

A THESIS SUBMITTED
to
THE FACULTY OF ART & DESIGN
&
COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES
in
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE.

FACULTY OF FINE ART,
DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE, JOINT COURSE
by

GARY COYLE

THE METAPHYSICAL PAINTINGS
of

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

NC 0015663 9



Giorgio de Chirico must be without doubt one of the most controversial and misunderstood artists of the twentieth century. There is no other figure of comparable stature, and he surely must rank alongside Picasso and Matisse, on whom scholars and critics opinions are so contradictory and divergent.

De Chirico began to paint in his mid teens, approximately in 1903. He continued painting right up to his death in 1978, during which time he passed through a myriad of styles, and phases. It is however with his most influential phase, his metaphysical period, between 1911 and 1917, during which time he painted a mere 120 paintings, that this thesis is concerned.

His metaphysical paintings are his most influential, provoking statements like the following from scholars. William Rubin, curator of painting and sculpture in M.O.M.A. New York in the early 1980's wrote. "Giorgio de Chirico's best paintings (meaning his metaphysical works) mark him, I believe as the greatest Italian artist of this century, and probably the best since the 18th century" (1) or as eminent a scholar as Wieland Schmied to write "without De Chirico there would never have been any Surrealist Art (or else it would have looked quite different) (2). It is astonishing how many misconceptions surround his metaphysical paintings.

What this thesis will discuss in the first chapter, are De Chirico's sources and influences, as well as exploring one of the most contentious debates which surrounds his metaphysical period: whether or not he was influenced by the modernist movement.

The second chapter, entitled De Chirico's Labyrinth, deciphers, and decodes, De Chirico's very complex iconography.

CHAPTER 1

GARY COYLE

DEGREE THESIS

ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES



Illustration No. 1 - Metamorphosis of a Glove

Giorgio de Chirico was born in Greece in 1888, in the town of Volos. Both of his parents were Italian, and his father, an engineer, was very well to do. His brother Andrea - (Later Alberto Savino) was born 3 years later in 1891. Nothing of great significance seems to have happened to De Chirico as he was growing up, he showed an early interest in art which was encouraged by his parents, who employed several drawing masters to tutor him during his youth.

One unusual feature of his childhood was his strange relationship with his father, who he liked a great deal and whose death when he was 17 seemed to have had a lasting effect on him. His father was very aloof and distant, as well as being more than a trifle odd, he would not let him have a bicycle because "his opposition was some how linked to his puritanism. Bicycles were for him one of those things one musn't even think of, like disinfectants, microbes and pistols. "In our house the words dagger, pistol, revolver, gun were never mentioned". (3) In 1903 De Chirico entered the Fine Arts Department of the Athens Polytechnic, where he spent 3 years studying under the typical art regime of the time: intensive drawing of classical plaster casts for 2 years, after which he was allowed to work from the life model. After his father's death in 1906, his mother decided to move to Germany so that Andrea, her favourite, could study music at the Conservatoire in Munich. Both of the De Chirico brothers were devoted to their mother, as she was to them, she was strongly supportive of her sons artistic ambitions, and was prepared to trek around Europe after them encouraging and supporting them.

In transit to Munich they stopped off for a few days in Italy, visiting Venice and Milan. This was De Chirico's first visit to his beloved Italy, though he confessed that he was more interested in eating ice creams than looking at paintings. When he arrived in Munich he thought that Munich was "paradise, a paradise on earth". (4) Munich was at this time considered to be the new Athens, due to Klenzes reconstruction in the neo classical style with endless columns, arcades and propylae.

It was in Munich that De Chirico's artistic development began in earnest, not that he learnt much in the Academy, which he detested as he did Munich and Southern Germany. However he discovered a variety of German painters, such as Alfred Kubin, Franz Stuck, and more importantly Max Klinger who mixed contemporary scenes with antiquity, producing highly troubling dream/reality scenes ie. Metamorphosis of a glove (plate no 1). But undoubtedly the painter



Illustration No. 2 - Isle of the Dead

whose work had the greatest impact on De Chirico was Arnold Bocklin (1827 - 1901). Bocklin, who was a late German romantic was known as a magic realist in that he painted almost Wagnerian canvases, involving a plethora of mythological creatures, as well as highly romantic landscapes which to quote Soby "made the real, unreal and the unreal real" (5) a fine example of his work is "The Isle Of Death"(plate No. 2).

Besides this ability to make the "unreal real" De Chirico admired Bocklin for an approach to his art which was primarily a philosophical one as opposed to an intuitive one. It is interesting at this stage to note the comparison made by Soby between Bocklin and De Chirico "whereas Bocklin had evolved an essentially germanic kind of painting from an Italianate vision, De Chirico was presently to create a thoroughly Italian art from a German metaphysical premise" (5).

Like Bocklin, De Chirico's attitude to his art was first and foremost a cerebral one, thus, an interest in the German philosophers Nietzsche and Schopenhauer was to have a profound and lasting effect on De Chirico's painting. It was from Schopenhauer that De Chirico derived his notion of the "metaphysical" which was to be vital to his outlook.

