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## Italian Futurism in the Polish Press

### Abstract

The topic of this article is the role of the Polish press in disseminating knowledge about Italian Futurism in the years 1909–1939. It is the press, both daily and more or less specialized periodicals on culture, that is the most important and unrivalled source of information on the Italian avant-garde in Poland. The collected bibliography, on which the present text is based, contains one hundred sixty-five references. The published materials can be divided into several groups: critical sketches, articles and all kinds of informative notes by Polish authors on Futurism, translations of Futurist theoretical texts, poetry and theatre, as well as reproductions of works of art, photographs and drawings portraying Futurists. From the beginning, the press commentators devoted most of their attention to the figure and activities of Marinetti. In the '30s, the interest in Futurism was effectively fuelled by his visit to Poland in relation to the staging of his drama *Prisoners* in the theatre in Lviv. Painting and theatrical experiments (mainly by Prampolini) also compose a large bibliography. Besides, Futurist literary manifestos influenced the new Polish poetry, creating hot press polemics, and the language of media itself. In addition to aesthetic issues, attention was drawn to Futurist proposals to rebuild social relations and to the link between Futurism and Fascism. Among the most important promoters of the Italian movement we list two poets, Peiper and Kurek, as well as writers and translators Kołtoński and Boyé, while the most well-deserved press titles are “Wiadomości Literackie” (Literary News) and “Zwrotnica” (Switches).

**Keywords:** Italian Futurism, Polish press, critical sketches, articles, informative notes, theoretical texts, poetry, theatre, reproductions of works of art, photographs, drawings, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Tadeusz Peiper, Jalu Kurek, Edward Boyé, Aleksander Kołtoński.

### First records (1909–1915)

The birth of Futurism in Italy has been received in Poland with moderate but sympathetic interest. Its proponents were well-known newspaper columnists who generally had tried their hand at poetry and other literary forms. The first one to

react to the new artistic and sociological phenomenon was Ignacy Grabowski, who published his text in "Świat" (The World) eight months after the announcement of Marinetti's founding manifesto.<sup>1</sup> Grabowski was a writer, journalist and well-known social activist, and the weekly "Świat" was one of the most interesting illustrated magazines in Warsaw in the first half of the twentieth century, which meant that the 'announcement' of Futurism in Poland was held in style and in front of a large audience.

The author comments wittily about the name of the movement adopted by Marinetti, revealing at the same time the cultural background of the main slogans. The playful and flowing style of expression together with Grabowski's genuine interest allowed his readers to look at the emerging artistic ferment in Italy with curiosity and with some degree of envy, because in general public opinion, contemporary Poland needed an invigorating breath of a new aesthetic. Grabowski clearly formulates such an opinion while being quite aware that many slogans of Italian Futurism could sound at least inappropriate in the Polish context:

The use of these words in the bombastic manifesto of signor Marinetti, which talks about the destruction of museums and flooding of libraries, in addition to the strong herostratism of the gesture, would have a strong sense of irony to us, where these 'respectable cadavers' are [...] scarce. Not only paintings are lacking but also, in places, plaster falls off the walls of our homes.

A month later, Wilhelm Feldman concludes his text in a very similar way.<sup>2</sup> Commenting on the anniversary of the National Museum in Cracow and its expansion plans, he quotes the echoes of the Futurist campaign against museums and their collections. He cites several passages from the founding manifesto of Futurism, and certainly he does not seem to be outraged by them. He only offers a reminder that the new art grows out of the old one, and the "old art – as long as it's art – is always young".

After this official introduction of Futurism to the Polish public, during the next two years, as it seems, there appeared no other text dedicated to the topic. This situation changed in late 1911 thanks to Cezary Jellenta.<sup>3</sup> Associated for years with the world of media, he was an editor and columnist and a very active promoter of Polish culture abroad, where he delivered countless lectures. Now, popularizing the Italian artistic movement, he also referred to fragments of the founding manifesto. Compared to previous critics, he took a somewhat more cautious stand on the young Italian artists, though like those critics, he congratulated the Futurists on their zeal in breaking artistic barriers.

The first noticeable wave of interest in Futurism appears, however, only in 1912, after the exhibition of Futurist painting is organized by Marinetti in 1912 in Paris and London. This event drew the attention of many correspondents and commentators to the Futuristic achievements in the fields of the visual arts. It was

<sup>1</sup> I. Grabowski, *Najnowsze prądy w literaturze europejskiej. Futuryzm* (The newest currents in European Literature. Futurism), "Świat" 1909, no. 40, p. 5 and no. 41, p. 2–5.

<sup>2</sup> W. Feldman, *Z życia i sztuki* (From life and art), "Krytyka" 1909, no. 11.

<sup>3</sup> C. Jellenta, *Futuryzm* (Futurism), "Literatura i Sztuka" 1911, no. 42 and 43.

the young, rebellious painters who, from the very beginning, became the movement's main driving force. They launched themselves impetuously into the aesthetic adventure alongside Marinetti: as early as 1910, they announced two more manifestos about painting, which they later put into practice. Thus were born the canvases of Balla, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo and Severini, opposing static Cubism with dynamics and motion.

It is due to these specific characteristics that Futurism echoed so strongly in contemporary European art. It is not surprising then that from now on Polish correspondents also devoted so much attention to the Futurist visual arts, as we will discuss below in more detail.

