Hachettes, Judiths and Charlotte Cordays, Cleopatras and Messalinas; warriors who fight more ferociously than men.”¹² By acknowledging these strong females she seems to be implying that strong women have always existed in history, and that her current culture has simply forgotten them. Her most poignant example is that of Caterina Sforza, a fifteenth century Italian noblewoman infamous for her brutality. De Saint-Point exclaims:

Let Future wars produce heroines similar to that magnificent Caterina Sforza who, while suffering the siege of her city, seeing from the high walls her enemy threatening the life of her son to force her to surrender, heroically displayed her female sex and shouted: “Kill him if you wish! I still have the mold to make others!”¹³

By mobilizing this example de Saint-Point highlights more than a few tenets of Futurist-Feminist rhetoric. Sforza becomes a war hero by refusing to surrender while her city is under siege; this action has decidedly nationalistic implications. Second, she is willing to sacrifice her son in battle, indicating that the ideal Futurist mother would consider it her son’s duty to not only fight, but die in war if necessary. Lastly, and most importantly, Sforza not only tells her enemies that they may kill her son, for she has the mold to make others, she “heroically” shows her “sex” or

¹²Ibid., 164. “Les femmes, ce sont les Érynnies, les Amazones; les Sémiramis, les Jeanne d’Arc, les Jeanne Hachette, les Judith et les Charlotte Corday, les Cléopâtre et les Messaline, les guerrières qui combattent plus féroceement que les males.”; Ibid., 10.

¹³Ibid. “Que les prochaine guerres suscitent des héroïnes comme cette magnifique Caterina Sforza, qui, soutenant la siège de sa ville, voyant, des remparts, l’ennemi menace la vie de son fils pour l’obliger elle-même à se rendre montrant héroïquement son sexe, s’écria: ‘Tuez-le, j’ai encore le moule pour en faire d’autres!’”; Ibid., 10-11.

her genitalia in what is a brazen affront to traditional feminine norms. It is not enough for Sforza to merely declare that her reproductive capabilities give her power, she also flaunts the fact. By doing so she becomes the Futurist superwoman, taking control of her own reproductive power, even to the point where she willingly sacrifices her own offspring for the Futurist higher calling of war.

This acknowledgement of female virility is contrary to Marinetti's *Mafarka* which suggests the feminine capacity for childbearing should be reappropriated by the male. In many ways de Saint-Point's model for the Futurist woman or man is much more realistic than that proposed by Marinetti. While Marinetti desires to create a superman capable of (pro)creation, and to seemingly to do away with women altogether, de Saint-Point proposes a model for humanity whereby the virtues of both genders are present in both the male and the female (though, it must be said, she does not detail how men might successfully integrate the feminine). In order to achieve this goal de Saint-Point does agree with Marinetti that the role of the female in society must undergo a drastic change. She provides a prescriptive approach for the role of the mother in the rearing of Futurist children, where Marinetti does not, stating:

Don't raise them (children) for yourself that diminishes them, but rather bring them up for freedom in a broader sense, for complete development. Instead of reducing man to the servitude of abominable sentimental needs, push your sons and men to surpass themselves. You are the ones who make them. You have ever power over them. *You owe heroes for the sake of humanity. Give them to us!*¹⁴

De Saint-Point's approach to raising children is decidedly Futurist, animated by violent language, and a desire to create the Future through the perfection of humanity; however she explicitly emphasizes the *female* role as mother in shaping her offspring, stating that the mother

¹⁴Ibid., 165-166; "Ne les élevez pas pour vous, c'est-à-dire pour leur amoindrissement, mais dans une large liberté, pour une complète éclosion. Au lieu de réduire l'homme à la servitude des exécrales besoins sentimentaux, poussez fils et vos homes à se surpasser. C'est vous qui les faites. Vous pouvez tout sur eux. *À l'humanité vous devez des héros. Donnez-les lui.*"; Ibid., 15.

has power over her children. Through this passage de Saint-Point illustrates that ideal Futurist mother, one who, as Caterina Sforza, employs her reproductive powers for the future of the species. Thus, where mothers are to raise their sons unsentimentally in order that they achieve their full potential, they would also raise their daughters to be futurist mothers, emphasizing freedom and power.

De Saint-Point articulates, perhaps better than Marinetti, the kind of woman that the Futurists scorn. She writes:

No more women from whom soldiers must fear ‘lovely arms intertwining around their knees on the morning of departure’; women nurses who perpetuate weakness and old age, domesticating men for their personal pleasure or for their material needs! No more women who make children only for themselves, guarding them from every peril, every adventure – that is, from every joy – thus shielding their daughters from love and their sons from war! No more women, vampires of the hearth, who suck the blood of men and make their children anemic; *women who are bestially amorous, and destroy the power of renewal that resides in Desire!*¹⁵

The woman who stifles man’s creativity by chaining him to the hearth is the object of as much scorn for de Saint-Point as it was for Marinetti. Here, though, we see that her concern is not just for the man whom she “domesticates,” but for the children as well. She advocates action and dynamism for male children, and criticizes mothers who shield their daughters from love.

Women make their children “anemic” by holding them back from action and adventure. By allowing her children the freedom of adventure, de Saint-Point’s woman would avoid becoming the object of the Futurists’ scorn; she would become a facilitator of her husband’s and children’s creativity rather than an impediment to it.