The word derived from Aristotle, originally referred to matters of natural science, though it quickly came to be misinterpreted as meaning "the science of things transcending what is physical and natural" . Schopenhauer used the word metaphysical in terms of "the ascent from the sensible to the supersensible may be seen as a parallel, even a direct ancestor of the sense of word "super-real" or surreal" (6).

Schopenhauer had been deeply dissatisfied with purely empirical knowledge as represented by the science of his time. He held that scientific explanations of the world and human experience were very limited. He believed that science could only classify appearances which we out of habit accepted as reality, but that it couldn't explain them. Thus he believed that metaphysics had a genuine function, for it could explain certain fundamental problems of human experience such as Beauty or Goodness, which science was unable to come to terms with or articulate.

He held that aesthetic or artistic vision pierces through the common way of looking at things - to the very heart of being, that it could reach the very essence of things. He believed that science's failure to take the aesthetic dimension into consideration, resulted in its impotence to see things as they

really are. He believed that art was not transcendent to life, but a continuation, and an intensification of experience, which leads to a deeper more universal and complete understanding of human knowledge and experience.

Schopenhauer had been strongly influenced by the romantic school especially Novalis, Hoffmann, Tieck and Wackenroder, and from them he derived a romantic view of art and the artist. Novalis described the artist in a transcendent sense of being like a magician; one who can penetrate the vital secret essence of things. (7). Novalis' influence on Schopenhauer can be clearly detected in his book "Will to Power" particularly in his chapter on genius.

According to Schopenhauer, the ability to apprehend beauty in art and nature constituted genius, and though he believed most men could potentially appreciate beauty, in many, these moments of beheld beauty are few and far between, since most men mistrust or ignore their faculty to taste such experiences - namely intuition. The genius to Schopenhauer is one who is indifferent to the material world and is therefore able to withdraw from it, and in his or her detachment is able to attach significance to what the rest of the world tied up with material concerns, would see as being immaterial.

Knowledge obtained through detachment was according to Schopenhauer superior to any acquired through more ordinary methods, since he believed it came into being via inspiration or intuition: a sudden and luminous perception of the quality of a thing which cannot be described, explained or formulated. This notion of revelation, born due to detachment, can be clearly detected in an unpublished article written by De Chirico in 1912 called Meditation of a Painter, where he wrote "A truly immortal work of art can only be born through revelation Schopenhauer explained such moments in Parega And Paralepmania" (8) "to have original, extraordinary, and perhaps even immortal ideas one has but to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar and in this way reveal their true essence". (9).

Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer had been to Italy, which seemed to have left a lasting impression on him and in his Italian note book from 1820's he wrote "Temples and churches, pagodas and mosques, in all countries, and from all ages, in splendour and grandeur, bear witness to the metaphysical appetite of man, which strong and inexplicable follows hard upon the physical". (10).

This would surely suggest an influence on De Chirico who frequently employed

architecture in his metaphysical paintings. That Schopenhauer was the source of De Chirico's uses of architectural motifs becomes more likely when one reads his essay of 1851 "The Metaphysics of Fine Art" - in which he contrasts the expression of mood resulting from the inorganic and organic world.

"The inorganic world so far as it does not consist of mere water, produces a very sad, nay an oppressive effect-upon the feelings, whenever it is presented to us quite by itself. Examples of what I mean are offered by districts which offer to the eye nothing but a mass of bare crags; that long valley of rocks for instance, without a trace of vegetation, near Foulon on the way to Marseilles. The same effect is produced on a large scale, and in a much more striking degree by the African desert". (11).

Now though, in this instance, Schopenhauer is referring to natural phenomena, and architecture is obviously man made - the melancholic mood which Schopenhauer refers to is clearly the mood, which we find in many of De Chirico's paintings except that De Chirico's desert is man made.

Schopenhauer was not over-concerned with the classical subject matter of art, and as noted by Ivor David "This pointed the way to an almost arbitrary choice" (12). Schopenhauer wrote "Almost any object could be worthy of art, so it is that a trivial event can become the seed of a great and glorious work. Jacob Bohme is said to have been enlightened by the sudden sight of a tin can" (13). This must suggest a possible source for De Chirico's use of everyday objects in his paintings.

While in Munich De Chirico read the works of Friedrich Nietzsche in particular "Human all too Human" and "The Birth of Tragedy". Nietzsche's writings probably constitute the greatest single influence on De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, and they provide us with one of the most effective keys in the decoding of his paintings. This area will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, but now let us discuss Nietzsche's general influence.

