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**AVANT-GARDE ITALIAN DRAMA: FUTURISTS, "I GROTTESCHI," AND
PIRANDELLO**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1983

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FUTURISTS, I GROTTESCHI,
AND PIRANDELLO

by
GEORGIANA O'KEEFE BAZZONI

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Theatre in
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ments for the degree of Doctor of
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New York.

1983

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

AVANT-GARDE ITALIAN DRAMA:

FUTURISTS, I GROTTESCHI,

AND PIRANDELLO

by

GEORGIANA O'KEEFE BAZZONI

Adviser: Professor Charles Gattnig

This paper studies Futurism, the Theatre of the Grotesque, and Pirandello as important examples of experimentation and innovation in Italy during the period 1915-1925. Though Pirandello is recognized as the major figure in the Italian avant-garde drama of this period, this study documents important correlations between his work and the work of the Futurists and i grotteschi. Fifteen full-length plays and over twenty-five sintesi are discussed together with several Futurist manifestoes. A close study of these representative plays is used in order to demonstrate similar characteristics in the kinds and treatment of character, the use of a synco-pated structure, and the deliberate attempt to give the audience a more active performance role.

Characters in these plays are frequently seen as types, rather than individuals, as puppets whose actions are feeble

and without effect, or easily manipulated by others. Often, the plays use one character as the author's voice, or io epico, allowing such characters to directly influence the stage action while commenting upon it. Two groups of characters--those who "pull the strings" and those "being animated"--are assigned descriptive names in this study in order to more clearly define them. The animators are called (1) "watchers," (2) "puppet masters," and (3) "testifiers." Those being animated are referred to as (1) puppets and puppet-like characters; (2) split personalities; (3) repertory regulars; and (4) machines, objects, and ambiances.

Syncopation is a hallmark of the modern rhythm of these plays. The effect of syncopation is produced by the consistent use of several structural elements in combination. These elements are: (1) simultaneity and dynamism; (2) contraction/compression of story line; (3) alternating tight and multiple focus; (4) deliberately interrupted and confused plot line; and (5) a preference for endings which are ambiguous, absurd, or unresolved and which are not satisfied by any definitive interpretation.

Finally, a deliberate theatricality in the plays is used to destroy the fourth wall convention and invite the audience to participate in a new way. By addressing the audience, using actor/spectators, and capitalizing on the element of surprise, the playwright demands that the audience become part of the action.

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During the preparation of this study, many people have given generously of their time and assistance. For their patience and help during the years that the work has been in progress, I would like to thank the members of my committee: Professors Charles Gattnig, Daniel Gerould, and Stanley Warren. Professor Gattnig, as principal advisor on the paper, has been particularly patient and persistent in his efforts to help me arrive at a more solid notion of form for this paper. Professor Gerould, whose contagious enthusiasm for modern European drama is fondly remembered, has been a source of inspiration as a teacher and scholar. Professor Warren, former Executive Officer of the Theatre Program and current Vice President and Provost, continues to be a steady source of encouragement.

I am also indebted to two colleagues in the Theatre program, Rosemary Weiss and Virginia Woods, whose continued support, both moral and intellectual, has always been graciously extended. My special thanks go to Professor Mimi D'Aponte for her friendship over the last few years. Her very sensible ability to balance scholarship with family life continues to encourage me to believe that things can be accomplished despite the claim of a variety of roles and responsibilities.

Most importantly, I would like to thank all the members of my family. Their support has come in ways far too numerous to mention in detail. I'd like, though, to especially thank my mother for many years of example, encouragement, and inspiration, as well as for seven years of faithful babysitting. And finally, I extend my grateful thanks to my husband, Enrico, for his patience, understanding, support, and belief that it could, at last, be done.

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INTRODUCTION

The years 1910 to 1925 mark a particularly active period of international artistic experimentation. New approaches to literature, art, and theatre resulted in a dazzling parade of movements which espoused viewpoints about the nature of art that were new and daring. The members of those movements, Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists, Expressionists, and Surrealists, clashed in many respects, but they were alike in their questioning of past values and in their insistence upon the need for new ways of "perception and expression."¹

Some artists began to experiment with new methods of organization. No longer were objects in a painting to be seen from one specific viewpoint but rather from several different ones simultaneously. New poems, narratives, and plays often abandoned a cause-and-effect order, substituting random arrangements. In both painting and writing, many artists demanded that the spectator or reader interpret their work in a new and unique way. Content, too, was expanded to include new subjects, such as machines, or old subjects in "new" ways, such as faces or objects split into disassembled fragments.

¹Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Findlay, Century of Innovation (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 265.

Experimental art in all areas did violence to the "rules" of the past by combining disparate and even contradictory elements, treating time and space in non-linear, simultaneous, and multiple fragments, and emphasizing idea over character or situation. In drama, dialogue frequently was reduced to abrupt and passionless utterances or even eliminated totally while characters became emblematic types or puppets in an attempt to de-emphasize the psychological and physiological underpinnings of realism and naturalism. A very early example of such innovative experimentation, which predates the period under discussion, can be observed in Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi (King Ubu), produced in 1896.

This paper studies Italian drama during the years 1915-1925. During this period, a "new theatre" emerged in Italy which challenged traditional ways of writing, producing, and perceiving theatre. The term "new theatre" refers to three different examples of experimental Italian drama and theatre: Marinetti and the Futurists, the Theatre of the Grotesque, and Luigi Pirandello.

In 1915, F. T. Marinetti and the Futurists concentrated their activities very specifically on the theatre for a dual purpose: both to influence the public with pro-war propagandistic pieces (Italy was to enter the war during 1915) and to change traditional theatre practice by introducing their own innovations. In 1916, La maschera

e il volto (The Mask and the Face) by Luigi Chiarelli signalled the beginnings of the "Theatre of the Grotesque," the name given to plays and playwrights who combined conventional elements with strange and even bizarre ingredients which produced a deliberately unsettling effect. Beginning in 1916, Luigi Pirandello increasingly turned to writing drama rather than narrative, which had previously been his major genre. Between 1916 and 1924, seventeen plays by Pirandello were written and performed, some of which are classified as "grotesques." (By comparison, only five plays by Pirandello were either written or published by 1915, while eight collections of poetry, ten collected short stories, and six novels, in addition to numerous essays had been published prior to 1915.)

The purpose of the paper is to study these three important examples of experimentation and innovation in Italian theatre: Futurism, the "Theatre of the Grotesque," and Pirandello, in order to identify correspondences and correlations in their works. While many characteristics are unique to the particular group or individual playwrights, many similar characteristics can be defined in common for the subjects of this study which demonstrate their participation, whether collective or individual, in the international revolution in art which took place during the period 1910-1925.

Very little has been published which treats all three subjects together in any detail, although many published works treat one or another of the subjects individually. An examination of the relevant literature in both Italian and English reveals only one work which examines all of the subjects of this study with near-equal attention. This is Gigi Livio's book, Il teatro in rivolta: Futurismo, grottesco, Pirandello e pirandellismo (Milan: Mursia, 1976). Livio's book examines these examples of "revolt" against traditional Italian theatre in an attempt to show how closely most of the playwrights remained to the typical themes (especially adultery) and characters of middle-class drama, and how often they turned to solutions which were typical of that drama. Because of the narrowness of Livio's approach to the subject, few plays are examined in depth. A very brief magazine article in Sipario (December, 1967) by Giovanni Calendoli discusses links between Futurists, grotteschi, and Pirandello, but its brevity allows only an outline of possible connections between the groups. Both of these works are in Italian; in English, there is no published study which discusses all three groups.

Critical works on Futurism have principally studied poetry, painting, and sculpture rather than theatre.

Exceptions are Mario Verdone's Teatro del tempo futurista (Rome: Lerici, 1969) and Cinema e letteratura futurista (Rome: Bianco e Nero, 1968); Luciano De Maria's Introduction to Marinetti e il futurismo (Milan: Mondadori, 1973) and his Introduction to F. T. Marinetti, Teoria e invenzione futurista (Milan: Mondadori, 1969); and Giovanni Calendoli's Introduction to Marinetti's collected plays, Teatro F. T. Marinetti (Rome: Vito Bianco Ed., 1960). In English, Michael Kirby's work, Futurist Performance (New York: E. P. Dutton & Sons, 1971) and Christine J. Taylor's Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1979) emphasize performance aspects rather than give detailed analyses of Futurist drama, while Henning Rischbieter's "Futurism and the Theatre" in Art and the Stage in the Twentieth Century (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1968) treats Futurist stage designs.

While criticism of individual members of the "Theatre of the Grotesque" is available in Italian (for Chiarelli, Rosso di San Secondo, and Massimo Bontempelli, for example), no full-length study exists except the Livio anthology, which contains critical comment. A work by Giovanni Calendoli, La suggestione del 'Grottesco' (Padua: Delta Tre, 1976) includes these playwrights in a general study of the grotesque, but I was unable to examine this work for my study.

The bibliography for Pirandello is, of course, extensive and includes biography as well as criticism in all languages. Published works on Pirandello, however, do not generally attempt a detailed analysis of Pirandello's relationship with either i grotteschi or the Futurists, although they sometimes give passing notice to the interest of such relationships. A 1974 work by Anne Paolucci, Pirandello's Theatre (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press) and a 1980 publication by Olga Ragusa, Pirandello (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) are two recent examples of a general trend to study Pirandello as the only important figure in Italian drama of the period.

While there are dissertations on all three subjects of this study, none examines all three groups together. There are, surprisingly, few dissertations in English on Pirandello, and none deal with his connections to either group in great detail, although at least one includes Pirandello as an example of the grotesque in Italian drama in a study of the international modern trend to the grotesque. Charles Gattnig's dissertation, "Pirandello, Umorismo and Beckett" (Southern Illinois University, 1967) treats Pirandello's association with the grotesque playwrights in a comparison with Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd. Recent dissertations on Pirandello have focused on studies of the plays which emphasize a particular aspect, as, for example, the 1978

dissertation by Kenneth Hodess, "In Search of the Divided Self," (CUNY, 1978) which analyzes certain plays by Pirandello, using psychoanalytic theory; or a 1974 dissertation which examines humor in Pirandello's plays (Roger W. Oliver, "Humor in the Theatre: The Dramatic Art of Luigi Pirandello," Stanford, 1974). On Futurism, both the Kirby and the Taylor books mentioned above were originally dissertations, among the very few which discussed Futurist theatre rather than Futurist art. One dissertation which was devoted entirely to the Theatre of the Grotesque discusses only two of the playwrights, not the entire group, and does not extend the analysis to a relationship with other playwrights of the period.

Pirandello's international reputation and impact, which are amply documented elsewhere, have perhaps obscured the nature and extent of his relationship to the drama of the period in Italy. In this paper, I will attempt to focus upon that relationship to the other experimental dramatists of his time and country.

As indicated in the title, my work concerns the drama rather than the theatre of the period. Therefore, directors, staging techniques, specific productions, and other pertinent data are referred to only marginally, as they appear to be necessary to a more complete exposition of the topic. In the paper, my method has been to concentrate almost entirely on a close study of the playscripts, analyzing them specifically

in regard to their themes, structures, and characters. In addition, I have studied the important new play/performer/audience relationship which Futurist performances and some plays by Pirandello attempted to create.

It is my hope that this paper will add to English-language studies on Italian drama by providing an analysis of these three important phenomena of the period, together, for the first time, in English.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter I outlines the activities of F. T. Marinetti, founder of Futurism, from his early years through 1915, when Futurism began to focus on theatre. In addition to treating Marinetti's early plays, the chapter outlines the major ideas in the original manifesto by Marinetti as well as in other Futurist manifestoes which are concerned directly with theatre or which contain ideas relevant to later Futurist work in theatre.

Chapter II examines two programs of Futurist sintesi, the brief "synthetic" dramas written by Marinetti and others, in an attempt to show the nature of the Futurist assault on the theatre of its time.

Chapter III treats the Theatre of the Grotesque by examining characteristics of the grotesque and by attempting to show how a syncopated structure (like that found in Futurist

painting and sintesi) helps to create a particularly "grotesque" effect in two representative plays.

Chapter IV analyzes several plays by the grotesque playwrights in order to show similar treatment of the raisonneur or author's spokesman, frequent characters in these plays.

Chapter V discusses five additional character types by examining several representative characters from plays by Futurists, grotteschi, and Pirandello.

Chapter VI shows how Futurists and Pirandello treated the audience role in new ways and deliberately planned for the audience to "act" or participate in the action. The Futurist Theatre of Surprise and several plays by Pirandello are examined in this regard.

Chapter VII concludes with an assessment and summary of the subjects and findings of this study.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

The international revolution in art which took place during the years 1910-1925 was reflected in artistic experimentation in Italy as well as in other European countries. The earliest example of major impact in Italy was the work of F. T. Marinetti and the modernist movement he founded called Futurism.¹ This

¹Marinetti's own account of the naming of the new movement is as follows: "My friends, poets Paolo Buzzi, Corrado Govoni, Enrico Cavacchioli, Armando Mazza, Luciano Folgore, helped me search for a password (parola d'ordine). I hesitated for a moment between the words Dynamism and Futurism. My Italian blood raced more quickly when my lips pronounced aloud the word 'Futurism'." This account is given in Guerra sola igiene del mondo, (1915) reprinted in Teoria e invenzione futurista, ed. and with an Introduction by Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), p. 201. This anthology of works by Marinetti is hereinafter referred to as TEIF. All quotations from this and other Italian sources used in this paper are my translations, unless otherwise indicated. English-language writers differ regarding the origins of the name. Joshua C. Taylor asserts, "there is no mystery about its origins . . . in 'Futurism' he [Marinetti] recognized at once the word that would stir the minds of the hopeful young." Futurism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 135. Robert W. Flint expresses doubt: "Whatever its origin (some think it came from Marinetti's secretary, Decio Cinti . . .), the mere word Futurism had an astonishing success." Marinetti: Selected Writings, ed. and with an Introduction by Robert W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 11.

chapter concerns Marinetti's activities in the years prior to Futurism, discusses the period 1909-1915 in regard to Futurist manifestoes and other Futurist events, and gives an account of Marinetti's early plays.

The chapter begins with a brief biography of Marinetti's life and accomplishments before the founding of Futurism, including a discussion of two plays. A chronology of events for the years 1909-1915 shows the wide range of Futurist activities during those years. The chronology is followed by a discussion of several Futurist manifestoes, including the original manifesto, written in 1909. Early Futurist performances, called serate (evenings) are examined, and the chapter concludes with an analysis of Marinetti's sintesi (synthetic drama), Elettricit  sessuale (Sexual Electricity, 1913).

F. T. Marinetti (1876-1944)

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and was educated there by French Jesuits.¹ His father, a lawyer, had moved the family from Italy to seek his fortune in Egypt. By the age of sixteen, the young scholar

¹This biography was compiled from information given in the anthology, Marinetti e il futurismo, ed. and with an Introduction by Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1973), pp. XLI-XLVII. This anthology is hereinafter referred to as MEIF.

had distinguished himself by starting a literary review called Le Papyrus and by being expelled from school, probably because he circulated copies of Emile Zola's novels to fellow students. Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-three, Marinetti studied in Paris, Pavia, and Genoa and finished two degrees, one in literature (Paris, 1894) and the other in law (Genoa, 1899). He took a law degree merely to please his father. In 1900, Marinetti decided to dedicate his life entirely to literature. While completing his studies, he wrote for an Italian/French magazine called Anthologie-Revue and won a poetry contest in Paris with his free-verse poem, "Les Vieux Marins." Once Marinetti had decided on a career in literature rather than law, he pursued his career both in France and Italy. He published his own poetry in several French reviews and helped to promulgate French romantic and symbolist poetry by reciting and giving lectures in theatres in both France and Italy. Marinetti was one of two children. His oldest brother, Leone, died while in his teens, and Marinetti's mother and father passed away by the time the poet was thirty. These unfortunate circumstances made F. T. Marinetti the sole heir of his father's considerable wealth and insured the young poet's independence and ability to experiment with new forms of literature.

In 1905, Marinetti co-founded an international review called Poesia which published an eclectic selection of material, reflecting the sometimes conflicting tastes of Marinetti and his collaborator, Sem Benelli (a D'Annunzian poet and free-verse theorist).¹ In 1906, Marinetti became the sole director of the magazine which was to become "pioneer publisher for early Futurism, including the manifestoes and an anthology."² In his early twenties, Marinetti attended many socialist debates in Milan, and between 1905 and 1908 Marinetti became increasingly active in political action.³

¹Piero Bargellini in Pian dei Giullari (Jesters' Plain), comments that collaborators included "Carduccians, Crepuscularians, D'Annunzians, Realists, Pascolians, and Decadents." (Florence: Vallecchi, 1963), p. 92.

²J. C. Taylor, Futurism, p. 135. In addition to its importance in publishing early Futurist literary efforts, Poesia may have been intended to have political purposes as well. Christine J. Taylor in Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1979), pp. 2-3, comments that Marinetti intended to use Poesia as a voice for nationalism "to expound and articulate his growing frustration and animosity toward the complaisance and compromise of Victor Emmanuel III's administration carried out and described principally in the policies of Giovanni Giolitti, King Emmanuel's chief minister from 1903 to 1914."

³F. T. Marinetti, Teatro, 3 vols., ed. and with an Introduction by Giovanni Calendoli (Rome: Vito Bianco, 1960), 1:XVI. In the Introduction, Calendoli comments that the early political meetings have served as an inspiration for Le Roi Bombance, Marinetti's 1905 play. Calendoli cites Marinetti biographer Walter Vaccari in Vita e tumulti di Marinetti, (Milan: Omina, 1959), p. 133.

Thus, by 1909, in the year the first manifesto of Futurism was published (Le Figaro, Paris, February 20, 1909), Marinetti was a recognized public figure in both France and Italy. A published poet, playwright and novelist, (Le Roi Bombance, Marinetti's second play, was published in 1905; his first novel, Mafarka le Futuriste, was published in 1909), director of a literary review, performer, lecturer, and political activist, Marinetti had accumulated experience in several different areas which would be useful to him in the promotion of Futurism.

In the discussion which follows, we will examine those areas which most concern Marinetti's later work in Futurist theatre: Marinetti's first two plays; his Futurist manifestoes on theatre, art, and music; the Futurist serate (evenings); and the 1909 performance of Marinetti's third play, and its transformation in a 1913 version. A chronology of Futurist activity for the years 1909-1915 is also included.

Marinetti's Early Dramas

Marinetti's first two plays are four-act historical dramas. The first, untitled and undated, is a patriotic romance which takes place in the late fifteenth century. The second, Roi Bombance (King Feast, 1905), is a bizarre and nihilistic satire set in an imaginary kingdom during the Middle Ages.

The untitled work shows romantic tendencies in its use of star-crossed lovers and patriotic actions. There are also elements of symbolism in the attention to evocative atmosphere and sensuality, which is both violent and macabre.¹

Roi Bombance

Roi Bombance, the first theatrical work by Marinetti to be published, was called a "tragic satire" by its author when it was published in Mercure de France in 1905.² When published in Italian, the play was called Re Baldoria. For this paper, the Italian text, as it appears in

¹Calendoli, Introduction to Marinetti's Teatro, 1:VIII. Calendoli dates the play at the beginning of the century or in the late nineties of the last century, p. VI. Calendoli comments that Marinetti revised this early play, as was his practice, but never intended the play to be performed or published. Benedetta Marinetti, the author's widow, translated the play from the original French into Italian for the Calendoli edition, Teatro, 1:281.

²The first production took place in April, 1909, at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris, under the direction of Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë. Marinetti, Teatro, 1:XVII. Marinetti apparently hoped to duplicate the sensation of the first night of Jarry's Ubu Roi, which was produced at Lugné-Poë's in 1896 and caused a memorable riot. The tepid reception which Bombance received (with only a minor riot) was perhaps a reason for Marinetti's abandonment of such large-scale productions until the 1920's. Ibid., p. XIX.

Marinetti's Teatro, was used. Therefore, throughout the discussion which follows, the title and the characters' names will be given in Italian.¹

Hunger is the predominant theme of Re Baldoria, both actual, extreme, physical hunger and spiritual hunger. The kingdom of the Citrulli (Fools) is in crisis at the beginning of the play because of the suicide of Panciarguta (Shrewd Stomach), the chief cook and sustenance of king, courtiers, and kingdom. Panciarguta is mourned by all as irreplaceable for his supreme ability to provide sumptuous feasts for those in power while distracting the king's subjects by various tricks, promises, and threats. The king's vassals march toward the capital in protest, the famished and angry populace is at the gates, and the king himself is starving and helpless. The situation takes a turn for

¹The Italian translation of Roi Bombance, entitled Re Baldoria, was published in 1909. The Italian text appears in Marinetti, Teatro, 2:11-253. This play was given in Rome by an "improvised company" headed by Renato Borraccetti at a new theatre called "Teatro 2000." Neither the play nor the company made a good impression. Critics mocked the bizarre acting style of Borraccetti and company and some found it so unbearable that they were unable to remain for the entire performance. (Silvio d'Amico, influential critic for La Tribuna, for example, left after the second act.) See Cronache del teatro futurista, ed. and with an Introduction by Giovanni Antonucci (Rome: ABETE, 1975), pp. 265-271 for a selection of critical comments. This collection of criticism of Futurist performances is hereinafter referred to as Antonucci, Cronache.

the better when three lowly kitchen workers convince the king to turn over the kitchen to them in order that they may prepare a conciliatory banquet for the arriving vassals and the people outside the palace gates. Instead, they delay, feasting themselves on delicacies they have found while the king and his courtiers finally die of hunger. Their bodies are put in brine and prepared for the banquet that will quiet the tribune Famone (Big Hunger) and Gli Affamati (The Famished), who follow his lead. The day after Re Baldoria is served, stuffed, to the throng, Famone discovers that he has been tricked by the three scoundrels in the kitchen, Torta, Soffione, and Béchamel (Cake, Soufflé, and Cream Sauce). These are led away in chains, tortured, and put aside to be used for future meals.

Not only cannibalism but decomposition and regeneration of the putrified corpses are events in this savage play. From the vile and stagnant Waters of the Past, the corpses of Re Baldoria and the Lords Sogliola (Sole), Triglia (Red Mullet), and others, decompose and are reborn from the stomachs of those who dined on them. A trial is held, presided over by Fra' Trippa (Brother Tripe but with the double meaning of paunch for the word trippa). Re Baldoria recognizes the culinary innovations of the three kitchen boys their use of fine salt and precious vinegar in the brining

process and all the rebels are forgiven. The horrible divinity who rules over this kingdom of hunger, Santa Putredine (Saint Putrefaction), however, begins the terrible process anew by rousing the Affamati and demanding that they eat Re Baldoria and his ministers once again.

Soon you'll eat each other. Then each of you will savor his own flesh finding it delicious! . . . This won't calm your appetites! And you won't have an ounce of happiness. Happiness is elsewhere.¹

Only one character in the play refuses to participate. Vampiro Ptiokarum (Vampire Ptiokarum), son of Santa Putredine, rejects even the delicacy of the Idiot Poet's brains and falls asleep, vomiting blood.

In this brutal, scatological play, which imitates Jarry's more successful Ubu Roi, Marinetti indicts political and religious leadership and demonstrates the impotency of poetry as an alternate ideal. Though the Idiot Poet is the only sympathetic character, his verses and his brains are tiresome and finally ineffectual.

Both of Marinetti's earliest dramas require spectacular productions with many different and elaborate scenes. In Re Baldoria, exotic stage props, costumes, and special effects are also required. Of particular interest is the fourth-act rebirth of Re Baldoria, Fra' Trippa, Anguilla,

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:252-253.

and other royal ministers. Stage directions indicate that certain characters in Act IV are to be represented by "enormous puppets, vaguely resembling gigantic toads, each one containing an actor who plays the part of those who were eaten."¹ After voices of the devoured are heard as if from a distance, Re Baldoria himself emerges first from the gigantic mouth of Famone; then Anguilla, followed by the Idiota, Fra'Trippa, and others are reborn through the mouths of those who ate them.

In his introduction to Marinetti's works for the theatre, Giovanni Calendoli remarks that although there are similarities between Marinetti's pseudo-historical dramas in their use of choral groups and in their ties with symbolism, in Re Baldoria a new element emerges. In the irreverent and straightforward polemic, the impulse toward destruction and bitter satire, Marinetti "becomes instead a rebellious and independent spirit who destroys existing myths in order to pursue new goals."²

In his next play, Marinetti abandons the trappings of the history play and uses the format of middle-class drama. Though apparently conforming to the norm for a

¹Ibid., p. 185.

²Calendoli in Marinetti's Teatro, 1:XIV.

typical play of the type--three-act structure, adultery, ill-fated love, suicide--Poupées Électriques (Electric Puppets, 1909), introduces a very modern twist in its second act.

1909-1915

The years 1909 to 1915 were years of feverish activity for Marinetti and for the growing numbers of those who called themselves Futurists. In an effort to help the reader in understanding the varied nature of those literary, political, and theatrical activities, I have outlined a selective chronology of those years immediately below.¹

1909: Manifesto of Futurism, 20 February, Le Figaro.

Poupées Électriques, published January, La donna è mobile, Italian translation of Poupées Électriques, performed in Turin, January 15.

First Political Manifesto.

Le Roi Bombance, performed at Théâtre de L'Oeuvre in Paris, under direction of Aurélien Lugné-Poë, April.

Mafarka le Futuriste, a novel by Marinetti.

1910: Marinetti meets Boccioni, Russolo, and Carrà, Italian painters.

Futurist serate (evenings) begin: January-March in Trieste, Milan, and Turin.

¹Sources for this chronological table include MEIF, Antonucci, Cronache, Calendoli's Introduction to Marinetti's Teatro, and Futurist Manifestoes, ed. and with an Introduction by Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

Manifesto of Futurist Painters, published February 11, read aloud at Turin in March.

Futurist Painting Technical Manifesto, April 11.

Marinetti's Against Traditionalist Venice manifesto printed on leaflets thrown from the Clock Tower in Venice, on July 8 (manifesto proclaimed aloud by Marinetti).

Marinetti brought to court on charges that his novel, Mafarka le Futuriste, was an outrage against public morals, October.

1911: Marinetti: Futurism, Let's Kill the Moonlight! Second Political Manifesto.

Marinetti: Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists (also titled, The Desire to Be Booed), January.

Balilla Pratella: Manifesto of Futurist Musicians, January.

Technical Manifesto, March.

La Voce, Florentine magazine prints anti-Futurist article. Boccioni, Carrà, Marinetti, Russolo confront Vociani Soffici, Prezzolini, Slataper, and Papini in a café. After a violent discussion which leads to a fistfight, they are all arrested and later come to an understanding of some common viewpoints. They part friends, June.

Marinetti goes to Libya as a war correspondent and Boccioni and Carrà join Severini in Paris to prepare a Futurist exhibition.

1912: Futurist exhibition in Paris, later London, Berlin, Brussels, The Hague, Amsterdam, and Munich. Paintings by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Severini, February to October.

Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, and Severini sign their Preface to the Catalogue of the Exhibitions in Paris, London, Berlin, Brussels, Munich, Hamburg, Vienna, etc., February. First use of word "simultaneity" occurs in this manifesto.

Marinetti publishes an anthology, Futurist Poets, together with a Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature and Reply to Objections, May.

1913: Marinetti: Destruction of Syntax, Imagination Without Strings, Words in Freedom, May 11.

Marinetti: Theatre of Variety Manifesto, November.

Russolo: The Art of Noises (Noise-Art), March.

Lacerba, first issue, January. Under the direction of Papini and Soffici (formerly with La Voce) adheres to Futurism until 1915.

Carrà: Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells, August.

Marinetti, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo: The Futurist Political Program, October.

Elettricità (Electricity) synthetic version of La donna è mobile, on tour throughout Italy, beginning in September in Palermo.

Futurist serate in Rome during February and March.

1914: Marinetti: Visit to Russia during January and February where he holds meetings and conferences in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Lacerba publishes Futurist Manifestoes, January.

Sant'Elia: Futurist Architecture, July 11.

Futurist serate, featuring works by Folgore, Palazzeschi, Soffici, Altomare, D'Alba, Cangiullo, Marinetti, Balla in March, April, and May in Rome and Naples.

Palazzeschi, of Lacerba, breaks with that magazine and with Futurism in a public Declaration, printed by La Voce, April.

Boccioni, Marinetti, Mazza, Piatti, and Russolo stage interventionist demonstrations in Milan and are arrested and jailed for five days, September.

Balla invents Futurist anti-neutral clothing.

1915: Marinetti: 1915 In This Futurist Year.

Marinetti, Settimelli, Corra: The Futurist Synthetic Theatre Manifesto, January/February, 1915, written, published in 1916.

Futurist Synthetic Theatre. Performances by the Berti Company in February in many Italian cities. In 1916, the Ninchi Company and through 1920 other companies perform sintesi throughout Italy.

Interventionist demonstrations throughout the year. Marinetti is arrested twice, the second time with several others, including Mussolini, Settimelli, and Corra.

Lacerba publishes an anti-Futurist article signed by Palazzeschi, Papini, and Soffici. This article marks their separation from Marinetti's Futurism, February.

Balla and Depero: The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe, a manifesto, March 11.

Balla, Corra, Marinetti, Russolo, Sant'Elia, Piatti, and Sironi, members of volunteer cyclists, join the Alpine troops and engage in battle for the first time. October and November.

The 1909 Manifesto

The first Futurist Manifesto was published in the French newspaper Le Figaro on February 20, 1909.¹ In it, Marinetti describes the occasion of the beginnings of Futurism: after a night of discussion with friends, there is a ride in Marinetti's car and then an accident at dawn. Marinetti and friends emerge from the overturned vehicle reborn "with faces covered with good garage mud--a paste of metallic waste, useless sweat, celestial soot--we, bruised, our arms in slings, yet fearless, declared our first will and testament to all living men of the earth." In a series of thirteen points

¹The manifesto is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 3-9.

and several additional paragraphs, Marinetti outlines the Futurist approach to life. Futurists "want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness."¹ Futurists were to be "like proud headlights or an advance guard against the energy of hostile stars, glaring from their celestial encampments."² Peril, speed, and courage were to be new goals for every part of life; poets, too, would "exalt aggressive action, feverish insomnia, the racer's pace, the somersault, the punch and the slap," rather than "pensive. immobility, ecstasy, and sleep."³ War, violence, riot, are to be glorified in their ability to sweep away, destroy, bring the freedom of the new. The enemy is the past and traditionalists who praise the art of the past centuries rather than seeking to create works appropriate to celebrate "the new beauty of speed."⁴ Futurist poetry will use "courage, audacity, and rebellion"⁵ as essential elements in a type of poetry conceived of as aggressive, "a violent assault against unknown forces."⁶ Museums, libraries and other academies must be destroyed because of their dangerous invitation to an

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

"eternal and useless worship of the past"¹ which can drain and weaken impressionable young artists, preventing them from daring to create from their own impulses. The manifesto stresses the youth and strength of Futurists and hopes that its leaders will be supplanted in a decade by younger and stronger men to come. (Here, Marinetti displays an uncanny vision of the future, because the important Futurists after the war were indeed younger men such as Enrico Prampolini and Fortunato Depero who were only fifteen and seventeen, respectively, at the time of the original manifesto. Marinetti, himself, of course, remained the unchallenged leader of Futurism and its chief spokesman throughout his life.)

Certain of the declarations Marinetti makes in the first manifesto are obviously exaggerations (the burning of museums and libraries, for instance). But the spirit of Marinetti's words and his energetic declaration of the war on things of the past were intended to have the shocking effect of a dousing with cold water on a sleeping nation. Marinetti called out to young artists to reject the past and its symbols (such as the moonlight, and cities whose reputation and livelihood thrive on the past) and open themselves up to expressing the new tenor of the times: speed, machines, force, and even violence.

¹Ibid., p. 7.

Futurist Painters and Their Manifestoes

The call to young artists was answered first by writers who joined Marinetti. But among the most significant of young talents to become Futurists during the pre-war years was the group of painters who formally joined Marinetti's new movement by issuing their own manifesto in 1910: Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini signed the Manifesto of Futurist Painters issued on February 11, 1910. Four of the signers were born between 1881 and 1885; only Balla was older, born in 1871, the year before Marinetti was born.¹

¹The manifesto is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 20-22. See also Maurizio Calvesi, Il futurismo, 3 vols. (Milan: Fabbri, 1975), 1:24-25. Calvesi reports two other original signers, Aroldo Bonsagni and Romolo Romani, and he says that Balla was added and the others were dropped almost immediately after the manifesto was recited in public at the second Futurist serata, March 8, in Turin. Calvesi uses an article by the poet Palazzeschi in which he refers to an evening at Marinetti's just after the first serata (January 12, 1910) during which "I saw pass by in the dark corridor, one after the other like shadows, four men dressed in black, jackets closed to the neck, almost identical . . . the four men were: Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, and another whom I don't recall, because he disassociated himself immediately after. That night at Savini's, Marinetti appeared calm, like someone who'd unburdened himself of a great weight: 'Futurism is born in painting, too,' he said, physically satisfied." One of the signers, Carrà, in his autobiography says that the first meeting between the painters and Marinetti took place in February of 1909 but his account of the writing of the manifesto by the artists with help from Marinetti, and its immediate dissemination as a leaflet, seems to have the wrong year. It is unlikely, as Calvesi points out, that any Futurist would take a year to work on a manifesto and finally publish it. Calvesi concludes that both Palazzeschi

The painters' manifesto, like the first Futurist manifesto, cries out against the past and against its enslaving mentality for the young creative energies of artists living in the present. "Away, then, hired restorers of encrusted antiquities! Away archeologists afflicted with chronic necrophilia! Away, critics, complacent panderers! Away!"¹ In the list of resolutions which concludes the manifesto, the painters echo many of the declarations made in the original manifesto:

1. Destroy the cult of the past, the obsession with antiquity, pedantry, and academic formalism.
2. Deeply despise every form of imitation.
3. Exalt every form of originality, even if reckless or extremely violent.
4. Take courage and pride from the easy accusation of madness with which they will whip and gag all innovators.
5. Consider art critics useless and harmful.

and Carrà's accounts are correct, but that Carrà was mistaken in dating the artists' meeting with Marinetti and the laboring over the manifesto in 1909, that instead, both are talking about February, 1910. See Calvesi, 1:25-30, for a full discussion of the meeting of the artists with Marinetti and the contents of the painters' manifesto.

¹MEIF, p. 21.

6. Rebel against the tyranny of the words "harmony" and "good taste," loose expressions which could easily be used to demolish the works of Rembrandt and Goya.
7. Sweep away from the ideal sphere of the arts all of the themes and subjects which have already been used.
8. Treat and praise the life of today, continually and tumultuously transformed by victorious science.

Let the dead be buried in the deepest bowels of the earth! Clear the threshold of the future of all mummies! Make way for the young, the violent, the fearless!¹

As the critic Maurizio Calvesi has pointed out, both the ideas and the writing style of the manifesto are strong evidence of Marinetti's involvement in the preparation of the Manifesto of the Futurist Painters 1910.² In the second manifesto to be devoted to painting, again signed by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, and Severini, Calvesi finds other correspondences between Marinetti's ideas and those of the painters who issued the second manifesto, entitled Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto (April 11, 1910). Calvesi cites certain images from Marinetti's 1904 poem, "Distruzione" ("Destruction"), to demonstrate the affinity between the manifesto's statements regarding the fusing of the human body

¹Ibid., p. 22.

²Calvesi, 1:31-35.

and its surroundings, the collision of people and objects in space, and the importance of new subject matter, such as the electric light bulb.¹

The Technical Manifesto explains by declaration and by example the principles by which Futurist art is led. The dominating principle is described as "universal dynamism."²

All things move, all things run, all things turn rapidly. A figure is never still before us but appears and disappears incessantly. Because the image persists in the retina, things in motion multiply and change, following one after the other, like vibrations, in the space through which they run. Thus a running horse doesn't have four legs but twenty and their movements are triangular. . . .

. . . in order to paint a figure, you must not only paint it: you need to paint its atmosphere. . . .

. . . who can continue to believe in the opacity of the body when our sharp and multiplied sensibilities have guessed the obscure manifestations of the medium's phenomena? Why should we continue to create without regard to our visual power which is capable of giving results like those of x-rays? . . .

The sixteen people around you in a moving streetcar are one, ten, four, three; they stand still and they move; they go and come, they bounce off the street, devoured by a sunny area, then return to their seats, persistent symbols of the universal vibrations. Sometimes, on the cheek of someone with whom we're talking in the street, we see a horse passing in the distance.

¹Ibid.

²The manifesto reprinted in MEIF, pp. 23-26.

Our bodies enter into the sofas on which we sit and the sofas enter us, like the passing streetcar enters the houses, which in turn hurl themselves on the streetcar and blend with it. . . .

. . . painters have always shown us persons placed in front of us. We will place the spectator in the center of the picture.¹

Futurist painters, in the need to be free of tradition and properly align themselves with the modern world; must treat new subjects by using new colors and new techniques. .

Our new awareness does not allow us to think of man as the center of the universe any longer. A man's pain is as interesting, for us, as that of an electric bulb, which suffers, has spasms and screams out with the most tortured expressions of pain; and the musicality of the lines and pleats of a modern suit have an emotional and symbolic power equal to that which the nude had for the old masters. . . .

How is it possible to see the human face as pink, when our life is undeniably doubled in dreams? The human face is yellow, red, green, blue, and purple. A woman's pallor as she gazes into a jeweller's shop is more iridescent than all of the jewelled prisms which fascinate her. . . .

This naturally brings us to the conclusion that painting cannot exist without divisionism. Yet, divisionism in our conception is not a technical method that one can methodically learn and use. Divisionism, in modern painting, must be an inborn compellent, judged by us to

¹Ibid., pp. 23-24.

be essential and inevitable.¹

In an expansion of these ideas, the five painters offered an explanatory Preface to the Catalogue of the Expositions in Paris, London, Berlin, Brussels, Munich, Hamburg, Vienna, etc. (February, 1912).²

In the Preface to the Catalogue . . ., the artists repeat some of their earlier statements, such as the need for innovation, individual freedom of expression, and a totally modern conception of art which scorns past models. Restated too are concepts as the need to put the spectator at the center of the picture, to make him "not a spectator but a participant in the action."³ An elaboration of the Futurist demand for painting objects and their unique movements,

¹Ibid., p. 25. Janson's History of Art defines divisionism: a procedure known as Neo-Impressionism, Pointillism, or Divisionism. Seurat preferred the latter term. The canvas is covered with "tiny dots of brilliant color that were supposed to merge in the beholder's eye and produce intermediary tints more luminous than those obtainable from pigments mixed on the palette. The mixing of colors in the eye remains incomplete; the dots do not disappear but remain as clearly visible as the tesserae of a mosaic . . . this unexpected effect gives the canvas the quality of a shimmering, translucent screen." H. W. Janson, History of Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962 ed.), p. 506.

²The Preface to the Catalogue . . . is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 58-66.

³MEIF, p. 63.

their "dynamic sensation,"¹ follows an announcement of the Futurist painters' disagreements with their admired colleagues in Cubism.

In spite of our admiration for the heroism of our Cubist friends, painters of the highest worth, who have shown a praiseworthy contempt for artistic commerce and a powerful hatred of the academic, we feel and we declare ourselves to be absolutely opposed to their art.

They persist in painting the immobile, the frozen and all static aspects of nature. They worship the traditionalism of Poussin, Ingres, Corot, aging and petrifying their art with an obstinate traditionalism that, for us, is incomprehensible.²

The need to depict constantly changing movement, the "universal dynamism" of the first manifesto on painting, is explained in greater detail in this manifesto.

We are used to the consideration of human beings under various aspects of movement or rest, of happy agitation, of melancholy gravity.

But no one realizes that all so-called inanimate objects reveal in their shapes whether they are calm or mad, sad or gay. These different tendencies give the different lines of their shapes a feeling and a character of heavy stability or airborne lightness.

¹Ibid., p. 62.

²Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Every object reveals by way of its lines, how it would decompose according to the pull of its force lines.

This decomposition is not guided by fixed laws but varies according to the characteristic personality together with the emotion of the observer.

In addition, every object influences its neighbor, not the reflection of light (fundamental of impressionist primitivism) but because of an actual competition of lines and an actual battle of planes, according to the emotional laws which govern the painting (fundamental of futurist primitivism).¹

Together with the guiding principle of "universal dynamism," a realization of the "simultaneity of the states of mind in a work of art" led the artists to point out the necessity of painting an entire surrounding ambience, both internal and external to the subject.²

We need to show the invisible which stirs and lives beyond the depths, what we have to our right, left and behind us, not the small picture of life artificially contained as though between sets in a theatre.³

As the artists acknowledge, it is difficult to express in words the governing principles of their new kind of painting, but the pictures of the period contemporary to and

¹MEIF, p. 62.

²Ibid., p. 61. First Futurist use of the word simultaneity.

³Ibid., p. 62.

immediately following this manifesto show the painters' concern with representing the simultaneous life and motion of objects, persons, and states of mind. These concepts are important for the development of Futurist drama, as we shall see in Chapter II, when examples of Futurist paintings and drama from this period will be examined to demonstrate the effect of treating subjects simultaneously in the way proposed by Boccioni and the other Futurist painters.

Of less immediate impact on the movement, but of considerable later importance, was the addition of musicians to Futurist membership. Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880-1955) wrote a Manifesto of Futurist Musicians (January 11, 1911), followed by a Technical Manifesto of Futurist Musicians (March 29, 1911).¹

Pratella appeals to young musicians to join their Futurist brothers, poets, and painters "on the paths of the future."² After citing international examples of innovations in music, Pratella turns to Italy where "teachers and professors, illustrious deficients, perpetuate traditionalism and fight any effort to enlarge the music field."³ As in Marinetti's first

¹Manifesto of Futurist Musicians is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 46-52; the Technical Manifesto is also in MEIF, pp. 53-58. Quotations from both manifestoes are translated from this source.

²MEIF, p. 47.

³Ibid., p. 48.

manifesto and the first painters' manifesto, Pratello condemns the academicians, critics, and traditionalists who suppress young creative talents by forcing them to conform to the demands of publishers and an ignorant public for "well-made music."¹ (The term musica fatta bene [well-made music] is certainly directly analogous to the playwriting term, pièce bien faite [well-made play] used to denote the plot-centered pieces churned out first by Augustin-Eugene Scribe [1791-1861], and later by Victorien Sardou [1831-1908] and a host of imitators.) Pratella, using Marinetti's imagery, indicts Italy's past relationship with art and with contemporary concerns as "an industry of the dead, cult of cemeteries, drying up of vital sources."²

In the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Music which was written shortly after the initial manifesto, Pratella discusses the new method of notation, called "enharmonic," which will give the composer a fuller range of possible notes from which to choose, enabling him to more closely capture natural and instinctive sound. The idea of off-key harmonies by orchestras or in spontaneous folk songs is pleasing to Futurists who prize individual creativity and innovation above all else. These compositions will only be arrived at by

¹Ibid., p. 49.

²Ibid., p. 50.

individual experiment on the part of musicians freed from the demands of traditionalists. It will be possible, says Pratella, through experiment, to render the sounds of nature, "sky, water, forests, rivers, mountains. . . ." ¹ More important perhaps for later Futurist music, Pratella concludes the manifesto:

Bring into music all of the new ways of nature, always variously tamed by man by virtue of constant scientific discoveries. Give the musical soul of the crowd, of the great industrial centers, trains, ocean liners, battleships, automobiles, and airplanes. Add the domination of the machine and the victorious reign of electricity to the great central themes of musical poems. ²

The idea of adding the sounds of machines and electricity to the repertoire of musicians, inspired the painter Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) to conceive the idea of noises as the basis for Futurist music. In The Art of Noises (March 11, 1913), Russolo suggests the substitution of "noise-sounds" for the pure sounds of the past. ³ These "noise-sounds" will be able to produce "the noises of streetcars, the internal-combustion engine, railroad cars, roaring crowds," sounds of the modern world. ⁴ Russolo outlines a table of sounds for an

¹Ibid., p. 55.

²Ibid., p. 58.

³Ibid., p. 93.

⁴Ibid.

eventual mechanical orchestra. He proposes that new instruments be designed and made to produce these six categories of noises which will be an addition and even a substitution for ordinary musical sounds. The new instruments (called intonarumori [noise intoners]) were demonstrated for the first time several months after the manifesto in Modena (June 2, 1913).¹

Concerts of intonarumori were begun in the summer of 1913 after an entire orchestra of them was developed by Russolo and his fellow painter, Ugo Piatti.² The concerts seem to have been separate performances from the serate and productions of sintesi, but Pratella and Russolo did collaborate on the music for Marinetti's play Il tamburo di fuoco (Fire Drum, 1922). Pratella wrote the score and Russolo and his intonarumori provided background music for the piece.³

¹Michael Kirby, Futurist Performance (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), p. 37. See Kirby, pp. 33-40, for a discussion of Pratella and Russolo, the manifestoes and their contributions to Futurist music, including the appearance and operation of the noise intoners.