The year 1914 brought the first information about Futuristic music and theatre, as well as the first conclusions of its social propositions. Significant in this context are articles by Anna Limprechtówna and Aleksander Kołtoński. Limprechtówna<sup>4</sup> proposes a synthetic review of the main points of the Futurist program, quoting passages from manifestos, thus informing her readers about the socio-political and cultural origins of the movement and about the main views on the cultural and socio-economic reality of its representatives. Even before Futurism was born, she had published in the press of that time her bold thesis on emancipation, and now with genuine enthusiasm she puts forward the ideas of rebuilding the existing social norms in the age of industrialization, and in particular stresses the need for the emancipation of women and the replacement of the traditionally understood institution of family by a more adequate form of coexistence. Limprechtówna emphasizes the Futurists' faith in the fetishes of contemporary living (electricity, machines) – the elements of the Futurists' program which in the first Polish reports had been overlooked or considered irrelevant and which will only be taken up by Polish Futurist artists<sup>5</sup> after a free Poland faces its first real chances of industrialization.

From the perspective of five years after the official launch of Futurism, the cultural dimension it brought to the Italian reality is presented by Kołtoński<sup>6</sup> in "Krytyka" (Criticism). His sketch can serve even today as a competent, well-tailored compendium of knowledge about the movement. The author not only discusses the achievements of the Futurists in various fields of art (literature, painting, sculpture, music), but above all expertly outlines the literary, philosophical, political and social background of Futurism. He also highlights the socio-political context in which Futurism was born, the "violent, exploding patriotism" from which directly results irredentism<sup>7</sup> and the idea of freedom seeking a fiercely won

<sup>4</sup> Orsyd [A. Limprechtówna], *Futuryzm* (Futurism), "Echo Literacko-Artystyczne" 1914, fasc. 1.

<sup>5</sup> The establishment by Jagiellonian University students Bruno Jasiński and Stanisław Młodożeniec of a Futurist club, "Katarynka" (Barrel Organ), in Cracow is considered the official beginning of Futurism in Poland. In: R. Eminowicz, *Futurists in Cracow*, "Zdrój" 1919, no.5. This text relates to the opening of "Katarynka" on the 13th of March 1920, and while describing the performing artists as "fourth-rank cabaret" it also deplores the fact that the public enjoyed it so well.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kołtoński, *O futuryzmie jako zjawisku kulturalnym i artystycznym* (On Futurism as a cultural and artistic phenomenon), "Krytyka" 1914, v. 42, fasc. 6 and v. 43, fasc. 13–14.

<sup>7</sup> Irredentism was a radical political movement in Italy of the 19th and 20th centuries directed towards the unification of all lands inhabited by Italians.

battle for absolute priority. It is in this area that one should look for an explanation of the Futurist attitude towards women, infamous for its scary-sounding declarations. Its superficial interpretation led to an increase in confusion, which the author tries to explain. He mentions as well the Futuristic reflection on sexuality, in which two concepts collide: the degradation of sexuality to its sheer physiological function and its rehabilitation as “an essential element of the dynamism of life”.

In proposing such a wide range of references, Kołtoński allows the Polish reader a more complete insight into the essence of Futurism and a better assessment of the significance of his proposals and accomplishments. Although many texts will be written about Futurism in the many following years, few will be able to match this one. To some extent, it is thanks to this text that we can conclude that the first five years of the development of Futurism, despite the somewhat impressionistic nature of the journalistic reports, were relayed to the Polish reader clearly and comprehensively.

Let's mention one more text dating from 1914, the author of which shares her impressions from encounters with Futurist art during her stay in Florence. One of her experiences was a Futurist evening.<sup>8</sup> As far as I know, this would be the only report on *serata futurista* posted in the Polish press, and its author – like other reporters – is far from condemning Futurist excesses. She writes: “Let's not condemn absolutely this movement [...] even if it appears to us as the most absurd: sometimes the least logical delirium (or) an unsuccessful attempt may push us toward new thoughts, new horizons. Remaining in place we can't do it and do not know how to do it, because it is opposed to life”.

During the First World War, reports from the Futurist front disappear from the Polish columns, only to return after the end of the war, in the now free Poland,<sup>9</sup> and continue to appear until the end of the '30s.

## Reception of the visual proposals of the Futurists

As mentioned above, the Futurist visual arts find considerable resonance among Polish journalists, and its success begins in 1912 when the Futurist painters presented their achievements outside of Italy for the first time. Reviews of the exhibition organized then in Paris and London were published by Tadeusz Nalepiński,<sup>10</sup> Witold Bunikiewicz<sup>11</sup> and Jellenta.<sup>12</sup> Their opinions are representative of the public's view of Futurist art back then. For example, a certain reluctance to the new style is perceptible in Jellenta's attitude along with the

<sup>8</sup> M. Sławińska, *Kilka słów o futuryzmie* (A few words about Futurism), “Kłósy Ukraińskie” 1914, no. 2, 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> Poland retrieves independence on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 after 123 years of captivity.

<sup>10</sup> T. Nalepiński, *Wystawa futurystów* (Exhibition of Futurists), „Sfinks” 1912, v. 18, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> W. Bunikiewicz, *Przegląd artystyczno-literacki* (Artistic and Literary Review), „Literatura i Sztuka” 1912, no.9 and 10.