In Human all too Human, De Chirico, according to Soby, found "Clarification of his longing for a supernatural intensity of expression" (14). Nietzsche wrote "Art is above all, and first of all meant to embellish life, to make us to ourselves endurable..... Hence art must conceal or transform everything that is ugly..... A man who feels within himself a surplus of such powers of embellishment, concealment and transfiguration will finally seek to unburden

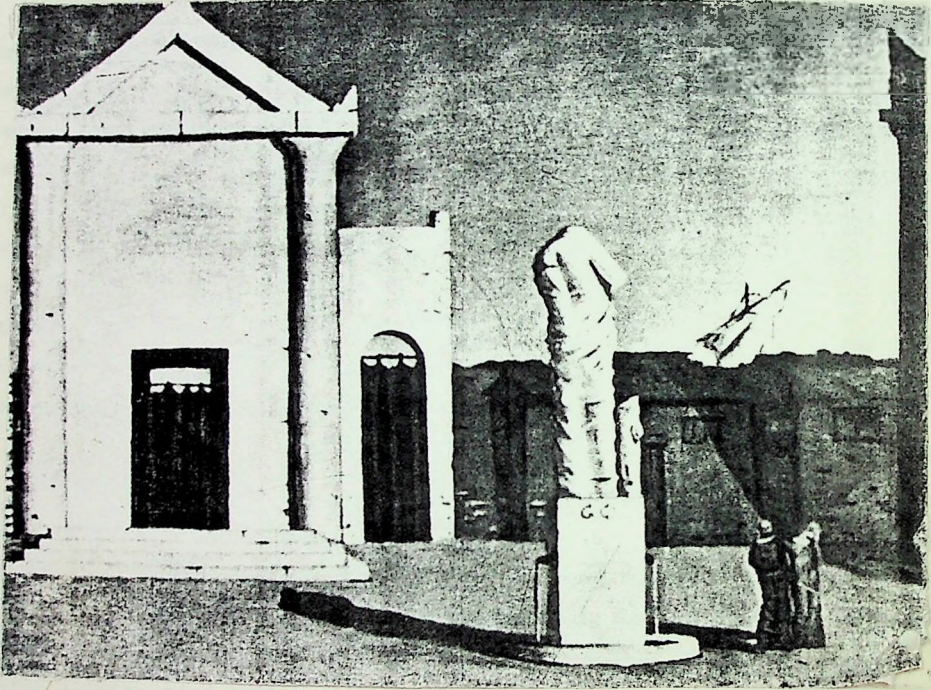


Illustration No. 3 - Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon

himself of this surplus in works of art" (15). In the Birth of Tragedy" the ideal artist is described "Through Apollonian dream inspiration, his own state, ie. his oneness with the primal source of the Universe reveals itself to him in a symbolic dream picture" (16) - and further "the beautiful appearance of the dream worlds the production of which everyman is a perfect artist, is the presupposition of all plastic art and in fact..... of an important half of poetry also" (17). One only has to look at De Chirico's paintings to see that - to quote Soby "they propose a Nietzschean counterreality based on reverie, incantation and dreams". (18).

The suggestion for his principal metaphysical subject matter - that of the Italian piazza came from Nietzsche. De Chirico claimed he had uncovered a novelty discovered by Nietzsche, which others had failed to notice. "The novelty is a strange and profound poetry, infinitely mysterious and solitary which is based on stimulating (which apparently translates as atmosphere) the Stimmung of an autumn afternoon. When the sky is clear and the shadows are longer than in summer, for the sun is beginning to be lower". (19). "This extra-ordinary sensation can be found in Italian cities and in Mediterranean cities like Genoa and Nice but the Italian city par excellence where this extra-ordinary phenomenon appears is Turin." (20).

In 1910 De Chirico left Germany to follow his mother and brother to Milan, where they stayed for a few months, where De Chirico says "I painted canvases of a Bocklinesque flavour". (21). The De Chiricos tired of Milan and moved for no particular reason to Florence. While in Florence De Chirico's health, which had been poor in Milan, due to intestinal troubles, deteriorated. De Chirico painted little, read philosophy, grew morose and was in his own words "overcome with a severe crisis of black melancholy". (22).

Though he painted few paintings in Florence, those he did, complete show the beginnings of his original style. He began "to paint subjects in which I tried to express the strong and mysterious feeling I had discovered in the books of Nietzsche, the melancholy of beautiful autumn afternoons in Italian cities". (24). It was at this time in Florence beset by serious illness and melancholia and influenced by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer that he painted his first metaphysical painting "Enigma of an autumn afternoon" (Illus. No.3). This painting is interesting, not only because it is the first metaphysical painting but also because De Chirico has written in depth about the inspiration behind it, which is something he hasn't done with any other metaphysical painting.

"One clear autumn afternoon I was sitting on a bench in the middle of the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, of course it wasn't the first time I had seen this square, I had barely recovered from a long intestinal illness and was in a state of almost morbid sensitivity. The whole world around me including the marble, the buildings, and fountains seemed to me to be convalescing. At the centre of the square stands a statue of Dante wearing a long tunic and clasping his works to his body, his head crowned with laurel and bent thoughtfully forward..... The hot autumn sun brightened the statue and the facade of the Church. Then I had the strange impression that I was looking at these things for the first time, and the composition of the painting revealed itself to my mind's eye. Now everytime I look at the picture I see that moment once again. Never the less the moment is an enigma for me, in that it is inexplicable. I like also to call the work derived from it an engima". (24).

In this statement the influence of Schopenhauer can be clearly detected. Here we have a sudden and luminous perception of a thing which cannot be explained or formulated - hence the enigma, and knowledge obtained through detachment. It was also one of his first works to be exhibited, with two others in the Salon d'Automne of 1912, to which he submitted three, and all three were hung. The other two being The Enigma of the Oracle (another piazza picture) and a highly melancholic self-portrait based on a photo of Nietzsche entitled What shall I love if not the Enigma ?.