¹⁵Ibid., 164. “Assez des femmes dont les soldats doivent redouter ‘les bras en fleurs tressés sur leurs genoux au matin du départ;’ des femmes gardes-malades qui perpétuent les faiblesses et les vieilleses, qui domestiquent les hommes pour leurs plaisirs personnels ou leurs besoins matériels!...Assez des femmes qui ne font des enfants que pour elles, les gardant de tout danger, de tout aventure, c’est-à-dire de toute-joie; qui disputent leur fille à l’amour et leur fils à la guerre!...Assez des femmes, pieuvres des foyers, dont les tentacules épuisent le sang des homes et anémient les enfants; *des femmes bestialement amoureuses qui, du Désir, épuisent jusqu’à la force de se renouveler!* ; Ibid., 9-10. Translation modified.

It is important to distinguish de Saint-Point's manifesto as distinctly Futurist and not feminist. In her "Manifesto of the Futurist woman she argues that "*women should not be granted those rights claimed by Feminism. Granting them these rights would not produce any of the disorder hoped for by the Futurists, but would cause, instead, an excess of order.*"¹⁶ Granting women rights specific to their sex, according to de Saint-Point, would anesthetize them, placate them, and render them ineffectual. According to the founding manifesto, "except in struggle, there is no more beauty."¹⁷ For de Saint-Point female power comes from struggle. She argues that for men and women the continual struggle towards the future would be undermined if women merely accepted the rights granted to them by men. She also implies that equal rights for women would do little to destroy hundreds of years of male domination, and that what the female Futurists desire is something far more significant than simply the right to vote. The Futurist woman desires an entirely new approach to the feminine, something not something easily achieved because it would require a complete reconception of gender.

I observed in Chapter One that the Futurists considered violence and war as creative, generative enterprises. To the elaboration of this theme, de Saint-Point's manifesto on lust makes an interesting contribution. While *Mafarka* advocated the forgoing of sexual pleasure for the higher calling of war, de Saint-Point's text asserted that lust was an essential force binding together both violence and procreation. Re argues that "desire is thus a 'force,' a potentially devastating energy, and is connected to fantasies of both violence and war – the ultimate discharge of libidinal energies."¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid.; "*Il ne faut donner à la femme aucun des droits réclamés par les féministes. Les lui accorder n'amènerait aucun des désordres souhaités par les Futuristes, mais, au contraire un excès d'ordre.*"; Ibid., 12

¹⁷ Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," 21.; "Il n'y a plus de beauté dans la lutte."; "Marinetti, Le Premier Manifeste du Futurisme," 47.

¹⁸Re, "Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo," 42.

Lust, then, was a fundamental category for de Saint-Point. She conceived its free expression as essential to the health of both sexes, and as a key to the Futurist refashioning of the universe, a project to which she sometimes added a racist dimension. “Lust,” she maintained, “is not, any more than pride, a mortal sin for the race that is strong.” Opposing lust to sentimentality, she continued, “*We must stop despising desire*, attraction at once delicate and brutal between two bodies, of whatever sex, two bodies that want each other, striving for unity. We must stop despising Desire, disguising it in the pitiful clothes of old and sterile sentimentality.”¹⁹ In the “Futurist Manifesto of Lust,” lust in intercourse, as argued by de Saint-Point is an essential element of life.

De Saint-Point’s manifesto on lust was symptomatic of the early Futurists’ willingness to experiment with sex and gender. We have already seen how in crafting his fantasy of male parthogenesis, Marinetti challenged traditional gender norms (albeit in a misogynistic way) while also unwittingly raising a host of issues pertaining to how male heterosexuality is maintained if men no longer need to have sexual intercourse with women in order to procreate. But *Mafarka* was only the first Futurist text to feature issues of gender and sexuality. One critic, Emma van Ness, argued that the appearance of sexually provocative articles like Travolato’s “*Elogio della Prostituzione*” from 1913 illustrated the lengths to which the Futurists would go to overturn traditional gender roles. This text, which praises the prostitute, contains not only sexual implications, but moral ones as well, upholding the figure of the prostitute as a representation of sexual freedom. Nevertheless, experimentation with the moral boundaries of sexuality within the

¹⁹De Saint Point, “Futurist Manifesto of Lust,” 168. “*Qu’on cesse de bafouer le Désir*, cette attirance à la fois subtile et brutale de deux chairs quels que soient leurs sexes, de deux chairs qui se veulent, tendant vers l’unité. Qu’on cesse de bafouer le Désir, en le déguisant sous la défroque lamentable et pitoyable des vieilles et stériles sentimentalités.”; Valentine de Saint-Point, “Manifeste Futuriste de la Luxure,” 20. Interestingly, de Saint-Point’s valorization of lust may have had some unintended consequences, for example the critique by open homosexual Italo Tavolato, whose essay in the Italian literary review *Lacerba* entitled “Elogio della Prostituzione” glorified the prostitute for her unrestrained sexuality. See Re, “Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo,” 42.

Futurist movement was short lived, as the Futurists became associated with the Fascist movement. De Saint-Point's manifestoes thus mark the high point of Futurist engagement with themes such as lust and desire.

De Saint-Point and Futurist Motherhood

De Saint Point applies the same principles of lust and action in her approach to the theme of childbearing. The critic Laura Scuriatti argues, for example, that in de Saint-Point's manifestoes "women's role is still defined by childbearing and sexual potential, but these should cease to be regulated by the myth of love, by the laws of traditional morality, and most of all by marriage."²⁰ Where Marinetti in his novel *Mafarka* imagined a future in which women were no longer needed for procreation (or indeed at all), de Saint-Point argued in her manifestoes for a new approach to marriage and motherhood which was vastly more realistic and prescriptive than that of the movement's founder. Perhaps for this reason, Lucia Re considers de Saint-Point's main contribution to the feminist movement to be her description of the futurist woman as one who is capable of overturning the traditional bourgeois view of women and replacing it with a strong, virile futurist mother who would not be oppressed by the institution of marriage and who would be free to "rule" her children as long as they needed her.²¹ For de Saint-Point the ability to bring life into the world is woman's greatest attribute. For the Futurists more broadly, procreation is a central tenet of their foreshadowing a super race free from the defects of the female sex.