<sup>12</sup> C. Jellenta, *Futuryści-dywizjoniści. Manifest malarzy* (Futurists-Divisionists. Painters' manifesto), “Rydwán” 1912, p. 179.

belief that this direction of change in the field of aesthetics is inevitable. The article by Nalepiński is marked by a sincere interest in the subject, grounded in true knowledge and artistic sensibility. While Nalepiński and Jellenta show positive attitudes to the Futurist proposals in painting, Bunikiewicz's position is definitely critical. He repeats the reproaches that Futurists often met in France, claiming that "what is good is not their own. They annexed the philosophical theories of Bergson, picked up the idea of form from the Cubists and value of simplicity from the independent primitives, and the most cynical academism from the academics. From right and left, good or bad they confiscated to their granary".

None of the first Futurist art commentators had any artistic training, and their activity can be described as literary. It was only in 1918 in "Maski" (Masks) that the text appeared by painter and philosopher Leon Chwistek<sup>13</sup> in which he emphasized, for instance, the fact that in Futurist painting one can distinguish as many "different types as many kinds of visionary reality we can imagine". Chwistek understands the term of Futurism very broadly, since he includes with Futurist paintings both Henri Matisse's last period and Tytus Czyżewski's paintings.

Similarly, another painter, Szczesny Rutkowski,<sup>14</sup> highlights a wide range of styles of Futurist painting in his review of the 16th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art organized in 1926 in Venice. The Italian Pavilion, which hosts such names as Prampolini, Depero, Dottori, Russolo, Tato and Balla, is – according to the author – worth a look, because this art brings "new ideas, seeds of future development". It seems that from now on, quotes for Futurist paintings are rising steadily. And so, two years later, on the occasion of the Paris exhibition, Jan Brzękowski, assessing the achievements of these artists, writes: "Some Cubist painters and theorists are trying to downplay the achievements of Italian Futurism in painting. This position, however, is flawed and biased, as Italian Futurism, after all, brought to the world of painting some advantages both theoretical and formal".<sup>15</sup> Brzękowski enumerates these values: "expression of motion, speed of modern life, its complexity and the simultaneity of events". The author most values the achievements of Prampolini, seeing him as "the current head of the school of Futurist painting". So he lingers on Prampolini's work, emphasizing its experimental character, work with colour, rhythm and composition of forms, based on a certain "analogy of ideas".

Marinetti's visit to Poland in 1933 will encourage many newspaper editors to remind their readers of the main ideas of Futurist art. For example, Ludwik Tyrowicz,<sup>16</sup> graphic artist and professor of graphic design in Lviv, speaks about Futurism's aesthetic echoes among Polish Formists, and about the relationship between Futurism and Cubism; he mentions as well aerial painting, the constructiv-

<sup>13</sup> L. Chwistek, *Wielość rzeczywistości w sztuce* (Plurality of reality in art), "Maski" fasc. 1–4.

<sup>14</sup> S. Rutkowski, *XVI wystawa międzynarodowa sztuki współczesnej w Wenecji* (16<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in Venice), "Epoka" 1926, no. 31.

<sup>15</sup> J. Brzękowski, *Wystawa futurystów włoskich w Paryżu* (Exhibition of Italian Futurists in Paris), "Głos Literacki" no. 2.

<sup>16</sup> L. Tyrowicz, *Futurismo vittorioso. O futurystycznej plastyce w Italii* (Futurismo vittorioso. On the visual arts in Italy), "Gazeta Lwowska" 1933, no. 70.

ist theatre settings by Prampolini, Sartoris' architecture, Thayaht's sculpture and Depero's graphics. Helena Blum, an art historian and museum expert,<sup>17</sup> returns to the Futurist's reflection on time, exposing the issue of simultaneism, and uses a key phrase, visual dynamism.

In addition to a large number of articles, Polish readers could also become familiar with the representative iconographic materials of the artistic achievements of Futurism. The number of published reproductions we managed to gather during research exceeds fifty pieces, mainly works by Boccioni, Prampolini, Sant'Elia, Carrà and Severini. Apart from these, there also appear works by painters such as Balla, Depero, Russolo, Cappa, Sartoris and Soffici. Quite a number of press titles promote these works, although only two of them, "Zdrój" (Wellspring) and "Wiadomości Literackie" (Literary News), seem to consistently follow on the achievements of Italian visual artists. "Zdrój" is mainly interested in the painted works of Boccioni and Soffici, while "Wiadomości" offers a wide range of names, devoting much attention to Futurist scenography.

"Wiadomości" turns out to be the leader in terms of the number of published photographs and drawings portraying various Futurists: Prampolini, Severini, Vassari, and most of all, Marinetti, portraits of whom we find about twenty times in a variety of press titles of that period.

Most of the editors devote to the Futurist visual arts only one or two photographic sets. In retrospect however, we can see that this editorial policy contributed to maintaining a continuous reception of Futurist art. Among these magazines, special attention should be given to "Arkady" (Arcades), a yearbook devoted to Polish advertising graphic arts published in Warsaw between 1935 and 1939, which dedicated to Futurism only two sites in 1936 and 1937. It introduced, however, Fillia to the Polish public and contributed greatly to familiarizing readers with the work of Sant'Elia. It is even more to the magazine's credit as the photos are accompanied with an article by the well-known Kołtoński, one of the few texts in Polish cultural journalism of that time devoted to Italian avant-garde architecture.<sup>18</sup>

## Towards Futurist theatre

Next to the visual arts, Futurist theatre also lived to see a considerable number of references, articles and reviews. The authors, however, generally treat its achievements with large detachment, and their texts are often cursory in nature. Only a few plays were discussed in Polish reviews: Marinetti's pre-Futurist *Le Roi Bombance* (*King Revelry*),<sup>19</sup> *Simultaneità* (*Simultaneity*) analysed as an example of synthetic

<sup>17</sup> H. Blum[ówna], *Marinetti a futurizm w plastyce* (Marinetti and the Futurism in visual arts) "Gazeta Lwowska" 1933, no. 78.

