

Heavens a Hippodrome and All the Actors Airplanes

Drama of the Futurists Where the Gestures Are Tail Spins, and the Waiting World Lies Flat on Its Back and Looks Up at the Busy Sky

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

HERE is something new under the sun, or there will be in a little while.

It is the human race on its back. Having begun its somewhat questionable career on its belly, it will simply reverse the process. Is it a form of evolution or devolution?

We have been looking at the world for some few ages on our feet or sitting. Things turned out to be pretty normal and dull. We have felt like a man sitting in the bleachers, with the score 19 to 0 against the home team in the ninth inning.

But the spine, according to Marinetti and his crowd of Italian Futurists, is the grand stand of the human soul, which reminds us of the invitation of a drunken old rowdy of a poet, who said, "Come into the gutters with me—you can see the stars there!"

This poet was the first great Spinologist, the father of modern Futurism, the Adam of "nuts." If he preferred to lie on his back in the gutters and watch the Great Bear doing the "shimmy" with Gemini, why, there probably was no Lusk Committee in those days to say him nay.

The back, in fact, is an unexplored world, a flat, pre-Columbian world. Men have heretofore lain on their backs in beds studying their debts or tracing the mythologic beasts on the ceiling built of airy wood alcohol emanations. Many have even been known to sleep on their backs in Joel's. But Signor Marinetti and his co-Futurists invite the whole world, or Italy at least, to lie on their backs and watch the opening of his Great Aerial Futurist Theatre!

Marinetti, as everybody knows, is the Barnum of Futurism. He is his own Tody Hamilton. He conceives the universe to be a circus. Every human skull is to him a circus ring. Whatever is serious is wrong. Only the absurd is true. Charlie Chaplin is, to him, the Prometheus of the Coming Time, when there will be fêtes to Humbug and Thanksgivings dedicated to Nonsense. He is the Beethoven of jazz music. The tin horns and buzzers on Broadway on New Year's Eve are more airily spiritual to this dithyrambic boileusher than a Bach fugue to James Huneker.

He has, for ten years, stood on the soapbox of his larynx and called hoarsely for the complete and instantaneous bustification of the fundamental laws of writing, painting, acting, dancing, cooking, dressing, talking, versifying, loving, inventing, and getting born.

On one point alone he seems to be hopelessly sane—and that is his uncompromising belief in the inherent and immanent rottenness of all things Teuton. If d'Annunzio is the King David of Latinity, F. T. Marinetti is its Aristophanes—an Aristophanes who plays the callopie. He has weighed on the Fairbanks of his windy guffaw everything that was and is, from Jove's whiskers to Bryan's lacteal smile, and has McCanned them all.

He would organize a League of Nations with Sir Jack Falstaff as President. He would build a Louvre along the lines of the late Huber Museum. The Homer of his Pantheon would be the late Mr. Cagliostro. His Santa Claus would distribute Keley motors. What would he do with the Eighteenth Amendment if he had the power? Distribute it worldwide, with teething rings. In a word, if he could re-edit the planet, life would be like a daily copy of La Vie Parisienne done in pi lines.

His latest proclamation is signed by "F. Azari, Futurist Aviator," which is probably another of Marinetti's fakonyms. The words may be the words of

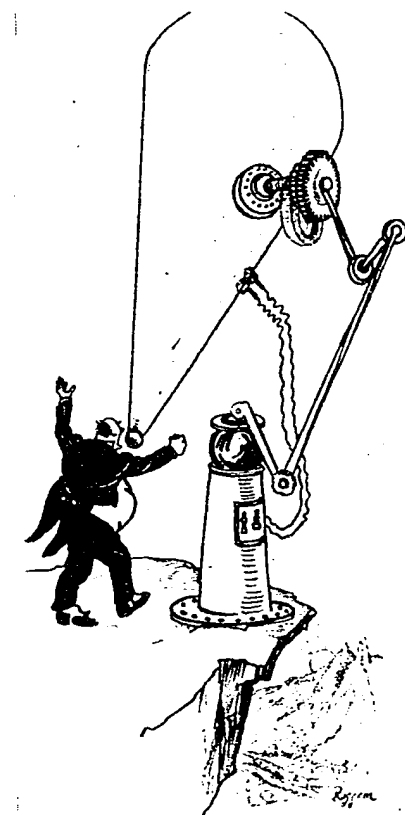
Azari, but their arrangement and the pipe-jointing of the syntax are the work of Italy's super-buffoon and human bull-ringing of ideas.

He leads off in war type:

The Futurist Aerial Theatre!
Flight Will Become an Artistic Expression of Our States of Mind!

Dialogued Flights—Pantomimes and Aerial Dances—Futurist Aerial Tableaux—Epigrams in the Air!

This is the key to the great Futurist drama. The Sardous, Gus Thomases, Ibsens, Sam Shipmans and Barries of the future will write for a stage whose wings will be Arcturus and Halley's comet, whose footlights will be the electric bulbs and lamp-posts of all the earth—even unto Philadelphia; whose roof will be heaven itself, whose actors will be airplanes cut and painted to resemble the characters of the play, driven and manipulated by hooded and goggled driv-



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ers. Instead of a prompter, a wig-wag aviator sitting on the edge of the moon. The stage manager will thunder his directions for rehearsals from a giant super-megaphone-telephone from the top of the Matterhorn or in a giant Caproni anchored to Mars.

Shades of the Kiralfy brothers and the ballets of "The Golden Crook"! It will all be done by airplanes to the music of Wagnerian motors, under the baton of a flying Campanini. Think of "The Dance of the Hours" a thousand feet in the air! Think of a dazzling epigram formed of words woven by five hundred machines that have discovered the trick of remaining motionless in the air like Mahomet's coffin!

