The themes of nutrition and digestion fascinated Filippo Tommaso Marinetti for much of his career. The beginnings of this interest can be traced to his pre-Futurist play Le Roi Bombance, published in 1905, in which the eponymous obese king is concerned only with satisfying his enormous appetite. Marinetti’s most famous discussion of gastronomy and gastronomic habits came in 1932 with the publication of La cucina futurista, which was a development of the Manifesto della cucina futurista launched two years previously. Although Le Roi Bombance and La cucina futurista were born out of very different cultural and historical periods, I wish to suggest that a continuum of ideas exists between them, specifically with regard to the relationship between eating and creativity and between eating and identity. In a recent article, Enrico Cesaretti has proposed such a link between the two texts, writing that La cucina futurista could ‘be considered as the ‘logical’ development of the culinary dystopia displayed in the nightmarish, ‘hard to digest’ and dyspeptic scenario of a text such as Le Roi Bombance’ and continues that ‘Marinetti may have eventually modulated the pessimistic, body-centered, progress-negating counter-utopia represented in his 1905 drama into a modern, mechanised, technologically obsessed and nature-taming “gastro-utopia [in the 1930s text]”’ (Cesaretti 2009: 842–3). An analysis of both texts reveals that, despite the chronological distance between two works, certain ideas about a gastronomic revolution, which Marinetti articulated in La cucina futurista, had already been percolating from as early as 1905 and, thus, the French play must be acknowledged as an important precursor to aspects of the Italian cookbook.

Both texts are positioned, consciously, in the shadows of two major preceding works, namely Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry (1896) and La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene by Pellegrino Artusi (1891), and yet they are also very much products of the time in which they were written and
show a desire to relate to the contemporary Italian political situation and not to become merely a pastiche of their literary and culinary predecessors. Prior to a discussion of the similarities which I believe are inherent between the two works, it is necessary to briefly contextualise them within their respective socio-political and cultural frameworks. The texts sprang forth not only from very different periods in Italian history but also from starkly contrasting periods of the Futurist movement.

*Le Roi Bombance* is not, strictly speaking, a Futurist work at all. Marinetti had conceived of the basic idea for the play in as early as 1902 (Berghaus 1995: 59). The play is part fairy tale, part grotesque farce and part social satire, considered by one literary critic of the time to be alternately lyrical, burlesque, fantastical and vulgar (Valdor 1907: 7). It is firmly situated in Marinetti’s pre-Futurist, post-Symbolist phase and although it was first performed in April 1909, less than two months after the launch of the Founding Manifesto, it had not been influenced by Marinetti’s new stance as a Futurist. Marinetti commented in 1920 that ‘this fat-bellied king of mine stormed on to the Parisian stage, already bearing the scandal of Futurism in his symbols and grotesque actions’ (Marinetti 2002: 14). This, however, must be considered a revisionist stance on his part. After the first performance, which received an extremely critical response, he condemned the play and aligned himself with its detractors by uniting them all in their joint denunciation of it, writing:

> It is almost five years since I wrote this satirical tragedy, and I have never wished to present it to the public as a definitive expression of my art. *Le Roi Bombance* is not a plan, it is, I repeat, a work of youth, which does not appear to me very far removed from tradition … it is a work conceived in a traditional taste – conceived in bad taste, I hear you say. This satirical tragedy discusses the beauty of violent action, the march forwards towards the ideal banquet of universal Happiness; this proves that it is the work of a very young man. I willingly boo at it. You all booed at it. We are all futurists. (Marinetti 1960: 476–7)

Following the bad press the play received, Marinetti was far from claiming his corpulent king as a pioneer of his newly founded movement, finding it more convenient to reject him, and the whole play, completely.