²Ibid., p. 38. For an account of a private concert in 1914 of "eight or nine" of Russolo's intonarumori, see: Francesco Cangiullo, Le serate futuriste (Milan: Ceshina, 1961 ed.), pp. 245-251. The concert took place at Marinetti's house in Milan and guests included Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Diaghilev, Massenet and Massine.

³Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 167-174, gives reviews of that production. Kirby, p. 38, notes that the music consisted mostly of imitation of real sounds such as drums and trumpets.

The ideas expressed in the original manifesto by Marinetti, together with those outlined subsequently by Futurist painters and musicians, provided the theoretical basis for later Futurist work. It is in this context that we can now turn to the examination of Futurist theories on theatre, expressed in Marinetti's favorite medium, the manifesto.

There are three Futurist manifestoes of this period which are concerned with the theatre: The Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists (January 11, 1911); The Variety Theatre Manifesto (October 1, 1913); The Futurist Synthetic Theatre Manifesto (January 11-February 18, 1915). The 1911 and 1913 manifestoes will be discussed in this chapter; the 1915 manifesto will be treated in Chapter II. (A later theatre manifesto, The Theatre of Surprise (1921) will be discussed in Chapter VI.)

Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists--1911

In this manifesto, the first to devote its attention to theatre, Marinetti clearly recognizes the potential value of theatre for the Futurists: "Among all literary forms, the one that can have the most immediate Futurist effect is certainly a theatrical piece."¹ In order to make theatre effective for Futurism, however, certain changes must be brought about in the minds of writers, actors, and the public. According to the manifesto, authors must learn to have "contempt

¹This manifesto is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 30-34.

for the audience, especially first-night audiences."¹
 Authors must beware of "the horror of the overnight success" and be concerned only with "an absolutely innovative originality."² Much of this originality can be obtained, says the manifesto, by avoiding some of the favorite subjects and structures of the past.

The leitmotif of love and the adulterous triangle, having been already overused in literature, should be reduced on the stage to a secondary role, as episodes or accessories. . . . We despise all types of historical reconstructions, whether they take interest from an illustrious hero or heroine (Nero, Julius Caesar, Napoleon or Francesca da Rimini), or whether they are based on the useless sumptuousness of historical costumes and sets.³

Rather than "psychological photography, drama must attempt "a synthesis of life in its most typical and most significant lines."⁴ Excited by the amount and kinds of speed and modern inventions, modern drama "must reflect a part of the great Futurist dream":

We need to introduce into the theatre the sensation of the domination of the Machine, the great thrills that excite the crowd, the new wave of ideas and the great scientific discoveries that have completely transformed our ways of feeling and thinking as men of the twentieth century.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 31.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 32.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

In order to have the courage to celebrate this kind of new life, authors must learn "the pleasure of being booed," and the distaste for popular fame and fortune which is too often a mediocre writer's main goal.¹ Booing, while it does not necessarily signal a new or great work, is preferable to "the grotesque habit of applause and whistling which is better as a barometer of parliamentary eloquence than as an evaluation of a work of art."² "Everything that's immediately applauded is certainly no better than average and is therefore something mediocre, banal, regurgitated or too well digested."³ Marinetti proudly affirms his own standing in this regard: "I have the joy of knowing that my genius, booed frequently by the audiences of France and Italy, will never be buried beneath the weight of too much applause, like some minor Rostand!"⁴

In speaking out against dramatic practice and theatre audiences of the time, Marinetti calls for a playwright-dominated theatre, instead of one dominated by the actors and audiences. As the critic Giovanni Antonucci points out,

¹Ibid., p. 33.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Marinetti's declaration came six years after Gordon Craig's 1905 demand for a director-dominated theatre.¹ Few playwrights in Italy at the time could have responded to this call as most were men of literature, not of the theatre, Marinetti included. The spirit of Marinetti's desire for the playwright's presence in the theatre, came to be felt in the Futurist serate and in all of the later Futurist theatrical events when the presence of the playwright in the audience and on stage was often the highlight of the evening. This insistence on the playwright's direct involvement in the theatrical production of his work led Marinetti, Cangiullo, and other Futurists to use themselves as major characters and even to perform on stage. Instances, too, in Pirandello's drama, of the author's presence are frequent, especially as he became more involved in the "theatrical" life of his works, a subject which will be discussed in a later chapter.

In addition to attempting to heighten the level of the playwright's involvement, Marinetti's 1911 manifesto also objects to the kinds of drama being written (both realistic and historical) as well as the content, and format, of contemporary plays. For example, he attacked the tendency to entertain the bored first-nighters as a way to overnight

¹Giovanni Antonucci, in Lo spettacolo futurista in Italia (Rome: Vita Nova, 1974), p. 23, argues that as Craig's ideas were published prior to Marinetti's, the latter's declaration was perhaps inspired by Craig's writings.

success and playwrights' willingness to settle for themes of love and adultery or the trappings of historical costumes and sets. In the next manifesto to concern the theatre, Marinetti reiterates his objections and introduces a new model, the Variety Theatre.

The Variety Theatre Manifesto--1913

The Variety Theatre Manifesto begins:

We have a deep distrust for the contemporary theatre (verse, prose and musical) because it wavers stupidly between historical reconstruction (hodgepodge or plagiarism) and the photographic reproduction of our daily life: a theatre of minutia, slow, analytic, and diluted, worthy more of the age of the oil lamp.¹

Beginning with the recapitulation of the tenets of the earlier Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists (1911), the Variety Theatre Manifesto outlines nineteen reasons why "FUTURISM EXALTS THE VARIETY THEATRE"² and finally offers suggestions for the Futurist transformation of the variety theatre. The earlier dramatists' manifesto concentrated its attention on the literary, fashionable, middle-class theatre, drama, and audience. The Variety Theatre Manifesto points out the many differences between the two contemporary theatre experiences and postulates ways in which the variety theatre could be improved

¹The Variety Theatre Manifesto is reprinted in MEIF, pp. 111-119.

²*Ibid.*, p. 111.

to suit Futurist needs. Marinetti's second theatre manifesto has a three-part structure: a list of the virtues of the variety theatre, a five-point program for its transformation, and a words-in-freedom paragraph, without enslaving punctuation and syntax, about a neon-lit night, a dreamlike evocation of the music hall, and the effect of electric signs on the people they touch with their light.

Nine of the nineteen virtues Marinetti lists for the variety theatre concern its anti-traditional qualities: it ignores or subverts usual treatments of time and space; it debunks, de-mystifies, and de-romanticizes famous events, people, art works; it reveals male and female relationships as they are--not as they have been idealized; it demands action, variety, record-setting phenomena, stress on physical abilities; it denigrates contemplation, soul-searching, and psychological analysis. Others of the nineteen points admire the practicality of the variety theatre which seeks to "distract and amuse the public with comic effects, erotic stimulation, and imaginative amazements,"¹ or its improvisational nature, which forces its artists to rise to new heights of invention, to push continually for newness and variety. In contrast with the audience of the traditional theatre, the variety theatre audience is part of the spectacle. The audience is encouraged to talk out, reacting verbally and even physically, while action

¹Ibid., p. 112.

takes place not only on the stage but in all parts of the theatre, simultaneously "on the stage, in the boxes, and in the orchestra."¹ Because of the openly sensual element which is a major ingredient of this kind of theatre, "it brings to light all of those admirable animal qualities in a woman, her powers of conquest, seduction, treachery, and endurance," unmasking her. The audience is encouraged to continue their participation outside of the theatre as well: "It continues at the end of the show, among the battalions, of fans, the stage-door johnnies who crowd the exit to fight over the star; double final victory: chic dinner and bed."²

In the second part of the manifesto, Futurist transformations of the variety theatre are suggested which would work to insure that no logic or tradition be allowed to deaden the liveliness of the variety theatre. Futurists would "multiply contrasts and make the unlikeliest and absurd reign supreme on the stage."³ Classic art and artists could be juxtaposed, condensed, synthesized, and generally abused in the de-mystification of the art of the past. Audiences would be made to take part in the action by planting deliberate "surprises" in

¹Ibid., p. 114.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 117.

their midst.¹ Types of characters to be encouraged and further developed by Futurists would include "the eccentric American type" because of his grotesque qualities, his "crude jokes, enormous brutalities, trick vests, and pants as deep as a ship's hold, out of which, with a thousand other things, will come the great Futurist hilarity that must make the world young again."²

The qualities celebrated by Marinetti in this manifesto include the improvisational, the grotesque, the absurd, the dynamic, the ironic, and the eclectic, all elements which Marinetti and other Futurist writers sought to produce themselves in their Futurist Synthetic Theatre, which began touring Italy in 1915. The Futurist Synthetic Theatre Manifesto and two programs of Futurist sintesi will be discussed in Chapter II.

First, however, it would seem more appropriate to discuss an earlier Futurist activity in which many of the qualities admired in the variety theatre were utilized by Marinetti, when poetry was read aloud and performer/audience "dialogue" was begun in the Futurist serate (evenings).

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 118.

Futurist serate

After the publication of the first manifesto, in 1909, most manifestoes were made public by being read aloud as part of the Futurist serate (evenings) which began in January, 1910.¹ In the serate and other Futurist manifestations, Futurists demonstrated quite literally their ability to both throw and receive punches, slaps, and ripe fruits and vegetables while, with great arrogance, daring, and sheer energy, they read aloud, showed paintings, played new "noise" music, and, in general, overturned the usual notion of poetry readings, art exhibitions, and, finally, theatrical performances.

Two pictorial records of serate are useful in attempting to describe their content and quality. Umberto Boccioni's

¹MEIF, Intro, p. XLIII. These tumultuous evenings have been vividly described by such dedicated Futurists as Francesco Cangiullo, Remo Chiti, and Marinetti himself. Those who eventually deserted the movement as well as hostile critics have also left written testimony. See:

F. T. Marinetti, Una sensibilit  italiana nata in Egitto (Milan: Mondadori, 1969).

Francesco Cangiullo, Le serate futuriste. Remo Chiti, I creatori del teatro futurista (Florence: Quattrini, 1915).

Giovanni Papini, L'esperienza futurista (1913-1914) (Florence: Vallecchi, 1919). Ardengo Soffici, Autoritratto d'artista, 4 vols. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1951-1955).

Francesco Flora, Dal romanticismo al futurismo (Piacenza: Porta, 1921).

drawing, entitled "Una serata futurista a Milano 1911," shows five Futurists on stage.¹ In the background are three large paintings; in the foreground is an orchestra; littering the stage are bodies (which Kirby identifies as "piles of defeated and unconscious passéists").² Shouting audience members surround the stage where Marinetti stands at stage center, reciting, while Pratella conducts the orchestra, and Boccioni, Carra, and Russolo, each with one arm extended, accompany Marinetti or perhaps attempt to explain their works, hung in the background.³

A poster for a serata in March, 1913, at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome provides a program which can be assumed typical of that period. Divided into four parts, the program began with a Futurist Symphony, "Hymn to Life" by Balilla Pratella, followed by Marinetti's recitation of poems by himself and by Paolo Buzzi, Aldo Palazzeschi, and Luciano Folgore. Next, Umberto Boccioni spoke about "Futurist Painting and Sculpture" and Marinetti, as a conclusion, gave a lecture, "Advice to the Romans."⁴

¹Calvesi, 3:64.

²Kirby, p. 15. There is a reprint here of the drawing taken from Raffaele Carrieri, Futurism (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1963).

³Kirby, p. 15.

⁴Calvesi, 3:64. A reproduction of the poster announcing the program for the serata.

Futurists participated personally in readings of their poetry or manifesti, and in exhibitions of their paintings and sculpture. They changed the nature of these literary and artistic events by making them theatrical. Often, Marinetti and his group rented a theatre for one of their serate (evenings), but even if the readings or exhibit took place in a private drawing-room or in an art gallery, Futurists always turned the event into a theatrical occasion.

A case in point is the night that Francesco Cangiullo's poem, "Piedigrotta," together with Giacomo Balla's "Discussione di due critici sudanesi sul futurismo" ("Discussion of Two Sudanese Critics on Futurism") was presented at the Sprovieri Gallery in Rome, March 29, 1914. While earlier serate, beginning in 1910, had combined many different elements: poetry readings, lectures, debates, showing of art works, reading of manifestoes, and always a lively interaction with the audience, the March 1914 serata is the first, apparently, to use a theatrical set and costumes.² Following are excerpts from a contemporary account, written by Futurist Bruno Corra:

In the Futurist gallery on the via del Tritone

¹Calvesi, 3:64. A reproduction of the poster announcing the program for the serata.

²Kirby, p. 28.

in Rome, directed with lively intelligence by Futurist Sprovieri, "Piedigrotta" was declaimed, recited and acted out by Marinetti, Cangiullo, and Balla. Every now and then the author would leap over to the piano, meanwhile alternating the recitation with Marinetti and Balla. The room was lit with red bulbs which doubled the dynamism of the backdrop painted by Balla. The public greeted with enthusiastic applause the appearance of our procession, like a troupe of dwarfs, bristling with fantastic hats made of tissue paper. The multi-colored ship that Balla wore on his head was much admired. Those who believe in an art that is joyous, optimistic, and divinely carefree, captured those who were undecided. . . . The public joined in with voices and gestures in a marvelous din that exploded now and then during Marinetti's recitation, which was very clear and effective in its blending with the onomatopoeic instruments.¹

The instruments mentioned were homemade and had invented names: Tofa, Putipu, Triccabballacche, Scetavalasse, and Fischiatore. A program of the event shows that the instruments were played by Sprovieri, Balla, Radiante, Depero, and Sironi (presumably the wearers of the hats mentioned in the quotation above).²

Accompanying this lively performance of Cangiullo's

¹Bruno Corra, Per l'arte nuova della nuova Italia. (Milan: Studio Editoriale Lombardo, 1918), p. 194. Cangiullo, in Le serate futuriste, quotes this passage but does not attribute it to Corra. Cangiullo cites Lacerba, 1914. The passage is nearly identical to part of Marinetti's later manifesto, Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation (March 11, 1916); see in MEIF, p. 181.

²For an explanation of these instruments, see Marinetti's manifesto, Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation in MEIF, pp. 180-181. For a description of the performance, including the instruments, see Kirby, pp. 28-29. A photograph of the program for this performance is reprinted in Maurizio dell'Arco, Balla: ricostruzione futurista dell'universo. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1968), p. 81.

"words in freedom," was Balla's piece, "Discussione di due critici sudanesi sul futurism." A notebook of Balla's records some of the basis for the improvised performance of Marinetti, Cangiullo, and Balla for which Balla played guitar and Cangiullo played an out-of-tune piano: "humorous nonsense" lyrics such as "Garcionisgnaco, gurninfuturo, bordubalotapompimagnusa sfacatata mimitirichita plucu soumnu farufutusmaca sgnacgnacgnac chr chr chr stechestecheteretete maumauzizitititititititi."¹

One of the most positive assessments of the theatrical nature of the serate asserts that "its elements of surprise, the margin of unpredictability, the tumult and incidents" give even the early serate the form of a theatrical performance.² Mario Verdone credits Marinetti with using theatrical elements in the serate in order to bring poetry and art to a greater number of people. He cites the fact that as Futurists went to different cities, they were analogous to a touring company and that Marinetti himself was like an impresario or producer and promoter of culture, like Diaghilev.³

¹Ibid. This book by Dell'Arco, part of a series on Balla, shows that this artist was particularly prolific. He designed for the stage (sets and costumes), for the home (a bedroom suite for children is particularly interesting, and for the Futurist-about-town, Balla designed anti-neutralist clothes, including suits, ties, and a handbag. In addition, he was a painter and sculptor.

²Mario Verdone, Teatro del tempo futurista (Rome: Lerici, 1969), p. 110.

³Ibid.

Opinions differ on the degree to which the serate can be called wholly artistic achievements. In addition to their artistic content, many of the Futurist evenings included political material as well. Futurists, led by Marinetti, were political activists who demonstrated, wrote, and painted about their views on Italy's need to go to war, first with Africa and later with Austria. On an evening in March of 1910, at the Teatro Lirico in Milan, a reading of a poem by Paolo Buzzi, "Asinari di Bernazzo," was interrupted by an Assistant Police Commissioner who objected that the poem's content was more political than poetic. After a colorful exchange of dialogue, several Futurists were arrested and taken to police headquarters. "On the next day, arguments [ensued] between the Austrian consul and the Prefect, screaming telegrams [were sent] between Vienna and Rome. The usual passésists of old Italy, with long lists of stupid insults, are adding to our fame, already powerful, of being madmen."¹

One of the eleven points of the first manifesto reads, in part: "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 women."²

¹Marinetti, in a letter to Cangiullo in Cangiullo, Le serate futuriste, pp. 89-93. For a discussion of political aspects of the serate, see: J. C. Taylor, Futurism, Christine J. Taylor, Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance, and Kirby. For reprints of the various political manifesti and of the first manifesto, see TEIF and MEIF.

²MEIF, p. 6.

There is also the question of the extent to which the serate were deliberately engineered "happenings" avanti lettera, publicity stunts which served to propel the Futurist movement and its followers constantly before the public eye. That Marinetti had a healthy respect for the relatively young art of advertising and public relations is amply demonstrated by his habit of publishing manifesti simultaneously in literary journals and in pamphlet form or in newspapers which could reach a wider audience. For instance, Marinetti published manifesti in Poesia and in Lacerba, which were also mailed out to an ever-growing list of potential readers, given out during Futurist serate in leaflet form or thrown out to a crowd, as was the case in Venice in July, 1910. The original manifesto was published in Le Figaro, a widely read newspaper, and simultaneously mailed and given out in person.

The principal means which Marinetti relied upon in publicizing Futurism, from its earliest days, was his own indomitable energy and enthusiasm.

His arrival in the peaceful city of Florence in those days was like that of a meteorite landing in an old palace garden. Telegrams, telephone calls, rides in motor cars, appointments made and put off, tumultuous dinner parties, mass invasions of respectable cafes. He was always rushing from one place to another, writing,

orating, organizing.¹

Marinetti, in addition to being a poet, playwright, publisher, and impresario was, apparently, a natural actor. Flamboyant and charismatic, he knowingly used his voice and body to have a desired effect on the audience, whether at a dinner party, in a café, or on the stage. That he was well aware of his talent is documented in a 1916 manifesto, entitled Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation. Prefacing a Futurist guide to the art of declamation (which, according to Marinetti, should make use of legs as well as arms, large movements using the entire stage or various sections of a large room and, above all, an inspired sense of vocal interpretation and great flexibility in rate, pitch, and volume), Marinetti gives a description of his own abilities:

My own irrefutable worldwide record as declaimer of free verse and words in freedom permits me to attest to the deficiencies of the art of declamation as it has been understood until now. Traditional declamation, even when bolstered by the most marvelous vocal organs and powerful temperaments, always becomes an inevitable monotony of highs and lows, and a maze of gestures that affect the petrified imbecility of lecture audiences with continuous waves of boredom.

For too long I've amused myself in seducing and moving them better and with greater confidence than all other European declaimers, introducing to their obtuse brains the most amazing images, caressing them with extremely refined voice alterations, velvety softness and brutality until,

¹Giovanni Papini in L'esperienza futurista (1913-1914), quoted in C. Taylor, p. 10.

overcome by my stare or dazzled by my smile,
they felt that feminine need to applaud what
they had not understood or loved.¹

An outstanding instance of Marinetti's effect on his public occurred on January 15, 1909, one month before the first Futurist manifesto was published. The occasion was the single performance of Marinetti's play La donna è mobile (Woman Is Fickle, originally titled Poupées Électriques, Electric Puppets, 1909). The performance took place at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin before a large audience of sophisticated first-night theatre-goers, including critics. The events of that night were recorded in the pages of Italian newspapers during the days that followed. Marinetti, who was known in literary circles as a poet and publisher of Poesia, received a great deal of free publicity over the cause célèbre created by his appearance between Acts II and III of the play. As the accounts of various critics report, Act I was received with both applause and whistling (a derogatory reaction in Italy, analogous to booing) and actors and author took curtain calls. During Act II, however, the audience murmured more and more audibly and commenced loud whistling after the act. In "an unprecedented action in the history of first nights,"² Marinetti appeared at the footlights and said, "I'd like to thank the organizers of this whistling

¹MEIF, p. 177.

²Domenica Lanza, as quoted in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 39.

which honors me deeply."¹ The audience, infuriated at Marinetti's ironic thanks, began an uproar that continued throughout the third act, making the rest of the play inaudible.

This event is perhaps one of the best illustrations of Marinetti's personal mastery of stage presence and his understanding of the importance of publicity. Because of the novelty and audaciousness of Marinetti's behavior and the reaction of the angry public, an otherwise unhappy theatrical debut became a vehicle by which Marinetti gained personal celebrity and considerable advance publicity for his soon-to-be-announced movement.

In the February/March, 1909 edition of Poesia, Marinetti repeated his "thanks" in print and commented, somewhat gleefully and with characteristic exaggeration: "Words of legitimate contempt which I confirm with pleasure, after having read some 418 articles of comment and criticism on my action."² Enough of the alleged 418 articles remain to show that Marinetti, consciously or not, had turned a disaster into a kind of triumph. The critic Giovanni Antonucci suggests that Marinetti deliberately set in motion the chaos of that evening

¹Ibid., reported in several accounts of the evening, pp. 37-41.

²Calendoli, Note in Marinetti, Teatro, 2:481, cites Walter Vaccari's Vita e tumulti di Marinetti, p. 190 ff., for full account.

between the public and the author and, later, between the actors and the public. Antonucci credits Marinetti with the creation of "a new theatre event in which, at the very least, the protagonists become those members of the audience who are the most active and involved in the situation."¹ For Antonucci, the most significant of the events of that night is the mix of roles: the spectators participated by engaging in direct dialogue with the author and actors as well as with one another. This, as we have seen, was to be a permanent feature of the serate and would be of increasing importance in the development of Futurist theatre.²

La donna è mobile (1909) becomes Elettricità (1913)

La donna è mobile, the play that was so rudely interrupted at the Alfieri Theatre on January 15, 1909, had much in common with other plays of the period: a typically middle-class setting whose characters are involved in adultery. Only its second act was out of the ordinary and "modern" in its fascination with electricity, alter egos, and rather bizarre sex practices.

The critics of that first and last performance of the play talked more about Marinetti's action and the crowd's

¹Antonucci, Cronache, Introduction, p. 24.

²This participation of the spectator in Futurist theatre is a link between that theatre and some of Pirandello's work. This subject will be discussed at length in Chapter VI.

reaction than about the play itself, but some included brief comments on the play and its merits. The drama critic for the Turin newspaper, Gazzetta del Popolo, E. A. Berta (known as e. a. b.) wrote, "Under the circumstances it's not possible to speak about the play that, as far as one can tell, seemed to have complicated and sophisticated psychological intentions."¹ Domenico Lanza, drama critic for La Stampa reported:

He thinks he's written a beautiful and profound psychological drama about ways of loving, showing two types of female lovers, one passionate and sentimental, the other passionate and sensual, crossed with two similar types of male lovers. Instead, he has written a drama which is entirely wanting under any aspect one might consider it.²

Thus, though Lanza recognized the novelty of Marinetti's invention, and even admired the author's and actors' courage, he had a clear dislike for the play. In the discussion which follows, we will see what the original play was like through a plot summary and discover the changes made in its evolution from full-length play to a shortened version which would be a forerunner of the brief Futurist plays known as sintesi, to be treated in Chapter II.

¹e. a. b., E. A. Berta, in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 38, from Gazzetta del Popolo, Turin, January 16, 1909.

²Antonucci, Cronache, p. 38 from La Stampa, Turin, January 16, 1909.

La donna è mobile

The first act takes place in a seaside park on the French Riviera. A couple, John and Mary Wilson, are walking with their friend, Juliette, who is engaged to a young naval officer, Paul de Rozière. Juliette, who suspects that Paul has been unfaithful to her with Mary, jumps from a balcony into the sea, just as her intended sails away to the Far East. In the second act, John and Mary Wilson are at home in their villa, inspecting the electric puppets which John, an engineer, has designed and built for their amusement. The two puppets function as constant stimuli for their love-making by representing Mary's father and aunt who were always present during the couple's courtship. The couple had always to maintain decorum and steal feverish embraces when their elders weren't looking. This atmosphere of forbidden pleasures is re-evoked to make their present love function at a higher pitch of excitement. John fears that, alone, they will be unable to preserve the freshness of new love, and it is for this reason that he has designed the puppets. At the end of their discussion and manipulation of the puppets, however, John decides that Mary's beauty alone will suffice to keep their romance alive. With Mary's help, he hurls the puppets into the sea. Fishermen passing below mistakenly think that two human beings have been drowned, and

send up an alarm. The fishermen demand to see the Wilsons and then are amazed to find that the cadavers fished from the sea are puppets. Act III, again at the villa, concerns Paul's return from the Far East and his avowal of love for Mary. Mary, guilt-ridden over the death of Juliette and the anguish she has caused John and Paul, shoots herself with a revolver and dies.

Clearly, the play in this three-act version was hardly the sort of vehicle which Marinetti's evolving ideology could point to as having "an absolutely innovative originality," as demanded in the 1911 Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists.¹ And, in fact, when Marinetti's play appeared again in 1913, it had dropped Acts I and III and been retitled, for new emphasis, as Elettricità (Electricity).²

Elettricità

Elettricità was performed on a national tour, September 1913 to January 1914 by the Tumiatì Company.³ This successful tour included a curtain raiser by an unnamed author, called

¹MEIF, p. 31.

²Elettricità is the 1913, one-act version of La donna è mobile (1909), the Italian translation of the three-act Poupées Electriques (1909). In a 1920 published version, Elettricità is called Elettricità sessuale and a 1925 production of the play by Anton Giulio Bragaglia used the title Fantocci elettrici. See Cangiullo, Notes, Marinetti, Teatro, 2:480-482.

³Marinetti, Teatro, 2:481.

Il martire di via Pigalle (The Martyr of Via Pigalle), described as "Grand Guignol."¹ Various Futurist "words in freedom" were also on the program. Reviewers talked more about the often rowdy crowds and the appearances of various Futurists, including Marinetti and Cangiullo, than about the subject matter of the play.² One critic summed up the plot in this way:

. . . brief Futurist one-act, in which the protagonists are two characters who speak incessantly and two puppets who never speak, even when Marinetti has them thrown off a balcony as symbols of things which are old and out-of-date.³

Perhaps because of the chaotic nature of the evening, none of the reviewers mentions the differences between Act II of La donna è mobile and the one-act Elettricità.⁴ The published text of the play shows notable alterations. True to one of the pronouncements of the 1911 manifesto, "love and

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 50, unsigned piece in Il Giorno, Naples, November 6, 1913.

²See anonymous review in the Corriere della sera, Milan January 17, 1914 for a typical description, in Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 53-57.

³G. Gentile, La Nazione, Florence, December 11-12, 1913 in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 53.

⁴For the analysis of the changes and their significance, I have used the 1920 published version, called Elettricità sessuale, reprinted in Marinetti, Teatro, 2:421-453. See also Teatro, 2:481 and Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 47-62, for reviews alluding to certain parts of the play.

the adulterous triangle should be reduced on the stage to a secondary role, as episodes or accessories,"¹ the focus in this truncated version of the play is fixed entirely on the relationship that the couple has with each other and with the electric puppets. John and Mary Wilson have been renamed Riccardo and Maria Marinetti. This change is significant because it exemplifies the determination of the Futurists to be present in their own works, as we have seen demonstrated in manifesto declarations and their participation in the serate. Another change occurs in the "identity" of the two puppets: in the full-length version, the puppets are named as the father and aunt of Mary. In the 1913/1914 version, according to an article by Marinetti which appeared in Il Resto del Carlino, the puppets were called Professor Mariti (Professor Husbands) and Signora Madri (Mrs. Mothers): the Professor was to combine the "two tedious components of husband and professor" while Mrs. Mothers would "symbolize all which is low, vulgar, and even bawdy in the duties of a mother."² In the published version, the puppets are named Signor Matrimonio (Mr. Matrimony) and Signora Famiglia (Mrs. Family).³ Just as the change in surname of the protagonists

¹MEIF, p. 32.

²Article, quoted on p. 482 of Marinetti's Teatro, 2, appeared in Il Resto del Carlino, Bologna, January 20, 1914.

³Marinetti, Teatro, 2:421, stage directions.

serves to make the work, at least superficially, more Futurist in content, so, too, the transformation of the puppets from representations of actual persons (Mary's father and aunt) to prototypes, embodiments of certain characteristics, (professor and husband; mother and guardian) to the more broadly emblematic social entities of the published version (matrimony and the family) serves to more tightly synthesize in two characters the two pillars of traditional society: marriage and the family.

Although the theme of adultery in the longer play was deleted in the shortened version, references to it remain. Without explanation, Riccardo pretends that he is Paul de Rozière and that the puppet is himself, snoring nearby: "I'm not your husband. Your husband is there, in front of us. He's sleeping."¹ In this version, the focus has shifted from adultery to the puppets and their purpose: to evoke a former time and rekindle passion. Maria responds to Riccardo's pleas for a stolen kiss in the voice and manner of herself as a young girl: "Riccardo! My Riccardo! You mustn't kiss me this way. It's not nice! You teach me wicked things! You make me lose my head."² They kiss until a blast of wind interrupts them; they separate and are obviously disturbed by the moments that have passed. Maria speaks in her normal

¹Ibid., p. 442.

²Ibid., p. 440.

voice, "What's wrong, Riccardo! If you knew how it moved me, your kiss! The illusion was complete!"¹ But Maria has demonstrated a dislike or discomfort with the puppets on occasion, especially when there is a storm. As the discussion develops, we learn that Maria is upset by the unnatural presence of the puppets and wants to rely on her own feelings to excite passion. She also objects to their being isolated with only the puppets as company: "It would be much better to see people, now and then."² For Riccardo, however, the puppets are all the company he needs to remind him of real life outside of themselves and their love:

. . . duty, money, virtue, old age, monotony
boredom, exhaustion, stupidity, social laws, and
who knows what else.³

By flaunting his love for Maria before these representatives of conventional life, Riccardo succeeds in creating, or recreating, the mysteries of love "artificially," mechanically. But, in a sudden gesture to please Maria, he decides to throw the puppets out of the window and asks for her help.

Come here. Help me. We'll throw them out of
the window! Anyway, they're useless! Help me,
Maria. Love is Futurist. It deceives, kills,
the slow, the old, the fearful, the stationary.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 445.

³Ibid., p. 446.

Love is a plot by the young against those who
are no longer young. Family and Matrimony:
out of the window!¹

Maria, relieved at their gesture, laughs aloud when the couple hears cries from outside which indicate that the fishermen below have mistaken the two puppets for humans and are blaming their drowning on Marinetti.² A kind of tense excitement prevails while the seamen outside drag for the bodies. Marinetti insists that he was only throwing out rubbish, and, finally, the soggy corpses of the puppets are brought in on stretchers. Marinetti says, "There! Look at my victims!" and the fishermen respond, as they realize their mistake, "He's crazy! Crazy! Mr. Marinetti is crazy!"³ (Marinetti's deliberate reference to personal attacks on him during many Futurist serate prefigures Pirandello's similar references in several of his plays.) With their cries, the sintesi ends and we are not told if the puppets are to be disposed of permanently. We do know that at least Signor Matrimonio still works: one of the servants, in a final stage direction, pushes the button which makes him cough continuously, one of his principal mechanical activities which remains intact.⁴

The play's characters and themes are documentation of

¹Ibid., p. 447.

²Ibid., p. 448.

³Ibid. p. 453.

⁴Ibid.

Marinetti's early innovative use of puppet characters, the idea of the split personality, estrangement or alienation, and possible uses for mechanical (or electrical) appliances.¹ The structure of the play, instead, follows a traditional form. Servants, gossiping in the first scene, introduce us (and a servant new to the household) to the ways of the Marinettis and demonstrate the workings of the puppets. In the second scene, the atmosphere is "electric" as a storm rages outside and the couple discusses their moods, courtship, and the puppets' presence in their lives. The puppets are activated during this scene, "used" by the Marinettis and then discarded by them at the end of the scene. The third scene clears up the mystery of the "drowned bodies" though it does leave open the ultimate disposition of the now-soaking but still apparently capable machines. The servants in the first act let us know that the townspeople think the Marinettis are odd, even crazy, and this attitude is confirmed by the fishermen's cries at the end of the play. They, at least, believe all the rumors are true.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Elettricit  was its scenic realization. Marinetti recognizes this in obvious frustration when he describes what his intentions were and how the actual production fell far short of those intentions.

¹Calendoli, in Introduction to Marinetti's Teatro, 1: XXI.

Speaking of the Mr. Matrimony puppet, Marinetti writes:

It's a perfectly perfected puppet operated by an electric conductor that makes it cough, snore, etc. All of this did not come about because the conditions of the theatre do not permit it. I was obliged to make the rain with a piece of paper and I had to blow from offstage to give the idea of wind. Almost always, we must do without these elements which would give the idea of that electric evening.¹

Although this amusing glimpse of Marinetti backstage demonstrates yet again his personal involvement in the performance, it also records the powerlessness which Marinetti must have felt in attempting to correct the limitations of the theatre of the time. Clearly, actors played the roles of puppets in this production, as in a 1925 production directed by A. G. Bragaglia, of which a photo exists.² Marinetti, of course, had a literary background and his artistic tendencies lay in the use of the word in new and different ways. Although he could imagine certain scenic innovations, the use of cinema for instance, as in the variety theatre, it was not within his area of competence to conceive of ways to revolutionize the scenic arts. Even the Futurist Synthetic Theatre Manifesto of 1915, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter, was restricted to the kinds or quality of content which Futurist drama was attempting and did not treat

¹In Teatro, 2:482-483, from Il Resto di Carlino, January 20, 1914.

²Comoedia, No. 13, 1925, p. 670.

scenic considerations at all.¹

As we have seen, Marinetti's early activities as poet, publisher, playwright, and declaimer/lecturer contributed a variety of experience from which he could draw support during the years 1909-1915, the years some critics refer to as the high point of Futurism. Much of this activity can be directly related to later theatrical work, beginning in 1915. It was not until 1915 that Marinetti and others in the movement made theatre the primary focus of their considerable energies. The years 1915-1916 were important for Futurist drama and theatre, and these years will be the subject of Chapter II.

¹Two other manifestoes of that year, written by others, concern the plastic arts and mark the artistic direction that the movement would take during the First World War and after. Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero signed the manifesto called Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe, March 11, 1915, and together with Enrico Prampolini, who published the manifesto Futurist Scenography also in March, 1915, they brought to Futurist work for the theatre an interest in things predominantly visual and plastic.

CHAPTER II

CUTTING THROUGH THE PAPER SKY

In the first Futurist manifesto of 1909, Marinetti announced: "We want to destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind."¹ By 1915, one of the "academies" was clearly the traditional theatre, "because it is all . . . prolix, analytic, pedantically psychological, explanatory, diluted, meticulous, static, full of prohibitions like a police station, cut up into cells like a monastery, moss-grown like an old abandoned house."²

By way of assault, the Futurists cut through the paper sky of the Italian contemporary theatre by introducing themes, structural techniques, characters, and a new audience role that would eventually modernize that theatre.³

¹MEIF, p. 6.

²Marinetti, Corra, Settimelli, The Futurist Synthetic Theatre, a manifesto, (January 11-February 18, 1915), reprinted in MEIF, pp. 164-171.

³The title of this chapter and the reference immediately above was suggested by a passage from Pirandello's 1903 novel, Il Fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) in Le opere di Luigi Pirandello, 6 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1967), Vol. 3: Romanze, pp. 383-384. The passage reads:

In this chapter, we will examine the nature of the Futurist Synthetic Theatre as described in its manifesto and as demonstrated by two different programs of sintesi, the brief Futurist pieces which were introduced on tours during 1915 and 1916.

The Futurist Synthetic Theatre was the result of inspiration from many different sources. The idea of short pieces which would be dynamic, alogical, and simultaneous can be traced to Marinetti's admiration of similar qualities in the Variety Theatre, expressed in the 1913 manifesto devoted to the analysis of that theatre. Also, Futurist artists as early as 1910 were writing about "universal

"The tragedy of Orestes in a puppet theatre! . . . Automatic puppets, a new invention. . . . Now just listen what a strange thought occurred to me! If, at the climactic moment, just when the puppet who represents Orestes is about to avenge his father's death on Aegisthus and his mother, a hole was torn in the paper sky of the little theatre, what would happen? . . . Orestes would be terribly disconcerted by that hole in the sky. . . . Orestes would still feel the need for revenge, he would still want to rush to carry out his passion, but his eyes, at that very moment, would go there, to that hole, where all kinds of evil influences would now infiltrate the scene, and he would become Hamlet. The whole difference, Signor Meis, between ancient and modern tragedy is in that, believe me: in a hole in the paper sky."

The passage seemed to me particularly significant for the purposes of the paper in its succinct definition of modern tragedy as something disconcerting and impotent, in its use of the puppet theatre, and the very theatricality of that puppet theatre with its paper sky, as an analogy for man's place in the universe.

dynamism," "simultaneity," and the internal logic of a piece, not to be judged by old standards but by the Futurists own judgement as creative artists. The painters' ideas on the intimate relationships of objects and beings in space, their interpenetration and fragmentation, no doubt influenced Marinetti, just as his poems had perhaps influenced their own writing.¹

In addition to these influences, which primarily had an impact on the structural nature of the sintesi, the Futurists' desire to treat new subject matter and debunk traditional dramatic materials provided thematic content for the sintesi which was imbued with the Futurist world view.

The Futurist Synthetic Theatre--1915

The manifesto entitled Futurist Synthetic Theatre was published in 1915 together with seventy-nine sintesi. The manifesto was signed by Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli, and Bruno Corra, the acknowledged founders of the Futurist Theatre.² The manifesto begins:

¹See note in this paper, Chapter I, p. 21, no. 1, which cites critic Maurizio Calvesi in this regard.

²Mario Verdone, Teatro italiano d'avanguardia (Rome: Officina, 1970) p. 31. This anthology of sintesi, with an Introduction by Verdone, is hereinafter referred to as TIAV. Verdone cites Remo Chiti, I creatori del teatro futurista (Florence: Quattrini, 1915).

While we await our long-demanded great war, we Futurists alternate our violent anti-neutral activity in the squares and universities, with our artistic activities directed at the Italian public who we want to prepare for the hour of greatest Danger. Italy must be fearless, extremely persistent, as agile and quick as a fencer, as indifferent to blows as a boxer, unmoved at the announcement of a victory which cost the lives of 50,000 or at the news of defeat.¹

The writers unequivocally acknowledge why they have chosen to concentrate their attention on the theatre:

We think that the only way to inspire the Italian soul with the warlike spirit is through the theatre. In fact, 90% of Italians go to the theatre, while only 10% read books and reviews. But what's needed is a Futurist theatre, that is, one absolutely contrary to the passéist theatre, which prolongs its monotonous and depressing funeral processions across sleepy Italian stages.²

The traditional theatre which deals with historical subjects, and theatre which purports to deal with modern life are equally condemned: "In other words, it is a pacifist theatre and a neutralist one, the antithesis of the ferocious, overwhelming, synthesizing velocity of the war."³

Having thus swept competitors aside, the Futurists

¹MEIF, pp. 164-165. The manifesto is reprinted in this anthology, pp. 165-171.

²Ibid., p. 165.

³Ibid.

proclaim the fundamental concepts underlying their theatre. The key words are: synthetic, atechanical, dynamic, simultaneous, autonomous, alogical, and unreal.¹ Their theatre pieces would, first of all, be brief and compressed.

Futurists were to achieve this objective by doing away with the conventional plot-building devices, substituting acts lasting only a few seconds or minutes, sintesi (syntheses) of facts and ideas. The specific techniques of traditional playwriting which the Futurist synthetic dramatist would abandon included: (1) lengthy elaboration of an incident or of character traits when a brief version would do, (2) elaborate building-up of suspense throughout the act so that a climactic event could be stalled until just before the curtain, (3) minor characters to help explain major ones or to provide additional interest, (4) over-simplified and extremely detailed explanations of the characters and incidents, and (5) a closed ending in which the character's fate is completely understood and all of the various plot strands are pulled together. Marinetti, Settimelli, and Corra proposed a theatre which would compete with the cinema (and in

¹Brief definitions of these terms as used by the Futurists may be of help: 1) synthetic: very brief, reduced in dialogue, action, and stage time; 2) atechanical: against conventional dramatic techniques; 3) dynamic, simultaneous: improvised, intuitive, showing interpenetration of different times and places; 4) autonomous, alogical, unreal: unlike anything but itself, not photographic reality but theatrical reality, not guided by any logic other than its own originality.

this respect were among the first to recognize a danger to the future of the theatre) in its "essential and synthetic brevity."¹ Insisting that "everything of value is theatrical,"² the writers of the manifesto attempted to supplant the cause-and-effect logic of traditional dramatic technique with "fragments of inter-connected happenings, enmeshed in one another, confused, entangled, chaotic," as in life.³

The Futurist Synthetic Theatre stressed the importance of becoming dynamic and simultaneous, using improvisation and intuition over studied and desk-bound preparation--"hours, minutes, seconds" rather than "months, years, centuries."⁴ The theatrical space itself was viewed as a place for inspiration: many sintesi, according to the manifesto, were written in the theatre. The Futurists believed that the atmosphere of an empty gilded theatre combined with the improvisation of an actor's voice or body and the movement of scenery could be a creative force, a potential source of inspiration.⁵

¹MEIF, p. 166.

²Ibid., p. 167.

³Ibid., p. 168.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 169.

Because the actors, the scenery, and the stage would serve as inspiration for Futurist writers, the writers could then embrace a new allegiance with the actors "who are among the few thinkers that abhor any deforming cultural force."¹ The Futurist relationship with the audience, too, was to be unique: the rapport was to be a familiar one, without formal boundaries, the better to assure audience participation in which "the stage action will invade the orchestra seats and spectators."²

This "new Futurist theatricality" would replace all traditional forms: "farce, vaudeville, the sketch, comedy, drama and tragedy" were to be supplanted by "dialogue in freedom, simultaneity, interpenetration, a poem acted out, a sensation dramatized, a hilarious event in dialogue, the negative act, a line re-echoed, an extra-logical discussion, synthetic deformation, the scientific inspiration."³

Anyone who read this manifesto, or the previous ones on theatre, would expect to find several characteristic elements in the sintesi: brevity, a free-wheeling attitude to the treatment of time and space, cause-and-effect development and outcome, and explanation of character traits or motivations.

¹Ibid., p. 171.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

The reader could also expect to be confronted with new types of subject matter and new dramatic forms which would reflect modern life in themes and techniques. Finally, in the theatre, the audience member would expect to play a more active role, both collaborative and antagonistic, but never passive.

In the discussion which follows, we will examine a program of sintesi published and performed in 1915 by the Berti Company in order to discover where these characteristic elements are found. Particular, though not exclusive, attention will be paid in this discussion to an analysis of themes. A second group of sintesi, performed in 1916 by the Ninchi Company, will then be examined more specifically for their structural characteristics. These two programs were chosen for inspection because they are representative of the genre and because records exist to document their performance.

The Berti Company Sintesi, 1915

In 1915, the Berti Company, under the direction of Ettore Berti, toured much of northern Italy with the first spettacolo (production) composed entirely of Futurist sintesi.¹ The

¹A tour in 1913/1914 by the Tumiati Company was, by comparison, an amplified, organized serata. The company used a mixture of professional theatre people and Futurist amateurs and the program included readings of poems and a lecture on Futurism by Marinetti, as well as Marinetti's sintesi, Elettricità. See Antonucci, Cronache, p. 56, for a reprint of an article from the Corriere della sera, Milan, January 17, 1914, writer, anonymous.

The Berti Company toured Ancona, Bologna, Padua, Venice, Verona, Bergamo, Genoa, and Savona during February of 1915. The entire company was composed of professional actors, a point to which Marinetti referred during a performance in Bologna when he defended an actress from fruit and vegetable throwers in the audience by coming out on stage to tell the crowd that the actors were not Futurists and, therefore, they were not to be blamed for the show.¹

From a copy of the program for the evening of February 19, 1915, in Bergamo, and from newspaper accounts in Ancona and Bologna, we can ascertain that the program included ten or eleven sintesi, works by Marinetti, Settimelli, and

¹"At the beginning of a three-minute work, an orange hit the actress, Mrs. Tricerri, who retreated backstage. Marinetti appeared to plead that as the actors were not Futurists, they should not be blamed. Finally he said, 'We'll come back to collect the explosion of your joy,' and, while speaking, he was bombarded by a hurling of multi-colored projectiles." Antonucci, Cronache, p. 82, from an article by reviewer "gace" (Antonio Cervi) in Il Resto del Carlino, Bologna, February 6, 1915. Ettore Berti, head of the company, was later to play Laudisi in the first production of Pirandello's Così è (se vi pare) (It Is So [If You Think So], 1917) when it was produced in Rome by the Virgilio Talli Company in November 1918. Leonardo Bragaglia, Interpreti pirandelliani (Rome: Trevi, 1969), p. 123.