<sup>18</sup> A. Kołtoński, *U podstaw nowoczesnej architektury włoskiej* (At the foundation of Italian architecture), "Arkady" 1937, no. 4. Worth noticing also is his article *Muroplastyka*, "Arkady" 1936, no. 3.

<sup>19</sup> I. Grabowski, op. cit., E. Boyé, *Dom pod pijanymi gwiazdami* (House under drunk stars), "Wiadomości Literackie" 1927, no. 158.

theatre<sup>20</sup> and *Tamburo di fuoco* (Fire Drum).<sup>21</sup> “Zdrój” (1919) published translations of four syntheses: *Teatrino dell’amore* (*Teatrzyk miłości* or *Theatre of Love*) by Marinetti, *Verso la conquista* (*Ku zwycięstwu* or *Toward Victory*) by Corra and Settimelli, *Genio e cultura* (*Geniusz i kultura* or *Genius and culture*) by Boccioni, and *Parallelepipedo* (*Paralelepiped*) by Buzzi. Magazine “Skamander” issued in 1925 Marinetti’s long drama *Tamburo di fuoco* (*Ognisty dobosz* or *Fire drummer*) as translated by Edward Boyé.

Apart from Marinetti, Sicilian dramatist Vasari gained some popularity. In 1926, a well-known columnist, Regina Reicherówna,<sup>22</sup> wrote about his play *L’angoscia delle macchine* (*Anxiety of Machines*), which was a great success in Paris, while Irena Krzywicka,<sup>23</sup> a very active journalist, interviewed the author. Vasari said: “Futurism is not a school, but simply the banner under which an array of avant-garde artists gathered, one unlike any other. [...] Futurism will die when the artists able to create die”. Such a broad interpretation of Futurism is to be found among some of our commentators as well.

In 1924, the very same Marinetti writes for Polish readers about the synthetic theatre and the theatre of surprise<sup>24</sup> on the pages of the avant-garde review “Blok” (Block), while Kołtoński related the course of the first Futurist Congress<sup>25</sup> and mentioned visual and aerial theatre.

Meanwhile, in 1927, Aurelia Wyleżyńska reported on a pantomime performances by Prampolini at the Théâtre de la Madeleine.<sup>26</sup> The author enumerates the aesthetic foundations of this Futurist show, highlighting the “visual psychology, architecture of lights and mechanism of painting and music” and the composition of the space with the music, visual arts and actor’s gestures, which allows for an embrace of both the stage and the audience in the common rhythm. She emphasizes the importance of the riddance of “decorative, which is the surface of things” as well as the elimination from the movements of all that is unnecessary. The strength of the play is an instinct and intuition that explains the systematic rejection of any logic. According to the critic, the proposal by Prampolini’s group in practice brings little new, deserving to be called a new, weaker version of Diaghilev’s ballets. This comparison may suggest that Wyleżyńska objects to the excessive dancing in the spectacle. She appreciates, however, the drama of

<sup>20</sup> A. Kołtoński, *O teatrze futurystycznym* (On Futuristic theatre), “Zdrój” 1919, fasc. 5.

<sup>21</sup> E. Boyé, *Dramat zgiełków, barw i zapachów. „Dobosz Ognisty” Marinettiego* (A drama of turmoil, colours and scents. *Fire Drummer* by Marinetti), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1927, no. 158. See also: A. Kołtoński, *O teatrze futurystycznym*...

<sup>22</sup> R. Reicherówna, *Dramat włoskiego futurysty* (Drama of an Italian Futurist), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1926, no. 14.

<sup>23</sup> I. Krzywicka, *Futuryzm jest nieśmiertelny* (Futurism is immortal), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1926, no. 41.

<sup>24</sup> F.T. Marinetti, *Futuryzm włoski* (Italian Futurism), “Blok” 1924, no. 5.

<sup>25</sup> A. Kołtoński, *Pierwszy kongres futurystyczny we Włoszech. Marinetti z Mussolinim* (First Futuristic Congress in Italy. Marinetti and Mussolini), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1925, no. 9.

<sup>26</sup> A. Wyleżyńska, *Włoska pantomima futurystyczna* (Italian Futuristic pantomime), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1927, no. 35.

objects and the use of unusual sounds raised to the rank of independent actors, both substantial to the Futurist poetics.

Generally, it is not easy for Futurist theatre to break through the wall of objections made by authors themselves belonging to the avant-garde. Here's what Witkacy,<sup>27</sup> one of the greatest representatives of European modernism and the creator of the concept of 'Pure Form', a theatre set designer who himself struggling with a lack of understanding of his avant-garde work, wrote about Futurism in theatre:

[Futurists in theatre] do not seek to create large and more condensed constructions; they are often satisfied with works presenting small and imperfect forms. I don't believe at all that little teases, some of the best quality, although not devoid of purely external glamour – that is the small Form, should necessarily apply to art liberated from the bonds of naturalism and psychological truth. There is in the entire work of contemporary art a short, asthmatic breath, and a satisfaction with very modest formal results, with the attempt to create maximum of superficial effect, which, together with the lack of saturation with Form and a quick apathy can speed up the process of the collapse of art, which I predict.<sup>28</sup>

