

BELLAGIO; or
Of all Things Made of Metal; or
When Grandpapa Had Daddy Shot

MAC WELLMAN
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DRAFT: 17 June 2005
apropos of B E L L A G I O:

All parts, including that of *Mussolini* and *Marinetti* are played by the:

FIRST FUTURISTA
SECOND FUTURISTA
THIRD FUTURISTA
and a DRIVER from *Puglia*

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BELLAGIO consists of two scenes: *.*, The Past considered as a Future; and */*, The Future considered as a Past.

Part 1: [*.*] takes place in a *DREAM TIME* of the Futurist past, the visit of Marinetti to Russia in 1912 to greet the Russian Futurists, conceived of as *Present* of an unknowable sort.

Part *due*: [*/*] takes place in Bellagio in December 1944, in exactly the old Baroque hotel described. Just after the executions of partisans in the Piazzale Loretto in Milan that so worried Mussolini. In this scene the *Dream Time* is the nightmare of actuality.

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Mussolini did not visit Marinetti, but he could well have had he thought to do so. So much to do so little time. Pay no attention to the *passeist* over your shoulder.

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The play begins with a FUTURISTA playing the American poet (and also a Fascist) Ezra Pound who introduces Marinetti by summoning his shade in the fashion of Dante:

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Scene: ●

An old baroque hotel, furniture covered for the winter. In the dark we hear the *Intonarumori* advance and make their strange low, rumbling: a FUTURISTA steps forth from the shadow, green face, and becomes the semblable of Ezra Pound:

In the beginning God
the great aesthete having created heaven and earth
& after the volcanic sunset, had painted
the rocks with lichen in the Japanese manner
Exuded the great usurer Geryon, prototype
of Churchill's backers. And there came singing
Filippo Tomaso with rough dialect, with h for c
All right, I am dead, but do not want to go to heaven
I want to go on fighting
& want your body to go on with the struggle.
And I answered: "my body is already old,
I need it, where wd. I go?"

.....

Goodbye Marinetti

Come back and talk when you want to.
"PRESENTE!" And after that shout, he

Added sadly
"I followed vain emptiness in many ways

...
I sang war, and you wanted peace.
Both of us blind, me to the inner things
You the things of today
and he spoke to me
neither wholly to me, nor to the next man
But a part of him talked to himself
and not to its center

And his shade grew grayer
Until another note of the scale
came from the hollow emptiness

[Fade into the FIRST SCENE proper, as the THREE FUTURISTAs
prepare for their enactment of the meeting in Russia in 1912 of
the Italian and Russian Futurists. Winter, bitter cold. The
intonarumori retreat and are still.]

FIRST FUTURISTA

The art of noise was born in Milan with the publication of Luigi
Russolo's book and the performance in Modena of the noise-
machine orchestra which was laughed at and which consecrated
my word *intonarumori*.

I have the impression of having introduced cows and bulls
to their first locomotive.

Futurist architecture was born with Antonio Sant'Elia
while in a Paris still echoing with the success of the first exhibit
of Futurist paintings I set up an exhibit of Boccioni's futurist
sculpture

Slavic starkness meaningful for the synthesizing energy it
reveals does not entirely please Boccioni

As we go down the streets alive with flashing lights and
traffic snarls I press down with all my might on the accelerator
of Boccioni's genius

We return to Milan and in Boccioni's studio sculptured
muscular shapes of speed are taking form and especially his

great polymaterial velocities the first sculptures of ambiance
light and shadow made solid

At the door Guillaume Apollinaire a trifle egg-shaped fat
almost oily high priest of novelty and eccentricity with a
honeyed smile his big intelligent eyes half Polish half Roman
whispers to me in Italian

SECOND FUTURISTA

"The aims of Futurism are bound to succeed and you're
right all the way I'm joining your words-in-freedom movement
and I'll announce it publicly and you can announce it to this
gathering of important Parisians"

FIRST FUTURISTA

We greet Picasso Lhote Delaunay and his wife Sonia
Valmier the art dealer Rosenberg the art critic Fenelon the
semi-Futurist philosopher Mercereau and the poet Salmon while
Boccioni grips my hand and mutters

THIRD FUTURISTA

"You're forward enough you do the talking because I
don't know any French and it's absurd you know really absurd
for me to try to speak in French off the cuff"

FIRST FUTURISTA

You're the one the public is interest in and as the most
daring sculptor in the world you must do you understand must
Futurism commands you improvise your ideas in French I'm
sure you can do it"

SECOND FUTURISTA

In London poets painters sculptors playwrights headed by
Mister H. G. Wells invite us to a banquet in honor of Marinetti
and the Italian Futurists in the hall of the Poetry Society

While praising me in his toast Wells says in his chirping
voice

THIRD FUTURISTA

“I am a bird but Mister Marinetti is a lion”

SECOND FUTURISTA

The comment hides a sly irony about the declared systematic violence of Futurism and I reply by reciting my free verse in honor of racing cars and *The Battle of Adrianople* and acclaimed by the whole group I conclude in French improvising extremely light words-in-freedom on a scratchy metallic noise made by the inhabitants of Mars

A pretty twenty year-old poetess the niece of a lord gets so excited that slapping her rope of pearls that's probably worth a million she carries me off in her car amid snow and gusts of icy wind and newspaper boys standing barefoot on frozen mud

FIRST FUTURISTA

Let's stay here in the dark on my fur next to this good coke fire that's looking at us with all those savage red eyes and now repeat your poem about the Martians and I will call my uncle whose spirit comes to me every night I want him to appreciate you too

THIRD FUTURISTA

In Berlin I take the train to Warsaw and Moscow the most beautiful German poetess who signs herself the Princess of Thebes but after a deep sleep I awake in the waste barren frozen Moscow railroad station feeling like a piece of lost luggage that's been found but there's no key and so it must await its owner while pretty customs inspectresses gather around while their men pickled in alcohol curse the cameras and magnesium flares all over the place laughter and great bouquets of flowers while criticism and praise of Futurism multiplies on all sides the Futurism safely back in Milan not the real me approaching the great cold frightening heart of Moscow

FIRST FUTURISTA

As Director of the lecturer's group in Moscow I have the honor

of inviting you to give a series of lectures in the larger Russian cities lectures for which you will be paid whatever you ask with half you fee in advance and traveling expenses do come soon if possible because they're waiting for you anxiously in St Petersburg and Moscow

