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Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico.

A co-authored novel in Italian Futurism

Abstract

*This essay focuses on 20th-century Italian co-authored literature. I define co-authored literature as a literary practice that entails the active and conscious co-operation of two or more authors. This approach leads to an innovative, argumentative and unpredictable interpenetration (compensation), which is the result of the various authorial contributions. In the first part of the essay, I will analyze the ways in which co-authored writing practice affects the authors' choice of genre. In order to effectively investigate this issue, I survey a set of literary works published by two or more authors in Western context from 1700 to 2013. This quantitative research led me to highlight some significant recurrent characteristics. In the second part, I will focus my attention on a co-authored novel in Italian Futurism entitled *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*, who can help me underline the relationship between the concept of multi-authorship and Modernity.*

Keywords: *20th-century; co-authored literature; Italian Futurism; authorship; genres.*

The main focus of my essay is Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Enif Robert's (1919) literary work titled *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*, which unfortunately not many people know about. Yet, this novel is quite important for the Italian literature on the 20th century as it brings about an

extremely varied set of questions, such as: What is a *gender*? What is an ‘epistolary novel’? How can the main features of Futurist writing and the peculiar style of different authors be defined? Interestingly, what links all these questions together seems to be co-authorship, which also deeply influences the way this novel is written and amplifies the issues dealt with in it.

Co-authorship is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that entails different types of collaboration, which deserve more time and space to be fully discussed¹. Nonetheless, I would provide a systematic yet brief account of the theoretical framework needed for this essay. René Wellek and Austin Warren remark the importance of authorship when two writers decide to collaborate:

the book is a real instance of a collaboration in which the author is the shared agreement between two writers. In terminology, tone, and emphasis there remain doubtless, some slight inconsistencies between the writers; but they venture to think that there may be compensation for these in the sense of two different minds reaching so substantial an agreement².

Wellek and Warren propose the definition above to describe the structure of their volume *Theory of literature*; I use this definition while dealing specifically with a literary work as it clearly points out that the authors want to collaborate and therefore plan carefully how they should proceed. Moreover, this definition suggests that idea that “two different minds”

¹ Cf. F. Medaglia, *La scrittura a quattro mani*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa MultiMedia, 2014.

² R. Wellek, A. Warren, A. *Theory of Literature*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1942, p. VI.

merge to create a product that is more complex and complete than what would be done by each author alone.

I have previously applied this approach while analysing and extracting from Édouard Glissant's *Poetica del diverso*, which describes the creolisation process. I have contended that this is a typical feature of Creole writing: "Creolisation entails that when various elements interconnect, they mutually increase their 'value'. This avoids degrading or diminishing individual identities, both inside and outside"³. Similarly, this study deals with language change within a creolised context and it demonstrates that several factors come into play during this process, but the resulting text retains its main features (without *diminutio*). Yet, it also produces new and unforeseen peculiarities.

On the basis of this brief introduction, I can now proceed to put forward a concise yet sound definition of co-authoring in literature. It can be seen as a planned and aware collaboration between two (or more) authors that leads to an innovative mutual penetration (i.e. compensation), which can result in an unforeseen improvement of each author's contribution in terms of content, language and style.

Before proceeding with my analysis of *Un ventre di donna*, I will briefly introduce co-authorship and will explain in particular what this complex phenomenon entails, especially when compared to other literary genres from a quantitative analysis viewpoint.

To this end, I examine a set of examples of co-authored works published from 1700 to 2013⁴. This corpus has been compiled

³ É. Glissant, *Poetica del diverso*, Roma, Meltemi, 1998, p. 16 (my translation).

⁴ The first example of co-authorship, as it is intended today, dates back to 1741 when John Arbuthnot, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, Alexander Pope and

by searching several national libraries in each country involved in the project (i.e. Italy, Portugal, Spain, the UK, France, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the USA). Moreover, I have searched the catalogues of the most important publishing houses in these countries, which are here defined under the term “Western Countries” for ease of reference. I have opted for this methodological procedure because it can offer a fairly good picture of the phenomenon in the countries under scrutiny. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, although including 1,088 literary works⁵, this sample can return only a partial picture of the whole phenomenon.

Considering the experimental nature of this data-collection project, I cannot exclude that, in some cases, language differences may have played a role in the analysis of this phenomenon. In particular, it may have led to consider co-authorship in a given country as more relevant in some specific fields than in others.

Co-authorship started as a phenomenon that involved mainly poetry rather than prose. However, over time, this trend shifted and more fictional prose was produced thanks to the collaboration of two (or more) authors, while co-authorship in poetry almost disappeared (cf. Figure 1). As can be noticed on

Jonathan Swift first published *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. Baldassarre Castiglione and Raphael's (1519) letter to Pope Leo X cannot be considered as an example of co-authorship as it does not contain instances of authorial creolisation or a co-authoring plan. Similarly, Agostino Mascardi's (1630) two letters to Claudio Achillini and Marco Trevisan, Nicolò Barbarigo's “heroic friendship” and the Occitan *tensos* and *partimens* cannot be considered as instances of co-authorship because they do not display any criolisation process.

⁵ Cf. F. Medaglia, *La scrittura a quattro mani*, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce-Brescia, 2014 for a complete list.

Figure 1, co-authorship demonstrates to be a phenomenon that developed exponentially during the 20th century. In particular, the two most recent periods analysed here (2000-2009 and 2010-2013) display a number of instances that is extremely significant if considering the relatively short period of time taken into account (only fourteen years). The graph reported in Figure 1 demonstrates how co-authorship can be defined as a contemporary phenomenon, even if it started in 1700.