The Polish audience only once had the opportunity to meet a Futurist drama in the theatre. *Prisoners*<sup>29</sup> by Marinetti, staged in Lviv, though warmly welcomed by the local audience, aroused mixed feelings, however. A rich collection of impressions from the premiere remains in the press.<sup>30</sup> The views of the majority of reviewers converge in one voice of admiration for the director Wacław Radulski's skills and the stage designs of Andrzej Pronaszko and disappointment with the lack of strong emotions and an overwhelming feeling due to the dark sexuality emanating from the stage. What is surprising in their statements is the consistent belittling of the role of the dramatist. Neither the pre-existential climate of the drama nor the number of formal solutions (the Futurist drama of objects, lighting), were appreciated or were assigned only to the producers' bravado. All the comment writers are waiting for some unspecified 'special' effects, which makes them look a little like the audience of the first Futurist evenings, looking for a thrill in contact with young artists but deaf to the new sensibility. Reviewers agree that at times they "do not understand" the play, and one can get an impression that it is this lack of understanding that makes them suspiciously reserved.

In May 1937 in Cracow, *Prisoners* was staged again. A reviewer from the local magazine "Czas" (Time)<sup>31</sup> evaluated the play quite coldly. Much more graciously

<sup>27</sup> Witkacy is an artistic pseudonym of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939); he was a painter, a photographer, a philosopher and a prosaist.

<sup>28</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Parę zarzutów przeciwko futuryzmowi* (Few objections against Futurism), "Czartak" 1922, no. 1.

<sup>29</sup> The play was shown in March 1933 in the Great Theatre, then managed by Wiliam Horzyca.

<sup>30</sup> In: K. Wierzyński, *Wizyta we Lwowie* (Visit in Lviv), "Gazeta Polska" 1933, no. 92; J. Gamska-Lemnicka, *Wieczór Marinettiego* (Marinetti's evening), "Gazeta Lwowska" 1933, no. 73; H. Sjiłberowa, *Z teatrów lwowskich* (From the Lviv theatres), "Kobieta Współczesna" 1933, no. 17.

<sup>31</sup> T.S.: *Italo-Americana*. The play was staged in the Słowacki Theatre on the 9th of May 1937, directed by Radulski, which completed the evening of the theatre star's premiere of *The Emperor Jones* by O'Neill.

did Cracow critics treat the dramatist, calling him one of the greatest writers of modern Italy, and even an “ace of world literature”.

One word needs to be said about the iconographic documents accompanying the texts, related to theatre design and costumes. These included photos of the Paris staging of *Le Roi Bombance*, decorations from the visual ballets of Depero, costumes for the show *L'angoscia delle macchine* by Vasari produced by Idelson, and the scenery and costumes of Prampolini for several pantomimes.<sup>32</sup>

## Opponents and proponents of Futurism: Polish-Italian contexts

Italian Futurism often met with criticism and was frequently targeted in writing about Futurism in Poland. More often than not, the accusations made against the Polish avant-garde pointed at its lack of originality, which paradoxically allowed the authors to appreciate the achievements of the Italian original. A good example of this scheme is Radosław Krajewski's text, which in this context clearly expresses a positive judgment: “Italian Futurism is a Futurism of wide angles, of cult of the civilization, of destruction of old monuments of the past in order to set up the foundations for monuments of new life”.<sup>33</sup>

Particularly acute attacks on Polish artists and their Italian sources of inspiration come from valued writer, critic and translator Karol Irzykowski.<sup>34</sup> Even though he accepts the term Futurism, he defines it as a “psychological need” and not as a direction in art within a given timeframe; Futurism means to “anticipate the future”, and as such has nothing to do with the new Italian fashion in art that is a “Nietzsche's monkey, a late impressionist and a shouter of obsolete slogans”.

Various cultural critics undertook the topic of Futurism at least once, and most of the time it would be their only encounter with the subject. That would probably explain why their articles were written in a tone of somewhat cursory reports, and their attitude often remained neutral towards the phenomena. Futurism had, however, its strong supporters and advocates, among them a journalist who since 1914 has repeatedly studied various aspects of the Italian avant-garde with unique insight. Aleksander Kołtoński (1882–1964)<sup>35</sup> deserves much credit in presenting Futurism in the Polish press. He worked in Italy for many years (he was a chemical engineer by education) and was able to closely follow the events of artistic life there, which made him one of the smartest commentators on Italian culture. He was a translator and cultural activist (in the early '20s he founded the Polish-Ital-

<sup>32</sup> “Świat” 1909, no. 40, “Wiadomości Literackie”: Depero 1925, no. 46, Idelson 1926, no. 14, Prampolini 1925, no. 1930, no. 9.

<sup>33</sup> R. Krajewski, *Futuryzm polski* (Polish Futurism), “Zdrój” 1919, fasc. 3.

<sup>34</sup> K. Irzykowski, *Futuryzm a szachy* (Futurism and chess), “Ponowa” 1921, fasc. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. A. Kołtoński, *O futuryzmie jako zjawisku...*; idem, *Na rozstajach sztuki włoskiej* (On the crossroads of Italian Art) “Zdrój” 1919, fasc. 5 and *O teatrze futurystycznym...*; idem, *O dzieł sztuki futurystycznym wartościowaniu* (On the evaluation of Futurist pieces of art), “Zdrój” 1919, fasc. 6; idem, *List z Włoch* (A letter from Italy), “Zwrotnica” 1923, no. 6; idem, *Pierwszy kongres futurystyczny we Włoszech...*

ian Society in Warsaw) and was also the author of hundreds of publications on various topics.