Melancholia, and melancholic are words which are frequently applied to De Chirico, by others as well as by himself. It's very difficult in the late 20th Century to capture precisely the meaning of Melancholy, as used by Nietzsche and De Chirico. The precise medical definition according to Butterworths medical dictionary is "A mental illness in which the predominant symptom is melancholy, a depression of the spirits, unhappiness, misery, frequently accompanying symptoms are disturbance of sleep, anergia, retardation, self reproach". (25). Thus melancholia today is seen as being just another term for depression, and yet in the mid-to-late 19th century, it meant a great deal more than mere depression.

Melancholy was the disease of the mind which affected any late romantic worth his salt. Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Baudelaire, Mallarme, Oscar Wilde/Nietzsche, Huysman and his decadent romantic hero par excellence D'esseintes, to name a few, all suffered from melancholia. The notion was even parodied by Gilbert in the opera Patience, when the young

maiden sings about Bunthorne, who is in fact a send-up of Oscar Wilde, the young melancholic poet, "Oh what a very, very, deep, young man, this deep young man must be". The word's nineteenth century meaning is best encapsulated in the French word "ennui", which connotes a listless world - weariness, a sort of boredom, in which one is halfway between elation and despair, but not yet without the loss of all hope.

Though it is evident in the Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon, that De Chirico had passed through his Bocklin phase, this influence is still very much in evidence; the figures are very similar to those painted by Bocklin. However several of what were to become - major motifs of his metaphysical paintings are featured here, he depicts. Architecture and statues; he paints the sails of an invisible boat peering over the wall. He also uses an exaggerated form of perspective; all of these features were to become almost standard fixtures of his metaphysical paintings. His modest success in 1912 greatly encouraged him, and he redoubled his efforts. Through the winter of 1912-1913, he expanded on his piazza theme - Ariadne makes her first appearance, to be followed by a whole host of classical motifs and allusions, which leads us on to one of the most contentious issues which surround De Chirico's paintings: was he involved in and influenced by the modern movement ?

The traditional view of De Chirico's work from 1911 to 1917 as noted by William Rubin in his essay "De Chirico and Modernism" was that it was painted by a loner whose sui generis enterprise bore little or no relationship to the dominant Parisian styles of the decade". (26). He cites Jean Cassou who compared De Chirico's "intense reaffirmation of the past" which he considered marked above all, by a will to classicism "with the futurists concern for modernity". (27). James Thrall Soby - who is considered the authority on De Chirico, supports this view: he wrote that "The influence of Cubism on De Chirico's early paintings should not be exaggerated". (28).

This argument appears to be substantiated, when one looks at the paintings themselves, they contain images of Classical Statuary, busts of Apollo and Ariadne, as well as fragments of ancient statues. Architecture which is a frequently used motif is of a simplified classical type, the mannequins who occupy many of the later metaphysical paintings - often bear classical names like Hector and Andromache - or wear togas. De Chirico's metaphysical paintings are underpinned by De Chirico's apparent revival of Renaissance-style perspective.



Illustration No. 4 - Gare Montparnasse
or

the melancholy of departure

When one finally turns to De Chirico, to find out what he has to say about the subject, the evidence seems over-whelming: he stated that his metaphysical paintings 1910 to 1917 "were absolutely different from what was being done at the moment" (29). Throughout his post-1919 writings one finds the notion of De Chirico as a classical painter "Pictor Classicus Sum" continuously asserted by De Chirico, while simultaneously availing of every opportunity to attack modernism and its heroes. In his memoirs he refers to Bracque and Matisse as "Fabricators of psuedo-painting" (30), while writing about Dr. Barne's collection in Philadelphia he refers to "the usual ridiculous Cezannes"; that Modigliani's work was "a complete daub" (31). He asserted that modernism was "a conspiracy of dealers who paid money to critics to praise modernist paintings", and that "The present method of dealing with art (ie. modernism) the method used by fools, thieves and pimps has spread throughout the modern world, but the origin and centre of it all was in Paris" (32) and finally "all my criticism of modern painting can be reduced to one word: filth" (33).

However if one examines the evidence carefully it soon becomes apparent, contrary to De Chirico's and others protestations that De Chirico was in fact a modernist. It must first be noted that all of De Chirico's anti-modernist, diatribe was written post 1919, after he had declared himself a classical painter; previous to that, his few writings on art confined themselves largely to Poetics. One of the most common arguments used to support the claim that De Chirico was not a modernist, other than his own protestations, was his use of Renaissance style perspective. Renaissance perspective was not merely a way of organising pictorial space for artists rather it was the end product of a rational humanist philosophy. The spectator understands that Renaissance pictorial space is an illusionary continuation of his own space. It is also logical and coherent with all of its octagonals meeting at a single vanishing point.

When one examines De Chirico's use of perspective in for example Gare Montparnasse (Plate No. 4), The Enigma of a Day or The Departure of the Poet, one finds that he uses multiple vanishing points. This practice is a complete subversion of Renaissance perspective which used a single vanishing point in order to relate to the viewer a sense of balance and order. De Chirico's perspective with its multiple vanishing points does the reverse by presenting the viewer with a whole series of conflicting spatial tensions which psychologically undermine any sense of balance or order.