SECOND FUTURISTA

In the packed amphitheater lecture hall of the university I use a large portrait of the Czar to explain the absurdity of *verismo* when all of a sudden a group of officers and soldiers with bayonets at the ready begins to move towards the speaker's stand but fortunately are stopped by my usual female admirers excitedly explaining over and over again in Russian that I didn't mean anything revolutionary or disrespectful but just an artistic explanation

Standing to receive their enthusiastic applause and the repeated comment

THIRD FUTURISTA

"Yes you are the great Futurist not these stupid sensation-mongering Russian Futurists"

FIRST FUTURISTA

I note the ugly incivility of the city and the rarity of taxicabs which forces you to use *isvoschi* a vehicle that favors a satisfying communion with beautiful Russian women but discourages our sudden love behind the ballooning back of a driver swollen with whips and reins and horses with the jogtrot rhythm of the steppes

A third group crops up known as "Bouquets to Marinetti" headed by Tastevan but he turns out to be a peculiar supporter and impresario having written an article about me in the most solemn and deadly terms saying that "Futurist depravation is a force and therefore a glory to desire cripple to the woman who feels pity for a man's tears she must kill him immediately unless she wants to debase herself below the basest whore"

SECOND FUTURISTA

In the bookstores and smart shops there's a caricature of me in the windows showing me half bombarded by rotten fruit and half colonized by feminine hearts

My raging success with women arouses the ire of the "Ass's Tail" group whose leader after he had denounced me as a traitor to Futurism in an article introduces me affectionately into the most important literary circle and eating drinking and talking in French with his Russian wife Goncharova I'm allowed to attend an important meeting

We stand in the back of the packed room and discover that a violent argument is raging on stage between university professors and poets about Futurism and me.

Larionov shouts

THIRD FUTURISTA

"Dear Marinetti that clown on stage with the red cloak gold cheekbones and blue forehead is Mayakovsky an imbecile in red arguing with four idiots in black"

FIRST FUTURISTA

In the freezing air outside some typical Futurist lines flame out so brightly as almost to declaim themselves

Bear in mind first of all: do not live for the present
only in the future is the tomorrow of poetry;
remember secondly: don't pity your fellow man;
Love yourself with infinite love;
Don't forget, thirdly: bow before art,
Only before art, without limits and without purpose

[A futurist pause ; the FIRST whispers snidely into the ear of the THIRD:

Hitler's a woman you know?

[Incredulous Futurist pause:

THIRD FUTURISTA
Who or what's ... that?

FIRST FUTURISTA

-

SECOND FUTURISTA

Two beautiful ladies enters masked as voluptuous orientals like two jaguars in their slow feline grace

One on my right one on my left a trilogy of seductive French small talk and giggles while husbands of each are sitting in front

Two pasty anemic husbands a little limp who can only murmur in Russian but seem to prefer taking down mysterious phases in their notebooks

After the lecture on the scandalous Futurists the dance begins and I am strongly attracted by a very young dancer an apparently well-bred girl but in the Russian way that is a charming manner of moving her buttocks at a martial step when she walked that still makes my nerves tingle

She even has a special way of smiling and saying

THIRD FUTURISTA

"The Futurist poet Mayakovsky plagiarized you today in the newspaper because you had said 'a racing car is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace* and he wrote 'the slipper of the prima ballerina of the Opera is more beautiful than the *Venus de Milo*' and I'll add that I'm sure he doesn't know a thing about Venus while I'm sure you know a great deal

"We'll see each other tomorrow night at Mantashev's house"

FIRST FUTURISTA

Without the slightest exaggeration I declare that that masquerade ball with its amazing costumes and fabulous prizes

given in Moscow in my honor constitutes my most successful
aeropoem in words-in-freedom

Three days and nights of the most varied entertainment
at the house of the Armenian millionaire who controls all the oil
interests and loves to tantalize the Czar with lavish parties to
which he invites all the celebrities of the theater and arts from
all over the world paying them the highest fees

A Neopolitan mandolin player gives a low bow and some
advice

SECOND FUTURISTA

"They're preparing a mad party for you but be careful of
those last few drinks. The bluish slate of a forty-degree-below-
zero sky competes with these lines by Mayakovsky:

THIRD FUTURISTA

All around me
They're laughing
The flags
a thousand colors.
They pass by.
They take offense.
Thousands of them.
They cross
Running.
In each young man Marinetti's fire

...

FIRST FUTURISTA

In the waiting room a scandal-rousing Futurist hands me
a declamation concerning sympathy and antipathy toward our
illustrious guest Marinetti the Italian poet complete freedom of
choice is accorded him among

SECOND FUTURISTA

"bouquets of flowers"

THIRD FUTURISTA

"rotten eggs"

FIRST FUTURISTA

"drunken female hearts"

SECOND FUTURISTA

and his choice does not interest us signed Burliuk Kamensky
Mayakovsky Matiouchine Kruchenik Livshitz Nisen Valimer
Khlebnikov the Russian Futurists

The women immediately demand my free verse poem in
praise of racing cars to lighten the festivities they say but that
provokes an argument between two art critics who've already
been drinking and talk too loud which annoys the otherwise
placid host his pale face set against an opulent Chinese robe
over embroidered with dragons and red pearls for eyes

An argument between two expert art dealers about the
price of pearls in Paris is interrupted by Mantashev whose face
is always gently kind his black eyes dripping indulgence

THIRD FUTURISTA

"Dear poet Marinetti come with me into the salon of
perfumes"

FIRST FUTURISTA

I am sinuously absorbed into a soft velvety wafting of
remembered smells part flavor part idea part lust

A light cloud of beautiful ladies evanescent in their
feathers ribbons flows tulle and intermittences of a precise
desire

SECOND FUTURISTA

In one corner about a hundred smoking censers were
swung back and forth for a whiff then put back then taken up
by others with servants all over dressed in green watered silk
they claimed was asbestos and a well of perfumes commanded
by a bearded man in white with the stylized gold cassock of a
sublime perfumer

I agree to lie down on the heaped violets surrounded by electric bulbs smothering mounds of overheated roses which begin to burn