Another important figure among the proponents of Futurism was Edward Boyé (1897–1943),<sup>36</sup> who was an editor, literary critic and essayist and who had translated Aretino, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Papini and Marinetti. Boyé was associated with “Wiadomości Literackie” (Literary News), the weekly published in Warsaw in the years 1924–1939. Its editors represented liberal views and were famous for their artistic taste, so the magazine was mainly addressed to the intelligentsia and published articles on social, literary, cultural and political topics, not shunning controversy. Therefore, the critically appraised Futurism fit perfectly into the interests of the editors.

Futurism also owes a lot to the avant-garde magazine “Zwrotnica” (Switches), founded by Tadeusz Peiper (1891–1969). The magazine came out in the years 1922–1923 and 1926–1927 in Cracow. Artistic and literary, its collaborators were found amongst Polish Futurists and Formists as well as representatives of the international avant-garde, including Marinetti and Tzara. It is on the pages of this magazine that Peiper elaborated the Polish avant-garde poetic theory, and it was his example that showed that writing about Italian Futurism was not only informative, but that it could have a direct impact on the development of indigenous aesthetic concepts.

The program of Italian Futurism had an important meaning for the crystallization of the image of “Zwrotnica” itself, as we read Peiper, who expressed his admiration for Marinetti, the spiritual father of the powerful socio-artistic movement, an excellent stylist, a “bold” man who “taught us about self-confidence and creative blasphemy”.<sup>37</sup> The Polish Futurism theorist admired his “tremendous power to be reborn” and “transform lives” and wished for the Polish avant-garde to follow this very path. He had, however, many reservations as to the specifics of the Italian ideas. What especially disturbed him was the Futurist approach to matter and machine, the concept of rejecting syntax and the illogical, bringing art down to the role of servitude for life. He also argued with the Futurist concept of analogy and with a series of dynamic language techniques offered by Marinetti in the manifesto about Futurist literature.

This stylistic and ideological dispute led Peiper to develop his own theory of the poem and to cut away from Futurism. However, the interest he had taken in Futurism drew down on his head thunderous attacks from enemy critics. One of them, in 1928 in “Głos Literacki” (Literary Voice)<sup>38</sup>, offered a spectacular manifestation of dislike for Futurism and an attempt to devalue its Polish representa-

<sup>36</sup> E. Boyé, *Faszyzm i futuroizm* (Fascism and Futurism) “Wiadomości Literackie” 1925, no. 40; idem, *Dom pod pijanymi gwiazdami. ...*; idem, *Machiavelli w faszystowskich Włoszech* (Machiavelli in fascist Italy), “Wiadomości Literackie” 1927, no. 35.

<sup>37</sup> T. Peiper, *Futuryzm* (Futurism), “Zwrotnica” 1923, no. 6.

<sup>38</sup> I. Ryon [Piotr Józef Podhalicz], *Właśnie przeciw frazesom* (Against cliché), “Głos Literacki” 1928, no. 17.

tives and even just its fans. In this way, with Italian Futurism in the background, one of the most ardent aesthetic controversies in post-war Poland began.<sup>39</sup>

In the same 1928, the most famous Futurist poet of the Skamander group, Julian Tuwim, used the Futurist poetic in a novel way – light and slightly mocking. His flirtation with Futurism – also unspared from criticism – resulted, for instance, in an excellent parody of Marinetti's poem *La macchina da corsa* (also known under the title *A mon Pegase*), which was printed in the Warsaw weekly "Epoka" (Epoch).<sup>40</sup>

In the '20s, another important populariser of Futurism appeared, poet and writer Jalu Kurek (1904-1983), a representative of the school of poetry called Cracow Avant-garde. Kurek focused on Romance studies at Jagiellonian University in Cracow and continued his adventure with the Italian language on scholarship in Naples. Meeting and forming a friendship with Marinetti, as well as developing an interest in the theatrical experiments of Prampolini made him the dedicated bard of the Italian poet and Futurist aesthetics, inspiring Kurek to write in 1925 the play *Golębie Winicji Claudel* (*Winicja Claudel's Pigeons*) based on the dynamic stage concept of Prampolini.

In the '30s, Kurek's journalistic activities resulted in texts on Futurist poetry and also served as a translator. It is his master and friend, Marinetti, who owes him the most. In the '20s and '30s, the Polish press printed fragments of the master's poem *Zang Tumb Tumb*, novels *Le monoplane du pape* (*Papal Monoplane*) and *8 anime in una bomba* (*8 Souls in One Bomb*), as well as several other poems, among which was *Lettre d'une jolie femme à un monsieur passéiste* (*Letter from a Pretty Woman to an Old-fashioned Man*). Before Kurek's translations, Marinetti had only been translated by Kołtoński, who had also reached to *Zang Tumb Tumb* ("Krytyka" 1914/1), and Tuwim, who had presented a piece from *La battaglia di Adrianopoli* (*Battle of Adrianople*) in "Nowy Kurier" (New Courier) of Lodz (1916/150) under the pseudonym Roch Pekieński.

Kurek cooperated also with the literary monthly "Kamena" (Kamen) where he published his version of many notorious poems, including those by Paolo Buzzi (*Il canto della filandiera*, or *The Song of the Spinning Room*), by Cangiullo (*Il Sifon d'oro*, or *The Gold Siphon*) and by Pallazzeschi (*La Fontana Malata*, or *The Sick Fountain*). Even though "Kamena" appeared in the small town of Chełm, it acquired outstanding collaborators, and its tradition continued until 1993. It was founded in 1933 by poet and social activist Kazimierz Andrzej Jaworski who also placed in it some of his own translations, mostly of Folgore and Palazzeschi.