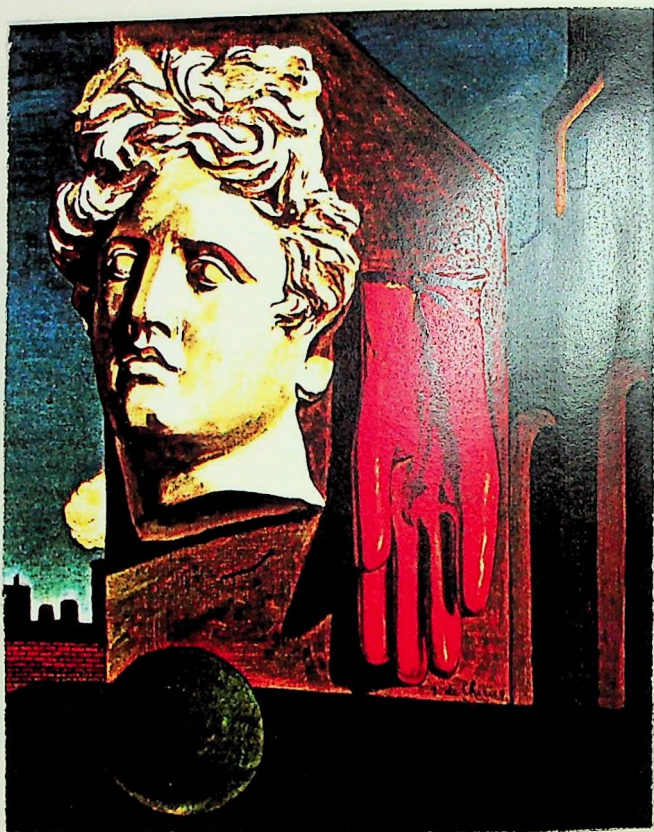


Illustration No. 5 - The Song of Love



Illustration No. 6 - The Silent Statue

In Renaissance painting, two types of perspective were normally used in conjunction with one another. Linear and aerial perspective to give the subject matter a solidity and mass by creating the illusion of a continuous turning that completes the cylinder of the mass, while at the same time supporting the illusion of receding space. Rubin in his article draws attention to De Chirico's subversion of aerial perspective in his metaphysical paintings. De Chirico deliberately deprives figures and objects of weight and bulk either by modelling the subject matter in very low relief e.g. the Head of Appollo in "The Song of Love" (No. 5) or his treatment of the frock coat in "The Serenity of the Scholar" - or by articulating their mass by a very simple and crude cross-hatching e.g. his treatment of Ariadne's torso in The Silent Statue - or his rendering of the tower in the same work (No. 6).

Rubin wrote the following about De Chirico's handling of Ariadne "in this work the painter substitutes for the kind of graduated modelling that would force our eye to see those round planes as turning in space, a bold hatching that produces an essentially two dimensional effect. (34). De Chirico employed a similar technique with respect to the tower; he darkened the left side so that it appears as in shadow, but where the shadow should be at its darkest he has used a line of white hatch marks which serves to flatten the tower, making it less cylindrical.

De Chirico's flattening treatment of his subject matter, and its resulting effect in that the light doesn't modulate the forms, and that they instead seem weightless and almost disembodied, is typical of his metaphysical work. Besides this deliberate undermining of the mass and weight of his subject matter in order to create an effect, De Chirico also employed a system of inconsistent and illogical lighting which heightens the sense of unease. For example in his treatment of the spheres in The Song of Love (Illustration No. 5) and The Evil Genius of a King (Illustration No. 7). In both cases the objects sense of two dimensionality is enhanced by his use of illogical highlights on the shadow side of the objects. This use of deliberate irrationalism (which was taken up by some of the surrealists, and by Dali in particular) was also in evidence in his treatment of cast shadows. In Italian Renaissance art, cast shadows were symbolic of the logic and order which existed in paintings. Since they indicated how solid the forms were, which blocked the light and therefore caused the shadows to be cast. However in De Chirico's paintings shadows weren't bound by any law or logic as for instance the shadows in the paintings Melancholy