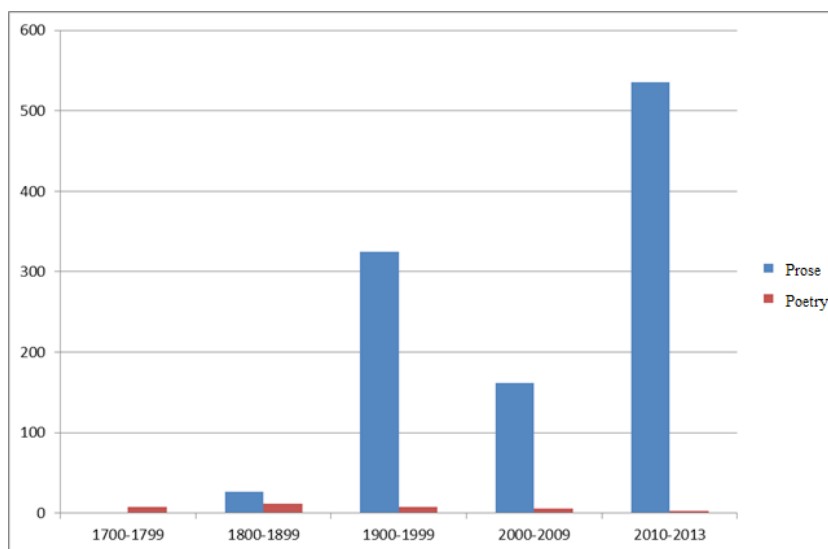


fig. 1 - Co-authorship in prose and poetry in different time periods

(Source: this author's corpus compiled by searching catalogues from 1700 to December 2013)⁶

I will now turn to the discussion and definition of the sub-genres that are an essential feature of this phenomenon.

⁶ The two shortest time periods (2000-2009 and 2010-2013) are compared to the longest and most important ones here. This choice is justified by the fact that this procedure helps highlighting the changes that occurred in the last few years. It does not falsify in any way the evidence retrieved this far.

According to my statistical analysis reported in Figure 2, *noir* fiction is the main sub-genre in co-authorship, as it includes 27% of occurrences out of the whole total dataset taken into account. Interestingly, *romance* also score quite high (16%), ranking second in terms of occurrences. Chronicles rank third with 11% of occurrences, while the other sub-genres rank lower in the list.

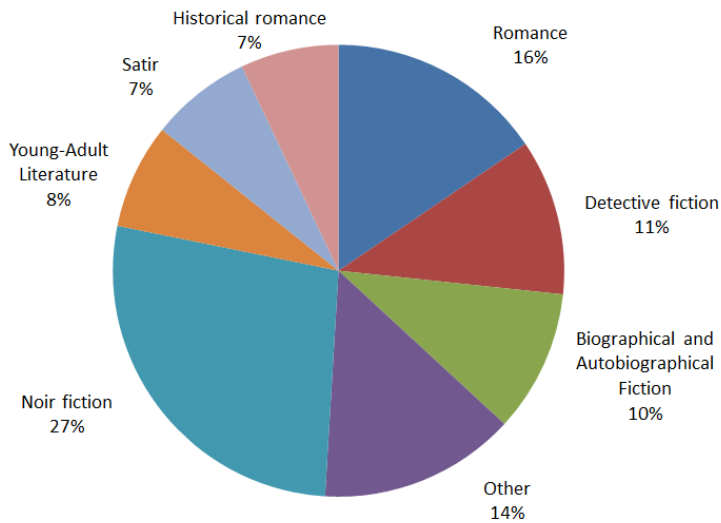


fig. 2 - Sub-genres in prose

(Source: this author's corpus compiled by searching catalogues from 1700 to December 2013)

In order to analyse co-authorship in more detail, I divided the whole sample according to the time periods mentioned above. This helped me verify whether the number of sub-genre has changed over time. This diachronic investigation returned not significant results, meaning that in general the sub-genres preferred in co-authorship have always been the same (cf. Fig. 3). Nonetheless, it is possible to notice a change in terms of

preference and popularity of such sub-genres during the time periods analysed. This may be due to the different literary trends popular during each period, which deeply influenced Western consumption literature from the 19th century up until today. This claim is further corroborated by the link that seems to exist between the production of co-authored literary works and the spread of more commercial and popular fiction.

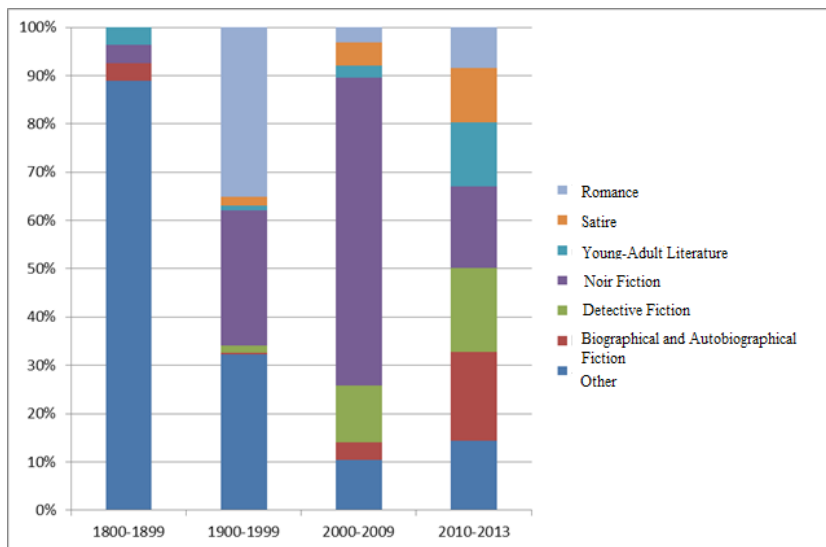


fig. 3 - Co-authored literature: sub-genres according to time period

(Source: this author's corpus compiled by searching catalogues from 1700 to December 2013)

So far, my essay has concentrated on the graphs reporting the phenomenon of co-authorship in Western prose. I would like now to focus on the specific case on co-authorship in Italian prose so as to offer a detailed account based on the comparison between the whole sample and a limited part of it. To be sure, by looking at the Italian production, it can be noted that the Italian co-authored literary works display a high number of occurrences

that can be subsumed under the *noir* fiction sub-genre. Hence, there is not a significant difference between the two samples analysed (Fig. 4). Moreover, like in the general Western corpus, the Italian sample demonstrates a constant increase of occurrences of this sub-genre.

