

Retrograde Chapbooks

FUTURIST MANIFESTO

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Lucas Battich

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by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

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by Lucas Battich

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Standing on the world's summit we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars! Instead, lift up your head! Take care not to repeat those infamous words! But we will not listen! What does it matter? All right! Perhaps! We know just what our beautiful false intelligence affirms: "We are only the sum and the prolongation of our ancestors," it says. Of course! I know them! All right!

Your objections? Standing on the world's summit, we launch once more our challenge to the stars! It is because you do not even remember being alive! Does this surprise you? For they are nourished by fire, hatred and speed! We are not out of breath, our hearts are not in the least tired.

Look at us!

The oldest among us are not yet thirty, and yet we have already wasted treasures, treasures of strength, love, courage and keen will, hastily, deliriously, without thinking, with all our might, till we are out of breath. For art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice. And strong healthy Injustice will shine radiantly from their eyes.

They will crowd around us, panting with anguish and

disappointment, and exasperated by our proud indefatigable courage, will hurl themselves forward to kill us, with all the more hatred as their hearts will be drunk with love and admiration for us. They will find us at last one winter's night in the depths of the country in a sad hangar echoing with the notes of the monotonous rain, crouched near our trembling aeroplanes, warming our hands at the wretched fire which our books of today will make when they flame gaily beneath the glittering flight of their pictures.

But we shall not be there. They will come against us from afar, leaping on the light cadence of their first poems, clutching the air with their predatory fingers and sniffing at the gates of the academies the good scent of our decaying spirits, already promised to the catacombs of the libraries. When we are forty let younger and stronger men than we throw us in the waste paper basket like useless manuscripts!

The oldest among us are not yet thirty years old: we have therefore at least ten years to accomplish our task. Undermine the foundation of venerable towns! Take the picks and hammers! Let the glorious canvases swim ashore! Divert the canals to flood the cellars of the museums! Heap up the fire to the shelves of the libraries! Here they are!

Let the good incendiaries with charred fingers come! But we will have none of it, we, the young, strong and living Futurists! It is, perhaps, some sort of balm for their wounds, the admirable past, at a moment when the future is denied them.

For the dying, for invalids and for prisoners it may be all right. is for artists what prolonged supervision by the parents is for intelligent young men, drunk with their own talent and

ambition.

Indeed daily visits to museums, libraries and academies (those cemeteries of wasted effort, calvaries of crucified dreams, registers of false starts!). Do you want to waste the best part of your strength in a useless admiration of the past, from which you will emerge exhausted, diminished, trampled on?

To admire an old picture is to pour our sensibility into a funeral urn instead of casting it forward with violent spurts of creation and action.

What can you find in an old picture except the painful contortions of the artist trying to break uncrossable barriers which obstruct the full expression of his dream? Do you want to rot? Do you want to poison yourselves? But to take our sadness, our fragile courage and our anxiety to the museum every day, that we cannot admit! We can even imagine placing flowers once a year at the feet of the Gioconda! To make a visit once a year, as one goes to see the graves of our dead once a year, that we could allow! Reciprocal ferocity of the painters and sculptors who murder each other in the same museum with blows of line and colour. Public dormitories where you sleep side by side for ever with beings you hate or do not know. Truly identical in their sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know each other.

Museums, cemeteries! We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries.

Italy has been too long the great second-hand market.

It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding

Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries.

11) We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-coloured and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons: the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; bridges with the leap of gymnasts flung across the diabolic cutlery of sunny rivers: adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon; great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle, and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.

10) We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.

9) We want to glorify war — the only cure for the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed. Time and Space died yesterday. What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible?

8) We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character.

7) Beauty exists only in struggle.

6) The poet must spend himself with warmth, glamour and prodigality to increase the enthusiastic fervour of the primordial elements.

5) We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit. A roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath.

4) We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.

3) Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber.

2) The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt.

1) We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.

MANIFESTO OF FUTURISM

Then with my face covered in good factory mud, covered with metal scratches, useless sweat and celestial grime, amidst the complaint of staid fishermen and angry naturalists, we dictated our first will and testament to all the living men on earth.