Corradini, Balilla Pratella, and Remo Chiti.¹ Antonio Cervi, the critic in Bologna, lists eleven sintesi for the performance of February 4, 1915. (1) Six sintesi were written by Marinetti: L'improvvisata, Simultaneità, Il teatrino dell'amore, Le basi, Vengono, Un chiaro di luna; (2) three sintesi were written by Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli: Passatismo, Verso la conquista, Dissonanza; (3) one sintesi was written by Remo Chiti and Emilio Settimelli: Pazzi girovaghi; and (4) one sintesi was written by Francesco Balilla Pratella: L'amante delle stelle. These sintesi will be examined in the order in which they were played, as recorded by Cervi.²

¹These pieces of evidence are contradictory to some degree in their listing of the program. The critic at Ancona lists ten sintesi, as does the program from the performance at Bergamo. Nine are the same, but Ancona lists an additional play by Marinetti and doesn't include a play by Paolo Buzzi, Il Guinzaglio (The Leash), apparently on the Bergamo program. The critic at Bologna lists the same ten as at Ancona and adds L'amante delle stelle (Star Lover, also called Notturmo or Nocturnal), by Balilla Pratella. For our analysis, we have used the Bologna listing. For Bergamo's program, see Verdone, TIAG, pp. 404-405. For critics' accounts in Ancona and Bologna, see Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 79-80 (Ancona) and pp. 81-84 (Bologna).

²Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 81-84.

L'improvvisata

The first sintesi on the program, L'improvvisata (Impromptu, 1915) by Marinetti, takes place in a tastefully decorated foyer which reflects its owners' upper middle-class origins.¹ (Five of the evening's eleven sintesi show well-dressed, middle-class characters in similarly recognizable middle-class surroundings.) The characters in the play, a husband and wife and the husband's seven friends, are dressed in contemporary fashion; the men are in formal evening wear, while the wife wears a robe over a nightgown. All of the characters speak in realistic, prose dialogue and the action follows a logical cause-and-effect pattern, containing one major reversal and concluding with an ironic twist.

After a drunken night on the town, the husband and his seven friends come back for a nightcap and the husband decides to awaken his wife, while one of the friends goes to get the drinks. The wife is awakened, one of the friends embraces her, and the husband jokingly insists on avenging her honor, shouting, "I'll strangle him."² Pretending to strangle him, the husband pushes the friend towards the sofa where he sits on him, laughing and shouting loudly, "Traitor!

¹ Marinetti, Teatro, 2:313-318.

² Ibid., p. 315.

Seducer! Don Juan!"¹ The other six friends pile on top of the husband who then pushes them away: "You're smothering me!"² When the husband pushes and pulls at the offending friend whom he thinks is in a drunken stupor, he realizes that the friend has been smothered. Someone suggests that the body be disposed of outside, before the milkmen begin to make their rounds. Those inside report as two of the friends carry the body outside and lay it on the tram tracks. The noise of an approaching vehicle turns out to be a funeral carriage. The body is crushed under the hearse and the friends watch in fascination as the driver stops and picks up the body. The piece ends with a remark from one of the men: "What a well-organized funeral!"³

This first piece takes a clearly ironic view of traditional values in several ways: the husband's treatment of his wife, the friend's drunken embrace of the wife, the joking "revenge," and the tragi-comic killing. Tradition would demand that the husband seek satisfaction for the outrage to his own and his wife's honor, which he does, but the stage directions make it clear that he is only joking and that he

¹Ibid., p. 316.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 318.

does not actually intend to "strangle" the friend. In the treatment of death as a drunken accident, Marinetti uses a theme in this play which will become typical of modern drama in Italy and elsewhere in years to come: death as a cruel joke, an accident, an ignoble and meaningless incident, not a heroic one. Not only is the friend grotesquely killed but he is also disposed of quickly, without a trace of guilt or other emotion. This "friend," like the others, apparently is easily expendable. In fact, in dress, speech and behavior, the seven friends (and the husband, too) are indistinguishable one from the other. The comic excess of friends seems deliberate--the seven become a faceless, mindless gang. The ironic, cruel and grotesque view of death and the dead is underscored by the funeral carriage which happens to pass, and the friends' fascinated and appreciative reaction to the "well-organized funeral service."

Verso la conquista

If L'improvvisata spoofs the ritual "crime of passion," the next sintesi, Verso la conquista (Toward Victory, 1915) satirizes the usual rhetoric of that passion and mocks

both the romantic hero and the d'Annunzian superman.¹ In Verso la conquista by Corra and Settimelli, a hero and his lover argue over his decision to leave her in order to perform great deeds. (Typically, in this synthetic, condensed plot form, the hero's destination and purpose are never explained.) After much highblown rhetoric on his part, the hero finally wrenches himself away from the woman and goes "toward victory." Corra and Settimelli give their hero an exit speech which is a shortened version of the superman rationale:

Ah! My Idea! It is the greatest in the universe; it is purer and brighter than the sun, it is more intoxicating than the most intoxicating drink! Goodbye Anna! I am going toward victory, I am the master of my interior God, I am immortal now, I cannot fear any danger, any obstacle, everything will fall before me. Goodbye.²

The irony of his last line is a comic comment on the ridiculous posturing of self-assurance in a world in which accident reigns. (In this attitude, the Futurists

¹Verdone distinguishes six major categories of sintesi: grotesque or eccentric; absurd; magic and occult; abstract; visual or cinematic; and ideological and polemical. According to Verdone, Verso la conquista belongs in the first category of grotesque or eccentric theatre because it attacks conventional literary forms. See Verdone TTF, pp. 84-102 for a full discussion of these categories, including examples.

²English translation, Kirby, p. 274, emphasis mine.

prefigure the Theatre of the Absurd.) In Verso la conquista, L'improvvisata, and in a play presented later in the program, Pazzi girovaghi (Vagrant Madmen), techniques which are typical in comedy--drunkenness, pratfalls, and irrational behavior--are part of a tragic action which ends in careless and casual death.

Simultaneità

The next sintesi, Marinetta's Simultaneità (Simultaneity, 1915), subtitled Compenetrazione (Interpenetration), uses a simultaneous set in an attempt to show the penetration of a prostitute's way of life into the thoughts, if not the behavior, of a middle-class family.¹ In this play, there is no humor or physical violence, and there is little contact between the two places represented on the stage or the people who inhabit those places. There are traces of symbolism in the atmosphere created by the snowy night outside, the brief, unconnected dialogue interspersed with long silences, and the dim lighting of the scene on stage left. An effect of events moving in slow-motion is achieved by the type of dialogue and activities which the family on stage left perform. These are offset by the brightly lighted dressing-table area, stage right, where the energetic figure of the

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:307-309.

prostitute sits. While the family on stage left read, study and sew (essentially passive, tranquil activities), the prostitute busily puts on her makeup and receives two delivery boys. The first brings a bouquet of flowers, the second brings a hat which the cocotte tries on with an expression of dislike. The family, the "realistic" aspect of the play, is not consciously aware of the "synthesis of sensations" being embodied in the figure of the cocotte. The fragments of dialogue which they exchange indicate that the intensely lighted area inhabited by the prostitute and those who make up her world does not exist in the same physical way that they do. They make comments on the family finances, the snow falling outside, and the isolation of the house, but they do not mention anything about the prostitute. That they do not see her is made obvious when the family's teenage son passes into the prostitute's area to get a book from the shelves behind her. He passes near her table but does not indicate in any way that he sees it. The only other time the characters directly intersect is at the end of the sintesi: The prostitute tiptoes softly into the family's territory and by her action makes us realize, for the first time, that she is aware of them. The children are sleeping, heads bent on their arms at the table; the father is looking out the window; and the mother has left the room. (Marinetti apparently wanted

to avoid the question of her "invisibility" once she is in their stage area.) The prostitute takes the schoolwork and sewing, throws it under the table and says, "Sleep!"¹ as she returns to her dressing table. In the use of a simultaneous set, Marinetti was harkening back to a much earlier theatrical technique: Medieval religious plays sometimes showed different locales (real and imagined) simultaneously on the stage and even showed movement from one place to the next..² Marinetti's use of the simultaneous set accomplishes his stated purposes of being "synthetic" and "absolutely dynamic." The set synthesizes successfully the two diametrically opposed worlds of the early realistic play in which a prostitute is often pitted against traditional middle-class characters and values. The set thus becomes a visual assault on the values which those traditional plays exalted, values personified in

¹Ibid., p. 309.

²Theatre researchers agree that scenic practices during the middle ages varied from place to place and country to country. Both written and visual testimony exists that in France, at least, mansions, that is, houses, representing different places were set up side by side. The actors apparently moved from place to place as the scene required. Two documents frequently cited in this regard are drawings: one of the stage for the Valenciennes Passion Play in 1547, which shows mansions stretched across the stage, including Heaven and Hell mansions; and the other a miniature painted by Jean Fouquet, c. 1460, of a mystery play, The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia, which shows mansions surrounding a circular stage interspersed with boxes for spectators. See both of these in Oscar Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977 ed.), pp. 111 and 105.

the middle-class family seated around their dimly-lit dining-room table. The action in which the prostitute appears to "infiltrate" the family's life by throwing aside their typically middle-class pursuits is a dynamic one; we see it happen, even if the family does not. This dynamic action is supported by the equally dynamic presence of the two sets, one brilliantly lit by "an intense, electric projection of light"; the other lit "by a shaded lamp with a green and feeble light."¹

The cocotte figure, Marinetti says in a note attached to the play, is not a symbol, but a "synthesis of sensations, of luxury, disorder, adventure, squandering, sensations which are alive in all of the people seated around the peaceful family table."²

The prostitute is not shown here only in her role as purveyor of sexual favors; during the play's action she touches no one, and is touched by no one. Only the bouquet and its accompanying note refer to an offstage admirer. Marinetti's attempt to synthesize the forces which inhabit the underworld of middle-class mores in the person of the prostitute is not the first of his experiments with new types of

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:307.

²Ibid., p. 309.

dramatic characters. The puppets of Elettricità were an earlier attempt to combine several different qualities and characteristics in one stage type. In that play, too, Marinetti depicts the projections of the "normal" characters' hopes, fears, desires, strengths and weaknesses in synthetic characters, the mechanical puppets. Other such attempts were to follow.

Passatismo

Passatismo (Traditionalism, 1915) by Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli was the fourth play on the program. Three short scenes span fifty years in the life of a couple.¹ In the first two scenes the man and the woman, who are described as old from the beginning, repeat the same dialogue regarding health, general happiness and the change of a calendar page. In scene one, the calendar reads January 10, 1860; in scene two, it is January 10, 1880. This highly compressed treatment of time and dramatic action accelerates in the third scene, when the usual exchange between the couple is cut short after the first two lines; the calendar is changed to January 10, 1910 and first the woman, and then the man, dies. In the accelerated treatment of time, the dreary couple's daily repetition of commonplace remarks become a kind

¹English translation appears in Kirby, pp. 269-270.

of mechanical ritual. (As in plays by Ionesco and Pinter, middle-class life is seen as a series of ordinary acts, incessantly and exasperatingly repeated.) The conventions of the realistic theatre are overturned along with the calendar: the couple shows no motivation for their actions; there is no indication of realistic, physical changes in the characters as they age; the set (a table and two chairs) and their positions on it remain unchanged. Only the removal of the calendar page serves to announce the passage of time, by twenty and thirty-year intervals. The piece suggests that traditionalists are dull and lead lives which are predictably tedious and unchanging until death, when they at last appear to feel "the stab in the heart." As these particular traditionalists die a year after the official beginning of Futurism in 1909, perhaps that stab they feel is Futurism itself.

Il teatrino dell'amore

The next two sintesi in the program are both by Marinetti. The first features objects which speak, in an otherwise realistically-oriented piece; and the second shows feet which move about in a frankly theatrical piece. In Il teatrino dell'amore (The Toy Theatre of Love, 1915) subtitled, "drama of objects," a man and woman commit adultery off stage right while the woman's husband reads and dozes off stage left.¹

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:341-344.

Onstage, a puppet theatre which has been placed atop a table at center stage, starts up of its own accord while a little girl sleeps downstage of the table. The toy puppet theatre is brought to the house by the mother's lover, called "the first to come." Although the actions of the puppets are not described, Marinetti's note to the play says that they are "moved by the love of the two characters who are embracing in the room next door."¹

In addition to the toy theatre, other objects in the play are raised to the status of "characters." The Buffet and a Credenza are situated on opposite walls, with a table at center. The Buffet and the Credenza speak whenever the human characters are not on stage. They talk about the things they hear in the house and the way the objects they hold (such as the Buffet's silver service) weigh on them.²

¹Ibid., p. 345. A stage direction on p. 344 indicates that the puppets are actually moved by an actor hidden under the table on which the toy theatre is placed.

²Unfortunately, no stage directions or other sources indicate how the audience would know which piece of furniture is speaking, nor can we tell from the written text or from Marinetti's note on the play whether or not actual stage furniture rather than a painted backdrop was used. As for indication which "character" was speaking, perhaps lights in the area of the particular piece of furniture was used. A photograph of the set for the other drama of objects on the program, Vengono (They Are Coming, 1915) shows that the chairs, "characters" in this piece, were real stage furniture but that the rest of the room was represented by a backdrop. The photograph also suggests that lighting played a significant role in the action of Vengono and a critic's account of an actual performance confirms that lighting was indeed responsible for creating the appropriate effect. For photograph, see Antonucci,

That Marinetti considered the objects to be the most important part of the work is evident from his note, published together with the play: "The most important characters are the wooden toy theatre (whose marionettes act in the dark without the presence of a puppet-master), the Buffet, and the Credenza, who cannot be found in traditional theatre."¹ Futurist painters were interested in the dynamic possibilities of objects--Carrà, for example, painted Rhythms of Objects in 1912.² Marinetti and Cangiullo, together with Balla, had produced object sculptures,³ and the Futurist film, Via Futurista (Futurist Life) is thought to have included objects in its cast of characters.⁴

Le basi

Le basi (Feet, 1915), sintesi number six on the program,

Cronache, p. 97 or Kirby, p. 56. For critics' comments see Antonucci, Cronache, Cervi, p. 84.

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:345.

²A photograph of this work appears in J. C. Taylor, Futurism, p. 76.

³Ibid., p. 120.

⁴M. Verdone. Cinema e letteratura del futurismo. (Rome: Bianco e Nero, 1968), p. 104, hereinafter referred to as CLF.

deemed a "true curiosity of its type" by the critic Cervi,¹ uses "talking" feet, in much the same way as we speak today of television's use of "talking heads." Stretched across the length of the stage, near the footlights, seven separate "units" of feet are visible, simultaneously.² Stage directions indicate the curtain should be raised "to a man's waist height."³ In each "scene," the characters exchange a line or two of dialogue which identifies something of the nature of the partially invisible characters and which indicates, minimally, the "plot" of the small sketch. The kinds of scenes and characters presented show "slices of life"

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 83.

²Marinetti, Teatro, 2:301-303. An extant photo of one of the first performances of Le basi is reproduced in Marinetti's Teatro, V. 1 in an unpaginated section of photographs. This photograph shows five and possible six of the units stretched across the stage, with the curtain raised to about waist level. As the sides of the stage are not visible, it is likely that this is only a partial photograph and the other one or two units are off-camera. The figures which can be distinguished in the photograph are, from stage right across: a figure seated at a sewing machine; a seated man and woman, chairs facing each other; a man seated, hands folded, ankles crossed; two men standing, one kicking the other; two women seated, chairs facing stage left; one or two men, either seated or standing (this edge of the photograph is not clear). Units represented in the photograph correspond to the following units in the written text: A girl at a sewing machine; a bachelor and a married woman in armchairs; a seated man, nervously moving his right foot; a man who is running away and a foot that is kicking at him; three seated women and three seated men (two visible in the photograph). Unaccounted for in the photograph, but present in the text, are: A man who is walking slowly with gouty feet and a man who is walking rapidly; a father, bachelor, and young girl. This photograph is also reproduced in Kirby, p. 57.

³Marinetti, Teatro, 2:301.

in a non-naturalistic, extremely reduced way. Although there is no apparent progression or connection between the scenes, more than one of them satirizes its subject, e.g., a businessman, seated at a desk, nervously waves his right foot about while he worries aloud about cheating others without getting cheated himself. The same unit, number 3, shows a traditionalist and a Futurist who demonstrate by their walking pace and by the length of their dialogue their divergent viewpoints: The one who walks fast says, "Quickly! Vile traditionalist!" while the slow one (who has a gouty foot) says, "Oh, what hurrying! No need to run! Who goes slowly goes safely."¹ Other scenes merely describe an activity or a state of mind: a man walks back and forth and says "Let's meditate;"² or a girl at a sewing machine says, "I'll see him on Sunday."³ These disembodied feet and legs accompany and enlarge the spoken dialogue. Without the more usual hand and facial movements, the nether parts of the body become objects which act, much in the way the objects are animated in other sintesi, such as Il teatrino dell'amore.

¹Ibid., p. 302.

²Ibid., p. 301.

³Ibid., p. 303.

Un chiaro di luna

Another attempt at a synthetically conceived character occurs in Marinetti's Un chiaro di luna (A Moonlit Night, 1915) which appeared on the bill after Le basi. Lovers, happy together, are seated in a garden. A pot-bellied fat man enters and sits next to them and can be seen by the audience but not by the couple--according to the stage directions, he is an invisible character.¹ In a note accompanying the play, Marinetti explains: "He's not a symbol but an alogical synthesis of many sensations: fear of the future, the cold and solitude of the night, a vision of life twenty years later, etc."² Like Simultaneità, this experiment in "alogical penetration" has symbolist correspondences in the evocation of feeling or atmosphere which progressively alters the young couple's state of mind from calm and innocent joy to a desire to retreat from the night which has suddenly seemed to turn cold. The audience, however, was to sense that it is the presence of the pot-bellied man which causes the change. Unlike the couple, the audience has superior awareness and can see the man so the tension they might feel for the couple will be different than that sensed by the couple themselves who cannot see the apparent cause. Once again, Marinetti's experiment

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:399-401.

²Ibid., p. 401.

gives physical shape to the projection of unconscious thoughts and unspoken feelings in a stage character.

Dissonanza

Dissonanza (Dissonance, 1915) by Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli, provides some comic relief after the uncomfortable feelings the pot-bellied man arouses. In Dissonanza, a lady and her courtly lover, dressed in thirteenth-century costume, are seated on a set which depicts a thirteenth-century room.¹ This sintesi, like Verso la conquista earlier in the program, pokes fun at a literary model. Dissonanza satirizes pseudo-historical drama such as Sem Benelli's Cena delle beffe (Supper of Jests, 1909), in which characters speak a flowery language of past ages but are engaged in non-heroic pursuits, such as petty flirtations. A fully-costumed thirteenth-century Lady and Page speak verses of love to one another. They appear to be speaking sincerely, in the fashion of the model, but it is clear from the kinds of similes and metaphors used, that this is a spoof. For instance, the page says,

Ah! Finally! and my steel heart breaks apart
like pomegranate seeds, ah! finally! and my
pride crouches under your dominating feet. ²

¹English translation appears in Kirby, pp. 262-263.

²Ibid., p. 262.

She answers,

. . . in this air, I too feel a dizziness of
a thousand songs opening in my blood, I too
feel a frost running through my heart that
divides it like a sweet fruit and my hesitating
icy fingers tremble as if they were butter-
flies over your head of ardent bloneness.¹

Just as that ardent young man is wishing that the moment between them could last forever, a Gentleman, dressed in twentieth-century modern clothing, enters and asks the thirteenth-century man for a match. The latter examines his pockets, says he's sorry, but, no, and the Gentleman exits as the two continue their love scene. Verdone writes that the intention is to "unmask" the falseness of the thirteenth-century setting and poetic dialogue in a play which is clearly based on the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century themes of love (usually adultery) and money.² The Gentleman is, clearly, a de-mystifier. The character called the Gentleman stops the action, interrupting the love scene and the "everlasting moment" the Page had wished for. When the Gentleman exits, with the quick and elegant step of the Futurist, the plausibility of the cardboard world is broken, as the Page, in an even more lyrical and passionate way, intones, "Love, love, we will find the force to make the indestructible moment eternal; we will perform a fruitful miracle."³

¹Ibid.

²Verdone, TTF, p. 85.

³Kirby, p. 263.

I pazzi girovaghi

The next play, I pazzi girovaghi (Vagrant Madmen, 1915), by Remo Chiti and Emilio Settimelli, is set in what appears to be a peaceful summer garden.¹ But the garden is "invaded" by madmen who dispel the effects of the heavy jasmine scent and dim street light. It is night; a young madman counts the pebbles on the ground around him as he speaks in a words-in-freedom poem dedicated to the night, the pebbles, the lamp-light (which replaces the absent moon). An old man enters who is also clearly mad, and their dialogue is really two separate strains of madness. The characters are differentiated in the kinds of subjects they rave about. The young madman concentrates on the more romantically imbued subjects outlined above, while the older madman, who is louder, more staccato, and more violent, talks of everyday needs: shoes, a hat, food. Although the characters' actions and dialogue are irrational, they are only apparently incoherent and ineffectual.

There is a discernible plot line and character development: the wandering madmen engage in a kind of duel of words. The more aggressive older man harangues the younger one directly: "Enough! Enough! I am hungry!"² The younger man, who otherwise appears not to hear the other madman, answers, offering himself, "Do you want some bread? I have a lot of

¹English translation appears in Kirby, pp. 260-261.

²Ibid., p. 260.

it here in my body. I am twenty years old and I have eaten a lot of it every day! You are hungry! Turn the jacket inside out!"¹ But the young man quickly turns inward once again and, infuriated, the older man strangles the young madman. He exits, after muttering: "Damn! New shoes, it's better to go in the fields."² Why it's better in the fields, why he's dissatisfied with the new shoes is not made clear. The young man is dead, the victim of apparently random violence from one of his own kind. The conflict is between the practicality of experience, aided by aggression and violence, and the vague, romantic, and self-interested musings of a feeble poet. Verdone cites this play as an example of Futurist absurdist drama because of its celebration of lyrical madness.³

Either one of the last two plays might appropriately close the performances of Futurist sintesi. Vengono (They Are Coming), a drama of objects by Marinetti, was the last piece played on tour except in Bologna where Francesco Balilla Pratella's L'amante delle stelle (The Star Lover) or Notturmo (Nocturnal), a dramatized state of mind, ended the bill.

¹Ibid., pp. 260-261.

²Ibid., p. 261.

³Verdone, TTF, p. 90.

L'amante delle stelle

Pratella's play is more closely tied to the logical, or real, though both plays use bizarre events and create a mysterious effect to some degree.¹ In L'amante delle stelle (The Star Lover, 1915), a man who is obsessed with the stars, neglects his wife and does nothing to prevent her being stolen by three "wife stealers" who unexplainably turn up at their garret door. When one of the three holds the wife and kisses her, trying to get a reaction, the man says and does nothing. Even when they beat him and exit, all four laughing and embracing one another, the husband doesn't protest. He rises, closes and barricades the door and returns to commune with the "ten million stars --red, yellow, green ones."² Although the world of the play is recognizable, it has obviously disintegrated. The garret with a couple who are poor and nearly starving refers us to late nineteenth-century "garret" plays, such as the libretto for La Bohème. In that tradition, however, the lovers cling to one another and suffer only when they are separated; they do not complain of their hardships but revel, rather, in the opportunity to prove their great and exclusive passion for one another. Here, the wife is a weak, complaining creature and the husband is oblivious to everything but the stars which pull him to the window and the

¹Italian version in Sipario (December 1967), p. 94.

²Ibid.

intruding wife-stealers eliminate whatever distraction the wife's presence might have been. In the Bologna review, Antonio Cervi says the play is "A satire on dreamers who lose all contact with reality through over-involvement with the abstract."¹ Michael Kirby recognizes L'amante delle stelle as a symbolist piece, particularly in its use of mood and mystery and in the combination of real and symbolic actions performed by the husband.² The husband has clearly removed himself from normal human behavior; he is neither heroic or anti-heroic but "aheroic," alienated and in communion only with the stars. The thieves, a small deus ex machina gang, adhere more rigidly to normal social rituals than does the husband; they are angry when he does nothing to save his wife. They, like the wife, don't understand why the husband counts stars; they, like the wife, are from the real world of "hunger, cold, and misery." He, instead, has transcended that life in some mysterious way and his total absorption in the stars permeates the play with an atmosphere of the unknown.

Vengono

The unknown in Vengono (They Are Coming, 1915) by

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 84.

²Kirby, p. 54. Kirby refers to the play as Notturmo. An English translation, entitled Nocturnal, appears in Kirby, pp. 299-300.

Marinetti is also part of that play's mysterious and illogical action.¹ In Vengono, a majordomo and two servants move chairs and table, provide food and drink, cushions and stools for "them." No one ever appears, but the chairs, placed in different ways around a dominating large armchair, gradually begin to command the stage. Their presence is non-human but imposing and mysterious at the end as they appear to be marching offstage. In one of the few critic's remarks on the production aspects of this program of sintesi, Cenci writes, "Here we have eight different kinds of chairs and a large armchair which have been moved about the stage in different places to suit the long-awaited guests. They end by animating themselves in a kind of fantastic coming to life and they seem to actually exit from the room in single file. The lights were well-arranged to make the illusion complete."² As in Il teatrino dell'amore we again have objects as characters. In Il teatrino the objects spoke and one object, the toy theatre, which appeared to start up itself was actually turned on by an actor hidden under the table.³ In Vengono, too, a backstage trick is used, but with apparently

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:283-285.

²Cenci in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 84.

³Marinetti, Teatro, 2:344, stage directions.

more sophistication and with successful theatrical effect. The "magic" of the apparently mobile chairs makes those on stage freeze in terror. The audience, too, should feel uneasy about the increasing urgency with which the majordomo gives the orders and counterorders about the furniture arrangement to the servants. The process is speeded up so that by the last order, the major is running in and speaking gibberish: "Briccatirakamekame."¹ Questions remain: Who are the "they" that are supposed to come and don't? Who gives the majordomo his orders? Why are the orders contradicted? Why do the chairs move and where are they going? Have the chairs taken over as the servants and majordomo cower before them? These questions are all suggested by the action and add to its disturbing aura of a world out of control in which directions come from an unnamed source and are frequently confused and contradicted. In this topsy-turvy world in which objects are animated, humans are servants whose futile, uncomprehending attempts at obedience serve masters whom they cannot see or know.²

¹Marinetti, *Teatro*, 2:285. Though this could be nonsense without any real origins in Italian, it could be a speeded-up slurring of several orders at once. One possibility might be: "sbrigati!" "tira!" "cammina!" (Move it! Pull! Run!!)

²To the modern reader, there are obvious correspondences between Marinetti's *Vengono* and Ionesco's *The Chairs*, such as a waiting-room with chairs which gradually assume a power of their own, and a fearful and chaotic ending.

All of the small plays which we have analyzed take only a few minutes to perform.¹ Most of the plays satirize some aspect of traditional thought or behavior and were obviously intended to shock or even offend some segments of the public.² But most of the plays also have some thematic content which goes beyond the desire to move the audience to outrage and to destroy old forms of art and life. The plays concern such themes as man's estrangement from the normal social world, the inability or unwillingness to relate to the "other," or, at the extreme, an open hostility toward the "other." Everyday life is recognized as unrelievedly drab. In the tragi-comic mix used in most of the plays, things are not what they seem. Experience and appearance are unreliable but the strength and fascination of the subconscious pull the mind and spirit toward new realms of possibility. There is the recognition that things do not always balance out or "add up." Often, there is no explanation for events or their results, nor is there anyone clearly at whom to point blame.

¹Several critics of performances of this tour remarked upon the extreme brevity of the plays and the unfortunate length of the intermissions between them. One reviewer called them "much too traditional intermissions." Anonymous writer for the Ancona daily L'ordine, February 1915, in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 79.

²For the critics' impressions of how the audiences in the various cities received the sintesi on this tour, see Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 77-96. Most critics devoted almost the entire column to the kinds of produce thrown at the performers rather than to an analysis of the plays.

Technical experiments, too, are an important feature of the sintesi: real time and place are invaded by an invented world in which characters and objects whose actions are reflections of the subconscious can exist simultaneously with characters and events based in reality. Plot line is compressed and synthesized; characters are mockeries of traditional ones or are new and strange types with sometimes frightening possibilities. The audience throughout the Berti tour seems to have acted consistent with Marinetti's expectations as outlined in the founding manifesto: "We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure or by riot"¹ and in the Variety Theatre Manifesto, in which the audience "joins noisily in the action, singing, accompanying the orchestra, communicating with the actors in unforeseen witticisms and bizarre dialogues. . . . And because the audience cooperates in this way with the actors' fantasy, the action develops simultaneously on the stage, in the boxes, and in the orchestra."²

The preceding analysis of the eleven sintesi performed by the Berti Company during February, 1915, was an attempt to demonstrate the kind of assault the Futurists made on the

¹MEIF, p. 6.

²Ibid., pp. 113-114.

theatre of their time through a discussion of their subject matter and inovative treatment. In those sintesi, three characteristic elements were discovered to be consistent: (1) an extremely brief action, (2) a tragi-comic mix, and (3) the use of irony in the resolution. In the discussion which immediately follows, certain additional structural elements will be examined which act in combination to give the sintesi an effect of syncopation.¹ These elements are:

(1) simultaneity and dynamism; (2) contraction/compression of story line; (3) alternating tight and multiple focus; (4) deliberately interrupted, fragmented, and confused plot line; and (5) a preference for endings which are ambiguous, absurd, or unresolved, and which cannot be satisfied by a definitive interpretation.

In an effort to demonstrate the relationship between the syncopated effect in the sintesi and a similar effect in Futurist painting and in the Variety Theatre, we will turn to a brief examination of some examples of Futurist art, before returning to the Berti Company sintesi and the subject of syncopation.

As discussed in Chapter I, painters joined Futurism

¹The verb syncopate has both a grammatical and a musical definition. In grammar, a word is syncopated when one or more sounds are omitted from the middle of the word and a contraction is formed: for example, "never" is reduced to "ne'er." In music, a piece is said to be syncopated when normally unaccented beats are emphasized or accented, as in ragtime or jazz.

in 1910 when they published two explanatory manifestoes:

A Manifesto of Futurist Painters and Futurist Painting: A Technical Manifesto.¹ Futurist artists, like Futurist writers, recognized the need for treating new subjects: "All subjects previously used must be swept aside."²

Futurist Art & Syncopation

Because of their concerns, Futurist artists treated new and unusual subjects together with, and sometimes in contrast to, the conventional subjects of painting, such as the human figure.³ Their belief in dynamism, simultaneity, and the interpenetration of matter in space caused them to deliberately contract, confuse, and fragment the narrative elements of their work.⁴ These formal techniques produced syncopated effects which are similar to those produced by the sintesi.

¹MEIF, pp. 20-22 and pp. 23-26.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³One of their most notorious pronouncements was that there would be no more nudes, which, they said, "are as sickening and oppressive as adultery in literature." MEIF, p. 26.

⁴Perhaps some clarification of these terms would be helpful. Dynamism, as used by Futurists, means the universe is explained in terms of energy; all matter is energetic, vigorous, forceful. Simultaneity refers to the fact that many things exist and interact in the same space at the same time. Interpenetration refers to the fusing of matter in space. Fragmentation is the act or process of breaking something up into pieces of unequal size and shape.

One of the favorite subjects of Futurism was the machine, especially the locomotive. Two of Gino Severini's studies of trains, Train Between Houses (1913-14) and Red Cross Train (1914) show locomotives which, while recognizable, are stylized and fragmented. In both pictures, several objects, apart from the train, draw our attention. In the first picture, houses and signs interrupt and attract our notice; in the second, a brightly colored landscape, full of abstracted shapes, demands nearly equal attention.¹ The eye is drawn through the paintings not in a direct way, with the train as principal focus, but rather everywhere at once; we are encouraged to look around and through the train, always recognizing the train's dominance but pulled away from it in all directions.¹

Two other subjects which were popular among Futurist artists were political action and such abstract concepts as dynamism and simultaneity. Carlo Carrà's 1915 college entitled Manifesto for Intervention is a visual manifesto which argues for Italy's intervention in the war.² The work

¹Photographs of all Futurist paintings can be seen in Archivi del futurismo, 2 vols., ed., Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1958-1962). Severini's train paintings are in 2:330.

²Ibid., p. 289.

creates the effect of dynamism through the simultaneous presentation of hundreds of letters, shaped into words and approximations of sounds in different languages and type-faces. The paper cutouts and painted words are placed in the shape of a wheel which appears to spin before us, challenging our eyes to follow. In the collage and in Severini's train paintings described above, there is an effect of syn-copation produced by the simultaneity of many focal points which alternate in their appeal to our eye and by the presentation of the subject in fragments. Both elements prevent a linear progression and make definitive interpretation or a discussion of beginnings or endings beside the point. The effect in all three is fragmented, dynamic, and simultaneous; in Futurist terms, "the dynamic sensation itself."¹

Umberto Boccioni and Giacomo Balla both treated the subject of dynamism. They attempted to express in painting the movement of matter in space, much as earlier photographic studies had done.² Balla's studies of a dog and a violinist,

¹Futurist Painting: A Technical Manifesto, MEIF, p. 23.

²Beginning in the 1870's, Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), experimented with a technique which recorded consecutive movements in both men and animals by taking a series of photographs. Later experimenters who perfected the techniques used by Muybridge included Ottomar Anschutz (1846-1907), Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), and E. J. Marey (1830-1904). Apollonio, p. 15. Apollonio credits Marey's photographs, taken with a photographic gun, as having an influence on Balla's paintings, Dog (1912) and Swallows (1913) as well as Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase (1911-1912).

both from 1912, are very precisely rendered drawings of the subjects. In Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash, a dog in the foreground and a leash leading to the dog's partially visible owner walk "off the canvas" to our left. Their speed seems to be a brisk trot, the movement suggested by a carefully escalated series of "stages" in the motion of the dog's feet, head, and tail, the leash as it swings back and forth, and the lady walking the dog. The motion of walking is multiplied to simulate actual movement. The same kind of precisely rendered drawing is also evidenced in Balla's The Violinist's Hands which again accomplishes the effect of movement through multiple drawings of the same movement, slightly adjusted each time in a technique which is akin to animation.¹ Boccioni published an essay on the subject in the magazine Lacerba (15 March 1914) entitled "Absolute Motion + Relative Motion = Dynamism."² In the essay, he argues each object has its own "plastic power." "This power . . . coordinates different plastic values of reality, a coordination which is purely architectural, freed of all literary and sentimental influences."³ Boccioni defined objects

¹Gambillo, p. 71.

²English translation appears in Apollonio, pp. 150-155.

³Ibid., p. 150.

as "infinite combinations of light and forms in the animal, mineral, and vegetable, as well as mechanical, worlds."¹ Objects of different shapes can influence each other and be characterized by the power of their respective absolute motions. The weaker, whether it has a static or a dynamic temperament, will always feel the effects of the power of the stronger, which can again be either static or dynamic."² Thus, an object's absolute motion, in relative motion with one or more objects containing different absolute motions . would produce the effect of dynamism. In Boccioni's various studies of dynamism during 1913 and 1914, the subjects are painted in decomposition and a kind of "war of objects" results. In Dynamism of a Human Body (1913), for instance, the human form is a visual battle of curves and cones which swirl and strain in and against a very tightly occupied space.³ It is one example of "a real competition of lines and . . . conflict of planes, following the emotional law which governs the picture."⁴ Carlo Carrà's painting,

¹Ibid., p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 151.

³Gambillo, pp. 228-229.

⁴Preface to the Catalogue . . ., MEIF, p. 62.

Simultaneity--The Woman on the Balcony (1912) combines Balla's technique of multiple drawings in depicting the outline of the nude woman's body, with the decomposition of objects in space seen in Boccioni's work.¹ The outlines of houses, the balcony railings, even portions of the woman's body are painted in fragments which appear to crowd in on the woman and explode out from her simultaneously. The 1912 Preface to the Catalogue . . . explains,

Painting a person on a balcony, seen from inside, we don't limit the scene to that which the window frame would allow us to see; but we try to give the complex of plastic sensations experienced by the painter at the balcony: the brilliant sun-drenched street, double row of houses that stretch out to the right and left, balconies full of flowers, etc.²

Thus, Futurist painters, guided by the principles of dynamism, simultaneity, and fragmentation, produce an effect of syncopation. In studying the paintings, several focal points seem to dominate simultaneously, the parts are fragmented, and the accent shifts as our eyes move over the picture. We are asked to experience the "sensation" of the painting rather than to decode a "meaning."

The Berti Company and Syncopation

We have seen how Futurist artists achieved a syncopated effect through their treatment of a subject according to the

¹Gambillo, p. 253.

²MEIF, p. 61.

principles of dynamism, simultaneity, and fragmentation. In the Berti Company sintesi examined earlier in this chapter, the same structural principles are at work.

Four of the plays demonstrate the use of simultaneity and dynamism by showing two actions occupying the same stage time. Simultaneità shows a middle-class family seated around a table on stage left in contrast with the elegant dressing-room of a cocotte on stage right. Dissonanza mixes two historical periods by showing a thirteenth-century couple who are interrupted by a twentieth-century man. Il teatrino dell'amore shows objects in action simultaneously with humans. In Le basi, in which only the bottom portions of the actors are visible, nine separate vignettes are on stage simultaneously.

Le basi also demonstrates fragmentation as well as the extreme compression of the story line used in most of the sintesi. Each of the vignettes is but a suggestive fragment. Passatismo reduces a marriage of fifty years to three minutes of playing time in which the couple repeat the same dialogue.

In the plays which use simultaneity as a structural principle, our attention is drawn alternately to a tight focus on one of the actions, then to a whole stage focus and back again. In Simultaneità, for example, all of the play's characters and settings are visible at once. As the action

alternates from one part of the stage to another, we go from tight to multiple focus, from the cocotte to the whole family, to individual family members, to the whole stage picture, and then retrace our progress.

Usually, in these sintesi, the play's resolution brings no traditional restoration of order. Frequently, the ending is ironic, as in Verso la conquista, when the hero steps on a fig and dies or in L'improvvisata when the murdered man's body is run over by a hearse. In Le basi, there is no ending, just as there is no necessary beginning; the fragments are interchangeable. Although the text indicates a playing area and the extant photograph discussed above (showing a partial stage view) suggests that the text was followed in performance, one vignette does not lead to the next in a traditional cause and effect relationship. And in Vengono, as the chairs appear to move past the terrified majordomo and servants, we are left in suspense and confusion.

Over half of the plays are clearly tightly focused, crisis dramas; the others, especially those which mix time periods, have a broader sweep, more characters, and more than one story line. Two of the plays (Verso la conquista and Dissonanza) mock contemporary models and several upset or invert social or theatrical convention (L'improvvisata, Notturmo, Pazzi girovaghi, Vengono). Overt theatricality is present in several of the Berti Company sintesi (Il teatrino

dell'amore, Le basi, Dissonanza, Vengono).

In virtually all of the plays, the familiar, e.g., a family table, a garden in moonlight, a middle-class drawing-room, soon become strange as the authors of the sintesi, through use of these structural principles, accent the unusual "beat" and bring about a syncopated effect.

The Ninchi Company, March 1916

In March of 1916, a second program of sintesi was presented in Florence by the Roma Company, directed by Annibale Ninchi. The nine sintesi performed at the Teatro Niccolini on March 10, 1916 were: Tricolore and Kaiseriana by Emilio Settimelli; L'arresto, Il soldato lontano and Camera dell'ufficiale by Marinetti; Kultur by Boccioni; La pancia del vaso by Francesco Cangiullo; Giallo e nero by Remo Chiti; and Davanti all'infinito by Corra and Settimelli.¹

Italy declared war on Austria in May 1915 and Futurists were quick to join the war they had loudly campaigned for. Now they were back to celebrate the war effort. Marinetti, Settimelli, Boccioni, and Remo Chiti all contributed works which were patriotic first and theatrical second. In a manifesto issued the day following the performance, Marinetti wrote, "Yesterday, . . . Settimelli, Bruno Corra, Remo Chiti,

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 102, listed as part of a review by Enrico Novelli (Yambo) in La Nazione, Florence, March 10, 1916.

Francesco Cangiullo, Boccioni, and I moved the Florentine public to war through our synthetic theatre, violently patriotic, anti-neutral, and anti-German."¹

Six of the nine pieces on the program were exclusively concerned with war themes. In their desire to be "violently patriotic," the Futurists are uncharacteristically sentimental in two of these propaganda pieces. Settimelli's Tricolore, for example, glorifies the heroic saving of the Italian flag by a member of the Alpine troops. Even Remo Chiti's contribution, Giallo e nero, is a sentimental portrayal of a German sergeant's "nightmare" as he betrays the Emperor and deserts his company. Kaiseriana by Settimelli and Kultur by Boccioni offer a more characteristic irony in their approach to the subject. Kaiseriana concerns a man who thinks he is Napoleon; and Kultur treats the perennial theme of Italian spontaneity and geniality versus stolid German philosophy and nit-picking criticism.²

Two of the sintesi by Marinetti, Il soldato lontano and Camera dell'ufficiale, use experimental theatrical techniques but also tend to sentimentalize the subject matter.

¹Marinetti, La declamazione dinamica e sinottica, MEIF, p. 176.

²Three of these texts were not available for examination. The content of these plays (Tricolore, Kaiseriana, and Kultur) is discussed in Enrico Novelli's review of the program, reprinted in Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 102-105.

In Soldato lontano, Marinetti uses simultaneity to show a soldier at the front and his family at home.

Il soldato lontano

As in Simultaneità, Marinetti attempts an interpenetration of two locales simultaneously in Il soldato lontano (The Soldier Far Away, 1916)¹ As a girl and an old woman sit sewing at the table, they speak of a present the girl has sent her cousin, a soldier at the front. There is a young man also seated at the table, who is talking to the girl, trying to get her attention with words the audience cannot hear. The girl ignores him. The soldier, who is invisible to the other characters, according to the stage directions, dominates the scene from his position in a trench at the front, bayonette extended. The soldier's extraordinary size, together with the placement of the actors on the stage, is an attempt to make the soldier appear to dominate and interpenetrate the action of the family scene. After three brief exchanges of dialogue, a loud and violent but very distant cry is heard, "Savooia!!!"² Simultaneously, the women stand abruptly, the young man remains seated, head in hands, the soldier's mouth drops open, and the curtain slowly falls.

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:385-386.

²Ibid., p. 386.

The effect of interpenetration apparently did not work. Critic Novelli wrote: "In these interpenetrations, the only absolute judge is the eye. If the optical illusion succeeds, the experiment works. But, unfortunately, last night this wasn't possible . . . no illusions, optic or psychological."¹ Despite its apparent failure, the piece has an interesting pre-expressionistic use of the grotesque in its larger-than-life-sized soldier and sudden and stark ending.

Camera dell'ufficiale

In Camera dell'ufficiale (Officer's Room, 1916), subtitled "A Drama of Objects," Marinetti uses a filmlike technique.² The curtain rises on a darkened room. Through an upstage window, we can see a guard who passes at intervals. At a distance, a light is flashing a signal. Stage right, a light shines from under a doorway, which only partially illuminates the onstage room. Behind the door, we hear a typewriter, paper being crumpled up and thrown on the floor, and the sounds of someone pacing. Cannon and voices are heard far away. A telephone rings in the room on stage but no one answers and the ringing stops. Suddenly, quick steps and voices are heard in the room next door. An explosion

¹Antonelli, Cronache, p. 105.

²Marinetti, Teatro, 2:377-378.

there bursts open the door and a spotlight suddenly illuminates the officer's room on stage and the officer's personal things, which include a woman's photograph and a letter, as well as a pair of embroidered slippers. After a minute, the curtain falls. The critic, Novelli, who was an astute and sympathetic critic of Futurist work, found this work too slight and insubstantial. There is no mention of the use of cinematic technique in what Novelli recognizes as a drama of objects. Marinetti's narrative, told through light, sounds, and the presence of objects only, does not appear to have been understood in performance, although the stage directions indicate that the combination of sounds and the juxtaposition of things in the officer's room are to suggest that the officer was writing a difficult letter, perhaps to his sweetheart, while a signal and then a telephone try to warn him of impending enemy attack, an attack which results in blowing him up. Although at first glance the play's effect is sentimental, in dwelling on a dead man's things, it is possible to infer that Marinetti is being critical of an army officer who is writing to his loved one rather than attending to his duties. This interpretation would certainly be in line with Futurist thought and would therefore be an appropriate criticism of those who go to war but can be distracted by things at home, especially women. (No doubt drawing on personal experience, Futurists, from the first manifesto,

warned that a man who wanted to live an active Futurist life must scorn women because of their seductive powers.)

