

Parodic Musings on Futurism and *Amore* in Oliverio  
Gironde's *Espantapájaros* (*al alcance de todos*).

Patricia M. Montilla  
*Western Michigan University*

The Argentine poet Oliverio Gironde (1891-1967) is a prominent figure in early twentieth-century Spanish American literature. Gironde is perhaps best known for his participation in developing the literary journal *Martín Fierro* (1924-1927), for which he served as codirector along with its founder, Evar Méndez, and to which he contributed financial support, critical insight, theoretical writings, and poetry.<sup>1</sup> Like many artists associated with the avant-garde, Gironde called for a new sensibility in the arts. His manifesto titled "Manifiesto de MARTÍN FIERRO," which appeared on the cover of the fourth issue of the journal on May 15, 1924, challenges conventional notions of artistic production and provides an overview of Gironde's stance on art and literature. The "Manifiesto de MARTÍN FIERRO" echoes many of the principles outlined in the "Manifesto of Futurism" (1909) and in F. T. Marinetti's subsequent writings in its militancy and strong opposition to the establishment and to institutionalized paradigms regulating the creative process. Marinetti's first Futurist manifesto denounces academicians and museums, the guardians of culture:

It is from Italy that we launch through the world this violently upsetting, incendiary manifesto of ours. With it, today, we establish Futurism because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians. For too long has Italy been a dealer in secondhand clothes. We mean to free her from the numberless museums that cover her like so many graveyards. (50)

This harsh declaration of the stagnant state of Italian culture, allegedly upheld by putrid thinkers and institutions that imposed and perpetuated mere imitation, instead of promoting artistic autonomy and innovation, is reiterated in the “MARTÍN FIERRO” manifesto. Gironde condemns the solemn historian and scholar who mummify everything they touch as well as the artistic models that promote anachronism, mimesis, and the pursuit of intellectual nationalism. But unlike Futurist proclamations that adamantly insist on a nihilistic approach to revolutionizing art, “MARTÍN FIERRO” does not require a decisive break from tradition:

MARTÍN FIERRO ve una posibilidad arquitectónica en un baúl “Innovation”, una lección de síntesis en un “marconigrama”, una organización mental en una “rotativa”, sin que esto le impida poseer—como en las mejores familias—un álbum de retratos que hojea, de vez en cuando, para descubrirse al través de un antepasado . . . o reírse de su cuello o de su corbata. (*Espantapájaros* 181)

MARTÍN FIERRO sees the architectonic merit in an *Innovation* trunk, sees a lesson of synthesis in a *Marconigram*, sees mental organization in a rotary printing press, without denying himself the amentiy—found in most homes—of a photo album, turning the leaves from time to time to take a trip into the past . . . or to laugh at his old collar and cravat. (*Scarecrow* 25)

Gironde embraces the beauty of the new machine age advocated by the Futurist movement without rejecting continuity with the past. The “Manifesto of Futurism” proposes the annihilation of the institutions that the Futurists so vehemently opposed: “We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice” (50). “MARTÍN FIERRO,” however, reserves the right to recognize artistic precursors and inherited traits as a family might its ancestors in a photo album. These references to self-reflection, self-critique, and laughter are characteristic of parody in that they acknowledge, incorporate, and mock the past while creating something new, and are essential to understanding Gironde’s adaptation of Futurist doctrine and poetics in his third collection of poetry, *Espantapájaros (al alcance de todos)*.

Appearing in 1932 approximately two decades after the rise of

Futurism, eight years after the foundational "MARTÍN FIERRO" manifesto, and six years after Marinetti's famous visit to Buenos Aires in 1926, *Espantapájaros* reveals many of the literary conventions promoted by the Futurists as already clichéd.<sup>2</sup> The poems of *Espantapájaros* humorously mimic both traditional and vanguard poetics, presenting the latter as a continuum of the former. But Girondo does not merely ridicule aesthetic theories and iconic representations of the past through comical imitation. The poems of *Espantapájaros* question and at times subvert literary and artistic conventions, specifically those regarding love, eroticism and gender, through parody.<sup>3</sup>

