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Mallarmé and His Futurist ‘Heir’ Marinetti

Abstract: Marinetti is known for his call to arms against Mallarmé’s aesthetics, but, in actual fact, he admired the great Symbolist at the beginning of his literary career. Moreover, in 1916, Marinetti published the first Italian translation of Mallarmé’s *Versi e prose*. But Mallarmé’s legacy did not enter his poetics in a pure fashion. This becomes most apparent in their diverging attitude towards the book as a cultural attainment and a literary vehicle. While Mallarmé’s ‘Book’ was organized according to a model in which all the elements relate to each other as in a system of echoes, Futurist texts were characterized by the absence of both memory and reverberation between the different parts of the book. What was important for the Futurist work was only its movement *onwards*, its accelerated pace towards an absolute utilization of the technical possibilities of the newspaper medium. However, the press could not be a model for either Mallarmé or Marinetti; in the first case, because it suggested a false immediacy of reality, in the second case, because it was written in a passéist manner. Marinetti’s ‘Tavole di parole in libertà’ can be considered an updated version of the mutual reflections between the words as precious stones in Mallarmé’s poetry. In this essay, I shall demonstrate how the internal organization of *Zang Tumb Tuuum* is far removed from Mallarmé’s structuring of ‘the Book’.

Keywords: Symbolism, Words-in-Freedom, typography, book art, newspaper, Little Magazines, Wireless Imagination

Introduction

The relation between Marinetti and Mallarmé was complex, and it is not self-evident to speak of the former as an heir of the latter. On the one hand, Marinetti expressed early on his admiration for Mallarmé, whom he considered in 1902 to be the greatest non-living poet because of the “evocative power”, the “prodigious harmony” and the “verbal sorcery” of his verses.¹ On the other hand, Marinetti

¹ “J’aime entre tous, le poète Stéphane Mallarmé parce que, méprisant tout ce qu’il se prouva facile en des poèmes tels que ‘Les Fenêtres’ et ‘Apparition’, il rêva de créer une symphonie poétique aussi définitive et magique que celle exécutée par Richard Wagner, en musique. ‘L’après-midi d’un Faune’ et ‘Hérodiade’, témoignages éblouissants de cet effort héroïque, sont les poèmes les plus grands et les plus purs du XIXe siècle, de par leur puissance évocatrice, leur

did everything in his power to present Futurism as a movement that had made a complete break with all those preceding it. In *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (1914), for example, he declared that there existed “no poetry before us”.² And in the manifesto, *We Renounce Our Symbolist Masters, the Last of All Lovers of the Moonlight* (1911), he explained why there was a need for an absolute rupture with the whole Symbolist school:

We have sacrificed everything for the success of this Futurist concept of life. To such a degree that today, after having loved them intensely, we hate the glorious forefathers of our intellects, the great Symbolist geniuses, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine. Today we feel nothing but contempt for them for having swum in the river of time, continually looking back over their shoulders toward the distant blue wellspring of the past, toward the “ciel antérieur où fleurit la beauté.” For those geniuses, there was no poetry without nostalgia, without evocation of times that were dead and gone, without the mists of history and legend. We detest them [...], [o]ur Symbolist fathers, [because they] had a passion that we think was ridiculous – the passion for things eternal, the desire for the immortal, imperishable masterpiece.³

As far as Mallarmé is concerned, Marinetti denounced his predecessor’s aesthetics in the manifesto, *Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom* (1913):

I am at war with the precious, ornamental aesthetics of Mallarmé and his quest for the rare word, for the unique, irreplaceable, elegant, evocative, and exquisite adjective. I don’t want to evoke an idea or a sensation with these traditionalist charms or affectations, I want to seize them roughly and hurl them straight in the reader’s face. Moreover, with this typographical revolution, I am at war with Mallarmé’s static ideal, for it allows me to impose on words (already free, dynamic and torpedolike) every kind of speed – that of the stars, the clouds, the airplanes, the trains, the waves, the explosives, the flecks of sea spray, the molecules, and the atoms.⁴

prodigieuse harmonie et leurs innombrables sorcelleries verbales.” Marinetti: “Stéphane Mallarmé”, pp. 121–122. In his autobiography, he noted: “My literary campaign throughout Italy then began to unfold, promoting both French Symbolism and Decadentism, with endless lectures in which I introduced Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue, Gustave Kahn, Claudel, Paul Fort, Verhaeren, and Jammes to Italy.” Marinetti: “Self-Portrait.” *Critical Writings*, p. 8.

² “Nessuna poesia prima di noi colla nostra immaginazione senza fili parole in libertà vivaaaaAAA il Futurismo finalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente FINALMENTE POESIA NASCERE.” Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 643.

³ Marinetti: “Noi rinneghiamo i nostri maestri simbolisti ultimi amanti della luna.” *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 302; “We Renounce Our Symbolist Masters, the Last of All Lovers of the Moonlight.” *Critical Writings*, p. 43.

⁴ Marinetti: “Distruzione della sintassi – Immaginazione senza fili – Parole in libertà.” *Teoria*

Nevertheless, Marinetti recognized Mallarmé as a ‘father figure’, effectively defining himself as his heir. Moreover, if Marinetti equated Futurism with a complete break with the past, this was perhaps in order to conceal the actual continuity of Symbolism in the early Futurist movement. After all, Marinetti published his foundation manifesto, *Le Futurisme*, in *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909 in exactly the same fashion as Moréas had issued his foundation manifesto, *Le Symbolisme*, on 18 September 1886. Moreover, Futurism borrowed from Symbolism some of its most important features, in particular the strategy to disseminate its innovative aesthetic concepts via ‘Little Magazines’. The Futurist successors of *Poesia* (1905–1910), from *Lacerba* (1913–1915) via *Roma futurista* (1918) to *Noi* (1917–1925), echoed the Symbolists’ love of the *petites revues*,⁵ which served them as a weapon in their battle against the literary groups that had preceded them (sometimes by only a few days). Such a strategy can be surprising for Symbolism, since the most important ‘Symbolist’, Mallarmé, set ‘literature’ against the process and techniques of reporting news (“universal reportage”⁶) and the book (*Le Livre*)⁷, whose main characteristic is the ‘fold’, contrary to the ‘newspaper’, which is not folded. However, the Symbolists who followed Mallarmé’s lead defied the ‘Press’ with the multiplication of Little Magazines, which were designed to act as places where it was possible to produce literature that was different from *reportage*.

Seen from this perspective, it is important to compare Mallarmé’s relationship towards the ‘Newspaper’ and the ‘Book’ with that of Marinetti, not least because, in both instances, these relationships are rather ambiguous. As Marinetti made clear in his manifesto, *Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom*, his principal target was Mallarmé’s emblem, *le Livre*:

e invenzione futurista, p. 77. “*Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom*.” *Critical Writings*, p. 128.

⁵ See Vêrilhac: *La Jeune Critique des petites revues symbolistes*, and the Symbolism chapter in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*. Vol. 3. Europe 1880–1940. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, discussed in the review section of this Yearbook.

⁶ Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 212.

⁷ Mallarmé’s *Le Livre* could be described as a synonym for what the German Romanticists called ‘literature’. It is the concept of something in the process of becoming and of remaining a virtual entity, particularly with regard to its formal characteristics. Whereas the newspaper is a large folio leaf, the ‘Book’ is *folded*. The ‘fold’ transforms the ‘Book’ into a system of relations, like the verse (with which it has much in common). Also, the ‘Book’ is characterized by its mobility, its predetermined structure and its ‘infinity’: “Un livre ne commence ni ne finit: tout au plus fait-il semblant.” (A book neither begins nor ends: at most, it pretends to). Mallarmé in a letter to Henri Cazalis of April 1864. Scherer: *Le “Livre” de Mallarmé*, Note 181A.

I am initiating a typographical revolution, directed against the beastly, nauseating concept of the book of verse, in the traditional, D'Annunzian manner, against the handmade paper of the seventeenth century, decorated with galleys, Minervas, and Apollos, with initial letters in red with fancy squiggles, vegetables, mythic missal ribbons, epigraphs, and Roman numerals. The book must be the Futurist expression of our Futurist thought. And this is not all. My revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which contradicts the ebb and flow, the leaps and bounds of style that surge over the page. We shall therefore use three or four different colors of ink on a single page, and should we think it necessary, as many as twenty different typographical characters.⁸

Although Marinetti considered the advent of a new type of book (“the book has to be the Futurist expression of our Futurist thought”) and recognized that “the necessity for propaganda will force us every now and then to publish a book”,⁹ he nevertheless preferred to the new means of cinematography, which inspired him to create ‘Free-Word-Tables’ (*tavole di parole in libertà*) and illuminated mobile billboards:

The book as a means for conserving and communicating thought is a vehicle that belongs unequivocally to the past. For a long time now it has been destined to disappear, along with cathedrals, towers, crenellated walls, museums, and the ideal of pacifism. The book, static companion of the sedentary, the nostalgic, and the neutralists, can neither amuse nor stimulate the new Futurist generations, who are drunk on revolutionary, warlike dynamism. [... Instead], we prefer to express ourselves through the cinema, the great graphic designs of Words-in-Freedom, and mobile, illuminated bulletin boards.¹⁰

Unlike Mallarmé, Marinetti did not believe that “everything” was made to “end up as a book.”¹¹ His thoughts, fully orientated towards an endless Becoming, were not geared towards finding any resolution or final state. Both Marinetti and Mallarmé thought that books, as they existed in time, were boring, but their conclusions differed widely. For Mallarmé, the shortcoming of the books as one could find them on the shelves of a bookstore (*étalages*)¹² was that they presented a mere

8 Marinetti: “Distruzione della sintassi – Immaginazione senza fili – Parole in libertà.” *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 77.” *Critical Writings*, p. 128.