²⁰Scuriatti, "Bodies of Discomfort: Mina Loy, the Futurists, and Feminism in Italy between the Wars, 131.; Scuriatti also applies this argument to Mina Loy's "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman" which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

²¹Re, "Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo," 53.

Whereas Marinetti's solution to this problem of eliminating feminine characteristics was to do away with the feminine altogether in procreation, de Saint-Point was not ready to hand over what is woman's greatest virtue to men. She proposes instead an entirely new approach to motherhood. Re argues that:

although Valentine...recognizes maternity as an essential feature of womanhood, she is far from any sentimental vision of the maternal as inherently non-violent. On the contrary, procreation is yet another extreme act, for the life of the children is destined to be sacrificed in the carnage of war.²²

The idea that children are created to be sacrificed in war is one example of the proto-fascist elements of Futurism, which emphasized the role of women as mothers of the State. For de Saint-Point the creative potential of the Futurist female is even more potent than that of the Futurist male. Marinetti's fantasy of male (pro)creation was largely literary, and certainly not founded in any physical possibility. In contrast, de Saint-Point proposed a new, dynamic approach to motherhood. Her model applied to women who desired to mobilize Futurist characteristics and the Futurist worldview.

It should be noted that de Saint-Point's Futurist approach to childbearing and marriage entailed her own rejection of these traditional female roles.²³ Lucia Re points out that "to reject this bourgeois feminine ideal, Valentine de Saint-Point, while pointedly refusing to become a wife and mother, constructed the image of a strong woman that took the notion of maternity and of the female body to radical, provocative extremes."²⁴ In her reconceptualizing the role of the mother, de Saint-Point appropriated numerous Futurist characteristics, such as virility, power,

²²Ibid., 54.

²³Though not completely. Later in her life, long after parting with the Futurist movement, de Saint-Point did settle down and marry in Egypt, Ironically converting to Islam, a faith not known for its openness to the transgression of normative gender roles.

²⁴Re, "Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo," 39.

and creativity for the act of childbearing. Like Marinetti, she advanced a concept of “superhuman.” However, she refused to concede that procreation can take place without a female mother. Instead, her compromise is for women to appropriate male characteristics, which would then be passed on to the children by mothers who were to nurture both feminine and masculine characteristics in their children, in keeping with the notion that the heroic individual is a “complete being.” De Saint-Point’s example of Caterina Sforza illustrates how the Futurist superwoman, while maintaining her feminine qualities, also possesses masculine ones as well. Sforza’s hyper virility is not only displayed, but wielded like a weapon against her enemies, as she flaunts her ability to bear more children if hers need to be sacrificed in war.

Sex and Gender

These questions of feminine versus masculine, or male versus female, lend themselves to a discussion of gender versus sex in de Saint-Point’s Futurist manifestoes. In *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism: Almost Lost to History* Bentivoglio and Zoccoli argue that:

the only element of independence that counters the words of the movement’s founder is in the thought – and this is the thought that inspires Valentine’s manifesto in its entirety – that femininity and masculinity are the qualities that coexist in every individual, and that it is therefore impossible to divide humanity into men and women. This notion is not new to the epoch, but in this particular context it proved highly effective, striking at the very roots of Futurist machismo.²⁵

De Saint-Point claimed that “a male individual who is virile is nothing but a brute; an individual who is solely feminine is nothing but weakness.”²⁶ According to Re it was de Saint-Point’s strong, masculinized femininity that attracted Marinetti to her. He believed for some time that

²⁵Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism*, 14.

²⁶De Saint-Point, “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman,” 163. “Un individu, exclusivement viril, n’est qu’une brute; un individu, exclusivement féminine, n’est qu’une femelle.” ; De Saint-Point, “Manifeste de la Femme Futuriste,” 8.

“Valentine could embody the new futurist woman.”²⁷ Although welcomed and nurtured by the Futurists, de Saint-Point was not afraid to disagree with them, which she did in relation to Marinetti’s tendency to conflate sex and gender. Her two manifestoes, in fact, were her direct rebuttal to Marinetti’s proclamation in the founding manifesto of “scorn for woman.” Re notes that de Saint-Point denied “that women are naturally ‘by instinct’ wise, peaceful and ‘good,’ thus implicitly rejecting the notion that women are inherently ‘feminine.’”²⁸ As the scholar, Carmen M. Gomez has recently argued,

a woman ‘la donna futurista,’ like all heroes, must possess the qualities inherent to both genders, that is, virile virtues in addition to her feminine ones. The woman who merits the disdain of the Futurists is the woman who has allowed herself to be overwhelmingly dominated by her femininity, a trait that is not necessarily representative of her nature or instinct.”²⁹

This concept of gender is the core of de Saint-Pont’s objections to Marinetti. De Saint-Point created her own model for overturning traditional gender roles inspired by the concept that feminine and masculine qualities transcend sex, and that it is precisely the commingling of these qualities that creates a complete man or woman.

Conclusion

De Saint-Point’s manifestoes succeed in asserting a female as the embodiment of the new modern woman, effectively arguing against Marinetti that the Futurist *superuomo* needs to be a male. De Saint-Point’s ideal Futurist woman adhered to the same rhetoric of strength and virility as Marinetti’s ideal Futurist man. However if we consider Mafarka to be Marinetti’s ideal

²⁷Re, “Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo,” 40.

²⁸Ibid., 52.