On my back I recite my free verse poem to racing cars although I feel trapped in my rhythms by my position and forced to throw my images up to the ceiling where infinite spirals of smoke mix orange sapphire cobalt sky-blue smells chancing the stench but applauded dazed by my effort and the strong essences I relish the mouth of a woman who creeps to give me advice and that mouth resembles the girl with the unforgettable walk from the previous night

THIRD FUTURISTA

"Turn on the big fan so everyone can smell the perfume of acacia along the Mahmudieh Canal in Alexandria the native city of Marinetti the Italian Futurist poet"

FIRST FUTURISTA

A theatrical arrangement of objects each in its cradle or nest of petals a jewel hundreds of them under the play of spotlights that dimmed any recollection of the shop windows in Rue de la Paix

THIRD FUTURISTA

I don't know whether it was because I had finally reached that famous mouth that had so painfully eluded me or because of the sheer weight of all those odors amid the unraveling of pleasurable sensations from which emerges a juniper flavor of pastry and rose petal jam but the fact is I'm standing there contemplating the large diamond on my finger the gift of the preceding night I dozed and fell asleep

FIRST FUTURISTA

I dozed and fell asleep

SECOND FUTURISTA

I dozed and fell asleep I must have eaten a great deal the

whole night and like a vagabond who's fallen asleep under the bridges of the Seine I look up at the soaring arches of smoke arising from the censers converging towards the rooms with the fans

Dreaming kissing wandering in the shadows and among the flashing of jewels here and there aimless guided and then lost by the always less real host whose face seems concentrated moonlight

SECOND FUTURISTA

My words-in-freedom excite even the dissident Futurists of the "Ass's Tail" who join my great polyphony of an army marching into the burning sands and the Tripoli-smelling Souk

But the popping of the enemy bullets don't hurt at all because they're most probably the champagne corks flying

Toward dawn after the third night I'm a little worn out and would like to enjoy the Venetian Room

THIRD FUTURISTA

My personal successes follow one on the other and the more of less coy sweet plots to checkmate Futurism multiply.

I leave for St Petersburg promising definitely to return to Moscow after receiving a telegram from Paris from the most famous and eloquent Russian jurist challenging me to a speaking contest

At St Peterburg the station is jammed picturesquely with the wildest most luxurious furs monumental white bearskin hats mustaches of iced Bernini proportions and all through this enthusiastic reception I keep thinking with every arctic blast about having my triumphs in some cave somewhere

Beautiful in so many ways the Russian woman there demand new proofs of Futurist energy and I'm compelled to take refuge in the arms of one of the prima ballerinas of the Opera who decides to outdo all the Moscow women I admire by

whisking me off in her sleigh making sure we're followed to a small station café by her rival friends according to their nightly habit of meeting at the station in dawn in the hope of taking the last ideal train

FIRST FUTURISTA

Many letters inform me that this ballerina is doubly celebrated for her beauty and for her constantly affirmed purity otherwise known as frigidity which my Futurist Italian genius tries in vain to warm up

I am later told that this mysterious beauty has announced she'll give an unusual gift in keeping with wealth to anyone who succeeds in defrosting her

As a licenced defroster I evade the watchful eyes of my beautiful maids at the Sabacha every afternoon

SECOND FUTURISTA

Sabacha which means wild dog

FIRST FUTURISTA

... and go out to the ballerina's opulent and cozy villa outside Saint Petersburg by sleigh even though it's buried in snow she always manages to blend her burning kisses with endless diatribes about the purity of the soul and the horror of lust

SECOND FUTURISTA

Sabacha which means wild dog

FIRST FUTURISTA

I remember acting as nimbly as a Capri fisherman who watches the squid he wants under the blazing noon sun until the right moment when he spears it suddenly to avoid the powerful backlash of its judiciously rational chilling chastity

SECOND FUTURISTA

Sabacha which means wild dog

FIRST FUTURISTA

I come to the conclusion that she is too educated to be intelligent but superbly beautiful in every point of her body the ballerina nicknamed flesh of pearls is worthy of indulgence and infinite love. The long-awaited gift is brought to me by the ballerina personally at the Sabacha

SECOND FUTURISTA

Which means wild dog

THIRD FUTURISTA

it turns out to be a small phial containing a cream she mixed herself of ground pearls and several essences whose composition she keeps secret

A scandalous backlash of rumors and idle chatter while flesh of pearls dances for me alone nearby I spot a poet from the "Ass's Tail" with an emaciated effeminate face he whispers that love of woman out of fashion

Thus having absolved the women of their sins and sinful pleasures their lovers logically being the lustful ones I suddenly pick up my pace firing off pyrotechnic images of the soul's immortality alternating between Futurist simultaneous action and the imagined folk language of the pope of pipes on the Volga

SECOND FUTURISTA

"Dear Larionov and you Futurists of the 'Ass's Tail' you're mistaken when you try to reduce Futurism to the brutal destruction of academicism and sentiment by exalting only pointless cruelty

"We Futurists are not talking about machines that grind man down or teach cruelty we Italians are trying to point out instead the aesthetic of the machine as the new form of the universe's dynamicizing and immortal soul

"To the Russian soul I send a plea for the recovery of Russian Futurism"

Rosa Exter the Futurist who afterward became the original and daring set designer for Tatiana Pavlova says to me

FIRST FUTURISTA

“Where will we end the night?”

[Lights become strange.

Intonarumori advance from far upstage, and begin their soft, strange rumble.

A giant GOLDEN BALL peeks from DSL; from below VERMILLION PYRAMID darts out, looks about in confusion till it spies a strange glowing WHITE POLYHEDRON of frightening demeanor. The PYRAMID rotates once and slowly approaches the POLYHEDRON which aggressively enlarges. The PYRAMID freezes in terror. Pause. Three GOLDEN PLANAR TRIANGLES sail about, alternately visible and invisible in the strange light.

Aha. The POLYHEDRON now has the PYRAMID cornered, but precipitously retreats offstage as the GOLDEN BALL advances ever so slightly. The TRIANGLES continue to sail about. The GOLDEN BALL goes out after the POLYHEDRON as the PYRAMID goes off USR. A BLACK CUBE we did not notice before slowly rotates and wiggles into the seclusion of dark corner, where it is only barely visible.