The play is an allegory, critiquing the contemporary political situation in Italy, inspired by events that took place in the first years of the twentieth century during the ‘age of Giolitti’ (Mack Smith 1997: 193). The Italian translation of the play, *Re Baldoria*, published in 1910, is dedicated ‘to the great cooks of Universal Happiness Filippo Turati, Enrico Ferri, Arturo Labriola’ (Marinetti 2004: 9). The Socialists Turati and Ferri are portrayed by the so-called ‘holy scullery boys’ Béchamel and Syphon, while the revolutionary syndicalist Labriola is represented in the play by Estomacreux, the
leader of the starving citizens of the kingdom, the Bourdes. In the play, the Béchamel and Syphon aim to achieve the socialisation of the means of culinary production and they try to inspire the hungry masses to revolt just as Filippo Turati and Enrico Ferri stirred up revolutionary fervour among the workers, which led to the general strike in Milan in 1904. (Marinetti had also closely followed the social unrest in 1898, which had also been led by Turati.) Estomacreux tries to incite the Bourdes in *Le Roi Bombance* to violently revolt just as Labriola and his followers advocated violent action as a way to achieve their aims. None of Marinetti’s revolutionaries, however, succeed in initiating any real change and at the end of the play the status quo has been restored, just as Giolitti’s government retained power, and was indeed strengthened, by the failure of the Socialist-led general strike.

*La cucina futurista* was born out of a very different cultural and historical period. Marinetti announced the ‘forthcoming launch of futurist cookery’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 18) after a Futurist-inspired banquet at the Penna d’Oca restaurant in Milan on 15 November 1930. The related manifesto, signed by Marinetti alone, appeared in the Turin-based newspaper *Gazzetta del Popolo* on 28 December of the same year. Undoubtedly Marinetti’s most famous (or infamous) declaration of this manifesto, and certainly the one which caused the most controversy, was the proposed abolition of pasta (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 18). Following the holding of a series of Futurist banquets, featuring Futurist cuisine, in Italy and France, Marinetti and Fillia3 published *La cucina futurista*, which gathered together the original manifesto, press reports reacting to the movement, descriptions of the banquets and recipes for Futurist food and cocktails. Lesley Chamberlain has memorably described *La cucina futurista* as a ‘serious joke’ (Chamberlain 1989: 7) and while there is a comic element to many of the recipes and banquets described, which was undoubtedly part of Marinetti’s instinct for self-promotion, there is still a coherent political and artistic theme which runs throughout the book.

*La cucina futurista* is a text that is deeply embedded in the rhetoric and ideology of the Fascist regime and, in some respects, can be interpreted as a critique of it. Preparing the masses for war was certainly one of Marinetti’s primary intentions when he first envisaged his gastronomic revolution. He was convinced that ‘in the likely event of future wars, it will be the most lithe, agile peoples who will be victorious … we are establishing a diet in keeping with an increasingly airborne, faster pace of life’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 20; trans. Marinetti 2006: 395). Pasta was the principal target of Marinetti’s culinary ire because it is not the food of soldiers (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 37) and because, according to a Dott. Signorelli quoted in the Manifesto, it induced in the eater ‘sluggishness, depression, inertia brought on by nostalgia, and neutralism’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 20;
trans. Marinetti 2006: 396). Clearly, none of these is a desirable trait for a Fascist or Futurist man on the brink of war. In pasta’s stead, Marinetti advocated the use of rice, which had the fortunate advantage of being a patriotic foodstuff. The abolition of pasta would thus liberate Italy from the need to import costly foreign wheat and would help to promote the Italian rice industry. Marinetti’s decision to favour rice, which could be easily produced in Italy, showed his desire to create an autarkic and self-sufficient Italian state. Marinetti used food as a ‘tool of political dissent’ (Helstosky 2003: 115) and his proposal in favour of the abolition of pasta was a reaction to Mussolini’s agricultural policies, namely the battaglia del grano, which had begun in 1925. The battle for wheat was an economic and agricultural failure but a propaganda success. Marinetti’s proposal to abolish pasta thus challenged Mussolini’s policy by suggesting an alternative, and more pragmatic, means of achieving the same aim of self-sufficiency. There is also a thread of imperialism which runs throughout La cucina futurista. Although Marinetti did, of course, harbour expansionist dreams relating to the African continent, resulting both from his childhood spent in Egypt and his ardent nationalism, it must be noted that the two most overtly colonial sections of La cucina futurista, the Pranzo sintesi d’Italia and the Pranzo desiderio bianco, are both attributed to Fillia and not to Marinetti himself. Nonetheless, Marinetti did express a ‘desire to interpret colonial motifs according to a modern and futurist sensibility’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 72), which belied an impatience with Mussolini’s failure to push forward with colonial policies during the 1920s. In this way ‘food became an urgent and visceral means to challenge the Fascist regime to do more for the sake of the nation’ (Helstosky 2003:132).