²⁹Carmen M. Gomez, “Gender, Science, and the Modern Woman: Futurism’s Strange Concoctions of Femininity,” *Carte Italiane* 2,6 (2010): 155.

Futurist man, it is evident that what de Saint-Point proposed was a much more realistic model for the new century. Lucia Re argues that “the ultimate difference between Valentine and Marinetti is that the ideal futurist hero(ine) for Valentine is neither a man nor a woman, but an altogether new being who would challenge the hegemonic gender codes of the fin-de-siècle and the belle époque, as well as Marinetti’s own misogynistic rhetoric.”³⁰ The method Marinetti employs to create his superman is largely symbolic and ultimately fictional. He desired an ideal Futurist being, free of the defects of the female sex, a giant containing all of the attributes of the superior male sex.

In the end the goals of de Saint-Point and Marinetti are the same. De Saint-Point also wished to create a superhuman free from the defects that predispose humans towards weakness. She does so by advocating that all virtuous characteristics, be they masculine or feminine, can be embodied in either sex. Re concludes that:

Valentine...turns the androgyne into a future-oriented ideal. Her androgyne is neither a hybrid, primordial being split into male and female, nor (as in the romantic version), the primary male essence ‘completed’ by the female essence. Hers is a being (Être) in whom – whatever his or her sex – the power and strength of both masculinity and femininity are combined in an unfixed, constantly (and historically) shifting dynamism.³¹

By combining these characteristics effectively to provide a model for an ideal Futurist human being, free from defects, embodying nothing but the positive attributes of either sex, de Saint-Point succeeds in creating her own version of the superhuman. Her ideal human may be male or female and capable of sustaining humanity in a dynamic, technologically advanced universe of possibilities.

³⁰Re, “Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence, and Feminism From Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo,” 56.

³¹Ibid., 57.

To sum up, de Saint-Point's model for a Futurist superhuman assigned value to the female sex insofar as women were able to appropriate male characteristics. In doing so she explicitly linked female value to masculinity. This represents an elaboration of Marinetti's gender theory that considered female characteristics negative and desired to rid humanity of the feminine altogether (though arguably that project fails, even in *Mafarka*). Mina Loy also mobilized the Futurist worldview in her conception of gender; however her "Feminist Manifesto" argued for a much more dynamic approach to the feminine. Loy attempts to valorize female characteristics in and of themselves, in a theory of gender that is in many ways a complete reversal of Marinetti's belief that all female characteristics were negative. In doing so Loy creates a conception of gender that is groundbreaking not only for the Futurist movement, but for feminist theory as well.

CHAPTER THREE

“Are You Prepared for the Wrench?:” Mina Loy’s Futurist Woman

Where the founding manifesto’s initial proclamation of “scorn for woman” initially left little room for interpretation, Marinetti’s later writings, such as those discussed in chapter one, were marked by a more generous and realistic approach to women. The participation of women in the Futurist movement was likely a contributing factor. As well, the same year that Marinetti wrote the essay, “Marriage and the Family,” (1919) he met the woman, Benedetta Cappa, who would become his wife and the mother of his daughters. The tone towards marriage and women that Marinetti adopted in the text can be interpreted as decidedly pro-feminine, and requires an acknowledgement of the factors in Marinetti’s personal life to which this *volte face* can be attributed.

Marinetti was, in fact, a great lover of women, and one woman who captured Marinetti’s attention was Mina Loy. Though her association with the Futurists was brief, lasting from roughly 1909-1916, she did manage to have an affair with two Futurists, one of them being Marinetti. Loy wrote some of the most thought provoking texts of the Futurist movement. Perhaps the most important, her “Feminist Manifesto” written in 1914, was one of the factors that inspired Marinetti’s increasingly generous approach to women. The criticism faced by Marinetti from de Saint-Point and Loy is reflected in his later writings, as he was forced to clarify his early remarks regarding scorn for woman. Loy’s manifesto will be considered here as a counterpoint to Marinetti’s “Against Amore and Parliamentarianism” and “Marriage and the Family.” As we saw in chapter one, these texts address the status of women in the post-war bourgeois cultural milieu. Both of Marinetti’s texts argued that a radical new approach to the feminine needs to be undertaken. Representative both of their time, and of the Futurist

movement, all three texts provide an invaluable resource for studying early twentieth century intellectual history as well as the beginnings of the feminist movement in Europe. An examination of the “Feminist Manifesto” reveals both a feminist and Futurist influence, as Loy criticized the same traditional bourgeois cultural institutions and gender roles that Marinetti did in his later writings. Like Marinetti she also attacked the institution of marriage, criticized woman’s sentimentality, and commented on the woman’s role in procreation. Though Loy’s association with the Futurist movement lasted only a few years, she masterfully wove its principles of radical rejection of the past with her own distinct feminist perspective.

As one of the many strong female voices of the Futurist movement, Loy contributed to the increasingly feminist perspective on the destruction of the past that the Futurists had advanced. Her “Feminist Manifesto” reveals a certain desperation to achieve an immediate transformation of the way woman was perceived by society and by herself. At times the text echoes the sentiments found in Marinetti and de Saint-Point’s work; however Loy’s brief association and eventual disillusionment with the Futurists propelled her to move her philosophy beyond the restrictions of the profoundly misogynistic elements of Futurism. Her blueprint for a radically different approach to the feminine invoked a warrior mentality associated with Futurism, but valorized women and femininity.