9 Marinetti: “La cinematografia futurista.” *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 139. “The Futurist Cinema.” *Critical Writings*, p. 260.

10 Marinetti: “La cinematografia futurista.” *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 139. “The Futurist Cinema.” *Critical Writings*, p. 260.

11 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 226. As both the French original and the English translation carry an identical title, I have referred to the English translation as Mallarmé: *Divagations*, and to the French original as Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2.

12 Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, pp. 218–223.

‘parody’ of the *Œuvre*,¹³ something he saw as a potential “spiritual instrument.”¹⁴ Ultimately, Mallarmé criticized the contemporary book because it fell within the category of *reportage*, which did not allow one to access the “Present.”¹⁵ This, however, was not true for the Futurists. Whilst for Mallarmé “a present doesn’t exist”,¹⁶ for Giovanni Papini (who, in this case, fully agreed with Marinetti), the past did not exist (“Il passato non esiste”). He explained: “If everything we know is already past (that is to say dead, that is to say non-existent), it appears that *the only really existing things are those that have not yet come*. There is no concreteness that does not belong to the future. Thus, the Futurists are the only ones who truly deal with reality.”¹⁷

Actually, the Futurists were not interested in highlighting the ontological difference between words and the world. They did not think that poetry had to present itself as fiction, or that a “flower” could be “absent in every bouquet.”¹⁸ They criticized aesthetic forms because they felt that they were inefficient for the task of presenting the world in its development towards the future. They rejected the poetry of their time because it did not have any grip on the present. Marinetti chose to consider the quality of the present according to its intensity and its immediate dynamism. He judged a world that was modern, animated and forward-thinking to be more ‘present’. Aesthetically speaking, his response to Mallarmé’s poetics resulted in the technique of ‘Words-in-Freedom’ and ‘Wireless Imagination’. In this regard, Gérard-Georges Lemaire was right when he claimed that Mallarmé’s *Throw of the Dice* “allowed Futurists to modify the strict hierarchy of the upper and lower cases”, yet was still “miles away from the Futurist perspective.”¹⁹

1 Mallarmé

There is a paradox in Mallarmé. He is known as the poet of the ‘Absolute’, who wrote some of the most challenging sonnets of French poetry, who established a strict difference between language and things (so that things are always considered as ‘absent’ in his poetics), and whose prose is the exact opposite of that of the

¹³ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 224.

¹⁴ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, pp. 226–230.

¹⁵ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 218.

¹⁶ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 218.

¹⁷ Papini: “Il passato non esiste”, p. 23.

¹⁸ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 210.

¹⁹ Lemaire: *Les Mots en liberté futuriste*, p. 11.

newspapers. But this trajectory towards the Absolute and towards solitude does not mean that his personal existence was 'absolute'. Like most French writers of the nineteenth century, Mallarmé was occasionally employed as a journalist in addition to his main occupation, which was that of a teacher of English. He was the sole editor of a fashion magazine, *La Dernière mode*, for which he wrote almost all the articles. Many of the essays collected in *Divagations* (Digressions, 1897) were first published in the London newspaper, *The National Observer: A Record and Review*.²⁰ And his most important poem, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance, 1897/1914) calls to mind the large-size letters of billboard advertising, in particular in the edition published by *Cosmopolis* in 1897 (see Fig. 1).²¹ More than once, Mallarmé proceeded from newspaper prose and created texts in either poetry or poetic prose, which in the final versions were often very different from the original source that inspired them. Such text transformations demonstrate that Mallarmé's criticism of journalism had nothing to do with any disdainful attitude. On the contrary, in "The Book as Spiritual Instrument" (*Le livre, instrument spirituel*), a section of "About the Book" (*Quant au livre*) in *Divagations*, Mallarmé almost praised the merits of the newspaper in comparison with those of the book. Thus, his criticism of the newspaper was complex and oriented towards a future literature that was a kind of fusion between journalism and poetry. From this perspective, it is not surprising that for the layout of a poem he first used a typography that resembled that of newspapers and thereby paved the way for the Futurist 'Free-Word-Tables' (*tavole di parole in libertà*). Nevertheless, Mallarmé's poetical results were very different from those of the Futurists. In order to understand Futurism's specificity, it will be useful to examine in more detail how Mallarmé dealt with the press.

Mallarmé's critique of the newspaper

The real significance of Mallarmé's criticism of the press becomes apparent only if one first analyses his appraisal of advertising. For him, the flaw of the advertising sections of newspapers was that they were nothing but "incoherent and inarticulate cries",²² constituting a regression to a pre-language stage and a reflection of the chaotic conditions of his times: "society appears [...] as it is: disorder, even

²⁰ Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, pp. 299–321.

²¹ Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1, pp. 393–401.

²² Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 227. "[...] une incohérence de cris inarticulés". Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225].

if this disorder is hidden by a false pretence of organization.”²³ And this disorder corresponds to the constant reiteration of an “original servitude”²⁴, i.e. to the alienation caused by worshipping ‘material gold’ (publicity is only considered important for its ability to increase sales), whereas in his view only ‘spiritual gold’ (in an alchemical sense) should be pursued. The advertisement ‘exhibits’ a product, makes it ‘manifest’ and ‘proclaims’ it through large headlines, but does so with neither order nor elaboration. Thus, it is not surprising that Mallarmé was so vehemently opposed to literary manifestos. He saw in them an anti-model to literature, because they did not afford literature to be reflected upon. Publicity “leaves out an art”, which is based on *le pli*; and it is exactly this “fold” that makes possible the “verse” and the “reciprocal reflections” of the “words” – *reflections* that oppose the idolatry of an immediate perception of the world.²⁵

Indeed, it is in religious terms that Mallarmé discussed the type of journalism that had arisen towards the end of the nineteenth century. While the development of the newspaper involved a rapid increase of print-runs,²⁶ Mallarmé drew attention to a more important characteristic of the press: its capacity to expose the infinite combinational possibilities of language. Instead of the modern miracle of the multiplication of newspapers – which is but a parody of the multiplication of loaves in the Gospel – Mallarmé proposed the miracle of combinatory language, symbolized by the printers’ use of movable type. This composition work must prevail since it can lead to poetical work – considered the apotheosis of the “type-setting process” which he viewed as a “rite”.²⁷

Mallarmé’s critique of the newspaper was not an ontological rejection of the medium per se. He did not attack the *idea* of the newspaper, but rather its *form* as a mass medium. This is why Mallarmé did not completely give up his journalistic work. His opposition to journalism was most likely related to the fact that nothing

23 “La société apparaît [...] pour ce qu’elle est: un désordre, même si ce désordre est masqué [...] par un faux semblant d’organisation.” Marchal: *La Religion de Mallarmé*, p. 366.

24 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 227. “[...] servitude originelle”. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

25 According to Mallarmé, it is impossible to get an *immediate* access to the world. Newspapers, therefore, can only report on an *appearance* of reality and otherwise “propagate faith in the quotidian nothingness.” Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 219. “[...] divulguer une foi en le quotidien néant”. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 217.

26 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 219. “[...] la multiplication de l’exemplaire et [...] le tirage.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

27 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 228. “Un miracle prime ce bienfait, au sens haut ou les mots, originellement, se réduisent à l’emploi, doué d’infinité jusqu’à sacrer une langue, des quelque vingt lettres – leur devenir, tout y rentre pour tantôt sourdre, principe – approchant d’un rite la composition typographique.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

was more important to him than to report on Today in its fresh and virgin state (“Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui”).²⁸ This attitude is evident in his jubilation at announcing contemporary facts: the “crisis of verse” in a sentence isolated by blanks where the two letters [i] in “ici” (here) are disseminated in order to underline the present crisis – “La littérature *ici* subit une exquisite crise fondamentale”²⁹ (Literature is here undergoing an exquisite and fundamental crisis³⁰) – make it as striking as an advertisement. This is confirmed by Mallarmé when he insists: “Whoever grants this function a place, or even the primary place, will acknowledge in this the topicality of the event.”³¹

Mallarmé was actually a practicing journalist, even though not of the usual sort and even though the reported events sometimes happened “far from the public square.”³² To carry out this work, he used certain features of the press which to him seemed useful qualities. It is thus not surprising that the virtues of the newspaper are considered in the section, *About the Book (Quant au livre)*, where “Displays” (*Étalages*) and “The Book as Spiritual Instrument” provide a counterpoint to the first section, thus offering a critique of “Restricted Action” (*L’action restreinte*).³³

In the paragraph examining the links between “Press”, “publicity” and “dissemination of opinions”,³⁴ Mallarmé explained his thinking: “I disapprove only of the return of some triviality into the original book, which agreed to share with the journal the monopoly on intellectual equipment, perhaps to unburden itself.”³⁵ Although it seems to concern the press, this criticism is directed above all at the book, to which ‘some triviality’ returns and evokes repetition, page by page, and is indicated in “The Book as Spiritual Instrument” as “an indifferent outlet where

28 Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1, pp. 36–37. “The virgin, vivid and beautiful Today.” Translations of Mallarmé’s poems follow the digital edition, *Selected Poems*, in verse translations by A. S. Kline. <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Mallarme.htm>.

