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*Contesting Sexual Morality.  
Futurism, Masculinity, and Homosexuality  
in Florence, 1913-1914*

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# Contesting Sexual Morality

## Futurism, Masculinity, and Homosexuality in Florence, 1913-1914

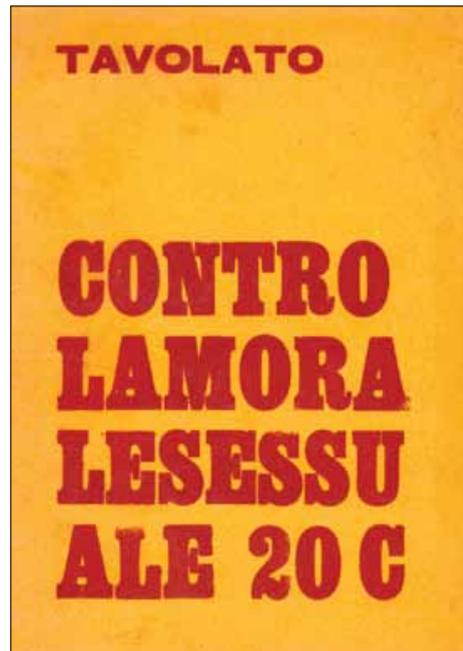
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### Introduction (\*)

On 1 May, 1913, the Florentine Futurist journal «Lacerba» published an article entitled *Elogio della prostituzione*<sup>1</sup> as part of a campaign against prevailing sexual morality initiated by a young collaborator called Italo Tavolato. Some weeks later, an Italian court prosecuted Tavolato for «oltraggio al pudore»<sup>2</sup>. The case gave the young writer a moment of fame, and it also allowed the expansion of «Lacerba»'s sales and public presence.

Profiting from this sudden notoriety, and encouraged by his association with Futurism, Tavolato re-invigorated his campaign, published a short booklet



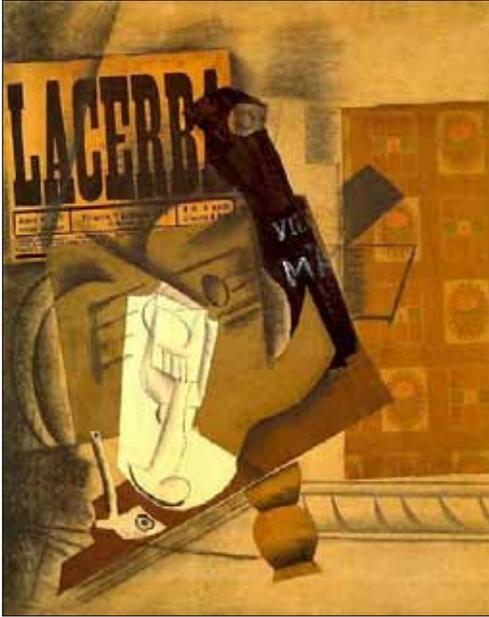
*Ardengo Soffici, copertina per Contro la morale sessuale, di Italo Tavolato, Firenze, Gonnelli, 1913.*

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\* The author wishes to thank Valeria Manzano for her help and encouragement during the writing of this article.

<sup>1</sup> *Praise for prostitution.*

<sup>2</sup> «Offense against morality».



Pablo Picasso, Pipe, verre, journal, guitare, bouteille de vieux marc ('Lacerba'), 1914, Fondazione Solomon R. Guggenheim – Collezione Peggy Guggenheim, Venezia. Fonte: [http://www.quirinale.it/qmw/statico/biblioteca/bol\\_cat/pdf/percorsi/PercorsiTematici2012-3-1.pdf](http://www.quirinale.it/qmw/statico/biblioteca/bol_cat/pdf/percorsi/PercorsiTematici2012-3-1.pdf).

entitled *Contro la morale sessuale*<sup>3</sup>, and sharpened his profile as an iconoclastic anti-moralist. Although some historians have referred to the “Tavolato affair” as an episode of libertine and hedonist provocation, they have thus far overlooked the connection between Tavolato’s writings and their overt defense of male homosexuality. This article analyzes the relationship between the “Tavolato affair”, «Lacerba», and the Futurists, in an effort to explore representations and attitudes surrounding masculinity and male same-sex desire within a particular Futurist experience. By focusing on Tavolato’s writings and their immediate context, this article seeks to capture generally overlooked responses to male homosexuality

among modernist Florentine intellectuals, as well as to add one more perspective on Futurism’s gender politics.

## Masculinity, Nationalism, and Futurism

The relationship between masculinity and nationalism constitutes a long-lasting trope within Italian political and cultural history<sup>4</sup>.

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, appeals to masculinity and virility multiplied. Many pedagogues, for example, became obsessed with recommending physical exercise and sexual abstinence as a form of shaping a strong will

<sup>3</sup> *Against Sexual Morality*.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the association of masculinity and nationalism in early nineteenth-century Italian intellectuals and politicians see Patriarca 2005, 380-408. For an analysis of masculinity after national unification in connection to dueling practices see Hughes 2007, 6, 96-109, 269-272.

and character among young men. Since for their part sociologists and psychologists associated modern mass society, the experience of the crowd, and urban life with emotional instability and increasingly instinctual and sensual demands, they emphasized discipline over the body and repression of sexuality as central requirements for shaping modern and healthy Italians [Bonetta 1990 14-15, 71-207, 321-450]. Moreover, nationalist politicians concerned about the nation-making process were also explicit in connecting the cultivation of the young male body with military strength and national regeneration. For many intellectuals, the cult of sport, speed, and competition, alongside the mastering of new machines and technologies came to epitomize masculinity and virility [Benadusi 2005, 13-34; Bellassai 2005]. Finally, some philosophers, writers, and literary critics increasingly articulated misogynistic attitudes, while the influence of anti-feminist and anti-female statements by authors such as Nietzsche, Otto Weininger, or Karl Krauss permeated the Italian cultural field as well [Salaris 1982, 22-28; Cavaglioni 1982].

Appeals to aggressive models of masculinity were not an exclusively Italian phenomenon. Some historians, in fact, portray the period between the 1870s and the First World War as a moment of increasing virilist responses to different kinds of anxieties [Mosse 1996, 77-106; Bellassai 2004, 36-73]. The sense of crisis and instability elicited by compressed social and cultural changes, the growing participation of women in the public sphere, the visibility of sexual deviancy made possible by the emergence of sexology, obsessions with the spread of infectious and social diseases, and concerns about social decadence increased the appeal to a stable, rigid, physically robust, and hierarchical masculine role. Historians focusing on Italy's apparent «exasperated masculinism», however, have identified some specific and additional reasons for anxiety in the peninsula. They point out to a general sense of frustration with the country's international status – in a time when imperial gains were a form of validating men's honor – and to a generalized discontent with a supposedly decadent political class [De Grazia 1992, 25-26; Hughes 2007, 269-272].