The *Intonarumori* majestically recede into the dark space far upstage]

From: The Conquest of the Stars

I now believe in nothing but my great illuminating lighthouse dream!

I now believe in nothing but its giant golden eye,

like an August moon,
wandering through the deepness of the Nights!

~

I lean over the cheeks of the Sea
and behold! the wonderful
submerged twilight and its vindictive
mountains! and the symmetrical corpses,
and their living hair that, for centuries,
has fanned their metallic faces.
Through the greenish immensity,
the submerged pyramids watch the zenith
with all their mad eyes.
All those green faces track the stupid sky,
the sorceress Night and its stars of lust
and Infinity!

End of Scene

Scene: /

An old baroque hotel, furniture covered for the winter; inside the wounded MARINETTI can be seen slumped in a wooden wheelchair; he wears a German SS greatcoat that is too large; outside the hotel CLARETTA PETACCI and the DRIVER are smoking; parked nearby an enormous Dusenburg; unseen, a FUTURISTA steps forth from the shadow, green face, and becomes once more the semblable of Ezra Pound:

The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders

Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed,

Thus Ben and la Clara a *Milano*

That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock

DIGONOS,)4(≅≦≧H, but the twice crucified

Where in history will you find it?

Yet say this to the possum: a bang, not a whimper,

with a bang not with a whimper,

To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars.

[She vanishes like smoke; CLARETTA and the DRIVER:]

DRIVER

You know what they call him, your boyfriend?

CLARETTA

-

DRIVER

Provolone, cheese head, that's what they call him.

CLARETTA

If he were here you would not dare to speak in such a way.

DRIVER

How do you know what I would dare? Who the hell are you my dear?

CLARETTA

Just shut up.

DRIVER

-

CLARETTA

This is a land of perpetual fog and rain, and in the spring, soggy vegetation. I hate hepatica.

DRIVER

What is hepatica?

CLARETTA

A kind of soggy wet white bloom like a buttercup but made out of cheese. Up there on the promontory there is a lot of the stuff. I hate the drizzle and the fog and the gloom.

DRIVER

I am from the south and and. So I wouldn't know.

CLARETTA

I hate Como and I hate Garda and in especial I hate Salo, and that bunch of creeps who call themselves a government. The SRI. *La Republica Democratic of Salo.*

It doesn't matter now. The Germans have betrayed us and we'll be killed.

DRIVER

We will all be killed if the *Duce* doesn't make up his mind what to do. It doesn't matter which road we take, but we must get going. Soon. Very soon.

CLARETTA

He cannot make up his mind.

DRIVER

Cannot make up his mind! What kind of a *Duce* is that?

CLARETTA

He is concerned about the fate of the people, and so many of them have betrayed him.

DRIVER

But why I ask you WHY waste time here. There THERE is the Swiss border. Only an hour away. Why are we stalled here like an overloaded transport aeroplane? This is senseless. This is absurd.

CLARETTA

I said he cannot make up his mind.

DRIVER

Here are communist partisans everywhere up here, and the Americans are moving up rapidly from the south why?

CLARETTA

He has an old friend here a poet who has been wounded. He is probably dying by the look of him.

DRIVER

Many are dying every day from this idiotic war.

CLARETTA

This one was wounded on the Russian front sixty years old, and fighting on the Russian front.

DRIVER

Any Italian who is crazy enough to go to the Russian front is crazy and deserves to be. What he gets.

CLARETTA

Deserves to be what? Say it and your boss will hear it, and you'll get yourself shot.

DRIVER

You two are lucky I am here.

[Pause

CLARETTA

I want to go home.

DRIVER

The SRI- ha. A colossal joke. And I am colossal idiot for joining the *Brigate Nere*. Now I am going to be shot like all the rest, and all of you people at Salo, ha, giving orders, orders which cannot be obeyed because they are senseless, and the war is lost and so too probably are you and me and everyone. All of it senseless.

All the *Duce* does is give orders, orders that cannot be obeyed. There is an order for a last ditch battle in the valley of Valtellina but there is no army left and no civil authority and not even a plan for food rationing.

No one listens to the *Duce* because the *Duce* is living in a dream world. They listen only to Herr Rann the German ambassador because the Germans know what to do and what to do is get the hell out of here. Even the SS Divisions are beginning to pull out.

CLARETTA

We shall only be staying here an hour. What's the harm in that?

DRIVER

Who is the poet anyway? What kind of poet goes to fight on the Eastern Front? He must be insane.

CLARETTA

I don't know I don't know.

He was one of Ben's oldest supporters, from the old days. Marinetti is the name. He was a fascist back in 1919. He and a man named Vecchi, a founder of the *Arditi*, the Black Shirts, marched on the offices of the Socialist newspaper, *Avanti*, and sacked the place.

Poor Ben had once been the editor of *Avanti*.

DRIVER

Provolone.

[Pause. Something creaks. It is the giant black cube from the Futurist Ballet Mechanique

CLARETTA

Ten days later Ben gave an interview for *Il Giornale Italia* in which he said that although he had not been present he himself took 'moral responsibility' for the action.

From that day Ben was a true hero of the Fascist movement, even though he had NOT BEEN there. And from that time the Socialists reviled him as a "rat". A "rat" can you imagine and of course they never said such things about Vecchi and Marinetti the ones actually responsible for the violence of the action.

DRIVER

You are crazy and you will get all of us killed.

CLARETTA

Why don't you shut up and leave me along.

MARINETTI

-

DRIVER

Should have joined Prince Borghese's gang. Tough guys. He's not afraid of this crowd of has beens. He's not afraid to call the cheese head what he is: the wisp of a legend and nothing more. A puff of smoke in the wind. Nothing.

[Pause

CLARETTA

I was just nine years old.

DRIVER

What? What's that?

CLARETTA

I was just nine years old when they sacked the offices of *Avanti* in 1919. He was my hero, Ben, Benito Mussolini.

DRIVER

Hero? Heros too many heroes. Not enough Italians who know how to fix a car

CLARETTA

He was my hero.

[Pause

DRIVER

My family's from Puglia in the South. In Puglia nobody cares about your fascism and your totalitarian state. All the squads, the *Arditi*, did is stiffen the resolve of the land-owners and the church. Nothing has changed down there. Down there is hard labor and no schools and no doctors and the life of a peasant is a life so hard and so pointless no one but a peasant could possibly endure it. My parents got out fifteen years ago just as the squad, the Black Shirts began to show up promising social justice and schools and social rights just like the socialists before them.