29 Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 204.

30 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 201.

31 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 201. “Qui accorde à cette fonction une place ou la première, reconnaît, là, le fait d’actualité.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 204

32 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 201. “[...] hors de la place publique.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 204.

33 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, pp. 220–225, 226–230, 215–219.

34 See Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 223. Here, and elsewhere, Barbara Johnson’s translation has been slightly changed.

35 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 223. “Je ne désapprouve que le retour de quelque trivialité au livre primitif qui partagea, en faveur du journal, le monopole de l’outillage intellectuel, peut-être pour s’y décharger.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 221.

the other [column] is emptied”,³⁶ i.e. a space the author has no thought about, where a new page begins only to be the continuation of the last. If the book is described as “primitive”, this is, among other reasons, because it does not integrate any of the innovations brought about by technological developments of the nineteenth century.

In contrast to this, in “Displays” (*Étalages*), the press appears as an organizational space of reading which highlights “writings” – among them, the “serial novel” and the “fiction”:

Rather, among us at least, the Press wanted its place among writings – traditionally grounded in the feuilleton [serial novel], which sustained the whole format [...] Furthermore, fiction in the literal sense or imaginative narratives parades around through well-stocked “dailies” until it occupies a position at the top, dislodging the background article about current events, which now appears secondary.

Plutôt la Presse, chez nous seuls, a voulu une place aux écrits – son traditionnel feuilleton en rez-de-chaussée longtemps soutint la masse du format entier [...] Mieux, la fiction proprement dite ou le récit, imaginaire, s’ébat au travers de “quotidiens” achalandés, triomphant à des lieux principaux, jusqu’au sommet; en déloge l’article de fonds, ou d’actualité, apparu secondaire.³⁷

Paradoxically, the newspaper then offers a real place for literature and reveals itself to be innovative with regard to the arrangement of texts. In the late nineteenth century, the serial novel occupied the lower third in three out of four pages of a newspaper; however, when published in book form any trace of this advantageous arrangement of the page layout in the periodical press was lost. The newspaper, ready to dislodge the background article in order to accord a primary position to “fiction”,³⁸ enabled the triumph of the *glorieux mensonge* (glorious lie) and the attainment of *l’aujourd’hui* (the present day), which is entirely opposed to the *quotidien néant* (quotidian banalities).³⁹ From this he drew the conclusion: “It contains a suggestion or even a lesson of some beauty: that today isn’t just replacement for yesterday, presaging tomorrow, but gets outside of time, as general, with a clean, new integrity.”⁴⁰ As in the sonnet, *Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui* (“The Swan”), where virginity appears after the swan has failed

³⁶ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 227. “[...] un déversoir, indifférent, où se vide l’autre.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

³⁷ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 223. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 221.

³⁸ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 223.

³⁹ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 218. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 217.

⁴⁰ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 223. “Suggestion et même leçon de quelque beauté: qu’aujourd’hui

for “n’avoir pas chanté la région où vivre” (not having sung a liveable country)⁴¹, the newspaper regains a virginal state which seemed lost forever. And yet, the adventure of the press is wholly ignored by some contemporaries:

Such an adventure leaves some indifferent, because, they imagine [...] that there is no change in the situation of what, alone, is most immeasurably precious and highest, known by the name of Poetry: it will always remain excluded, and the quiver of its wings elsewhere than on the page is parodied, not more, by the breadth, in our hands, of the hurried and spacious pages of the newspaper.

Telle aventure laisse indifférents certains parce qu’imaginent-ils [...], la situation se maintient quant à ce qui, seul, est précieux et haut, immesurablement et connu du nom de Poésie: elle, toujours restera exclue et son frémissement de vols autre part qu’aux pages est parodié, pas plus, par l’envergure, en nos mains, de la feuille hâtive ou vaste du journal.⁴²

But if such an assessment of poetry seems to exclude it from the realm of the newspaper, its free indirect speech presents a margin of uncertainty on behalf of its enunciator – such that it is not certain whether Mallarmé would have accepted it. In any case, he considered that the Press could lead to the invention of a new genre of the Poem:

To gauge today’s extraordinary overproduction, in which the Press cedes its means intelligently, the notion nevertheless prevails that something very decisive is being achieved: as if, before a new era, there is a competition for the founding of the modern popular Poem, or at least some numberless *Thousand and One Nights*, at which a suddenly invented reading majority would marvel.

A jauger l’extraordinaire surproduction actuelle, où la Presse cède son moyen intelligemment, la notion prévaut [...] de quelque chose de très décisif qui s’élabore: comme avant une ère, un concours pour la fondation du Poème populaire moderne, tout au moins de Mille et Une Nuits innombrables: dont une majorité lisante soudain inventée s’émerveillera.⁴³

The means of the press would thus lead to the domain of the “lightning flash” (*foudroyant*), which in Mallarmé’s work was associated with a network of terms designating the poetical virtue – from the “scintillations” of the celebrated *Sonnet en Ix* (Sonnet in -ix, 1887) to the “trail of fire across precious stones”, through

n’est seulement le remplaçant d’hier, présageant demain, mais sort du temps, comme général, avec une intégrité lavée ou neuve.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

41 Mallarmé: *Selected Poems* Translation by A. S. Kline.

42 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, pp. 223–224. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 221.

43 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 224. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 222.

which, in “Crisis of Verse”, the words “set each other alight by means of reciprocal reflections.”⁴⁴ Now, if the term ‘press’ seems to designate only the printing device and not the newspaper, it is through the periodicity of the daily papers that the emergence of this “Poem” could come about.

The relationship between newspaper and poetry

Mallarmé’s deliberations about the press were not only theoretical. At the end of “The Book as Spiritual Instrument”, Mallarmé made a practical suggestion for a poetic work, in which the large and bold letters, as in headlines, would be included for the very first time:

Why couldn’t a line – a spurt of grandeur, a considerable thought or emotion, a sentence in bold type that continues for pages, one line per page in tiered placement – keep the reader breathless, calling upon his powers of enthusiasm, for the length of the book; along with little groups of secondary importance, explanatory or derivative – a sowing of frills.

Pourquoi – un jet de grandeur, de pensée ou d’émotion, considérable, phrase poursuivie, en gros caractère, une ligne par page à emplacement gradué, ne maintiendrait-il le lecteur en haleine, la durée du livre, avec appel à sa puissance d’enthousiasme: autour, menus, des groupes, secondairement d’après leur importance, explicatifs ou dérivés – un semis de fioritures.⁴⁵

This poetic work – ironically supposed to “keep the reader breathless” as the sensationalist press would typically do at the end of the nineteenth century – emerged two years later in the form of *A Throw of the Dice*, which in its first edition contained characters that call to mind newspaper headlines (see Fig. 1):

In the final edition, only published in 1914, the text did not appear on one page, but was spread across a double page. The relative reduction of types and the new page layout diminished its immediate visual impact and was characterized by a shift from newspaper towards poetry (see Fig. 2):

⁴⁴ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 208. “[...] traînées de feu sur les pierreries.” – “les mots [...] s’allument de reflets réciproques.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 211.

⁴⁵ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, pp. 229–230. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 227.