One of the most vociferous groups promoting aggressive models of masculinity in early twentieth-century Italy was the Futurist avant-garde that crystallized in Milan in February of 1909 and whose leader was the writer and cultural entrepreneur Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Although Futurism was basically an artistic and aesthetic trend aiming to influence literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture, their efforts were also oriented towards shaping a more general attitude towards life, society, and even politics [Mosse 1990; De Felice 1987; Gentile 2003]. Along with specific aesthetic statements, the Futurist manifestos and other

programmatic writings emphasized danger, courage, the cult of sports and competition, speed, the mastering of technology and machinery, violence, force, and militaristic behaviors as the values and attitudes that signaled a vigorous and virile masculinity. Moreover, their modernist reflections were largely based on an implicit or explicit opposition to femininity and feminism, both linked to decadent, traditional, weak, or incorrect conceptions of life – something Futurists labeled «passatism», which came to represent all what they despised. The Futurist Founding Manifesto, published in early 1909 and considered as the launching document of the movement, is clear about this, especially in two of its eleven points:

9. Noi vogliamo glorificare la guerra – sola igiene del mondo – il militarismo, il patriottismo, il gesto distruttore.

10. Noi vogliamo distruggere i musei, le biblioteche, le accademie d'ogni specie e combattere contro il moralismo, il femminismo e contro ogni viltà opportunistica o utilitaria<sup>5</sup> [Marinetti 1909].

Over the past decades, literary critics and cultural historians alike have investigated the relationship between Futurism and gender. Schematically, their findings and conclusions are organized across two kinds of responses. On the one hand, some authors highlight the paradoxes of Futurism's gender politics. Regarding women, for instance, scholars have usually noted that, despite Futurism's misogynistic rhetoric, some female intellectuals did participate in their initiatives and held independent stances that sometimes contested or differed from Marinetti's. These scholars have moreover emphasized that many Futurist manifestos and writings endorsed divorce, free love, and equal rights for women, while despising traditional or bourgeois forms of marriage and romance. As a result, these approaches have read Marinetti's proclaimed «scorn for woman» as an actual call for women to leave aside their attachments to nostalgic and traditional gender roles, and to get more actively and aggressively involved in modern life<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> «9. We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman. 10. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice» [Marinetti 1973, 19-24].

<sup>6</sup> See Guericchio 1983; Salaris 1982, 22-28; De Felice 1987, xvii-xviii; Adamson 2007, 99-105; Re 1989, 253-272; Re 2009, 103-124; Contarini 2009, 125-139. Most of these approaches focus on the Florentine journal «L'Italia Futurista (1916-1918)», and especially during its third period, from mid 1917 to early 1918, when female writers such as poet Maria Ginanni, poet and novelist Enif Robert, and novelist and graphic designer Rosa Rosà became part of the staff. Other important female contributors were Eva Kuhn Amendola – who signed as Magamal – Fanny Dini, Irma Valeria, Fulvia Giuliani, Marj Carbonaro, Emma Marpillero, and Shara Marini. For a general description of the journal see Adamson 1993, 218-224; Adamson 1997; Salaris 1985, 98-99.

More recently, studies on male homosexuality proposed an analogous analysis. Even though Marinetti utilized “homosexuality” or “pederasty” as scornful terms applied to opponents, and even when he condemned effeminate men as decadent and weak, his rejection of bourgeois respectability permitted him to perceive homosexuality without further scandal. The result was that, as long as men remained «virile» and masculine, Futurists seem to have been more tolerant of same-sex relationships than other contemporary intellectuals [Benadusi 2005, 24-27]. Other scholars, instead, have pointed out the repressive aspects of Futurism’s gender politics. For historian George Mosse, Futurism’s notion of masculinity was a precursor of, and influence on, Fascism’s constructions of a “new man”. For Mosse, Futurism’s linkage of patriotism to manliness was a way of disciplining the individualistic and dynamic modernism of the movement. As a result, Futurism’s call to break with tradition and its celebration of modernity’s limitless possibilities would have been constrained by the sacrifice to the nation implied in its virilist notion of masculinity. Mosse also points to Marinetti’s Florentine allies such as Giovanni Papini and the journal «Lacerba», whose «Nietzschean nationalism, always in movement, aggressive and hard» was highly influential for Mussolini, mostly during the pre-war years [Mosse 1996, 155-157]. The relationship between masculinity, Futurism, and Fascism finds a more sophisticated analysis in Barbara Spackman’s study of the role of virility in political rhetoric. She argues that the pre-Fascist Italian political culture was permeated with notions of virility that reinforced hierarchical gender roles by linking nationalism to masculinity – a linkage that fortified the rhetorical backbone of Fascism. In the case of Futurism, its virilist nationalism exaggerated the divide between a male public and political realm and a female domestic sphere, and therefore became obsessed with the search of a pure masculinity based on strong male bonding and the abjection of the female.

Based on Marinetti’s narrative, his manifestos, and related pamphlets, Spackman observes that Futurism’s intense male homo-sociability implied anxieties regarding male same-sex desire that were purged by reinforcing dominance over women and misogynistic attitudes. Anti-female violence would have therefore been the result of a «homophobic panic» generated by the underlying homoeroticism of Futurist rhetoric. Spackman concludes that in Marinetti’s writings, «female “matter” must always be available, open to violence, in order to maintain the border between virility and what Marinetti slurringly refers as «pederasty»<sup>7</sup>. Futurism’s pervading virility was also the reason why the efforts by some Futurist

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<sup>7</sup> See Spackman 1996, 74, 6-17, 36-40, 52-74.

women to subvert or reverse his writings were useless. Futurism could only value women under the condition of erasing their gender difference and forcing them to perform masculine and virile roles. According to this formula, being equal was only acceptable for women at the cost of being like men. Moreover, despite some iconoclastic and unconventional remarks against traditional notions of family, Spackman argues, most Futurists still conceived of women as mainly mothers, with the difference that instead of submitting to the rules of traditional bourgeois marriage, women were called to produce children for the «race» or the nation [Spackman 1996, 36-40].

Profiting from these two lines of scholarly research, this article uses the “Tavolato case” and the responses to homosexuality among Florentine Futurists in order to show the flexibility of Futurist gender politics, as well as the undeniable virilist linkage to nationalism. On the one hand, the Florentine context shows that many male homosexuals felt comfortable with Futurism, and that the Futurist rhetoric, centered as it was on unconventionality and provocation, lent itself to an articulate defense of some forms of homosexuality. On the other hand, the acceptance of homosexuality was subordinated to elitist notions of “genius” and to the unbreakable association of masculinity with nationalism. The result was that Futurist masculinity did leave room for the defense of same-sex desire, although under the condition of performing an intense virilist pose. Ultimately this formula proved functional to anti-feminist and anti-democratic claims, which subordinated gender demands to the call for war and nationalistic politics.