After the Socialists and Fascists are gone it will be just as it was before. Nothing has changed and nothing will change and nothing has ever changed because the socialists and the Fascists are like a brief wind that stirs up the leaves maybe a little and maybe rattles the window, but that is all. Once the wind has gone it is like it has always been and everything is the same as if the centuries had come and gone for nothing. All of it in a moment like smoke again like the smoke that is there and then is not there and all of it senseless.

Signorina, all I want is to get a job as a technician and become an automobile machinist.

[MARINETTI perks up, suddenly alert

To get a job at the Ferrari factory at Monza. My family settled east of there in the Romagna, near Forli near where Mister Big-Head grew up. Could never stand the place. *Il Crapun*. Big Head is what the communists call him. It is the Fascists who call him "Provolone".

Only good thing about the region is Bologna and the only good thing about Bologna is the food. Ha. We never had food like that down in the south down in Puglia.

The only good thing about Bologna is not the Communists no it is the food. I hear the wife Donna Rachele is a woman of respect. *Dura*. A tough one. *Dura*, not like you.

[She turns and goes out

I hear she makes a very estimable *tagliatelle alla Bolognese*. What I would do right now for a plate of pasta.

[M sighs and sags visibly

Donna Rachele the wife of Big Head

~

MUSSOLINI

Some idiot can you believe it? Who knew what would the odds be? Yes some

idiot told me you would be here

And here you are. Well. It is raining and once more my friend together

Are you ill slumped over are you?

The driver is waiting and my friend. My friend Claretta Petacci Why, why are you so still?

MARINETTI

Hitler's a woman you know.

MUSSOLINI

-

MARINETTI

Malaparte says so. Hitler a woman.
Ha.

MUSSOLINI not listening

-

er,

(What nonsense)

[MARINETTI looks at the official portrait of Il Duce then at the poor specimen before him]:

MUSSOLINI

I know I know. But like you I've been ill and accordingly lost a lot of weight.

[He takes down the official portrait and turns it to the wall .]

Claretta thinks I look quite dashing, twenty years younger.

No longer eat meat of any kind. I've cut out caffeine. No alcohol, only an occasional glass of wine. The rare cigaret. Now my diet is pasta and porridge. Warm milk toddies. For the damned ulcer.

The Salo days done. All over; I fear. This car

Will take us North to the Germans or to the Swiss or to whoever is to the North.

You are working too for the Germans I see.

I ask you what what is the future in that?

The driver is a sullen brute hair all over him.

MARINETTI

All those green faces.... Green faces with all mad eyes. The sorceress night and stars of lust and infinity, ha.

~

MUSSOLINI

So are you staying? Studying how to? What to do?

What can you what can you do, and say for yourself for staying at this horrid, yes, ha ha, horrid old hotel, old baroque hotel, yes you, Tom?

[Tom gestures.

MARINETTI

Wireless.

MUSSOLINI

What?

MARINETTI

Green faces. Wireless. A harbor full of things that are only, that is not only mechanical but alive.

~

[Neither man listens to what the other is saying]

MARINETTI

You revolting pig you peasant.

MUSSOLINI

Well as a matter of course I was thinking maybe perhaps spend a little time North of here.

MARINETTI

Because of you I have become passe a passeist.

~

MUSSOLINI

Sometimes I am astonished that I am who I am, Mussolini. The Duce. It is a staggering thought to be one thought widely, to be so central to our time. Someone so chronically misunderstood. Vilified.

And then sometimes I feel as if my head were too large for my body, as my face is too large for my head.

And then sometimes I feel as if the back of my head had broken and fallen away, had been magically and painlessly removed and filled with daylight so that.

So that I might take a sojourn to a favorite park or camping site, have a quiet and pleasant time and never even be missed.

~

M looks at M

MUSSOLINI

Who could have known ... how far from ...

Anyone can make a mistake

History will take a balanced view

MARINETTI

May Mafarka bugger all of history with his immense coiled phallus, may Mafarka ...

M looks at M warily

~

MUSSOLINI

Perhaps history is a ruin, but if so it is a perfectly symmetrical one, a balanced ruin; a ruin that emerges from a series of terrible events and terrible individuals behind each of these. Each event and each person, in succession, a little more and little less than it was; than he was.

~

MARINETTI

Today it is cold and rainy. Up on the hills above us is the Villa; the old Roman villa. Green faces everywhere. Sabacha. Now we Italians are all crowded down here, in Bellagio, humbled and defeated by an obscure succession of incomprehensible events. Confined to this hideous, old, deserted hotel. This passeist abomination. And who now occupies the Villa, who I ask you?

MUSSOLINI

What are you saying?

The Villa has been requisitioned as a convalescent hospital for wounded German flyers.

MUSSOLINI

Maybe I should pay them a friendly visit. On my way North. Maybe not. Some suspicion might arise.

MARINETTI

Green faces. Sabacha. Sabacha means wild dog. The green faces dream of a succession of better times, better futures. Perhaps of a succession of better times, better futures, times before this and times to come.

MUSSOLINI

When all this mediocre human filth and shit and ruin that so appalls us shall all have been swept away.

~

MARINETTI

-

MUSSOLINI

-

MARINETTI

?

~

MUSSOLINI

My definition of fascism:

1) To organize a single governing party. 2) To create a single organization for Italian youth. 3) To create a single organization of employers and workers, recognized by law and entailing a collective work contract with legal standing everywhere. 4) To create a *dopolavoro*— an organization for recreation after work.

Man is an absurd animal. Choosing a good man is about as likely as winning the lottery.

They call me infallible, ineluctable, a Titan, a genius, a divine creature.

Homer, the divine in art; Jesus the divine in life; Mussolini, the divine in action

Looking at him (me) is like looking at the sun: A man can not be seen but rather an immense flood of vibrations from the ether.

Claretta moans about her body her teeth her health the size of her breasts. If given the chance she prefers to stay in bed all day eating chocolates.

I must often think what I do not say, and say what I do not think. Yes, there is a real gap between the two Mussolinis. Sometime it is profound and terrible. Perhaps one day one of the two will beg an armistice, break his sword and submit. I still don't know which one.