Loy’s Futurist Critique of the Institution of Marriage

Loy criticized the institution of marriage in her “Feminist Manifesto.” Loy framed marriage as an economic contract between a man and a woman through which the man offers financial security in exchange for a woman’s virtue. This mutually beneficial exchange allowed the man to establish his masculinity and virility, and allowed the woman to assert her adulthood

by leaving her parents' home. However, Loy interpreted marriage in sinister terms. "The value of man," she argued, "is assessed entirely according to his use or interest to the community; the value of woman depends entirely on chance – her success or failure in manipulating the man into taking life-long responsibility for her."¹ Consequently, Loy concluded that a woman did not need to achieve any specific characteristics or achievements in order to procure a husband. The only currency the woman could offer was her virtue, for which some men seemed to be willing to pay. The declaration that a woman must "manipulate" a man into marrying her implies a certain degree of cunning on the part of the female, or perhaps ignorance on the part of the male; but in either case marriage is portrayed as a disingenuous façade in which each party uses the other to get what he or she wants. In such a relationship neither the man nor woman benefits spiritually or mentally from the exchange of vows.

As part of her argument, Loy maintains that for women to be emancipated they must reject the oppressive male discourse that had defined not only what it meant to be a woman, but also what was considered feminine. "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not*," she urged. "Seek within yourselves to find out what you *are*." Women, she continued, had limited options: "As conditions are at present constituted you have the choice between Parasitism, Prostitution, or Negation."² Of the three roles available to women, the parasite and prostitute retain some sense of action or autonomy on the part of women – albeit within a patriarchal framework. A parasite is a woman who takes what she needs from the man without offering anything in return. The third characterization, negation, is perhaps the worst of the three. A woman characterized by negation would be one who has failed to secure an advantageous marriage, or even to manipulate her sexuality in order to earn a living. A negated

¹Mina Loy, "Feminist Manifesto" in Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), 270.

²*Ibid.*, 269.

woman, a woman with no husband or employment, who never left her family home, not only has no emotional or spiritual identity, but no legal identity as well, since at this time in Italy, where Loy was living when she wrote the “Feminist Manifesto,” women were had limited rights. Loy urged women to reject these male-defined and restrictive roles.

While Loy believed that marriage was detrimental to both parties, she thought that it was more so for the woman. Although a woman who was able to manipulate her way into a financially desirable marriage theoretically did not have anything to worry about, since she would be taken care of for the rest of her life, such a situation was ultimately pernicious because it allowed her to maintain the status quo of stoic complacency regarding her own place in the world. She need not strive for personal improvement or growth, and could forego an education or employment. Loy asserted that “the advantages of marriage are too ridiculously ample compared to all other trades, for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man without returning anything – even offspring – as an offering of thanks for her virginity.”³ The “ridiculously ample” advantages of marriage are such that, even if a woman were to choose education and employment over marriage, she would never be as financially secure as she would be if she were she to marry well. In the traditional concept of marriage, feminine virtue is currency; it is so highly valued at this time that it can essentially be sold to the highest bidder without even so much as a requirement to produce offspring. That marriage could provide so much for so little was anathema to Loy, who, as we shall see, put great emphasis on women’ roles as mothers. Indeed she believed that women had a “race responsibility” to reproduce.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Loy's concern for women's "race responsibility" in fact led her to prioritize procreation over marriage. Unmarried women, she argued, should be allowed to be mothers without being stigmatized. In turn of the century Italian bourgeois society, an unmarried mother would have forfeited her only currency, her virtue, and theoretically would have lost her value as a human being. Against this norm, Loy insisted that "every woman has a right to maternity," including those who, not having struck the "advantageous bargain" of marriage, find themselves "debarred from maternity" and thus "prohibited from any but the most surreptitious reaction to life-stimuli."⁵ Loy's view that unmarried mothers have a right to maternity was bold and runs counter to Marinetti's male-centered reproductive fantasy, which used the trope of male parthogenesis to reimagine gender roles. As we have seen in chapter one, however, Marinetti's view of procreation was a completely unrealistic fantasy of male reproductive autarky that could never be actualized. Since this view of procreation was biologically impossible, it opened the door for critics such as Loy to posit reproductive scenarios that were more achievable than those offered by male Futurists.

As it was for Marinetti, the figure of the sentimental woman was, for Loy, closely connected to the institution of marriage, and thus an object of scorn. In fact, Loy stated that "Woman must destroy in herself the desire to be loved,"⁶ In doing this they might free themselves from the illusion that a happy marriage is all that is needed to be successful. By becoming unsentimental and forgoing love as their ultimate goal, women, Loy believed, would develop a whole new set of goals. The belief that women could subsist on love alone precluded them from seeking any other kind of intellectual, spiritual, or artistic fulfillment. There was no question for Loy that women were capable of achieving great things, and as a result she did not

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 271.

spend any time in the manifesto arguing that women possess equal capabilities to men – this position was self evident to her. She focused her critique on the patriarchal institutions that oppressed women, leading them to believe that all they need out of life is love.

The Sexually Autonomous Female of the “Futurist Manifesto”

In keeping with the Futurists’ desire to reject the past, Loy challenged bourgeois ideas on gender and sexuality in a number of ways. In what was perhaps her most radical proposal, she called for all women to have their hymens removed, thereby eliminating in one fell swoop the traditional notion of virginity as the defining measure of a woman’s virtue or value. In a revealing passage, she states:

The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity is too easy a standby. It renders her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value. Therefore, the first self-enforced law for the female sex, as protection against the manmade bogey of virtue (which is the principle instrument of her subjugation) is the *unconditional surgical destruction of virginity* throughout the female population at puberty.⁷

By automatically de-virginizing women at puberty, Loy concludes that it is possible to destroy the power that men have over women’s sexuality, as well as women’s own tendency to exchange their virtue (historically identified with virginity) for the financial security of marriage. Without her virtue/virginity to trade, Loy argues that women would have to find some other way to increase their value, which she terms the “acquisition of intrinsic merits of character.” In acquiring and developing virtuous characteristics unconnected with their sexual behaviour, women would be able to assert their intrinsic value as individuals.