**Food and creativity**

In the Manifesto della cucina futurista, Marinetti alluded to the interplay between food and art when he wrote ‘what we think or dream or do is determined by what we eat and what we drink’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 19; trans. Marinetti 2006: 395). He touched on the same idea again in La cucina futurista, commenting that the influence of diet on creative impulses was a frequent topic of conversation among himself, Umberto Boccioni, Antonio Sant’Elia, Luigi Russolo and Giacomo Balla in the earliest years of the Futurist movement (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 17). Marinetti had, however, already addressed this relationship between nutrition and creative production four years before the birth of Futurism, and twenty-seven years before the publication of La cucina futurista, in Le Roi Bombance. One of the central beliefs enshrined in La cucina futurista is that food should be divorced from the mere act of nourishing oneself and should instead be
explored as an aesthetic and artistic medium, capable of transcending its traditional dietary function. To this end, in the *Manifesto della cucina futurista*, Marinetti suggests that chemists should invent a method of administering the necessary calories in pill or powder form, which would be provided free of charge by the State (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 21). This artificial means of nourishment would result in lower costs of living and salaries, and thus in a reduction in the hours in the working day. He also predicted that the development of machines’ capabilities would almost completely liberate people from manual labour, which in turn would ‘allow the refinement and the exaltation of the other hours through thought, the arts, and the anticipation of perfect meals’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 21; trans. Marinetti 2006: 396).

The concept of artificial feeding is in fact an idea Marinetti had already considered in *Le Roi Bombance* twenty-five years earlier. In Act One, the King is desperate to restabilise the order of the kingdom’s kitchens. Poule-mouillet, one of the King’s advisers, declares that Ripaille, the royal chef whose death has thrown the kingdom into turmoil, had carried to his grave the secret of those pills that calmed one’s appetite, which he had distributed to the starving masses (Marinetti 1905: 25). Although the concept of artificial feeding through pills exists in both works, the pills envisaged in *Le Roi Bombance* did not have a transformative power on the lives of the citizens. These pills merely calmed the appetites of the Bourdes but did not have the effect of providing greater time for the pursuit of artistic endeavours.

According to *La cucina futurista*, the ideal Futurist man and diner would be freed from the demands of feeding himself in the traditional way and would therefore be able to devote his energies to higher goals, such as art and poetry. This figure does in fact have a prototype in *Le Roi Bombance*, in the form of the Idiot/Poet character. In the 1920 manifesto *Al di là del comunismo*, Marinetti suggested that the fusion of the artistic dynamism of the Idiot/Poet with the revolutionary dynamism of Estomacreux would bring about the only solution of the universal problem, namely ‘all power to Art and to revolutionary Artists’ (Marinetti 2005: 485; trans. Marinetti 2006: 348). Marinetti wrote that:

> We need to stimulate spiritual hunger that finds satiation in great, stupendous, and joyous art … Art must become the ideal nourishment to console and reanimate the most restless races, dissatisfied and deluded as they are by the eventual collapse of so many ideal yet insufficient banquets (Marinetti 2005: 485; trans Marinetti 2006: 347–8).

It is the Idiot in *Le Roi Bombance* who shares Marinetti’s dream of exciting ‘spiritual hunger’, although he is ultimately unsuccessful in his aim. The
Idiot is the only character in the play who is not ruled by his body; he has a minute appetite and does not suffer any digestive troubles. His stomach is so small that a flower or a tear is enough to fill it (Marinetti 1905: 75). In his article ‘Dyspepsia as Dystopia’, Enrico Cesaretti identified the Idiot’s lack of appetite as a kind of anorexia and suggested that the essence of Le Roi Bombance could be one that joins “dyspepsia” and “dystopia” on one side and “anorexia” and “utopia” on the other (Cesaretti 2006: 353). This is a persuasive argument up to a point. Certainly, the disturbed digestion of the King is linked to his passattista lifestyle filled with sleep and excessive consumption of food. The Idiot, however, is not an anorexic who refuses to eat but is a person whose appetite is sated quickly and who receives his nourishment from other sources, namely an artistic ideal, allowing him to strive for a utopian lifestyle – just as Marinetti would advocate in Al di là del comunismo in 1920 and later in La cucina futurista. The Idiot is nourished by substances other than food, such as sweet music and soft words (Marinetti 1905: 69). Although the Idiot offers the same sustenance to the citizens around him, he is doomed to be ignored and unheeded and the Bourdes continue in their endless cycle of eating, vomiting and re-ingesting.