No such conflict of interpretation is likely with the other three sintesi on the Ninchi Company bill. L'arresto, La pancia del vaso, and Davanti all'infinito are comparable with the Berti Company sintesi in that they are brief, biting, and mix comic and tragic concerns and techniques. They are also clearly critical. All three plays show condensed actions which mock contemporary values. L'arresto accuses critics of cowardice in the face of war, La pancia del vaso satirizes scientists, and Davanti all'infinito ridicules philosophers. The underlying violence of some of the Berti Company pieces, e.g., L'improvvisata, in which a man is accidentally murdered and then run over by a hearse, or Pazzi girovaghi in which one madman strangles another, is again in evidence in these three sintesi. Perhaps because of their experience at war and anger at those intellectuals who were dissecting the war from the comfort of their armchairs at home, the violence is very strong here and is deliberately anarchic in tone.

Structural elements in L'arresto, La pancia del vaso, and Davanti all'infinito

Several of the structural elements which we have distinguished as giving the sintesi an effect of syncopation, operate to that same effect in L'arresto, La pancia del vaso, and Davanti all'infinito. An analysis of these plays follows.

L'arresto

L'arresto (The Arrest, 1916) is set in an elegant drawing-room in which chairs surround a small stage.¹ Spectators are seated, waiting for the performance to begin. From the conversation of two of them, we learn that the actors who will be playing soldiers have actually been at the front themselves. We learn about several of the people in the audience too, which includes "the most elegant woman in Milan," an anti-war philosopher, and other critics, including Nietzsche's Italian translator whose prewar boasts of his prowess have turned to faint protests of a sudden weakness since the war began.

The curtain rises to reveal a group of Alpine soldiers who are preparing a trench under the direction of their captain (played, we are told, by a famous painter whose name the spectator forgets). After the actors begin to speak, several people begin to criticize various aspects of the production. They complain that a captain wouldn't use that tone of voice to his troops and that the actor/soldiers are not building the trenches correctly. Finally, after the bickering in the audience has continued for a few lines of dialogue, the actor playing the Captain drops his character and demands that the critics take over the performance. All of the

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:369-373.

critics are forced to go up onto the stage and then the actors take their places in the audience, their rifles held between their legs. The actors mockingly urge the "grotesque and trembling" critics to continue the play as the audience laughs uproariously. By accident, the Captain's rifle goes off and one of the critics is killed. Amid the resulting confusion, police enter and ask where the killer is. The spectators all point to the dead critic. When the police ask how they are to arrest a dead man, the Captain shouts, "Arrest his stench which will endure."¹

In the first section of the play, the exposition is given by the conventional device of having one spectator tell another some background on what they're to see, therefore informing the audience as well. All of the preparation is done in this section: the critics are named, the actors are identified, and even a degree of foreshadowing is planted as it becomes clear that the first spectator's sympathies are with the Futurists. In the second section, the actor/soldiers briefly perform and are interrupted by the critics who shout out to the actors and talk among themselves. In the third section, the critics are pushed up on stage; one of them is accidentally killed and the police come to arrest the assassin whom the audience names as the dead critic.

¹Ibid., p. 373.

Marinetti, still interested chiefly in simultaneity and dynamism as structural principles, uses a play-within-a-play device to accomplish his end. The device multiplies the simultaneous effect by having Futurists act the parts of soldiers, by naming fictional counterparts of real anti-war and anti-Futurist critics, and by having the two groups exchange roles. Although none of the actors are named, it is possible that the "famous painter" referred to by the spectator could be Boccioni or an actor representing him. The comment by Marinetti cited earlier suggests the possibility of Boccioni's presence, along with that of the other playwrights represented that evening. One critic mentions Marinetti's presence and refers to Boccioni as Captain of the Alpine Company in his summary of the event, written in pseudo-Futurist style,

Nine (9) dramas seriousness rapidity thirty
(30) dead almost all killed. Intermissions too
long not synthetic mumblings from the tradit-
ionalist public noises protests waiting applause
applause applause Marinetti from behind the
scenes to dry the sweat of labor official servant
. . . Marinetti impressions of the war. The
Commander of the Third Alpine Troups (these words
must be sung) Successess, Successess, Successessess!¹

¹"Nove (9) drammi sobrieta rapidita 30 (trenta) morti quasi tutti ammazzati. Intermezzi troppo lunghi non sintetici mormorii pubblico passatista rumori proteste attesa applausi applausi applausi. Marinetti evocato scena asciugare sudore-fatica cameriera ufficiale . . . Marinetti impressioni di guerra. Il Comandante del 3 Alpini (Queste parole devono essere cantate) Successoo successooooo successooo'oooooo!" Baccio Bacci in Il Nuovo Giornale, Florence, 10 March 1916 in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 102.

Whether or not the actor/soldiers were played by recognizable Futurists, Marinetti wants us to believe that the actors playing soldiers are Futurists who are just back on leave from the war. Actual Futurist performances are evoked by the elegant drawing-room set and by the presence of the on-stage audience. On several levels, reality is mirrored: Futurists as soldiers and as actors, actors as critics interrupting a Futurist performance, non-soldiers telling how to fight a war, critics vs. Futurists at war, Futurists at war away and at home. There is only one line actually spoken in the play-within-a-play before the audience interrupts. But the device has worked to set the several actions working simultaneously. When the audience's interruptions have fragmented the play and the fourth wall has been violated by both audience and actors, led by the Captain, a new play or improvisation is suggested: the critics are to play soldiers at war. When the actors join the audience to watch, the boundaries are crossed between the two, although not between the stage and actual audience. As has frequently been the case in other sintesi which used simultaneity as a structural principle, our focus shifts from a small action to a whole stage action and back again. Throughout, we are led by stops and starts in directions we could not have imagined at the outset. At one moment the play is about the actors in the soldier-play; the next, it's about the audience at that play and, finally, it evolves into a play about critics turned actors.

The violence which fragments the play is part of the war motif. The real world of the war is present in the soldiers' uniforms and rifles in contrast to the elegant drawing-room and finely dressed women and men. With remarkable economy, Marinetti gives us fragments of two separate worlds simultaneously. The actors, who act like brutal ruffians as they herd the critics up on stage, create an atmosphere of violence in their very persons. Because we know they are actual Futurists and soldiers, their actions evoke the real violence of war. When the critic is shot while playing at war, although the stage directions make clear that it is an accident, we are reminded of war's real purpose; to overpower and eliminate the enemy. The war serves also as a metaphor for the Futurists' own war against critics who attack them. When one of the actors accidentally kills a critic, the spectators agree that it is the critic who is the assassin, not the Futurist/soldier/actor. When the onstage spectators absolve the Captain and condemn the dead critic, the play applauds the active, Futurist life, and condemns the reflective, passéist life Futurists abhor.¹ The piece demonstrates the Futurist desire to incorporate non-traditional subject

¹In Pirandello's theatre trilogy and in other, later plays, a similar critic/artist polemic takes place: e.g., in Six Characters in Search of an Author (reference to critical reaction to Pirandello's plays in the first scene), and in Each in His Own Way (critics "act" in the play).

matter into their drama and to translate to the stage their own life experiences. L'arresto is propaganda for the war effort, but more forcefully, it depicts Futurists as heroes and critics as effete cowards and weaklings whose putrified bodies exude an influential stench which must be arrested, locked up, stopped.

La pancia del vaso

La pancia del vaso (The Paunch of the Vase, 1916) also gives Futurists the last laugh. The play takes place in a scientist's laboratory. There are three brief acts and three characters, the scientist, a secretary, and Cangiullo, the author of the sintesi.¹ In the first two acts, the scientist, who is mummified and has an idiotic expression in his eyes, looks through the middle part of a glass vase. There is no dialogue or motion, but the scientist remains in this position for three minutes (Act I) and then repeats this for three minutes "identically" (Act II).² In Act II, one minute after the curtain rises, Cangiullo, or an actor impersonating him (the text gives the character's name as "Io" or "I") comes on stage and hits the scientist over the head with a cudgel--splitting his head. The scientist, without becoming upset in any way, continues to stare at the vase and

¹Verdone, TIAV, pp. 54-55.

²Ibid., p. 54.

asks Cangiallo to leave his card. Cangiallo flips his card on the table, then lights up a cigarette and leaves. A minute later, the scientist rings a bell and a typist appears who sews up the scientist's head and bandages it, covering his eyes. She then types as the scientist dictates a thank-you note to Cangiallo for splitting open his head and not the vase. The scientist signs the letter and as she leaves to mail it, he turns toward his vase in a blind stupor and the curtain falls.

Two structural principles are important features here: compression of the action and dynamism. The use of repeated action to condense the plot is typical of many sintesi, as we have seen. Here, Cangiallo has condensed the action in a way similar to that used in Passatismo by Corra and Settimelli, discussed earlier. But Cangiallo has reduced the action still more by eliminating all dialogue in the first two acts. Instead of even a line or two of dialogue, Cangiallo shows a totally immobile scientist, who appears to be a member of the living-dead. We watch this "action" for six minutes and can interpret those six minutes as representative of the interminable continuation of that one act. In addition to condensing the action, this non-action and the dynamic action which follows subvert the usual notions of playwriting. No background is given regarding the scientist,

no information is provided about what's in the vase, or if there is anything in it. When the confrontation occurs and Cangiullo splits the scientist's head, the scientist doesn't react except to ask for a card which he then uses to address a thank-you note, thus providing the play with a particularly absurd and unexpected ending.

In strong contrast to the mummified scientist's immobility throughout the play, Cangiullo's every action is dynamic. He enters abruptly, hits the scientist violently, thrusts his card on the table and scoffingly lights a cigarette. An additional dynamic feature here, as in L'arresto, is the presence of an actual Futurist onstage, if not in fact, at least in name. Whether or not Cangiullo actually played the character himself is not known, as no reference can be found to confirm or deny it. From earlier performances, in the Futurist evenings for example, we know that Cangiullo was a willing performer and from the text it is clear that he intended himself as the character. As Michael Kirby points out, it is important that the relationship be understood, or that Cangiullo be recognizable to the audience "since the play hinges to a great extent upon the identity of the 'I' figure."¹ In L'arresto, Marinetti provides exposition which identifies the soldier/actors as Futurists, but Cangiullo does not. In fact, Cangiullo does away with most conventional

¹Kirby, p. 52.

devices in favor of the surprise action and effect, a characteristic which was to continue in his later plays, especially those performed under the title Theatre of Surprise, which we will examine in Chapter VI.

This play, without much dialogue, is a polemic against academics (the scientist has idiotic eyes, a very large head, is mummified, and values his work over himself). It is also a celebration of unconventional, anarchic behavior (Cangiullo splits the man's head open, throws out his card, and lights up a cigarette in a laboratory). An absurd effect is achieved by the action of Cangiullo and by the scientist's reaction, a ridiculously traditionalist thank-you note for the preservation of the vase.

Davanti all'infinito

The final play presented by the Ninchi Company that evening was Davanti all'infinito (Faced with the Infinite, 1916) by Corra and Settimelli. It is the briefest and the most violent. The play has one character, one speech, and one principal action.¹ The character, described as a very young, wild philosopher of the "Berliner type," is walking back and forth, somberly, as the curtain rises. In his right hand he has a revolver; in his left hand, he carries a copy

¹Sipario (December, 1967), p. 91.

of the Berliner Tageblatt, a newspaper. As he paces, he speaks, as follows,

It's useless! . . . Compared with the Infinite all things are equal . . . all things are on the same level . . . Their birth, their lifetime, their death, a mystery! . . . And so what to choose? . . . Ah, doubt, uncertainty! I really don't know, today, 1915, if after my usual breakfast, I should read the Berliner Tageblatt or shoot myself instead. (He looks first at his right hand and then at his left, raising the revolver and the newspaper with indifference, bored.) Eh! I'll shoot myself. (He shoots and falls, shot.) Curtain.¹

Structural elements in this piece are again, as in L'arresto, compression and dynamism. Corra and Settimelli have reduced the sintesi to one character and one line which details the character's state of mind. The character is described as a German philosopher. In other instances, e.g., L'arresto, philosophers in Futurist plays are usually figures of scorn or amusement; they are men of reflection by nature and by trade and their constant pondering of questions of existence and eternity is pointless, passive behavior, according to Futurist thought. In Davanti all'infinito, Corra and Settimelli have distilled all of the great questions into the conflict faced by the young philosopher over whether to read a newspaper or commit suicide. In thus equating the two choices and in showing their philosopher as indifferent and bored with even the act of choice-making, the authors ridicule

¹Ibid.

philosophers. Verdone makes this point:

The very act of living is devalued by the choice, purposely casual and absurd. But it's important to see that, unlike Gide, who approves, pre-existentially, the "justice" of the gratuitous act, here in Corra and Settimelli, we have the criticism of the act of abstract philosophizing, of getting lost in Eternal Questions, in other words, a criticism of the inconsistency of skeptical philosophy; and the philosopher of the "Berliner type" is ridiculed.¹

In this interpretation, a German-type philosopher, who shoots himself because he thinks of any other activity as equal, is a caricature of a type, a philosophizing type who would give equal weight to all essences and actions. The philosopher here, like the scientist in Pancia del vaso and the critics in L'arresto, is an object of Futurist scorn. Kirby, however, cites this play and another by Corra and Settimelli called Atto negativo as a "clear forerunner of what was to become recognized as the Dada spirit of aesthetic nihilism."² In Kirby's view, the play is atypical in its negative philosophy and unlike most Futurist sintesi. But if the philosopher is seen as an object of Futurist criticism, than the negativism, the nihilism, too, is being criticized by Corra and Settimelli, not encouraged or applauded.

¹TTF, p. 87.

²Kirby, p. 50.

Futurists and the Variety Theatre

In the sintesi we have studied, the Futurists offer their critical view of contemporary life in a brief, ironic, and tragi-comic fashion, using a structure which I have called syncopated. The syncopated effect of the sintesi is brought about through the use of the several structural principles which have been the subject of this chapter, namely: brevity, simultaneity, and dynamism, compression and fragmentation of story line, alternation of tight and multiple focus, and endings which are ambiguous, absurd or unresolved. As we discussed, Futurist artists used similar techniques to like effects in their paintings. But Futurism had a theatrical model for the syncopated effect as well. Their formula is an adaptation of the same elements found in the music hall or variety stage format. Brief, irreverent, hybrid, and theatrical, the variety or music hall stage is, in its very essence, improvisational, grotesque, absurd, dynamic, ironic, and eclectic, all virtues which Futurists were able to exploit in their own work. Their recognition of a kinship with the variety theatre, and their use of its structure and spirit, was an inspiration which allowed the Futurists to combine their literary and artistic "philosophies" with a method of theatrical production which uniquely suited them.

How did the wealthy, young poet Marinetti come to recognize Futuristic possibility in the popular variety theatre? That theatre's well-deserved reputation as a non-academic, non-intellectual entertainment, directed at the working classes rather than at the middle or upper classes is a probable reason. In the first manifesto of Futurism, and in subsequent manifestoes, Futurists insisted that they wanted to free art from the prisons of museums or museum-like thought. They meant to put action and speed at the heart of literature and they intended to write about crowds of people at work, at play, and in revolt. In the variety theatre, Marinetti found a model which he and the other Futurists could use to transform theatre and the theatrical experience. The first step came in realizing what had to be discarded: the subject matter and most techniques of the traditional theatre, including the lone artist working in a vacuum. Next, perhaps because of Marinetti's own experiences on tour with Elettricit  sessuale during the season of 1913, he saw that the other half of the theatrical experience, the audience, had to be transformed as well. In the uninhibited and often rowdy audience of the variety theatre, Marinetti discovered the prototype of the audience he wanted and had helped to create for Futurism during the early "evenings." After analyzing the existing advantages of the variety theatre, including

its audience/actor relationship and its anti-literary, anti-psychological makeup, Marinetti and his collaborators in the Futurist Synthetic Theatre were able to create theatre "syntheses" which drew upon the variety theatre and on the Futurist serate, which had been part of the movement since its inception, as well as upon the themes and techniques outlined by Futurist painters.

CHAPTER III

SYNCOATING THE GROTESQUE

In the preceding chapter, we examined Futurist sin-tesi in order to determine their characteristic elements and found that they had thematic and structural aspects in common. The mixture of these structural elements (brevity, simultaneity, dynamism, compression, fragmentation, alternating focus) produced a syncopated effect, similar to that produced in Futurist painting.

In this chapter, we will attempt to describe the themes and structural patterns in examples of the "Theatre of the Grotesque" which create a perhaps even more startling syncopated effect because of their use of traditional forms and subject matter in new ways.

The opening discussion concerns the group of writers known as i grotteschi. This is followed by an analysis of the characteristics of these "grotesques." Finally, these characteristics are examined in two plays of the type: Luigi Chiarelli's La maschera e il volto (The Mask and the Face, 1916) and Luigi Pirandello's Così è (Se vi pare) (It Is So [If You Think So], 1917).

I grotteschi

Beginning in May, 1916, another type of play began to appear on Italian stages which, like the Futurist sintesi, challenged the conventional contemporary drama. The first play of the type was called by its author, Luigi Chiarelli, a "grotesque," and this subtitle to the play, La maschera e il volto (The Mask and the Face), was then used by critics to describe plays belonging to the "school." Unlike the Futurists, the group of Italian writers known as i grotteschi did not have any organization, leader, or credo. The writers whose names are most frequently associated with the term, Chiarelli, Luigi Antonelli, Rosso di San Secondo, Enrico Cavacchioli, Massimo Bontempelli, and Luigi Pirandello did not meet for discussions or issue manifestoes or appear at the opening nights of their plays in any other role but that of the traditional one of playwright. Rather, these writers were individuals whose works demonstrated several general characteristics in common.¹

Characteristics of i grotteschi

Giorgio Pullini, in his book Teatro italiano del novecento, outlines the major elements which characterize the group, whose characters and themes, he says, reflect

¹Luigi Chiarelli stated on one occasion, "A school of the so-called grotesque does not exist." "Piccola apologia," Comoedia n.23, Milan (December 1, 1923), p. 6.

"the same stage of moral and stylistic crisis."¹ Pullini notes that the characters in these plays typically waver between the dictates of society and the realistic lessons of experience; they are frequently represented as wounded creatures who are alienated and without hope of rejoining a society whose codes of behavior have been recognized by them as false and cruel. The themes of alienation and of the gap between appearance and reality usually bring these characters to a cynical view of life in which a carefully guarded "distancing" of themselves from life is their only protection.

I grotteschi most often use the materials of the traditional, three-act, realistic drama as the model, particularly those which focus the action around an adulterous liaison. (Gigi Livio, who has published two books and several articles on the grotteschi, uses this point as his thesis for much of his discussion about the Futurists, grotteschi and Pirandello in Il Teatro in rivolta.) But whereas the models, Marco Praga, Giuseppe Giacosa and others, were concerned with the morality of the situation and its social implications, the grotteschi focus on the behavior of the principals in order to show both the tragic and ridiculous aspects of their entrapment, their awareness of their own passions, and the need to subordinate emotion to reason, their knowledge too, of the necessity

¹Pullini, Teatro italiano del novecento (Bologna: Cappelli, 1971), p. 87.

of playing a part, assuming a mask in order to maintain social and personal equilibrium. In plays by i grotteschi, what seems to be the truth may only be appearance; social conventions are empty, rigid, and sometimes cruel methods of controlling human emotion. In these plays, a person's public personality is endangered when the rules of the game change.

The Idea of "The Grotesque"

Gigi Livio says it is the "sentiment of the ridiculous" which provides the works of the grotteschi with a characteristic irony, an irony which is described as distorted and tragic, grotesque.¹ Pirandello used the term "sentiment of the contrary" (sentimento del contrario) to describe the humorist's condition: the simultaneous awareness of both comic and tragic aspects of any situation in human life.

I see an old woman, whose hair is dyed and greased with some horrible preparation, badly made up and dressed in the clothes of a young woman. I start to laugh. I realize that the old woman is just the opposite of what a respectable older woman should look like. At first glance, and superficially, I may stop at this comic impression. The comic is precisely the realization of contradiction, but if reflection intervenes, and suggests that perhaps that old woman gets no pleasure from

¹Gigi Livio, Il teatro in rivolta: Futurismo, grottesco, Pirandello e pirandellismo (Milan: Mursia, 1976), pp. 60-61, hereinafter referred to as ITR. The phrase sentimento del ridicolo is quoted from S. Slataper, Ibsen (Turin-Milan-Rome: Bocca, 1916), pp. 151-152. Slataper was one of the writers for La Voce who clashed with Futurists in 1911.

getting herself dressed up like a parrot, but that perhaps she suffers because of it and does it only because, pitifully, she deceives herself into believing that dressed like that, hiding her wrinkles and grey hair, she'll succeed in holding on to the love of a husband much younger than she; then I can no longer laugh as before, precisely because reflection, working within me, has brought me beyond that initial realization of contradiction to this sentiment of the contrary. Here lies the difference between the comic writer and the humorous one.¹

Wolfgang Kayser, in The Grotesque in Art and Literature, discusses the work of the German poet, Morgenstern, in the period 1906 to 1908. During that period, the poet wrote that in thinking about the properties of the grotesque, he found that "over and above the ridiculousness suggested by absurdity and distortion, the grotesque inspires a fear which grows out of the sudden recognition that man's position is precarious."² Though Morgenstern was specifically defining the grotesque and Pirandello was not, they were both identifying a sudden intimation of mortality and the effect that sudden view of life's dark side can produce, especially when immediately accompanied by an equally strong sense of the ridiculous.

¹Opere di Luigi Pirandello, Vol. 6: Saggi, poesie e scritti vari di Pirandello, p. 127.

²Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 154.

In the plays by i grotteschi, the presence of the grotesque is evidenced in this mixed point of view which produces a feeling of both irony and compassion in contemplation of the human condition. For while there is, in Kayser's view, "a play with the absurd," in works of the grotesque there is also the acknowledgement of "The Estranged World," and "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world."¹ For the authors of the Italian grotesques, the demons of conventional behavior are invoked by using the dramatic models which uphold and celebrate that behavior, and then they are subdued by satire and ridicule. Social and moral conventions are shown as fraudulent and human beings become "mechanically operated puppets,"² some of whom are victims, some victimizers.

La maschera e il volto was performed for the first time on May 29, 1916, at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. Its success there and in other Italian cities in which it played that season gave Luigi Chiarelli, its author, the beginnings of a long theatrical career, first as playwright and later as critic and director.³ A plot summary of the play follows:⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 184-189.

²Ibid., p. 131.

³Livio, Teatro grottesco del novecento (Milan: Mursia, 1965), hereinafter referred to as TGN. Introduction, p. xxxiv. Chiarelli wrote criticism for Corriere italiano, Comoedia, (where his column was called "Maschera e il volto," and for Il Tempo. He remained active in the theatre world through 1945 when he was named president of the Italian Playwrights' Union for the second time.

⁴Ibid., pp. 1-66.

Act I

All three acts are set in an elegant drawing room in a villa on Lake Como owned by Count Paolo Grazia. It is summer; through the upstage center French doors, we can see a glimpse of the moonlit night.

In a discussion about an American couple who are having an adulterous affair, the question is asked what a husband should do when he finds that his wife has committed adultery. Paolo, in his first speech in the play, remarks, "A husband with any self-respect would not let his wife run away with a lover." When pushed for an answer as to what his own reaction should be should his wife be found in an adulterous relationship, Paolo unhesitatingly replies, "What would I do? I'd kill her, yes, I'd kill her. This is something we both know, right Savina?" Savina, his wife has just entered the drawing room from the terrace outside, where she has been strolling with Luciano Spina, the family lawyer. As the discussion continues, Paolo says, ". . . the forgiving husband is ridiculous, a hundred times over. And there is nothing worse than being ridiculous. For such a husband, there's nothing left but suicide." Paolo finds out that his friend, Cirillo Zanotti, is aware that his own wife has had a number of adulterous relationships. Paolo is unable to understand Cirillo's detached and ironic acceptance of his role of the supposedly unsuspecting husband. As the act continues, we discover that there are

two engaged couples, two married women who are having extra-marital affairs and three unattached men. When Paolo, through hints from one of the women, finds that his own wife may be entertaining a lover in her room, he rushes in to surprise them, but is too late. When the guests have gone, Savina returns. Paolo tries to strangle her but finds he cannot. Then Savina offers him a revolver, but he does not take it. Instead, he demands that she leave the country, assume another name and live apart from him forever. He "confesses" to his lawyer, Luciano Spina, that having discovered that his wife had betrayed him with an unknown lover, he has killed her and thrown her body into the lake. Paolo asks Spina to represent him when he goes to the police the next morning.

Act II

Paolo returns from prison, acquitted for his "crime of passion." In the ten months he has been away, he has become a hero. He receives offers of marriage, flowers, and congratulations. The town proposes to honor him with a banquet, and Luciano's career has been made secure with the brilliant defense of Paolo. Several marriages have taken place during his absence and Paolo, increasingly disturbed by the reactions to his supposed crime, becomes bitter and disillusioned about his new celebrity. While he is arguing with Luciano, cries are heard outside. A

corpse has been found in the lake. The body, which is said to be "unrecognizable," is nonetheless recognized as Savina's and funeral arrangements are made. Just as Paolo, by himself, is muttering, "God only knows where this will end!," Savina arrives. She has come to attempt a reconciliation. While he considers what to do with her he hides her in his room as Luciano, suddenly moved by guilt, comes to confess that he was Savina's lover. Paolo is vindicated because Marta, whom Luciano has recently married, has just offered herself to him. Savina tries to make Paolo admit that he still loves her and needs her as much as she needs him. Paolo resists but delays sending her away and allows her to wait in his room. As she goes into the bedroom, the servants come from an upstage entrance bearing four large candles. They enter Savina's old room, where the body from the lake has been placed.

Act III

It is the next afternoon, just before the funeral. Cirillo and his wife have been reunited; Paolo and Savina are clearly still in love after their night together. Savina unexpectedly confronts Luciano, who flees, thinking he's seen a ghost, after Savina reads him the text of his terrible denunciation of her at the trial. After everyone discovers the news of Savina's "resurrection," the party reunited for a funeral is ready for a party instead.

Victory for Paolo and Savina is short-lived when their devoted friend, Marco Miliotti, a judge, becomes outraged at this miscarriage of justice. Marco tells Paolo that he will be jailed for up to thirty months under a charge of perjury. Paolo responds, "But why? I killed her and they absolve me; I didn't kill her and they send me to jail? Ah, but it's absurd." Cirillo is not surprised by this outcome. He says, "But it's always like this! Even in the most tragic moments we are pursued by the ridiculous!" Cirillo urges Paolo to run away with Savina, and jokingly adds, "and above all, don't kill her anymore! To Savina he says, "Goodbye, madam, I am going to your funeral!" As the notes of Chopin's Funeral March are heard in the distance, both Paolo and Savina gaze out toward the street and then embrace as the music fades.

As the plot summary demonstrates, La maschera e il volto uses the materials of several dramatic traditions. The need to avenge one's honor comes from the romantic drama; the ubiquity of adulterous relationships is typical of French and Italian social drama and farce; and the tight structure is modeled after la pièce bien faite, in the tradition of Scribe and Sardou. These ingredients led one important critic of the time, Silvio D'Amico, to write that the play was not grotesque at all, but rather a delightful commedia di repertorio, the kind of play that resident theatres could exploit for years before audiences who couldn't

resist "the clever comic effects and tasteful dramatic moments."¹

In spite of the use of traditional materials in every aspect of the play, there are differences which alter the overall effect of the play's events. Consider, for example, the treatment of the protagonist and of the theme of revenge for one's honor. Paolo Grazia is a man who has openly vowed to kill his wife if he should discover that she has taken a lover. From his first speech on, Paolo insists throughout Act I that he has no doubts about what his actions would be in such an instance. Then, when he finds he is unable to act as he had imagined, he tries to act out the fiction (the role he has imposed upon himself and the role he imagines that society demands of him). Paolo spends the rest of the play regretting the circumstances which result from his action. Finally, when the truth is revealed by accident, he decides to break completely with the society which has imprisoned him within a false role. But because the "hero" is a false one, he will have to play yet another role before the world as he and Savina flee from the absurd circumstances of his possible imprisonment for having not killed her. The honor which he has wished to uphold is tarnished anyway. It is no longer family honor which must be upheld, but rather personal ridicule

¹Ibid., p. XXVI, quoting from D'Amico's Il teatro dei fantocci (Florence: Vallecchi, 1920), pp. 82-86.

which must be avoided at all costs. Paolo, who fears ridicule above all, is trapped by it ever more deeply. First, he is unable to fulfill his vow to kill Savina; next, he is defended by her lover; then he must suffer the congratulations and solicitations of those who desire him for his "heroics," and finally, he is discovered to be innocent of the crime against Savina but guilty of a crime against the state. The theme, in fact, has degenerated from the need to revenge one's honor to the need to cloak one's ridicule. The apparent self-assurance of Paolo's initial words are challenged by the play's raisonneur, Cirillo. He tells Paolo that he knows that his wife is unfaithful but that he refuses to feel ridiculous when so many husbands are in the same position: the condition is normal because so many have it. When Savina returns, after almost being discovered, she reinforces Cirillo's argument against the fear of ridicule. She begs Paolo to look within himself, to his love for her, not to the conventional notions of behavior. He cannot understand at this point the trap he is laying for himself and he decides to send her into exile. Once Paolo has decided upon a plan, he sets it in motion very swiftly. Then, for the duration of the play, the hero lies and schemes to protect the fiction he has created.

The treatment of adultery, too, is different. In its proliferation in the play, (there are at least five instances: Luciano/Savina; Elisa/Giorgio; Wanda/Piero;

the American man with 2 different women) it is treated comically, as in a farce by Feydeau.¹ In fact, it is this proliferation which provides Cirillo's rationale: it's so common, it's become normal and being normal the condition can hardly be feared as ridiculous. The only person in the play who may have been punished by death for adultery is the body in the lake, who may be the American lady who was being sung to by her lover in Act I. This fact is never confirmed and contributes to the play's ambiguous resolution. We can only guess that the body is that of the American lady number 1, and her lover suffers no punishment for the implied murder. Paolo and Savina suffer from the supposed adultery but they do not die and in fact will be reborn under new identities.

The play's structure is closely knit. Every discussion has purpose; every reference to past or present events has implication for the future; every character is part of the type of game plan typical of the well-made play. Overheard conversations, chance encounter, mistake, complication, and reversal of fortune reign in the design of this play. But certain of the structural elements outlined early in this

¹Lucio Lugnani in Pirandello: letteratura e teatro (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1970), p. 57, says, "The plot of Maschere e il volto is, in fact, almost a kaleidoscopic multiplication of the old bourgeois comedy."

chapter work in opposition to the "well-made" approach and alter the overall effect. Simultaneity, changing focus, a series of unexpected reversals, and an ambiguous ending lead to a somewhat syncopated effect.

Simultaneity is apparent in the many adulterous situations operating concurrently in the play. Although drawing comparisons through the use of sub-plots and parallel characters is standard playwriting technique, here the excessive number of simultaneous adulteries assumes a critical function and operates structurally as well as thematically. We alternate our focus between the main subjects, Paolo and Savina, and all the other examples of adultery and its consequences which are presented in the play. In the typical middle-class drama on the subject, the plot would proceed directly to the punishment of the adulterers in some way and to the restoration of a social and moral balance. For example, in Marco Praga's play, La porta chiusa (The Closed Door, 1914), Bianca is punished for a long-ago adultery when her son discovers that he is illegitimate. She has remained in an unhappy marriage in order to give her son respectability and she and her former lover, Decio, have maintained a friendship, nothing more. But Giulio, the son, rejects his mother and the house and name of his "false" father and leaves forever, closing the door to any future between them. Thus Bianca has lived a painful and empty life for her son, only to be rejected by him when he learns

the truth of his birth and their false life together. In another play by Praga, Il divorzio (The Divorce, 1915), a woman's decision to leave her husband and child for another man is punished eight years later when she meets her son and first husband at a resort, by coincidence. She breaks down, realizing how terribly she has been punished in the loss of her son.¹

In the typical farce, the plot would exploit the proliferation, confusion, and near-wicked delight in the adulteries, but again, the resolution would restore the old norm or introduce a new one. The Italian commedia dell'arte, for example, or Niccolo Machiavelli's play, La mandragola (The Mandrake Root, c. 1518) have a great deal of fun with immorality but end with appropriate marriages and otherwise happy endings. And in French farces by such masters as Eugene Labiche (1815-1888) and George Feydeau (1867-1921), the complications and confusions which frequently turn an ordinary situation into chaos, are always carefully contrived so as to end well, with things turned right side up again and partners--old and new--correctly matched. Here, instead, the plot is given a series of ironic twists: Savina's adultery is committed with the lawyer who represents her husband by condemning her behavior; Paolo is unable to "punish" Savina; Savina's "death" elevates Paolo to heroic status; Savina is almost present at her own funeral; Paolo

¹Marco Praga (1862-1929) and Guiseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) were leading Italian playwrights of the period whose realistic and materialistic plays were among those being attacked by the Futurists and i grotteschi.

is to be punished for not killing Savina. When the adulterous Savina is exiled by Paolo, and later when she returns, we recognize her point of view as the reasonable and right one, not Paolo's. The multiple reversals of farce are used here to disrupt the story line and disengage us in order to focus our attention on serious issues.

As the play ends, there are several ironies operating: we have been affected by the fact that Paolo has only pretended to kill Savina, that he has been tried for a crime he did not commit, that his lawyer is his wife's lover, that Savina is condemned to hear her lover of an hour ago rail against her to her husband, that Savina can attend her own funeral, and that the law will attempt to punish Paolo for lying about having committed a crime, for having made a fool of the law.

After the exposition, the mounting action, the scandal made public, there is no restoration of order. The main characters reject the status quo and opt for a life apart from the social milieu of the play. One of them, Savina, has urged this from the beginning. The other, Paolo, is brought to it only when he is faced with the absurdity of going to jail once again, this time for not murdering Savina. Belatedly, he recognizes that it is social dictates, not his own desires, which he has tried to follow. And the decision to leave the mad public world for a private world of their own making is a difficult and disturbing one for Paolo which

prompts us to think about the contradictions the play has raised about public vs. private roles, duties, behavior, allegiances.

Finally, we are not even allowed a comic enjoyment and appreciation of the machinations of the plot because the characters are not presented only as comic fools but are given tragic dimensions as well. In their conflicts with each other and with their social and moral world, we can recognize our own conflicts.

In the second example of a grotesque play which produces a syncopated effect, Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) presents us with a town full of prying gossips who attempt to find out "the truth" about an unusual form of the "triangle" which is often at the center of these plays.

Così è (se vi pare) was performed for the first time on June 18, 1917 at the Teatro Olimpia, Milan, by the Virgilio Talli Company. Although an earlier play by Pirandello, Pensaci, Giacomino! is perhaps the first Pirandellian grotesque, that play was written and performed first in the Sicilian dialect and only later published and performed in Italian (in 1918).¹ A plot summary follows.

Act I

All three acts take place in the home of the Agazzi family. The first act takes place in the drawing-room. As the curtain opens, Signora Agazzi, her daughter, Dina, and her

¹Opere di Luigi Pirandello, Vol. 4: Maschere nude I, pp. 17-18. Così è appears on pp. 1005-1078.

Brother Lamberto Laudisi are discussing a new neighbor. The neighbor, a Signora Frola, has refused to see them, when they went to introduce themselves, and Mrs. Agazzi has demanded that her husband see an official about the matter. Her husband's newly-hired secretary, Ponza, is Signora Frola's son-in-law. Mrs. Agazzi accuses both of them of strange behavior and demands an apology. The whole town, it appears, is in an uproar over the living arrangements of Signora Frola and her daughter and son-in-law. Signora Frola lives in a nice apartment in the fashionable section of town while Ponza and his wife live in a walk-up apartment on the outskirts of town. Agazzi enters to report that Signora Frola will soon be coming to apologize. By this time, the company has expanded to include another trio, an official named Sirelli, his wife, and a friend, Signora Cini. Signora Frola is introduced, apologizes, and explains their circumstances by saying that Ponza's great love for his wife, her daughter, causes him to behave in an unusual way. He insists that all of her love must be channeled through him to his wife. Ponza, very upset at the interference in his private life, comes in after Signora Frola has left and tells his version of their story. Signora Frola, he says, is mad. During an earthquake in which most of their townsmen were killed, his first wife, Signora Frola's daughter, was killed. When, after two years, he remarried and Signora Frola saw his second wife, she insisted that

wife #2 was her daughter and he has arranged living arrangements so that she can continue to believe this without causing too much discomfort for his wife. Finally, Signora Frola returns after Ponza has left and says that after they were married, Ponza's great love for his wife was nearly too much for her delicate daughter, and so doctors insisted that she be taken to a sanitarium for a rest cure. Ponza refused to recognize her on her reappearance and insisted that she was dead. A second marriage was arranged with the help of town officials and the doctors attending the couple. Signora Frola thinks that Ponza now knows that the two wives are one but that he appears to feel a need for keeping up the illusion, feeling that it is a protection against his wife's being taken away again. The Agazzis and company first believe Signora Frola, then Signor Ponza, and with Signora Frola's reappearance, are in a state of confusion. The act ends with Laudisi's mocking, "So you're looking at one another? And the truth?"

Act II

During this act, the group plots to bring the two together so they can tell which is telling the truth. In the meantime, Agazzi has set the police commissioner to making inquiries in the town where Ponza and Frola lived. When the confrontation comes, it is unsatisfying and does not bring out the truth. Signora Frola acts as she has told

them she does to keep up her end, and Ponza, who appears to be nearly raging over her being in the Agazzi household and playing a song her daughter played, immediately drops his role once his mother-in-law is gone from the room. Once again, Laudisi's laugh ends the act, "And so, ladies and gentlemen, we learn the truth!"

Act III

The Police Commissioner, Centuri, brings documents showing that the first wife was in a sanatorium and that there was a second marriage. Laudisi gets him to agree that these are definitive proof and then shows the Commissioner that the documents are worthless since both parties agree that the first wife was in a sanatorium and that there was a second marriage. Laudisi's inspiration is to ask the Prefect to have Ponza's wife appear. After a scene with Ponza in which he tries to resign his position rather than appear with his wife, the Prefect (the highest official in the provincial government) convinces Ponza that to present his wife and let her speak is the best solution. When the lady is brought before the Prefect, the Commissioner, the Agazzis, and several other townspeople, she confirms that she is the daughter of Signora Frola and the second wife of Ponza. When pressed for more, she says that she is nothing for herself and is "whoever you believe me to be." Laudisi, with a look of mocking defiance at the crowd, says, "and

there, my friends, you have the truth! Are you satisfied?"

The plot summary demonstrates how Pirandello adapts the structure of a crisis drama to his own unique purpose. Using the formula: exposition, confrontation, resolution, Pirandello successfully aborts each process before it can be completed. Adapting a comic technique "in which the audience could, and should, be drawn, repelled and drawn again, the 'gap' closed, opened and closed again,"¹ in order to manipulate his characters and his audience, Pirandello achieves that syncopated effect which has been the subject of this chapter. In what is perhaps the strongest show of the effect of syncopation which we have studied, Pirandello uses simultaneous "realities," presented in enticing but incomplete and conflicting fragments which offer a "dialectical vision of reality."² We and the characters

¹J. L. Styan, "Types of Comedy" in Comedy Meaning and Form, ed. and with an Introduction by Robert W. Corrigan (Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing, 1965), p. 239. At least some members of the audience apparently delighted in the confusion and ambiguity of the play's resolution. Bruno Corra gives an account of attending the opening night performance with Marinetti, in Per l'arte nuova della nuova Italia: "At the end of the third act of the comedy, the public, who wanted at all costs some explanation, were angry and they exited heaving great signs of disillusion and disapprobation, oh! oh! oh! Those oh! oh! oh! were exactly like those with which the Italian public have greeted the end of our plays. We heard these with satisfaction, Marinetti and I, at the premiere at the Olympia, while we defended with enthusiastic applause, the end of this clever comedy." p. 175.

²Salvatore Guglielmino, ed., Guida al novecento (Milan: Principato, 1971), p. 184.

are drawn first to one character's version of the truth and then to another's. When we are given hope that outside proofs exist, these too, are crushed: first, when the legal documents are proved worthless and finally, when Ponza's wife speaks, providing a resolution that is completely open. Use of these structural elements provide the play with a particularly frustrating, syncopated rhythm which acts as a musical score for the drama.¹

The conductor of the syncopated score is, of course, Laudisi. Pirandello's raisonneur teases the townspeople and audience alike as he comments on the voracious appetite for "the truth." In himself, Laudisi is a physical manifestation of manipulative comic technique as he creates anticipation of answers and then deflates any which are offered. Laudisi keeps the rhythm going; to continue the musical analogy, he is the left hand in a ragtime piece, steadily pounding out the same theme, i.e., that there is no way to know "the truth" and that the others are overexciting themselves needlessly. He is also the right hand, however, as he orchestrates the variations played by his relatives and the increasingly large portion of the townspeople who come to find out "the truth." His laughter and comments alternately

¹Ettore Romagnoli, a contemporary critic, may have recognized in this play, as he did in Ciascuno al suo modo (Each in His Own Way, 1924), Pirandello's use of this Futurist principle of simultaneity. See Antonucci, Cronache, p. 190, reprint of an article in In platea, Bologna, 1926.

stop and start the action; as he deflates one possible answer (one variation) he encourages and instigates another so that the near-hysterical search can begin again in increased intensity.

In Act I, Laudisi has two sections of his "orchestra," the Agazzis and their neighbors, the Sirellis, with their neighbor, Signora Cini. In Act II, Mrs. Cini brings Signora Nenni and by Act III officialdom is "playing" under Laudisi's direction, in the persons of the Police Commissioner and the Prefect while a full chorus of the town's gentry babble in confused and unharmonious crescendo from a room just offstage. In this way, the play builds to a frantic pitch; from being asked to give an apology for the original offense to the Agazzi family, the Ponza/Frola triangle is forced to confront virtually the entire town. Throughout the play, Pirandello expands the numbers of players most frequently by threes, first the Agazzis, then the two Sirellis with a neighbor. These principal six become nine with the addition of Signora Cini's friend, Signore Nenni, the Police Commissioner and the Prefect. These are swelled by the "many other men and women" who join the others in Act III. The principals, then, are the Ponza/Frola threesome, the nine "invaders," amplified by the crowd in Act III and Laudisi.

Most of the scenes in the play take place between a threesome or a multiple of three. At the beginning of the

play for example, Laudisi is on stage with his sister and niece, Signora Agazzi and Dina. In the next scene, the Sirellis enter, with Signora Cini, who make up the second trio. When Signor Agazzi enters, the triangles shift; Agazzi joins his wife and daughter, together with the Sirellis on the side of the search for "truth," while Laudisi stands apart, the odd man out. Indeed, Laudisi alternates positions rapidly; sometimes he is part of a triangle or a multiple of three and often he takes up a spectator's stance in order to watch the circus in progress.¹

The play is presented in three acts: Act I, a confusion of exposition; Act II, a confrontation that is a hoax; Act III, a resolution that refuses to satisfy.

Just as there are three parts to the play, there are also three rings or focus points. The main focal point, the Ponza/Frola trio, is held in balance between the opposing sides: Laudisi on the one side and everyone else on the other. Our attention shifts from one ring to the next and back again.

Pirandello's subtitle for the play, "a parable in three acts," suggests that the play will point out a moral,

¹The part of Laudisi obviously would appeal to an actor as it is somewhat a "bravura" role. Yet, as Olga Ragusa points out, "sometimes the same actor alternately played Laudisi and Signor Ponza," showing the importance of both roles from an actor's point of view. In "Pirandello's Teatro d'Arte," Italica (Summer, 1978), p. 251.

tell a story with a point. The moral of this story is commented upon throughout the play by Laudisi: reality is relative to each individual's point of view and we should all "show some respect for what other people see and feel." (Act I) In Italian, the word for parable, parabola, is identical with that for the geometrical figure, parabola: a curve formed by the intersection of a cone with a plane parallel to its side. Perhaps Pirandello wished to suggest a double or even triple meaning for the term, one which relates to the triangle at the center of the play and their intersection with the "plane" of townspeople from whom they have put themselves aside and apart, (to incorporate the Greek definition, parabole, a putting aside).