⁷Ibid., 270.

Loy's call for the destruction of virginity as a measure of female value went hand in hand with her proposal to destigmatize sexuality, and especially female sexuality, which had traditionally been connected to impurity. She argues that "another great illusion that woman must use all her introspection, innate clear-sightedness, and unbiased bravery to destroy is the impurity of sex – for the sake of her self-respect."⁸ With these words, Loy imagines a world in which women could freely express their sexuality without losing their self-respect. Such sexual independence, moreover, would ultimately lead to greater harmony between the sexes. "Men and women," she writes, "are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited – at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the other's sexual dependence."⁹ Finally, in this scenario, sex would lose many of the cultural meanings historically attached to it: "Honor, grief, sentimentality, pride, and consequently jealousy must be detached from sex," she writes, echoing the calls of both Marinetti and de Saint-Point to separate sex from love (defined as sentimentality).

It is impossible for Loy to discuss sex and sexuality to this degree without addressing reproduction, but her stance on this topic also demonstrates her adherence to many of the main principles of the Futurist movement. For all of her progressive notions about freeing women from the shackles of traditional conceptions of female sexuality, Loy's stance on reproduction is, for lack of a better term, fascist, since she places so much emphasis on racial purity. For example, she states that "every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility by producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex."¹⁰

⁸Ibid., 271.

⁹Ibid., 269.

¹⁰Ibid.

Loy's views are consistent with eugenics ideas popular at this time. Believing that intelligence was a genetically inherited trait, Loy envisions a society organized by race – divided between those of superior intelligence and the unfit and degenerate. But the racial structure of society was, in Loy's view, potentially at risk if “unfit or degenerate members of her sex” reproduced at a greater rate than those “women of superior intelligence,” hence her injunction for “women of superior intelligence” to produce children “in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex. Loy's support for the concept of a superior race is consistent with the much earlier expressions of the desire for a superhuman race, as we have seen in Marinetti's *Mafarka*. But in aligning herself with the Futurists' eugenic ideas Loy undermines her plea for the emancipation of woman which called for the severing of the tie between sex and emotion, and by disrupting the sexual economy between woman and men by devaluing virginity. In her views of motherhood, Loy re-introduces the idea that woman has a responsibility to a greater good – the perpetuation of the species – and, therefore, must subordinate her sexual autonomy. In effect, patriarchal values are reconfigured in Loy's Futurist view of motherhood. In addition Loy contradicts her belief that every woman has the right to maternity. This is a far cry from the valuation of the female sex that Loy articulates throughout this manifesto, a reorientation of priorities that lead, for example, the critic Aimee L. Pozorski to label Loy “Eugenicist Mistress and Ethnic Mother.”¹¹

Just as Marinetti throughout his various manifestoes and essays valorizes the role of the man in procreation, Loy valorizes the role of the female. Not content to portray women as merely reproductive vessels, Loy sees them as essential to reproducing and raising children.

¹¹Aimee L. Pozorski, “Eugenicist Mistress and Ethnic Mother: Mina Loy and Futurism, 1913-1917,” *Melus* 30,3. Fall 2005.

Here Loy mirrors de Saint-Point who emphasized the creative role that women play in the perpetuation of the species. Loy states that:

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life and not necessarily of a possibly irksome and outworn continuance of an alliance that is spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but which becomes unbalanced as the parties of that alliance follow the individual lines of their personal evolution.¹²

Here, once again we see Loy not only admonishing the institution of marriage and dismissing it as a necessary element of procreation, but also advocating an approach to motherhood that emphasizes the fitness of the woman for raising children. For Loy, a woman is not fit to be a mother simply by virtue of the fact that she is a woman. In order to achieve the perfection of the species, it is necessary for mothers to improve themselves so that they may pass on their desirable traits to their offspring. What is especially interesting in Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" is that there is no mention whatsoever of the male's role in procreation. This is a departure from the Futurist line of thinking in which the man's role was fundamental with the woman being considered as little more than a reproductive vessel. Loy reverses this hierarchy, emphasizing woman's role as primary in the conception and development of offspring.

Loy implicitly states that women should demand more from themselves, offering a model of how to become what she terms a "complete woman." She argues that:

The first illusion to demolish is the division of women into two classes: the mistress and the mother. Every well balanced and developed woman knows that no such division exists, that Nature has endowed the Complete Woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions. These are *no restrictions*. The woman who is so completely evolved as to be unselfconscious in sex will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental expansion of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother, an inferior mentality. She will not have the adequate apprehension of LIFE.¹³

¹²Loy, "Feminist Manifesto," 271.

¹³Ibid., 270.

The concept of a complete woman created by nature, capable of “expressing herself through all her functions” presents a new model of woman who is as fully developed as her male counterpart. The controversial claim that “a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother” destroys the barrier between the designations “mistress” and “mother,” and creates a space in which the woman is free to create herself combining all aspects of her personality.

Loy’s model for the self-defining woman invokes the notion that that woman should not be defined by what she lacks, but rather by what she makes of herself. In some sense, her writings anticipate Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, a founding feminist text which emphasized women’s power to create themselves as autonomous beings.¹⁴ Unlike de Beauvoir, however, Loy insists that there are certain valuable characteristics that women inherently possess, regardless of their relationship to men. “Woman,” she says “must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance, combined with indomitable will, irreducible courage, abundant health, and sound nerves.”¹⁵ By describing woman as willful, courageous, strong, and rational Loy refers to the dominant characteristics associated with the male sex. She does not, however, argue that women should adopt these characteristics, but rather that they should retain them. This description of women indicates that these characteristics exist in the female sex naturally, and merely need to be acknowledged and utilized by women. Even the argument that women possess these character traits naturally is a radical departure from the traditional view of femininity which defines femininity in restrictive terms.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

¹⁵Loy, “Feminist Manifesto,” 271.