We thought it was dead, my good shark, but I woke it with a single caress of its powerful back, and it was revived run-

ning as fast as it could on its fins. It rose slowly leaving in the ditch, like scales, its heavy coachwork of good sense and its upholstery of comfort. With patient and tentative care they raised high enormous grappling irons to fish up my car, like a vast shark that had run aground. A crowd of fishermen and gouty naturalists crowded terrified around this marvel.

As I raised my body, mud-spattered and smelly, I felt the red hot poker of joy deliciously pierce my heart. I savoured a mouthful of strengthening muck which recalled the black teat of my Sudanese nurse! A factory gutter!

Oh, maternal ditch, half full of muddy water! I stopped short, and in disgust hurled myself — vlan! — head over heels in a ditch. Pouah! What a bore! Their stupid swaying got in my way.

As soon as I had said these words, I turned sharply back on my tracks with the mad intoxication of puppies biting their tails, and suddenly there were two cyclists disapproving of me and tottering in front of me like two persuasive but contradictory reasons. Let us feed the unknown, not from despair, but simply to enrich the unfathomable reservoirs of the Absurd!”

“Let us leave good sense behind like a hideous husk and let us hurl ourselves, like fruit spiced with pride, into the immense mouth and breast of the world!

Death, tamed, went in front of me at each corner offering me his hand nicely, and sometimes lay on the ground with a noise of creaking jaws giving me velvet glances from the bottom of puddles.

We drove on, crushing beneath our burning wheels, like

shirt-collars under the iron, the watch dogs on the steps of the houses. No reason to die unless it is the desire to be rid of the too great weight of our courage!

And yet we had no ideal Mistress stretching her form up to the clouds, nor yet a cruel Queen to whom to offer our corpses twisted into the shape of Byzantine rings!

And we hunted, like young lions, death with its black fur dappled with pale crosses, who ran before us in the vast violet sky, palpable and living. "Smell," I exclaimed, "smell is good enough for wild beasts!" Here and there unhappy lamps in the windows taught us to despise our mathematical eyes. A great sweep of madness brought us sharply back to ourselves and drove us through the streets, steep and deep, like dried up torrents. I lay along mine like a corpse on its bier, but I suddenly revived again beneath the steering wheel — a guillotine knife — which threatened my stomach.

We went up to the three snorting machines to caress their breasts. "Nothing equals the splendour of its red sword which strikes for the first time in our millennial darkness. Here is they very first sunrise on earth! Let us go! We must break down the gates of life to test the bolts and the padlocks! We are going to be present at the birth of the centaur and we shall soon see the first angels fly! At last Mythology and the mystic cult of the ideal have been left behind. Let us go!" I said.

"Come, my friends!" As we listened to the last faint prayer of the old canal and the crumbling of the bones of the moribund palaces with their green growth of beard, suddenly the hungry automobiles roared beneath our windows.

Then the silence increased.

Then we were suddenly distracted by the rumbling of huge double decker trams that went leaping by, streaked with light like the villages celebrating their festivals, which the Po in flood suddenly knocks down and uproots, and, in the rapids and eddies of a deluge, drags down to the sea. Alone with the engineers in the infernal stokeholes of great ships, alone with the black spirits which rage in the belly of rogue locomotives, alone with the drunkards beating their wings against the walls.

Our hearts were filled with an immense pride at feeling ourselves standing quite alone, like lighthouses or like the sentinels in an outpost, facing the army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs. And trampling underfoot our native sloth on opulent Persian carpets, we have been discussing right up to the limits of logic and scrawling the paper with demented writing. We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls, because like them they were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts.

Retrograde Chapbooks

Retrograde:

adj.: directed or moving backwards.

verb: revert to an earlier and inferior condition.

The Oxford Dictionary

In Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone system, *retrograde* refers to the operation of time-reversing the tones in a musical series, while maintaining the original pitches and rhythms on the sequence. As a literary counterpart to Schoenberg's retrogression technique, *Retrograde Chapbooks* presents existing texts from the history of modernism and the avant-garde, where all sentences have been re-arranged in the inverse order. The immediate meaning and readability of each sentence is maintained, but the overall sense is displaced within the text as a whole.

Retrograde Chapbooks aims to celebrate the original texts, while at the same time proposes an inquiry on the forward linearity of historical development in culture, by performing a literal "going back" movement to modernist paradigms.

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