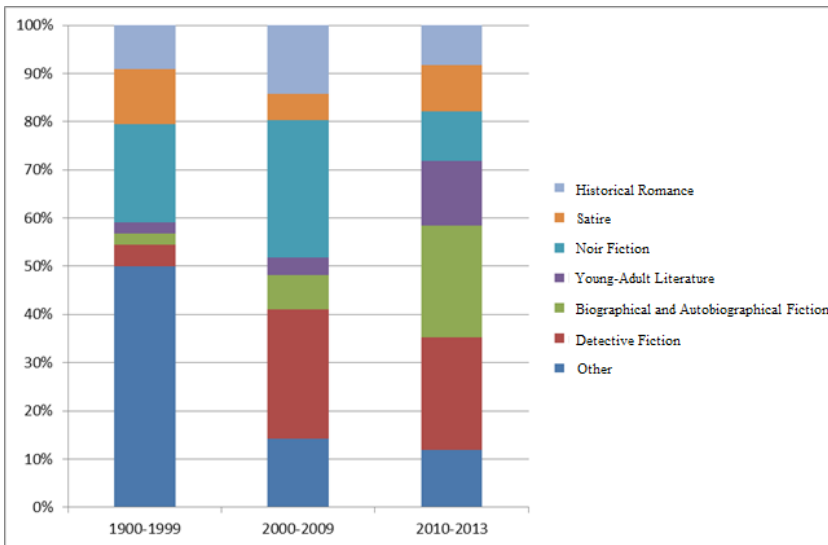


fig. 4 - Italian co-authored literary prose: categorisation as per subgenre

(Source: this author's corpus compiled by searching catalogues from 1700 to December 2013)

Therefore, it seem safe to state that, apart from a few sub-genres (e.g. historical romance and children's literature), which in any case do not score significantly compared to my previous searches on the whole sample, the Italian sample of co-authored prose does not different significantly from the rest. Hence, the general statistical results are still valid.

It seems clear that the different types of collaboration between authors are influenced by the historical and social context within which they are embedded. Italy's artistic production during the

20th century was enormously influenced and characterised by Futurism. This overarching artistic movement encouraged the discussion of those issues and themes that subsequently became prominent within Italian literature, which I will in more detail explain shortly.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, in Italy and elsewhere, aesthetic communication and artistic language started to depart. Futurist artists were the main actors of such slip as they refused traditional forms of artistic expression. Consequently, they managed to create a new type of artistic language that could match more closely the changing of the time, which was characterised by industrial production. The followers and members of the Futurist movement strived to cancel the past. However, this did not necessarily imply inventing a new future⁷, but it became soon clear that it could foster and acceleration in dealing with those issues that would later become the basis of contemporary literature, e.g. the speed, globalisation and industrialisation of literature. The advent of Futurism led to a new avant-garde period that could allow authors to search and subvert “old traditions” as well as seek authorial “multiplication”. This change was felt as necessary since it would allow the literary world to survive the frantic innovations that those years brought, amplifying speed in everyday life and, most importantly, in writing.

The peculiar way of writing and the themes dealt with by the Futurist authors helped making the complex authorial depersonalisation easier (cf. some of the less known and quoted examples: *Il Novissimo segretario galante: 400 lettere d'amore per ogni evenienza* (1928) and *Lo zar non è morto. Grande romanzo d'avventure* (1929), by I Dieci and *L'isola dei baci*.

⁷ L. Ballerini, *La piramide capovolta*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1975, p. 16.

Romanzo erotico-sociale (1918) by F. T. Marinetti and B. Corra) . This process implied merging single and multiple selves that could lead to a common ground where the main ideology was not based on single individuals but on the group as a whole.

It is worth remarking that Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who was also the funder to the Italian Futurist movement, is erroneously perceived as its sole referent. Instead, we should always remember that the Futurism is a ‘movement’, a place within which an extremely varied group of people moved in search of innovation.

An extremely good example of Marinetti’s ability to relate with the other members of the movement is *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*, an epistolary novel written in collaboration with Enif Robert. As a consequence of this, narration proceeds according to the scheme of dialogic narrative, meaning that one author replies to the other so as to complete and transform the text. This leads to a continuous exchange of information and change in perspective; one single narrative object can be transformed and shaped according to the point of view from which an author looks at it. As Lucia Re states: “However, the double signature does not mean that Enif Robert is not only the co-author, as it is often given for granted, but she is the author thanks to Marinetti’s mediation and maieutic intervention. As underlined in this book, Marinetti and Futurism mainly played a therapeutic role as they helped Enif Robert look inside herself bravely and allowed her voice to come out”⁸. Some scholars, including Lucia Re⁹, Andrew Bridges¹⁰ and to some extent

⁸ L. Re, *Enif Robert, F.T. Marinetti e il romanzo Un ventre di donna: bisessualità, trauma e mito dell'isteria*, in “California Italian Studies”, (5) 2, 2014, p. 45 (my translation).

⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 43-82.

Barbara Zecchi¹¹, tend to trivialise co-authorship, sometimes maintaining that Marinetti's signature was mainly used to advertise the book itself. Some others put forward the hypothesis that this novel was entirely written by Enif Robert and Marinetti's contribution is a merely decorative asset. In actual facts, and as I will demonstrate shortly, the main feature of this novel is the fact that the two authors actively contributed to its writing and this is demonstrated by the fact that it is based on a conversation that engages and helps both authors develop their ideology. Through this continuous dialogue over a merely material event, both authors unexpectedly change their writing style.