Loy's Complete Female

This portrayal of the ideal woman in Loy's "Feminists Manifesto" drastically strays not only from Marinetti and the Futurists, but also from the earlier manifestoes written by Valentine de Saint-Point. Whereas de Saint-Point argued that both male and female characteristics are present in each sex, Loy maintained that a woman need not appropriate masculine characteristics to achieve the autonomy that men enjoyed. In fact, she contends the opposite: for Loy there are many virtues that constitute the feminine and that need to be preserved intact, such as the woman's role as a mother, and the nurturing characteristics that are associated with motherhood. Whereas de Saint-Point's valuation of the female sex depended on women being virile, Loy contends that females are strong, capable, and moreover that these traits are not incompatible with femininity.

It is useful here to situate Loy's views in their historical context. In 1914 when this manifesto was written, the role of women was undergoing a drastic shift as Italy entered for the First World War. Though the increasing presence of women in the workforce would lead to an increased valuation of women's contribution to society, it was understood that once the war was over they should return to their rightful place in the home and to their roles as wives and mothers. While many women seemed satisfied with their new role in public and civic life, Loy believed that women could accomplish more. She declares to women:

Professional and commercial careers are opening up for you. *Is that all you want?* If you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice, be brave and deny at the outset that pathetic clap-trap warcry, "Woman is the equal of man.

She is *not*.

For the man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is a protectorate of the feminine element is no longer masculine. The woman who adapts herself to a theoretical valuation of her sex as a *relative impersonality* is not yet feminine.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., 269.

Loy refuses to see the opportunistic movement of women into the workforce as success. Loy regards the new rhetoric “Woman is the equal of man” as a “pathetic clap-trap” warcry, necessitated by men leaving their jobs to go to war rather than a genuine push for equality between men and women. This new equality discourse is based on a “theoretical valuation” of their sex, which is a far cry from an actual valuation. By settling for the theoretical valuation Loy argues that the woman has not yet become feminine. By asking of women “*is that all you want?*” she is imploring women to take advantage of whatever gains their foray into the workforce has granted them, and to demand more. Throughout this manifesto Loy demands more of women, and demands that they demand more from themselves. In fact she proposes a radical new model for women to define their role in society on their own terms, irrespective men, and without renouncing their feminine specificity. In making this demand, Loy requires the destruction of the patriarchal oppressive institutions which have limited women’s choices to parasitism, prostitution, or negation. By advocating the complete destruction of all societal impediments to woman’s growth Loy places herself at the forefront of the feminist movement emerging across Europe and North America. Her assertion that women have the right to whatever they choose, be it career, motherhood, or both created a paradigm for the modern woman that has evolved over the course of the twentieth century.

Feminism and the Destruction of the Past

Loy begins her manifesto by claiming “The Feminist Movement as instituted at present is INADEQUATE.”¹⁷ She continues:

¹⁷Ibid.

Women, if you want to realize yourselves (for you are on the brink of a devastating psychological upheaval) all your pet illusions must be unmasked. The lies of centuries have got to be discarded. Are you prepared for the WRENCH?

There is no half measure, no scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition. Nothing short of Absolute Demolition will bring about reform. So cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades, and uniform education. You are glossing over REALITY.¹⁸

Loy advocates the necessity of the complete destruction, or “Absolute Demolition” of not some, but all of the institutions, values, beliefs, and customs of a society that have oppressed and repressed women throughout history. In doing so she is appropriating a Futurist approach to change that emphasized energy, destruction and dynamism. For Loy, the feminist movement required more than female suffrage, or any other tangibles that could be granted by law. Rather she strikes to the core of how the female, and the feminine is perceived, and provides a new model for women to aspire to that allows them to develop their own intrinsic qualities. As women began to constitute more of the workforce they were increasingly viewed as capable and competent workers, which corresponded to them being viewed as capable and competent people. The advantages that followed as women asserted their position in society cannot simply be attributed to circumstance provided by the war. They were also due to the emergence of avant-garde intellectual and artistic movements that urged individuals to examine their place in a rapidly changing culture, which had especially profound implications for women.

Conclusion

Besides constituting a Futurist text in its theme and approach, the “Feminist Manifesto” also appropriates Futurist form, language and syntax. The second point of the founding manifesto of Futurism states that “courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our

¹⁸Ibid.

poetry.”¹⁹ Loy’s adherence to the founding principles of Futurism allows us to consider her manifesto as one of the key texts of the movement. However, her radically feminist approach to her subject matter propels her beyond Futurism. By combining the essential elements of Futurist form and language with her own unique brand of feminism, Loy posed a clear challenge to traditional bourgeois conceptions of gender and sexuality as well as to the norms that had traditionally regulated marriage and procreation, and the Futurists’ view of gender. Though her vision for women contained elements that we would now consider racist or essentialist, it was nonetheless radical and original both for how it challenged bourgeois norms and for how it managed to valorize women’s strength and autonomy without coding those traits as masculine. In that way, Loy’s vision extended the Futurist project while also departing from Marinetti and de Saint-Point because she reimagined gender and sexuality in the distinctive ways.

¹⁹F.T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Futurist Manifestoes* Umberto Appolonio, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973),21. “Les éléments essentiels de notre poésie seront le courage, l’audace et la révolte.