Girondo's *Espantapájaros* is regarded by many scholars as the poet's final volume of avant-garde poetry.<sup>4</sup> But although it was successfully promoted as a best seller, *Espantapájaros* did not receive the same critical acclaim as Girondo's previous books, *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* (1922) and *Calcomanías* (1925). Girondo's contemporaries praised his initial two books for their unique adaptation of vanguard poetic techniques and comical depiction of the metropolis.<sup>5</sup> *Espantapájaros*, however, puzzled and eluded contemporary readers and critics alike. The book consists of an opening calligramme and twenty-four untitled, numbered poems that express an affinity with eroticism and the absurd.<sup>6</sup> The majority of these compositions are narrated in the first person; only three of the twenty-four poems appear in the third person, and all except the twelfth poem are written in poetic prose. Although they are at times anecdotal, these compositions are not readily classifiable as narratives. The poems of *Espantapájaros* often resemble monologues and are characterized by anti-poetic speech and popular idiom, as well as traditional and vanguard artistic rhetoric.

The apprehension surrounding the book's form and content is perhaps best captured in a review published in the August 1932 issue of the bibliographic journal *La literatura argentina*. While identifying the parodic intent of *Espantapájaros* as a "burla ingeniosa" 'ingenious scoffing,' the review denounced its erotic content as "una suciedad para espantar" 'a dreadful dump' and ultimately dubbed the book as "la última bufonada de una generación que ya no tiene qué decir" 'the last joke of a generation that doesn't have any more to say' (351). Ramón Gómez de la Serna attributes the lack of criti-

cal attention given to *Espantapájaros* to the book's innovative imagery and freedom of expression, stating that "en *Espantapájaros* todas son fecundaciones del porvenir y lo inventado en ese libro no tiene aún nombre" 'in Scarecrow all are future fertilizations and what is invented in this book does not have a name yet' (103). But while Gómez de la Serna considered it to be the most ingenious of Girondo's works, critics either remained silent or disregarded the book as a mere vanguard experiment unworthy of further consideration. So deeply seated was this notion that, a full thirty years after its first appearance, Marta Scrimaglio dedicated just three pages to *Espantapájaros* in her book-length study of Girondo's writings, stating that the book "no pretende en absoluto ser obra de arte" 'absolutely does not pretend to be a work of art' (27).

The fact is that a more receptive attitude toward Girondo's third book did not emerge until the early seventies, shortly after the poet's death. *El acto experimental: Oliverio Girondo y las tensiones del lenguaje* (1972), Beatriz de Nóbile's groundbreaking study of Girondo's writings, provides one of the first textual analyses of *Espantapájaros*, based primarily on Wolfgang Kayser's theory of the grotesque. Saúl Yurkiévich dedicates a chapter in *A través de la trama: sobre vanguardias literarias y otras concomitancias* (1984) to address the structure of *Espantapájaros*, demonstrating how the book's compositions defy classification by literary genre. The hybrid and open format of *Espantapájaros* has also been analyzed by Rose Corral, who suggests reading the book as a composite of heterogeneous texts communicating sensorial and imaginative experiences that are linked together through word play. Luis Martínez Cuitiño introduced Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on language and literature to the study of *Espantapájaros*. For Martínez Cuitiño, the perpetual integration of the comic and the serious, the use of the vernacular, the proliferation of multiple voices, and the constant metamorphoses present in the book are techniques borrowed from the Menippean satire (166-67). It is important to note, however, that these elements are also characteristics of avant-garde discourse.

The public debut of *Espantapájaros* was in itself reminiscent of a Futurist happening in its critique of the establishment and bourgeois society. During fifteen days Girondo staged and accompanied a procession in which a scarecrow made of papier-mâché and dressed

like an academic rode in a funeral carriage, echoing the book's initial calligramme as well as recalling the demise of the official scholar advocated by the Futurists.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the procession, however, the scarecrow was not burned in effigy, as the Futurists might have done. Instead, the papier-mâché scholar arrived at the home of the SADE, *Sociedad Argentina de Escritores* 'in the arms of two beautiful girls, thus undercutting the seriousness and severity of a Futurist critique.