This novel is based on an event that occurred to Enif Robert a few years before World War I. She had to undergo hysterectomy and this led her to write about this painful experience as well as the several operations related to this disease. On the other hand, Marinetti, who is on the battlefield of the Italian front, wrote letters, warnings, slogans and suggestions to his friend Robert so as to help her while she lay in a hospital bed. With Marinetti's help, Enif Robert wrote this novel and managed to reflect on her relationship with pain as well as the way her intimacy was violated. This also led her to reflect on the female identity more in general. She explained how it is constantly compromising between science and technology, on the one hand, and feelings and emotions on the other hand. As a woman, Robert felt caught in this dilemma and tried to find protection in what the literature could give her, meaning the possibility to create another world.

¹⁰ A. Bridges, *Autobiographical Seduction and Futurism*, in "Carte Italiane", (1) 13, 1994, pp. 16-33.

¹¹ B. Zecchi, *Il corpo femminile trampolino tra scrittura e volo. Enif Robert e Biancamaria Frabotta: settant'anni verso il tempo delle donne*, in "Italice", Vol. 69, n. 4 (Winter, 1992), pp. 505-518.

This seemed to have healing properties on her. She was a writer looking for her identity through her writing; yet, she was very well aware of the fact that literature is not only a shelter and a place where to find joy, but also a “way to denounce the truth that being humans entails”¹².

From the 20th century onwards, and more than ever before, women started writing urged by the desire of defining themselves¹³. However, this should be seen as an example of women’s writing rather than feminine literature. As Martina Giuffrè pointed out, this writing allows “women to reflect on themselves and their condition [...] These literary works [also] written by women suggest important, new and interesting paths that help understanding that critical thinking women that informs their investigation of the female identity”¹⁴. It is this need to find a definition to their identity that led Marinetti and Robert to leave their contributions to the book under scrutiny separated. This also allowed the author to project themselves into each other’s writing. The main theme of this book is the main character’s aching body: “her most intimate female part – her womb – which is an integral part of the main character’s identity as it determines how she experiences the world around her. This is the starting point of her comprehension process as well as her means to express her mental state. Marinetti’s character writes to the main female character from the battlefield of the front; for him, her sick body is both a physical object and a psychological state that need curing and constant monitoring. It is also the metaphor of the social body devastated by war. It

¹² A. Di Benedetto, *L'uomo del silenzio*, BUR, Milano, 2006, p. 13 (my translation).

¹³ An example of this is Boris Akunin who adopted Anna Borisova as his pseudonym.

¹⁴ M. Giuffrè, *op. cit.*, p. 28 (my translation).

symbolizes Italy during World War I”¹⁵. In order to investigate adequately these two authors’ relationship, it is essential to take into account another Marinetti’s novel, titled *Come si seducono le donne* and written a few years earlier. It contains a letter that Robert wrote to Marinetti that can be seen as the starting point of their exchange since it highlights their similarities and differences. Marinetti dictated Bruno Corra his answer to Robert on a September morning in 1916 while temporarily away from the front of World War I. This is one of the few instances where Marinetti complied with the grammar rules in terms of syntax and punctuation. It can be described as a sort of manual that is divided into eleven chapters. Marinetti uses a quite polemical tone in almost every page to explain to the young Futurists how women can be seduced. He makes ample use of biographical example so as to demonstrate everyone how they can become “good” futurists:

Un libro sull’arte di sedurre le donne, ora?...Sì, ora, nella conflagrazione futurista delle nazioni, nella nostra guerra igienica liberatrice novatrice centuplicatrice io sento il bisogno di dirvi come si seducono le donne¹⁶.

In the very beginning of this book, Marinetti explains that this it is: “Non contro la donna dunque ma contro il ‘concetto donna’ creato da noi egoisti, gelosi, ossessionati, troppe volte incapaci di considerarla come una cosa importantissima ma non essenziale e sovrastante tutte le altre”¹⁷, and he also underlines

¹⁵ P. Sica, *Il testo, il corpo e la cultura futurista: riflessioni sul romanzo Un ventre di donna*, in “Quaderni del ‘900”, V - Scrittrici nella politica culturale del Fascismo, 2005, p. 11 (my translation).

¹⁶ F. T. Marinetti, *Come si seducono le donne*, Tip. A. Vallecchi, Firenze, 1917, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 23.

that this book aims to become something “[...] che demolisce concetti ‘sacri’ come l’Unicità, l’Eternità e la Fedeltà nell’amore”¹⁸. Enif Robert is “a good futurist woman” who, in the letter I mentioned above, supports Marinetti’s claims by stating that:

[...] per le donne *vere* che sentono il superbo slancio del proprio destino, che pensano all’amore come ad un loro diritto, che hanno lasciato indietro nella vita l’ingombrante bagaglio di sentimentalità decadenti, il verbo *sedurre* ha perduto da tempo ogni significato. E che aspettiamo a definire l’amore una intelligente cooperazione fra due esseri che cercano insieme con eguali diritti, egual volontà la soluzione di un problema psico-fisiologico più o meno urgente?¹⁹.