A cone, after all, is a solid which has a circle for its base and a curved surface which tapers to a point. It is an enclosed isosceles triangle, turned upside down. Ponza, his wife, and the Signora Frola (a triangle turned upside down, an odd or unusual one) can be likened to that conical figure whose intersection with their gossipy neighboring plane forms a curve in which they are helplessly caught as if in a wave, which sweeps them up in its path. This interpretation, though it may stretch the point, gives the proliferating triangles in this play, and the series of clashes (or intersections) with varying planes

an especially rich structural base, analogous to the cone's base: a solid circle. (The interpretation also brings statements about "intersecting planes" and "interpenetrating objects" to mind, suggesting a correspondence with Futurist theories.) At the end of the play, the base has not been breached; the central trio remains solid, though exhausted from its battles to withstand the assaults from outside its delicate security.¹

¹The description of the set for the 1924 Paris production of Così è (Chacun sa vérité) at the Theatre de l'Atelier, supports the parabola possibility. Dullin directed and played Laudisi in the production, "The sets represented a long dark cone and the characters appeared from the depths of it." Gaspare Giudice, Pirandello, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 130.

CHAPTER IV

PULLING THE STRINGS

In Chapters II and III, the use of structural elements in the sintesi and in two full-length plays were analyzed in order to demonstrate the effect of syncopation which these structural elements produce.

In this chapter, seven characters in seven grotesque plays will be examined. These characters serve as the on-stage manipulators of the action, those who "pull the strings" of the many marionette figures who share the stage with them. Such characters act as surrogates for their offstage playwright, and they can be described as the io epico or the playwright's voice on stage. Unlike the traditional raisonneur whose function is usually restricted to the role of confidant, these characters have a broader range of activities to perform. In fact, in all of the examples being analyzed in this chapter, the io epico figure expresses the author's viewpoint and also acts to shape and influence the action by his presence on the stage. Frequently, he is the

character who determines the syncopated structure of the action through his persistent use of irony, deliberate divisiveness, and interruption.¹

The seven plays selected represent major works written between 1916 and 1925 by Italian dramatists of the so-called "Theatre of the Grotesque":

¹Livio describes this type of character as follows: "Now the author ascends the stage, more or less disguised in a character's costume: the io epico is born, the choral character through whom twentieth-century theatre attempts to overcome the formal limits imposed by the times: the antinomy to narrate dramatically." In TGN, p. VIII. An entry in the Dictionary of Italian Literature, edited by Peter Bondanella and Julia Conaway Bondanella (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 508, reads, in part: "few if any of the grotesque works aspire to the naturalism of that period, and most reject the norms of objectivity and impersonality by having the author inject himself and his ideas into the play, usually by means of a 'mouthpiece' character." Both A Dictionary of Literary Terms, ed. J. A. Cuddon (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977) and A Handbook of Literary Terms, eds. H. L. Yelland, S. C. Jones, and K. S. W. Easton (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1980 ed.), limit the definition to the equivalent of confidant, which they define as a character who has little effect on the action but who acts as a listener to the other characters. According to Yelland, Jones, and Easton, the device "supplements other methods of revealing motives and attitudes that might otherwise escape the audience." (p. 40). Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, in Literary Terms (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 202, define raisonneur in a broader sense: "A character in a play who acts as the author's spokesman. He observes the other characters, regularly delivering one or more speeches in which he comments on the action and expresses the writer's views. Most commonly found in nineteenth-century well-made plays." All sources agree that this type of character is not of central importance to the action of the play and is somewhat distanced from it.

1. Luigi Chiarelli, La maschera e il volto (The Mask and the Face, 1916)
2. Luigi Pirandello, Così è (se vi pare) (It Is So [If You Think So], 1917)
3. Luigi Antonelli, L'uomo che incontrò se stesso (The Man Who Met Himself, 1918)
4. Enrico Cavacchioli, L'uccello del paradiso (The Bird of Paradise, 1918)
5. Rosso di San Secondo, Marionette che passione! (Marionettes, What Passion!, 1918)
6. Luigi Pirandello, Il giuoco delle parti (The Rules of the Game, 1919)
7. Massimo Bontempelli, Nostra Dea (Our Goddess, 1925)

For purposes of discussion, I have identified three categories of authors' spokesmen: (1) watchers, (2) puppet masters, and (3) testifiers. Characters in all three categories comment openly on the action, give advice, influence the events to some degree, and state the playwright's message.

The characters who serve as "watchers" are: (1) Cirillo in La maschera e il volto and (2) Laudisi in Così è (si vi pare); the "puppet masters" are: (1) Vulcano in Nostra Dea, (2) Dr. Climt in L'uomo che incontrò se stesso, and (3) Lui in L'uccello del paradiso; the "testifiers" are: (1) The Man in Grey in Marionette che passione! and (2) Leone Gala in Il giuoco delle parti.

This brand of well-made grotteschi plays provide numerous examples of the use of the io epico figure. However,

it should be noted that two of the Futurist sintesi discussed in Chapter II also use the device: in L'arresto and La pancia del vaso, the io epico figures are Futurists, obvious representatives of their authors. In L'arresto, Marinetti uses a "watcher" in the first half of the play; the First Spectator only appears to be neutral in his comments about the actors and the audience and is actually a Futurist spokesman. In the second half, the Futurist painter/soldier/actor, as the protagonist of both on-stage plays, "testifies" both for his company of Futurist/soldier/actors and for his author's point of view.

In La pancia del vaso, Cangiullo names a character after himself, thus underscoring the relationship between protagonist and author. In both of these pieces, the io epico figure's actions determine the play's structure. In L'arresto, the io epico character determines the outcome. It should also be remembered from the early discussion in Chapter I of Marinetti's sintesi, Elettricità sessuale, that the protagonist's name was changed to Riccardo Marinetti in an obvious desire to have the audience connect character and author.

But it is the grotteschi playwrights, and Pirandello, who use an alter-ego in its several variations most extensively.

Watchers

The characters I have called watchers are part of the

action, yet remain at a distance from it. Because they are observers of the other characters in the play, and particularly of the principals, they are good spokesmen for their authors, both to characters on stage and to the audience.

La maschera e il volto

In La maschera, Cirillo represents the author's point of view to the other characters as well as to the audience, as does Laudisi in Così è.¹ Significantly, Cirillo's most important lines occur chiefly in Act I, and he remains restricted to the role of raisonneur or confidant during the rest of the play. In contrast, Laudisi is on stage, active and talking, during the entire play. In Così è, Laudisi is the only character on stage who represents the author's viewpoint. In La maschera, Cirillo sometimes shares this function with other characters. For example, in La maschera, at the end of Act II, Savina urges Paolo, "be honest with yourself, look into your heart, don't be a slave to your words and conventional behavior!"² Paolo, too, begins to act as the author's voice in Act II, when the irony of his predicament

¹Livio, ITR, p. 65 and p. 98, respectively.

²TGN, p. 21.

is clearer to him. He says,

It's better not to force people to find themselves face to face with their beliefs. . . . men need to be more courageous and annul those conventions they've agreed to with their pride and vanity; they need to forget that they've lied to others in order to try to be uniquely, religiously frank with themselves; but it's not easy, especially in a moment when you're overcome by a violent emotion. Then you follow what's called a life plan which is, like all plans, being perfectly logical, completely unadaptable to life!¹

But Cirillo remains the true spokesman for Chiarelli, his author, when in a moment alone with Paolo, he confronts the protagonist with his worst fear, the fear of ridicule. You killed because of your fear of being a ridiculous husband. And the joke is this: that ridicule hits always, and only, at he who's afraid of it."² When Paolo a few lines later admits to being disillusioned about the whole chain of events, Cirillo sympathizes and takes the opportunity for another "message." "Oh, I understand. You're beginning to see how absurd all of our conventions are!"³

Because of their parallel status of husband betrayed, Cirillo is a figure of contrast and comparison with the protagonist, Paolo. Cirillo's own problem does not receive much

¹Ibid., p. 32.

²Ibid., p. 36.

³Ibid., p. 37.

notice from the playwright, however, until Act III when Cirillo's relationship with Elisa, his wife, seems to have a chance of renewal. Elisa apologizes to Cirillo for the hurt she has caused him and insists she's cured. When Cirillo tells him of his reconciliation with Elisa but expresses doubt as to her sincerity or will power, Paolo responds, "Maybe you were right!"¹

After Savina is "resurrected," Paolo and Cirillo act as co-spokesmen for their author.

Paolo. It's always like that. Even in the
most tragic moments we're followed
by the ridiculous!

Cirillo. Yes, it really is like that. Right
next to the most laughable grotesqueries,
the most frightening dramas burn; in the
most obscene smirk of a mask there are
the screams of the saddest passions.²

When, finally, Paolo worries about what the law will do now that the deception has been discovered, it is Cirillo, in his most optimistic moment who suggests that the couple run away. While Paolo sees only the dark side of this solution, imagining flights by night under aliases, living "in sin," Cirillo insists that because the couple has money and youth they can make an adventure out of it. And it is Cirillo who most clearly voices the author's sentiments that love is the answer, "If you love each other, nothing else matters! When you're together! It's

¹Ibid., p. 55.

²Ibid., p. 63.

when you feel alone that it's sad!"¹ As Cirillo has just overheard Elisa flirting with a former lover, his lines have a wistful ring which subdues the optimistic message.

Cirillo is a watcher of an uncomplicated type: he observes, comments, and serves as an expediter but does not move far from the raisonneur model. The other example of this type of character is much more complex, fulfills a far more active function, and can be said to range beyond the boundaries of watcher, to the category of puppet master.

Così è (se vi pare)

In Così è, spokesman Laudisi is a direct descendent of the well-made play raisonneur in his status as watchful bystander to the tragedy of the Frola/Ponzas and the farce of the Agazzi. And yet, despite his apparent objectivity, skepticism, and rational approach, Laudisi gives an occasional glimpse of the human doubt that lies beneath his comic detachment. When Laudisi talks to his mirror image in Act II, he acknowledges that he, like all human beings, is subject to the scrutiny of others who see him not as himself but as his image, a "ghost" as he calls it.

Which of us is the crazy one. Oh, I know. I say it's you, and you point back at me. Well, head on like this we understand each other very well, don't we. The trouble is that the others don't see you the way I do! And so, dear friend, who are you? Here in front of you, I see myself and touch myself--that is you--but others? A ghost, that's what you are for them. And yet, look at them all,

¹Ibid., p. 65.

without thinking about their own ghosts,
they're crazy enough to try and chase after
other people's. And they think that what they're
doing is altogether a different thing!¹

It is Laudisi, of course, who presents Pirandello's beliefs to the Agazzi group and to the audience. He continually tries to convince the others to let the newcomers alone. He argues that as they can never know the whole truth as it exists for these three, they would be better not to continue the search.

Laudisi. I say that your curiosity (pardon the term, ladies) is insufferable, it can't be otherwise, because it's useless. . . . What can we really know about other people? Who they are, what they're like, what they do, why they do it?²

The argument is designed to appeal to his family and friends under the guise of good sense rather than compassion and, yet, he appears to understand the trio's suffering despite the air of amused indifference he adopts to the events around him.

Laudisi. You, not I, need facts, dates, documents to confirm or deny. I wouldn't know what to do with them because for me reality doesn't consist of those things but lies within the souls of those two and I can't enter there, except to hear whatever they tell. . . . You can't say; no one can. And not because all those facts you're looking

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 1043-1044.

²Ibid., p. 1015.

for have been nullified--dispersed or destroyed--by any accident, a fire, an earthquake. No, but because they have nullified them from within, creating--her for him or him for her--a fantasy that has the same consistency as reality. And they live with it, in it, in perfect agreement, pacified.¹

In his understanding, however, of the dilemma of public and private persons, Laudisi knows himself to be a potential victim of the prying curiosity of others. When he attempts to turn the others away from the sufferers, he's acting in fact for his private face, while wearing his public mask. Except for the mirror scene in Act II, however, Laudisi does not reveal himself further to the audience. His importance to the play is not in the revelation of his own character but in the revelation of the absurd machinations of the Agazzi camp. As the discussion of the play in Chapter III made clear, Laudisi instigates much of the confusion and continually heightens the frenzy of the play by his maddening suggestions and explanations. The deeper understanding he briefly exhibits in Act II is a red herring. We wait in vain for it to lead us to greater depths in the man. In Laudisi, Pirandello gives us a sketch of later dramatic characters, testifiers, whose public face explicitly masks a painful private condition. These later characters, including Leone Gala in Il giuoco delle parti, combine logic and capable wit with a depth of suffering Laudisi only briefly hints at. Laudisi also is a kind of puppet master,

¹Ibid., pp. 1040-1041.

but he can only manipulate the puppet-like Agazzi group, not the trio. Whenever the members of the Ponza/Frola trio are on stage, Laudisi has few lines, sometimes none. The trio are precursors of the six characters. Their mourning dress, their closed ranks, their different versions of "the truth" of their circumstances estrange them from the other characters in the play, including Laudisi. Yet they are bound by love, rather than by necessity, as are the six characters and, of course, they are human.

Cirillo and Laudisi illustrate the two ends of the spectrum for watchers. Cirillo, whose own status as a cuckolded husband makes him a sympathetic foil for Paolo, is a benign and quiet guiding voice in the play. Laudisi, on the other hand, whose inner motivations we barely glimpse, frequently steps out of his spectator's role to feverishly incite some new activity. These two also represent two extreme positions in regard to their attachment to the protagonist. Cirillo is clearly Paolo's valued friend. He is older than Paolo and somewhat wiser, having already acknowledged and accepted his cuckolded state, but, in his plight, he is clearly intended as a comparison, a favorable one, to Paolo. Laudisi, instead, is not tied to either opposing group in the play. Although he is a member of the Agazzi family (Signora Agazzi is his sister) he is clearly not like them or sympathetic to their mad pursuit of "the truth." And,

although he argues that the townspeople should leave the Ponza/Frola trio alone, it is not because he has aligned himself on their side but because he insists that it is useless to search for a truth which can never be satisfactory. Cirillo is less active yet more protective than is Laudisi. Cirillo is willing to use his own experience to help Paolo clarify and accept his own; Laudisi's brief intimations of his own mask/face dilemma, expressed in the mirror scene in Act II, is not used to help the protagonists or their adversaries, the townspeople. Laudisi shares this insight only with the audience and after this brief stillpoint, he is off again, wearing his mask, protecting only himself by his amused detachment. Cirillo has suffered because of his wife's unfaithfulness, yet he makes it clear that his acceptance of her infidelity and of his public mask as the unsuspecting husband, has taught him a great deal about himself, his wife, and others. His acceptance of this role has taken the barb out of the ridicule and given him the last, ironic laugh. Laudisi gives no indication of having suffered. In his dress, general behavior, and dialogue, Laudisi appears to be a superficial, charming, upper-class gentleman whose hobby is poking fun at the foolish provincials around him. Cirillo's remarks have the sadness of experience in them; Laudisi's are motivated by reason rather than emotion. Cirillo, anticipating Paolo's predicament, can empathize; Laudisi is beyond feeling and he can laugh at the end of each act, including

the last, regardless of the anguish felt by some of the characters.

Puppet Masters

The second category, puppet masters, includes characters who are both spokesmen for their authors and who directly manipulate some of the action on stage. Because they clearly regard most of the other characters as puppets or puppet-like, I have given them the title of "puppet master."

L'uomo che incontrò se stesso

In Antonelli's L'uomo che incontrò se stesso, Dr. Climt reigns over a magic island in which people can live forever (as does a character, Rosetta) or can meet and compete with their younger selves (as does the protagonist, Luciano De Garbines).¹ When Luciano meets Rosetta, she describes Dr. Climt:

He's a handsome man, jovial, a jokester, awesome. In the course of his studies, and he can study for all eternity if he wants--he amuses himself with human beings like a boy with puppets. That's his secret. He's dangerous, I tell you. He is capable of anything!. . .He's simply a man like anybody else, to look at. If he performed good works he's be like God. But, then, is it certain that God does good?. . .Anyway, he's like a God who condescends to invite you to dinner.²

Dr. Climt grants wishes, sets certain actions in motion, but

¹In TGN, pp. 119-185.

²Ibid., p. 124.

then withdraws to allow Rosetta and Luciano to make their own choices and accept their consequences without intervention. Even though he has supernatural powers (he has granted Rosetta eternal life and has now agreed to allow her to age naturally at her request; he has called Luciano to the island and has summoned up his younger self and his wife, friend, and mother-in-law) Climt denies any god-like status, "I am not a God"¹ and resists all attempts to bring things to a manipulated conclusion. Dr. Climt appears in the play only when he is needed as a listener for Luciano and when the author wishes to point out a message as, for example, in Act II, when Climt remarks,

Console yourself! Life is nothing but a tiny adventure in time and space. And man mustn't think it stops in the grave! Anyway, in the meantime, he must live! Live! Getting stuck in the past, as you've done, is like guarding a cemetery.²

Whenever he appears, Dr. Climt carries with him a suggestion of other-worldly knowledge and power. He seems to appear and disappear just in time to philosophize for a moment or prompt the action on a bit. In fact, Climt is an almost totally indifferent observer, albeit one with magical powers.

¹Ibid., p. 128.

²Ibid., p. 176.

Nostra Dea

Vulcano in Nostra Dea comes to call on a woman named Dea (a name which also means goddess in Italian) whom he has met the previous day.¹ Attracted then by her sweet, submissive nature, he is confused by her apparently total transformation into a flirtatious and worldly woman of unfeminine and unconventional behavior. But by the end of Act I, he (and the audience) have begun to understand--Dea is what she wears: her personality changes depend on her wardrobe. For the rest of the play, Vulcano manipulates this factor in order to help a pair of adulterous lovers arrange a biennial tryst.² Vulcano is a quick-witted man-about-town, a recognizable character from popular well-made comedies. The world of the play is a sophisticated and wealthy one; the only workers are servants and a doctor with an unusual diagnostic method (he visits a patient's ambience rather than his person). Bontempelli satirizes the vacuous social world which thrives on silly intrigues and masked balls, where costume can dictate behavior and rooms retain more of a person's substance than does the body itself

¹Massimo Bontempelli, Teatro (Verona: Mondadori, 1947), pp. 120-212.

²In Adriano Tilgher's review of the play, he refers to Vulcano as the "deus ex machina." Il Mondo, April 24, 1925, now in Tilgher, Il problema centrale (Cronache teatrali, 1914-1926), (Genoa: Edizioni del Teatro Stabile di Genova, 1973), p. 347.

which can be covered and disguised, thereby resisting accurate diagnosis.

Vulcano, as a representative of this world, explains that he enjoys arranging things for friends, such as the rendezvous between Countess Orsa and her military lover, or the meeting between Dea and Vulcano's friend, Marcolfo. Only once does Vulcano reveal himself as unhappy with his life. In Act IV, while waiting for Dea and Marcolfo to return from the masked ball, Vulcano indulges in a lengthy monologue addressed to the variety of possible personalities represented by Dea's clothing. A genuine feeling of child-like anguish in him mixes with the witty "conversations" he invents with several different garments from Dea's closet. In this speech, Vulcano both reveals more depth of character and simultaneously comments playfully upon possible endings for the "comedy," referring both to the complications of the intrigue played out at the ball in Act III and the comedy the theatre audience is watching. At one point in the speech, he refers directly to the audience, saying that the ending doesn't really matter except to send everyone off to bed. He is ironic about the ending, about his own function as "arranger in evening clothes," a costume which helps remind him to control his feelings and act like a man, a man of seriousness and importance. A final outburst of feeling overcomes him and he calls out for Dea's return, but quickly masks his emotion with a smile as Marcolfo and Dea enter.

Throughout the play, we are aware, with Vulcano, that Dea is a "character" without substance. Men, Vulcano included, who fall in love with her are responding to the one Dea they meet, and are unprepared for the abrupt change and variety that occurs with Dea's wardrobe changes. Vulcano quickly guesses the "mystery" and uses it to his benefit, but as his actions and dialogue reveal in Act IV, his anguish is keenly felt. Having found the girl of his dreams, he has lost her overnight to a wardrobe full of incompatible personalities and, worst of all, the girl, Dea, doesn't exist in herself; she's a mannequin who limply waits for the next outfit to resurrect her.

L'uccello del paradiso

The least human character in the plays under discussion here is also the most manipulative and theatricalist of these characters. Lui, in Cavacchioli's L'uccello del paradiso is described as the pivotal character of the drama, but he is not the protagonist.¹ Cavacchioli, in a note which precedes the play, describes Lui:

Lui, character-abstraction, unreal, philosophical. An old centenarian. His body lives, his spirit has passed on. He has a cadaverous head, but he carries himself like a young man, is impeccable, very elegant. His ironic, cutting, amused tone is made by a contrast of voices: deep and slow voice, high and thin falsettos. A braggart, mocking demon. Only in the third act, does tragedy nearly strike,

¹In TGN, pp. 187-348.

but after having reached its greatest intensity, he locks himself anew in his indifferent and impudent mask.¹

Lui, the author's man on stage, is the acknowledged puppeteer of the play's events. "I weave life like the strands of a skein of yarn, until the strands become trapped."² Cavacchioli, a Futurist in his early years, adopts the characters and concerns of the old drama and uses Lui to attempt to show them all up as sentimental claptrap. In an expository first act in which Lui only briefly and silently appears, we meet an estranged couple and their daughter. Anna is an unfaithful wife who has left Giovanni Ardeo, her husband, long ago for a string of unsuccessful love affairs. Their daughter, Donatella, a beautiful young woman now living with her father, is their only remaining link. Anna takes Donatella off with her and Ardeo vows to fight to keep his daughter out of the life her mother will surely lead her to. The entirely straightforward Act I, with its obligatory comic servant, does not prepare us for the surprise of Lui's revelations in Act II. Act II takes place six months later; Lui is entertaining two young women by explaining that the events we have seen in Act I have been instigated by him and that more "strands" are to follow shortly. The audience, from this moment on, can never be sure where to put its allegiance and is therefore encouraged to take a distanced

¹Ibid., p. 189.

²Ibid., p. 211.

and skeptical view of the action which follows. (In so throwing his audience off-balance, Cavacchioli recalls earlier Futurist performances, prefigures Pirandello, and anticipates the Futurist Theatre of Surprise.) Throughout the rest of the action, Lui deliberately defuses the excitement of the action by predicting the outcome of a scene before it is played. He tells a woman, identified as La Camagni, for instance, that before the night is out she will allow herself to be seduced by Mimotte, Anna Ardeo's latest lover. Thus, when we watch the scene between Mimotte, a prototypical, bloodless Don Juan, and La Camagni, we already know where the scene will end and can therefore appreciate the scene as a comment on a traditional seduction scene.¹ When asked who he is and how he dares make certain predictions, Lui responds:

It's a suggestion from the Unknowable. You all think that it is I who speak to you. It's not so. You translate a desire into a reality. You give me a body, a manner, a way of dress and a voice. I think but do not exist, the answers I give to your objections are formulated by your own fantasies. I don't exist for you or for them. If I was in a theatre and was acting in a play, I wouldn't even exist for the audience, except as a simple abstraction. And I can permit myself anything from the most

¹Claudia Terzi comments: "Cavacchioli wants the public to become engrossed in the deliberately trite workings of the play so he can then introduce this character who takes apart the stage artifice little by little, anticipating scenes, underlining the conventions . . . or the language. . . ." *La poetica del grottesco*, in *L'idea del teatro e la crisi del naturalismo*, ed. by Luciano Anceschi (Bologna: Edizione Calderini, 1971), p. 65.

wise to the most insane action. Shoot the moon, walk like bats do, poison you with phosphorescent vapors or kill you with a diabetes caused by the excessive sweetness of my words. If this conversation seems logical, it is because you have allowed your arguments and contradictions to unite in a discussion that appears reasonable.¹

Lui is a repository for the desires and feelings of other characters. He can predict their behavior and prompt their inner voices to speak because he is the omniscient author, a representative of the great Unknown. Like his dramatic ancestor, Iago, Lui is faithful to no one but himself and he betrays both Anna and Mimotte in turn. Although he appears to be Anna's friend, it is he who suggests to Mimotte that he court Donatella. At the end of Act II, Mimotte and Donatella are discovered by Anna; their reconciliation scene opens Act III. But Lui has not finished his cruel manipulations and he attempts to make Donatella hear Mimotte's explanations, "using an expedient from the popular theatre. He'll answer my questions, as though speaking directly to you, and you'll listen from behind that curtain."² When she responds that she can't betray her mother, Lui scoffingly replies, "Oh, what big words! Go in there, I said!"³ But Donatella, the only innocent in the play,

¹TGN, p. 216.

²Ibid., p. 238.

³Ibid., p. 239.

rejects temptation and she runs to her mother. Lui then pretends to Mimotte that Donatella is hiding behind the curtain so that the scene can go on as planned. Throughout the scene, Lui prompts Mimotte with nods, and brief comments. Like a director, Lui guides Mimotte through his part, suggests line readings and conclusion. Part interrogator, part director, when Mimotte suddenly stops his open confession to ask who Lui is, Lui answers, "I'm your remorse. Don't you know me?" With a cruel laugh, Lui shows Mimotte that Donatella is not behind the curtain. "There's no one there. There can't be. You act the part too well to have an audience, marionette! Now the audience will come and you'll be speechless."¹

A shorter, but similar, scene follows between Lui and Anna. This time, Lui takes the part of Anna's husband and asks what she's done with her daughter. Answering, Anna asks that Donatella be returned to Giovanni Ardeo, her father. When this has been decided, Lui announces that after Donatella has been brought to her father's house, he'll leave to search for humans rather than stay with puppets.

I've forced myself to give some life to these puppets and nothing but words has resulted. A false love, a false maternal piety, masculine egoism, a few violent quarrels. I'll be a kind of bankrupt merchant running towards the conquest of truth opposed by the prejudices of faith, habit, fashion, hypocrisy.²

¹Ibid., pp. 241-242.

²Ibid., p. 245.

When La Ronza, a friend of Anna's, insists on further explanation, Lui puts a series of questions to her about the motivations of the principal characters. Each of the questions respond to the rules of conventional behavior against which Lui has labored during the play: filial and maternal loyalty, gentlemanly behavior, the code of honor. During this scene with La Ronza, Lui is obviously piqued and the intensity of his frustration grows to the final outburst:

Morality, so-called morality, my friend!
 For that false entity of control that doesn't
 exist and which says that the ideas of a mind
 without bounds, such as that of Anna, are
 right for others but absurd for her. That
 says, yes, that she's mad when she wants to
 win men with her love and make them cavaliers,
 or gentlemen, raise them, that is to her own
 intellectual level and become wise only when
 illusions slap her in the face. Wise and sad
 because wisdom is always melancholy. I'll
 leave these failed beings whose outcome can't
 help being human.¹

Lui's final words introduce the parting scene between Anna and Donatella when he says, "I authorize the last scene of the melodrama."²

Throughout, Lui's words are directed at characters on stage rather than to the audience, but his interruptions, predictions and on-stage directions have both a structural and critical function. Lui, in Mimotte's words, is a kind

¹Ibid., p. 246.

²Ibid.

of "Mefistofele," and, as such, has tried to make each character act in the most unconventional, amoral way. A mother leaves her child to follow an endless stream of lovers, a lover takes a woman's reputation and money and then courts her daughter. But no matter how awful their actions are, all of the "puppets" with whom Lui has shared the stage redeem themselves by responding to some higher duty before they are beyond redemption. Cavacchioli's thesis, expressed in Lui's final speeches, is that these "puppets" react according to type, no matter how far astray they are led. Characters such as these, says Lui, can provide no real insight into the truth as long as they are tied to such dead and false "prejudices" as faith, custom, fashion, and hypocrisy.

Lui leaves, disgusted that his attempts to change these characters has failed. It is important to remember that Cavacchioli is putting the characters and concerns of the old drama on trial. His conclusion is that the drama won't be changed unless the characters are more "human," that is, less predictable and well-made. Lui acts to keep our judgmental faculties active during the play, but the scenes between Anna and Donatella, especially the scenes which begin and end Act III, are "tearjerkers," in the old-fashioned sense. It appears that Cavacchioli, if not Lui, wants to exploit the climactic act-ending scenes typical of the

well-made play at the same time he is busy destroying suspense and ridiculing traditional characters.

And, yet, the dark and eerie presence of Lui is constant and deliberately unsettling. If mother and daughter are reconciled, father forgives daughter, and mother and lover are appropriately punished by being left alone, as in a conventional play, Cavacchioli has disturbed us by using Lui to poke and prod our thinking about the ways of traditional drama so that the double issue ending does not satisfy as it might have, had Lui not muddied the waters.

The three examples of puppet masters we have studied are alike only in that they are dealing with characters who appear to be lifelike but who are puppets. Dr. Climt operates in a kind of never-never land in which people can have eternal life or can be recalled from the dead. Climt is a kind of benevolent despot, willing to change people's desires and able to conjure up the past at will. Once the puppets are in motion, however, Climt allows them free rein and, in fact, refuses to interfere or intercede arbitrarily. Vulcano, a pragmatic puppeteer, can orchestrate Dea's manner and personality at will, once he holds the key to her wardrobe, but he, too, allows the succession of personalities, once emerged, to take their own course of action. Only when the action threatens his plans does he make a switch of costume that brings about fortuitous change. Lui, instead,

attached to no one by love, interest or any common human bond, deliberately sets his puppets in motion against each other and though he is, ultimately, a failed dictator, he does manage to wreak havoc by his deliberate confusion of the puppets' strings.

Testifiers

The category of testifiers includes those characters who are central figures in their respective plays, characters who bear witness, or testify, to their own experience, but who also speak their author's viewpoint.

Marionette, che passione!

The Man in Grey is one of three love-torn victims at the center of Rosso di Secondo's play, Marionette che passione!¹ His unhappy love affair has been over for a year when the play opens and he is thus the senior member in the trio's soon-to-be-formed "lonely hearts club." As the one who's had to live with his condition for the longest time, he is accepted by the others as their teacher. His subject could be called "Mastering the Pain of a Broken Heart." Throughout Act I, which takes place in a telegraph office on a rainy Sunday in Milan, The Man in Grey listens to the conversation of the two others, The Man in Mourning and The Woman in Blue Fox. When he overhears them decide to join forces, to live together

¹In TGN, pp. 67-117. The Man in Grey has a name similar to the "Figure in Grey" in The Life of Man (1906) by Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919). In that play, the character is a ghost-like choral figure, somewhat comparable to the mysterious Lui in L'uccello del paradiso. It is probable that both Rosso and Cavacchioli knew Andreyev's play.

in an effort to forget their own painful passions for former loves, The Man in Grey joins their conversation to dissuade them and tell of his own experience:

Pardon me a minute, I beg you. I must tell you something before you leave. I, too, was here to send a telegram. I didn't write it. For over 15 minutes I'd decided not to but I stayed to listen to you. Yes, I confess. I pretended to be occupied with something but instead I was concerned for you. Now I can tell you that what you are about to do is mad, insensitive, horrible. But above all, useless. Let me tell you why, then you can go anyway, if you still want to.¹

Stage directions indicate that The Man in Grey speaks in a perfectly sane and reasonable manner, with great conviction and lucidity, but a gleam in his eyes reveals an inner disturbance. When the other two obediently seat themselves before him to listen, he remarks, ironically, how little it has taken to shake their resolve to start anew. He tells them that he knows their plan won't work because he has tried it. He warns them,

Go now, if you want. But I warn you that tomorrow you'll be sick of each other. Take an apartment, pretend to be married and if you do manage to get past tomorrow, illuding each other for one month, or two or three that you're helping one another overcome that passion, it will be worse later; you'll hate each other. In the end, one of you will kill the other. Go ahead, go on together if you like. You'll see what will happen. You think you can handle your soul like a servant, less even that that! You think you can do what you please--try it, my friends.²

¹Ibid., p. 86.

²Ibid., p. 88.

As we have seen from their earlier conversation, The Man in Mourning and The Woman in Blue Fox are so distraught that they are unable to think or act for themselves. They are pitifully open to suggestion, first from each other, then from The Man in Grey. They are beings with exposed nerves, exhausted, near despair, like marionettes whose strings are their passions. The Man in Mourning wears black for his faithless wife whom he has not killed in accordance with the time-honored husband's right. Unable to kill her, yet equally unable to live with the scandal and his undiminished love for her, he has run away from their small town to a city where he can be another of the anonymous thousands of sufferers: he wears mourning to "kill" her in thought, if not in deed. The Woman in Blue Fox suffers for a lover whom she has left because of his unfaithfulness to her and because he has beaten her when she complained. By comparison with these wretched souls, The Man in Grey does seem to have mastered his passion and his words, cynical and pessimistic, and convince the other two to abandon the idea of union. The man and women leave separately and the act ends when The Man in Grey takes a glove the woman has left behind, together with her local address. We are not surprised when, at the beginning of Act II, he comes to The Singer's house, where The Woman in Blue Fox is staying, to return the glove.

In Act I and again in Act II, The Man in Grey refers to himself as two beings, one moved by passion alone, still

hoping, still searching for a resolution to the pain, the other sane and reasonable, cynical, too, convinced of the futility of the other's search. That "other" has prompted him to use the pretext of returning the glove in order to follow The Woman in Blue Fox again and to see her friend, The Singer, whom he has seen briefly when she stopped at the telegraph office for a moment in Act I. When The Man in Grey speaks with The Singer, we see both selves speak, one a pleading, pitiful spectacle in a frenzied anguish worse than the others; the other, a controlled, rational self. When he asks The Singer to kiss and hold him, to help him put out "the torch," he accepts her gentle and troubled rebuff as well as her reminder that he's going against his own words and degrading himself. His rational self appears to take control again and he promises "to be good."

After a misunderstanding with The Man in Mourning, who threatens to kill The Man in Grey for having tricked him into leaving The Woman in Blue Fox, The Singer reconciles all concerned and suggests that they meet after her performance for dinner.

In Act II, The Man in Grey has totally rejected or disregarded his own advice of Act I and it is understandable that The Man in Mourning sees this as a trick, a joke in very bad taste. But by the end of Act III, it will be clear that The Man in Grey's jokes are deadly serious and are prompted

by an pain and anguish that has rendered his life schizophrenic and, ultimately, unbearable.

Act III takes place in the restaurant where the three sufferers await The Singer. When a problem arises over how to use a second table so that unwelcome guests won't join them, it is The Man in Grey who takes charge after the other two admit that they are in too bad a state to think.

The Man in Grey's mysterious positioning of chairs against the second table and ordering of flowers turns out to be a final experiment in confronting and coping with the past. The Man in Grey chooses flowers for each of the three places set at the second table for the ex-loves in absentia. He orders champagne and convinces the others that by drinking it, soon they'll be able to laugh at their troubles. He imagines their great friendship, future trips together, fortunes to be made, inspired by The Woman in Blue Fox, their new lady, a replacement for those estranged loves. In a grotesque extension of the "solution" found at the end of Act I, the unhappy duo has now become a trio, a traveling ménage à trois to-be.

This moment of promised accommodation and growing contentment is interrupted when He Who Shouldn't Have Come arrives to reclaim The Woman in Grey. An attempt is made to use an old theatrical convention, "the usual final expedient, a curtain,"¹

¹Ibid., p. 112.

in order to hide The Woman from her lover, the intruder. But this usually comic device is unsuccessful here and indirectly leads to tragedy. The Woman in Blue Fox, once discovered, goes meekly away with her lover, pinning the red carnation on his lapel. The experiment aborted, The Man in Grey and The Man in Mourning are left on stage. The Man in Mourning is the first to mention wanting to end his life; he also says he's tried but failed. The Man in Grey tells his friend that he hasn't yet suffered enough, hasn't eaten his heart out with suffering. While he speaks, The Man in Grey pours powder into a glass of champagne and stirs it,

. . . When you've been through it all, you'll see, it will be easy. Oh, very easy. But first you must try everything until there's nothing left to try, not to right or left--no way out. Then you'll talk a lot, like me. You'll feel a tremendous need for discussion, words. You'll listen to your own voice as though it belongs to someone else, to an annoying and untalented actor. It will seem as though it must be the wind, whistling through your empty breast. When you're worn down like a pumice stone, then it'll be easy. (He drinks in one gulp.) Like this. Who are you killing? No one.¹

The play ends when The Singer, come too late, meets The Man in Mourning and is told what has happened. Saddened, she says somewhat wistfully that she thinks she could have loved him, The Man in Grey.

The Man in Mourning and The Woman in Blue Fox remain

¹Ibid., p. 116.

unable to help themselves or each other throughout the play. The Man in Mourning's outburst in Act II is only posturing; he suffers loudly, even dresses as a sufferer, but is clearly a weakling and inexperienced at the kind of suffering he's being asked to undergo. The Woman in Blue Fox is the perfect victim for her lover; she's a possession of his, much in the way that the blue fox stole he bought for her is a possession of hers. When he comes to get her, she makes no attempt to resist but goes obediently, even a bit playfully, perhaps, with the gesture of the flower. Neither of them is as deeply corroded by suffering and by trying to overcome it as is The Man in Grey. He is both observer and sufferer. He survives by constantly reigning in his passion, by alternatively indulging and denying the will to try again. He feels his own pain, recognizes it in others and is able to offer a method for coping but is unable to follow it himself.¹

Il giuoco delle parte

Leone Gala, the protagonist in Pirandello's Il giuoco delle parti, dominates the play from the outset.² He and his estranged wife, Silia, have lived in separate residences

¹"By now the overthrow of the d'Annunzian hero is clear: man submits, without any possibility of fleeing, to the farce of a passion he cannot dominate." Livio, ITR, p. 73.

²In Maschere nude I, pp. 513-580. J. L. Styan remarks that Leone "is both the protagonist of the action and its chorus." In The Dark Comedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 140-141.

for three years; he allows her total freedom and makes no demands on her time. Daily, he calls in for a mutually contracted half-hour, but frequently, he satisfies this duty by merely asking Silia's maid if there's any news, before going off again. This unusual arrangement and her "freedom" have become an imprisonment for Silia. During the first scene, in a conversation with her lover, Guido Venanzi, Silia describes her husband:

For hours, I think about the fact that a man like him exists, almost outside of life, like a nightmare for other people's lives. He looks down on everyone, dressed as a cook--a cook, for God's sake! He watches and understands everything, point by point, every move, every gesture. Watched like that, you begin to see what you're going to do before you do it and any pleasure is gone. He paralyzes me, that man! There's only one thought in my mind, how to get rid of him, how to free myself--and everyone else--from him.¹

When Leone enters in the next scene (Silia has told the maid to have him come up, then has left Guido to meet him), he explains his reasons for the way he behaves. He sees life as a series of facts which have imprisoned him, from which he cannot escape; birth, marriage, his wife's infidelity. To battle against them is useless but he has found another way. Although, as he says, "It's a sad thing, when you've understood the game,"² understanding the solution helps. For him the

¹Maschere nude I, p. 525.

²Ibid., p. 529.

solution is to defend himself against others, against himself, against life and the hurt it can bring. You need to kill life in yourself, he says, and "content yourself, not by living any longer for yourself but by watching others and even, for that little bit of life that you have to live out, by watching yourself, as though from outside."¹

When Guido protests that that doesn't sound like enough to get out of life, Leone counters that the intellectual pleasure of clarifying and codifying tumultuous internal emotions, is very satisfying. He warns, though, that a counterbalance to the emptiness is necessary: in his case, as Guido suggests, a preoccupation with food, eating well. Turning once again to talk of Silia, Leone remarks that she is unhappy because she's so full of so many different pieces of life and doesn't know which to choose.²

Leone's solution to the "game" is to transfer the passions of life to a love of cooking and eating well. He makes this the important part of his life and does not allow his emotions to interfere. As we will see later in

¹Ibid., p. 530.

²In his review of the play in Avanti!, Antonio Gramsci credits Pirandello with presenting, in Silia, a personification of the Futurists' vision of life: "her spiritual inferiority is a decomposition of volumes and planes that continue on in space. . . ." February 5, 1919, now in Letteratura a vita nazionale (Turin: Einaudi, 1950), p. 345.

the play, a meal and its preparation bring him constantly back to his main "concept," his control, whenever life threatens to intervene.

As we have seen, Leone's understanding of the "game" is detestable to Silia who vows that she'd pay with her life if someone would kill him. The opportunity to turn the game against Leone comes immediately after he leaves. A group of men who are quite drunk, mistake Silia's apartment for that of Madam Pepita, a neighbor who apparently accepts "gentlemen callers" into the wee hours. Silia demands a card from one of them and then presents it the following morning to Leone, demanding that he send a challenge. After some discussion over whether or not Silia is justified in her outrage (Guido asserts not, but agrees that it was prudent for him not to have intervened), Leone sends Guido with the challenge, acknowledging it to be his duty as Silia's husband. Silia, obviously pleased by what appears to be a crack in the shell which surrounds him, seems to have second thoughts about the duel she's arranged and she is moved to offer herself to Leone, to stay with him through the night. He refuses, saying he looks forward to a dreamless sleep.

During the first two acts, Leone's demeanor has been intelligent, kindly, even friendly towards Guido and Silia. He often jokes with his servant and kitchen colleague,

Filippo, calling him Socrates and accusing him of being a follower of Bergson. Leone does seem to have found out how to play the game and is as unperturbed by Silia's demands for a duel as he apparently is for her other demands on him. In fact, Leone (the word means lion in Italian) is like a cat whose prey are blind, scurrying mice. Throughout the play, gaming images predominate. It is Leone who introduces the motif when he acknowledges that he has "understood the game" and he uses game terminology in many other instances, as well. As master of the game, it is he who calls the shots as the game of the play is played out. Silia has said she wants to get rid of Leone and so she has contrived this duel. But having made the first move, she is forced to watch the rest of the game from the sidelines. What she and Guido (who agrees to act as padrino or second) do not know is that they are playing out of their leagues. When Guido, at first reluctant to have Leone challenge a man who is a known expert with swords, eventually delivers an uncontested challenge, much stronger and irreversable than necessary under the circumstances, he is hoping to claim Silia as his prize, no doubt, after Leone has been killed in the duel. He, and everyone else, is surprised when Leone, dressed still in robe and slippers, says he's played out his own role, that of husband. He insists that it is Guido who must fight the duel, according to his proper role. When Silia arrives, the fight is already in progress. She is

confused and then, as she understands how he has fooled them, "punished them," as he says, she shouts, "You're a demon, a devil!" When Leone's neighbor, a rather absent-minded surgeon, comes rushing in to gather his things, Silia asks what's happened. When he doesn't answer, she cries, "Dead? Dead? Dead?"¹ Leone stares motionless before him. As at the end of Act II, Filippo calls him to breakfast. This time Leone doesn't move towards the table as he had at the end of Act II and the curtain falls before we can know whether or not his own rules for the game are irrevocably broken this time.

Silia, restless and tortured by her "freedom" from Leone, has made a bid for true freedom from him. But he, experienced as a watcher and player, is able to defend himself against Silia and Guido by tricking them. Pirandello, using a device from comedy, "the trickster tricked," has turned it to a tragic end. Leone, like the big cat, devours the mice who stalk him: Guido dies in the duel, Silia has lost hopes of any semblance of freedom. But Leone's victory is not sweet, for in saving himself from death, in refusing to play the role as indicated by the others, Leone has caused Guido's death. The wounded animal has struck back in defense. He will be more feared and wondered at, more misunderstood and hated by his wife, and undoubtedly more disillusioned about life and about his own abilities to protect himself from it by reducing it to a series of concepts and

¹Maschere nude I, p. 579.

a menu of good meals.

Throughout the play, Leone is characterized by a calculated sparseness, careful order, controlled by logical thought and action. In contrast to Silia's smart apartment in the middle of town, Leone and his servant live in a sparsely-furnished dwelling set back in the woods. The order of his day is determined by mealtimes and by his after-dinner one-half-hour with Silia. Although, as he tells Guido, he may regret the necessity of rigid adherence to his "rules," Leone recognizes that without the order and logic he has imposed upon his existence, he would be lost to the passions he must continually uproot and divert. In accepting his role of husband "in name only," Leone allows himself no liberty, he spends as little time with Silia as possible, a maximum of one-half an hour a day and he refuses her invitation to enjoy more. Leone is so rigid because, as we have guessed, he, like Rosso di San Secondo's Man in Grey, is aware of the power of the life force and of its potential chaos. Much more successfully than The Man in Grey, Leone is able to hold passion at bay. Yet, once Leone's deadly game has been played out, it appears that his precarious balance is faltering when, for the first time in three years, he's late for breakfast.¹

¹Livio interprets this moment: "His artificial equilibrium between books and cooking, reason and the concrete, is ruined forever . . .," ITR, p. 111.