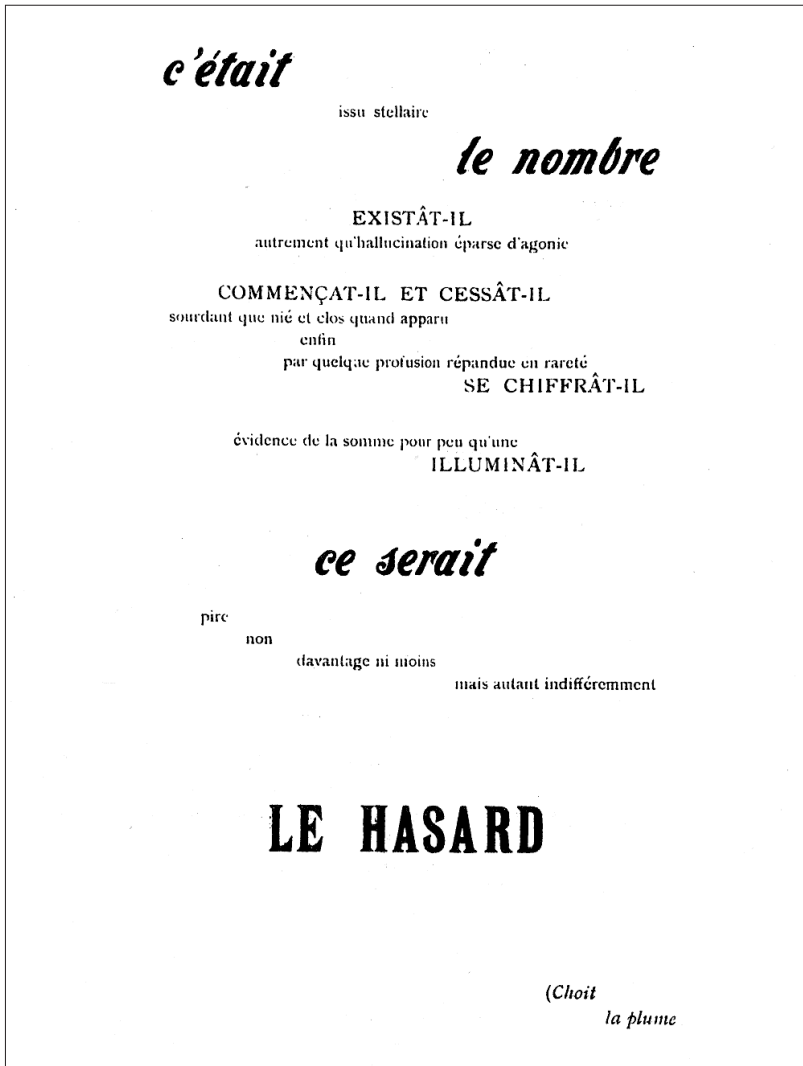


Fig. 1. A page from *Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance) in the edition published by *Cosmopolis* in 1897.

For Mallarmé, the genre of this 'poem' was not only a direct consequence of the modern medium of the newspaper. The newspaper and *A Throw of the Dice* were separated by a relationship of inversed symmetry. Some processes presenting apparent similarities in fact operated in radically different ways from one case to the other. While the newspaper as well as *A Throw of the Dice* (according to Mallarmé's "Observation relative au poème"⁴⁶) proposed a "simultaneous view

⁴⁶ "Observation relative au poème 'Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard'." It was published as a preface to the *Cosmopolis* edition of the poem (1897). Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1, pp. 393–401.

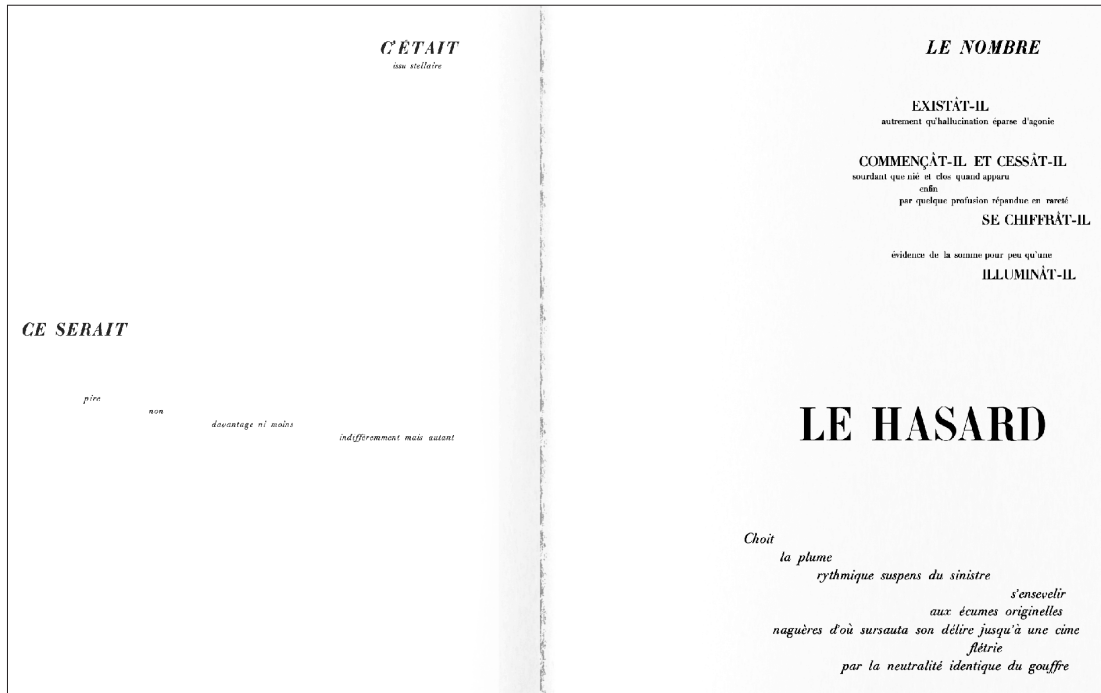


Fig. 2. The same page from *Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard* in the edition published by Gallimard in 1914.

of the page” organized as an independent whole, the page in *A Throw of the Dice* actually constitutes the equivalent of the “verse or perfect line”, whose caesura is the fold of the double page (in the posthumous edition of 1914).⁴⁷ Thus, the logic of the verse puts all elements of the page in relation to each other, and the reader is invited, when crossing the central fold, to bring together the blocks of text which the newspaper separates by vertical dividing lines (called ‘brass rules’ in typographic terminology).

Next, if both the newspaper and the ‘poem’ are based on a hierarchical organization (in which the large capitals dominate the small characters), the interlacing and the dispersion of the title in *A Throw of the Dice* tend toward a diversification of the relations between the most visible elements and the “sowing of frills” (*semis de fioritures*⁴⁸). Unlike the journalistic headline, which is no more than a suggestive summary of the article it introduces, the *literary* title is distributed across the poem as a whole. At the same time, since the passages in small characters are inserted between the fragments of the title, the reader discovers the title only after having read the passages in small characters according to an eye

⁴⁷ Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1, p. 391.

⁴⁸ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 230. Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 227.

movement unlike that of a newspaper reader, for which only the unidirectional passage from title to article is important.

Finally, the typographic layout, with variable tabulations and leaps across the fold of the double page, triggers hesitations and, at the same time, opens up diverse possibilities of readings. The eye of the reader tends to apprehend the elements of the right page (or those of the left page) as a whole, or to establish links between elements beginning at the same tabulation, without knowing which path to choose. If syntax can offer orientation to the reader, the frequency of appositions and of parenthetical clauses leaves a great deal of uncertainty. Seen from this perspective, *A Throw of the Dice* can be regarded as a work that was rooted in the newspaper, but which distanced itself from this medium, keeping only some traces intact, such as the words set in large characters. This evolution explains why the large bold letters in the *Cosmopolis* version more clearly evoke headlines than the equivalent passages in the Gallimard version.⁴⁹

However, this differentiation process was only the second step in a dialectic process evoked by Pascal Durand.⁵⁰ The first step consisted in acknowledging certain technical features of the newspaper, whereas in a second step, the author turned away from the medium and gave *A Throw of the Dice* a new and radically different structure. In the end, this development led to a synthesis, i.e. to the production of a *Livre-Journal*, an “enormous and superior report”⁵¹ – even of the report – if this were not rendered impossible by the intrusion of chance (*le hasard*), which invalidates the power of the “eternal circumstances” (*circonstances éternelles*⁵²).

Indeed, the ‘topicality’ does not disappear from this poem insofar as it participates in the “Crisis of Verse”, which appears in *Divagations* as a “topical event” (the *fait d’actualité* mentioned above⁵³). It is exactly this crisis that *A Throw of the Dice* represents, primarily by addressing it allegorically. According to Pascal Durand, the poem “puts into narrative and drama the explosion of the old Alexandrine, the unique number that cannot be another, and the dislocation of the ‘Master/Meter’, outside of ancient calculations’.”⁵⁴ It is, above all, by the use of

49 Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 1, pp. 393–401 and 363–387.

50 Durand: “De ‘l’universel reportage’ au ‘poème univers’.”

51 “[...] un as de reportage énorme et supérieur.” Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 240.

52 Mallarmé: *A Throw of the Dice*, pp. 5–6.

53 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 201

54 “*Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* [est] ‘universel reportage’, c’est-à-dire [...] reportage cosmogonique, mise en drame et en récit de l’explosion du vieil alexandrin et de la dislocation du ‘Maître’/Mètre”. Durand: “De ‘l’universel reportage’ au ‘poème univers’”, p. 346. For the translation of Mallarmé’s text, see Mallarmé: *A Throw of the Dice*, pp. 8–9.

the “crazy” literary device⁵⁵ of large headline characters typical of newspapers that Mallarmé replies to the “current event”. By using a new type of versification he inscribes the “Crisis of Verse” into the form of a poem. Thus, *A Throw of the Dice* acts like a ‘manifesto’, but differs from those published in *Le Figaro*. The meaning of the title – element of a paratext ‘absorbed’ by the work⁵⁶ – appears only in fragments and is hence absolutely not ‘manifest’. The complex relations between the portions of text in characters of diverse sizes, and even between the scattered words of the same font size, make it impossible to discern any obvious meaning.