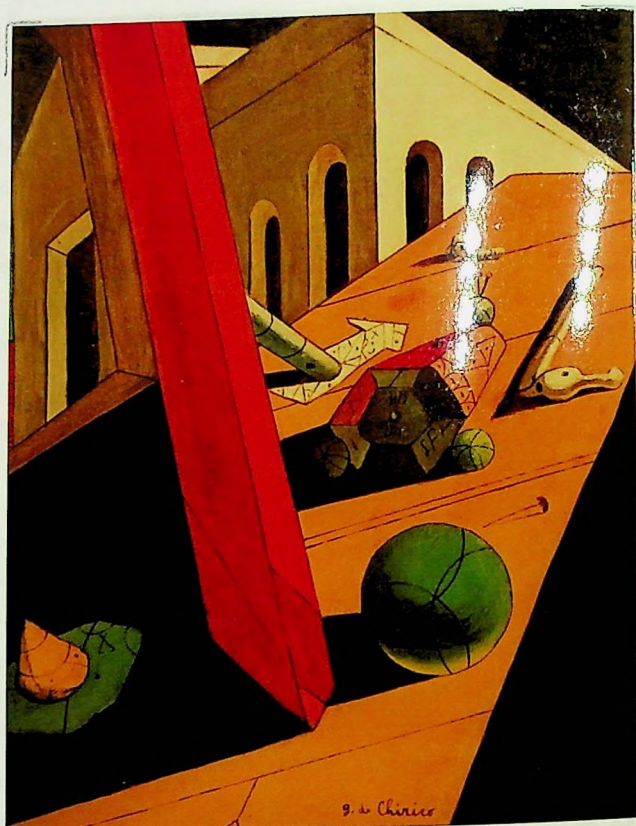


Illustration No. 7 - The Evil Genius Of A King

(Illustration No. 8), The Nostalgia of the Infinite, and Gare Montparnasse (No. 4). Sometimes shadows are completely unrelated to the objects by which they are thrown e.g. the shadow to the left-hand side of Melancholy, (Illustration No. 8) or the shadows of figures beneath the clock in The Philosophers Conquest (Illustration No. 9).

Finally there is De Chirico's use of *depaysement* - or the irrational juxtaposition of unrelated though familiar objects. He used this to devastating effect and it was one of the features of his metaphysical paintings which impressed the surrealists most of all. The device of *depaysement* had been used by French symbolist poets like Mallarmé and Rimbaud - whose work De Chirico would have known via Apollinaire. The difference was that their imagery was exotic, sophisticated and decadent, whereas De Chirico's use of clocks and cannons, bananas, artichokes and architecture was much more everyday and commonplace. It was this use of the everyday which made De Chirico's use of *depaysement* so effective. One of the most important elements of modernist painting from the early decades of this century is the fact that it was non-illusionistic. Unlike Renaissance, modernist painting didn't try to pretend that it was a continuation of real space.

De Chirico's subversion of aerial perspective and his deliberate flattening of his subject matter, making elements in his paintings seem without mass, combined with his low relief. Modelling of forms, make his metaphysical paintings non-illusionistic which must obviously negate claims that he was at this stage a classicist. His use of classical motif was not as Cassou asserted "an intense reaffirmation of the past" (35), rather it was a romantic, melancholic nostalgia for a dying or dead past, which he combined with a Nietzschean-inspired anticipation of the horror, barbarity and depersonalisation of the modern-technological age.

Therefore his use, or should one say his inversion of cast shadows, which were formally symbolic of the order and logic of Renaissance art, in De Chirico's paintings are not bound by any logic and order, and are therefore symbolic of the modern age. One can also say the same for De Chirico's use of illogical lighting which is symbolic of the chaos of the modern world. It is evident in his paintings that De Chirico understood fully the implications of Nietzsche's accusation, that it would be human fate to live in a world in which conditions of existence are transposed into "predicates of being".

DEGREE THESIS

DECODING THE LABYRINTH

When one considers, how influential Giorgio De Chirico's metaphysical paintings are, it is astonishing how little is actually known about their meaning. Initially, it would seem that his work seems fairly straightforward and uncomplicated. On the face of it one has a variety of components: statues, buildings, mannequins and various banal everyday objects like toys, balls and gloves, which are mixed together in a variety of combinations to provoke a sense of mystery.

Moreover, this initial sense of intelligibility is heightened by De Chirico's highly legible realistic style. However this notion of legibility rapidly evaporates, as soon as one attempts to analyze and decode his paintings. One can write about the general meaning of his works, its atmosphere of mystery, and his use of various stylistic and iconographical devices, but it is incredibly difficult to say what precisely his works mean. This is because the meaning of his works does not exist on a realistic level, but beyond it, hence the fact De Chirico called his paintings "metaphysical".

What De Chirico himself has to say is of little use to those trying to decipher his works, except that it may discount what others said they meant: "They had in no way understood the exceedingly solitary and profound Lyricism of these paintings. Moreover no-one has every understood them, either then or now. Usually people see these paintings as scenes imagined in the twilight, with the light of the moon in eclipse prophesying catastrophes, or great silences which precede "cataclysms", a kind of atmosphere of terror, the air of a thriller or a suspense film. These interpretations belong simply to the surrealists, the leaders of modernistic imbecility, they are suitable for cheap literature. In fact the paintings deal with something quite different....." (36).

In his typical ebullient fashion, De Chirico denounces the traditional "atmosphere of terror" interpretation put forward by Soby and the surrealists which was until very recently, the accepted canon. It is only in the last five or six years that scholars, like Willard Bohn and Maurizio Fagiola dell'arco have come up with a very interesting analysis of De Chirico's iconography and this will be discussed shortly. Though De Chirico tells us what his works don't mean he makes no effort to tell us what they do, other than to say that "they are profoundly lyrical".

De Chirico tried as much as possible to conceal the true meaning of his metaphysical paintings, by deliberately cultivating the enigma. It is not



Illustration No. 8 - Melancholy

co-incident that De Chirico believed his protector was Hermes (ie. his self portrait from 1923) from whence comes the hermetic or secret. It is necessary to approach De Chirico's work obliquely in order to uncover its real meaning. By careful study of his writings pre 1919 and of his 1928 surrealist novel *Hebdomeros*, one can discover a few items of relevance. Of far greater use in guiding one through De Chirico's Labyrinth are the writings of his brother Savino. The Dioscuri, as the De Chirico brothers called themselves were very close, both personally and artistically. They both shared the same sources and influences, and frequently borrowed themes from one another.