*Espantapájaros* was also promoted and sold from a rented space on what is still today the most commercial street in Buenos Aires. Aldo Pelligrini states in his account of the book's premier that Girondo "al mismo tiempo alquiló un local en la calle Florida atendido por hermosas y llamativas muchachas para la venta del libro. La experiencia publicitaria resultó un éxito y el libro se agotó en cosa de un mes" 'at the same time he rented a place on Florida Street assisted by beautiful, flashy girls to sell the book. The publicity resulted in success and the book sold out in a matter of a month' (15). Girondo adopted a marketing tool that was guaranteed to sell his book: sex. Regardless of whether the largely bourgeois ruling class looked down upon the use of attractive and provocative young women to lure potential buyers on Florida, the tactic worked and the book sold. In this sense, the promotion and sale of *Espantapájaros* is in itself a social commentary that clearly illustrates the material and ideological aspects of popular advertising. It is also ironic that at the same time that he appropriated Futurist principles in staging the official academician's funeral procession, Girondo undermined Futurism's adverse views on women and sex.

The annihilation of love, or as Marinetti stated in his speech to the Venetians of 1910, the murder of the moonshine (the emblem of love), is at the core of Futurism's assault on literary and aesthetic ideals, and specifically on its assault on Symbolist poetry. Marinetti renounces the city of Venice for fashioning itself as the destination of love par excellence, stating "Let's free the world from the tyranny of *amore*! We're sick of erotic adventures, of lechery, sentimentality, and nostalgia!" (64). Instead, Marinetti and the Futurists promoted sex as a mechanical act intended for the sole purpose of reproduction: "We are convinced that *Amore*—sentimentality and lechery—is the least natural thing in the world. There is nothing natural and im-

portant except coitus, whose purpose is the futurism of the species” (80). This latter statement from Marinetti’s polemical essay “Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism” refutes the notion that love is both an inherent and worthy human quality and acknowledges only the sex act, devoid of any emotion, as a necessary means of perpetuating mankind. Furthermore, the Futurists condemn women as the preeminent symbols of love and sentimentality:

This hatred, precisely, for the tyranny of *Amore* we expressed in a laconic phrase: “scorn for women.” We scorn woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of *Amore*, the woman poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman, obsessing and fatal, whose voice, heavy with destiny, and whose dreaming tresses reach out and mingle with the foliage of forests drenched in moonshine. (81)

Love and women are assimilated and scoffed as aesthetic ideals. As Lucia Re notes in her essay “Futurism and Feminism,” Marinetti’s abhorrence of woman “was aimed at the late-romantic and decadent clichés of woman as on the one hand *femme fatale*, vampire, adulteress—the eternal object of man’s desire and the agent of his damnation—and on the other hand woman as muse, Beatrice, *angelo del cielo* or *del focolare*, virgin-martyr, sacrificial victim, and so on” (253). Thus, Marinetti equates woman with artistic and literary conventions: woman as courtly and sublime symbols of love, as ephemeral and delicate objects as well as dangerous beings, deserving of hate.

In *Espantapájaros*, Gironde parodies Futurism’s adverse notions of love, sex, and gender. The poems numbered seven, twelve, and twenty-two of the book play on Futurism’s contempt for love and sentimentality, its glorification and fusion of sex, danger, and violence, and its scorn for women. Gironde adapts poetic techniques outlined in Marinetti’s “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” (1912) and incorporates, at times comically, Futurist iconography of man and machine and of bodies and matter in motion. Gironde’s poems demonstrate how Futurist views, which militated against *amore* and eroticism, once jolting and rebellious, were quickly imitated and eventually absorbed into the literary canon.

Poem number seven of *Espantapájaros* is a composition in

prose that presents an inventory of poetic formulas traditionally applied to the theme of love. The text is delivered in the third person and is both enumerative and repetitious. The speaker of the poem describes love as having saturated literature and art. The first stanza establishes beyond doubt its all-encompassing presence:

¡Todo era amor... amor! No había nada más que amor. En todas partes se encontraba amor. No se podía hablar más que de amor. . . . (85)

Everything was love... love! There was nothing but love. Everywhere I looked I found love. I could talk of nothing but love. . . . (25)

The initial exclamation is one of protest and complaint over the inordinate treatment of love. The first and second utterances of "amor" are separated by ellipses, suggesting the omission of an expletive. The word "amor" appears three more times in the proceeding verses, which restate the idea that the topic of love has been excessively foregrounded.

Having set a pattern of overkill in the opening verses, Girondo's poem traces the literary evolution of love in the remaining stanzas, which all begin with the word "amor" and comically list past and present variations on the popular theme:

Amor pasado por agua, a la vainilla, amor al portador, amor a plazos.  
Amor analizable, analizado. Amor ultramarino. Amor ecuestre.