The Man in Grey and Leone are two who testify with the same message: the only way to deal with passion is to face it, stifle it, and then deny it. For The Man in Grey, the philosophy may be the right one but he hasn't yet found the method. Already a victim of love at the beginning of the play, he must kill himself by the end of the play because his year-long battle against the longings within him has failed. Leone Gala, on the other hand, is able to succeed in channeling his passion into a form which includes spare living and a concentration on cooking and eating rather than on the activities of his faithless wife. When this form is threatened, he is able to lead his wife and lover into the trap they've laid for him and thus emerge victorious, if not unscathed. Rather than kill himself, or be killed, Leone leads Guido to his death in a cat and mouse game in which the mice are, inevitably, devoured. The Man in Grey, although stronger than his companion "marionettes," is finally no match for the passion that overcomes him. Leone, instead, is a stoic. In his battle for survival, he is the fittest, but the price is someone else's death, as well as a penetration of the armor he has so carefully constructed.

CHAPTER V

BEING ANIMATED

This chapter concerns several different kinds of characters. The characters being examined have been divided into four different categories: (1) puppets and puppet-like people; (2) split personalities; (3) repertory regulars; and (4) machines, objects, and ambiances. The definition and limitation of each category will precede the analysis of that category.

Puppets

By puppets, I mean either hand-held puppets, marionettes or life-size puppets (even when played by actors). Examples of the use of puppets are found in plays by Futurists, i grotteschi and Pirandello.

Marinetti used a puppet theatre in Il teatrino dell' amore. Cavacchioli used life-size puppets in Quella che ti assomiglia (The One Who Looks Like You, 1919), and Pirandello also used life-size puppets in his last, unfinished play, I giganti della montagna, (The Mountain Giants, 1931-33). In 1918, a series of Futurist puppet plays was produced in Rome, at the Teatro dei Piccoli. Called I Balli Plastici (The Plastic Dances), these performances featured puppets

created and constructed by Futurist painter and sculptor, Fortunato Depero.¹

In the examples which follow, puppets are used as characters by the Futurists and by one of i grotteschi: Marinetti's Elettricità sessuale and Massimo Bontempelli's Siepe a nordovest (Northwest Wall, 1918-1919).

Elettricità sessuale

Marinetti's first sintesi, Elettricità sessuale, (an adaptation of the second act of his full-length play, Poupées Électriques, 1909) introduces two puppets, played by actors who represent matrimony and the family. (Although this play was discussed in Chapter I, here we will focus specifically on the use of the puppet characters.) Marinetti hoped to have puppets which were animated by electrical means, a type of robot. In notes which accompany the text of the published version of the play, Marinetti describes the male puppet:

It's a perfectly perfected puppet, animated
by an electric switcher that makes it snore,
cough and so forth.²

As Marinetti unhappily adds, however, none of this plan was realized and, in fact, he even had to make the effects of rain and wind (the "electric" atmosphere outside) by the rather primitive means of pieces of paper and his own

¹Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 125-132, for reviews of performance.

²Marinetti, Teatro, 2:482-483.

breath.¹ The play was produced again in 1925 by Anton Giulio Bragaglia at the Teatro degli Indipendenti in Rome, under the title Fantocci elettrici (Electric Puppets). As noted in Chapter I, a photograph of the production, published later that year in the magazine Comoedia, shows actors dressed as the two puppets who represent the pillars of traditional society: marriage and the family.²

The puppets, called Signora Famiglia (Mrs. Family) and Signor Matrimonio (Mr. Matrimony) are on stage, seated down-stage right and left, close to the edge of the stage when the play begins. In the stage directions, Marinetti describes them,

The Professor Matrimony puppet wears a green dressing gown which exaggerates his paunch and clashes violently with his reddish coloring and red sideburns. His lower lip is large and droops a bit; big near-sighted eyes that can be seen when he removes his glasses to clean them. He's completely bald. He is seated in a rocking chair near a table laden with old books; he wears huge slippers.

The Mrs. Family Puppet is wrapped in a brown shawl; she has greyish hair, a tired face with flabby cheeks, a mouth twisted in a sour expression, and a wrinkled forehead, on which six greasy curls are fixed. She sits next to a table covered with linens, lit by a lamp with a pink shade, made in the shape of a butterfly. The puppet holds a piece of crocheting and a crochet hook.³

¹See Chapter I, p. 68, for full text of Marinetti's remarks.

²Comoedia (July 1, 1925), p. 670.

³Marinetti, Teatro, 2:421.

The puppets are introduced by Giovanni, a servant who is showing a new maid, Rosina, how they work. He describes what Professor Matrimony can do:

It's simple, see? All you have to do is put this thing into this, press the button and see, it starts up right away. The puppet takes off its glasses, cleans them with a handkerchief, and puts them back on his nose. Then he picks up the newspaper again, you have to put that here on the edge of the table. It works the same with a book, too. Do you understand? I'll bet you didn't have people like this to work for on your last job, right?¹

And Mrs. Family coughs for Rosina at the pressing of a hidden button. Rosina admits to being a little afraid of the puppets, even though she admires such an invention. It is Rosina who has guessed what purpose the puppets serve: for the Marinettis, the puppets provide the forbidding presences who guarded their courtship and now serve to make their stolen kisses more exciting. Giovanni adds that they've stolen kisses behind many others, too, as there are many other puppets in the attic. The puppets, he says, are changed nearly every night.

Following a scene in which the couple uses the puppets (described in Chapter I), Maria says that she'd be happy to "throw away all of those ugly characters" and Riccardo remarks that's impossible because "they are inside of us!"² Instead, the puppets must be used to explore new frontiers of love. But Riccardo, in an effort to please Maria, and calm

¹Ibid., p. 425.

²Ibid., p. 446.

her nervousness, suddenly decides to throw the two puppets out of the window.

Family and Matrimony, whee, out of the window!
I'll get rid of Mrs. Family myself. After all,
she wasn't really in the way. I owe some of your
best kisses to her!¹

When the "bodies" are brought on stage, they are, of course, the puppets. All of the fisherman scream, "He's crazy! He's crazy! Mr. Marinetti has gone crazy!" as Giovanni shows off Mr. Matrimony's cough by pushing the appropriate button.²

Elettricit  sessuale attempts to show puppets as mechanisms that can have a use in daily life. For Riccardo, they help create an artificial atmosphere in which he can build greater sexual excitement in himself and his wife. Just before throwing the two puppets away, Riccardo admits that Maria must think his experiments bizarre. She has already expressed the thought that he thinks of her as one of the puppets, too, "I know that you don't value women and that you consider me like one of your puppets." Riccardo replies, "The prettiest of all! (Jokingly) In fact, your mechanisms are identical. Electricity makes your nerves vibrate like conducting wires of pleasure. . . ." ³

In fact, Riccardo is a puppet master like those

¹Ibid., p. 447.

²Ibid., p. 453.

³Ibid., p. 444.

discussed in the previous chapter. He controls his house and servants, his wife, and the puppets with whom he enlivens his existence. He designs the puppets to perform certain mechanical functions, but it is their powerful effect on the imagination that he values and manipulates. With them, Riccardo and Maria can relive past times and invent new fantasies. There are no limits to the possibilities for exploration. A change of personage, the opening lines of a new scenario, and a different fantasy can begin nightly. Even when Riccardo and Maria throw out the puppets, there are a room full to choose from the next night. And, as the play's ending shows, the old puppets are very durable and even though they're half-drowned, they are still in working order.

As Futurist author, Marinetti is exalting the use of invention and machinery together with imagination in pursuit of endless sexual adventures. He is celebrating impulsive action and improvisational behavior over well-laid plans and pre-scripted courtship and marriage. Marinetti uses the puppets as physical manifestations of traditional society, to be tricked, to be laughed at, eventually to be thrown out, when no longer of use. The puppets are Riccardo's playthings, invented to keep life interesting, especially his sex life. And yet, along with the praise for machines, a Futurist hallmark, and the call to adventure, Elettricità sessuale uses some traditional characters, and motivation.

The three servants, Giovanni, Pietro, and Rosina are completely recognizable. Giovanni, the senior man, is capable and respectful of his employers. Pietro takes the lead from Giovanni, but can't help tease Rosina, the new maid, about her flirting with a neighbor's chauffeur. Rosina is a young, pert, and smart girl whose theatrical ancestors include maids in ancient Roman comedies, Italian commedia and English Restoration comedies. Maria (who in the three-act French version of the play, Poupées Électriques, has an affair with Paolo) is young but sophisticated; she smokes cigarettes, has travelled with her husband and is alternately bored and very nervous. She is a rather typical example of heroines of many contemporary French and Italian plays about the upper middle class. Riccardo, too, except for his pre-occupation with puppets, is like the leading men of many of these plays: handsome, worldly, intelligent, wealthy, and in apparent control of his situation. Riccardo, however, is a Futurist and an inventor of mechanical puppets. He has taken life into his own hands and uses the puppets not only for his amusement and excitement, but also as a means of controlling his married life. In many contemporary plays which treat adultery, the wife is discovered in adultery and the husband is moved to punish her by death, exile or economic abandonment. Riccardo, instead, whose suspicions about Maria and Paolo are hinted at, even in the synthetic version of the play, deliberately uses the puppets to encourage Maria

to react to him as Paolo. And, by limiting their social life to a selection of different puppets every night, Riccardo deliberately removes the opportunity for Maria to become involved with another man. When Maria protests that they should see other people every now and then, instead of living with "absurd fantasies," Riccardo answers:

And you, my little Maria, would be less unhappy if you could flirt and allow yourself to be courted. (Laughing) Look, here they are, other people!¹

And when Riccardo's attempt to play Paolo with Maria fails, his reaction is not typical of husbands in plays of the time. He does not press Maria further and, in fact, ends in throwing out the puppets who make her uneasy. He does not punish her, but rather the puppets.

In Elettricit  sessuale, the use of puppets is integral to the play's action and themes. Marinetti indicts traditional love and marriage and offers a solution in the changing gallery of Riccardo's puppets. Old-fashioned life is presented in the male puppet's dress, looks and activities (reading the newspaper and old books, rocking, cleaning his glasses, coughing) and also in the female puppet's appearance and activities (greasy, perhaps false, grey curls, sewing and crocheting, a soured expression on her face). New life, in contrast, is evident in the electrically lighted house, servants in smart uniforms, sophisticated appetites and toys which satisfy them, smoking cigarettes, carefree and

¹Ibid., p. 445.

unconventional behavior. The past is not viewed in a sentimental or nostalgic way, but rather in a distanced or pragmatic way. The puppets, representatives of the past, are used to inject new life into the present. The puppets' appearance and presence add a grotesque element to the play, as does their "drowning," which converts Riccardo's impulsive decision to throw out the puppets into a joke on the fishermen, who believe them to be human beings. They shout, "He's crazy!," but he has the last laugh.

Siepe al nordovest

In Siepe al nordovest (Northwest Wall), 1918-1919, by Massimo Bontempelli, both hand-held puppets and marionettes appear. Bontempelli describes burattini as "those moved from below" (hand-held) and marionette "those moved from above with strings." In Siepe, the marionettes were to be "a little more than half life-sized."¹

Two sets of principal characters enact two separate story lines simultaneously. A love triangle of human beings: Laura, Mario, and Carletto are at a country house together. The men are friends but Laura is married to Mario while carrying on a flirtation with Carletto. (Carletto is a diminutive of "Carlo," which suggests a childishness in this adult character.) The marionette characters include the King, Princess, Hero, two Ministers, Workers and the King's Subjects. Their action concerns a plan to erect a wall on a

¹Bontempelli, Teatro, p. 54. Complete text of play appears on pp. 54-109.

hilltop (located in Laura and Mario's garden) in order to protect the city which they've built in the valley below. Without the wall, the populace of the town suffers strong northwest winds during the winter months. Neither of the two groups is aware of the other, as the stage directions make clear,

Behind the hill we hear the cries of the Marionettes, whom we don't see as yet. The actors make no indication that they hear the cries, just as they never indicate that they see or hear anything that happens in the world of the Marionettes, which remains unknown to them. Similarly, the Marionettes neither see nor hear the humans.¹

Two hand-held puppets, Colombina and Napoleone Bonaparte, reside in a downstage left corner in a small puppet theatre. They give the prolog and appear at intermissions to make comments on the action that has passed. Columbina flirts and fights with Napoleone and they both marvel at the fact that the humans and marionettes never see one another, even when their separate actions become entangled. Ironically the marionettes seem more human than the actual human beings who refer to themselves as marionettes, drawn by strings to their destiny. The Hero, a marionette, argues instead for free will, when he says to the Princess: "We're not just miserable instruments in the hands of a manipulator: we're divine sparks, masters of our will and intellect." ²

¹Ibid., p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 65.

Bontempelli, having set up the two actions to play simultaneously, takes comic advantage of the inability of the marionettes and humans to see one another. When the workers begin to tie cords to a pole on one side of the hilltop and from a tree on the other, Carletto, escaping from a tête à tête with Laura before Mario appears, trips and falls over the cord. A love scene with Mario and Laura is rudely interrupted when the hammock Mario is on falls suddenly to the ground, cut by a worker to use as part of the marionette's wall.

The actions and language of the two worlds are sharply in contrast, as are the characters. In the human world, a woman pretends to love her husband exclusively while planning an affair with his best friend. In contrast, the Princess wants to join the convent and the Hero is pure and good, willing to prove himself for her hand. The language of the human world is modern, straightforward, unromantic. In the marionette world, the characters speak in an elegant, flowery and formal style. In the marionette action, the marionettes are all working towards a common good, saving their city from the harsh winds of winter. In the Laura/Mario/Carletto plot, each individual acts selfishly, without regard for the others. Yet, Bontempelli mocks both worlds: although the King seems a worthy leader, his Ministers are incurable bureaucrats, wanting to form a commission before making any decision, whether minute or

urgent. Noble though the Hero is, he is clearly more brawn than brains and the Princess is most willing to go from convent gates to the Hero's embrace when he saves the town. Colombina's sympathies are with the marionettes, though, as the second act interval demonstrates,

Napoleone. And what about the others, those made of flesh and blood? Don't they matter to you?

Columbina. If I must tell you the truth, the marionettes are more likeable than the human beings.

Napoleone. To me too, they're more serious about things.

Columbina. And those people have something of marionettes about them.

Napoleone. And what are we?

Columbina. We're real, what difference does that make? But quiet, here they come again.¹

The third act brings the solutions to both actions, one by design, the other by accident. While the marionette workers are attempting to attach one of the hammocks to their cord, Carletto (who, of course, is invisible to them) pulls it from them. To the marionettes, the hammock seems to float by itself in the air and they run off to tell the rest of the kingdom about the terrible supernatural event they've witnessed. The Hero promises to overcome whatever demonic power moves the hammock, and the Princess agrees to marry him if he succeeds. At the opening of Act III, the Hero's soliloquy shows that he is a prudent, perhaps a cowardly hero, a spoof of the Superman type character, who's determined to wait out the "demon" rather than rush

¹Ibid., p. 82.

into battle with it. While he waits, Laura and Carletto enter. Mario, Laura's husband, is incapacitated from the fall off the hammock and is inside the house.¹ The lovers are alone but visible from the house. This problem is solved by Laura who has ordered servants to bring a large folding screen from the house and erect it on the hilltop in order to protect the hill from wind (and hide herself and Carletto from Mario's view). Seeing this screen arrive, more than twice his height and just the wall the marionettes were trying to erect, the Hero decides to use the miracle to his own advantage. So, prudent, cowardly, and not above a lie, the Hero calls out to the marionette kingdom to witness the miracle which he explains was brought about by a magic charm of three words given to him long ago by his nursemaid. The charm can work only once and the words are forgotten as soon as they are used, so the Hero has conveniently forgotten them. The Princess kneels before him, the populace cheer him just as Carletto and Laura reappear from their tryst behind the screen. The simultaneously resolved happy endings abruptly halt, however, when a gypsy appears, offers to read Laura's fortune and then sees the marionettes. Laura and Carletto run into the house, thinking she's crazy as they are still unable to see the marionettes. A curse is heard and the Puppet Master, suddenly appears for the first time, trailing his puppets by their strings behind him.

He is angry at the gypsy girl for interrupting his play, but because he recognizes her gift, he invites her to join him to learn the art of puppetry. The girl wants to begin right away, but the Puppet Master smiles,

No, not here. You've ruined the place. And besides, I need some time to convince myself that I'm not a marionette too. Let's go away, far away, I don't know where. Come on, that way.¹

Puppet-like Characters

Puppet-like characters are human beings who do not control their own actions but instead allow themselves to be moved by some outside entity.

Examples of this type of character are frequent in plays by i grotteschi. In Cavacchioli's L'uccello del paradiso, the stock characters of old dramas act in predictable ways and Lui refers to them, disparagingly, as puppets. Dea in Bon-tempelli's Nostra Dea is puppet-like because she is motivated externally by her changing wardrobe. In Luigi Chiarelli's play, La scala di seta (The Silken Ladder, 1917), Desirée, a dancer, becomes a millionaire and a public minister with the help of a corrupt social world of whom he is a puppet. Puppet-like, he continues to dance with the lower half of his body while giving a public speech in the scene that ends the play. Following is a discussion of the puppet-like characters in Marionette che passione!.

¹Ibid., p. 90.

Rosso di San Secondo's characters often are puppet-like, especially those led by passion to commit foolish, cruel and even tragic acts. The three "marionettes" in Rosso's play, Marionette che passione! are strong examples of the type. As the playwright describes them in a note addressed to the actors,

The three protagonists of the drama, especially, are like marionettes, and their string is passion. They are still human beings, however, humans reduced to marionettes and, therefore, profoundly to be pitied.¹

As each of the protagonists enters the stage, we learn from their actions and their general demeanor that they are distraught, nervous and, apparently incapable of completing the simple action of writing a telegram. The Man in Grey, on stage when the curtain opens, alternates trying to write the telegram with a variety of nervous gestures, fingering his hair, crossing and recrossing his legs, smoking and talking to himself. When the Man in Mourning appears, he resolutely goes to a table, writes out his telegram but then stops, reads over what he has written, lays it down and then frowning, is lost in thought. The Woman in Blue Fox is slim and elegant but her eyes are red from crying. She goes to a table, takes up a pen, but is unable even to begin writing and remains immobile, pen in hand. Soon we discover that the Man in Mourning and the Woman in Blue Fox are in the same predicament: they have left someone

¹TGN, p. 73.

and are unsure about whether or not to send reconciliation telegrams. Both of them have run away to Milan but seem unable to do anything beyond that to rebuild their lives. When the Man in Mourning suggests that perhaps they'll find strength together, by living together, the Man in Grey steps in to reveal his story. He, too, has run away from a faithless love. For more than a year he has tried to get on with his life, to forget his passion for the woman. He warns them that their proposed union is foolish and will end badly. The two quickly acquiesce and the three sufferers leave the telegraph office separately.

Acts II and III show these puppet-like characters drawn on their string of passion to attempt other actions which consequently fail. The Man in Grey tries to hold his need for love in check but he reaches out in a frenzy for the Singer's hand and heart; the Man in Mourning in a great bluster of bravado threatens to shoot the Man In Grey for a supposed affront and betrayal but he is easily swayed by the Singer to drop the gun. The Woman in Blue Fox, in turn, does what the Man in Mourning, the Man in Grey, and the Singer suggest: as she explains, early in Act III, she is incapable of making any decisions on her own. All three, having decided at the end of Act I to disband, have reversed this decision by the beginning of Act III and they are willing to try the Man in Grey's experiment: confronting their past loves through an imaginative use of a table set for

three, and an appropriate flower at each place.

During Act III, the Man in Grey is triumphantly, almost hysterically in charge of the action. All decisions are made by him, including the ordering of champagne to toast their brave alliance. The arrival of good feelings, which shortly follows the first glass of champagne, is interrupted by He Who Shouldn't Have Come. We are not surprised when the Woman in Blue Fox obediently Follows him, open as she is to suggestion, pulled as she is by her passion for him. The Man in Mourning, who has tried suicide, but failed, can only watch as the Man in Grey drinks the potion that will kill him. He remains seated, "seemingly stupefied, he looks out into the void and dully repeats, 'Resolved. Already resolved.'¹"

In Marionette, Rosso uses several minor characters to contrast with his puppet-like protagonists. In Act I, the guard at the telegraph office, the clerks and various customers, are examples of normal behavior. Telegrams announcing a death, birth, and a marriage, are sent by a variety of quite ordinary citizens. In Act II, the Singer and the dancers who live at her theatrical boarding house, provide further contrast, as do the waiters and customers in the restaurant of Act III. It is the three "marionettes" who are out of joint, not the times, Rosso

¹Ibid., p. 117.

seems to be saying. Life and death continue to go on in their normal rhythm while the three principals concentrate solely on healing their respective wounds. The Singer, especially, provides a note of optimistic and practical good sense. She has "carried the torch" herself many times, but she makes no mystery of it for herself or for anyone who is able to bear the pain until it passes, although she is sympathetic to those weaker than she, like the three vagabonds before her. The Singer works while the Woman in Blue Fox, a former singer, is a kept woman. The telegram senders, the ballerinas, the waiters, make up a kind of working-people's chorus in juxtaposition to the total self-absorption of the lovelorn trio. This chorus takes Sunday afternoon walks, jokes, shares good news and bad, in short goes about the every day business of life in a brisk, upbeat rhythm which contrasts with the trance-like immobility and inertia of the sufferers at the center of the play.

Split Personalities

Characters who exhibit split personalities are those types of characters who are aware (or become aware during the course of the play) that they have both an outer and an inner self, one as viewed from the outside by other people, the other as viewed from within, by themselves. Many of the male characters who have been cuckolded by their wives are in this category: Cirillo in La maschera e il

volto, for instance, knows that he is viewed by his friends as a poor, unsuspecting fool of a husband. He, of course, is aware of his wife's infidelities, suffers from them, but chooses to maintain the mask of a fool rather than reveal the true depth of his suffering. Leone Gala in Il giuoco delle parti, too, has elected to assume an outer appearance which protects and masks the pain he feels over his wife Silia's unfaithfulness. In both of these cases, the characters have willfully assumed the mask themselves in order to protect a vulnerable inner self. In other cases, the mask is not assumed but is rather imposed, either by circumstances or by some influence outside the immediate control of the character. In these instances, the character usually cannot succeed in working past the mask to free the "face" within. This is the plight faced by Paolo Grazia in La maschera e il volto and by the Ponza/Frola trio in Così è (se vi pare) as well as by Pirandello's six characters.

In the discussion which follows, three different examples of the use of characters with split personalities have been selected: (1) Bianca e Rosso (White and Red, 1923), by Marinetti; (2) L'uomo che incontrò se stesso, by Antonelli; and (3) Enrico IV by Pirandello.

In Marinetti's three sintesi, Bianca e Rosso, a male character named Forte (Strong) and a female character named Dolce (Sweet) confront their "second selves," Rosso

(Red) and Bianca (White), respectively.¹ Forte and Dolce both wear black modern dress while Rosso is dressed in red pyjama-like jacket and trousers and Bianca wears a full-length white tunic. Rosso's face and hair are colored red and Bianca's are painted white. During the first sintesi, Forte and Dolce speak passionately of their love while Bianca and Rosso lie sleeping in front of them, near the footlights. Forte and Dolce become aware that something interrupts their happiness and while Dolce suspects it's their black costumes, Forte is sure that it's the constant presence of the other two, "We can't ever be completely alone."²

In the second sintesi, Dolce and Forte enter, exhausted from their passionate lovemaking. They go to rest on a bright blue couch (the only stage furniture) while Rosso and Bianca lie still, heads pointed downstage, feet almost touching beneath this couch. Suddenly, Bianca and Rosso rise, stretch, and begin to jump, becoming frenetic. Soon, Dolce and Forte begin to kiss again and this subdues Rosso's and Bianca's movements. This pair then goes to stand behind the couch, Bianca behind Dolce, Rosso behind Forte. While Dolce and Forte speak about their love, Rosso suddenly assaults Bianca, throws her to the ground, and almost

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 1:85-94.

²Ibid., p. 87.

strangles her. Dolce and Forte continue to talk without taking notice and Rosso and Bianca take up their still postures once again. As Dolce and Forte worry about growing old and about losing their love for one another, Rosso and Bianca touch them with light passes of their kymono-sleeved costumes, but they are ignored and then brushed aside as Dolce and Forte rise to dance. During the dance (a slow waltz), Dolce throws kisses to Rosso and Forte does the same to Bianca.

The third sintesi shows the same black bench on a black background as the first sintesi. Bianca and Rosso, speaking for the first time, express their disgust for their alter egos and the artificially created lovers' pain they complain of. Dolce and Forte are asleep on the bench and Bianca and Rosso attempt to strangle them, but they awake and defend themselves. Forte tells Dolce that he's going to get rid of his "tormenting inquisitioner," "his second self" and that he'll return. Dolce says she too wants to free herself from Bianca. The curtain falls, two gunshots are heard.

In Bianca and Rosso, Dolce and Forte, Marinetti has made an attempt at showing a pair of split personalities. Through most of the action, Dolce and Forte speak while Rosso and Bianca sleep, dream or perform various mimed actions. Dolce and Forte are the dominant ego; Bianca and Rosso are the colorful sub-conscious. As Forte puts

it to Rosso in their final (and only) confrontation:

"You're a color; I'm your volume. Without my memory, you can't live. I have very little and you are trying to monopolize it".¹

Although each is aware of the presence of the other, this is not always acknowledged, either in dialogue or by action. When Rosso attempts to strangle Bianca, for example, Dolce and Forte make no indication of seeing or hearing the action.

The conflict in personalities is made visual in color: black for Dolce and Forte, red and white for Rosso and Bianca. In kinds of activity, too, the personalities differ: when Rosso and Bianca sleep, Dolce and Forte make passionate love. When Forte and Dolce are exhausted from their tortured love-making, Bianca and Rosso jump up and down, and when the first couple dances, the alter-egos sulk, piqued at being ignored.

When Forte and Dolce lay dreaming of each other Bianca and Rosso interpret their disturbed movements as a torturing of one another even in their sleep. The colorful alter-egos decide to strangle them, but Dolce and Forte awaken and decide to rid themselves of these "tormenting inquisitors," as Forte calls them. After the curtain falls, two shots are heard and then the author appears to tell the audience that they must choose their own ending:

¹Ibid., p. 94.

Certainly you'd like to know the meaning of those two gunshots. Either they mark the suicides of Forte and Dolce or the suicides of the deceased Bianca and the expired Rosso. It's your choice, your choice I say because I abhor precise symbolism.¹

"Suicides," of course, because Dolce and Forte in killing their alter egos kill themselves.

Marinetti has combined here an interest in color as a living force with the notion of multiple personality.²

¹Ibid.

²One of the experiments frequently associated with Futurism was called the Theatre of Color. Its originator, Achille Ricciardi (1884-1923), is said to have conceived of the idea as early as 1906. Color was to become an expressive theatrical force, used to interpret the theme and action of the drama, perhaps even becoming a protagonist. Ricciardi published Il Teatro del Colore in 1913. Despite help from many influential friends, including Gabrielle D'Annunzio, Ida Rubenstein and Sarah Bernhardt, Ricciardi was unable to move from theory to practice except on one occasion in Rome, in 1920 when several symbolist pieces were presented, using Ricciardi's ideas about color in fabric and lights. It is not certain that Ricciardi was a Futurist, though Enrico Prampolini called him the "Futurist creator and promulgator of the Theatre of Color" in an article written on the occasion of Ricciardi's death. Ricciardi's work may have had an influence on Marinetti's ideas about characters defined by colors, as in Bianca e Rosso or in his later play, Vulcano (Volcano, 1926) which was produced in 1926 by Pirandello's Teatro d'Arte. One of the principals in the latter play is a master of fireworks who works to give a display which will rival the colors of an erupting volcano. Both Rosso di San Secondo and Antonelli used color as important elements in certain of their plays: the black/white color scheme of Marionette, the rainbow colors of La Bella Adormentata and the fantasy-colored island of L'uomo che incontrò se stesso are some examples. See Verdone, TTF, pp. 159-162 for a brief discussion of Ricciardi's theories. See too, an anthology of writings by Gino Gori, Gino Gori, il grottesco et altri studi teatrali, ed. by Paola D. Giovanelli (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1978), pp. 36-44 and pp. 220-247.

The abstraction of a colorful second personality has been given physical shape but has been formalized by the use of costume and makeup which underscores the colors and by the kinds of activity in which the alter-egos are engaged: mimetic, physical rather than psychological, spontaneous and direct rather than premeditated or foreshadowed. Dolce and Forte are one-dimensional creatures, too: they are shown as embodiments of the characteristics their names imply (sweet and strong); their conversation and activity concern only the immediate, that is, the expression of their love for one another. There is no reference to other people, to the world outside, to the past and only brief reference, by way of speculation, on their possible future together. The ending, of course, destroys both pairs, the only mystery being who-shot-who first, the colorful or the tormented lover.

An earlier sintesi by Marinetti, Cura di luce (Light Cure, 1915), uses a character who deliberately splits himself from his erotic half. Volontà (Will) has split his erotic body at a place where "five electrically-lighted street-cars meet." A group of women come to protest the split and carry off the erotic body into the moonlight while Volontà continues his electric light-bulb cure.¹

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:319-324.

L'uomo che incontrò se stesso

A more complex treatment of the split personality is found in Luigi Antonelli's full-length play, L'uomo che incontrò se stesso. Here, time is stopped, the dead are brought back to life and a man meets himself of twenty years ago through the magical powers of the strange Dr. Climt who has discovered the secret of immortality. In L'uomo, we get to know the protagonist, Luciano de Garbines, through a conversation with Dr. Climt in Act I. Luciano tells Dr. Climt of his married life, his wife's death in a volcanic eruption twenty years before, his discovery that she was killed together with her lover (of whom he was unaware), and his travels in the aftermath of that "little family drama" in which he describes himself as "the comic hero."¹ Luciano confesses that he feels older and wiser now, that as a young man he made many mistakes in handling his wife. He frequently thinks about his younger self and is conscious that that self still lives on inside of him. When Climt announces that soon he'll meet his younger self in the flesh, Luciano is amazed and apprehensive. But Climt makes Luciano an unusual and attractive offer: he will erase the past twenty years, the adultery and subsequent tragedy, returning Luciano to his younger self, married to a faithful wife, if Luciano is able to use his experience to avert

¹TGN, p. 128.

his youthful mistakes.

Antonelli uses Luciano's assumed identity, Mario Gregory, "a millionaire, illustrious scientist, bachelor,"¹ as a vehicle for learning the truth about Luciano's wife, her lover, her mother, and his own reputation. In a short scene with his despised mother-in-law, a translator of romantic novels, and then in a longer scene with his wife, Sonia, Luciano/Mario learns that his wife is a flirt, that her mother is greedy to procure a rich lover for her, and that Sonia and her mother think that the young Luciano is a fool. So, Luciano is belatedly awakened to the truth behind the appearances of his former life and he resolves to help his younger self and his wife survive with their marriage intact this time. Unfortunately, he has not counted on the strength of his passion for Sonia and despite his best intentions, Luciano, as Mario Gregory, seduces Sonia while they are on a walk. The two selves are thus set up in conflict with one another, but Luciano the elder tries during Act II to convince his younger self that his friend, Rambaldo, is the one to watch. This angers young Luciano and Act II ends in an open quarrel between them. Act III finds the two selves reconciled as Luciano agrees, at last, to spy on his wife but Sonia's cleverness fools Luciano the younger into renewed confidence in her faithfulness to him

¹Ibid., p. 134.

and pushes Luciano the elder to sobbing despair.

In a simultaneously developed sub-plot, Antonelli has provided another example of split-personality. Rosetta, the first person whom Luciano meets on his arrival at Dr. Climt's island, is an eternally young creature who yearns to be mortal once again. Although she appears to be young and beautiful, she is actually old, embalmed as she says to Luciano, by the immortality process Climt has worked on her. The Rosetta plot provides an inverted reflection of the Luciano motif. Whereas Luciano has lived in the past, Rosetta has lived in a constant present, as a statue, providing pleasure for countless numbers of admirers; but because her frivolity and beauty is false, she can derive no pleasure for herself. As Luciano gradually awakens to the truth of his past, his fortunes undergo several obstacles and complications and are on the decline. Rosetta, instead, is released from her youthful self by Dr. Climt and she begins to enjoy the brief but real and savoured pleasures of a present which is rapidly escaping. While Luciano is busily attempting to correct the mistakes of the past in order that he may have a new chance at life, Rosetta has accepted the suffering and death she knows are an inevitable consequence of her choice. Since she regards her new life as a genuine rebirth, she is on the ascending side of her life cycle in terms of the value which she gives it. When, at the end of the play, she asks for a few more days of life to comfort her despairing lover, it

is a selfless act. Dr. Climt does not respond to her request, leaving us in doubt as to her fate, but we see a self-knowledge, a wholeness in her union of her older and younger selves that ennobles her as a matured character.

In developing the plot, Antonelli uses both modern and traditional materials. The issues are modern: the failure of experience, the impossibility of self-knowledge, and the destructive effects of both illusion and reality. These issues are treated within a framework that concentrates on the classic triangle situation and includes characters and plot devices from the commedia dell'arte, such as the conspiring mother-in-law, the faithless young wife, and the duped husband who is tricked into believing in her and therefore becomes an accomplice in the deception of himself. Although the magical aspects of the island create the necessary dream ambience in which normal logic can be foregone, actual magic and its effects have little to do with this play's development, once the initial situation is established and accepted.¹ Rather, comic asides, mistaken identity, overheard conversation, misunderstandings and comic intrigue move the dramatic action.

It is its comic framework and traditionally comic

¹Critic Adriano Tilgher commented negatively on this point, "Without the intervention of Dr. Climt, we would never remember that we're on an island of dreams, in the realm of the unreal." In Il problema centrale, p. 76.

characters which especially distinguish Antonelli's play from others of i grotteschi. Although Rosso di San Secondo uses comic and grotesque characters in La Bella Addormentata and both Cavacchioli and Bontempelli make use of some comic characters, Antonelli's play uniquely uses a self-nominated "comic hero." Luciano is an ordinary man with tragic baggage, suddenly thrust into an extraordinary situation. Like Rosso's Man in Grey, he has been aware of a second self, but more like the Man In Mourning, he has run away from his tragedy rather than face up to it directly. No matter how much he begins to see "with new eyes," he is never fully aware of the irony and absurdity of his situation, except perhaps at the very end of his trial. The audience, of course, is consistently aware of the discrepancy between Luciano's own vision of himself and his true nature as fool. Luciano's likeable qualities are an easygoing nature and a certain gullibility but these very qualities are his downfall even as he attempts to overcome them in his younger self. In his final effort at convincing his younger self of Sonia's unfaithfulness, he is tricked, as is his younger self, in a double deceit played by Sonia.

In the final scene, Antonelli's invention capitalizes on the traditional comic scene in which someone who thinks to trap another by overhearing him at devious planning, is trapped instead by the cunning and foresight of the cleverer knave. Here, Luciano the elder and younger are the

would-be spies and Sonia is the knavish plotter. Because of the unique situation in which one person exists in time simultaneously at two different ages, the result of Sonia's duping of the two men is both a brilliant coup on her part and a demonstration of the author's ingenuity as well. The younger Luciano is foolish and predictably blind to the actual state of affairs as the elder Luciano is simultaneously aware of the truth, but too late to explain to his younger self. The younger man exits, pleased with a restored faith in Sonia while Luciano sees his plan to save himself foiled. His younger self exits happy while his older self sobs in despair.

Enrico IV

Pirandello's works provide many examples of characters who are split personalities, some of whom were mentioned at the beginning of this section. His recognition of the tragicomic significance of the theme of multiple personality brought great depth to the "mask and face" motif.

In most of Pirandello's plays, the protagonists are split between an inner and outer self, a private and public self. The conflict between these selves and "the others" is the central conflict of the play. Perhaps the most famous Pirandellian split personality is the title character of Enrico IV.¹

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 291-371.

Knocked from a horse during a costume pageant for which he was dressed as Henry IV of Goslar, Germany, the protagonist (whom Pirandello does not give another name) is "fixed" in the role for twenty years. An elaborate apparatus, designed to support his mad fixation, includes four "Secret Counselors" to the king (actually paid employees in costume), authentically detailed twelfth century furnishings, clothing, and conversational topics. During the first two acts, we see Enrico with his Counselors, servants and visitors. His erratic behavior is accountable to the audience and to the other characters because he is mad. So we are surprised to discover at the end of Act II, together with his Counselors, that Enrico is no longer mad. He has been cured for some time (for eight years, he says, in Act III) but has continued to live as Enrico rather than make the transition back to modern life. As he explains,

And so, doctor, see if the case is not truly new in the annals of madness! I preferred to remain mad, finding everything ready at my disposition for this new type of amusement! To live it--with the most lucid awareness--to live my madness and revenge myself in this way against the brutality of a rock that bruised my head! . . . The joke of the day! Make it become forever, not a joke any longer, no, but a reality, the reality of a true madness: here, everyone in costume, the throne room, these four counselors. . . .¹

¹Ibid., p. 367.

The identity assumed for a day long ago has become permanent and being thought mad is somehow less awful to Enrico than trying to catch up with those intervening years. In fact, Enrico has obviously taken a kind of perverse pleasure in hiding his sane self behind the assumed self of a historical personage. Enrico IV can say anything, offend anyone and be excused because the assumed personage is a king and has great liberty, especially played as he is by a madman who is not responsible for his actions. The role also provides a refuge from the vicissitudes of life. As a part of history eight centuries ago, Enrico IV is "fixed forever" and free from the anxiety, anticipations and disappointments of daily life. For a historical character, there are no surprises; all sorrows are mourned and put away. It is the attempt to retain that security that prompts Pirandello's hero to pose as the man gone mad from a fall, once that madness has suddenly been removed. He has the fear of taking up life again because he has already lost too much, missed too much. In those twelve years when he lived madly but innocently in the identity of the famous king, he himself has grown old, without realizing it. When his old rival, Belcredi, says he too, has grey hair, Enrico answers,

Yes, but with this difference, that mine has turned grey here, as Enrico IV, understand? And I didn't even notice it! Only one day I noticed,

all at once, reawakening; and it was a shock because I realized right away that not only my hair, but everything must have gone grey, the same way, everything ended, finished, and that I'd be arriving famished at a banquet that had long been cleared away.¹

In the eight years since his unannounced cure, the protagonist has daily assumed the false identity prepared for the madman and now useful to mask his fear of a return to the world. The crisis comes when he is brought face to face with his former love, La Marchesa Mathilde Spina. That she is accompanied by his rival, Belcredi, angers Enrico and this anger is revealed in his treatment of his visitors during Acts I and II. But it is in Act III that the cure the group has come to effect is put in motion and then abruptly interrupted, tragically aborted. A psychiatrist has suggested that if Enrico is truly on the brink of being cured, as his recently deceased sister suspected, one way of "bringing him around" would be to reproduce the past and present simultaneously. Enrico's nephew and his fiancée (daughter of his former love, the Marchesa) substitute themselves for the portraits of Enrico and the Marchesa in costume 20 years before. Enrico, is of course, dressed as usual and the Marchesa has had a duplicate of her old costume made. The playacting of Acts I and II was in Enrico's control, but the young Frida's "Enrico" spoken

¹Ibid., p. 366.

from the frame, takes him totally by surprise. He is momentarily shaken, as though the woman in the portrait of twenty years before had come to life, as though he had indeed gone mad again. The mood is broken as the others rush in, Belcredi and the doctor out of costume now. The counselor-employees have told the others what Enrico has admitted to them: that he is sane and has been for some years. Once Enrico gets his bearings again, he very quickly takes charge of this brief Act III. He criticizes the doctor's recipe for cure and says it very nearly has put him back again into madness; he talks about madness and now openly about the madness that has brought his visitors to him that day, a madness which he sees but which they don't recognize. He appreciates with a critical eye the double, if distorted, image of the two couples, Enrico and Mathilde, one couple young and the other old, with tinted hair. Finally, he rejects his younger image and the older Mathilde and seizes Frida as rightfully his. When the others protest, he holds her to him and brandishes a sword which he's taken from one of his counselors. With a quick stroke, he stabs Belcredi, someone takes Frida, and the others carry Belcredi off. A long cry offstage tells us he has died of the wound and Enrico turns to his counselors, beckoning to them to surround him, "Now, yes, it will have to be like this, here together, here together--and forever!"¹

¹Ibid., p. 371.

The two Enricos are present throughout the play, of course, in the actor's awareness if not in the audience's. But it is in Act III that the split is both most apparent and most ambiguous. First, Enrico (in his true, twentieth century self) is shocked back into 20 years ago in time, and nearly back to the twelfth century. Then, when he has composed himself, he plays with his visitors (the audience onstage) about the past, about madness, about his cure. His actions invite us to question the lucidity of the earlier explanation he gave to his counselors and finally, when he grabs Frida and stabs Belcredi, we are unsure and divided over his sanity. He is crazy, as some of those onstage think, or is he sane, as Belcredi, dying, continues to insist? Mad or sane, he has now permanently condemned himself to the role accidentally assumed twenty years earlier. Is it accidental this time, or deliberate, as the last eight years of role-playing have been? Pirandello does not tell us but only leaves us to wonder at madness and sanity and the accident that can stop a human progress for a lifetime.

The subject of the play is a consummate actor, as we come to know, and all of the others, paid or not, come to act within him and for him. They come, too, as audience, to a king who gives them "audience" and as we, the theatre audience, to watch and marvel at this twentieth-century man locked back in time. To some extent, the play is about actors and acting, role-playing, as well as madness

and longing for life.¹ It is about split personality, too: Enrico is surrounded by a cast of doubles, all of whom agree to play at least one role in addition to their own, agree to assume a part, either for money or for some hope of cure for madness. The play is also about audience reaction, whether it be the day-to-day accepting of things at face value or the reaction of the audience in the theatre, so easily led up the garden path and back down again by Enrico and his author. For Enrico is a manipulator, a string-puller of his audience on stage and of those in the theatre. Like Laudisi, he enjoys a joke, but like Leone Gala, his own being is at stake in the terrible game being played.

Repertory Regulars

Regulars from the traditional repertory are used by Futurists, i grotteschi, and by Pirandello. This is not surprising as their plays (with the exception of some Futurist occasions) were performed by the members of traditionally organized acting groups. These companies included both classic and modern works in their repertory and the personnel of the company was organized along lines that would accommodate the casting requirements of such

¹This theatrical facet of the play is perhaps intentionally alluded to by the placement of Enrico IV in Maschere nude I, directly after the theatre trilogy. Certainly, the actor for whom Pirandello wrote the play, Ruggiero Ruggieri, appreciated this aspect of the play, a part of his repertory for over thirty years. For a discussion of Ruggieri and other "Enricos," see L. Bragaglia, Interpreti pirandelliani, pp. 169-178.

plays. Whether the company was large or small, the minimum roster would include a leading man and leading lady, a male and female character actor and two younger actors to play young lovers. The company might also include children and other character people as well as additional performers hired for a season or for a specific play. Pirandello gives us a look at a contemporary acting company in Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author, 1921) and again in Questa sera si recita a soggetto! (Tonight We Improvise, 1929). In Sei personaggi, the company includes the actor-manager, the first actress and actor, the second actress, a young man and young woman, and "other actors and actresses." In Questa sera, there are the first actor and actress, an old character actor, a character actress, three young male and female actors and, of course, the director, Dr. Hinkfuss.¹

Futurist authors of sintesi normally kept within the boundaries of the existing acting companies' personnel, although they sometimes required furniture to speak or move (Il teatrino dell'amore and Vengono), or asked for an

¹For an explanation of the organization of Italian acting companies and of the changes being attempted in traditional practice during this period (by Virgilio Talli, for example, who produced many of Pirandello's plays), see Lucio Ridenti, Teatro italiano fra due guerre (Genoa: Dellacasa, 1968), pp. 17-20. Ridenti, director of the periodical Il Dramma for over forty years, writes as both participant and spectator of theatre during this period.

addition to the troupe, as in the case of Cangiullo's Non c'è un cane (Not Even a Dog, 1915), in which a dog is the only personage on stage. And, they sometimes made a new use of characters the actors might be familiar with from the traditional repertory. The actor's ease in thirteenth century costume and manner, for example, familiar to him from playing historical drama, could be juxtaposed with his colleague's twentieth century costume and pose as in Corra and Settimelli's Dissonanza. Or, a leading man, accustomed to playing supermen of the D'Annunzian stamp (Leonardo, for example, in La Città Morta, [The Dead City], 1904) could learn how to take a pratfall as in Verso la conquista.