My diet is composed of: meat, small portions quite rarely, but lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. My two daily meals are taken peasant-style. No coffee no tea and only an occasional glass of wine.

Though like the peace-loving bourgeois I do take a cup of camomile tea each afternoon. I do take 30 to 45 minutes of exercise daily and sleep readily from 11pm to 7am. I manage to read about 70 books per year, preferably novels and history books. Classics and occasional romances. I can read in French, German and English as well. I like Verdi, Wagner, and Rossini, but also like jazz especially when I can dance to it.

~

The key to my life as an administrator lies in my precision and diligence. I can boast that I am a first class bureaucrat. I sack any collaborators who are disorganized, confusing or time-wasters.

I have organized my activity through a division of labor, and a struggle against the dispersal of energy and time-wasting. It is this that explains the volume of work that I get through and the fact that I never get tired. I have turned my body into a motor, which is under constant review and control and which therefore runs with absolute regularity.

As for the Italians [MARINETTI: passeists, pasta-chefs, shop-keepers]: We are a young people who want and who ought to create and refuse to be a syndicate of hotel keepers and museum guards. Our artistic past is admirable. But as for me, I haven't been inside a museum more than once, er twice. Er.

[Outside CLARETTA overhears and looks dubious

Claretta is such a wonderful girl, but she is a complete Italian. She complains about her skin, her teeth, the shape and size of her breasts. If it were up to her she would stay in bed all eating chocolates.

MARINETTI

Crapun. Yes, yes, you. *Signor* Big-Head. Which Mussolini has showed up today and blessed us with his massive rock-like head, with his ultra-dynamic eyes that dart with the speed of automobiles on the Lombard planes.

MUSSOLINI

–

MARINETTI

Will it be the Mussolini who unites the people all classes in one unified and totalitarian whole and one proud people, dedicated to improving the lot of both worker and peasant the lot of women and throwing off the vile and stupid legacy of the past the church the monarchy the museum with ghastly store houses of old and boring passeist art, an Italy united in Fascism?

MUSSOLINI

Marinetti, always talking the same old crap.

MARINETTI

The Mussolini who hates the Germans worse than the English imperialists and the American plutocrats?

MUSSOLINI

Things are in disarray with Fascism but in a hundred years the whole world will sing the.

MARINETTI

Or the Mussolini who grovels before the Vatican and the lords of industry and the passeist lesser nobility of Rome and Naples and all the rest which one?

MUSSOLINI

I only stopped off here because I heard from the local police that you were here. In bad shape. Back from 23 months on the Eastern front they say. Is this true?

MARINETTI

Maybe the Mussolini who waits till he can see that yes Hitler appears to be winning the war yes till France has fallen and Belgium and Holland and that Norway has fallen that it is only a matter of time before England sues for peace.

MUSSOLINI

Yes yes I was prudent what of it what are you saying?

MARINETTI

Now you argue that we have nothing to fear from the Jews and that the anti-Semitism of the Germans is vulgar absurd and atrocious and your own mistress Margherita Sarfatti a Jew and the magazine *Gerarchia* you started with her and published fine theoretical fascist ideas about the unity and democracy and inherent truthfulness of the corporate state and but now yes and now publishes idiotic diatribes against the Jews.

MUSSOLINI

Ah but I am cunning because we have very few Jews in Italy and mostly they very good and loyal citizens my secretary even but it is necessary to make compromises. And furthermore it was my idea all along that by denouncing the Jews as the Nazis wished I have actually saved a great deal of them.

MARINETTI

His coat collar always turned up from a need to disguised the violent *Romagnolo* words hatching their plots in his mouth.

MUSSOLINI

–

MARINETTI

Tell that to the ones in the last month the Gestapo has hauled off.

MUSSOLINI

Ciano and Badoglio have betrayed me. Only blood can cancel so humiliating a page from the history of the *patria*. Parasites and traitors must be punished so that the peasants and workers and petit-bourgeois can unite in the cause of a reinvigorated Fascism.

[Pause of misplaced faith.

Everyone has betrayed me. I am crucified by my destiny. It is coming.

It is my singular agony to be betrayed by my own daughter.

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

My daughter Edda, whose husband Ciano was a traitor and a thief.

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

I tried unsuccessfully to have the death sentence commuted.

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

Ah. Only the malevolence of others stopped all requests for pardon from reaching my ears.

I wrote a letter of consolation.

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

Well you see the state I'm in.

~

MARINETTI

Your grandchild will write the book, *Quando il nonna fece fucilare papa*, When Grandpapa Had Daddy Shot.

MUSSOLINI

What I can see, Marinetti, full well full well is that after all the good I have done for you I can expect no sympathy.

Egoism, after all, is the law of human life. We are all animals nothing more nothing less. We scratch and kill for the hell of it and then piously talk about the human soul.

The people are weak. They need religion.

MARINETTI

Passeism you mean. And Popes and pasta, ugh.

~

MUSSOLINI

You are right I am a man apart. Not just a dirty peasant and merely a member of the herd. I cry out for action.

[Thoughtful Pause

What are you thinking, Marinetti?

MARINETTI

I am thinking about the Russians and how I went to St Petersburg and drank to the health of the Russian Futurists they drank to the health of the Italian Futurists and we both swore an allegiance for all time against the Germans

[So much thought neither is listening to the other. Much.

MUSSOLINI

I had forgotten. Yes, there are avenues of action open to me yet.

MARINETTI

That was in 1912 when the future of the future wore a different face

MUSSOLINI

Yes, there are options. I might take my crack troops to the Valtellina Valley, make a last ditch stand, then slip over the border to Switzerland. That would look good

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

I am sure I could expect protection from General Franco in Spain.

MARINETTI

–

MUSSOLINI

Juan Peron used to be military attache in Rome, so Argentina is clearly also an option.

Only how to get to these places. Perhaps even return now to Milan. Right now. Make a stand there. I am a great admirer of Stalin and who knows if a repetition of the miracle at Stalingrad is not possible here in this country.

Yes there are options but I must consider them all carefully. I must think I must I must think clearly.

MARINETTI

Provolone

~

MARINETTI

While you were groveling before that little asparagus Vittorio Emmanuelle and defending your record at the 187th Grand Council of Fascism in the *Sala della Papagallo* the Room of the Parrot boasting about your iron memory and holding your poor aching belly do you know where I was.