A Throw of the Dice is by all accounts a ‘book’, because it confers to the ‘fold’ the fundamental rôle of building up relationships between its constituent elements, all the while leading the reader to question the relations s/he is establishing. At the same time, it is more than a book, since it goes beyond the organizational format of a conventional book, i.e. beyond the column of prose, which is only an overflow of excess material (*déversoir*⁵⁷), or the utilization of a third of the page for the ‘lyrical’ poetry evoked in the preface of the *Cosmopolis* edition. At the same time, *A Throw of the Dice* is very much like a ‘newspaper’, since it reveals and makes visible “the current events”. But each double page is organized in a unique way, such that the multiplicity of the possible relationships between the typographical blocks is exacerbated. This ‘manifestation’ also goes beyond the parameters that define the newspaper. As a consequence, the reader does not gain immediate access to the “current event” (*l’actualité*). On the contrary, s/he reaches it by the mediation – and the meditation – of a literary device, which is able both to exhibit and to accomplish the “crisis of the verse”.

A Throw of the Dice therefore goes beyond the book *and* beyond the newspaper. The newspaper is possibly subsumed here by the book, since the fold that characterizes the latter, as well as the typography, produce a system of “relations among everything” that is specific to the book;⁵⁸ but only its “versification” allows access to the topical matter (the “crisis of verse”) – something the press

55 “Don’t you think it’s a crazy act?”, Mallarmé asked Valéry when giving him the corrected proofs which *Cosmopolis* was going to publish.” See Valéry: “‘Le Coup de dés’: Lettre au directeur des ‘Marges’”, p. 625.

56 Durand: *Mallarmé: Du sens des formes au sens des formalités*, p. 245.

57 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 227.

58 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 226. “Les qualités, requises en cet ouvrage, à coup sur le génie, m’épouvantent un parmi les dénués: ne s’y arrêter et, admis le volume ne comporter aucun signataire, quel est-il: l’hymne, harmonie et joie, comme pur ensemble groupé dans quelque circonstance fulgurante, des relations entre tout.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 224.

misses by failing to grasp the “present”.⁵⁹ In *A Throw of the Dice*, the book and the newspaper both surpass each other, and it is in this sense that they result in the “hybrid” form evoked by Pascal Durand – “hybrid” here describing a synthesis in a biological sense.

Ultimately, this ‘poem’ should be called a ‘Newspaper-Book’, an oxymoron for a genre in which, as in the “poèmes critiques” of *Divagations*,⁶⁰ the antithetic terms would be allied and thus enabled to surpass their antinomies. “Everything in the world exists to end up as a book”, Mallarmé wrote in the chapter “The Book as Spiritual Instrument”.⁶¹ Daniel Oster points out the ‘retrograde’ aspect of such a proposition.⁶² In the nineteenth century, everything existed to end up in the “Newspaper-Book”. Mallarmé was fully opposed to the “scribbles” (*crayonné*⁶³) of the book-“overflow” (*déversoir*⁶⁴) and the newspaper-“bits” (*lambeaux*⁶⁵) and felt that only the “Newspaper-Book” would be capable of leading to the present (*l’actuel*) and of introducing the infinitely complex (but incomplete) system of relations of the ‘impossible Book’ – a perpetual goal of the nineteenth century with its philosophical ‘systems’. Mallarmé was fully aware of its chimerical character ever since the depressive crisis that caused him to write *Hérodiade* (1868), in which he also borrowed from the newspaper medium the path towards its own collapse. At the end of the day, the newspaper became mere ‘refuse’ (*lambeaux*), whereas *A Throw of the Dice* tells the story of a shipwreck represented by the debris scattered across the vellum paper.

2 Marinetti

To understand Marinetti’s possible Mallarmean heritage, I should like to examine here whether Mallarmé’s technique – aimed at accomplishing literature through a synthesis of book and newspaper – was also adopted by Marinetti. Let us begin with the principal literary device of Futurism: the Words-in-Freedom (*parole in libertà*). Marinetti himself explained the origins of this technique:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁶⁰ Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 277.

⁶¹ “[...] tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un beau livre.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 224.-

⁶² Oster: *La Gloire*, p. 53.

⁶³ A whole section of *Divagations* was dedicated to such *crayonnés*. See Mallarmé: *Divagations*, pp. 117–170.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

Now, just suppose that a friend of yours, who has this great gift of lyricism, finds himself in an area of intensified life (revolution, war [...]) and then comes, immediately after, to relate his impressions to you. Do you know what this deeply affected, lyrical friend of yours will do instinctively?... He will begin by brutally destroying syntax as he talks. He won't waste time building sentences [...] He will ignore linguistic subtleties and nuances, and in his haste he will breathlessly fling his visual, auditory, and olfactory impressions at your nerve ends, precisely as they strike him [...] He will thus convey life's analogical bedrock, telegraphically, that is, with the same economical rapidity that the telegraph imposes on reporters and war correspondents in their summary reports.⁶⁶

It is important to take account of the *journalistic* context of the supposed birth of Words-in-Freedom, all the more so because the “friend” evoked in this paragraph is reflective of Marinetti himself. In 1911, Marinetti was a correspondent in the Italo-Turkish War (1911–12), from which he dispatched a series of reports, published in *L'Intransigeant* and then issued in book form as *La Bataille de Tripoli* (The Battle of Tripoli, 1912), which he quotes several times in his manifesto, *Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom*. Indeed, telegraphic messages were for Marinetti a highly ‘lyrical’ form of reporting and thus quite the opposite of Mallarmé’s clear distinction between “literature” and “universal reporting”.⁶⁷ If Marinetti was disappointed with the journalistic discourse typical of newspapers, this was so because he felt that journalism did not live up to recent technical developments, nor to the transformation of language (e.g. destruction of conventional syntax) due to the telegraph. Therefore, Marinetti was not opposed to *reportage* per se, but rather felt that its very essence was not sufficiently exploited. Marinetti expressed a certain disdain towards the news media, because he wanted to see a real inscription of *the present* in the news.

Does this mean that Marinetti would have favoured the direct use of the telegraph in order to achieve the poetical revolution he envisaged? In the case of Words-in-Freedom, the model of the telegraph could turn out to be less pure than it seemed at first glance. Thus, in his first book that operated with the new technique of Words-in-Freedom, *Zang tumb tuuum*,⁶⁸ the model of the newspaper was accorded a very important place.

⁶⁶ “Distruzione della sintassi – Immaginazione senza fili – Parole in libertà.” *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 70. “Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom.” *Critical Writings*, p. 123.

⁶⁷ See Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 210.

⁶⁸ *Zang tumb tuuum: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912. Parole in libertà* was reprinted in Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, pp. 639–779. Although it was the first book written in Words-in-Freedom style, it was not the first text using that technique. See the end of the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*, where Marinetti gives an example, *Battaglia: peso + odore* (Battle: Weight +

The first chapter of this ‘novel’, “Correction of proofs + desires in haste”, ends with the decision of the narrator not to correct the proofs of his book on the Battle of Adrianopolis,⁶⁹ but to use them to clean (*ripulire*) his “dear carburettor”.⁷⁰ This cleansing is, admittedly, the end of a book project, but it is also the end of the traditional book medium, squashed under the pressure of new forces.⁷¹ Indeed, the chapter begins with a rupture of a long-standing poetic tradition and marks the eruption of techniques that allow a new poetry to “be born” (*nascere*): the ‘Wireless Imagination’ and ‘Words-in-Freedom’:⁷²

<p>Nessuna poesia prima di noi colla nostra immaginazione senza fili parole in libertà vivaaaaAAA il FUTURISMO fi- nalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente</p> <p>FINALMENTE</p> <p>POESIA NASCERE</p> <p>treno treno treno treno tren tron tron tron tron (ponte di ferro: tatatuuun-tlin) ssssssiiii ssiissii ssiisssssiiii</p> <p>treno treno febbre del mio treno express-express-expresssssss press-press-press- press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press- pressssssss</p>	<p>No poetry before us we with our wireless imagination words in freedom vivaaaaAAA Futurism fi- nally finally finally finally finally FINALLY POETRY TO BE BORN train train train train tren ton tron tron tron (Iron bridge: tatatuun-tlin) ssssssiiii ssiissii ssiisssssiiii train train fever of my train express- express- expresssssss press- press- press- press-press-press-press-press-press-press-press- presssssssss</p>
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How does this poetic rupture make itself felt? Three of the processes announced by Marinetti in his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (1912), and in *Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom* are used here: the abolition of syntax, which will make room for the juxtaposition of clauses without the use of a conjunction (parataxis), the intensive use of typographic possibilities and the usage of onomatopoeias to indicate different noises. Thus

Stench). If I consider the first *book*, it is because its extent allows to present the different aspects of the Words-in-Freedom.