Early Italian acting companies were organized for the colorful characters of the commedia dell'arte and authors of i grotteschi use these characters, either as inspiration for modern type characters, or as themselves, often in anachronistic company with modern characters. Cavacchioli uses a literary character, Pinocchio, combined with characters typical of both literary and stage fable (Bluebeard and Il Capitano) in Pinocchio Innamorato (Pinocchio in Love, 1921). In La danza del ventre (The Belly Dance, 1921) Cavacchioli involves Arlecchino (Harlequin), the commedia servant, in a triangle which includes a false Don Juan type (Nadir, a eunuch) and a woman called Pupa (Doll) whose beautiful exterior masks an empty being. In La Danza,

Arlecchino wears the traditional multi-colored costume and half-mask until the third act when he has been assimilated into a higher social world and wears modern evening clothes but retains his traditional mask and continues to speak in both Italian and the traditional dialect of Bergamo.¹

La Bella Addormentata

In La Bella Addormentata (The Sleeping Beauty, 1919), Rosso di San Secondo uses figures with descriptive names to create a colorful and grotesque atmosphere in which La Bella moves, unawakened and untainted by the bickering and depravity which surround her.² As in a fairy tale, characters are introduced at will as they are required and disappear when their function is fulfilled, without recourse to the usual dramatic preparation or explanation. La Bella is a prostitute who travels to country fairs in a painted carnival wagon where she is visited by the local gentry and farmers alike. La Padrona Guanceblù (Madame Blue Cheeks) and Nasoviola (Purple Nose) are her procurers. They are kind to La Bella but do expect her to exhibit herself, dressed in one of her rainbow-hued costumes, posed on an overdecorated couch ready to receive the paying customers.

During the first act of the play, fighting between

¹Pierre Duchartre, The Italian Comedy (New York: Dover Press, 1966), p. 124.

²Pier Maria Rosso di San Secondo, Teatro 1911-1925, ed. and with an Introduction by Francesco Flora, (Bologna: Cappelli, 1962), pp. 224-288, hereinafter referred to as Rosso, Teatro.

La Padrona and Nasoviola, together with a scene between two young miners and a country boy (who's brought figs for La Bella), provide a noisy, farcical introduction. This initial tone is in stark contrast to the rarified atmosphere which La Bella herself seems to inhabit. Shortly after clients arrive, two Grassi de veluto (Fat Men in Velvet), La Bella appears, dressed in hot pink and bright green. She is heavily made up, in a grotesque and startling way, but underneath the elaborate hairdo and makeup, she is beautiful. She brings quiet to the scene by her presence and everyone stops to admire her somnolent beauty. La Padrona advises her two important clients to wait a bit before approaching La Bella and not to be upset by her manner which is always distant and strange upon her entrance into the reception room. They continue to talk of business and mention the need for a notary, at which La Bella, surprisingly, breaks her silence and speaks. She gives the notary's name and his family's general character to the amazement of all. Her delivery is mechanical, as though she is repeating a text learned by rote. After this speech, La Padrona kisses her, pleased at her behavior before their clients, but La Bella changes mood, complains of a sore foot, and refuses to cooperate with La Padrona, who wants her to meet the clients. Nasoviola tries to get her to smile by asking her to look out of the window at the acrobats and clowns putting on a show outside, but when he fails, he mentions

that perhaps only Colantonio, "Il Nero della Zolfara" ("The Black of the Sulphur Mine") can make her laugh. On cue, Il Nero arrives, "like Mephistopheles leaping from the sulphurous flames."¹ Nero is La Bella's saviour. When he is with her, she laughs and seems awakened from her dream-like state to joy, and to new purpose. Il Nero shows his distaste for the two businessmen and even for the young miners, who are first or second generation miners, not descended from a long line as he himself is. Il Nero, though black and tough from the sulphur mines, is a swash-buckling, romantic hero who sweeps everyone and everything before him, so that Bella and he can be alone, when he senses that her rebelliousness has a serious cause. She tells him that she is going to have a baby and that she must leave this place. Puppet-like, she has been led through this carnival life, but a responsibility to her child has awakened her to the need for a different life. She asks Il Nero's help to leave La Padrona and Nasoviola, and Nero accepts:

Il Nero della Zolfara has lent himself to worse adventures! Let's go! Life is all a colored adventure: mined sulphur is yellow, but underground it's dark, like a jail; the sky is tourquoise, the clouds are white or grey; hilltop towns are like flocks of sheep when there's green around them, but when there isn't they seem burned and grey like iron. Coming or going,

¹Ibid., p. 242.

we keep turning: here there's a fair
 and famine, too; humanity can't find a
 way to free itself. Freedom is La Bella
 Addormentata pregnant, passing with Il
 Nero della Zolfara. Here's your shawl;
 we're on our way. (He wraps her in a
 large black shawl; and they leave.)¹

In Act II, Nero brings La Bella to the Notary's house, where she was employed as a maid. Here we are introduced to another set of stock characters, again with descriptive names: Il Notaro Tremulo (The Trembling Notary) who seduced La Bella when she was a young servant in the house; his sister, La Zitella Angosciata (The Tormented Old Maid) who has a green face and a nervous disposition; and La Vecchia Disperata (The Old Wretch), their aunt, who rules the house and threatens them daily with disinheritance. La Bella (whose real name is Carmelina) is recognized by the old aunt who insists that her nephew, the notary, must marry the girl and acknowledge her child as his own. The debate over the justice of this decision brings in another character, Il Prete Polposo (The Pudgy Priest) who eventually sides with the aunt, Nero and La Bella, although he is angered by the liberties which Il Nero takes in talking about La Bella as "the Madonna Immaculate."²

¹Ibid., p. 250.

²Adriano Tilgher reports that the first-night audience in Rome "roared out its indignation" at the references to La Bella as "La Madonna immacolata." In Il problema centrale, p. 98.

Rosso has created a bizarre and poetic fairy tale which celebrates maternity and free will over barrenness and subservient conventionality. La Bella, like her fairy-tale namesake, sleeps through life. Once her child, Nico, is born, she returns to that dream-like state despite the arguments of Acts I and II and the deaths of Act III. Il Nero, the playful hero, has awakened and saved La Bella by delivering her to the Notary's house and arguing for her innocence but he must pay for his actions with a jail term which lasts six months and keeps him offstage during all but the very last moment of Act III, when he is heard playing the Jew's harp we have heard in Act I.¹ It is Il Nero, whom Il Prete calls a devil but whom La Bella calls her friend, who animates La Bella and helps her to save her child from misery.

There are two versions of Act III, the second version written in an attempt to pacify critics of the first version who were outraged that the prostitute heroine and her hero should live on, happy ever after, while the notary and his old aunt die. In the second version, instead, La Bella dies. Sanctified to some extent by her maternity, she is kind and forgiving to all, and attempts to make peace between the old aunt and her niece and nephew.

The original version is much more in keeping with the tone of Act I. While the aunt is noisily resisting death

¹Rosso, Teatro, p. 8.

offstage, a doctor and the town pharmacist argue remedies and politics while the mayor (also the aunt's lawyer) talks about his efforts to get the will changed back in favor of the notary and his sister. The priest rushes in and out, trying to calm the aunt, getting ready to administer the last rites and trying to avoid meeting the town witch who comes to try her dark cures on the old lady. La Bella, dozing as she breast feeds her baby by an arched window, sits in the midst of this chaos as though she is the Madonna described by Il Nero in Act II, this time holding her child. She is happy, dressed in gay colors, not strident ones like those of Act I and she is full of her new role as mother. The only thing lacking in her happiness is Il Nero, who has not yet returned from prison. The witch's brew doesn't work and the aunt dies as sacristans ring bells by her bedside. La Bella sits dreaming and talking of Il Nero with a young servant girl, still in the windowed archway downstage left while on the main stage, Il Notaro hangs himself, and a moment later, Il Nero's Jew's harp is heard and Bella rises, baby in her arms, to look for him.

This play is full of colorful costumes and speeches and characters which nostalgically recall the sulphur-mining region in Rosso's native Sicily. The type characters and the exaggerated atmosphere of carnival and petty

bureaucrat's office and home provide this "poetic fable"¹ with a storybook world in which La Bella and Il Nero reign as romantic hero and heroine. As in a fairy tale, enemies are vanquished (La Padrona Guanceblù and Nasoviola); obstacles are overcome (Il Nero must serve out a jail sentence but saves La Bella and returns in the end); and the wicked are punished (Il Notaro kills himself and La Vecchia Disperata dies of old age). La Bella's maternity and Il Nero's bravery are the good magic in the story while the witch La Canzia's black magic heals no one and brings a curse on La Bella's enemies. As the fable ends, La Bella awaits Il Nero, her child in her arms, both of them blessed by the stars of the bountiful sky Il Nero has praised.

Machines, Objects, and Ambiences

This final category includes actual machines which act as characters, machine-like characters, pieces of furniture and other objects, and atmospheres which become or embody unseen characters.

The Futurist credo exalted the machine as the most important feature of the modern world. Painters glorified automobiles, locomotives, and machine parts in their works; Futurist musicians made use of noise machines as the

¹Francesco Flora, Intro to Rosso's Teatro, p. XLIV.

instruments of their brand of music.

In 1922, Ivo Panaggi and Enrico Prampolini signed a manifesto of Futurist mechanical art which appeared in Lacerba. A more detailed version appeared in Noi in May of 1923 and was signed by Vinicio Paladini, along with the other two artists. It reads in part, "Today it's the MACHINE which distinguishes our epoch. Pulleys and shuttles, bolts and mines, all the steel and fragrant grease (perfume of the ozone of the main works). Here's where we feel irresistibly pulled. No more nudes, landscapes, figures, no matter how Futurist, but the panting of the locomotives, the scream of sirens, the notched wheels, gears, and the whole mechanical sense SHARP RESOLUTE that is the atmosphere of our sensibility."¹

Russolo's 1913 essay, "The Art of Noises" credits the era of the machine for having "created such a variety and rivalry of noises that pure sound, in its meagerness and monotony, no longer arouses any feeling." "Noise-sound," as Russolo called it, would celebrate the machine age. "The variety of noises is infinite. If today, when we have perhaps a thousand different machines, we can distinguish a thousand different noises, tomorrow, as new machines multiply, we will be able to distinguish ten, twenty, or thirty thousand different noises, not simply to imitate but to combine according to our imagination."²

¹Verdone, TTF, pp. 259-260.

²MEIF, pp. 91-99.

Marinetti and other writers of sintesi, however, did not, apparently, find a way to praise machines in the same way on the stage. Marinetti's attempt at mechanical puppets, as we saw earlier in this chapter, was unsuccessful, due to technical limitations. A more successful mechanical puppet, designed by Fortunato Depero, was used in the 1918 Balli Plastici for a series of performances at the Teatro dei Piccoli in Rome. The puppets, marionette-sized, were made of wood, painted in different colors. One of the dances, "La danza dei selvaggi" ("The Dance of the Savages"), however, used a large puppet whose stomach opened to become a dance floor for a smaller puppet to whom the larger puppet gave birth. Vincenzo Cardarelli, writing for Rome's Il Tempo, gave this eye-witness account,

Rather comic is the colossal figure of the savage who gives birth quite innocently before the audience, by means of two small windows in the stomach which open. These are like a magic and luminous room where the newborn immediately begins to perform, by dancing grotesquely.¹

Later unrealized plans for mechanical theatres, by Enrico Prampolini and Marinetti himself, were visions of entire stage areas to be operated as a machine. Prampolini's model of a "Teatro magnetico" was exhibited in 1925 in Paris

¹Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 130-132, reprint of article dated April 17, 1918.

where it won a prize for theatrical design.¹ It featured moving platforms, elevators, and three-dimensional constructions which were to move and interact with appropriate accompaniment of light and sound. This model is a visualization of the 1915 manifesto, signed by Prampolini, on Futurist scenography, in which he writes,

Scenery will no longer be a painted backdrop, but a neutral electromechanical architectural structure, enlivened by chromatic emanations from a light source, generated by electric reflectors with colored filters arranged and coordinated according to the requirements of the actions on stage.²

The idea of a dynamic stage even more complex than that envisioned by Prampolini was later described by Marinetti himself. He wanted a circular stage with several smaller stages interspersed throughout the audience area. In this "Total Theatre," projections, films, recitations, simultaneous stage actions, music, sound, and even smells were to interact for an audience who would be seated in revolving chairs, in order to allow them to view the several simultaneous actions from a variety of vantage points, thus encouraging their participation in the action.³

¹Kirby, p. 87.

²Prampolini, Futurist Scenography, a manifesto issued in 1915. Reprinted in Mario Verdone, Prosa e critica futurista (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1973), pp. 283-286. Quotation is from p. 286.

³Marinetti, Manifesto del teatro totale per masse (1933), mentioned in Verdone, TTF, p. 366. See also Kirby, pp. 89-90 for description of Total Theatre.

In the area of machine-like characters and of objects and atmospheres, however, Futurists were more successful. Giacomo Balla's dance piece, Macchina Tipografica (Type-setting Machine), (1914), featured dancers who were to imitate the motions of various parts of the machine while uttering machine-like sounds. Though never performed, apparently, an account of a rehearsal which took place in 1916 recalls,

The author placed us in geometrical patterns and with his inevitable painting-gray stick, directed the machine-like movements and gestures that each of us were to perform in order to represent the life of the individual pieces of a newspaper rotary press. I was assigned to a repeated and violent "STA," to be performed with an arm raised, gymnastically, so that I thought I was in a military courtyard. Balla, needless to say, kept the more delicate syllables, onomatopoeics and verbalizations for himself, all of which issued from his lips interspersed with that memorable "neh" Piedmontese and with the uncorking of bottles of Frascati by the inpenitent and bearded Semenoff, which made everything into a very intelligent and enjoyable grotesque.¹

Several designs for the planned production exist, including a set design showing backdrop and wings painted with the word "TIPOGRAFIA," a costume design of a man dressed in severe black as a machine part, with one arm raised, and a design for the choreography which shows six stick figures

¹Virgilio Marchi in La Stirpe, March 1928, pp. 159-163, cited in dell'Arco, Balla: Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo, pp. 82-83.

in machine-like motions. An extant "noise text" asks for twelve people each to repeat a different sound for several minutes. "STA" is number six on the list, along with "Seste", "nenne", "LALALA", "rio", "ft" and so forth.¹

Another ballet, Il ballo meccanico futurista (The Futurist Machine Ballet, 1922) was choreographed and directed by Ivo Panaggi and Vinicio Paladini, perhaps in an attempt to illustrate in theatrical form some of the ideas presented in their Manifesto of Futurist Mechanical Art, also of 1922. Russian dancers named Ikar and Ivanoff performed the ballet in June at Bragaglia's Casa d'Arte in Rome. The dancers' movements were comprised of improvised surprises which ranged over the entire stage and into the auditorium and were accompanied by a play of both white and color follow spots as well as a musical score which consisted of a "rhythmic polyphony of motors, obtained by the orchestration of two motorcycles placed on a platform over the main room of the nightclub-cafe where the action took place."² The dancers' movements followed the rhythm of the motorcycles' motors.

In Fortunato Depero's Ballo delle macchine (Dance of

¹Reprinted in dell'Arco, p. 36, figures 56, 57, 58, 59.

²Verdone, TTF, p. 261, recollection of Ivo Pannaggi, reprinted from Maske und Koturn, Vienna, n. 4, 1966.

the Machines, 1924), the characters are a stationmaster and two locomotives. Depero's drawing for the locomotives shows an actor and actress dressed in tubes which completely cover their bodies, leaving only their feet exposed, in an attempt to simulate the design of a locomotive.¹

Marinetti's Il Teatrino dell'amore, discussed in Chapter II, used talking furniture, the Buffet and the Credenza, and a working miniature puppet theatre as characters. In Marinetti's Vengono, chairs are characters. In both of these works, the objects are seen as dynamic entities, activated by the sensations which emanate from the place they inhabit together with the human characters.

Two other pieces by Marinetti, Un chiaro di luna and La camera dell'ufficiale (also discussed in Chapter II), further explore the idea of an atmosphere or ambience which becomes a dynamic presence.

Generally, i grotteschi avoided the types of characters discussed above. There are exceptions, however. Both Rosso di San Secondo and Enrico Cavacchioli experimented with the use of non-human characters. In an untitled 1911

¹The work, also called Aniccham del 3000 (Aniccham, macchina [machine, backwards] of the year 3000), was written, choreographed and costumed by Depero, music was by Franco Casovola. It was performed by The New Futurist Theatre, featuring De Angelis, Cangiullo and Marinetti as well as other performers. See Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 185-195. See too, Verdone, TTF, pp. 444-445 for a reproduction of the costume design.

sintesi by Rosso, an eye and eyelid are the only two characters.¹ In Cavacchioli's play, Quella che t'assomiglia, characters include a voice who is "like furniture, part of the house," evoked through a person's thought, an electric introduction board which represents a person according to a chromatic scale, and "Il Mecchanico" who "has two wheels instead of eyes" and "seems a mechanical device of levers and gears, rather than a man."²

Pirandello, too, experimented with the idea of dynamic atmospheres in both Sei personaggi and I giganti della montagna. In Sei personaggi, Madam Pace is evoked by simulating the room behind her milliner's shop, through the use of stage furniture and props. In I giganti, a variety of puppets and "apparitions" live their own secret lives, animated by the atmosphere of their theatricalist arsenal, independent even of the whims of their master, Cotrone, the magician.

¹Rosso, Teatro, p. 3.

²In Comoedia, (November, 1919), p. 4.

CHAPTER VI

MAKING THE AUDIENCE ACT

One of the most noticeable features of Futurist performances is the direct participation of spectators. This subject was introduced earlier in Chapter I. In this chapter, a more detailed study of this phenomenon is planned. Several factors contributed to this new audience role: Futurist notoriety, the sharp division between Futurists and their detractors, a talent for publicity, and the Futurists' expressed intention to incite their audience to new ways of thinking and behaving. Futurists were missionaries for the active life on all fronts. Riots in connection with theatre events were not new with Futurism (in Futurist Performance, Kirby cites the Hernani opening in 1830 and Jarry's 1896 opening of Ubu Roi).¹ But, as Kirby points out, Futurists were particularly "outrageous and provocative."²

¹Kirby, p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 14.

Whether they wanted to encourage their audience to appreciate their new poetry, "words in freedom" without regard to meter, rhyme or syntax, or listen to a new kind of music made up of loud noise-makers and rude sound effects, or learn to support the war from certain of their sintesi, Futurists made aggressive and deliberate assaults on their audience's sensibilities. As the record shows, their audiences returned the favor with the seemingly limitless supplies of fruits and vegetables with which they inevitably responded, making participation in Futurist performances, whether as actor or spectator, a peculiarly dynamic, spontaneous, and even perilous undertaking.

If Futurists assaulted their public with the kinds of works they performed and in their aggressive and provocative manner, the situation is very different when considering i grotteschi and Pirandello. Writing from their positions within the confines of the regular theatres and most often using a dramatic format familiar to their audiences, Pirandello and the writers known as i grotteschi made their assault from within. Most frequently, these authors did not appear in person to defend or publicize their works before the theatre audiences, but relied on critics and on their own access to the columns of newspapers for such purposes.

It is in their works themselves, rather than in their

own persons that we must look to find evidence of their interest in affecting audience participation. By using familiar forms and themes in new and unexpected ways, i grotteschi and Pirandello intentionally upset their audience's expectations and added a new degree of tension between stage and auditorium. These writers attracted the mainstream of the theatre-going public with the apparent regularity of their productions, acting companies, theatres and sets, play content and form; all of which appeared to follow the contemporary norm. But once inside the theatre, spectators witnessed the unusual, unexpected, and even bizarre acted out before them masquerading under the cover of the ordinary sets, costumes, and social standing of the protagonists. Audiences were asked to take a new look at old ideas and conventions about life as well as about theatre. Pirandello, going further than i grotteschi, broke the fourth-wall barrier and gave the audience the opportunity to watch itself mirrored on stage.

In the discussion which follows, the Futurist Theatre of Surprise tours of 1921/22 and 1924 as well as several plays by Pirandello are examined in order to illustrate their particular attempts to broaden the audience role and bridge the gap between stage and auditorium.

Futurists and their Audience

From the beginning, the Futurist movement sought to be an exceedingly public endeavor. Poetry readings, art exhibitions and theatrical performances were promoted by Marinetti and his followers through hand-distributed leaflets, newspaper announcements, manifestoes and publicity brought about through Futurist activities. The Futurist attitude toward the public whom they hoped to have participate in their work might at first appear contradictory or counterproductive to their desire to attract a large audience. In the 1911 Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists (known also as The Pleasure of Being Boored), for example, Marinetti writes that Futurists will teach authors to "despise the audience" who are incapable of "judging, approving or disapproving a work of art." But his analysis of the audience makes clear that he speaks especially of "first-night audiences" whose concerns are with social reasons for being at a theatrical event, not cultural or intellectual ones. The challenge to dramatists is to be "absolutely original and innovative" and to be fearful of instant success in the eyes of the public. Rather, dramatists must work at freeing the public from the cares of everyday life in order to elevate it to "a dazzling atmosphere of intellectual intoxication"

in which the excitements and scientific discoveries of the twentieth century could be introduced and experienced.¹

In contrast with the first-nighters derided in the 1911 manifesto, the Variety Theatre audience and its rapport with the performers is applauded in the 1913 manifesto.

The Variety Theatre is the only theatre which uses the audience's collaboration. It doesn't remain static like a stupid voyeur, but joins noisily in the action, singing, accompanying the orchestra, communicating with the actors in unplanned witticisms and bizarre exchanges of dialogue. The actors argue jokingly with the musicians.

The Variety Theatre uses the smoke of cigars and cigarettes to blend the atmosphere of the auditorium with that of the stage. And because the audience collaborates in this way with the actors' imagination, the action develops on the stage, in the balconies and in the orchestra all at once. It continues even at the end of the performance among the battalions of stage-door johnnies who crowd the stage door to fight over the star; double final victory: chic dinner and bed.²

In Futurist hands, however, even the Variety Theatre audience would be helped to achieve greater participation by a series of unannounced events which would "introduce surprise and the necessity to act among spectators in the orchestra, balconies and boxes."³ Some of the suggestions for motivating the audience included

¹MEIF, pp. 30-33.

²Ibid., pp. 113-114.

³Ibid., p. 117.

spreading glue on the seats, selling several different people the same ticket, giving away seats to trouble-makers or eccentrics. At least some of these ideas were apparently employed, as suggested in the later manifesto,¹ The Theatre of Surprise, issued in 1921.

In practice, the Futurist/audience rapport was almost always chaotic. Whether the audience was supportive, antagonistic or a mixture of the two, a Futurist evening was always marked by vocal audience participation, and very often physical participation as well. Audience "collaboration," to use the Variety Theatre manifesto's language, might include tumultuous applause, booing, whistling, talking to the performers, arguments between members of the audience, throwing fruit, vegetables, and objects at the stage and at other members of the audience, fist-fights in the auditorium, parades, fights, and mob scenes after the performance, outside in the streets.

¹Manifesto reprinted in Marinetti, Teatro, 2:457-460.

²For descriptions of such audiences, see the suggested reading list for Futurist serate in Chapter I. In addition, see Francesco Cangiullo, Il teatro della sorpresa, (Livorno: Belforte, 1968), and Antonucci, Cronache. The Cangiullo work is hereinafter referred to as Sorpresa.

The Futurists wanted "direct contact" with the audience, "a wave of informal familiarity," which would instill in the audience the "dynamic vivaciousness of a new Futurist theatricality."¹ Accounts of Futurist performances show that there was much vocal contact, some physical contact and an extremely informal rapport between Futurists and their public.

The pugnacious attitude of the Futurists toward their audience, together with their missionary zeal for spreading the gospel of Futurism, combined to make their theatre performances, both in intent and effect, unlike any previous theatre in Italy (or elsewhere). Anxious though they were to convert their audiences to Futurist projects, Futurist writers and performers refused to give its public what it expected or wanted. A public used to well-made plays of three or four acts with recognizable characters and events, were served sintesi, unconnected, brief, eccentric, and oddly-made plays with few familiar guideposts.

Futurism, despite its ambitions, was never to appeal to the majority of theatre-goers. Many critics of the time did not review Futurist pieces seriously or at all.

¹
Futurist Synthetic Theatre Manifesto, in MEIF,
 p. 171.

Some condemned it outright, as did Silvio D'Amico and Renato Simoni, two of the most important critics of the day.¹ D'Amico only belatedly considered Futurism's impact and then made a joke of it: "We confess frankly we'd forgotten it," said D'Amico in The Italian Theatre After the War.² The fact remains, however, that Futurists introduced a new kind of performer/spectator rapport in their theatrical presentations and numerous contemporary accounts testify to that fact.

First, among those evenings, was the performance of the full three-act version of Marinetti's La donna è mobile. (La donna è mobile was the Italian title for Poupées Électriques, published in Paris in 1909.) The first and last performance of La donna è mobile took place³ at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin on January 15, 1909. One of the principal features of the evening was Marinetti's appearance on the stage after the second act. According to critics, he called out to the obviously disapproving public (whistles, boos, yells, derisive remarks) "I'd like

¹Antonucci, Lo spettacolo futurista, p. 7.

²Quoted in Kirby, p. 3.

³See Chapter I for a discussion of this performance.

to thank the organizers of the fischiata (literally, whistling) which honors me profoundly."¹ One critic mentions that a member of the audience responded, yelling out, "Let's continue to honor the author!" at which point more whistling and booing ensued.

Many other nights saw equally tempestuous relations between Futurists and their public. In the 1913-1914 tour of Elettricità (the second act of La donna è mobile, now a sintesi), performances regularly ended with fights outside of the theatre and sometimes with arrests.² During a performance in Milan, at the Teatro dal Verme, the audience fought among themselves over whether to listen to the play or mock the actors' performance.

Every so often the whole audience was on its feet, turned toward some part of the theatre where a fight had broken out. When the guards intervened, they were applauded. In the meantime, there was an actor who had a strange hiccup in the delivery of a poem by Marinetti. And the public echoed every hiccup.³

Not only the actors, but Marinetti himself faced the audience while reading a poem by Palazzeschi, entitled L'orologio (The Clock). Marinetti read the line, "I

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 37 in E.A. Berta's review from Gazzetta del Popolo, Turin, January 6, 1909 and D. Lanza review from La Stampa, Turin, January 16, 1909, p. 39.

²Antonucci, Cronache, p. 47.

³Ibid., p. 55, from an anonymous review in Corriere della Sera, Milan, January 17, 1914.

bless the hour of he who is about to die," and was answered, "Here's a revolver," to which Marinetti responded, "You'll kill yourself with a pile of dung."¹

Through the years of public performances from 1909 (La donna è mobile) to 1913-14 (Elettricità and a program of poetry, serate, and performances of "Piedigrotta" and "I funerali del filosofo passatista") through 1914 and 1915 (tours of the Teatro sintetico), Futurist performances, which always included appearances by Futurists as well as professional actors, were notorious for their noisy and boisterous audience/actor relationship. In 1921, Marinetti and Cangiullo, together with Rudolfo De Angelis and a truly unique Futurist assembly, reached the peak of such actor/audience rapport in the tours of The Theatre of Surprise.

The Theatre of Surprise

A manifesto, written according to Cangiullo on October 1, 1921, dated October 11 and published in January of the following year, declared the end of the Synthetic Theatre and resolved to concentrate on the complete involvement of the audience in performance and the elimination of stage/auditorium barriers through the use of surprise.² The element of surprise, introduced in 1913 as a Futurist idea for the improvement of the variety theatre, was to be the modus

¹Ibid.

²Marinetti, Teatro, 2:457-460.

operandi of the current Futurist endeavor.

In the Theatre of Surprise, the key of the gimmick that the author launches must be something that will,

1. Hit the audience with pleasant surprise, completely.
2. Suggest a chain of other hilarious ideas like a long spray of water, concentric circles of water or reverberating echoes.
3. Provoke words and actions among the audience that are absolutely unpredictable, because each surprise gives birth to new surprises, in the orchestra, the boxes, and in the city that night, the next day, to infinity.¹

The company was assembled for the Theatre of Surprise by Rudolfo De Angelis, whom Cangiullo had met, appropriately by chance, in a train compartment on an overnight trip from Naples to Milan.² De Angelis, a Variety singer, chose dramatic actors, dancers, comics, young amateurs with a love for the theatre or a desire for publicity, acrobats and a dog, "disparate elements," as he called them who were courageous enough to join the company.³ The Theatre of Surprise Company, headed by De Angelis, Cangiullo and Marinetti, opened its tour in Naples, Cangiullo's home town, on September 30, 1921 at the Teatro Mercadente. The tour

¹Ibid., p. 458.

²Cangiullo, Sorpresa, pp. 20-21 and Rudolfo De Angelis, Noi futuristi (Venice: Cavallerro, 1958), pp. 9-10.

³De Angelis, Caffè-Concerto (memorie d'un canzonettista), (Milano: S.A.C.S.E., 1940), pp. 283-284, cited in Antonucci, Lo spettacolo futurista, p. 66. See too, Cangiullo, Sorpresa, p. 19.

played theatres all over Italy, including Palermo, Rome, Florence, Genoa, Turin, Milan and Trieste.

Certain highlights of the tour are worthy of examination. Exposition will include a description of the performance in Rome on October 11, 1921 and a brief analysis of the program, including Marinetti's "tactile tables," presented for the first time in Trieste in February, 1922.

Salone Margherita, Rome, October 11, 1921

The announced program, as quoted by Il Tempo's critic, Vincenzo Tieri, promised "amazing surprises by famous Futurists Balla, Boccioni, Buzzi, Mario Carli, Cangiullo, De Angelis, Depero, Folgore, Jannelli, Marinetti, Pratella, Russolo."¹ No titles are given. The names of the company are listed and certain "public personages" are also listed: "the most surly Roman critic, the thinnest woman of the Roman aristocracy, the chief surgeon of the Capital, the most Futurist Roman matron." This program note was no doubt intended to incite comment and speculation over which well-known Roman citizens best fit the offered descriptions. Such descriptions, it should be noted, could be changed to suit each city visited on the tour, although as no other critic makes mention of this program note, it is unclear whether this particular "surprise" was used elsewhere or not.

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 149, Rome, October 12, 1921.

Marinetti began the program, appearing dressed in a tuxedo which a member of the audience immediately derided as being non-Futurist. Marinetti apparently explained that his wearing formal attire was in deference to the caffè-concerto formula, not to the public.¹ Cangiullo then came to conduct the small and unusual orchestra, which consisted of two violins and a trombone and was located in a box in the audience section. The audience accompanied the orchestra with "sounds that can not be decently transcribed."² Throughout the program, consisting of ten or twelve *sintesi*, alternated with lectures, poetry reading, and exhibitions, tactile tables, and concerts of Futurist music, the audience participated noisily, often drowning out the actors.³ Many of the audience had come equipped with fruit and vegetables which littered the stage and had to be swept up between each piece. One of the more notable performer/audience interactions was the kick which a Futurist applied to a spectator who kept coming on to the stage to pick up more agricultural ammunition for reuse. Critic Tieri reports:

The game worked three times. The fourth time, a forceful kick on his rear sent him flying back to his proscenium

¹The Salone Margherita was an elegant nightclub, described by Cangiullo as "the most famous and elegant" in Italy. Le serate futuriste, p. 188.

²Antonucci, Cronache, p. 150.

³Cangiullo, Sorpresa, p. 19.

box, amidst general hilarity. That was the battle cry.¹

Some of the younger members of the audience in the upper balcony accosted Anton Giulio Bragaglia, director of the Casa d'Arte (later the Teatro degli Indipendenti), who in protest, was applauding, asking those around him to wait until the end to "show their delight."²

True to the demands of their manifesto, the audience invented surprises which took place all over the theatre and continued into the street, where Marinetti and members of the company were accompanied to their hotel by an unruly crowd and the friendly help of police.³

The Surprise Program

The sintesi apparently changed from one performance to another, although it is probable to assume that pieces that proved most effective in eliciting overt audience response were repeated more often, as indicated by their more frequent mention by journalists in the various cities.⁴ Among those

¹Antonucci, Cronache, p. 152.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp.154-155, anonymous writer, La Tribuna, Rome, October 13, 1921.

⁴Antonucci, Cronache, p. 304, notes that although the program lists sintesi by "Balla, Boccioni, Buzzi, Mario Carli, Cangiullo, De Angelis, Depero, Folgore, Jannelli, Marinetti, Pratella, Russolo" (authors of the sintesi published in 1915

mentioned often are Cielo e ciglia (Sky and Eyelash) by De Angelis and Cangiullo, Stornelli vocali (Vowel Sounds) by Cangiullo, and La battaglia nella nebbia (Battle in the Fog) by Marinetti which is mentioned by critics and by Cangiullo as being universally applauded.¹ The latter work featured Marinetti reading a section from his novel, L'alcova d'acciaio, (The Steel Bedroom, 1921) accompanied by noises of bombing offstage and an elegantly dressed couple dancing the tango, onstage. In Turin, the unsigned article in the Gazzetta del Popolo comments,

The novelty of this recitation consists in the fact that it is accompanied by two dancers and by a Futurist orchestra making battle sounds. The public was not offended by this strange mixture of theatrical elements, but rather Marinetti's extremely effective reading communicated the emotion contained in the lyrical evocation of the battle. So the evening, begun in whistles and chaos, was brought to a close with unanimous applause for Marinetti as author and actor.²

In his book, Teatro della Sorpresa (Theatre of

and featured in the 1915 and 1916 Futurist Synthetic Theatre tours), the program changed "by surprises" nightly. Antonelli cites as most characteristic, those written by Cangiullo, De Angelis, and Marinetti.

¹Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 147-165 and Cangiullo, Sorpresa, p. 92.

²October 23, 1921, in Antonucci, Cronache, p. 161.

Surprise), 1968, Cangiullo includes three pieces performed on tour which are specifically designed to achieve greater audience involvement. In Marinetti's La Grande Cura (The Great Cure, 1921), a man must choose between a beautiful woman and a jagged blade. "As though inspired," according to the stage directions, the man looks toward the forestage, where a small ladder leading into the orchestra slowly appears. The man goes into the audience, where the first row is occupied by beautiful women, dressed in very low-cut gowns. Slowly, he looks at the women, smells them, almost touches them, then suddenly turns and rushes back up the ladder to the stage where he rushes to the woman's arms, only to cry out painfully. He tears himself away from her and throws himself on the blade, saying, "Better death in two minutes than an agony of three years."¹ The beautiful women were probably played by actresses from the company planted in the audience, but the actor's slow savoring of their presence, in the vicinity of genuine spectators would surely have altered the degree of audience involvement and heightened the intensity of the action.

Two pieces, Consiglio di leva and Luce, both by Cangiullo, demand direct audience participation for their denouements. In Consiglio de leva (Draftboard, 1921), a man

¹Cangiullo, Sorpresa, pp. 85-88, also in Marinetti, Teatro, 2:335-337.

and woman are married offstage. A master of ceremonies announces that the audience is to imagine the offstage scene which takes place during their first night. At dawn, the bridegroom (three times wounded in battle) appears and announces to a friend that he's going to the courts to ask for an annulment because he finds himself "unable" to keep pace with his bride, who is "extremely able."¹ The master of ceremonies reappears to announce that the play is finished but that if the audience applauds, the bride will be brought out on stage. The audience was then to shout . "Bring out the bride" and the master of ceremonies would try to pull the bride out on stage but fail, bringing down the curtain. The audience, continuing to shout through several more rises and falls of the curtain and pulls on the actress's arm, the master of ceremonies would finally succeed and the bride would appear dressed in a seductive silk nightgown wearing two large oranges tied over her pubic area. Cangiullo reports that on one occasion, the theatre owner and promoter were completely taken in by the gag and sent messengers backstage to demand that the bride appear.² In Luce, the whole piece depends on the public to call for lights with increasing consternation. The curtain rises and all the lights on stage and in the house go out.

¹Cangiullo, Sorpresa, p. 94.

²Ibid., pp. 95-98.

There is silence until someone shouts "Lights," and then is joined by others until the whole audience is shouting furiously. Finally, lights on stage and in the audience go on, "four minutes of blazing fright" occur and then, the curtain falls.¹

Except for Cangiullo's comments on Consiglio de leva, no evidence exists as to whether these specific pieces were effective in involving the audience to the extent intended, to the point that the audience becomes co-author or "collaborator," as the Theatre of Surprise manifesto called for. Apart from the fact that Futurists could count on a certain number of supporters to cooperate and perhaps could even plant false spectators to begin the appropriate response, no guaranteed audience participation was foreseeable. Thus, the Theatre of Surprise must often have provided a dynamic and surprising evening for the Company as well which is, of course, the ultimate outcome of the reverberating responses for which Marinetti and Cangiullo hoped in the manifesto.²

In Cangiullo's Il teatro della sorpresa are reprints of sintesi by himself and Marinetti which were presented on tour and include a section of personal recollections of various performances on tour. Although much of Cangiullo's

¹Ibid., p. 103.

²Ibid., pp. 139-141, regarding an unmoveable audience in Perugia.

memoirs are concerned with his female companions on the tour, he frequently alludes to particular details of performances. It is to his personal account, seconded by a brief newspaper reference, that we must turn for a description of Marinetti's "tactile tables," introduced to the public by Marinetti himself in Trieste.

Marinetti had read a manifesto entitled Tactilism to the audience at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris, where he also showed an early form of the tactile tables, in January, 1921.¹ A year later, Cangiullo reports, during a chaotic performance at Trieste, the tactile tables were presented to the Italian public for the first time. The activity at the theatre box office was such that a rival production at the Teatro Fenice was cancelled due to the lack of public.² Cangiullo attributes part of the audience enjoyment of the evening to the phenomenon of tactilism, "artistic excitement which can be felt with the hands." Marinetti, with the help of two faithful female servants, had covered rectangular pieces of cardboard with various materials attached: sandpaper, foil, sponges, pumice stone, feathers, and other materials which had a particular character when touched.³

¹Manifesto reprinted in MEIF, pp. 244-250.

²Cangiullo, Sorpresa, p. 149.

³Ibid., p. 150.

It's easy to imagine how the public grabbed at the tables When, at the intervals he [Marinetti] in the orchestra and I in the galleries, let the public touch the latest Futurist invention. We were like charlatans . . . come, come, gentlemen, please observe. There are no mysteries here, everyone can see and touch. Touch, touch, gentlemen, Tactilism. We'll let the ladies touch them too.¹

Some of the audience were obviously much taken with the event, and the tables, made only of cardboard, got the worst of it. As Cangiullo reports, the table he was holding, entitled "Sudan-Paris," tore in two after a struggle with a member of the audience, so that he was left holding Paris while the Sudan remained in a lady's hands.² Perhaps because of such treatment, the tactile tables, according to Cangiullo, were not used again. In the Tactilism manifesto, however, Marinetti had postulated the idea of theatres designed specifically for tactile experiences.

We'll have theatres predisposed for Tactilism. The seated spectators will place their hands on long moving tactile bands, producing tactile sensations with different rhythms. Such tactile bands could also be placed on small moving wheels, accompanied by music and lights.³

¹Ibid., p. 151.

²Ibid.

³ MEIF, p. 249.

The tactile tables or the proposed moving tactile bands or wheels would, of course, invite the audience to experience certain sensations by directly touching them. So-called tactile sintesi, such as Il quartetto tactile (The Tactile Quartet, 1921) and La grande cura, discussed above, were only able to suggest various textures through the juxtaposition of such items as precious porcelain figures, rare books, a semi-nude woman (Il quartetto), and a wall of jagged knives, a semi-nude woman, and beautiful women in low-cut dresses (La grande cura). As the audience was not directly touching these items, but only observing, Marinetti would have to hope for their tactile effect on a particularly perceptive and imaginative audience.¹

In January 1924, a new Theatre of Surprise tour, again organized by Marinetti and Cangiullo with Rudolfo De Angelis, featured a variety star of some note, Diana McGill, as well as the direct participation of Futurist scenic and musical artists Prampolini, Depero, Casavola and Mix.² The program included many of the same sintesi and readings presented during the first tour and in addition, Futurist readings by Diana McGill, Anihccam 3000, a mechanical ballet by Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini and music, dance, and mime

¹As Kirby notes, regarding the tactile sintesi, "all of these tactile elements must be understood and experienced by the spectator through imagination, projection and empathy." Kirby, p. 150.

²Antonucci, La spettacolo futurista cites De Angelis' memoirs for this information, p. 87.

by Franco Casavola and Silvio Mix.¹ Ettore Romagnoli, Milanese critic, singled out the latter two works as being very successful but faulted McGill for her mistakes in pronunciation.² Marco Praga, writing about the evening in the February 3, 1904 edition of L'Illustrazione Italiana, found nothing new: speaking of the sintesi, he says,

. . . always the exquisite fruit it should be understood, of deep thought, subtle research and acute observation-- they are those that we've already applauded since the beginning.³

His tone is ironic and his position is that of the old guard against the new, representative as he is of the pre-Futurist plays and playwrights.

According to the anonymous critic of a piece in the Corriere della Sera, the audience didn't become violent until Cangiullo's remarks on the fundamentals of Futurism and on the plagiarism of "avantgardists of the regular theatres" such as Pirandello, Chiarelli and Cavacchioli.⁴ From the account the writer gives of Cangiullo's remarks, it seems that Cangiullo was in part inspired by the Theatre of Surprise manifesto, which states,

¹ Anonymous in Corriere della Sera, Milan, January 12, 1924. In Antonucci, Cronache, p. 193.

² Ibid., p. 188, Romagnoli in L'Ambrosiano, Milan, January 12, 1924.

³ Ibid., p. 194.

⁴ Ibid., p. 191.

In the synthetic theatre we have created the new mix of serious and comic, of characters both real and unreal. The compenetrations, the simultaneities of time and space, the dramas of objects, the dissonances, images performed on stage, the windows of ideas and actions. If today there exists a young Italian theatre of serious-comic-grotesque mix, unreal characters in realistic settings, simultaneity, and compenetration of time and space, it is due to our Synthetic Theatre.¹

Whether or not Cangiullo actually mentioned the writers by name, as the manifesto does not, the Corriere critic, at least, understood the reference and specifically recorded their names.

The audience of the 1924 tour which again played in many Italian cities, seems to have reacted as did those of the earlier tour. The accounts given by critics and by Cangiullo and Marinetti in their memoirs document that both tours were financially successful events which invariably featured police, whistling, furious hand-clapping, and a direct stage/auditorium rapport, with the public becoming a part of the performance.²

¹Marinetti, Teatro, 2:489.

²For critical accounts of both tours, see Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 147-165 and pp. 185-195. See too, Cangiullo Sorpresa, throughout and Marinetti's autobiography.

Pirandello and the Audience

In marked contrast with the Futurists, Pirandello did not revel in the possibility for a direct author/audience relationship and in fact, deliberately worked to avoid one. At that time, it was customary for the author to take curtain calls together with the actors, especially on first nights. The Futurists, of course, were often actors as well as being authors and took advantage of every opportunity to appear before the public. Pirandello, instead, was reluctant to taken even the usual act-ending bow and held himself apart from the public performances of his plays, often sitting in an out-of-the-way place, so as not to be observed. Gaspare Giudice, in his biography of Pirandello, quotes from a letter Pirandello wrote to his son, Stefano, describing his refusal to appear before the audience at the Sicilian-language production of Pensaci, Giacomino! in July, 1916,

. . . at the end of the third act the audience leapt to their feet and called me three times on to the stage. But I did not appear. The first act had four curtain calls, the second two. Twelve in all. But the whole thing is satisfactory because the work is very daring and the spectators had not been predisposed to applaud. . . . I would have liked to have had you close to me together with Fausto who kept me company in a third-rate box hidden away.¹

As Giudice points out, Pirandello appears to have been anxious about the success or failure of his theatre works.

¹Giudice, Pirandello, p. 107.

Always a very private and independent man, Pirandello had a distrust for the theatre and for actors, very public and collaborative entities. And yet, as Giudice suggests, the possibility for a larger public and greater financial rewards, held some attraction for Pirandello, who continued to write short stories and articles, but increasingly, after 1916, wrote for the theatre.¹ The ambivalence of his attitude toward actors and the public performances of his plays, is demonstrated in Angelo Musco's recollections of his company's premiere production of Liola, in November of 1916.² Musco, who had performed the leads in Pensaci, Giacomino! and in Lumie di Sicilia (Sicilian Limes, 1916), earlier that year, thought of Pirandello as a difficult author to please. Some of the difficulty was perhaps due to Pirandello's basic distrust of theatrical ways. When Pirandello appeared for the final rehearsal of Liola, on the day of the opening, he found, to his horror, that the actors didn't seem to know their lines. Pirandello took the script away from Musco and forbade the performance that night. But Musco explained,

. . . Professor, I shouted, running after him, it's no good your taking the script away. We're going to improvise tonight. You don't realize that we're like racehorses who don't start unless they hear the starting pistol. If we don't

¹Ibid.