.....  
Amor con una gran M, con una M mayúscula, chorreado de merengue,  
cubierto de flores blancas. . . . (85)

There was love that passed the test, love with vanilla, love to go, love on  
the installment plan. Love to be analyzed, love that's been analyzed.  
Ultramarine love. Equestrian love.

.....  
Love with a big M, an M in majuscule, creaming with meringue, covered  
with white flowers. . . . (25)

Traditional representations of love are humorously described as though they were an ordinary and much too familiar food disguised under a new preparation. In addition to being watered down or perhaps platonic, love is projected in installments as in serial romances;



love analyzes and is analyzed, occurring both by sea and by land. The “gran M, con una M mayúscula” alludes to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aesthetic movement known as Modernism. Love is associated with dripping, sickly sweet meringue and with white flowers, bringing to mind the highly decorative, undulating, and plant-like imagery associated with the literature and art of the period.

In the verses that follow, Girondo incorporates Futurism’s attack on *amore*. Futurist notions of love and eroticism are also presented as having already been exploited:

... amor con leche... lleno de prevenciones, de preventivos; lleno de cortocircuitos, de corta-pisas.

.....  
Amor con sus accesorios, con sus repuestos; con sus faltas de puntualidad, de ortografía; con sus interrupciones cardíacas y telefónicas. . . (85)

... love with cream and sugar...full of preparations, of preventions; full of short circuits, of shortcomings.

.....  
Love with its accessories, with its provisions; with its lapses in spelling and punctuality, with its interruptions, cardiac and telephonic. . . (25)

Romantic and idealized love is replaced with sex. The phrase “amor con leche,” referred later in the poem as “amor espermatozoico” and “unctuoso,” is suggestive of sexual contact and reproduction, for “leche” is also a word for semen and sperm. The word “amor” is positioned where one would expect “café,” thus depicting sex as a common and widely treated topic. But these verses also express sexual activity as being full of precautions. The poem identifies the hazards of sex as short circuits and shocks, words that are associated with some of the very materials suggested as the subject for Futurist literature, specifically motors and machines. Ironically, although Girondo appropriates imagery that is characteristic of Futurism, he does not incorporate the movement’s scorn for women. The poem does not make reference to the female sex directly, nor does it associate love with a specific gender. In this regard, the composition renews the tradition of love poetry while at the same time critiquing it as conventional.

In addition to enumerating the thematic treatment of love,



the poem also provides a trajectory of its various forms of exposition. The language of love is adorned and substituted; it can also lack punctuation and orthography, as is often the case in Futurist and other vanguard literatures. The lack of the first person "I" and adjectives and adverbs, the predominance of random nouns, and the uninterrupted sequence of images in Girondo's poem are also techniques outlined in the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (92-95). Girondo inserts Futurism's own thematic and formal treatment of *amore* and sex into a text on the aesthetic evolution of love, thereby presenting Futurist doctrine as just another artistic current.

In poem number twelve of *Espantapájaros*, violence and death function as mechanisms for change in the otherwise outmoded canon of love poetry. It is the book's only item to appear in verse form, consisting of one twenty-four verse stanza with assonant as well as consonant internal and end rime. Another factor that sets this text apart from traditional love poems is the voyeuristic stance assumed by the poetic voice. Unlike many of the texts in *Espantapájaros* that play on Surrealist themes and exalt the taboo practice of onanism, this poem, like Marinetti's essay "Against *amore*," inversely portrays intimate relations between lovers as perverse. The opening lines describe the initial stages of what at first appears to be a typical amorous liaison:

Se miran, se presienten, se desean,  
 se acarician, se besan, se desnudan,  
 se respiran, se acuestan, se olfatean.  
 se penetran, se chupan, se demudan  
 se adormecen, despiertan, se iluminan  
 se codician, se palpan, se fascinan,  
 se mastican, se gustan, se babean,  
 se confunden, se acoplan, se disgregan,  
 se aletargan, fallecen, se reintegran. . . . (93)

They admire, they desire, they gravitate  
 they caress, they undress, they osculate  
 they pant, they sniff, they penetrate  
 they weld, they meld, they conjugate  
 they sleep, they wake, they illuminate  
 they covet, they touch, they fascinate,

they chew, they taste, they salivate  
they tangle, they twine, they segregate  
they languish, they lapse, they reintegrate. . . . (43)