## «Lacerba», Futurism, and Homosexuality

Throughout its more than two-year existence, the journal «Lacerba» acted as a notorious and intense avant-garde standard-bearer in pre-war Florence. Launched by painter Ardengo Soffici and writer Giovanni Papini in January of 1913, «Lacerba» deployed a high-impact and irreverent cultural politics that allowed it to reach a relatively broad audience. The *lacerbiani* were passionate in their attacks on the official cultural institutions, the predominant morality, and the main ideological and political trends in pre-war Italy. As their launching issue stated, «[I]e religioni, le morali, le leggi hanno la sola scusa nella fiacchezza e canaglieria degli uomini e nel loro desiderio di star più tranquilli e di conservare alla meglio i loro aggruppamenti»<sup>8</sup>.

Their almost anarchic and aggressive call for detachment from cultural and social conventions paralleled their cult of the “genius”, which they associated with radical originality, spontaneity, and uncompromising creative freedom: «Tutto è nulla, nel mondo, tranne il genio [...] crepino di dolore i popoli se ciò è necessario perché un uomo creatore viva e vinca».

The *lacerbiani*'s complicated relationship with the Milan-based Futurists entails another relevant aspect of the journal's life. Before the launching of «Lacerba», the encounters between some Florentine intellectuals and Marinetti had been conflictive. In June of 1911, Soffici's criticisms of the Milan-based Futurists escalated, and Marinetti, along with painters Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Umberto Boccioni, organized a punitive expedition that culminated in fist-fighting episodes in Florence's Piazza Vittorio and the train station. Some months later, however, after verifying the success of Futurist paintings among Parisian and European artists, the Florentines reconsidered their position against the Marinetti group, adopted a straightforward avant-garde profile, and joined the lot of the Futurists for a while. From March of 1913 to February of 1914, «Lacerba» served the Futurist cause and welcomed the collaboration of their Milanese comrades, who enthusiastically published their pieces and manifestos<sup>9</sup>. Those months signaled the momentum of Futurism in Florence. Between September of 1913 and January of 1914, the city hosted its first exhibition of Futurist painting, which attracted numerous visitors. On December 12, 1913, also, the Verdi Theater hou-

<sup>8</sup> «Religion, moralities, and laws find their only excuse in the weakness and cowardice of men and their desire to be more calmed down and to better conserve their gregariousness». *Introibo*, «Lacerba», 1 (1), 1 January 1913: 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Adamson 1993, 148-149, 153-181; Salaris 1985, 71-79; Salaris 1994.



Giorgio de Chirico, Ritratto di Italo Tavolato, 1925  
Fonte: <http://touchingideas.blogspot.it/2013/03/erotica-futurista-6-contro-la-morale.html>.

sed the city's first futurist *serata*: a performance consisting of aesthetic and political proclamations, provocations of the audience, and the public's attendant response – throwing of food at actors. The *serata* captured public attention through its well-advertised presentation and its expected tumultuous and chaotic unfolding [Soffici 1955, 317-334; Viviani 1983 (1933), 59-70].

Most of these episodes included the active involvement of one of the youngest *lacerbiani*, the university student and pamphleteer Italo Tavolato (1889-1966).

Originally from Trieste, Tavolato moved to Florence around 1910, after taking some philosophy classes at the University of Vienna. Soon thereafter, he began to publish pieces

about the Viennese and Central European intellectual scene in journals such as Giuseppe Prezzolini's «La Voce» (1908-1916) and the short-lived «L'Anima» (1911), edited by Papini and Giovanni Amendola<sup>10</sup>.

Although he took center stage during the months of his prosecution, there is not much known about Tavolato during his years in Florence. Alberto Viviani, a Futurist poet who also published some pieces in «Lacerba», describes him in his memoirs as a bohemian who spent most of his time in the café *Giubbe Rosse*, which was the actual headquarters of the journal. A tall and physically imposing person, Tavolato impressed Viviani with his philosophical acumen, but mainly because of his unstable character and changing moods,

Non era un uomo fortunato. Dubbi e smarrimenti improvvisi lo colpivano ogni tanto e se gli capitava di porsi seriamente davanti il problema del suo *io*; e allora conduceva per lunghi periodi una vita di clausura che aveva alla fine il suo corol-

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Tavolato I., *Karl Kraus*, «L'Anima», 1 (6), June 1911: 184-188 and «Theodor Däubler», (9), September 1911: 275-285. For «La Voce» see Tavolato I., *Frank Wedekind*, «La Voce» 4 (22), 30 May 1912, and his review *Otto Weininger. Sesso e carattere. Traduzione dal tedesco dal dott. G Fenoglio*, 4 (44), 31 October 1912.

lario in una serie di atti disordinatissimi a base di orgie, di nottambulismi, di notti completamente bianche addirittura in serie. Dato il suo temperamento, io credo che ciò le fosse necessario per vivere. Ho pensato molte volte a lui durante le sue assenze come a un certo candidato al suicidio, e in tali periodi me lo immaginavo regolarmente chiuso a chiave nella sua stanza completamente buia anche in pieno meriggio, intento a preparare una corda per impiccarsi<sup>11</sup> [Viviani 1983 (1933), 95].

Tavolato's Florentine years and, more specifically, his collaboration with «Lacerba», constituted his most intense attachment to Futurism and the Marinetti group, a relationship he owed basically to his friendship with Papini, and which did not last for long. After the end of «Lacerba» in 1915, Tavolato moved to southern Italy, and it seems that he lost his contact with the *lacerbiani*. His best friend in Florence had been the poet Dino Campana, who was not on good terms with either Futurism or «Lacerba». Even when Tavolato entered into contact with Roman Futurist Fortunato Depero in the immediate aftermath of the War, by the early 1920s he joined the group around the journal «Valori Plastici» and explicitly detached himself from Futurism and avant-gardism [Mastropasqua 2008, 87-110]. Moreover, the War years were also the beginning of a sordid circumstance of Tavolato's life that has only recently surfaced: his collaboration as an informant to the political police. Tavolato started as an agent of the secret police during the war, and reinforced his association during Fascism, remaining on the payroll of the political police until the end of the regime [Benadusi 2005, 229-230; Canali 2004, 191-193].

During his years at «Lacerba», Tavolato's connection to Futurism was idiosyncratic, and crucially determined by his single-issue politics of assaulting conventional sexual morality, a campaign that he pursued through a series of articles and even a short booklet<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> «He was not a fortunate man. Sudden doubts and confusion used to strike him and it would happen to him that he was seriously considering the problem of his ego; and then he pursued for long periods a life of closure, which ended in a series of very disordered acts based on orgies, night life, serial white nights. Given his temperament, I think he needed this to live. I have thought many times of him during his absences as a certain candidate for suicide, and in such periods I could imagine him locked in his completely dark room, even at noon, preparing a rope to hang himself».