It is possible to view the King and Père Bedaine, the royal chaplain, as the ultimate manifestations of passéist eaters that Marinetti so deplored in La cucina futurista. Their physical size is the most immediately visible aspect that sets them apart from the ideal Futurists imagined in the 1930s. The King’s stomach hangs over his thighs, while the priest is praised for his mystical and warlike stomach that makes him appear pregnant. An article written in favour of Futurist cuisine, which was reprinted in La cucina futurista, expresses the need to rebuild the Italian man (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 43). What is the use, the author Audisio asks, in requiring men to raise their arm in a Roman salute if he can rest it on his enormous stomach? Thus, Audisio declares that the modern man must have a flat stomach, in order to have clear thoughts and quick reflexes. The population of the Kingdom of the Bourdes in Le Roi Bombance is emblematic of the type of people whom Marinetti condemned in La cucina futurista. The Bourdes live only to gorge themselves and to be gluttonous. In the fourth act, having decried the fact that ‘the sublime art of eating and drinking to excess has disappeared’ (Marinetti 1905: 221), Père Bedaine outlines his theory of digestion, the basic thrust of which is that one must learn to stuff oneself in such a way as to never be forced to vomit. It is their method of eating that primarily influences their lifestyle; the Bourdes, and particularly Roi Bombance, are slow, sleepy, inept and passive – the antithesis of the model of the Futurist diner as laid out in the Cookbook but remarkably similar to the description of the Italian masses who stuffed themselves with pasta.
Pasta is singled out for criticism above all other foods because (as well as being anti-Italian) it is not easily digested, thus bloating the stomach and causing obesity. This however is only the physical effect of pasta, which I feel Marinetti regarded as less serious when compared with the dangerous psychological and emotional effects of this foodstuff. During the radio broadcast which launched Futurist cuisine, Marinetti announced that pasta was a passéist foodstuff because it ‘weighs one down, makes one ugly, sceptical, slow and pessimistic’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 18). Traditional food impedes artistic expression – as was the case in the Kingdom of the Bourdes, where the only figure capable of rising above torpidity and general inactivity and of striving towards poetic creativity was the Idiot who was never hungry and rarely ate anything at all. Marinetti articulates this same idea in his description of one of the definitive Futurist dinners, the Pranzo estivo di pittura-scultura. He begins by describing how a painter or sculptor on a summer’s afternoon might try and stimulate artistic inspiration by indulging in a traditional tasty meal. However, Marinetti warns that he will be weighed down and will have to walk around to try and digest his meal and as a result, ‘between anxiety and cerebral pessimism, he will end up wasting the whole day artistically wandering about without creating any art’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 92).

In La cucina futurista, the separation of food and nutrition has further value than simply allowing people to devote more time to artistic pursuits. Once food is liberated from the constraints of having to provide nutrition, food itself can become an artistic medium and an aid to an artistic life. Thus, the process of eating assumes a theatrical and performative aspect. Associations between food and theatre have a long history within the Futurist movement, beginning, it has been argued (Berghaus 2001: 3–17; Salaris 1997: 291), with the impromptu banquets held after the serate futuriste. The first such banquet took place on 12 January 1910 in Trieste after the first serata futurista at the Politeama Rossetti. This banquet was a timidly anti-traditional affair in which the meal was served backwards beginning with coffee, moving on to desserts and fruit and passing through various other main courses before finishing with an antipasto and vermouth (Salaris 2000: 20). It was only in the 1930s that Futurist banquets were explored to their fullest potential and that their theatrical possibilities were exploited to the greatest extent. Günter Berghaus considers Futurist cuisine as a ‘performative art’ (Berghaus 2001: 12) and Giusi Baldissone has written that ‘Futurist culinary art wanted to be a happening … [in which] the guests participated in a collective performance’ (Baldissone 2009: 105).