⁶⁹ Marinetti participated as a reporter in the Bulgarian-Turkish conflict of 1912–13 and observed the assault on Adrianopolis (Hadrianopolis, or Edirne) in October 1912. The polyphonic spectacle of sounds and smells inspired him to write *Zang Tumb Tumb* and is evoked in its last chapter, “Bombardment of Adrianopolis”.

⁷⁰ Marinetti exploits the polysemy of “ripulire”, meaning “to correct” (a text) and “to clean” (an object).

⁷¹ For a similar idea, see Bentivoglio: “Innovative Artist’s Books of Italian Futurism”, p. 474.

⁷² See Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 643–644.

the first two evoke different media, but while the syntax in a ‘wireless’ context echoes the telegraph, the typographic game recalls the printing press.

Actually, the entire beginning of the chapter is based on the idea of a shift from one medium to another. At the beginning of the paratactical section (*colla nostra immaginazione senza fili* – “with our wireless imagination” ...), the telegraph is to be implied;⁷³ but this rapidly progresses into new printing techniques and modes of transportation. “VivaAAA il FUTURISMO” highlights typography but does not owe anything to the telegraph; and the five repetitions of *finalmente* (finally) is completely at odds with the economic principle of telegraphy (it rather calls to mind a monotonous, mechanical and circular reiteration, followed by a reference to a train). But then, the “express” quickly transforms into a “press”, which evokes both the news medium and the machine in a printing workshop.

The text in small letters operates like a rotary press or a printing plate cylinder, giving birth to the large poster-like letters. Yet, in a context of rupture and absolute novelty, which claims that there was no poetry before the one the reader is holding in his hands, each of these poster-elements appears like a brand-new sheet, like the special editions, the newspaper headlines and the advertising posters announcing something new.

One of the most significant consequences of this literary arrangement is that it underlines the manifesto-like aspect of *Zang tumb tuuum*’s beginning (“no poetry before us with our wireless imagination words-in-freedom long live Futurism finally finally ...”). The telegraphic sentences create a poetry that seems to come ‘hot off the press’. From now on, poetry is to have immediacy, to enter our life like something entirely new, just like the Futurist manifestos with their boisterous proclamations transmitted by means of unprecedented techniques that imitate newspaper headlines and directly enter the reader’s mind:

Futurism is based on the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries made by science. Anyone who today uses the telegraph, the telephone, and [...] great daily newspaper (which synthesizes the daily events of the whole world), fails to recognize that these different forms of communication, of transport and information, have a far-reaching effect on their psyche.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, *Zang tumb tuuum* cannot be said to be a ‘manifesto’. The poetic statement at the beginning of the book makes way for a description of war; and

⁷³ Even though the radio was originally called TSF (Transmetteur Sans Fil; Wireless Transmitter), initially it only broadcast messages in Morse code through wireless radio waves. The parataxis therefore calls to mind the telegraph and not the radio, which does not modify the syntax.

⁷⁴ Marinetti: “Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom”, p. 120.

although the book is designed to challenge the journalistic discourses referring to the Battle of Adrianopolis, it is also composed so that it can compete with them. Sometimes, at least, the treatment of war is meant to be informative, like the reports of any correspondents (“bisognerebbe annunciare all’Europa la disfatta” – The defeat should be broadcast to Europe)⁷⁵ and, above all, it strives to take into account the entire network of reporters deployed in the theatre of war. Admittedly, the chapter entitled “War correspondents and aviators” (*Corrispondenti di guerra e aviatori*⁷⁶) is an attempt to represent the multiplicity of voices charged with chronicling the war, all speaking at the same time in a continuous brouhaha. Showing the press at work in the third chapter of *Zang tumb tuuum* can be interpreted as an emblem of the poetic strategy deployed throughout the book.

Indeed, if the ‘telegraphic’ message is transmitted into print (a medium that is heavily conditioned by the possibilities of typography), how can we interpret the passage at the beginning of *Zang tumb tuuum*? Is the shift from the telegraphic text in small print to the parts in big letters meant to lead to a synthesis, where two media⁷⁷ are merged in order to form another, more efficient one? What we can witness here is an operation towards process that has more affinity towards our contemporary multimedia world (combining texts, sounds and images) than with the techniques in Marinetti’s time, when the press transcribed telegraphic messages into large and bold headlines.⁷⁸

Marinetti’s typographic realization of ‘Wireless Imagination’

What is, in the case of *Zang tumb tuuum*, the exact relation between the two media of telegraphic messages and poetry? And which element is more important for the book’s organization? These questions can only be answered after we have clarified the – ambiguous – conception of ‘Wireless Imagination’.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 678.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 675–684.

⁷⁷ Or three, if we also take in account the train. But the train is a motif, and not a structuring device.

⁷⁸ The process of combining media is thus less ostentatious than in the newspapers, even though around 1910 telegraph poles were drawn, for example, next to the title of *Le Matin*. In any case, no journal used ‘telegraphic speech’ in their articles.

⁷⁹ The Italian term ‘immaginazione senza fili’ literally translates as ‘wireless imagination’. The recent edition of Marinetti’s *Critical Writings* uses the more figurative term, ‘untrammelled imagination’. To underline the connection with wireless telegraphy (telegrafo senza fili) I retain ‘wireless imagination’ here, but otherwise use the translation in Marinetti’s *Critical Writings*.

This ambiguity can be articulated in a simple way. In the manifesto of 1913, to which *Wireless Imagination* gave its name, Marinetti claimed to be undertaking a “typographic revolution”, which is also relevant for the other crucial device mentioned in the same text, *Words-in-Freedom*, which equally appears in the title. If the expression ‘wireless’ evokes the telegraph, and if *Words-in-Freedom* suggests a typographic technique, then the order in which the two concepts appear in the title is significant: “wireless imagination” appears first and therefore seems more important than “*Words-in-Freedom*”. However, in *Zang tumb tuuum*, I consider typography to play the leading rôle.

One may understand this better when examining the “CARTA SINCRONA // dei suoni rumori colori immagini odori // speranze voleri energie nostalgie // tracciata dall’aviatore Y. M.”⁸⁰, which is the most accomplished example of *Words-in-Freedom* in *Zang Tumb Tuuum* and resembles the *Free-Word Tables* which Marinetti inserted in *Les Mots en liberté futuriste* (*Futurist Words-in-Freedom*, 1919; see Fig. 3).

This ‘map’ includes two parts: the very schematic calligram of an aeroplane directly under the title, whose indications “sinistra” (left) and “destra” (right) surmount the wings and whose fuselage contains the description of its trajectory when arriving at Adrianopoli. Underneath, inscribed by means of an arrow, the course of the plane when descending or diving down towards the town. On either side of the central column, in the form of small typographic blocks, several strings of analogy, for example “5 stelle argentate di rumori = 5 shrapnels” (5 silvery stars of noises = 5 shrapnels). But curiously, the tropes of the place names, metaphors or metonymies, are expressed before the places themselves, with the effect that topography gives way to tropology.

If the very schematic ‘map’ cannot be easily read as a geographic document, its typographic presentation can lead one to believe that it is structured according to another model. The adjective “synchronic”, in a context marked by *reportage*, suggests an analogy with the layout of a newspaper, which has the virtue of presenting several major events of a day on one page.⁸¹ And, more importantly, the substitution of precise topographic indications by typographic blocks allows for the presentation, on one page, of various phenomena of *Wireless Imagination*, each of the different typographic blocks presenting one of these condensed images promoted in the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*. Thus, the *Wire-*

⁸⁰ See Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, pp. 672–673. The reproduction in Fig. 3 is taken from the original edition.

⁸¹ This model was particularly developed in the 1910s on page 3, traditionally dedicated to “faits divers” (minor current events), of newspapers with a wide circulation

less Imagination at work in each of these blocks is enhanced by a synoptic typographic presentation.

For this reason, we should not understand the rôle of the press with regard to *Zang tumb tuuum* and to Words-in-Freedom as a formal model (according to which all Words-in-Freedom would imitate the newspaper), but as a model of successive operations analogous to those happening in Marinetti's new technique. It is as if typography would allow for the presentation of a synthesis of Wireless Imagination, just as the newspaper page with its multiple headlines presents a synthesis of different telegraphic dispatches. Words-in-Freedom as a synthesis of Futurist typography is to Wireless Imagination what the synchronic composition of the newspaper page is to the telegraphically transmitted messages of its reporters.

Having established this distinction, another should be made which brings to light the autonomy of Words-in-Freedom poetics with regard to the newspaper. Whereas the layout of the daily press works with an arrangement of various articles on the page, the Words-in-Freedom follow other relational principles. One of them, for example, presents the shape of a balloon (see Fig. 4).