<sup>12</sup> Tavolato's main texts on this issue in «Lacerba» are: *L'anima di Weëniger*, «Lacerba», 1 (1), 1 January 1913; *Contro la morale sessuale*, 1 (3), 1 February 1913; *Glossa sopra il manifesto futurista della lussuria*, 1 (6), 15 March 1913; *Elogio della prostituzione*, 1 (9), 1 May 1913; *Il convito non platonico*, 1 (14), 15 July 1913. His booklet was published by mid 1913: *Contro la morale sessuale* (Firenze: Ferrante Gonnelli, 1913). For a fictional account of the episodes around Tavolato's campaign based on primary sources, see Vassalli 1986. See also a reference to Tavolato's texts in Bonetta, 366 and Adamson 1993, 176-177.

As I will show below, there is a clear connection between Tavolato's assault on sexual morality and his defense of male homosexuality. Yet before going to that point, we must mention that in the immediate pre-war years there were many connections between the Florentine Futurists and homosexuality. In this respect, it could hardly be overstated the fact that two out of the four main contributors to «Lacerba» – Tavolato and the Florentine poet and novelist Aldo Palazzeschi – were homosexuals. Palazzeschi's case was radically different than Tavolato's – he was more reserved and gained his notoriety due to his talented and prolific writing. Yet Palazzeschi's approach to Futurism is also evidence of how Marinetti and early Futurism were unprejudiced toward homosexuality<sup>13</sup>.

Palazzeschi's first novel, the 1908 *Riflessi*, was based on an epistolary exchange between two men with clear homoerotic undertones [Palazzeschi A. 1958 (1908)], and as the letters between Palazzeschi and Marinetti reveal, the former felt confident enough with the founder of Futurism to briefly refer to his romantic life<sup>14</sup>. Palazzeschi was indeed among the first artists in Florence to enthusiastically embrace Futurism since the spring of 1909, and Marinetti was a strong promoter and supporter of his work<sup>15</sup>.

In addition, even when the sources are elusive on this issue, over the months in which the “Tavolato case” unfolded, some prominent members of the Florentine homosexual community claimed their belonging to Futurism, perhaps because they perceived it as an opportunity to gain a more visible and respectable existence. According to Viviani's memoirs, when Tavolato was in charge of «Lacerba», the *Giubbe Rosse* became the gathering site of a crowd of a «turba di ragazzi e di efebi»<sup>16</sup> who used to surround Tavolato and transform the place in a site of intense homosexual sociability. As Viviani recalls: «pareva che nella terza sala [del Giubbe Rosse] si fossero dato convegno tutti gli amici di quei tre giovanotti che Petronio ha fatto protagonisti del suo *Satyricon*». Viviani also mentions that,

In breve quella masnada che andava impudentemente spacciandosi a Firenze per 'futurista' venne messa alla porta con la proibizione di porre piede nel locale sotto

<sup>13</sup> For the relationship between Palazzeschi and «Lacerba» see Adamson 1993, 172-175. For the relationship between Palazzeschi and Marinetti: Benadusi 2005, 27.

<sup>14</sup> For analysis and information on the Palazzeschi-Marinetti relationship see also De Maria 1978, vii-xii; Prestigiacomo 1978, xii-xxiii. The letter from Palazzeschi to Marinetti of April 1911 is usually referred to as evidence of Palazzeschi's confidence to Marinetti [Marinetti, Palazzeschi 1978, 44-45].

<sup>15</sup> See also Palazzeschi's memoirs on his relationship with Marinetti during those years in Palazzeschi A. 1968, xv-xxvi.

<sup>16</sup> «Young and ephobic men».

pena di richiami da parte dell'autorità<sup>17</sup> [Viviani 1983 (1933), 155].

The relationship between the Florentine Futurists and homosexuality was an explicit issue during the time, and rumors and gossip about the topic seem to have been widespread. In February of 1914, Papini wrote an article defending his relationship to Futurism, and contesting the main attacks usually addressed to the *lacerbiani*: that Marinetti had bought them, that Futurism was not serious, that despite their performance as rebels they were making money with Futurism and, finally, that Futurists were homosexuals and pederasts – an accusation he thought was particularly strong in Florence. Papini used a relevant portion of this article to address the last issue, in a mix of defensive gestures and bold statements. He defended male homosexuality – or «pederasty» – and attacked traditional morality, asserting «che i futuristi non avendo troppo rispetto per la vecchia morale non hanno nulla da predicare, *teoricamente parlando*, contro la pederastia»<sup>18</sup>.

Along with emphasizing that homosexuality was widespread, that many great men had been – or had been accused of being – pederasts, and that pederasty was accepted in the past and in other cultures, Papini's basic point was that homosexuality was natural, and that Futurists had nothing against it even though they were not homosexuals themselves:

Per la sua enorme diffusione nel tempo e nello spazio, la pederastia non è dunque, a priori, *contro natura*, perché si chiamano contro natura soltanto le cose molto rare e fuor dell'ordinario. Per molta gente l'omosessualità è naturale e spontanea come l'eterosessualità. Ciononostante i futuristi debbono confessare che, a questo proposito, essi sono vergognosamente normali e tradizionali. Per quanto uno dei loro manifesti affermi il disprezzo per la donna – considerata come simbolo di tutti i romanticumi indebolitori – siamo costretti a confessare che ci piacciono le donne e che le preferiamo infinitamente a qualunque maschio. Alcuni di noi (Balla, Folgore, Govoni, Papini, Cavacchioli, Severini) hanno moglie e figliuoli e gli altri sono, chi più chi meno, ostinati donnaioli. Come può esser nata sul nostro conto una così

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<sup>17</sup> «It seemed as if in the third room [of the Giubbe Rosse] there were a gathering of all the friends of those three young men that Petronius has made protagonists of his *Satyricon*. [...] These people, who were immodestly passing themselves off around Florence as 'Futurists, were soon expelled with the prohibition of coming back to the site, under penalty of calling the authorities».

<sup>18</sup> «Futurists, not having excessive respect for old morality, have nothing to say, *theoretically speaking*, against pederasty». Giovanni Papini, *Ora basta!*, «Lacerba», 2 (3), 1 February 1914: 37. «Pederasta» was the most common word in Italy at this time to refer to a male homosexual [Benadusi 2005, 313, n. 15].

falsa leggenda? Misteri del passatismo<sup>19</sup>.

