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Andrea G.G. Parasiliti. *All'ombra del vulcano. Il Futurismo in Sicilia e l'Etna di Marinetti*. Olschki, 2020. Pp. 288.

It seems unconscionable for an artistic and social movement, today, to glorify violence and dynamism, and yet in Italy, at the beginning of the 20th century, the avant-garde movement of Futurism did just that. Led by key figures such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Giacomo Balla, the movement acclaimed modernity and aimed to liberate Italy from the weight of its past. Like the Fascists, the Futurists were Italian nationalists, radicals, admirers of physical strength, and were opposed to parliamentary democracy. Yet, it is relevant to notice that, although Marinetti founded the Futurist Political Party in early 1918, which was later absorbed into Mussolini's *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, he then opposed the Fascism's later exaltation of existing institutions, and walked out of the party in 1920.

Andrea Parasiliti intends to shed light on the less known Sicilian experience of Italian Futurism, and in particular, on the emotional relationship between Marinetti and the powerful force represented by Mount Etna. In pursuing this goal, he appears to follow a stylistic model as unconventional as the Futurist free-word poetry: this volume is organized in an original manner, combining documents and images from Futurist magazines and archives together with critical analysis. In the first part of this study, the focus is on two Sicilian Futurist magazines (*La Balza Futurista* and *Haschisch*); in the second part, the discussion centers around Marinetti's Sicily and his relationship with its most famous volcano: Etna.

One of the prized passages in the first part of the volume is Futurist Francesco Cangiullo's account of the casual meeting of Marinetti and Giovanni Verga, contained in his unusual novel entitled *Le serate futuriste: un romanzo storico vissuto (The futurist evenings: a lived historical novel)*. Verga, a well respected Italian realist writer of the late 19th century best known for his depictions of traditional life in his native Sicily, would intuitively be regarded as the antithesis of modernity. Yet, quite surprisingly, Marinetti admired the older writer, also due to his "ungrammatically" offenses to syntax as genial explosions that were intolerant of periods, commas, etc. He defined Giovanni Verga as a "fiery original creator turned toward the future" (9).

The second part of the volume begins with a homage to Maria Corti, a philologist, literary critic, and novelist, who, on the verge of the new millennium, published a monograph on Mount Etna as seen through literature from ancient to modern times, with references to the sacred and pagan worlds. What follows is the kernel of this study: an analysis of the literary relationship of Marinetti with the most famous of the Sicilian volcanoes. First of all, Parasiliti introduces its readers to one of the most relevant definitions of Futurism published by Marinetti in *LA "DIVINA COMMEDIA" è un verminaio di glossatori* (*The DIVINE COMEDY is a maggot house of annotators*, 1915): “Il Futurismo è un gran masso di metalli incandescenti, che abbiamo con le nostre mani divelto dalle profondità di un vulcano, e con le nostre mani sollevato verso il cielo” (p.129), or, in English, “Futurism is a great boulder of incandescent metals, which we have disengaged from the depth of a volcano with our hands, and with our hands have raised toward the sky” (my translation).

The merit of this volume resides in the acknowledgment and assessment of a unique genealogy, based on the impact of a region and geological territory on a national movement, which is unique in the critical history of Futurism. Traditionally, literary movements have followed the lines of history and geography, not paying too much attention to geology and its distinctive aesthetics. It is therefore exciting, in the context of this volume, to track down Filippo Marinetti’s inspiration, fed also by the Romantic French writer Victor Hugo, in promoting the Sicilian volcano as a symbol of the poetic imagination, whose cliffs represent natural genius and greatness.