Do you believe it? No? Well, there were once those who believed the earth was flat, that the heavens were a series of blue-china saucers glued together, that Bryan was a radical and that booze was immortal.

The Marinettist of the pamphlet hurtles along on his flying words. The Italian aviators who have discovered how to vanquish the German and Austrian aviators in surprising them by manoeuvres of an unexpected and crushing audacity have created little by little a marvelous acrobatic aerial style, fantastic and unique. If the war had lasted

a year longer these Futurist aviators would have air-shimmied into Vienna.

The pamphleteer concedes that the French have the glory of inventing the loop-the-loop, the gimlet and the aerial absinthe drip; that the English aviators discovered the frozen flip-flop; but the Italian aviators are the acrobats par excellence, the jugglers of space, the clowns of the air, the mad Pierrots of the clouds.

It was to them, say the Marinettists, came the idea of making the heavens a Hippodrome. After plunging, dancing, doing the "staircase," arranging themselves into pinwheels, buttonholes, soup tureens, buttonhooks, lampshades, demi-johns, nut-bowls and pinheads, the bright little idea waxed into a titanic conception—the Play, which is not only the thing but the super-thing. From the invisible trapeze of the atmosphere they landed in an idea.

"The Futurist aviators," says the pamphlet, "are about to create today a new form of art which will express by means of flight states of mind the most complex."

By rolling rhythms and the prancings of their airplanes, by strange zig-zags and hieroglyphic somersaults, following a thought-out plan, they will manifest to multitudes, lying flat on their backs, from the heights of heaven their most intimate sensations and the personal poems of these air-crazy poets.

The first playlet has already been given. It was called "The Drunken Airplane," executed in 1915 in the sky of Busto Arsizio. The "Busto" may be only a coincidence. It was acted by Azari himself and directed by Marinetti, who wheeled around the aviator-actor.

In acting in the air no distinction is to be made between the pilot and his machine. The latter is only a prolongation of the former's body and brain. The cables and the wires are an extension of the pilot's nerves, muscles, tendons, and



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fists. The motor is identified with his larynx—what a prospect for an American political campaign! Oh, Bryan, where is thy lung now!

Human passions are to be depicted very simply. Looping manifests impatience or anger. Alternate somersaults from right to left indicate heedless nonchalance—as, for instance, when the tired hypotenuse of a marital triangle drama enters the parlor with his meekness full upon him. Long hovering flights express nostalgia, fatigue, charley-horse—to be used, for instance, in dramas when the village drunk returns from the little moonshine party in the hayrick. Sudden stops, followed by spirals, crescendoes, decrescendoes, plunges, "bends," and right-about-ex-



"A chance for 'Doug' Fairbanks to get into the Sky-high 'legit.'"

press "states of mind that are indecisive." Bring your Morse code with you. Or learn wordless Esperanto. It'll help.

Here's a bit hot out of the proclamation:

"If one multiplies the airplanes, one can compose easily enough real dialogues and great dramatic actions. All those who have been present at aerial combats have been easily able to appreciate the different temperaments of the combatants, their enveloping skill and their calculated prudence. These were the elements of our aerial theatre. Our Futurist Aerial Theatre proposes to accentuate and perfect the acrobatics of airplanes and those of aviators who, climbing on the wings, knew how to modify and animate the profiles of airplanes."

Here is a chance for Doug Fairbanks to get into the sky-high legit. After he has perpetrated a drama "on the wings" of a biplane and played leapfrog over two or three dirigibles his present antics will seem tame. Sic transit gloria movie—maybe.

Next and most startling statement in this attempt to elevate the drama:

"The sex of actors will be brought into relief by the form of the airplanes, the voice of the motors and the special rhythm of the flight. For example, an SVA, with a two hundred horse power motor, which rises with continual majestic rearings, is evidently masculine. A Henriot, with a one hundred and ten horse power motor, which flies from left to right with a rhythmic, wavelike motion, has all the characters of femininity. The voice of the motor can be regulated to suit the masculine or feminine voice. * * * Each dirigible may be camouflaged with paint to represent houses, animals, gods, demons, &c. * * * We shall, besides, have colored powders, confetti, fireworks, parachutes, puppets and little colored balloons * * * Over the great multitude of spectators spread out on their backs the airplanes will dance during the day in colored zones formed by the powders which they will scatter, and during the night they will dance in the dazzling shafts of light thrown by giant searchlights."

Four reasons are enunciated why this theatre should come into being:

1. The Futurist Aerial Theatre will be the first real democratic theatre, because it will offer a free show to millions of spectators. The poor will at last have their theatre. The ticket speculator will

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be reduced to peddling bootleg rain-absorbers among the crowd.

2. The Futurist Aerial Theatre, which has for essence heroism, will be a marvelous popular school of heroism. Teaching contempt of death, no one will quake at a rise in his rent.

3. It will, by the sublimity of its spectacles, the concourse of vast crowds, and the emulation of its flying actors—among which will soon shine Duses, Carusos, Booths, Salvinis, Louis Manns

and Morgy Comans—stimulate in a decisive fashion commercial and industrial aviation.

4. It will teach the human race the utility of backs.

It may be a dream that is not at all a dream; but with a Winter ahead that is heavy with strikes, prohibition, and evictions it is good to know that there is a bunch of poets somewhere who are looking after our aesthetic needs.

To be reasonable is human; to be "nutty" is divine.