Papini's response is significant on several accounts. His willingness to rapidly convert Futurists into «normal» (i.e., traditional, women-loving, and family-oriented) in order to object accusations of homosexuality is certainly striking. Also significant: in denying that the other members of «Lacerba» were homosexuals, he reveals his reluctance to address the issue more aggressively. That said, the passage nevertheless shows that some Futurists, or at least the *lacerbiani*, were tolerant regarding homosexuality, and that they could even become a public voice defending homosexuality against «old morality». Indeed, before Papini's article came out, Tavolato had appropriated specific elements of «Lacerba»'s rhetoric and other Futurist writings alike in his effort to make a public defense of male homosexuality against traditional sexual morality.

## The Tavolato Strategy: the Homosexual as Futurist

Tavolato's writings are a key site to better understand the rhetorical strategies linking Futurism and homosexuality. His short and intense pieces articulated the defense of sexual diversity with the praise of genius and the condemnation of social conventions that permeated «Lacerba»'s pages. As a result, conventional and conservative attitudes towards sex became associated with mediocre people who did not dare challenge the basic assumptions of ruling morality. Although this strategy had interesting progressive gender claims, it also reinforced Tavolato's elitism and scorn of democracy, since he associated rule by the majority with the triumph of weakness, suffocation of original individuality, and cowardly conformism. Tavolato also drew from other Futurist texts in order to endorse hedonism and sensuality more forcefully. He found a companion in his attack against morality and the association of pleasure with sin in the French Futurist dancer and writer Valentine de Saint Point. Tavolato's appropriation of Saint-Point's notions

<sup>19</sup> «For its huge diffusion in time and space pederasty is therefore not, a priori, against nature, because only the very rare and out-of-ordinary things can be called against nature. For many people homosexuality is as natural and spontaneous as heterosexuality. However, Futurists must confess that, with regard to this, they are shamefully normal and traditional. Even though one of their manifestoes asserts the scorn for woman – considered as the symbol of all weakening romanticisms – we must confess that we like women and that we infinitely preferred them to any man. Some of us (Balla, Folgore, Govoni, Papini, Cavacchiolli, Severini) have a wife and children, and the others are – some more, some less obstinate womanizers. How could such a false legend have been told about us? Mysteries of passatism!», *ibidem*.

of sensuality and female virility reinforced his hedonist defense of same-sex relationships. Moreover, Tavolato's anti-feminist rhetoric coincided with Saint Point's reflections on the issue, since both of them considered the suffragettes as a problematic and indeed repressive political expression.

The link between Tavolato's defense of sexual diversity and the iconoclastic rhetoric of «Lacerba» was already established in Tavolato's first article attacking sexual morality. In the form of short announcements and provocative aphorisms, Tavolato contended that all major religious, moralist, and allegedly scientific arguments about sexuality were a straightjacket for the true principle of sexuality and life in general, that is, the «realtà maggiore dell'istinto»<sup>20</sup>.

Tavolato thus endorsed a spontaneous form of naturalism, by which corporal pleasure had to take the upper hand over life-constraining forms of morality. Based on this naturalism, he attacked what he considered the moralist mediocrity of sacrificing sexual diversity to social conventions: «In nulla l'uomo mediocre è tanto dommatico come in fatto di predilezioni sessuali», he wrote, «[o]gni gradazione e sfumatura che non rientra nel suo gusto particolare vien giudicata contro natura»<sup>21</sup>. Although from the onset Tavolato made some references to male homosexuality, the topic became more explicit in later writings, especially in his booklet *Contro la morale sessuale*<sup>22</sup>, where the last section is devoted to the «taboo of homosexuality» and adopted a personal and autobiographical tone<sup>23</sup>.

He straightforwardly condemned «il borghese» who «si sente offeso nella sua triplice dignità di cittadino, di padre e di maschio ogni qualvolta due individui del medesimo sesso abbandonano le norme stabilite dalla maggioranza per seguire le norme tracciate dalla loro natura»<sup>24</sup>.

Emboldened by avant-garde rhetoric, Tavolato could claim that «[n]on spiego la pederastia. La elogio»<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> «Greater reality of instinct». Tavolato I., *Contro la morale sessuale*, «Lacerba» 2 (3), 1 February 1913: 28.

<sup>21</sup> «In nothing is the mediocre man as dogmatic as in issues concerning sexual preferences. Every graduation and nuance which does not enter into his particular taste is judged as something against nature», *ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Against Sexual Morality*.

<sup>23</sup> Tavolato I., *Contro la morale sessuale*, 1 (3), 1 February 1913, 20-23.

<sup>24</sup> «The bourgeois [...] who feels himself offended in his threefold dignity as citizen, father, and male, each time two individuals of the same sex abandon the established norms of the majority to follow the norms traced by their nature», *ibidem*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> «I don't explain pederasty. I praise it», *ibidem*, 20-21.

Using iconoclastic language, he performed a reversal of the terms by which the marginal, the excluded, or the misfit, metamorphosed into the genius, who radically opposed the usually accepted moral principles,

Sotto forma di tradizione, religione, educazione, disciplina, solidarietà, ci fu imposto il dovere alla mediocrità. Ma il gregge non era nostro volere, ma non erano per noi né media, né livello, né uguaglianza. E la morale si vendicò, la morale che avvelena chi non si piega, chi non si impiega: tutti morimmo, noi che amammo. Oggi non siamo che ombre, noi geni di ieri e di domani. Siamo gli spiriti maledetti confinati ai margini della società<sup>26</sup>.

Tavolato's strategy, consisting of framing his defense of sexual diversity as an attack against "mediocrity" and predominant morality was effective in strengthening his association with «Lacerba's» avant-garde rhetoric. As mentioned before, the cult of the genius as a radical original innovator opposing the commonplaces and «imbecility» of established society was part of «Lacerba's» original project. The *lacerbiani* were inviting for people willing to convert marginality and discrimination into a gift, especially when announcing in their first issue that «[n]oi siamo inclinati a stimare [...] il genio nascosto e disgraziato ai grand'uomini olimpici e perfetti venerati dai professori»<sup>27</sup>.

Interestingly, the whole attitude of going against the grain and calling for a detachment from accepted norms was a crucial element in the notion of masculinity predominating among Florentine modernists. In a series of articles published between 1909 and 1914, and edited together in 1915 under the title *Maschilità*<sup>28</sup>, Papini reinforced the opposition between genius and masculinity on the one hand, and conformism, mediocrity, imbecility, commonsense, and commercialization, on the other. He vituperated the «half men» who yielded to the charms of comfort and material gaining, something proper of «l'idea mercantile, borghese, filistea, giudaica e americana che senza quattrini non si fa nulla [...]»<sup>29</sup>.