<sup>39</sup> Maryla Jurtkiewiczówna was among those who stood up in defence of Peiper ("Marinetti-Peiper", "Głos Literacki" 1928, no. 19). She enumerates differences between the two artists, obvious for the connoisseurs of the Polish poet and poetry theoretician; Peiper's sentence theory, the role of rhyme, respect of tradition that can be of "great presence" and of the logical construction of enunciation, are only a few program discrepancies dividing the Polish and Italian artist. Jerzy Jodłowski („Obrona oskarżonego. Tadeusz Peiper jako poeta społeczny" – Defence of the accused. Tadeusz Peiper as a social poet, *ibid.*, no. 20) stated: "It is high time to finish with the legend about some empty aestheticisation or snobbish follower of Futurism, about the made up life escape of 'Polish Marinetti' and to see in him at last a great creator, original ideologist and a poet standing 'on our positions'."

<sup>40</sup> "Epoka" 1928, no. 222.

To “Kamena”, we owe the only encounter with the poetry of Fiumi in the translation by Zdzisław Kempf. Buzzi and Palazzeschi were introduced earlier to the Polish press on the initiative of the “Nowy Przegląd Literatury i Sztuki” (New Review of Literature and Art). This monthly magazine of a literary and artistic character and appearing in Warsaw from mid-1920 included in the first issue of 1921, translations of Buzzi’s and Palazzeschi’s poems edited by Wincenty Rzymowski who was at that time not only an active publicist, chief editor and collaborator with important newspapers and magazines but who also worked in the Diplomatic Mission of the Republic of Italy.

To sum up the achievements of the translations, it should be noted that while it may not be impressive in terms of quantity, the translated works are, however, highly representative of Futurist poetics.

Marinetti’s journey in relation to the Polish premiere of *Prisoners* in Lviv, mentioned above, revived interest in Futurism and most of all in Marinetti himself. In the press, dozens of articles and informative notes related to the event were published. Daily literary-artistic and socio-cultural titles gave reminders of Futurism. Although short articles and references dominated, their importance is not to be underestimated, as they remain today the only witness that allows us to recreate the event of Marinetti’s route through the salons, theatres and other cultural institutions in Warsaw, Lviv and Cracow, during which the most important part was the lectures and recitations of his own poems.

For example, according to Kurek,<sup>41</sup> the visit of “his Excellency Futurist” did not attract the expected interest in the artistic circles of Warsaw, as he notes not without irony: “Desperately lots of people interested in the topic had more urgent occupations than to participate in this exceptionally worthy event”. The milieu of Polish avant-garde acted in a similar way and this absence can be partially explained. The Italian visitor was known for grabbing all the achievements of the widely defined avant-garde under the banner of Futurism. This is how we can understand the absence of some avant-garde artists as a protest of this simplification and the desire to emphasize the independence of their own aesthetic.

The importance that maintaining independence from the Futuristic banner had for the Polish avant-garde is, for example, revealed in a report by Peiper from Marinetti’s meeting with representatives of the avant-garde in Cracow. The author writes: “Marinetti, who is sufficiently familiar with innovative movements in all the countries, understands enough the differences that separate “Zwrotnica” from Futurism that he promotes to avoid calling us Futurists and instead to use the name avant-gardists”.<sup>42</sup>

During this meeting, Peiper took the opportunity to distance himself from Futurism, pointing out the Italian Futurists’ “glorification of war and fascist megalomania”. A few other similar critical voices, such as the leftist “Robotnik”

<sup>41</sup> J. Kurek, *F.T. Marinetti w Warszawie* (F.T. Marinetti in Warsaw), “Gazeta Warszawska” 1933, no. 74.

<sup>42</sup> T. Peiper, *Po wizycie Marinettiego* (After Marinetti’s visit), “Gazeta Literacka” 1933, no. 7 and “Czas” 1933, no. 68.

(Worker), used an interview given by Marinetti to Nelly Nucci<sup>43</sup> to deride her admiration for Marinetti and for proposals by Futurists of a culinary revolution. The author of the commentary writes: “Happy people – they have no other worries. We would like to know, however, what kind of ‘light’ and ‘cheerful’ menu Mr. Marinetti could offer to the unemployed Italians and what ‘surprises in the diet’ he devises with his friend the dictator for, let’s say, the residents of the Aeolian Islands”.<sup>44</sup>

A few months after Marinetti’s visit to Poland, Stefan Kawyn emphasized his role in the building of fascist ideology. In his review of the lecture on relationships between Futurism and Fascism, held in Lviv in the Writers Trade Union office, he cites an attack by one of the speakers – the leftist poet Marian Piechal – aimed at Marinetti, the “prophet of Fascism, Mussolini’s and Hitler’s protagonist [...]”. He is the one who freed and raised to the dignity of the principle the method of fist, baton and ricin in human progress. He unleashed wild, blind instincts of primitive man, armed with fangs, claws and flint club. He finally, Marinetti, during the congress of PEN clubs in Yugoslavia defended Hitler, the executor of his terrible metaphors”.<sup>45</sup>

The relationship of Futurism and Fascism is also noted by Jerzy Walldorf, but we don’t find in his text any accusations typical of the Polish left. As Marinetti’s guest, Walldorf-the esthete is primarily concerned with the statement that “great revolutions are always preparation for the equally great changes in the field of art, which, by its very nature must follow the social upheavals. The Fascist coup is the only case in history where this order was reversed, the art prepared the revolution”.<sup>46</sup>

A few years earlier, the historical and political conditions between Futurism and Fascism were described thoroughly by Kurek. His article<sup>47</sup> appeared in a special issue of “Przegląd Współczesny” (Contemporary Review), next to texts by such theorists of Fascism as Bottai, Balbo and Gentile. He focuses on the political dimension of Futurist revolution, giving the exact report on the course of events, especially in the hot years of 1918–1919.