What is more important than the visual design is the frequently repeated "T.S.F" inscription (from which vertical lines descend) and the diagonally extended verb, "vibrrrrrrrrrrrare" – symbolizing telegraphic vibrations spreading into all directions. They seem to move beyond the margins of the page into the next or opposite page. The typography thus makes the eye establish links between textually discreet passages – which means that typography helps to bring to fruition the phenomenon of Wireless Imagination.

Whereas the newspaper arranges isolated elements side by side, Futurist typography seeks to establish links between scattered elements on the page. If telegraphy was an essential precondition of the modern daily newspaper, and if the syntax of headlines was a reflection of this, then the Futurist Wireless Imagination incorporates the telegraphic transmission directly onto the page. The letters "T.S.F.", meaning: "wireless transceiver" or telegraphic relay apparatus, are inserted in the above example in Fig. 4, but otherwise are not really necessary for this phenomenon to occur.

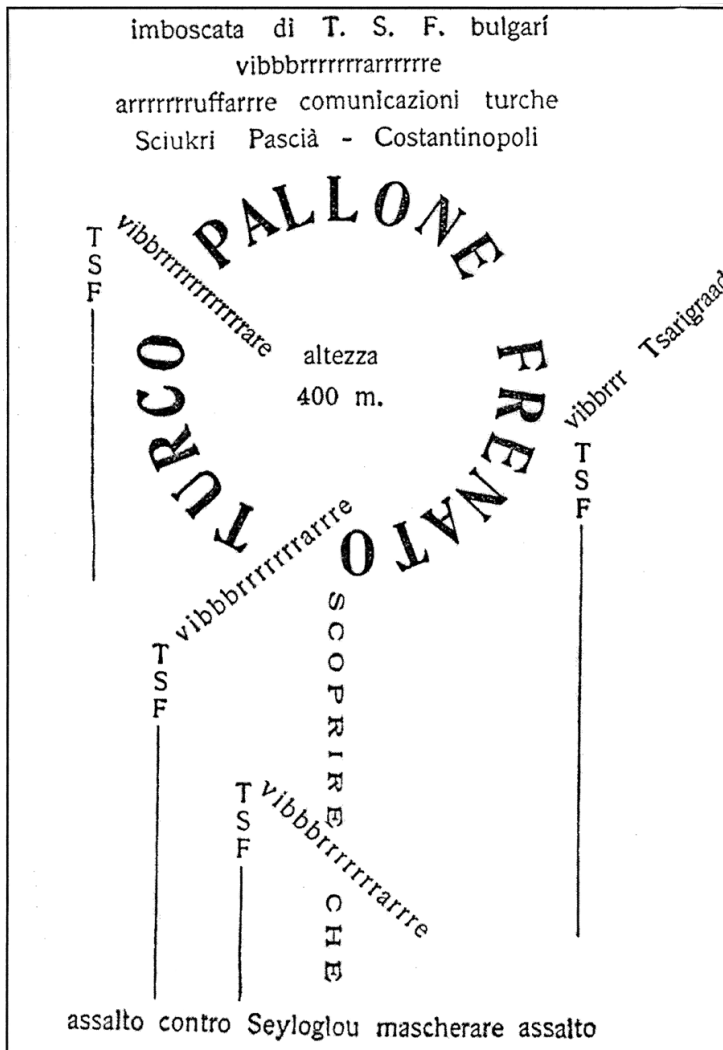


Fig. 4. "Tethered Turkish Balloon", a Free-Word Table on p. 120 of *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (1914). The balloon is surrounded by radio-directed gunfire shots from a Bulgarian tank turret.

The 'arch-newspaper'⁸²

What is the status of Words-in-Freedom within Futurist poetics? On the one hand, they were born from an opposition to the traditional book and developed in a relatively extended manner in *Zang Tumb Tuuum*; on the other hand, they were born of opposition to visual syntax of newspapers. The transmission process leading

⁸² I am using the term 'archi-journal' in the meaning of 'model-newspaper', an original and absolute notion of a newspaper where each page would have a different layout and look like a Free-Word Table.

from telegraphy to newspaper page served, at least in part, as a model for Marinetti in his attempt to establish a relationship between Wireless Imagination and Words-in-Freedom. But does a work such as *Zang tumb tuuum* belong to an intermediate genre positioned somewhere between book and newspaper?

First, let us consider this question in terms of Mallarméan aesthetics. According to the French poet, the book differs from the newspaper-“overflow” and should be based on a meticulous organization of its parts: “I mistrust the volume and the marvels announced by its structure, if I can’t, knowingly, imagine a certain motif in a certain place, page and height, casting its light on the work.”⁸³ And if it is possible to imagine a “certain motif in a certain place”, it is because this structure works on the principle of parallelism: “Given that the volume does not carry any signatory, so what is it like? [... A] pure cluster grouped together in some shining circumstance, tying together the relations between everything [... The] clarity of the links [...] has only [...] the parallelism of pages as a model.”⁸⁴ This parallelism is related to the fold, which distinguishes the newspaper from the book and allows the latter to establish correspondences between the different elements, as verse does.

But is *Zang Tum Tuuum* a ‘folded’ work? Is it organized in such a manner that its different parts echo each other? Does the “verse”, which Mallarmé calls “dispenser and organizer of pages, master of the book”,⁸⁵ govern it? For two reasons, the answer has to be negative. Firstly, because the novelty value claimed for *Zang tumb tuuum* (“No poetry before us”) is not truly fulfilled. The *onward* rush of the train on the following pages gives rhythm to the whole beginning of the chapter before handing it over to an automobile on page 6 of the text (after the arrival in Sicily⁸⁶). The journey is always faster when there is no flashback, and the speed increases until the vehicle has a surprise encounter and needs to brake hard.⁸⁷ The second reason for the negative answer relates to the ‘rotary press’ effect of

⁸³ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 228. “Je méconnais le volume et une merveille qu’intime sa structure, si je ne puis, sciemment, imaginer tel motif en vue d’un endroit spécial, page et la hauteur.” Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 226.

⁸⁴ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 226. “Admis le volume ne comporter aucun signataire, quel est-il: l’hymne, harmonie et joie, comme pur ensemble groupé dans quelque circonstance fulgurante, des relations entre tout. L’homme chargé de voir divinement, en raison que le lien, à volonté, limpide, n’a d’expression qu’au parallélisme, devant son regard, de feuillets.” Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 224.

⁸⁵ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 222. “[...] dispensateur, ordonnateur du jeu des pages, maître du livre.” Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 220.

⁸⁶ Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 648.

⁸⁷ Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 63.

the new sheets that give the journey the pace of a newspaper report. Regarding the proof sheets, they serve – as we have seen above – as material for cleaning the carburettor, thus allowing the journey to continue *onward*. For Mallarmé, the verse is not only a line of poetry with a pause (caesura) in long lines such as the alexandrine (the most important verse in French poetry). After the 'crisis of verse', he discovered other possibilities, demonstrated on the double page of *One Throw of the Dice*, where the verse allows echoes between words and ideas, and the rhyme at the end of a verse is only one of many possible forms of versification. In Marinetti's *Zang tumb tuuum*, on the other hand, there are no echoes between different parts of the book: each page is a new page. Of course, there are echoes between different parts of *one* page (as in the *Carta sincrona*), and these are phenomena Marinetti called 'wireless imagination'. But because there is no flashback in the *onward* narrative, there cannot be any echoes between the pages.

Of course, one could ask whether this destruction of the proofs, combined with the rotary press effect, would not symbolize the way in which the entire book works. The slogan, "nessuna poesia prima di noi", is implicitly contained on each new page and in each new chapter, leading the work through a process of constant change. Ultimately, *Zang tumb tuuum* would not be a book, but a continuous series of first pages, of radically new texts where each chapter would begin a new series of news, and of literary devices in which the main objective would be to vary the techniques of Wireless Imagination and Words-in-Freedom. Therefore, if each Free-Word Table in *Zang tumb tuuum* is well on the side of literature, its organization as a whole eludes the concept of the 'Book'. Such an interpretation falls in any case within the aesthetic parameters of Marinetti's Futurism, well described by Giovanni Lista:

The indispensable prerequisite for understanding Futurism, at least in Marinetti's conception, is to accept this minimal condition: Futurism means the complete and constant denial of the Past. [...] What could be considered as its most negative or paradox aspects – for example, the predominance of manifestos over the creative works – are in fact only signs of an absolute coherence. [...] It is a pragmatic doctrine of the *élan vital* formulated on the basis of an axiom one could characterize as a rebuttal of the genetic chain.⁸⁸

88 "La *condition sine qua non* pour comprendre le futurisme, du moins dans sa version marinettienne, est d'assumer cette définition minimale: futurisme veut dire rejet total et constant du Passé. [...] Ce que l'on croit pouvoir indiquer comme les aspects négatifs ou les paradoxes de son action – la prédominance des manifestes sur les œuvres, par exemple – ne sont en réalité que les signes d'une cohérence absolue. [...] Il s'agit d'une doctrine pragmatique de l'élan vital formulée à partir d'un axiome que l'on peut résumer comme le refus de la chaîne génétique." Lista: *F.T. Marinetti*, p. 88.