As in the previous composition, the first person "I" does not appear anywhere in the poem, and there is no mention of gender or sex. Instead, an affair between lovers is narrated entirely through a series of action verbs in the third person plural, preceded by the reciprocal pronoun "se" in all but five cases. Despite its unusual form, the poem presents a customary chronological chain of events, whereupon the lovers notice, allure and desire one another. This attraction leads to a sexual involvement, which is described from the perspective of someone who is secretly watching. The encounter is depicted as a purely sensorial experience: the lovers see, sense, touch, smell, and taste one another. They eventually penetrate and absorb each other, becoming one entity during intercourse until reaching the moment of climax, after which they separate, fall asleep, wake and have sex again. This pattern of arousal, copulation, withdrawal, and reprise is reiterated and progressively magnified in the poem.

The second coupling is signaled by the word "despiertan" 'wake up,' the first verb to appear without the reciprocal pronoun. In addition to indicating that the lovers have ceased to sleep, this verb suggests that each has experienced an awakening. A burst of passion unfolds in the succeeding verses, where sex is rendered more carnal than before, as earlier caresses and kisses advance to groping, chewing and driveling. Though slightly more aggressive, these actions are not yet in the realm of perversion. Yet sex is followed by a deep state of lethargy that does not lead to sleep, as one might expect, but causes death. In his analysis of the poem, Jorge Schwartz likens this image to Georges Bataille's discussion of the well-known French expression for orgasm as "la petite-morte" 'little death' (35). In Girondo's text, however, the verb "fallecer" 'to die' appears after sexual intercourse ("se acoplan" 'they join together') and withdrawal ("se disgregan" 'they separate'), providing a final, antithetical close to an experience which began with a kind of birth. Furthermore, "fallecen" 'they die' is immediately followed by "se reintegran" 'they re-integrate,' suggesting that another change has taken place in the relationship.

Upon reuniting a third time, the lovers express an appetite for

violence:

se distienden, se enarcan, se menean,  
se retuercen, se estiran, se caldean,  
se estrangulan, se aprietan, se estremecen,  
se tantean, se juntan, desfallecen. (93)

they wriggle, they squirm, they infundibulate  
they fumble, they fondle, the perfricate  
they swoon, they twitch, they resuscitate  
they sulk, they pout, they contemplate. (43)

Erotic behavior has now transformed into violent activity. The lovers combatively twist, stretch, heat, choke, squeeze, and shake one another as though their bodies were made of a highly pliable plastic. But the verb “tantear” ‘to probe’ sustains the human quality of the encounter, implying not only that the lovers are examining one another closely, but that they are also measuring and exploring each other’s intentions. Although the two couple once again, the moment of sexual intercourse is described simply as a joining, after which the lovers’ bodies immediately collapse from a loss of spirit and strength, suggesting that erotic pleasure is derived from the preceding abuse. The experience is rendered as threatening and debilitating though enjoyable at the same time. This change toward masochism is reinforced in the following verses:

se repelen, se enervan, se apetecen,  
se acometen, se enlazan, se entrechocan,  
se agazapan, se apresan, se dislocan,  
se perforan, se incrustan, se acribillan,  
se remachan, se injertan, se atornillan,  
se desmayan, reviven, resplandecen,  
se contemplan, se inflaman, se enloquecen,  
se derriten, se sueldan, se calcinan,  
se desgarran, se muerden, se asesinan,  
resucitan, se buscan, se refriegan,  
se rehúyen, se evaden y se entregan. (93)

they ignite, they inflame, the incinerate,  
they erupt, they explode, they detonate  
they nab, they grab, they dislocate

they clinch, they clutch, they concatenate  
 they solder, they dissolve, they calcinate  
 they paw, they claw, they assassinate  
 they choke, they shudder, they embrocate  
 they redden, they madden, they federate  
 they repose, they loll, they oscitate  
 they splice, they smolder, they colligate  
 they abate, they alate and they transubstantiate. (43)

The fourth union is described as though it were an assault: the lovers attack and tie each other as with a rope, colliding and clashing until copulation is achieved. Violent methods for bringing about death are expressed by the verbs “estrangular” ‘to strangle,’ “acometer” ‘to attack,’ “acribillar” ‘to riddle,’ and “asesinar” ‘to assassinate,’ producing the effect that what the speaker is observing, and subsequently what one is reading, are acts of transgression.