Although critics have linked La cucina futurista to the post-serate banquets of the 1910s, the experience of Futurist banquets has not been extended further back to include the banquet that features in Le Roi
Bomdance, however. The first half of Act Three, entitled ‘L’Orgie’, presents a banquet scene, prepared by Syphon, Béchamel and Torte, who are collectively labelled the cooks of universal happiness. This banquet, variously called the ‘Ideal Banquet’ (Marinetti 1905: 14) and ‘Universal Banquet’ (Marinetti 1905: 93), is described by Syphon as ‘a satisfying and definitive banquet which will sate all appetites’ (Marinetti 1905: 46). It can thus be argued that the first Futurist banquet took place on a Parisian stage in April 1909 during the premiere of *Le Roi Bombance*. Marinetti organised the 1930s banquets as a kind of ‘savoury-olfactory-tactile theatre accompanied by music and poetry recitations’ (Berghaus 2001: 3), a description also applicable to the scene he unveils in *Le Roi Bombance*. The banquet in *Le Roi Bombance* is a far more chaotic affair than the highly choreographed events described in *La cucina futurista*. Nonetheless, the banquet becomes a performative space and provides the climax for the whole play. Following the presentation of the roasted bodies of the King and his advisers as the culinary highlight of the meal, the banquet descends into a nightmarish scene of cannibalistic orgy.

Marinetti proposed that new states of mind could be created through his experiments with Futurist food. One of the principal methods was to bombard diners with sensory stimulation relating to all five senses and not just to taste, in order to confuse their expectations and to encourage them to experience eating in a new way. Marinetti’s experimentation with the senses in *La cucina futurista*, aimed to confuse diners’ sensory perception to such an extent that the distinction between them would appear arbitrary, and many of the dining experiences described border on a kind of willed synaesthesia. Synaesthesia has been defined as ‘occurring when stimulation of one sensory modality automatically triggers a perception in a second modality, in the absence of any direct stimulation of this second modality’ (Baron Cohen and Harrison 1997: 3). In *La cucina futurista*, Marinetti is most interested in exciting the senses of smell and touch, as well as obviously stimulating the taste-buds. Marinetti proposed a dinner during which the diners would not eat but would satisfy themselves with perfumes (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 103). Fillia also experimented with creating specific dishes which would excite usually neglected senses. His *Aerovivanda tattile con rumori ed odori* begins with the use of perfumes to enhance the enjoyment of the food, while the second half of the experience instructs the diners to eat an olive, candied fruit and fennel while simultaneously stroking, with their left hand, a specially made board featuring a scrap of red damask, a piece of black velvet and a square of sandpaper (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 63). A more extreme extension of this dish was the *Pranzo tattile*, based on tactile enjoyment of the food itself, including placing one’s face in a dish of vegetables. This dinner also required all the diners to wear
a pair of pyjamas covered with different tactile materials, such as sponge, cork, sand paper, felt, sheets of aluminium, brushes, wire wool, cardboard, silk and velvet and concluded with diners being invited to ‘nourish their fingertips’ by stroking the pyjamas of their dining companions (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 113).

However, long before La cucina futurista, Marinetti had already experimented with the experience of synaesthesia in Le Roi Bombance. At the beginning of Act One, when the King and his subjects are mourning the death of Ripaille and the subsequent loss of his wonderful sauces, the Idiot points out that the recipes are painted and embroidered on to the black velvet on the coffin. He then engages in a kind of synaesthesic experience when he says ‘my eyes can taste them better than my lips!’ (Marinetti 1905: 23) Shortly afterwards, Poullemouillet describes a sumptuous royal banquet, which the subjects observed in envy. The list of royal dishes was sewn on to banners that were carried around the hall and the style of the list was so tasty and sweet that all of the starving citizens licked their lips, to which Anguille replies that it would be more fitting for them to ‘lick their ears’ (Marinetti 1905: 33). The suggestions in Le Roi Bombance that taste can be experienced through visual and aural stimulation heralds Marinetti’s more elaborate experiments with synaesthesia in La cucina futurista.