Ultimately, *Zang tumb tuuum* is not a ‘book’ in the sense Mallarmé understood the term, but a series of texts whose task is to overthrow and to go beyond those that preceded them. Each Free-Word Table has its own rules and does not refer to any others in the book. The echoes (or phenomena of ‘wireless imagination’) only exist *within* each Free-Word Table and not *between* the different Tables.

A further element is that the parataxis leads *Zang tumb tuuum* away from the Mallarmean ‘Book’. Marinetti’s juxtaposition of clauses is not only opposing syntax but also the notion of the period as an indication of the end of a sentence. The period is composed according to effects of symmetry, of echoes between the different parts of the sentence, or of parallelisms between certain sounds. In short, the period is ‘folded’, as is the verse for Mallarmé.

But what about the paratactic strings of sentences in *Zang tumb tuuum*? Let us consider an example, taken from chapter 2:⁸⁹

gonfiarsi delle campagne bulgare	swelling of Bulgarian campaigns
rabbia rapacità di 3 praterie convesse ribellione dei solchi andare alla guerra mangiare le strade presto	anger rapacity of 3 converging grasslands rebellion of the furrows go to war eat the streets soon
varsì affamato di quel campo arato = fetta di cannone rigato doppiare la velocità del vento-obice devastatore di nuvole (villaggi—aerei—fumanti—carbonizzati bevuti rivomitati bevuti dal sole bocca-distrazione-voluttà) a che scopo	hungrily into the plowed field = slice of cannon lined double the speed of the wind-howitzer destroyer of clouds (villages—aircraft—smoking—charred drunk throw up again drunk from the sun mouth-distraction-pleasure) to what purpose
rere saltare oltre frontiera impossibile	dig run- ning jump over the border impossible

It could hardly be said that there are no repetitions or echoes in this passage. The first part of the sentence reiterates a pattern of noun phrase + possessive phrase, which shows a clear intention to destroy syntax. However, in this telegraphic context, each formal beginning is related to the enunciation of new information. The same background noise makes itself heard in the beat of the parataxis, but each time it moves a step ahead. The new element shares with the previous and the following ones the characteristic of only *appearing* at the very moment when they are being read. This textual régime corresponds to the continuous presentation of new items: “Here is | here is | here is...” could be its formula, without any memory of previously enounced events. And this is perhaps why each word is separated from the others by a space bigger than is common in typography. Just as there can be echoes within one page but not between the

⁸⁹ Marinetti: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 661.

pages of a book, each group of words within a Free-Word Table is isolated from those around it and at the same time appears in addition to those which precede it, tending to cover them and make the echoes between them impossible. Thus, we are far removed here from the Mallarmean book. No sentence traverses the text from one part to the next, uniting the scattered fragments on the pages in a superior hierarchy, as was the case in *A Throw of the Dice*. Marinetti's dynamic text raced ahead without any concern about what came before. It is governed by a principle of a forward-moving "outflow" (*déversoir*), which comes very close to the one that, under the influence of the newspaper, invaded the industrial book in Mallarmé's time.

Yet, in *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, the new device of the Free-Word Tables breaks this process of repetition and guards the work against the influences of the press which, according to Mallarmé, imposes "on the organism, complex, required by literature, the divine book, a certain monotony – it's always that same intolerable column that is distributed, made to measure for the dimensions of the page, hundreds and hundreds of times."⁹⁰ *Zang Tumb Tuuum* therefore seems to be related to a new literary invention that goes beyond the models of the book and the newspaper, which we now have to examine more closely.

Reminiscent of both telegraph and rotary press, the Futurist work incorporates, in a condensed manner, the becoming-newspaper trajectory and makes converge – and work simultaneously – the steps leading, ordinarily in a successive manner, to the publication of a daily paper. At the same time, if *Zang tumb tuuum*, with its telegraph quotes and 'reportage' elements, reminds us of the news press, by stressing the removal from the rotary press and the apparition of a radically new product, it resembles the newspaper at the time it has most impact, namely at the time of its publication. However, the model of the press is not substituted by that of advertising, although we are very close to the "incoherence of unarticulated cries",⁹¹ and once again far from the Book.

But how are we to interpret this use of the newspaper, both in an accelerated state (by the simultaneous condensation of its successive steps) and in a dynamized state (by its advertising aspect)? And how are we to interpret, on the one hand, the importance of the manifesto from the very beginning of *Zang tumb*

⁹⁰ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 229. "La sympathie irait au journal placé à l'abri de ce traitement: son influence, néanmoins, est fâcheuse, imposant à l'organisme, complexe, requis par la littérature, au divin bouquin, une monotonie toujours l'insupportable colonne qu'on s'y contente de distribuer, en dimensions de page, cent et cent fois." Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

⁹¹ Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 227. "[...] incohérence des cris inarticulés:" Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 225.

tuuum and, on the other hand, the move away from the model of the book, despite the length of some 150 pages? We have to distinguish here between two levels: a) the level of the Free-Word Table, which consists of one page or a double page, and b) that of *Zang tumb tuuum* at large and of its position in Marinetti's aesthetic programme. Indeed, there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the realization of Wireless Imagination on the page – which establishes, by means of Words-in-Freedom, relationships between the scattered elements – and, on the other hand, the erasure, at the level of the book, of each page by the one that follows, similar to the erasure of one manifesto by the following ones within the Futurist movement at large. At the level of the Free-Word Table, wireless telegraphy allows access to the Mallarmean ideal of “pure work” (*l'œuvre pure*), marked by the “disappearance of the poet speaking” (*la disparition élocutoire du poète*), as the poet “yields the initiative to words” (*cède l'initiative aux mots*)⁹². Moreover, electricity could be interpreted as equivalent to the above-mentioned words that “set each other alight by means of reciprocal reflections.”⁹³ Wireless Imagination would thus reach a poetic absolute and, as *Zang tumb tuuum*'s incipit claims, “no poetry” could pre-exist it.

This hyperbolic reading, however, cannot be taken any further. Indeed, in *Zang tumb tuuum*, the “relations” are not established “between everything” but, at most, between the scattered elements of one page or one Free-Word Table. The book's race forward has, as a consequence, the instantaneous devaluation of each part of the already published text: the book, crossed by a rotary press effect, privileges the apparition of an absolute ‘New’ at the expense of memory. If there are no links between *all* the elements of the book, this is so because its progression is not linear but is based on a series of continually reiterated ruptures. The “trail of fire across precious stones”, referred to above, or the telegraphic electricity, do not allow distant elements to be logically inter-related, but rather has the effect of a flashing neon sign, at a given moment in the reading process, without offering any echo to other ones. Moreover, the Mallarmean metaphor of the “precious stones” does not fit into an aesthetic that has chosen to “bring the ugly into literature”⁹⁴ and opposes the Mallarmean ‘Music’⁹⁵ with a noisy cacophony of sounds.

In the economy of *Zang tumb tuuum*, does the novelty value of the Words-in-Freedom prevail over their poetic value? Certainly, such an option is possible,

92 Mallarmé: *Divagations*, p. 208; Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*. Vol. 2, p. 211.

93 *Ibid.*

94 See Marinetti: “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature.” *Critical Writings*, p. 113.

95 On the complex question of ‘music’ in Mallarmé see Jenny: *La Fin de l'intériorité*, pp. 60–62.

insofar as poetic quality is here subordinated to the organization of the entire text; but the principle upon which such a structure is based has to be clarified.

Zang tumb tuuum, as noted above, opposes the model of the book as well as that of the newspaper. However, it borrows from the latter what could be called its 'active principle'. Indeed, in *Zang tumb tuuum* the newspaper appears in a refined state, more active than it truly is, faster, more technical, more polyphonic. The *reportage* element is not annulled; on the contrary, it crosses the newspaper from side to side, on an accelerating basis – which is the same as saying that the newspaper 'in the pure state' constitutes the horizon of this suite of Words-in-Freedom.

This may have been Marinetti's ambition in *Zang tumb tuuum*. Far from seeking to be a self-enclosed literary masterpiece, it strives to be a stimulus for a process of continuous renewal and movement *beyond* its own parameters. This is what I would call 'the poetics of the arch-newspaper', i.e. a literary programme that aspires to possess the power of a *condensed* newspaper and to develop a technical model that opposes both the conventional book and the regular newspaper, because both employ a syntax that is firmly rooted in the past.

And, of course, *Zang tumb tuuum* is not a work that rejects poetry but rather reinvents its processes and devices (no Futurist Free-Word Table is organized in one and the same fashion) while, at the same time, denying that their privileged place of organization is that of the 'book'. Indeed, poetry is programmed here to be mortal: no matter how brilliant it may be, once it has been published, it will be devalued by what is coming next – exactly as yesterday's news are superseded by today's. The power of poetry is circumscribed by that of the 'arch-newspaper', which governs it and determines its form and impact.

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