In the same letter, she reaffirms even more boldly her agreement with her friend Marinetti; however, she also takes the chance to point out how he sometimes goes too far, when she writes: “[...] e perciò tutte le donne intelligenti sono con Voi, e vi perdonano sorridenti i paradossi. Auguri per la vita vostra di combattente-nato, e saluti”²⁰. In this book, Marinetti promotes a positive image of women and their relevance within the society. Yet, he does so by offering paradoxical experiences that recall a chauvinist attitude aiming to seduce them. Robert manages to read through Marinetti’s paradoxical discourse that, on the one hand, brings about modern concepts that encourage women’s independence. On the other hand, his discourse is still bound to an extremely chauvinist way of thinking. Robert interprets his way of reasoning in the best possible manner and manages to

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 22.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. IV.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. VI.

move beyond his attempt to provoke her. In this book she projects her image of a woman who rebels against the stereotyped image of women and femininity of those years. As Barbara Zecchi points out, “she is a widow with a child having an affair with Giulio. This makes her parents and friends upset as they would prefer to see her remarrying. Her refusal to comply with the patriarchal rules of the society reveals in her rejection of an imposed “femininity”. This is further confirmed by her relationship with Giulio since she refuses to be a “slave of love”, as Jessica Benjamin would say. Sometimes, she prefers and enjoys play this role, pretending to be jealous. According to Enif, love is a vital stimulus which is also unsatisfactory and almost irrelevant [...], she is openly atheist and pokes fun at her gynaecologist by pretending to be having an orgasm while he visits her; she indulges in the almost childish pleasure of breaking things so as to annoy Giulio, etc”²¹.

In the light of all the above, I can now focus on the analysis of *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*. This novel is the result “of a complex and experimental project: it merges together different types of documents and materials: some biographical pages written by Enif Robert, a sort of a journal recounting her disease and the laparotomy she has to undergo; some letters by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti who writes to his sick friend”²². In order to understand how Enif Robert deals with the main theme of this book, it is essential to mention her manifesto named “COURAGE + TRUTH”²³, included in the preface to the book.

²¹ B. Zecchi, *art. cit.*, p. 506.

²² C. Bello Minciocchi (a cura di), *Spirale di dolcezza + serpe di fascino. Scrittrici Futuriste Antologia*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 2007, p. 225.

²³ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*, Facchi, Milano, 1919, p. XI.

This essential yet pragmatic motto is her true declaration of a woman that is also a member of Futurism, as well as:

E mi sono convinta che una non ultima ragione di quelle sue pietose pose plastiche andava ricercata nel genere letterario ch'ella prediligeva. Libri, giornali, riviste, dove le donne letterate sfiorano *'con dita d'azzurro'* le più inconcludenti rarità del senso che vuol parere raffinatissimi e sedicente vibrante; dove la ricerca di snobismi spirituali è così intensa da raggiungere a volte incredibili spunti di ridicolo. Siate sicure: nessuno più crede, ormai, alle nostre divertenti giravolte di belle parole dal ritmo elegante – NESSUNO – neppure gli studenti liceali malati di adolescenza. Cerchiamo quindi di cambiar strada e *di convincere*, raccontando d'ora in poi la nostra vita vera, intessuta di realtà non sempre sorridenti, che MAI PIÙ dobbiamo diluire nel sogno. Facciamo che 'donna futurista' voglia dire CORAGGIO + VERITÀ²⁴.

As Cecilia Bello Minciocchi observes, such a statement “is directly and naturally reflected on her expressive code, her choice of *topoi* and style. We no longer find “cerebral fever”, merging with the night, starts or fireflies, attempts to listen to one’s own soul in order to achieve self-maieutics. These themes are typical of another Italian futurist, Maria Ginanni, who wrote in her incredibly fine style. Enif Robert and Marinetti write about her long and painful disease that often forced her to lie in bed and undergo several operations to her womb. Robert therefore offers a more brutal perspective: she has the courage to face a simple and painful truth that relates to her body rather than her soul”²⁵:

²⁴ *Ivi*, pp. XIV-XV.

Mi è sembrato, leggendo, che un fascio di luce nuova mi aprisse e penetrasse un più vasto orizzonte, che il ritmo stanco della mia vitalità quasi vinta dal male riprendesse a pulsare violento e vittorioso. Certo mi avete additata una strada non percorsa, ignota alle verbosità inutili²⁶.

As Cinzia Blum contends: “Enif Robert's novel *Un ventre di donna* proclaims loudly its emancipation from the conventions of the fashionable, predominant genre of feminine literature – the so-called ‘letteratura rosa’ – and the dictates of bourgeois moralism. A manifesto-preface entitled “CORAGGIO + VERITÀ” launches an attack on women writers' sentimental literature: in the spirit of the avant-garde movements, characterized by an effort to reintegrate art into life, Robert emphasizes the relationship between the two realms and rails against the hypocritical romantic rhetoric of contemporary feminine literature”²⁷.

This is a literary work written by a man and a woman which obviously displays its authors' differences in terms of style, although they still belong to the same avant-garde movement. They decided to merge their writing to create a single tale. However, in some parts of this tale each author emerges as an individual and their collaborative writing diverges to take different paths that clearly show each author's contributions. In such instances, the split is evident as demonstrated, on the one

²⁵ C. Bello Minciocchi, *Lo sperimentalismo terapeutico di Enif Robert. Storia di una guarigione futurista*, in “Avanguardia. Rivista di letteratura contemporanea”, 26, 2004, p. 68 (my translation).

²⁶ F. T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, p 127.

²⁷ C. Blum, *The Scarred Womb of the Futurist Woman*, in “Carte Italiane”, 1 (8), 1987, p.16.

hand, by Marinetti's precise and clear prose and, on the other hand, by Robert's softer and baroque writing:

Mi annoio [...] io penso che sarei stata un poco pittore e un poco poeta, se fossi nata uomo [...] Mi sento veramente, in questo momento, poco donna [...] Ricordo però la gioia profondamente carnale che provai otto giorni dopo il mio parto, quando il mio spirito fissò nettamente questo pensiero: 'Ecco la mia creatura, nata da me, voluta da me, portata da me, nel mio ventre'. Giulio tarda un po' troppo, oggi. È quasi l'una. Non mi preoccupo. Ha una quantità di affari, non sono mai stata gelosa, non lo diventerò, credo, mai²⁸.