CONCLUSION

By undertaking an examination of the Futurist founding principle “scorn for woman” through a variety of sources, it is possible to reconsider the characterization of the movement as simply misogynistic and anti-feminine. Instead, Marinetti’s own elaboration of the concepts of woman and femininity in his later writings, as well as the critiques mounted by the female Futurists, instead reveal that the founding principles of Futurism provided a framework for a new twentieth-century approach to place of women in society. Because the Futurists focused on the destruction of the past as its main goal, it was perhaps logical that they also called for an end to the traditional bourgeois approach to gender and sexuality. I have argued, however, that it was the inclusion of women in the Futurist movement that provided the perspective necessary in formulating a new approach to the feminine. The manifestoes of Valentine de Saint-Point and Mina Loy provided essential counterpoints to Marinetti’s gender theory which, even though it eventually accepted the value of women, still maintained an emphasis on the valorization of male characteristics.

The main issue with Marinetti’s approach to gender as portrayed in his novel *Mafarka the Futurist* was that it proved impossible for numerous reasons to eliminate the feminine completely. Despite Marinetti’s belief that the product of one man reproducing is desirable to the product of the muddling of the sexes, this is simply not a biological possibility, and therefore must be dismissed as a plausible model. Furthermore, the elimination of women provides an insurmountable obstacle whereby masculinity, insofar as it requires heterosexual expression, is threatened by the absence of women. Marinetti failed to consider the implications of a world without females for male heterosexuality. Lastly, in creating a male mother in *Mafarka*, Marinetti’s is forced to concede that certain female characteristics are inextricable from the

creation of life, and woman's sentimental attachment to her offspring is not easily overcome even when transplanted into the male.

Marinetti clarifies his position on women in his essays "Marriage and the Family" and "Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism," perhaps as a result of the criticisms mounted by de Saint-Point and Loy. He eventually accepts the fact that it is not woman's inherent lack, but rather the characteristics ascribed to her by a decadent bourgeois society, that accounts for her weakness. As a result, Marinetti reorients his criticism to take aim at marriage and government as the institutions responsible for the oppression of women. Marinetti's acknowledgement that there is nothing inherently less valuable in the female sex is an essential turning point not only for Futurist gender theory, but for the overall perception of women's role in European culture. Pervasive throughout all of Marinetti's texts, however, is an overarching emphasis on the primacy of woman's role as a mother, and he urges women to embrace this role as part of their duty as Futurists. Neither de Saint-Point nor Loy contradict Marinetti on this point, although they provided a different, distinctly feminine, perspective on motherhood and reproduction.

Valentine de Saint-Point's manifestoes appropriated the Futurist framework to advance her own approach to gender. Where Marinetti unabashedly glorifies man and all things masculine, de Saint-Point also values masculine characteristics but gives a more complete treatment to their place in female identity. By combining male and female characteristics in individuals of either sex, de Saint-Point posits her theory on the construction of the Futurist superman, inspired by both Marinetti's *Mafarka* and Nietzsche's *übermensch*. In doing so she creates a model that is reminiscent of Mafarka, who adopted the female characteristic of childbearing in an attempt to combine what was considered the one virtue of the female sex with the completely virtuous male. However, it is de Saint-Point's strong, virile female who

represents the possibility of a new Futurist approach to gender which incorporates all of the virtuous characteristics in each of the sexes. Mina Loy's approach to gender is also profoundly Futurist; however, her understanding of virtuous characteristics is situated squarely within the female, making no apologies for her sex's ability to attain superhuman status without combining what were thought of as traditionally masculine and feminine virtues.

Eugenicist elements aside, Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" is arguably the most controversial of the works discussed because her theory of gender argues for the inherent value of the female sex regardless of women's relationship to men. Whereas de Saint-Point maintained that it was the presence of both female and male characteristics in one person that created a superhuman, Loy considers a woman to be a complete being in and of herself. This approach to the valuation of the female sex represents a profound leap forward in the conception of gender from either Marinetti or de Saint-Point. Loy's manifesto also inhabits an essential place within early feminism. Mindful of the changes that were happening throughout society, as women began to enter the workforce, Loy maintained a critical eye, emphasizing that it was not enough for women to be granted increased status in society, they needed to demand it. This violent and dynamic approach to change is what characterizes Loy as a Futurist, despite the fact that she was only associated briefly with the movement.

Over a very short period, only 1909-1914, Marinetti's first conception of gender as "scorn for woman" is completely reversed. On one end of the spectrum Marinetti's novel *Mafarka* creates a fantasy whereby the dreaded female and all of the characteristics associated with it are either appropriated by men or eliminated. Through parthenogenesis men can pass on all of their virtuous characteristics to their offspring that they are able to create through will alone, creating a perfect race of supermen. In the middle of the spectrum, Valentine de Saint-

Point's more pragmatic approach to gender argues that it is already possible to create superhumans by acknowledging the existence of masculine and feminine characteristics in each of the sexes. Women will be able to approach their reproductive capabilities as the manifestation of their own powerful virility, uniquely feminine, and Futurist; women will be able to harness their creative powers for the perfection of humanity. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Mina Loy reverses Marinetti's conception of a world without females, arguing that every woman has the right to maternity and, that every woman has the right to be a mother regardless of whether or not she is a wife. Her violent declaration that a female is a complete being, discarding her relation to men as passéist and oppressive, highlights her belief that there is nothing lacking in the female sex and that all accusations of lack are the result of an oppressive male-dominated society. If one takes into account these three gender theories proposed by Marinetti, de Saint-Point and Loy, with the knowledge of the women's liberation movements that would dominate the twentieth century, one must conclude that it was the women who were truly Futurists.

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