MUSSOLINI

–

I was at Kursk.

MUSSOLINI

What, what are you saying?

MARINETTI

The Kursk Salient. A battle. A real battle in a real war.

MUSSOLINI

-

MUSSOLINI

In the Room of Parrots. I was deposed. Deposed and humiliated.

MARINETTI

The Germans massed two thousand tanks to the north and south of the salient around Kursk. But the *coglione* that little prickhead Hitler ignored (as usual) his generals. Even Mannstein the most intelligent of them. And so.

All over the tanks rumbled and exploded, brewing up in a scene from Dante's inferno. I have never seen anything like it. And the sound of the battle was deafening even at the distance of hundred kilometers.

MUSSOLINI

I can't believe this is happening to me.

MARINETTI

Listen Mussolini there is no room in my head for the sound of it all.

After five days of the madness combat was still deadlocked. A thousand tanks destroyed on each side. Eighty thousand on our side dead, and about the same on the other. News reached the Prick-head that the Allies had invaded Sicily. In his wisdom *Il Coglione* decided it would be best to break off the

fight and send his best SS Divisions to the West for the struggle there: *Grossdeutschland Division* and *SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* and *SS Division Das Reich* and *SS Division Totenkopf*. The Death's Head Division.

The allies landed at Lampedusa, remember, *Duce*? The only allied casualty was an English soldier who was bitten by a donkey.

~

MUSSOLINI

My conscience is clear, Marinetti. I have worked for 21 years without a break and with complete disinterest and perfect loyalty.

MARINETTI

And then last summer while you were trembling and sharing your nightmares at Rastenberg after the failed assassination attempt on *il Coglione*, Hitler wrapped in a blanket his right arm dead and you wide-eyed with shock an old man planted like a basket of laundry on a rickety stool, the two of you two old *passeists*, do you know where I was?

MUSSOLINI

We Italians are not alone when it comes to betrayals.

MARINETTI

Do you know where I was?

MUSSOLINI

Hitler pleaded with me to hold Florence at all costs. At all costs the city of his dreams.

MARINETTI

Do you know where I was ? DO YOU KNOW WHERE I WAS?

I was in the forests and swamps of White Russia. Operation Bagration.

The collapse of Army Group center.

The partisans killed and mutilated the Germans they captured and nailed genitalia and other parts to the trees along the roads and pathways so we would know what this was and why and who was hunter and who was hunted.

I still don't know how I got out of there alive.

MUSSOLINI

—

MARINETTI

Three weeks on a flat-bed railway car, blazing in the September sun and shivering at night with nothing but a filthy tarp for protection.

MUSSOLINI

—

[Stares at MARINETTI'S great coat

MARINETTI

The coat just happened.

[Pause

Happened to fit.

Coglione got his war, just like you, *Duce*.

MUSSOLINI

I can't believe this is happening to me.

~

MUSSOLINI

And which Marinetti do I see before me hunched in the gloom like an old roue the kind of depraved old playboy who dyes his hair jet.

MARINETTI

Crapun.

MUSSOLINI

I never wanted war the English Imperialists and American Plutocrats wanted war.

MARINETTI

We should have bombed Florence and Venice. Levelled them with the stink of their hideous museums and churches and monasteries. With their crowds of hideous Passeist tourists.

MUSSOLINI

I never wanted war I wanted Italy to be proud and united and respected.

MARINETTI

The war we Futurists glorified was the struggle against old cathedrals and idiocy and police dimwittedness and clotted blood and the gallows and espionage and bigotry and papalism and the Inquisition and the requisition bedbugs and priests.

The war the Germans glorify is a fat feast for crows and hyenas.

MUSSOLINI

Too late. Too late.

MARINETTI

If I was a German I'd be treated like a fallen hero stretched out on my humble pallet and a young girl with doe eyes would

gently swipe my brow and attend to my bandages up there there, with the Luftwaffe flyers who kill soullessly from miles away. A young girl like all the charming young girls with soft eyes like the young intoxicated Futurist women I met in St Peterburg thirty years ago.

MUSSOLINI
Bolshevists. Ha.

MARINETTI
When we drank champagne toasts and swore eternal friendship and vowed we would once more gather to lift glasses and celebrate our great victory in Berlin over the Germans. Yes the Germans that is what we swore.

MUSSOLINI
-

MARINETTI
Germans with their heaviness and philosophy and crudeness and brutality and archaeology and rigidity and analysis and methodical imitation and all the rest of their obsessive numismatics and pedantry and constipation and all the crowd of pale little *Coglione* prickheads all with their identical black little dabs of a moustaches loathsome.

[A pause of obsessive numismatics

MUSSOLINI
The Germans have some good qualities. Beethoven was a German and so was Wagner.

~

MARINETTI
I am the Marinetti who is both for and against war, war in all forms. I am the Marinetti who believes in the ideals of the

exhilaration of speed and of factories and of all things manufactured. Of all things made of metal. I believe in the metallization of the human race, and I am also the Marinetti who believes that these things too when the time comes will be as passe and as dreadful as the priests and bourgeois landlords in their bathrobes and slippers.

[He notices that he in his agitation has gotten up and that under his SS great coat is a bathrobe and that there are slippers on his feet.

MUSSOLINI

Ha. Look at your feet.

~

MARINETTI

I have become passe.

MUSSOLINI

Guess we're the bad guys

MARINETTI

-

MUSSOLINI

Guess the whole world hates us because we're the bad guys

Yeah

Guess so

[A bad guy pause

Maybe we shouldn't have done all those bad things

Maybe

Maybe what?

MARINETTI

—

MUSSOLINI

Maybe if we say we're sorry it'll be a little bit just a little bit better

You think that?

Like repent but not quite repent

I'm really sorry for all the bad things I did

Just like that

Just like that I mean

[A repentant pause

I'm really sorry

I mean I'm really sorry. I didn't know what I was doing, and if I had known what I was doing I would not have done those bad things

[They consider the sky the lake the road the wind]

~

MARINETTI

But there is a difference between us, Mussolini.

MUSSOLINI

I am wasting my time, Marinetti. You are just the same as all the rest. I am going.