The exchange is based on the differences between the two authors, which also becomes the central theme of this novel. Marinetti helps Robert with his letters, advising her to accept his "futurist cure"²⁹ to overcome a difficult moment and, at the same time, to become a 'real' woman. This influences Robert's writing as well. From a stylistic standpoint, *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico* is extremely varied. Some parts display a strong subversive, experimental style including the words-in-freedom technique whereas others demonstrate to "still owe something to the journal genre and having something of an intimate touch"³⁰. At the beginning of this book, the writing appears to be uncertain and delicate. However, as the account of the disease and life experiences connected to it unfold, the prose become clearer ('hygienic' to use a futurist term) and harsh:

Sono a letto. La finestra è aperta sul golfo arrossato dal tramonto. Penso che dal mio ventre sia colato tutto quel sangue, formando una pozza smisurata. Laggiù, quelle

²⁸ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 134.

³⁰ C. Bello Miniciacchi (a cura di), *op. cit.*, p. 226.

montagne impallidiscono, come la mia carne sotto il terrore di una nuova incisione. Una piccola falce di luna d'acciaio, una luna chirurgica, domina il paesaggio anatomico³¹.

and

Dio??? Che è, Dio? Dov'è? Non lo sento, né m'importa di sentirlo. Il conforto soprannaturale non ha per me alcuna importanza. Mentre compio una toilette accuratissima delle mie unghie che vernicio con precisione, senza tremare, mi vertigina nel pensiero la vuota immagine del Dio barbuto venerato dalla gente ignorante, e la idea astratta di un Dio invisibile, creatore del mondo, forza superiore che governa i destini, venerata dai sapienti.

Nessuna considerazione di tal genere mi commuove. Non mi convinco affatto della necessità di aggrappare la mia anima ai sostegni della religione. Sta benissimo in piedi DA SÉ³².

As Cecilia Bello Minciacchi remarks, throughout the book, Robert talks and confesses to Marinetti “[her] courage to talk about real life avoiding to make it sweeter or cover those aspects of it that are more difficult to refer to, without being tempted to use metaphysical strategies that may sound visionary”³³ and can be perceived from her “belligerent statements [...] that attempt to legitimate erotic instincts and go beyond the mind-body dichotomy (which is also the real culprit) that pairs with other dichotomies such as spirit-matter, chastity-lust, abstraction-concreteness, men-women, following assumptions that were

³¹ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³² F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

³³ C. Bello Minciacchi (a cura di), *op. cit.*, p. 226 (my translation).

popular (see Weininger's lesson) at the beginning of that century"³⁴:

Tutto già detto di sentimenti estetici, di ondeggiamenti aerei nello spazio azzurro: tutto da dire, invece, delle realtà d'ogni giorno, delle sinuosità che la vita torce e ritorce senza posa nelle anime nostre tormentate. È questo, dunque, che dobbiamo affrontare. Rendere la verità, LA VE-RI-TÀ, senza il groviglio di veli e di lievi accomodamenti che la deformano rendendola... graziosa. Ecco: la verità non può essere soltanto graziosa [...] ³⁵.

and

Pulsare nervoso di forze vive accelerate dal ritmo del respiro. Nel piacere, questo magico viluppo di fisiologia sana deve avere una larga gioia di onda violenta. Tutti i nervi, tesi a raccogliere le sonorità ardenti, a moltiplicare le sensazioni febbrili, del caldo dono virile... ³⁶.

What strikes the reader's attention is certainly the brutality of the images that are conveyed by both authors throughout the text. They aim to strip the flesh from the images and consequently from the words. As Robert herself maintains, it is necessary:

[...] smettere il tono civettuolo e inconcludente che è caratteristico della letteratura muliebre d'oggi, e di cominciare con energia l'enunciazione vigorosa di realtà ANCHE NON ESTETICHE, delle anime nostre. Via le tiriterie di stati d'animo velati, graziosi, assurdi, quali la contemplazione aeriforme delle stelle luminose, delle notti

³⁴ C. Bello Minciocchi, *art. cit.*, p. 70 (my translation).

³⁵ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. XIII-XIV.

³⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 204-205.

lunari, la descrizione meticolosa delle quattro stagioni rifritte in tutte le prose e le poesie maciullate da generazioni e generazioni di grandi, mediocri, infimi prosatori e poeti!³⁷.

Marinetti retains an ambiguous and contradictory attitude throughout the book. On the one hand, he promotes a new role that differs from the one traditionally attached to women. On the other hand, he links it to the dominant chauvinist thought. This is particularly evident when both authors agree in describing the female womb as a trench. This symbolic equation is part of a broader process that describes war as an aesthetically hygienic phenomenon rather than a painful experience:

Voi non sapete, per esempio, che ciò che accade al vostro ventre è profondamente simbolico. Infatti, il vostro ventre somiglia a quello della terra, che oggi ha un'immensa ferita chirurgica di trincee. L'ossessione che attira e concentra i vostri sguardi sulle labbra della vostra ferita è identica alla nostra [...] Simboli... analogie... Sono sicuro che la gran ferita sarà chiusa presto da una nostra nuova operazione. Auguro altrettanto alla vostra ferita³⁸.

If for futurists a literary work is a tool that can help the author mediate with the society, this book becomes a perfect example of such a scope. It precisely aims to show to all the members of the society that the only real cure to the diseases that attack our body or mind is Futurism itself. This becomes clear when Robert agrees with Marinetti regarding the “futurist cure” and the strong bond that they form, which is also demonstrated by Robert’s reply to one of Marinetti’s letters:

³⁷ *Ivi*, pp. XI-XII.

³⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 113-115.

Grazie: dite cose meravigliose che frustano la volontà illanguidita. Mi è sembrato, leggendo, che un fascio di luce mi aprisse e penetrasse un più vasto orizzonte, che il ritmo stanco della mia vitalità quasi vinta dal male riprendesse a pulsare violento e vittorioso. Certo mi avete additata una strada non percorsa, ignota alle verbosità inutili dei medici e della scienza che mi ha solo torturata per lunghi mesi senza guarirmi³⁹.