Another aid in decoding De Chirico's paintings, is the Dioscuri's love of Greek myth and legend, hence the fact that they called themselves the Dioscuri. They both deliberately constructed an auto-mythography, and in both their works, one frequently finds references to The Myth of Ulysses and his wanderings; to Jason and the Argonauts and their quest for the Golden Fleece; to the Dioscuri, to Ariadne, to Hermes. This use of myth provides us with a useful key in deciphering De Chirico's enigma.

Both the brothers, though they were born in Greece, (in fact it is probably because they were born in Greece) were devoutly Italian. De Chirico even used to claim he was born in Florence. Both the Dioscuri joined the Italian army as privates which was a great sacrifice for the two, who had been brought up as gentlemen of leisure. This love of Italy and things Italian, is another key to De Chirico's iconography. Finally and most importantly, to aid us in our quest to explore the Labyrinth, there are the writings of Nietzsche which constituted the greatest single influence on De Chirico's metaphysical paintings.

Some of De Chirico's earliest Parisian paintings involved or invoked the legend of Ariadne about whom De Chirico painted a series of seven pictures, as well as making a small plaster statue of the Greco-Roman version and which is the only example there is of his sculpture pre-1920. In all of the paintings she appears as in an Italian piazza, in conjunction with a variety of motifs which De Chirico was to repeat again and again; towers and trains, the wanderers and shadows. There is one work of the series which probably provides the key to De Chirico's use of this particular myth - *Melancholy* (Illustration No. 8).

De Chirico wrote concerning his work from his early Parisian years "I resumed the thread of my inspiration of Nietzschean origin" (37). The myth of Ariadne was important to Nietzsche, due to her involvement with Daedalus, and the Labyrinth, Daedalus personifies the artist and the Labyrinth - his greatest work



Illustration No. 9 - The Philosopher's Conquest

according to Fagiolo Della Arco, but also because she married Dionysius. In Nietzsche this myth is synonymous with the spirit of Knowledge and therefore with the Enigma. It is a very claustrophobic painting, with the statue of Ariadne almost completely surrounded by architectural components. There is a slight gap, showing open countryside which is however occupied by the wanderers. Beneath Ariadne - on her pedestal is written the word "melancholia".

As was noted earlier De Chirico's first self portrait entitled "What shall I love if not the Enigma" is concerned with melancholy, and is in fact based on a photograph of Nietzsche, who sits with his right arm under his chin - as also does Ariadne in this painting.

Melancholia was something from which as was stated earlier, many creative men of the late-19th century suffered. Nietzsche in "Thus spake Zarathustra" wrote a song entitled the "Song of Melancholy" - "But already he assails and subdues me, this spirit of melancholy, this demon of twilight..... The day is fading, nor is it becoming evening for all things even the best things, so hear and see, you higher men, what a demon this spirit of twilight melancholy is" (38).

Melancholy is bathed in the light of "twilight melancholy", Nietzsche's Stimmung, as are many of De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, so therefore this Stimmung is the source of De Chirico's melancholic twilight thus it would seem that for De Chirico, Ariadne represented the sleeping soul waiting for the revelatory and liberating influence of art, as well as being a reference to the soul of Nietzsche, who went mad in Turin. Ariadne also symbolises a journey or a stage of transition, for it was she who guided Theseus through the Labyrinth and thus enabled him to kill the minotaur. In 1913 De Chirico began to populate the foregrounds of his paintings with inanimate objects while retaining his use of deep perspective. This device is used to great effect in three paintings in particular. The Uncertainty of the Poet (Illustration No. 10), The Melancholy of Departure (Illustration No.), and The Philosophers Conquest (Illustration No. 9). In all of these works one has by now the standard feature of architectural elements combined with an atmosphere dependent upon Nietzsche's Stimmung. Another common feature of these works is an expansive vista of emptiness, which is at the last moment frustrated by a brick wall where the horizon should be behind which travel puffing steam engines and sailing ships.

The viewers sense of unease is increased by De Chirico's apparent contradictory simultaneous use of agoraphobia and claustrophobia. The terrifyingly vast vistas of urban desert, contrasted with the still-life subject matter a few