**Food and identity**

The motif of cannibalism is one common to both texts. The act of eating another person results in the complete domination of the devourer over the devoured. The anthropophagus is able to possess and conquer the ‘other’ that constitutes its human food. During the banquet scene, Roi Bombance, Père Bedaine, Anguille and the Idiot are all eaten by the Bourdes and subsequently vomited up during the fourth act. As Anguille comments, the cannibals ‘held in their stomachs all the powers of the world! Bombance, the power of this world! Bedaine, the power of the next world! [The Idiot] the impossible that cries! Me, the possible that laughs! Worldly Domination … Heaven … Dream … Irony!’ (Marinetti 1905: 200). After the King and his allies have been regurgitated, Estomacreux, the leader of the opposition forces, seeks to re-ingest Roi Bombance, so that Justice, Equality and Liberty can reign at last in all stomachs and in all intestines (Marinetti 1905: 259). Estomacreux and his followers are doomed to fail, however, in their quest. The pessimistic conclusion of the play is that the Bourdes are destined to continue this eternal cycle of eating, vomiting and re-ingesting. Ptiokarum, the vampire son of the feared Moon Goddess, Sainte Pourriture, declares in the final lines of the play that the Bourdes will continue to improve their jaw bones in the act of eating one another,
and that this is the only progress possible (Marinetti 1905: 267). Even this cannibalism will never fully satisfy them, however, as ‘because of their base materialism and anti-intellectual attitude, they are eternal enemies of art, poetry, and intellectual achievement’ (Berghaus 1995: 64) and they cannot grasp the Idiot’s concept that liberty is not something that can be eaten (Marinetti 1905: 250).

The object of possession resulting from the cannibalistic ritual differs in *La cucina futurista*. In ‘Un Pranzo che evitò un suicidio’, the section which opens the 1932 volume, Marinetti recounts his trip to Lake Trasimeno, along with Enrico Prampolini and Fillia to help their suicidal friend, given the pseudonym Giulio Onesti. In this case, it is the power of the feminine which must be dominated and controlled. Onesti had been abandoned by his lover and as an antidote to this heartbreak, Prampolini creates an edible sculpture of Onesti’s lover (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 9). Marinetti’s fear of woman’s power is a well-documented aspect of his rhetoric and manifests itself here in the need to eat, and thus destroy, the female body in order to eradicate the threat she poses to the men around her. Ingesting the sculpture of the female form results in the feminine power being imprisoned in the stomach. This anthropophagic ritual has a profound effect on Onesti. He feels himself to be at once ‘empty and full … possessor and possessed’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 13). The image of eating women is not only a feature of *La cucina futurista* but is one which is evident in many of Marinetti’s writings, among them *Come si seducono le donne* (1916) and the short story *Come si nutriva l’Ardito* (1930) and demonstrates Marinetti’s desire to dominate and destroy the female gender. As Cinzia Sartini-Blum has observed, ‘the topos of erotic ingestion is played out by male anxieties regarding identity and power’ (Sartini-Blum 1996: 97).

Michel Delville has made reference to the links between eating and identity in *La cucina futurista*, writing that ‘the body in Futurist food aesthetics is … the site of a living experiment which questions the very notion of selfhood’. The authors’ tendency to ‘dissociate and individualise the guests’ body parts … paves the way for a radical redefinition of body, art and world’ (Delville 2007: 19). I believe that a similar link between food and identity can be established in relation to *Le Roi Bombance*, a connection Delville himself does not make. Marinetti’s play features an analogous trend; the stomach is regularly considered as a completely separate entity from the body to which it is attached. Indeed, this idea is explicitly expressed by Crouton, who swears that Père Bedaine’s stomach is detached from his body (Marinetti 1905: 17). More so than the mind or the heart, the stomach is the primary organ in the Kingdom of the Bourdes and is regularly elevated to a divine position. Roi Bombance is called ‘the world’s holy gut’ (Marinetti 1905: 52) while the remainder of his body is presented
almost as an appendage to his stomach, which must take precedence over everything else.