²Angelo Musco in Cerca che trovi, quoted in Giudice, pp. 108-109.

see the footlights and the audience,
we don't act.¹

Somehow Pirandello was mollified and agreed to the performances, despite his misgivings. In marked contrast to his behavior earlier that day, Musco reports, "Pirandello kissed and embraced me enthusiastically with the affectionate and sincere emotion of a gentleman and a Sicilian."² No doubt the actor's world, so apparently dependent on ingenuity, chance, and the presence of an audience, was incomprehensible to Pirandello, the epitome of the solitary, desk-bound writer so disdained by the Futurists in the Synthetic Theatre manifesto.³

For the other half of the two necessary elements for theatre, the audience, Pirandello had, it seems, some degree of respect, expecting the audience to understand his work even if critics might not. Before the opening of Il giuoco delle parti, for example, Pirandello wrote to his son, "Let's hope the public understand it; I do not expect the critics to do

¹Giudice, p. 109.

²Ibid.

³"We have an unconquerable repugnance for a work written at the desk, a priori, without considering the place in which it's going to be presented. THE GREATER NUMBER OF OUR WORKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN THE THEATRE. For us, the theatrical ambience is an inexhaustible reservoir of inspiration: the magnetic circular sensation of an empty gilded theatre which filters through our tired brains during a morning rehearsal, the intonation of an actor which suggests the possibility of constructing a paradoxical combination of thoughts, a movement of a piece of scenery which gives us an idea for a symphony of lights, an actress's fleshiness which generates conceptions in us full of genial, excessive endings." MEIF, pp. 168-169.

so."¹ As his theatrical works moved from those written and performed in Sicilian dialect by Nino Martoglio and the Musco Company to the plays written and performed in Italian, Pirandello came into contact with the larger theatre-going public and critics. Especially between 1921 and 1925, Pirandello achieved a degree of success and notoriety he had never enjoyed before, both in Italy and abroad. In 1921, Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore; in 1922, Enrico IV; in 1923, the Pietoff production in Paris of Six personages; in 1924, Ciascuno a suo modo (Each In His Own Way): success in Italy, France, England and America and personal visits abroad lifted Pirandello out of his accustomed solitude and forced him to accept an exceedingly public life. Pirandello's worldwide success and fame came through his works for the theatre produced in Italy and abroad during those years. The fame and financial rewards withheld during his younger days of teaching and writing were now bestowed on the playwright in his mid-fifties. The experience of those years in which Pirandello became a well-known playwright turned him more and more to the theatre. Finally, in the last decade of his life, he was truly a man of the theatre, both as a playwright and as theatrical director and producer. Obviously, the theatrical connection he had shied away from prior to 1916/1917, had become the final and most successful link in his career.

¹Giudice, p. 112.

Pirandello did not, it is clear, attempt to involve himself in direct dialogue with his audience. As we have seen, he hid himself away at performances or depended on others to tell him about first night audiences. Ironically, the first appearance he made before the audience was at the end of the first performance of Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore, at the Teatro Valle in Rome on May 10, 1921. According to Walter Starkie, Pirandello openings were "combative with the audience divided into pro- and anti-Pirandello."¹ Accounts of the first night of Sei personaggi and the treatment of the actors and of Pirandello himself read like descriptions of a typical Futurist evening. From the beginning, there was consternation about the lack of a set, the actors in street clothes, the apparently improvised dialogue and action. Shouts of "Manicomio!" ("madhouse") and "Buffone!" ("buffoon") were alternated by a majority of the audience while supporters of Pirandello urged silence and even came to physical defense of their views.² And after the play, the audience waited for the playwright (accompanied

¹Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, 1867-1936, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. XI.

²Giudice, p. 116: "At one moment, a poet named Arnaldi was seen to hurl himself into a box where a thick group of whistlers had assembled."

by his daughter, Lietta) in order to shout at him and insult him by throwing money after him, as to a mad beggar. Orio Vergani, a writer and friend of Pirandello's, whose sister played the Step-daughter in the production, recalls the scene:

He came out arm-in-arm with his daughter. He was recognized by the light of the first lamp-post. His friends surrounded him to defend him. Beautiful ladies laughed and repeated with their painted lips: "Madhouse!" Elegant young men with white ties leered at him and insulted him. His daughter, on her father's arm, trembled so much she could hardly move forward. Other people rushed up, laughing and whistling. Not even the policemen knew whether they should intervene on behalf of "that lunatic Pirandello." A taxi approached. In the light of the square, Pirandello, with a barely perceptible smile of irony on his lips, received the insults. . . .¹

Happier relationships with audiences were soon to follow, however, after the more successful September production in Milan which led eventually to the worldwide successes of the play between 1922 and 1927.² By the time of his visits to America and to Spain in 1923 and 1924, Pirandello was featured in "lecture-dialogues with the audience."³ These offered him the opportunity of direct contact with the audience in a format familiar and comfortable for him as a former professor.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 117.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 135.

⁴Starkie reports, "I had listened in rapt attention at Barcelona in 1924 when he expounded dramatic theories to the critical audience and faced, imperturbably, shrapnel epigrams fired at him by Spanish intellectuals." Introduction p. XI.

On that first night of Sei personaggi in Rome, Pirandello had his first intimate contact with an aroused, angry but engaged audience. Pirandello had discovered another character in search of an author and in three plays which follow, Enrico IV, Ciascuno a suo modo and Questa sera si recita a soggetto, he made increasingly deliberate involvement of the audience a feature of the plays, making the public more self-aware of its role as spectator.

Already in Sei personaggi, it is clear that the audience was to be treated differently: when the spectators enter the theatre they see a bare stage, a raised curtain, no apparent action in progress.¹ When the play begins, a stagehand appears, followed by what appears to be an impromptu exchange between actors and their director about a rehearsal that is to take place. The audience, in fact, is being deliberately surprised, and confused, by this unorthodox beginning. Having dressed up and paid for their opening night tickets, they arrive to find none of the usual decorative trimmings in place and what sounds like a rehearsal rather than a performance in progress. To add to their upset, Pirandello pokes fun at himself in a line spoken by the director, "Can I help it if no good comedies are coming from France these days and we're forced to put on Pirandello's plays, purposely written so that neither actors, nor critics, nor

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 25-116.

the public is ever satisfied?"¹ To this unusual opening which included actors in street dress and makeup, the director, a stagehand, and the prompter fully visible to the audience, Pirandello added the entrance of the Characters:

. . . The Chief Usher meanwhile has entered the house, wearing his braided cape. Using the main aisle, he has come to the stage in order to announce the arrival of the Six Characters to the Director. The Six Characters follow him at a certain distance; they seem a bit lost and perplexed as they look around them.²

Giudice reports of that first night,

. . . All this was enough to infuriate anyone who had gone to the theatre to spend a pleasant evening. The first catcalls were followed by shouts of disapproval, and, when the opponents of the play realized that they were in the majority, they started to shout in chorus, "madhouse" or "buffoon."³

As discussed above, the audience reaction continued to be loud and generally unfavorable for much of the performance, especially after each act and at the final curtain, leading to violent discussions and actual fighting in the streets and square near the Teatro Argentina. That novelty and surprise were a necessary element of the audience's reaction, is demonstrated by the fact that when the play was performed some months later, at the Teatro Manzoni in Milan, the audience, far from resenting its confusing or surprising elements, acclaimed its author and made the play a success. Giudice

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 54.

³Giudice, p. 116.

mentions that both the public and critics in Milan had been able to read the published text before attending the performance, which probably accounted for their willingness to accept their new role.¹

Pirandello's willingness to tease his audience, to provoke them even, is evidenced in many of the earlier plays as well, for example in Così è. But in Sei personaggi and in the other plays mentioned above, the attempt to confuse, surprise or disorient uses deliberately theatrical means, rather than only conventionally dramatic ones. And, as Pirandello had previously occupied himself with the unmasking of social realities, now he used theatrical conventions, including the mask, to uncover the realities that lay beneath the stage art: the bare boards, and walls, the offstage personnel, the banality of the actors' ordinary conversation, the stock settings and tricks of the trade.² The Characters,

¹Ibid., p. 117.

²The idea that the Characters should wear masks is one of the several significant changes between the first acted version in 1921 and the 1925 definitive version to which Pirandello added a Preface. This version, which I have used in analyzing the play, appears in Maschere nude I. For an excellent discussion of the play, with particular attention to the changes which appear in the 1925 version, see Olga Ragusa, Pirandello, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980), pp. 137-169. As Ragusa notes, many of the changes show Pirandello's heightened awareness of theatrical, rather than dramatic, techniques, e.g., the use of masks, the addition of a Stage Manager, and the characters' entrance through the auditorium, by means of steps leading to the stage.

whom Pirandello wishes to wear masks, embody in their presence among the spectators in the theatre, the harsh reality of theatricality seen by daylight. Actors wearing masks, each frozen in one characteristic attitude, play Characters who interrupt a "rehearsal" in order to have their play performed. What Pirandello presents us with instead, is an on-going dialogue of the nature of theatre versus reality; the realities of theatrical convention versus the demands of characters and situations whose reality is unalterable. As in Così è, Pirandello uses a comic technique which pulls us in and out of the play-within-a-play at will, keeping us constantly off-balance and wary of the events as they unfold on the stage.

Enrico IV

In Enrico IV, first performed on February 24, 1922 at the Teatro Manzoni in Milan, Pirandello again deliberately confronts the audience with a theatrical performance which is not as it seems. This time, rather than present "a play in the making," Pirandello gives us a player/king and his vassals in a costume drama for which the script was written 800 years before.¹ From the historical personage of Henry IV of Goslar, Germany and the known facts and events of his life, this player/king and paid actors

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 291-371.

improvise daily to make up a life for the supposed madman who is, we find, the lead actor in the piece. For this "life in the making" is not what it seems: the player/king is not mad any longer. He has been cured for some years but has continued to act out his role, unbeknownst to his fellow actors or visitors; his audience. For the first two acts of the play, we, the audience, are treated as his on stage audience; that is, we are not let in on the secret.

Pirandello deliberately leads us to believe that appearances are true: that "Enrico" is a man who has been mad for twenty years and his madness has taken the form of his thinking and acting as Enrico IV, a historical character whom he impersonated in a long-ago pageant. For two acts, Pirandello shows us the madman in action and we, like his paid actors, like his old friends, like the doctor who hopes to cure him, can marvel at this form of madness, at the elaborate trappings which serve it. And we can feel superior to him, as do the members of his on stage audience. When the fact that Enrico is now cured is revealed by him to his actors, we are surprised, somewhat relieved, perhaps, and hope for a happy ending. But Pirandello has more surprises in store for all, on stage and in the auditorium. The sane Enrico, frightened by part of the attempted cure and angered by the machinations of his old lover and rival, kills Belcredi, the rival, and having argued his sanity now claims the sanctuary of madness

anew. We, like those on stage, are no longer sure of the truth. Enrico retreats behind the safety of the mask of an historical personage who is free from the ravages of time and the surprises of the living. The theatre audience, like those on stage, must decide the significance of the ending for themselves: is Enrico sane or mad? did he kill knowingly or in madness? One thing is certain, the role-playing that substitutes for real life in the mock castle will continue and the paid actors, at least, will never be sure of their master's real self. As audience, they will constantly be in doubt as Enrico's madness and sanity gradually merge and become fixed behind the mask.

Ciascuno a suo modo

In Ciascuno a suo modo, which premiered in Milan in May of 1924, Pirandello makes a more direct attempt to bring the theatre audience into the world of the play.¹ To do so, he provides members of a fictitious first-night audience who, in the two interludes of the play, argue and fight about the play's relative meaning and worth. This time, the audience at the Pirandello play has a direct, if once-removed, representative on stage. First, we watch an apparently realistic play about an actress and her lovers and would-be defenders. Then, when the curtain falls on the first act, we find that we are now to watch spectators

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 117-198.

at that play, a kind of play-within-the-play involving the spectators and "real-life" counterparts of some of the characters mentioned in the first act. Pirandello makes clear his wish that the critics and spectators of the interludes be modelled on their real-life counterparts in the audience:

This first choral interlude can easily be improvised, well known as they are the usual judgments given indiscriminately on the works of this author: "cerebral" "paradoxical," "obscure," "absurd," "un-realistic."¹

But even before the device of the intervals and actor/spectators, Pirandello offers his audience some surprises.

The representation of this comedy should begin in the street, or, more specifically, in front of the theatre, with the announcement, given by criers, and the sale of a Giornale della Sera produced for the purpose as a flyer, so that it seems to be a special edition.²

The flyer will announce the fact that the play is based on actual events of the recent past and that some disturbance may take place at the theatre that evening. On the posters announcing the event, the producers will have printed a notice to inform the public that the number of acts in the play cannot be determined because of unforeseen incidents that may interrupt the performance.

¹Ibid., p. 156.

²Ibid., p. 121.

Two additional surprises are in store for the audience in the form of two separate, but related improvisational scenes which take place before the play begins. One, to take place near the box office, is between Amelia Moreno and friends. Miss Moreno is the "real" actress whose life is the subject of the play. The second scene takes place just inside the theatre, at the rear of the orchestra, between the Baron Nuti, reputedly the "real" lover of Amelia Moreno, and friends with whom he has come to the theatre. Both are determined to see the play and assure their friends that they'll remain calm.

Pirandello's stage directions make clear that the scenes were to be played in as real a manner as possible so that the spectators would be "surprised, curious and perhaps a bit apprehensive."¹ Here, Pirandello has made a very intricate and elaborate attempt to unsettle his audience and upset their expectations. He invites them to participate in a new way, by adding their own comments, criticisms, and speculations to those given in the preliminary and interlude improvisations. The first night audience in Milan was enthusiastic, although the critics were divided. The play had been criticized unfavorably before the first production which meant that the potential for surprise was greatly diminished, as in the second

¹Ibid., p. 122.

performance of Sei personaggi. Still, the introductory surprises, the onstage audience mirroring the opinions of the real one, the "real" interruption of Moreno and Baron Nuti and the sudden halting of the play at the end of the second interval, provide even the forewarned spectator with genuine moments of surprise and confusion as well as the unsettling feeling that the unexpected may happen at any moment and that he might be involved in some way.

Questa sera si recita a soggetto

Questa sera si recita a soggetto was first performed in January of 1930 in Koenigsberg, Germany, and later that year, performed in Berlin. Giudice tells us that Pirandello, in Germany since 1928, spent his days writing and his evenings at the many theatrical events offered in the Berlin of those years.¹ Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator were the most famous of the innovative directors then working in Berlin. His own experiences as director of the Teatro d'Arte Company, from 1925 to 1928, and his theatre-going in Berlin no doubt inspired the idea of the play.²

In Questa sera, Pirandello takes a further step to

¹Giudice, p. 183.

²Many writers on Pirandello have made this connection. For two examples, see scholar Renate Matthaei's Luigi Pirandello, (New York: Ungar, 1973), p. 146, and Lugnani, p. 147.

involve his audience by once again using actor/spectators, as in Ciascuno a suo modo, but this time planting them among the real spectators, in every section of the audience.¹ It is these actor/spectators who open the play; hearing arguing voices from behind the stage curtain, members of the audience speak,

A Man in the Orchestra (he looks around and asks
loudly) What's going on?
Another Man from the Balcony. It sounds like a
fight on stage.
A Third from the Orchestra. Maybe it's part of the
show.

Someone laughs.²

Several other lines are given to other actor/spectators until the opening gong is heard, when several call out for silence. The opening gong sounds again but nothing happens until Hinkfuss appears at the back of the orchestra and comes through the audience to the stage. The rest of this prologue involves Hinkfuss in a dialogue with members of

Interestingly, their conclusions differ as to whether or not Pirandello intended the play as an attack on Max Reinhardt (to whom he dedicated the play). Matthaei says the play is "one long attack on Reinhardt" (p. 149) but Lugnani argues against this reading, saying that although there is intentional irony, Hinkfuss's theories are expressed in a tone to be taken seriously and considered as possibly valid argument. What Pirandello wants, says Lugnani, is to investigate theatre and its technique in all areas, rather than present a polemic against one particular school, (pp. 148-150).

¹Maschere nude I, pp. 199-289.

²Ibid., p. 205.

the audience and ends with Hinkfuss's theory of art and of the superiority of the director's function, over that of the author. He then informs the audience that the actors will be improvising from the text of a short story by Pirandello. The exchanges between Hinkfuss and the actor/spectators has a somewhat belligerent tone--Hinkfuss appears at first reluctant to answer audience demands and then gives answers which bait them deliberately. As in Sei personaggi Pirandello pokes fun at himself through the derogatory reactions from members of the audience when his name is given as author.

During the first act, when the actors in the play being improvised take their places in a box in order to watch an opera being shown in a silent film on stage, several members of the audience make remarks about their loud entrance. These actor/spectators are now acting as members of the audience in the improvised play, but their voices come from positions in the theatre near members of the real audience. And Pirandello perhaps hoped they would be joined, initially, at least, by the real spectators.¹ Throughout the first act, Hinkfuss stops the actors to comment and at the end of the act, he announces to the audience, both real and acted, that the characters from the play will be present in a lobby scene while the set is being

¹Lugnani, p. 154.

changed on stage in full view of whatever part of the audience chooses to remain seated. Here, Pirandello attempts to provide simultaneity, in the presentation of scenes in several different locales at the same time. He instructs actors to split into four different groups in the lobby and to enact their improvised scenes simultaneously, while Hinkfuss oversees the set change. Actor/spectators continue to mingle with the real audience. In the third act, the actor/spectators are silent, even when the actors demand that Hinkfuss leave the theatre. The actors play out their text, improvising it as they go, only interrupting themselves on one or two occasions. Finally, Hinkfuss reappears and is credited with the lighting that has captured the tragic mood of the scene and we are brought back once again to the actors, who suddenly discover that their leading actress has remained lying on the stage where she finished the play, having suffered a heart attack from the demands of her role. With concern for the actress and a continued battle with the actors over the importance of written parts and of an author, Hinkfuss begs the audience's pardon and the curtain falls.

Pirandello has taken the most radical theatrical view of his career in this play. He examines the roles of all those connected with the theatre: author, actor, director, technicians, and audience. As in most of his plays, he does not give a definitive answer to the questions he has posed

and we are left to ponder them ourselves. The use of actor/spectators seated among the actual audience is, of course, another part of a play-within-a-play, one controlled by the lines the author has given these actors playing spectators. When the actual audience really begins to participate, without benefit of script, a potentially uncontrollable situation occurs. The performance of the play at the Lessing Theatre in Berlin proves the point. Oscar Büdel reports that when the real audience began to perform, along with the actor/spectators, and their catcalls and insults interfered, the real director, Hans Hartung, appeared on stage to shout back at the angry public.¹ Though the play did continue until its planned ending, critics and public were very harsh on it and Pirandello's reputation, already on the wane both in Italy and Germany, was sadly undermined.²

In Questa sera si recita a soggetto, Ciascuno a suo modo, and Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore, Pirandello uses a core story line which is essentially melodramatic, involving love triangles, social condemnation, turgid passions, and death. Instead of treating the core story in straightforward fashion, however, Pirandello presents only fragments of the whole story, dissecting and criticizing it and the

¹Büdel, p. 95.

²Giudice, pp. 184-185.

dramatic and theatrical methods used to perform it. In the process, the theatre audience is invited to involve itself in the making of the play by piecing together fragments and interludes, attending to actors in their midst in dual roles as actors and spectators, responding to the confusions and surprises offered and finally, agreeing to become actors themselves. The audience participates cooperatively, when they agree either to sample one or several of the scenes in the lobby or stay to see Hinkfuss's airfield set be carefully loaded in and then suddenly struck without being used: the audience may also choose to operate on its own, beyond the bounds desired by the author, in protest against the assaults on its understanding and unspoken agreement to the convention of the fourth wall.

This is, of course, the danger and the excitement of live theatre of the kind that challenged its audience to assume a more active role. The Futurists and Pirandello offered this kind of challenge to its audiences in the hope that their deeper involvement in the performance process might initiate a more thoughtful response to the issues being raised in those performances about the nature of theatre, the essence of art and its relationship to life. That many theatre practitioners since have continued to experiment in the area of greater audience participation is some measure of the importance of these early innovative attempts.

CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE

The purpose of this paper was to study Futurism, the Theatre of the Grotesque, and Pirandello as important examples of experimentation and innovation in Italy during the period 1915-1925. Specifically, the task was to attempt to identify correspondences and correlations in representative works by these authors. To that end, fifteen full-length plays and over twenty-five sintesi were discussed together with many Futurist manifestoes, some directly concerned with theatre, and others which were judged of relevance to the nature of this study because of their influence on those involved in Futurist theatre.

A close study of plays chosen as representative of their authors' work was used in each chapter of the paper in order to demonstrate similar characteristics in the plays in the use of materials, in the view of the world (both real and theatrical) and in the structure.¹ The purpose of this concluding chapter will be to summarize

¹I am indebted to Professor Daniel Gerould, Ph.D. Program in Theatre, City University Graduate Center, for this format for play analysis, given to students in his seminar in theatre criticism, Avant-Garde Theatre Between the World Wars.

the findings of the paper and make some assessment about the contribution made by the subjects of the study.

All of the playwrights studied were consciously attempting to change traditional theatre. The Futurists were, typically, the most outspoken about the changes they wanted to effect. Through four manifestoes on theatre, published between 1911 and 1921, the Futurists announced their determination to work against contemporary theatrical form and conventions in order to show modern life on the stage, using models ignored by traditional theatre in an attack on revered models of the past. Though less violent in their remarks on the traditional theatre, Pirandello and the grotteschi were equally determined that a new approach had to be made. Attacking "theatre professionals" and the entire conception of theatre as a commercial enterprise, Pirandello argued for "creation" over "imitation or reproduction." In a 1918 article, he insists that those who attempt to reproduce everyday life on stage as though it is knowable by piling up of dates and facts, are "voluntary martyrs to an absurd system, to an aberration of theory . . . to which gentlemen theatre professionals reveal themselves bound."¹ Chiarelli, too, argued for the autonomy of art: "in art, the only truths are those which

¹In "Teatro e letteratura," published in Il Messaggero della Domenica (July 30, 1918). Now in Saggi, poesie and scritti vari, pp. 1020-1021.

find a response in our minds. True and false, real and unreal do not exist in art except in as much as these designations have their beginnings in our ideas, and not because they agree or not with everyday reality."¹ Pirandello's argument against the commercialization of the theatre (applicable to any art form) is reminiscent of Futurist attacks on commercial control in painting and music as well as in theatre. And Chiarelli's insistence, as well as Pirandello's, on the freedom of the artist to create without rules except those dictated by the work itself, echo Futurist claims that the artist be freed from academic restrictions and prized for invention and innovation.

In working against the conventions of the commercial theatres of their day, Futurists, the grotteschi, and Pirandello were anti-realists. In naturalism and realism, artists attempted to explain life as something that could be studied, analyzed, added-up, and understood. Certain truths could be uncovered and relationships between the causes of things and their effect could be revealed. Anti-realists, instead, argued that life was "dynamic" (Futurists) and "in continuous flux . . . infinitely various and constantly changing."² Because it is constantly changing, life is visible only in fragments, a situation which results in perceptions that cannot be whole. Different points of

¹From Chiarelli's column in Comoedia (May 15, 1924), p. 4.

²Pirandello, "Teatro e letteratura," p. 1021.

view, a kaleidoscope of fragmented bits of "truth" can only be given momentary and arbitrary shape, for our convenience. But these shapes or outward appearances are fleeting; given the absence of permanence and "the truth," there is doubt and chaos beneath the surface.

This view of the world in disintegration and doubt had a profound effect on the way these writers used the conventional elements of theatre. Beginning with a discussion of the sintesi (including Marinetti's Electricità sessuale), it was demonstrated that the majority of these plays use traditional characters and settings which would be instantly recognizable to their audiences. The apparently normal appearance of things at the outset of the plays deliberately misleads the audience by providing them with a familiar format. With this technique, the playwrights are able to subvert traditional values and the drama which supports those values by turning the models against themselves. For example, in Marinetti's L'improvvisata, and Pratella's L'amante delle stelle, the notion of a husband's protection of his wife's reputation (and his own) and the idea of the right to revenge infidelity are viewed ironically. In L'improvvisata, the drunken husband and his friends insult the wife by their behavior and then take a joking "revenge" on a supposed seducer by accidentally killing him. In L'amante delle stelle, a husband continues to gaze at the stars while a gang of wife-thieves unsuccessfully tries to

convince him to fight for his honor as husband. In Chiarelli's La maschera e il volto, a man who finds himself unable to do "the honorable thing," that is, kill his adulterous wife, attempts to salvage public respect by pretending to have murdered her. But after he is acquitted, his own doubts and the reaction of the society around him, force him to a new awareness of the falsity of the system under which he has suffered. Pirandello's Il giuoco delle parti treats the same adulterous situation and shows an attempt to live without society's regard (Leone lives apart from his wife and only visits her for thirty minutes each evening); while managing the pain of being a cuckold in an apparently bizarre manner. (Leone has turned to cooking and dining as focal points in his life.) Simultaneously, Pirandello shows the danger of threatening someone like Leone who only appears to have mastered his situation: the unchecked flow of life which he masks in routine and in culinary interests rises in him to protect him and results in his wife's lover's death. All of the above examples use characters and settings which at first appear to be identical to their traditional models.

But their view of the world leads the playwright to point up its conflicting differences, its tendencies toward violence, despair, and destruction. In describing this new "underworld," these authors use different kinds of characters, especially a different kind of protagonist. They are concerned with modern issues and frequently show their

characters' lives as masquerades, artificial constructions which may collapse under pressure, empty shells which, puppet-like, can be manipulated both from within and without.

Characters in these plays are frequently seen as types, rather than individuals, as puppets whose actions are feeble and without effect, or easily manipulated by others. Often, the plays use one character as the author's voice, or io epico, allowing these characters to directly influence the stage action while commenting upon it. Frequently, these characters determine the play's structure through their deliberate meddling in the affairs of the other characters. Two groups of characters--those "being animated" and those who "pull the strings"--were assigned descriptive names in this paper in order to more clearly define them. The animators were called (1) watchers, (2) puppet masters, and (3) testifiers. Those being animated were referred to as (1) puppets and puppet-like characters; (2) split personalities; (3) repertory regulars, and (4) machines, objects, and ambiances.

These new character types include a different idea of the "hero." Traditional heroes, even when they fail, are seen as confident, righteous, and noble. They are mindful that their action will affect others as well as themselves. Anti-heroes lie to protect themselves; e.g., Paolo in La maschera, Hero in Siepe al nordovest, and "Enrico" in Enrico IV. They often doubt their actions when

and if they are capable of taking any; or they see vastly different actions as equal; e.g., the Majordomo in Vengono, Luciano in L'uomo che incontrò se stesso, the Man in Grey, the Man in Mourning, and the Woman in Blue Fox in Marionette, and the young philosopher in Davanti all'infinito. These anti-heroes may do violence to others, either by accident or deliberately and without remorse. They may even do violence to themselves in seeming indifference, or in despair; e.g., the madman in Pazzi girovaghi, Io in Pancia del vaso, the Captain in L'arresto, the philosopher in Davanti all'infinito, The Man in Grey in Marionette, Lui in L'uccello, Leone in Il giuoco, "Enrico" in Enrico IV, and all four characters in Bianca e Rosso.

Surrounding the principal characters in these plays are groups and individuals, minor characters, who frequently embody the "other," that new form of antagonist who, like the protagonist, has undergone considerable change. Antagonists in traditional plays, whether clear-cut villains, as in melodrama, or more complex and subtle adversaries as in realistic drama, act consistently, deliberately, and forcefully to overcome the hero and the values which he upholds. In plays in this study, however, antagonists are portrayed in several different ways. (1) They may be mirror images of the protagonist. Such antagonists appear in Pazzi girovaghi, L'improvvisata, L'uomo, Bianca e Rosso, and Nostra Dea. (2) They may also be bunglers and fools

such as those who appear in L'arresto, La pancia del vaso, Il giuoco, and Enrico IV. (3) A third category of antagonists are silly creatures whose power comes only from being part of a gang. This type of antagonist is portrayed in Così è, La Bella Addormentata, La maschera, and L'amante delle stelle. (4) Finally, in such plays as Vengono, Un chiaro di luna, Simultaneità, Dissonanza, Il teatrino, L'uccello, Sei personaggi, and Questa sera, inanimate objects and the very atmosphere become antagonists.

In the Futurist sintesi, there is often no identifiable antagonist; the conflict is usually one of situation and the resolution is brought about abruptly, sometimes with a bizarre or ironic twist, sometimes without a clear or definite explanation of the events or a person or group at whom to point blame. In the plays of traditional length written by the grotteschi and Pirandello, the conflict is most frequently developed through a situation in which the principals confront some opposing segment of society and perhaps themselves, as well, during the course of the play's action. In La maschera, for example, Paolo confronts himself, and his own beliefs as mirrored in the society which surrounds him. In Così è, the central trio are forced to respond to charges about their personal conduct by members of the conventional, provincial society in whose power they are held prisoner. In Antonelli's L'uomo, a man is in conflict with

his self of twenty years earlier and his task (at which he fails) is to alert his "rival" to the dangers before him. In Marionette, the three creatures who are "suspended on the strings of their own passion" are in conflict with the inner passions which control them, while in Nostra Dea the conflict is as changeable as Dea's costumes.

In the plays for which there is a definite ending given, violence often determines the outcome, whether to the self or to the "other" and sometimes to both. In Marionette, La Bella Addormentata, Enrico IV, and Sei personaggi, deaths are part of the resolution while in Così è, Il giuoco, and La maschera, a personal sacrifice has to be made by the protagonists in the resolution of the play. And in plays such as Così è, Nostra Dea, L'uccello, Siepe, L'uomo, Ciascuno, and Questa sera, we are not given a completely unambiguous ending.

Virtually all of the plays discussed in this study progress from the semblance of order to the destruction of that apparent order. The resolutions do not restore even the appearance of "all's well" but instead leave the audience in uncomfortable suspense and ambiguity. The characters at the end of these plays are not drawn together in any kind of unity, whether joy or suffering. The audience, kept increasingly distanced throughout the action of the play, is left to the cold comfort of contemplation rather than the

catharsis wished for or expected.

Finally, the playwrights whose works have been discussed in this study chose to be deliberately theatrical. They made changes in structure, often while apparently using a traditional one; dramatized new treatments of space and time which defied convention; and opened up new areas of investigation, particularly in regard to the role of the audience.

Futurists used flamboyantly theatrical devices, such as a character's directly addressing the audience, or a bare stage, with a half-raised curtain. They employed simultaneous settings, on-stage spectators, a mixture of different places and times, and tricks of sound and lighting. They also used visual images which supported their verbal attacks on traditional life and theatre. For example, in Simultaneità, Marinetti shows two conflicting life-styles simultaneously: a prostitute's boudoir and a family's sitting room. In Dissonanza, a sixteenth-century love scene is abruptly interpenetrated by a twentieth-century man who enters and asks for a match. In Passatismo, Corra and Settimelli show the rapid passage of time and the dull existence of a passéist couple both verbally and visually through the use of repeated dialogue and a calendar which advances twenty years in each act.

One of the primary formal elements of Futurist plays was their brevity, the result of a desire to do away with

usual playwriting techniques in favor of compressing and synthesizing the action. This was shown in all of the sintesi and even in Marinetti's reduction of a full-length play to synthetic form. In these brief plays, few preliminaries are given nor are the outcomes explained. We are given characters, settings, and situations which are distilled versions of traditional ones. These are sometimes combined with an invented world in which apparently real people and events are interspersed with creatures of fantasy or elements of the unconscious.

The grotteschi and Pirandello seem to adhere to usual dramatic and theatrical conventions in most of their plays: they use a three-act structure, some exposition, elements of confrontation, and they observe the fourth-wall convention. But these playwrights work to distort those conventions through a deliberate mix of tragic material and comic characters (or vice versa) as well as a preponderance of situations which are exaggerated, repeated, and disassembled. The emphasis is on fragmentation, collision, and disintegration.

In these plays, too, verbal imagery is reinforced by visual imagery. The plays which concern appearance vs. inner truth (mask and face): e.g., L'uomo, Il giuoco, Enrico IV, all use visualizations of the theme. In L'uomo, Luciano enacts the confrontation with his "inner self." In Il giuoco, a motif of verbal game imagery is underscored

visually by a game with an eggshell, and by the actual duel; in Enrico IV, the two selves of "Enrico" appear on stage as one person, while the portraits and the scenes of acting out and dressing up visually reinforce the play's themes. La Bella Addormentata, in which life is celebrated as "a colorful adventure," uses characters with colorful names, colorful costumes, and settings. In the plays dominated by puppets or puppet-like characters, these characters themselves act as constant visual reminders to the play's theme. In Siepe, for example, the puppet-like humans and marionettes interact in each other's worlds without being aware of one another, and in Elettricità sessuale, the puppets used by Riccardo and Maria are prominently placed downstage on either side as reminders of both past and future possibility. When their stuffed bodies are discarded and later when their "corpses" are brought out on stage, they are again images made visible.

Perhaps the most striking feature distinguishable in the plays analyzed for this study was the effect of syncopation produced by the consistent use of several structural elements in combination. These elements were described as (1) simultaneity and dynamism, (2) contraction/compression of story line, (3) alternating tight and multiple focus, (4) deliberately interrupted and confused plot line, and (5) a preference for endings which are ambiguous, absurd,

or unresolved and which could not be satisfied by any definitive interpretation.

As discussed in detail for representative plays by Futurists, groteschi, and Pirandello, syncopation is a hallmark of the rhythm in these plays, a rhythm which works to support the kinds of themes and characters treated in the plays. Futurists presented programs of short plays which used all of the elements leading to syncopation. In addition, the format of the program itself, with its juxtaposition of many different, extremely brief pieces offered its own syncopated effect. The grotesques achieved a syncopated effect by using the same combination of structural ingredients, but in particular, emphasized the deliberately interrupted or confused plot line together with the preference for ambiguity and oddness within an apparently normal middle-class world. In the several examples of syncopation which we discussed in the course of the paper, all used this structural feature in a critical function. But it was Pirandello who stretched this technique to its limits in this respect. In Così è, Enrico IV, and in the theatre trilogy, especially, Pirandello most successfully embodied his view of the world in the presentation of simultaneous "realities" given in enticing but incomplete fragments which conflict with one another, challenging the notion of reality and the notion of theatre as well.

The research and writing of this study has demonstrated that indeed, Pirandello is the major figure in the Italian avant-garde drama of this period. His notion of the split between apparent and felt reality led him to focus on these concerns in his drama and finally, led him to invent forms which would support those notions.

To the playwrights of grotesques belongs the honor of having made consistent efforts to change traditional drama by distorting its shape, thereby exposing its limitation for the modern world. Because plays by i grotteschi were more frequently leavened with some amount of comedy, many of their works enjoyed popular success which prepared the public, and critics, to better understand the darker grotesques of Pirandello.

The Futurists, instead, made contributions to theatre as well as to virtually every art and literary form to which they addressed themselves. Because their efforts were so eclectic and so wide-ranging, however, and because the nature of their activities was frequently so scandalous and bizarre, they were not taken seriously until recently (in the 1960s) when another avant-garde had achieved international prominence (The Theatre of the Absurd) and critics began to resurrect Italy's first avant-garde in order to re-evaluate it in the light of changes in the more free-spirited world which began to emerge in the sixties. The Futurist credo

celebrated speed, ingenuity, innovation, words-in-freedom, and the unexpected, improvised surprise. In their theoretical writings, contained in the manifestoes, in the serate, synthetic theatre, and the Theatre of Surprise, Futurists demonstrated that they were determined to develop a new kind of drama, in which new kinds of characters would have a part and in which the audience would be invited to participate in a way that the traditional theatre would not allow.

It is this last element, after all, which perhaps had the greatest influence on Pirandello and on his dramas after 1920: the realization that the audience, like the drama, had to be treated in a new way. The audience would become part of the action by specific design on the part of the playwright.

Pirandello's use of actor/spectators, actor/critics, and actor/directors who engage in dialogue with the audience together with his deliberate use of the element of surprise seem to be theatrical inspiration directly traceable to the work of the Futurists.

In 1915, when Futurists began their synthetic theatre tours, the public began to see the culmination of Futurist theories about drama and theatre which had been in development since 1909 when the first manifesto was written. The Futurist Synthetic Theatre was an attempt to join the theories expressed in the manifestoes to the experience of the serate in the creation of a new form of performance which would have a new rapport with its audience. In 1916, Chiarelli's

play, La maschera e il volto, announced still another new type of play. Chiarelli and the other playwrights of grotesques, extended the parody of old drama begun by Futurists in a full-length form which more successfully challenged its traditional rival, from within its own bastions. When Pirandello entered the contest with Così è (se vi pare) in 1917, the invasion of the stage advanced still further. Pirandello's genius was to present simultaneous realities in conflicting fragments which refuse to yield "the truth." In Così è, in Enrico IV, and in the theatre trilogy, Pirandello combined his own philosophical ideas about the problem of existence with the Futurist innovations presented in the programs of sintesi and the concerns embodied in the plays by the grotteschi.

By 1925, this era of experimentation and innovation in drama had yielded its best results. Marinetti returned to writing full-length dramas, none of which were favorably received.¹ The one Futurist whose work continued to create a stir of interest was Enrico Prampolini, with his Theatre of Futurist Pantomime.² The writers of grotesques attempted to

¹One example is the production of Marinetti's Vulcano which Pirandello directed in 1926 at the Teatro D'Arte. A selection of unanimously unfavorable reviews is reprinted in Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 213-222.

²Pirandello and Bontempelli collaborated with Prampolini for a 1918 program of these pantomimes. Pirandello wrote a scenario entitled La salamandra (The Salamander) for which Bontempelli wrote the music. La salamandra appears in Saggi, poesie e scritti varii, pp. 1185-1190. Reviews of the pantomime are reprinted in Antonucci, Cronache, pp. 247-254.

imitate earlier successes but had by now outlived the mode they had invented. Pirandello had begun in yet another direction by founding a theatre and becoming its principal producer and director.³ Although some critics praised the efforts of this new theatre and especially praised the talents of its director, the theatre lost money and eventually lost the state funding it had enjoyed. Pirandello spent much of the last decade of his life abroad, out of fashion and out of favor at home. The Fascist "call to order" was well under way by 1925 and a promising decade of experimentation and innovation in Italy was at an end.

³The original contract and relevant correspondence regarding the Teatro d'Arte is collected in Il teatro nel fascismo, Pirandello e Bragaglia: Documenti inediti negli archivi italiani, ed. A. C. Alberti (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974).

APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Futurist Painters

BALLA, Giacomo (1871-1958). After attending an art school in Turin, Balla moved to Rome with his mother in 1895, where he soon became well-known through works shown at annual art exhibits. He studied in Paris for several months in 1900 and upon his return met Boccioni, Severini and Sironi. Boccioni considered Balla to be his master in the use of "Divisionism" as a technique and in his use of social content in his work.

BOCCIONI, Umberto (1882-1916). Boccioni was born in Reggio Calabria, but his family soon moved to Forlì and then to Genoa, where they lived until 1884. From 1882-1897, the family lived in Padua. Boccioni went to Catania in 1897 to study at the Technical Institute there; during this same period he began writing. In 1898, Boccioni travelled to Rome to study and in 1902, after having won an award which granted him a stipend, he went to Paris to study. In 1904, Boccioni began to exhibit in Rome. Also in 1904, he travelled to Russia where he stayed for seven months. In 1908, he moved to Milan. As an artist and as a theoretician for the Futurists, Boccioni was second only to Marinetti. He died after a riding accident, during World War I.

CARRÀ, Carlo (1881-1966). Trained as a decorator, Carrà worked in Paris in 1900 and later in London. In 1904, he studied at the Brera Institute in Milan. Carrà met Boccioni in 1908, was a signer of the painters' manifesto and remained active in the movement until 1915. By 1924, he was a member of the Novecento movement, based in Milan.

SEVERINI, Gino (1883-1966). Born in Cortona, Severini travelled eventually to Rome, where he worked at odd jobs in order to support himself while attending night school. In 1901, he met Boccioni and Balla and began to frequent Balla's studio. Severini studied in Paris in 1906 and was strongly influenced by Seurat. He joined

the Futurists in 1910 and signed the original manifesto. In 1911-1912, he persuaded Boccioni and Carrà to join him in Paris and was influential in setting up the 1912 exhibition.

Futurist Musicians

PRATELLA, Francesco Balilla (1880-1955). Pratella was a student of Mascagni at the Pesaro Conservatory. He won several prizes as a young composer and was the initial theoretician for Futurist music, as author of three manifestoes. His Futurist compositions, however, were still linked to the music of the past.

RUSSOLO, Luigi (1885-1947). Russolo studied music and was a self-taught painter. He was part of the avant-garde literary group based in Milan and headed by Marinetti. He met Boccioni and Carrà in 1909 and was one of the original signers of the painters' manifesto. By 1913, when he wrote The Art of Noises, Russolo had begun to work on devising instruments, called intonarumori, used to play the new "noise-notes" he had categorized.

Futurist Dramatists

CANGIULLO, Francesco (1888-1977). Cangiullo was born in Naples where he first encountered the Futurist movement through outsized posters which announced the advent of the Futurists for a series of serate. The gigantic red letters of the word FUTURISM moved him to go to meet Marinetti in person. He immediately became an active member of the movement as a poet, painter, writer, and dramatist. He was the moving force behind the Theatre of Surprise tours which began in 1921.

CORRA, (Ginanni-Corradini), Bruno (1892-). Together with his brother, Arnaldo Ginna, a painter and director of the film Vita futurista, Bruno Corra became an early Futurist, meeting Balla in Rome and Marinetti in Milan, together with other members of the movement. The brothers wrote several sintesi together, but Corra more often paired himself with Emilio Settimelli. Those two, together with Marinetti, signed the manifesto entitled Futurist Synthetic Theatre. In 1916, the brothers, and Marinetti, Balla, and Chiti, signed a manifesto on Futurist film. Corra had written a 1912 manifesto entitled Chromatic Music. He was a novelist and in the 1930s wrote several full-length plays.

SETTIMELLI, Emilio (1891-1954). Born in Florence, Settimelli was part of the Florentine group which published L'Italia Futurista, a group which included Corra, Chiti, Mario Carli, Ginna and others. Settimelli was a writer, essayist, and political journalist as well as the author of many sintesi, most of which were published in 1915.

I grotteschi

ANTONELLI, Luigi (1882-1942). As a young man, he founded a small magazine, L'illustrazione abruzzese and became a working journalist, travelling to Argentina in 1912. L'uomo was his seventh play; and after its success, he continued to write and have plays published and produced through the 1930s.

BONTEMPELLI, Massimo (1878-1960). Bontempelli was a teacher and later a novelist, journalist, theoretician of the movement Novecentismo (Twentieth-centuryism), through the magazine 900. Bontempelli promoted a type of literature he called "magical realism" which would discover a sense of magic from the everyday life of people and events. He became a member of the Italian Academy but because of a dispute with the regime, he was suspended from his journalistic activities between 1938 and 1940. After the war, he served as a senator for the Popular Front.

CAVACCHIOLI, Enrico (1885-1954). Cavacchioli was a poet, and an early Futurist, an influence which is visible in some of his plays. L'uccello was his third play and he followed it with four or five other grotesques, written between 1919 and 1925. Cavacchioli was the grotesque playwright who was perhaps the most misunderstood and attacked by supporters of traditional theatre. Marco Praga, especially, realistic playwright of the nineties and the early years of this century, severely criticized Cavacchioli in every review he wrote regarding this particular author's theatrical production. Cavacchioli himself was a reviewer, for the Secolo in Milan.

CHIARELLI, Luigi (1880-1947). Chiarelli became a journalist after his father's death forced him to discontinue his studies. He wrote for the Milanese paper, Secolo, and was the first to use the term grotesque to describe his play, La maschera e il volto. In addition to playwriting and journalism, Chiarelli was a dramatic critic for several magazines, including Comoedia, became a theatrical producer and director, and finally a painter.

He was twice named president of the Society of Dramatic Authors, first in 1925 and again in 1945.

ROSSO DI SAN SECONDO, Pier Maria (1887-1956). Born in Caltanissetta, in southern Italy, Rosso went to Rome to study at the University of Rome. He had a letter of introduction to Pirandello with whom he soon became friends. Like Pirandello and Marinetti, he studied law and then immediately turned to literature. After the success of Marionette che passione!, Rosso devoted himself to the writing of plays and editing the literary supplement of Il Messaggero della Domenica. After World War II, Rosso was dramatic critic for Il Giornale d'Italia and collaborated on several films.

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