In opposition to this attitude, Papini endowed genius and creativity with two at-

<sup>26</sup> «Under the form of tradition, religion, education, discipline, solidarity, the duty to be mediocre was imposed upon us. But the flock was not what we wanted; there was not for us any measure, level or equality. And morality took revenge, morality which poisons he who does not follow, who does not apply [...]. Today we are only shadows, we, genius of today and tomorrow. We are the cursed spirits confined to the margins of society», *ibidem*, 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> «we are inclined to esteem [...] the hidden and disgraced genius before the Olympic and perfect great men venerati by the professors». *Introibo*, «Lacerba», (1), 1 January 1913: 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Maschilità*.

<sup>29</sup> «Mercantile, bourgeois, philistine, Jewish, and American idea according to which nothing can be done without money». Giovanni Papini 1947 (1915), *Maschilità*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 15, 17.

tributes: first, the actual creative person was to be courageous, and even brutal, since he might break with conventions, politeness, and constraining social compromises. Second, the genius was to be an unhappy, lonely, anguished and suffering being, since he was conscious of his own weaknesses and limitations, and his contemporaries were unable to recognize and celebrate his talents<sup>30</sup>.

Tavolato enthusiastically agreed with the notion that «chiamasi genio il disgraziato che non riesce a diventar filisteo»<sup>31</sup> as it permitted him to fit his attack on sexual morality and his defense of male homosexuality into the notion of masculinity underlying «Lacerba»'s Futurism<sup>32</sup>.

Yet this strategy was also consistent with and in fact reinforced Tavolato's elitist scorn for democracy. In 1913, Italy adopted almost universal male suffrage, and Tavolato did not hesitate to write against the ascending sovereignty of the people as an extension of the «flock attitude» that jeopardized his individuality<sup>33</sup>.

In a very eloquent piece attacking democracy, he used a repetitive call «down with democracy» rhythmically, in order to curse the increasing collectivism, the destruction of individuality, and the general leveling and debasing underlying what he perceived as the «supremacy of the employees», or the triumph of mediocrity and weakness. As he closed his almost desperate call, democracy was for him the «cloaca dove affogano fantasia, ingegno, energia e tutte le soavità»<sup>34</sup>.

The idea of genius the *lacerbiani* endorsed was not the only source of Tavolato's prose. His campaigning became bolder after reading the French Futurist Valentine de Saint Point and, especially, her *Manifesto futurista della lussuria*<sup>35</sup>. Originally published in January of 1913, Tavolato immediately celebrated Saint Point's manifesto in «Lacerba»<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance *ibidem*, 33-40 and 41-45. See also Comte de Lautréamont's short text on the hermaphrodite – probably published by suggestion of Tavolato – where the hermaphrodite is described in terms of a melancholic and radical originality which also fit into «Lacerba»'s vindication of genius. Comte de Lautréamont, *L'hermaphrodite*, «Lacerba», 1 (15), 1 August 1913: 166-167.

<sup>31</sup> «We call genius the unfortunate one who fails to become a philistine».

<sup>32</sup> Tavolato I., *Frammenti*, «Lacerba», 1 (17), 1 September 1913: 191.

<sup>33</sup> Italy expanded the right to vote the 1913 elections from 3 million to 8.5 million male citizens [Duggan 2008, 386-387].

<sup>34</sup> «Sewer where fantasy, ingenious, energy, and all sweetness drown». Tavolato I., *Bestemmia contro la Democrazia*, «Lacerba» 2 (3), 1 February 1914; see also *Frammenti*, «Lacerba», 2 (10), 15 May 1914.

<sup>35</sup> *Futurist Manifesto of Lust*.

<sup>36</sup> Tavolato I., *Glossa sopra il manifesto futurista della lussuria*, 1 (6), 15 March 1913. For information on Saint-Point's manifesto: Salaris 1982, 26-28, 36-40.

Although Saint Point disassociated herself from Futurism and the Milanese group around Marinetti by 1914, she left a remaining mark through her rephrasing of Marinetti's «scorn for woman». In her explicit response to Marinetti, the *Manifesto della donna futurista*<sup>37</sup> written in March 1912, Saint Point argued that decadence and mediocrity in the present age predominated because of lack of virility on the part of both men and women, who had become excessively female. Saint Point argued that instead of despising women, Futurism might compel them to become more virile by adopting a cruel, brutal, but also sensual attitude, and thus overcoming the association of women with domestic, romantic and nostalgic ideals<sup>38</sup>.

Two of Saint Point's ideas seem to have been attractive to Tavolato: her rejection of feminism and her vindication of lust. First, Saint Point rejected feminism in firmer and more aggressive terms than Marinetti – whose relationship with the suffragettes was indeed complex [Re 1989, 258-260].

Although she never explained which exact feminist groups she was referring to, Saint Point generically considered feminism as «un errore politico [...] un errore cerebrale della donna, un errore che il suo istinto riconoscerà»<sup>39</sup> since it pushed women to adopt rights and duties which would detach them from their natural anarchism and radical disorder. She perceived of feminism as something extremely logical and intellectual, and considered that achieving the rights proclaimed by feminists «non produrrebbe alcuno dei disordini augurati dai futuristi, ma determinerebbe, anzi, un eccesso d'ordine»<sup>40</sup>.

For her, feminism was associated to the image of the woman as nurse, as a tender caregiver, docile and full of piety – a role that split women from their cruel, ambitious, and violent side, aspects which were actually present in Saint Point's counter model: the warrior<sup>41</sup>.

The second aspect of Saint Point's writings that attracted Tavolato's attention was her interest in lust, which she vindicated as sensual pleasure emancipated from moralist constraints. Saint Point's *Manifesto della lussuria* conceived of lust as synonymous with the expansion of consciousness achieved by liberating flesh and sensuality. For Saint Point, lust entailed a dynamic and mobilizing experien-

<sup>37</sup> *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman*.

<sup>38</sup> Valentine de Saint Point, *Manifesto della donna futurista. Risposta a Marinetti*, in Salaris 1982, 31-36.

<sup>39</sup> «A political mistake [...] - a cerebral mistake of the woman, a mistake that her instinct will recognize».

<sup>40</sup> «Won't produce any of the disorders hoped by Futurists, but it will determine, in contrast, an excess of order». Saint Point, *Manifesto della donna futurista*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, 33-34.

ce to be valued with the same dignity – or perhaps more – as «celebrality» or «spirituality»<sup>42</sup>.

«Noi abbiamo un corpo e uno spirito» – she wrote – «Restringere l'uno per moltiplicare l'altro è una prova di debolezza e un errore. Un essere forte deve realizzare tutte le sue possibilità carnali e spirituali»<sup>43</sup>.

Saint Point described lust in multiple forms. It was the force that pushed primitive people to war, and the energy driving modern entrepreneurs toward capitalist accumulation. In some passages she assimilated lust to cruelty, ambition, vanity, pride, and celebration of power and domination. Yet the sexual and carnal dimensions were predominant. As Claudia Salaris has observed, in her *Manifesto of Lust*, Saint Point «elabora una teoria del Desiderio dove, battuti in breccia l'idea del peccato e il senso della colpa, viene recuperata la priorità dell'istinto secondo un erotismo paganeggiante, panico e polimorfo»<sup>44</sup> [Salaris 1982, 28].