What first began as a somewhat traditional portrayal of passion through the use of familiar images that appealed to the senses ends with a description of sexual activity that involves abusive physical treatment and violence. Eroticism is linked with aggression and combat, recalling the exaltation of “the furious coitus of war” in Marinetti’s “Let’s Murder the Moonshine” manifesto (61). The actions related by the poetic voice, as well as the verbs employed to describe them, also render the lovers less human and more machine-like. For instance, drilling, piercing, and grafting ironically lead to screwing. In the final union, sex is described as the coupling of chemical compounds. The lovers not only shine like metal, they inflame, melt, solder, and calcinate each other; they are reduced to mere substances and are reminiscent of the Futurist desire to make literature out of matter and to capture the dynamic quality of matter in space. The lovers’ bodies are mechanical, and their motions perpetual. Toward the end of the poem, sex is presented as a repetitive action that, over time, is as automatic as the operating of machines or the steady cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through which the past, present, and future are linked, thus maintaining continuity.

The threat of death in love and sex reappears in poem twenty-two, where sexual intercourse with a “mujer eléctrica” ‘electric woman’ is said to bring about death by electrocution. Here, Gi-

rondo mocks the way the Futurists equated their aversion for love and sentimentality with their disdain for women, as conveyed by Marinetti in the opening statements of "Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism." In a similar fashion, Girondo's poem brings together conventional and contemporary representations of the *femme fatale* in which men are depicted as victims of evil-doing women. However, Girondo replaces with humor the hostility toward women expressed by the Futurists. The text is narrated by a male voice that offers advice on how men can protect themselves from three types of women: those who are vampires, those who have prehensile sexes, and those who are electric. The scientific and matter-of-fact speech with which the speaker discusses the perils associated with these women mocks human desire, particularly that associated with the male gender, to quantify and categorize. The *femmes fatales* are comically classified and introduced in order of the dangers they present, beginning with the female vampire who is the most commonly known, and therefore the least harmful.

The female vampire has a long established tradition in folklore and literature since ancient times, but she achieved the most notoriety in European literature of the 19th century. According to Bram Dijkstra, "by 1900 the vampire had come to represent woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership, and money" (351). Girondo's poem acknowledges the popularity of the female vamp:

Las mujeres vampiros son menos peligrosas que las mujeres con un  
sexo prehensil.

Desde hace siglos, se conocen diversos medios para protegernos  
contra las primeras. (108)

Women vampires are less dangerous than women with a prehensile  
sex.

For centuries, we have known various methods for protecting  
ourselves against the former. (77)

The text is delivered as though it were an informative lecture. The use of the impersonal and passive *se*, and the subsequent repetition of the first person plural *nos*, which the speaker uses to express solidarity with his fellow men, produce an effect of ridicule by giv-

ing the text an exaggerated oratorical tone. The poetic voice assures the male reader that the techniques for protection against female vampires that have been known and passed on for centuries render these women more recognizable and avoidable than women with prehensile sexes:

La imposibilidad en que se encuentran de hundirnos su lanceta en silencio, disminuye, por otra parte, los riesgos de un ataque imprevisto. Basta con que al oírlas nos hagamos los muertos para que después de olfatearnos y comprobar nuestra inmovilidad, revoloteen un instante y nos dejen tranquilos. (108)

The impossibility of their being able to sink their lancet into us in silence reduces, however, the risk of an unforeseen attack. As soon as we hear them coming we play dead because, after sniffing us and confirming that we are not moving, they hover for a moment and leave us alone. (77)

Because female vampires are so commonplace, they are easily detected and dodged. The vampire-woman is depicted as a rapacious huntress who scents and circles her prey, while the male would-be victim intuitively perceives her and plays dead. In this relation, both the vampire-woman and her male targets are depicted as animals. Human behavior, specifically, sexual impulse, is devoid of emotion, and sex is presented as merely a physical and ravenous act. This is also characteristic of the lesser-known women with prehensile sexes:

Contra las mujeres de sexo prehensil, en cambio, casi todas las formas defensivas resultan ineficaces. Sin duda, los calzoncillos erizables y algunos otros preventivos, pueden ofrecer sus ventajas; pero la violencia de honda con que nos arrojan su sexo, rara vez nos da tiempo de utilizarlos, ya que antes de advertir su presencia, nos desbarrancan en una montaña rusa de espasmos interminables. . . . (108)