Although *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico* contains a diverse set of materials, it seems quite easy to perceive it as a text based on the two authors' discussion regarding their "gender" differences. The themes, scopes and, as already highlighted towards the end of the book, their writing blend to become an ultimate "superior actor", whose main objective is celebrating Futurism and the female identity as put forward in it. As Barbara Zecchi remarks, in this work "rejecting the typically female features means opposing to a body (and a role) that has been reified by a phallogentric society. This is the rejection of a body that is seen as an object, which cannot therefore be claimed. The main character of *Un ventre di donna* does not own her body. A (masculine) type of medicine inspects and cuts it disrespectfully, being at time violent. Enif experiences a real struggle with her surgeon (Jack the Womb Killer as she dubs him) – since her sick uterus is at stake, so that it is eventually depersonalized and rejected by her owner [...] Enif is 'a too virile mind to be trapped in a too feminine body'; hence, she seeks to make her body more masculine by reaching a complete merge into a male identity, a 'perfect' emancipation: being a woman is seen as something "physical and not necessarily

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 127.

‘mental’. Body and mind are separated; her femininity becomes something strictly material rather than a social construction”⁴⁰.

Despite the fact that the two authors’ writings remain formally separated up until the end of the novel, from chapters eight and nine onwards, it is impossible to find any marked authorial distinction. Cecilia Bello’s claims regarding this are particularly interesting, especially when she points out that: “this proves to be a writing style that, towards the end of the book, is influenced by the epistolary relationship with Marinetti and boosted by the encouraging news that Futurism brings about. Her writing style becomes progressively more experimental, by attempting to find even more daring analogies and create free words to express the feelings she felt when entering the operating theatre”⁴¹. Robert’s lexicon eventually becomes Marinetti’s, especially because of the ‘Futurist cure’ he offers: “her lexis is filled with energy, becomes dynamic and extremely sensual”⁴²; while she ‘dries’ her wound, her language dries up as well:

[...] è veramente bellissimo, giovane, perfetto, senza una piega, con un’elastica solidità muscolare e un velluto epidermico dolce, attraente allo sguardo e al tatto. Non ha che un difetto: quella ferita terribile, piena di mistero. Penso alle forme ambigue, quasi terrorizzate e terrorizzanti di certe ferite mortali di pugnale. Ferite che parlano, raccontano disperatamente, quando la bocca del cadavere è già chiusa, convinta, pacificata nell’al di là. La mia ferita è certo più eloquente della mia bocca [...]. Analogie infinite che mi suggerisce il mio ventre. Il Golfo di Santa Margherita non è forse un dolce ventre voluttuoso tutto imbrigliato di diamanti

⁴⁰ B. Zecca, *art. cit.*, pp. 508-509.

⁴¹ C. Bello Minciocchi, *art. cit.*, p. 78 (my translation).

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 83 (my translation).

che tremano sotto una lenta brezza? Questa, con grazia pianistica, fa scivolare le sue dita di seta e di carta velina sugli orli della mia ferita, mentre si precisa e si accentua un dialogo curiosissimo fra il sole incandescente e il mio ventre che cuoce felice⁴³.

and

bianco bianco bianco abbagliante chiarore di cielo di sole da finestroni lucenti [silenzio] piccole suore candide tacite sorridere di volti dolcissimi abitudine allo strazio quotidiano delle carni ammalate. Rabbrivire del corpo al contatto freddo del lettuccio di vetro – FREDDO – brivido della calda nudità e corrispondere dell'urto tortuoso al dorso al cuore forte battito vigile sospettoso...

Affacciarsi della piccola infermiera pratica brutta rapida sicura [silenzio] a grandi caratteri nella parete in faccia. Entrare rigido agghiacciante della «Scienza» calva fredda arcigna ansioso colpo nel cuore.

Sciacquo d'acqua correnti mani braccia nude volti intenti candidi camicini lunghi LUNGHI e sciacquo cic-ciac-cic d'acqua calda sul ventre sul male nascosto [...]. Mugolio di parole rotte schiacciate dalla rete sottile tenace implorare dello sguardo atterrito coglie sui volti cambiamento d'espressione prima dolce ora risoluta aggressiva [silenzio] [silenzio] barbaglio di sole su le sillabe inesorabili – inutile sforzo di fuga – accorgersi che tutto precipita sentire il cervello battere colpi violenti un suono di campanello vibratissimo acutissimo lacerante driiiiiiiiiinn-driiiiiiiiiinn nella testa che si rompe – calma improvvisa – immobilità

⁴³ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

repentina – larghe onde di vita fuggente – due battiti lenti
ovattati pesanti della macchina fer-ma⁴⁴.

The two extracts reported above display some, albeit minor differences. Although the semantic force of each excerpt remains unchanged, it marks a shift in Robert's writing. To be sure, the first example reported above displays a sentence structure and images that are aesthetically marked, bound to a symbolism that entails some *liberty* features. Conversely, the second example seems to be more essential in denotative terms as it displays analogical constructions marking a change: from the baroque style used in the first few chapters she shifts into a more essential one in the last chapters of the book.

If we accept Luciano Anceschi's suggestion that: "the whole idea of a text [...] is nothing but a set of relations that depart from and return to the text itself"⁴⁵, then this text is clearly co-authored by a man and a woman. Hence, it seems particularly useful here to focus on those paths that lead to the creation of "a text whose composing elements are as such because they belong to it. In other words: the whole meaning of a text is greater than its composing parts taken separately"⁴⁶. In Erich Köhler's words, this process can further be described as: "a desperate search for the identity via the other's love"⁴⁷, whereby 'love' has to be understood as the relation to the other and one's spontaneous interest in another person.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 134-137.