Three years after the publication of the *Manifesto of Futurism*, Marinetti paid homage to Mount Etna in *Le Monoplan du Pape: Roman Politique en vers libres* (*The Pope’s Airplane: Political Novel in Free Verse*), published first in French in 1912, then in the Italian translation in 1914. This work contains all the great Futurist themes: the challenge to time and space; the rejection of the moonlight as a poetic subject of the past; the repudiation of the dark that obfuscates logic; the conquest of the Adriatic Sea; the profound aversion for Rome, seen as a city of traditionalism. Here the lyrical “I” of the writer flies over Italy on an airplane and, offering a comprehensive aerial poetic vision of the peninsula, finally lands in Sicily, which features as “the new heart of Italy.” Marinetti’s admiration for the Sicilian people derives precisely from the perception of their volcanic nature. In chapter two, “I consigli del Vulcano” (*The Volcano’s Advice*) and three, “Nei domini di mio padre, il Vulcano” (*In the domains of my father, the Volcano*), the writer directly addresses Etna through an intimate relationship charged with strong emotions.

This political novel written in free verse can be read in relation to the debate on Italian intervention in the Great War that raged between the war’s outbreak and Italy’s

entry into it in May 1915. In it, Marinetti receives orders from Etna to go to war against Austria in order to complete the process of re-construction of Italy and the Italians that began with the Risorgimento. Politics, however, soon gives way to art, and Etna is presented as a burning theater, with the flames acting as members of an enthusiastic audience, and the center of its crater as a smoldering circus. The protagonist proclaims to be gleefully intoxicated with this fiery sea and spectacle of violent beauty in action. The lessons of Futurism are clear in the volcanic force of creation and destruction, eliciting a raw sentiment of furor and aggression.

Parasiliti quotes generous passages from the work, and guides our understanding of Marinetti's cult of the ephemeral, in line with the Futurist avant-garde. This critical study shows how Mount Etna turns into the embodiment of Futurism at large, of the principles of art and life; of anti-traditionalism; of the Heraclitean *Panta Rei*; and of war as the foundation of everything. Through art, Marinetti conjures up the volcano's desire to see the Italians at war, in a continuous eruption of heroism. Etna, therefore, becomes the tangible and scorching sign of the visceral battle of the elements—the place in which war is justified because it is seen to be first displayed in nature. In the fervor of this volcanic representation, the protagonist metamorphoses into the offspring of the volcano: the father of the Italian Futurism thus becomes volcano himself and the son of Etna.

The study meticulously describes the actual visits of Marinetti and a group of Futurist artists and enthusiasts to the crater of Etna, featuring photos, letters, postcards, and other writing for the reader's stimulated interest. There is also a captivating analysis of *Vulcani*, which is a series of interconnected pieces contained in *Prigionieri e Vulcani* (*Prisoners and Volcanoes*, 1927) that represent a specimen of Futurist Theater authored by Marinetti. The book ends with an evaluation of *L'Aeropoema di Gesù* (*The Airpoem of Jesus*, 1944)—the finest example of Futurist sacred poetry written by Marinetti and containing a chapter called *La carne dei vulcani* (*The volcanoes' flesh*).

From a social studies perspective, what all of these Sicilian and volcanic Futurist expressions have in common is a philosophy of art that appears to be quite misogynistic. Although Parasiliti's main intent is to bring to light an aesthetic that is linked to a distinctive territory and literary sensibility, it is worth also noting the gendering of Marinetti's volcanic aesthetic. If, on the one hand, women are described in these works as an embodiment of the flames of the volcanic fire, hot and waiting to be loved in anticipation of the battle, on the other hand, Marinetti calls for the decapitation of all those women who oppose war. Of course, this view is in line with Fascist notions of hegemonic masculinity and the consequent objectification of women, but beyond the party politics, this reader would love to see a continuation of the discussion on the volcanic aesthetic, in gendered terms as well as in different geographic areas. In what

way is Marinetti's Etna different from his perception of Vesuvius? Is Etnean Futurism different from Vesuvian Futurism, and if so, why? Is Vesuvius a mother mountain or a father mountain as Etna is seen? Many of these questions and additional ones might be answered in a different book thanks to this study, which has successfully contributed to establish volcanic aesthetics as a legitimate theoretical field.

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