The impact of Saint Point's texts on Tavolato's writing was immediate and powerful, and it pushed him to make bolder claims in favor of his cause. In his comment to Saint Point's *Manifesto futurista della lussuria*, Tavolato located the core of Saint Point's project in her appeal «cessiamo di schernire il desiderio»<sup>45</sup>, which for him implied that the necessities and pleasures of life had to be justly valued<sup>46</sup>. This reading connected well with previous texts where he had endorsed free sexuality as a life-asserting activity, against the moralist imperatives and the association of pleasure with sin. The relevant element in Tavolato's reading, however, was that Saint Point's call was in fact the brief and the only part of her text in which she defended corporal attraction «whatever their sex might be» against «old and sterile sentimentality»<sup>47</sup>.

It was clear then that Tavolato strategically focused on Saint Point's call to «stop scorning desire» in order to make his defense of sexual diversity more prominent. In doing so, Tavolato celebrated that «[l]a richiesta della Saint Point, infine, rivoltandosi contro la secolare tradizione d'imbecillità, che infama le cosiddette

<sup>42</sup> Valentine de Saint Point, *Manifesto futurista della lussuria*, in Salaris 1982, 36-7.

<sup>43</sup> «We have a body and a spirit. To restrain the former to multiply the latter is a proof of weakness and a mistake. A strong being must realize all his carnal and spiritual possibilities», *ibidem*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> «A theory of Desire where, expelling the idea of sin and the sense of guilt, she recovered the priority of instinct according to a paganizing, Panic, and polymorphous eroticism».

<sup>45</sup> «Stop scorning desire».

<sup>46</sup> Saint Point's manifesto had been published in January 1913. For references to Saint-Point's texts and life: Berhaus 1993; Salaris 1982, 31-42.

<sup>47</sup> Saint-Point, *Manifesto futurista della lussuria*, in Salaris 1982, 38.

inversioni e perversioni sessuali, riabilita coloro che non si sentono di seminare nei campi concessi dall'autorità»<sup>48</sup>.

For Tavolato, this implied a protest against an age «in cui un infinità di forme della sessualità sono considerate sul serio come peccati mortali»<sup>49</sup>.

Tavolato also agreed with Saint Point's contempt for feminism. For Tavolato, women's suffragism was the effect of an «absolutist morality» that had reduced women to motherhood and therefore prevented them from satisfying their natural inclination towards sex. His assault on feminism was part of his battle against forms of public morality condemning sexual pleasure and preventing people from an enriching contact with their erotic side<sup>50</sup>.

For him, suffragettes represented the outcome of traditional and repressive sexual morality, which allegedly pushed women to transfer their erotic energies towards activities more appropriate to men, such as politics<sup>51</sup>.

Tavolato's descriptions of feminist activism elicited some of his most visceral pieces. Commenting on a gathering by the International Woman Congress (IWC) held in Rome in June of 1914, for example, he gave free rein to his fury and condemned what he viewed as the feminists' extremely rationalistic, pacifist, and ascetic ideology. For him, their increasing influence in the public sphere implied the triumph of sexual restraint, of the values linked to anti-alcoholism and anti-white-slavery campaigns, and the overvaluation of the intellect and motherhood over sensuality<sup>52</sup>.

Like Saint Point, he also opposed instinct and sensuality to feminist intellectualism, although Tavolato added an anti-Semitic tone when referring to the IWC president, Alice Salomon, «cui gli avi han lasciato in retaggio, insieme al nome e

<sup>48</sup> «Saint Point's call, rebelling against the secular tradition of imbecility which defames the so-called sexual perversions and inversions, rehabilitates those who do not accept to plant only in the fields conceded by authority».

<sup>49</sup> «In which infinity of forms of sexuality are seriously considered to be mortal sins». Tavolato I., *Glossa sopra il manifesto futurista della lussuria*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Most probably Tavolato had in mind the feminist trends which, toward the beginning of the century had become more prominent and more inclined to identify motherhood and womanhood as a way to empower themselves and claim political rights [Buttafuoco 1991, 178-195; De Grazia 1992, 23-24].

<sup>51</sup> Tavolato I., *Contro la morale sessuale*, 1 (3), 1 February 1913, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Tavolato I., *Cronache*, «Lacerba» 2 (13), 1 July 1914. Perhaps, Tavolato also had in mind the repressive turn in English courts and public opinion, where the anti-white-slavery campaigns were used by conservatives to elicit moral panic and reinforce persecutions of "deviants". This repressive turn was particularly intense between 1894 and 1913: McLaren 1997, 13-36.

alla dovizia del naso, la maledetta cerebralità»<sup>53</sup>.

Tavolato believed that the expansion of male enfranchisement and the assertion of women's political rights were threatening forces, as they represented the victory of consensus over originality, family values over sensuality and hedonism, intellectualism over passionate corporality, and the spirit of moralist campaigning over eroticism. In contrast to what he depicted as the asphyxiating and tyrannical values of democracy and feminism, Tavolato advocated two basic realities or institutions. The first one was prostitution.

His article *Elogio della prostituzione* – in which he blended poetic prose with aphorisms – used the vindication of prostitution as a call to release corporal pleasure from all limiting intellectualisms and moralism ruling public life. Prostitution demonstrated for Tavolato that sensuality and sexual attraction were the only constant and transcendent principles; or, as he put it: «moralities change, transform, decay, disappear; prostitution remains. Indeed, if duration is indicative of value, prostitution is superior to ethics»<sup>54</sup>.

Most probably, his article was meant to raise indignation among the feminist groups and the Catholic moralists that campaigned against State-regulated prostitution and white-slave trade [Gibson 1999, 59-75]. In stark opposition to the intellectualistic suffragettes, female prostitutes became the goddesses of Tavolato's symbolic pantheon. He shifted Saint Point's opposition between nurse and warrior away and established instead a divide between feminist and prostitute. Contrasting with feminists and their supposedly fix, rigid, and ascetic intellectualism, Tavolato saw in female prostitutes the best embodiment of a dynamic, unstable, fluid, and impulsive imagery of desire:

la prostituzione non è altro che istinto, impulso naturale. Vivono i ritmi del loro sangue, le puttane; sono quello che sentono. Materia, negazione, caos, mondo avanti la creazione, aspettano il loro formatore<sup>55</sup>.