MARINETTI

Because the Marinetti who will one day meet in Berlin to salute the Russian Futurists and drink champagne with the beautiful futurist girls girls with flashing eyes is at least as possible as the Marinetti you see before you a man haunted by the slaughter and conflagration and the noise of deafening concussions.

A man haunted by Kursk.

And the horror of slogging through an endless sea of. Of muck.

Because. Because.

[A futurist pause.

Our Futurist futures are all neatly folded up like a score of elegant dress shirts in the mahogany dresser of a man very much like my father. My father who worked and made a fortune as a merchant and official provisioner to His Excellency the Khedive of Alexandria in Egypt.

MUSSOLINI

I give orders and no one obeys me. Everyone has failed me, even you Marinetti who was such a light in 1919 and so promising.

MARINETTI

I have here a poem.

MUSSOLINI

When we sacked the offices of *Avanti* of the socialist newspaper.

I have here a poem I have written for my daughter, Luce.
Luce, Light.

MUSSOLINI

Claretta. Claretta. [He goes out.

MARINETTI

Do you want to hear the poem?

[A terrible, hollow pause.
He puts down the paper and is still.]

We should have bombed Florence. We should have bombed
pasta-loving Venice. Flattened the place.

Slow fade to Black.

End of Play (not quite).

[Time stops:

A new and bright wee scene: MUSSOLINI pops in sight
unexpectedly once more. MARINETTI tries to ignore this.

MUSSOLINI

I am thinking about my head again, Marinetti. And just how
remarkable it is– as a physical object.

[MARINETTI looks at his old friend closely and in disbelief.]

My head is like a rock, as you once wrote. That is true. But it
is not filled with insensible stone, no, I believe my head is far
too ...

[Pause

Too something, something poetical.

You are the poet, tell me; so tell me what is the correct metaphor?

[Pause for further reflection

Nor is it empty; totally empty; nor is it totally empty that is.

[MARINETTI turns away; then suddenly grabs MUSSOLINI's arm:]

MUSSOLINI

-

MARINETTI

Listen. Malaparte tells a story of the glass eye.

Nazi General Dietl is leading his battalion through Poland on a murky day, all snakes of smoke, flares, fires and a sea of bugs. The town they have just passed, nameless, burnt to the ground and a mess. Dead people everywhere.

A dead Jew hangs from a tree and a dead dog also hangs, both swaying, hanging just there, on the same bough of the same tree.

The General has the habit of adjusting his glass eye in the perimeter of the eye socket. Nevertheless, the eye being glass cannot see.

Gunshots. One two three. A bullet whizzes just by, splinters the bough of a tree.

The General snaps his dark stick and a company of troops slide off back to the dead, burning town, but not entirely dead it appears.

Time passes. The General Dittle adjusts the play of the glass ball in the eye's orbit.
He does not like this war anymore; this war against Russia; there is beginning to be something about it distinctly troubling; troubling to the rectilinear, passe mind of General Dietldum.

General Dottle's hetman salutes, holds a rifle in one hand, and a boy in the other, the boy about ten years old, by the scruff of his neck.

General Dultidum possesses his own ten year old son back in Berlin.

He paces he paces he thinks he thinks this is not the war he wishes to fight a war against ten year old boys.

"Why did you shoot at us," he asks.

"Why are you German," the boy replies.

—

He paces he thinks he paces.

"So.

If you can say ..."

He gestures vaguely as though to indicate something resembling

hope, in the symbol of a bird

to indicate precisely, that is:

"Can say which is the glass eye I shall forgive this act of yours".

"The left," the boy shoots back with no hesitation.

—

A pause of what the hell.

"How could you tell?"

"It had a little life in it".

—

General Dittodummdittl paces he paces and paces and stops and turns to the blazing boy.

He laughs.

He laughs and embraces the boy.

He commands that the boy be dressed in silver and gold. It is done. He commands that the boy be driven to Berlin in a golden coach pulled by ten white horses. It is done. He commands that, upon arriving in that fair city, the boy be married to Hitler's daughter. It is done. Hitler is jubilant. Berlin is jubilant. Germany is jubilant.

Hitler is so very happy for her daughter.

MUSSOLINI

—

~

No, my head is light, but it is not empty; so ...

[Thinking hard

I imagine it must be filled with something splendid, splendid and luminous: Orchids perhaps, and butterflies; yes and plenty of sunlight.

Orchids and butterflies.

What a happy thought!

[Pause filled sunlight; MUSSOLINI strides manfully out.

MARINETTI whispering
My god, what did I do in all those years?

~

[Claretta walks slowly in and sits down. Lights a cigarette and begins talking quietly:

I think I'd like to study fashion and design once this dreadful and boring war is over. His daughter, Edda, is such a frightful drunk. She'll never forgive Ben for Galeazzo's execution, but he did all he could to prevent it. The Germans would have perhaps murdered poor Ben the *Duce* if he had pardoned him what else could he do?

She's peevish and nasty and not as pretty as me.

I don't think the Americans are all that bad. But Ben does, swears up and down about how bad they are how they kill innocent people in their nasty bombing raids. Ben says Americans are shallow, and not deep thinkers the way we Italians are.

But Ben and I love to go to American movies and we love Mack Sennett and Laurel and Hardy.

And I don't think Africans are all that bad either. I like jazz music and so does Ben, especially if you can dance to it. And Ben's grandson (Vittorio's son) Romano is studying to be a jazz musician. The SS guards at Salo don't like it when he plays the boogie woogie but that doesn't stop him

Ben says bad things about Jews and Africans when the German Ambassador, Rann, is around but he only does that to please him

People are complicated, and full of pieces that don't belong in the same heap.

Like a bundle of twisted sticks tied together with string, the kind of thing you see peasants carrying as they walk along the road

Italian men are so excitable; they are always doing something. Do! Do! Do! Everything is a circus of action and reaction. Flying aeroplanes. Dueling with sabers. Jumping up and down. If it was up to me I would stay in bed all day eating chocolates.

Oh just look at me. My skin is not good My teeth are too small. And I am coming down with a cold, all these mists and fog. One could catch the tuberculosis. Italy is supposed to be a sunny place. Where is *Signor* Sun hiding? I am worried about the shape of my breasts. They are not sitting right.

[She takes her time and goes out. Pause.

Maybe the play is really over this time?

Maybe not.]