⁴⁵ L. Anceschi, *Tre studi di estetica*, Mursia, Milano, 1966, p. 53.

⁴⁶ J. Mukarovsky, *La funzione, la norma e il valore estetico come fatti sociali*, Einaudi, Torino, 1971, p. 168.

⁴⁷ E. Köhler, *Per una teoria materialistica della letteratura. Saggi francesi*, Liguori, Napoli, 1980, p. 110.

According to Futurism, as also demonstrated by the novel under scrutiny, the concept of identity cannot be defined in absolute terms. As Glissant explains: “what becomes important is not the relevance of each single root, but the way it enters in contact with the other roots: the relationship itself”⁴⁸.

In the light of the above, and drawing on Erich Köhler’s suggestion, chance can be seen as new element that is connected to the gender issue. As Köhler elucidates: “chance is what allows two human beings to meet and turns into their destiny, be it in the real and fictional world; chance takes a card within a game that has a finite although countless number of possibilities, which are also unforeseeable”⁴⁹.

Hence, if we consider the human relationship that two people establish, especially if they are two writers of opposite gender, according Köhler’s unpredictability, the result cannot be other than *Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico*. When a text is co-authored by a man and a woman, the result is “the unpredictability of our experience and mutual influences”⁵⁰:

L’astro incandescente manifesta subito la sua meravigliosa brutalità incivile avventandosi con furia selvaggia e senza diplomazie sulla mia ferita [...]. Ressa di fiamme cocenti che vogliono tutte penetrarvi profondamente con una soave e pur dolorosa, lenta e pur velocissima ferocia. È un amplesso avvolgente e una lacerazione insieme. Ogni poro del mio ventre è una bocca che si apre, trema, vorrebbe fuggire. La mia ferita ferve di un’ansia precisa e confusa. La sento immensificarsi, come se fosse la bocca di un vulcano. La

⁴⁸ E. Glissant, *Poetica del diverso*, Meltemi, Roma, 1998, p. 26.

⁴⁹ E. Köhler, *Il romanzo e il caso: da Stendhal a Camus*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1990, p. 10.

⁵⁰ E. Glissant, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

guardo, e mi stupisco di trovarla così piccola. Contiene indubbiamente il travaglio di tre o quattro miliardi di formicai solari. Tutto il sole, più vasto della terra, è nella mia ferita⁵¹.

Marinetti, and Futurism in general, help Robert go beyond sentimentalism and a pity to concentrate more on the overflowing materiality and sensuality of her body. I do not agree with Cecilia Bello Minciocchi's claim that this story: "is told according to a point of view that is totally and dangerously individual"⁵². Conversely, it appears to be an allegory of the futurist feminine identity that results from its exchange and debate with the society:

IL SOLE

Dimentica te stesso... Slègati... Sciogli le tue paure... Apriti... Colerò una lava di forza nella tua forma convessa levigata succosa di frutto. La ferita che ti fu fatta da un ordigno inadatto non ha importanza. La chiuderò perfettamente, come si chiudono perfettamente le ferite aperte dal remo nel mare.

IL VENTRE

Ho dimenticato tutto... Tutti i pensieri della testa ormai lontana. [...] Sono tutto aperto, offerto a te. Mi struggo di piacere nella tua vasta bocca di caucciù rovente! Ma modera per pietà la tua violenza scottante. Mi sento come un pane nella tua bocca di forno. S'addensa il sapore vitale della mia mollica e si fortifica la coesione della mia crosta dorata; ma temo di carbonizzarmi!

⁵¹ F. T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

⁵² C. Bello Minciocchi, *art. cit.*, p. 89 (my translation).

IL SOLE

Non temere. Io taglio, apro, rimescolo, divido e ricongiungo, brucio i germi della morte, pèttino ogni piccola treccia di nervi, rifaccio i nodi dei tessuti, le alleanze delle cellule, rianimo le pompe dei vasi sanguigni. Tutto con la velocità delle mie lunghe dita spirali, di fuoco liquido inesauribile.

IL VENTRE

Perdòname; sono tuo; fa di me ciò che vuoi. Sono quasi liberato da ogni coscienza. Mi sento leggero [*sic*], impersonale, staccato dalle altre membra, e m'inalzo [*sic*] verso di te nella luce, rapito dal tuo ardore sradicante che appassionatamente mi succhia in te... Taglia! Ferisci! Lacera! Dilania! Spalanca! Sarò tuo a brandelli. Tuo! Infilzami! O stritolami! Carbonizzami! Così! Ancòra! Ancòra!...”⁵³.

In the extract above, Enif Robert “draws her conclusions” regarding this Futurist experience and offers a summary of this learning process. Yet, this process of female realization takes place according to “masculine” parameters. This is demonstrated by her lexical choices since the word ‘sole’ (the sun) symbolically refers to the masculine sphere (as opposed to ‘moon’) and it is used as a central futurist symbol. It is therefore possible to conclude that the masculine discourse dominates the feminine; the authorial merging, which is hoped for from the beginning of the novel, is achieved through virile power. The situation depicted in this novel seems to represent the complexities and ambiguities that are typical of Futurism. In this text, the dominance of masculine terms becomes paradoxical and challenging.

⁵³ F.T. Marinetti-E. Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

Un ventre di donna: romanzo chirurgico finally achieves its objective to become a modern allegory of the identity of the 'real' Futurist woman who can raise above 'gender' differences, which are often able to communicate. This also leads to a continuous comparison with the other. This novel is an extremely peculiar and innovative work that cannot help but reminding us Hermann Hesse's statement in *Narcissus and Goldmund*, which in my opinion fits this context perfectly:

We are not meant to come together, not any more than sun and moon were meant to come together, or sea and land. We are sun and moon, dear friend; we are sea and land. It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is: each the other's opposite and complement⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ H. Hesse, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, Picador, New York, 1968, pp. 42-43.