Delville also relates this ‘redefinition of body, art and world’ to Marinetti and Fillia’s interest in the insides of the human body. He notes that Bianco e nero is the only recipe to explicitly refer to the interior of the body. This recipe is for a cocktail (or polilibita to follow Marinetti’s dictate regarding the use of Italian culinary terms in favour of foreign imports) which will be an ‘individual exhibition played out on the internal walls of the stomach’ (Marinetti and Fillia 1990: 141). However, Delville continues that ‘the wealth of stuffing recipes contained in the Cookbook continually insists upon the necessity to consider corporeality as a fragile totality liable to be upset by the cook’s transgression of inside and outside boundaries’ (Delville 2007: 19). While there are only a few references to stuffing in strictly culinary terms in Le Roi Bombance, the act of stuffing is alluded to through the metaphorical language used throughout. Once the women of the kingdom have fled, for example, it leaves the men free to ‘stuff themselves’, and this verb ‘empiffer’ appears many other times in the text. In the Italian translation of Le Roi Bombance, Père Bedaine becomes Fra Trippa – a name which in Italian means both tripe and, more informally, belly, thus drawing attention simultaneously to both the inside and the outside of the body.

Another kind of stuffing does however take place in Le Roi Bombance. The cannibalism in Act Three can be interpreted as the ultimate stuffing – one body being stuffed with another. I suggest, therefore, that corporeality is just as fragile a concept in Marinetti’s French play as it is in his Italian Cookbook. The inviolability of the body is constantly threatened in Le Roi Bombance. People are eaten, then vomited up again and thus, our understanding of corporeal liminality is undermined. At the beginning of Act Four, the Bourdes are being tormented by the bodies that they ate during the banquet in the previous act. Once the bodies have been consumed, the eater’s bodily integrity ceases to exist and his whole identity is compromised. The nature of the individual self is questioned in Le Roi Bombance when the eaten begin to corrupt their host bodies and take them over, speaking with their own voices from the stomach of the devourer. Thus, we are presented with the situation where there are two identities simultaneously residing inside the same body, a traumatic experience for both parties. For example, Estomacreux ate Roi Bombance so the latter’s voice can be heard coming from Estomacreux’s stomach. A similar situation features in Marinetti’s short story ‘Come si nutriva l’Ardito’, when the soldier Guzzo carries the dismembered body of his beloved around with him and gradually eats it all. As a result of this cannibalistic act, he assumes also his lover’s identity and speaks alternately with a tremulous female voice and with his own voice (Marinetti 2003: 263). The desire to eat her arose
from a deep-seated desire to possess, in its entirety, the female body, so that she could neither think nor see anyone else, nor ever escape (Marinetti 2003: 263).

A comment Marinetti made in 1938 in an article entitled 'Verso una imperiale arte cucinaria' is certainly relevant to the current analysis of Futurist experimentation with food. He wrote, 'Is it not time to declare culinary art as noble and attractive as poetry, painting, music and architecture, or in other words capable of creating spiritual harmonies worthy of admiration and susceptible to infinite evolution?' (Salaris 2000: 140). La cucina futurista was of course Marinetti’s ultimate manifestation of this aim to render cuisine a noble art form. In Le Roi Bombance of 1905 Marinetti had not yet conceived of food as an art form, but rather viewed the separation of food and nutrition as a method of encouraging greater participation in traditional artistic pursuits. Nevertheless, the play constitutes Marinetti’s first exploration of the interaction between food and art, which would be refined and developed through his experiments with Futurist cuisine in the 1930s.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this chapter (under the same title) was presented at the Back to the Futurists conference at Queen Mary University of London in July 2009. The formulation of my hypothesis regarding a link between Le Roi Bombance and La cucina futurista was not therefore influenced by Enrico Cesaretti’s article, published only in November 2009.

2 This translation is taken from F. T. Marinetti (2006: 8).

3 Fillia (also Fillìa) was the pseudonym of the Futurist painter Luigi Colombo (1904–36).

4 In the manifesto ‘Per una società di protezione delle macchine’, published in La Fiera Letteraria (24 April 1927), Fedele Azari (1992: 95–9) had also predicted that artificial nutrition would become the way of the future.

5 This short story first appeared in the collection Gli amori futuristi in 1922 entitled La carne congelata. The title was changed in 1930 when it was included in the collection Novelle con le labbra tinte.

References


Le Roi Bombance