In the ’30s, during the period of political and cultural political rapprochement between Poland and Italy, the Polish press very readily published articles on any given Italian topic. In addition to political reports, quite often translations of Italian prose were also published. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 140 prosaists were translated into Polish and the press published hundreds

<sup>43</sup> N. Nucci, *Wywiad z jego eks. Marinettim* (Interview with His Excellency Marinetti), “Gazeta Literacka” 1933, no. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Bd., idem, *Futuryzm czy makaron?* (Futurism or pasta?), “Robotnik” 1933, no. 127. In the Aeolian Islands mentioned in the text, in 1922, a concentration camp was set for the regime’s opponents right after the takeover of power by the fascists. It operated until 1943 when the islands were taken by the Allies.

<sup>45</sup> S. Kawyn, *Futuryzm i faszyzm* (Futurism and Fascism), “Słowo Polskie” 1933, no. 318.

<sup>46</sup> J. Walldorf, *Sztuka pod dyktando. D’Annunzio i Marinetti* (Art under dictatorship. D’Annunzio and Marinetti), “Prosto z Mostu” 1937, no. 55.

<sup>47</sup> J. Kurek, *Futuryzm i faszyzm* (Futurism and Fascism), “Przegląd Współczesny” 1933, no. 100–101.

of short stories and novels. Similarly, a lot of poetry was translated and a bit less, but a still considerable collection of plays.<sup>48</sup> On the wave of right-wing sympathies, the magazine *Polonia-Italia* was even founded and published in Warsaw in 1935–1939, but in the issues that have survived to this day, there are no reports of Futurism to be found. The magazine published only a story by Palazzeschi<sup>49</sup>, who was associated with early Futurism. Another Italian writer endorsing the Futurist heroic period, Papini, was extremely cherished. He won recognition not as a Futurist, however, but as an author promoting Catholic culture.

## Epilogue

The last text on Futurism we found in the press is from 1938 and comes from the noble “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” (Illustrated Weekly) one of the most important social and cultural magazines in Warsaw, published in the years 1859–1939. It focuses on Marinetti and specifically on his lecture delivered in Paris. An anonymous author of the note comments:

Marinetti, fiery apostle of Futurism came down to Paris with a lecture. He spoke of the Italian youth and culture. P. Abel Bonnard,<sup>50</sup> whom the French consider to be the most academic of academics, while presenting Marinetti to a wide audience in *Rive gauche*, said: ‘I knew him when he was still quite young [...] Currently, Mr. Marinetti’s young as ever (and) is decided as ever to acquire and penetrate rapidly into the future.’ French people after listening to his assurances of the peaceful goals of Italy’s arming called him a jolly humourist.

Thus ended the period of press reception of Futurism in Poland. To sum up the achievements and the role of the Polish press in popularizing the movement, we need to say that they are not to be underestimated, even though it sometimes was negatively promoted and left blank spots in the image of Italian avant-garde artistic achievements. The collection of articles, translated publications, poetry and drama of Italian Futurism, together with reproductions of pieces of art results in more than 300 references.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, if Polish archives had not suffered so much during the war, this collection would be increased by further publications.

Let us add, finally, that over time, Polish newspapers themselves began to be influenced by the Futuristic aesthetic revolution. A synthetic, colourful and dynamic style, born from the freedom of words, has become a specialty of many journalists, reporters and columnists. A good, albeit a bit late example of the Futurist style in Polish journalism is the illustrated magazine “As” (Ace) published

<sup>48</sup> See J. Miszańska, M. Gurgul, M. Surma-Gawłowska, M. Woźniak, *Od Dantego do Fo* (From Dante to Fo), Kraków 2007.

<sup>49</sup> It was “issimo” (from: *Il palio dei Buffi*) in the translation by Gabriela Pianko, *Naj...szy*, “Polonia-Italia” 1938, no. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Abel Bonnard (1883–1968), French poet and writer.

<sup>51</sup> See M. Gurgul, P. Strożek, *Bibliografia sul futurismo italiano in Polonia (1909–1939)* (Bibliography of Italian Futurism in Poland) [in:] G. Tomassucci, *Gli altri futurismi. Futurismi e movimenti d'avanguardia in Russia, Polonia, Cecoslovacchia, Bulgaria e Romania*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Pisa, 5 giugno 2009, Pisa 2010, p. 149–159.

in the years 1935–1938 in Cracow. Editors adhered to the modern look and to the accumulation of short texts of varying themes. The texts promoted new ways of communication (telephone, airplane), celebrated women pilots and large-scale industry, providing reports from new factories with futuristic headlines. It's one of the examples of how a free Poland was reaching for its modern tomorrow and adopted the spirit of Futurism, aware of the value of its slogans of acceptance of modernity, belief in action, and the construction of national independence as invaluable promoted by the press.

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