Tavolato undertook his campaign against sexual morality within a series of pro-war, anti-feminist, and elitist statements. Yet within his reactionary framework, his choice of prostitutes as a symbol for unconstrained desire lent itself to remarkable suggestions. As many of his images proposed – «abisso d'inconscienza, caos

<sup>53</sup> «Whose ancestors left as legacy, together with the name and the large nose, the damned cerebrality», Tavolato I., *Cronache*, «Lacerba» 2 (13), 1 July 1914.

<sup>54</sup> Tavolato I., *Elogio della prostituzione*, 1 (9), 1 May 1913, 89.

<sup>55</sup> «Prostitution is nothing but instinct, natural impulse. They live by the rhythm of their blood, the prostitutes; they are what they feel. Matter, negation, chaos, world before the creation, they wait for their shaper», *ibidem*, 92.



Italo Tavolato, *Elogio della prostituzione*, «Lacerba», Anno I n. 9, 1 maggio 1913.

Fonte: <http://touchingideas.blogspot.it/2013/03/erotica-futurista-6-contro-la-morale.html>

d'illogicità»<sup>56</sup> – Tavolato described prostitutes as subversives of the organizing categories and coordinates of consciousness.

Understood in metaphorical terms – as the experience of sexuality liberated from Romantic or moralist constraints – prostitution was a mind-expanding experience, since it represented a window into people's repressed sides: «L'uomo che sente e che pensa si specchia nella puttana; in tutta l'enorme sua estensione psichica; e riconosce in sé il superuomo e l'inferuomo»<sup>57</sup>.

Tavolato's naturalism reinforced indeed a hedonistic utopianism. As he stated in the closing paragraphs of *Contro la morale sessuale*, he endorsed a «return» to nature and the removal of the imperatives that frustrated an enriching contact with pleasure,

ancora una volta ritorneremo alla nostra natura, redenti dal *tu devi*. Non più la prigionia dei sensi, non più l'avvilimento nella subordinazione agli ideali, non più la riprovazione del piacere, non più amori oscurati e corpi spenti. Risorga la carne, e infiammi lo spirito inaridito in una vita che era colpa e castigo e morte»<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> «Abyss of unconsciousness, chaos of illogicity», *ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> «The man who feels and thinks mirrors himself in the prostitute, in all her enormous physical extension, and recognizes in himself the superman and the infra-man», *ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> «Once again we will go back to our nature, liberated from the “you shall.” No more the prison of the senses, no more debasing ourselves in the subordination to ideals, no more the reproof of pleasure, no more obfuscated loves and extinguished bodies. Let the flesh rise again and inflame the spirit which was dried out in a life which was guilt, and punishment, and death». Tavolato I., *Contro la morale sessuale*, 1 (3), 1 February 1913, 22.

Yet this sensual utopianism was only one face of Tavolato's campaign against intellectualism and moralism. Along with prostitution, the second social reality that Tavolato celebrated was war, which he found to be an awakening experience. When war came, he embraced it eagerly. Together with personal impetus – such as his commitment to «redeem» his native Trieste from Austrian dominance – his interventionism was also an attack against all the abstract, conceptual, and rigid forms of sociability that impeded a passionate bond to life. His praise for war was therefore a means to make his own sensualist contribution to «Lacerba»'s intense interventionist campaign,

poiché la passione abbrama la guerra, poiché l'amore vuole la guerra, anche lo spirito tende ala guerra. Vogliamo la guerra, la bella guerra: la raffica che spazzi dalla mente l'intelletualismo, il razionalismo, il socialismo, l'ergotismo, l'ismo. [...] Finiamola con la pensagione concettificante [...] con la logomachia dissolitrice. [...] Divampi la guerra, a riscattare insieme alla terra e al mare l'idea della patria<sup>59</sup>.

After liberating desire from logical, moralist, and intellectualist constrains, Tavolato willingly resubmitted it to «the idea of the fatherland». Even in a highly hedonistic and passionate form, he could not escape from promoting the aggressive nationalism common to many intellectuals during the period. By so doing, he was making his own contribution to the cult of virility and to the association of nationalism and masculinity. Moreover, by jumping into the general mood of the interventionist campaign – which «Lacerba» intensely supported along with many other intellectuals and journals from Florence [Adamson 1993, 191-203] – Tavolato's anti-moralist campaign reached an end. In his new interventionist mode, making war became the substitute for making love.

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<sup>59</sup> «Because passion craves for war, because love wants war, also the spirit tends to war. We want war, the beautiful war: the gust that sweeps from the mind intellectualism, rationalism, socialism, ergotism [ergotismo], the ism. [...] Let's finish it with conceptualizing thinking, with dispersive logomachy [...]. Once the war spreads like wild fire, let's rescue along with the land and the sea the idea of the fatherland». Tavolato I., *Vogliamo la guerra*, «Lacerba», 2 (21), 15 October 1914: 287.

## Conclusion: Futurism and Masculinity

Despite the apparent straightforwardness of some of its statements, the implications of Futurism's gender politics are actually complex. First, Futurism was not a homogenous movement: it changed over time and assumed different characteristics in accordance to spatial location. As a result, Futurist manifestoes and initiatives were re-signified by different participants operating in different contexts. Tavolato's short-lived Futurist experience belongs to a larger list of cases that includes Saint Point, Palazzeschi, the artists gathered around the post-war Florentine journal «L'Italia Futurista», or the texts by Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, among many others. In each case, the gender statements that Marinetti or early Futurism issued were appropriated, openly criticized, or re-interpreted to serve changing interests and claims. Second, Futurism blended overt and iconoclastic calls for unconventionality with nationalistic, elitist, and hierarchical gender claims. As the Tavolato case shows, liberating calls to release desire from moralist constraints could coexist with and be frustrated by the celebration of military action, nationalism, and war. In so far as gender is concerned, hence, Futurism strikes one as an unstable, contradictory, and multifaceted phenomenon.

The connection between Tavolato and Futurism and other circumstances around «Lacerba», however, reveal some important aspects of Futurism's responses to sexuality, and more specifically, homosexuality. They prove that the cluster of meanings, attitudes, and representations surrounding Futurism's notion of masculinity could be appropriated in surprising ways. Tavolato's crucial move, consisting in imagining a non-heterosexual masculinity, found strong endorsement in «Lacerba's» cult of the genius and Saint Point's lust. The final outcome was a complex product mixing anarchic, highly individualistic, and hedonistic pronouncements with an equally enthusiastic submission to the state and war. Despite a general attitude of acceptance toward male homosexuality and a set of ideological resources that permitted the articulation of a defense of same-sex desire, the fact remains that the association of masculinity and nationalism was a primary motive in Futurism's sexual politics. This also indicates that Futurism, no matter how innovative and iconoclastic it became in many other aspects, subordinated its gender politics to one of the most long-lasting tropes predominating among intellectuals and politicians: the association of masculinity with nationalism. As the Tavolato experience suggests, most claims around homosexuality within the Futurist constellation could be successful as long as they did not challenge that association.

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