Against the women with a prehensile sex, on the other hand, almost all forms of defense prove ineffective. No doubt prickly underpants and certain other preventatives can offer their advantages, but the violence of the sling with which their sex lashes out at us rarely gives us time to use them; before we notice their presence, they hurl us into a roller-coaster ride of interminable spasms. . . . (77)

cape. This evil-doing woman is described as a succubus: in folklore, a demonic woman who forces sexual intercourse upon sleeping men. The “mujer de sexo prehensil” casts herself impetuously upon her male victims. As is the case with succubine encounters, a man can easily be caught by surprise. Nonetheless, a confrontation with a “mujer de sexo prehensil” ‘woman with prehensile sex,’ while violent and debilitating, is enjoyable. Though often followed by a period of recovery, the emotional and physical spectrum of the encounter is compared to the exhilarative roller coaster ride. Sexual aggression and violence are rendered yet again as pleasurable experiences.

Similar confrontations with electric women, however, can be fatal. After comically relating the dangers associated with the popular and celebrated vamp and succubus, the text presents a caricature of a more contemporary *femme fatale*. The electric woman is the most evil of all, for although she is most currently in vogue, she is not yet as familiar to potential victims as are her predecessors:

Mucho más peligrosas, sin discusión alguna, resultan las mujeres eléctricas, y esto, por un simple motivo: las mujeres eléctricas operan a distancia.

Insensiblemente, a través del tiempo y del espacio, nos van cargando como un acumulador, hasta que de pronto entramos en un contacto tan íntimo con ellas, que nos hospedan sus mismas ondulaciones y sus mismos parásitos. (108)

Nevertheless, among the creations of sexuality’s inventory, those already mentioned are the least dreadful. Much greater dangers, indisputably, proceed from electric women, for one simple reason: electric women operate at a distance.

Undetectably, across time and space, they charge us up like a battery, until suddenly we enter into such intimate contact with them that we find ourselves sharing the same currents and hosting the same parasites. (77-9)

The electric woman and her male victims are not given animal traits, as in the previous two examples, but are rendered as machine-like. An encounter with this *femme fatale* is both violent and life threatening. Sexual intercourse is depicted as a combustible charge strong enough to cause a short circuit. The “mujer eléctrica” actually ignites her victims with an electric spark, recalling Francis Picabia’s



"Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity" (1915), a drawing of a spark plug bearing the inscription "FOR-EVER" (See Fig 1). Picabia's early Dada drawing plays on Futurist iconography of man and machine. In the essay, "Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine," Marinetti discusses the intimate relationship between man and motor, and proposes the creation of a human machine:

This non-human and mechanical being, constructed for an omnipresent velocity, will be naturally cruel, omniscient, and combative.

He will be endowed with surprising organs: organs adapted to the needs of a world of ceaseless shocks. (99)

Marinetti's mechanical man possesses the principal qualities exalted by Futurism: speed, aggression, infinite knowledge and power, militarism, and masculinity. Picabia's drawing transforms this futuristic male robot by changing its gender, and thus mocking what is perhaps the most iconic convention associated with the Futurist movement. The representation of a spark plug as a young American girl or *knock-out* is embroidered further in Gironde's text:

En todo un instante se nos escapan de los poros centenares de chispas que nos obligan a vivir en pelotas. Hasta que el día menos pensado, la mujer que nos electriza intensifica tanto sus descargas sexuales, que termina por electrocutarnos en su espasmo, lleno de interrupciones y de cortocircuitos. (109)

Hundreds of sparks escape from our pores every instant, obliging us to live in nakedness. All the way up to that little-contemplated day, when the woman who has been electrifying us intensifies her sexual charge to such a degree that she ends up electrocuting us in a spluttering spasm of disruptions, disconnections and fizzling short circuits. (79)

The poem ends with a final allusion to both Marinetti's well-endowed robot and Picabia's spark plug. The electric woman generates sparks that escape from her victims, thus forcing them to live in the nude for fear of igniting their clothing. Eventually, her hot sexual charges electrocute her victims, who ultimately die from ceaseless shocks. Like Picabia's young American girl, the electric woman is "for-ever."

*Espantapájaros* plays on Futurism's tenets, adapting many of the movement's formal principles, but at the same time rejecting and ridding

culing through parody its seemingly misogynist views of women and its conceptions of love and gender, both male and female. Girondo's affinity for transgression is indisputably representative of the avant-garde. The poet pushes aesthetic boundaries through his use and exposition of language as well as his association of physical violence and death with love and sex. But unlike his vanguard contemporaries, Girondo does not advocate a clean slate from which to create new art. The poems of *Espan* incorporate, mock and challenge both conventional and avant-garde literary discourse, constructing a link between past, present, and future forms of artistic expression while at the same time renewing the otherwise exhausted genre of love poetry.

## Notes

1 The preliminary study to the facsimile reproduction of *Martín Fierro* (1924-1927), published in 1995 by Argentina's *Fondo Nacional de las Artes*, credits Girondo for his vital role in the elaboration of the journal and highlights the poet's economic, ideological and literary contributions to the magazine, including the writing of the "MARTÍN FIERRO" manifesto: "... el más famoso manifiesto de toda la historia de la literatura argentina, redactado también por Oliverio Girondo. ..." See *Revista Martín Fierro 1924-1927 Edición Facsimilar* (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 1995) X-XI.

2 The journal *Martín Fierro* dedicated most of its June and July issues (29-31) in honor of Marinetti's visit to Argentina in June of 1926. In addition to printing Marinetti's founding "Manifiesto of Futurism" from 1909 on the cover page of its June 8 issue, the journal published numerous articles re-examining Marinetti's significant contributions to the development of new aesthetic ideals and to promoting the international avant-garde. Nearly all of these essays in homage to Marinetti recognize Futurism as an artistic movement of the past. See *Revista Martín Fierro 1924-1927 Edición Facsimilar* 207-17 and 223.

3 The incorporation and critique of past and contemporaneous aesthetics in *Espan* befits Linda Hutcheon's definition of modern parody as "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion," and as "repetition with critical difference" (6-7). By subverting and transgressing previous texts, Girondo successfully initiates artistic renewal while preserving a connection to his precursors.

4 For a sampling of studies that consider *Espantapájaros* to close Gironde's early cycle of vanguard poetry, see Pellegrini 28; Nobile 42-58; Masiello 121-22.

5 See Ricardo Güiraldes's letter to Gironde in response to *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* and the book reviews of Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jules Supervielle, and Jorge Luis Borges compiled and reproduced *Homenaje a Gironde*, comp. and ed. Jorge Schwartz (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1987) 259; 326-31.

6 The calligramme visually depicts the figure of the scarecrow that gives the book its title and functions as a prologue in its critique of the Argentine intelligentsia, its direct reference to sex, specifically auto-eroticism, and its rebellious stance on logic and reason. A facsimile reproduction of the calligramme appears in *Oliverio Gironde: Obra Completa*, ed. Raúl Antelo (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1999) 77.

7 For a detailed account of the staged funeral procession that announced the publication of *Espantapájaros*, see Enrique Molina, "La casa y el espantapájaros" in *Homenaje a Gironde* 216.

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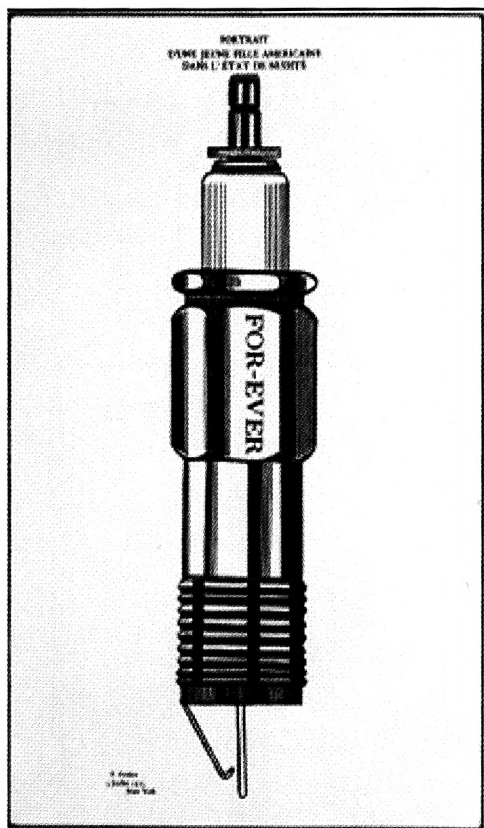


Fig. 1 Francis Picabia. *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Archives.