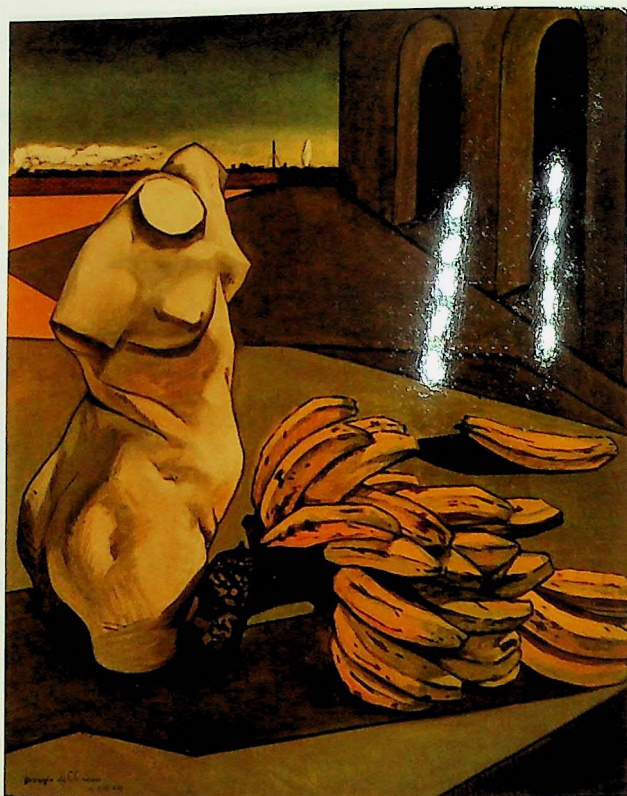


Illustration No. 10 - The Uncertainty of the Poet

inches inside the paintings pictorial space. In two of these paintings, The Uncertainty of the Poet, and The Philosopher's Conquest, overtly sexual elements are also featured for the first time. In The Uncertainty of the Poet (Illustration No. 10) there is in the foreground a bust of a headless, limbless, woman, beside her, barely touching her thigh and pubis, is a profuse and clearly highly phallic bunch of bananas.

In The Philosopher's Conquest De Chirico has painted an obviously phallic cannon - beside which rests two cannon balls. In the background there are three towers of various types, on the left there is a smokestack, on the extreme right a tower with flags - and in the centre, there is a vast tower, whose end we cannot see, but whose girth would indicate that it is incredibly tall. Once again the phallic symbolism is obvious. According to Soby the erotic element in De Chirico has been "either ignored or exaggerated", "some have refused to see any sexual content, others have maintained that his shadows and towers are phallic his arcades vaginal". The truth as far as Sobys concerned "lies somewhere in the middle". He has also written that De Chirico's erotic element is as innocent as Watteau's". (39).

It is interesting to note how little is written about De Chirico's attitude to sex, which is very strange considering that some of his work does appear to have strong sexual element, far stronger than Soby suggests. Jean Clair claims that "De Chirico had been introduced to sexual symbolism very early on by reading Otto Weiningers "Sex and Character" (40). What little that is written about De Chirico's sexuality, becomes very interesting when contrasted with the few brief mentions of the subject in his memoirs. The only writer who seems to pay more than a passing aside to the subject is Robert Pincus Witten, in a brief essay in a catalogue entitled "Post Metaphysical and Baroque Painting" who states "De Chirico married twice, unions that became, if they were ever not otherwise marriages blancs" (41).

De Chirico in his memoirs mentions, in fact stresses several times, his sexual appetites. "This very blond and shapely German woman, awoke in me, the anti-pederast par excellence - romantic fantasies and appetites, which were in fact normal (42) and later "I have never been in love with a maestro, in any case, I would have been in love with a maestra" (43).

Witten also notes "throughout De Chirico's classical imagery is imposed an intense suppression of sexual feeling, libido is absent even when the couples are grand romantic figures of history such as Hector and Andromache though its

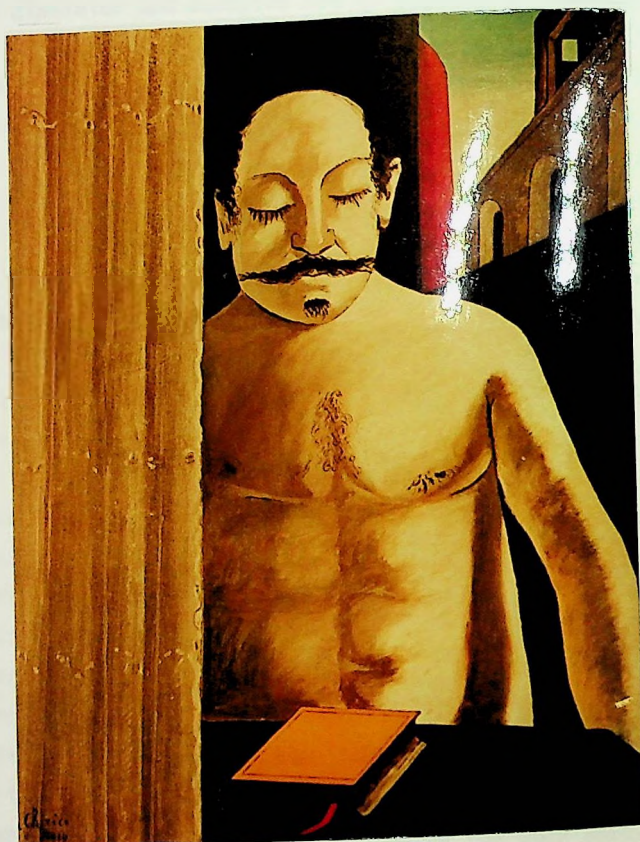


Illustration No.11 - The Child's Brain

hard to say who is who, since they both resemble men" (44).

Witten also notes "De Chirico saw it as a point of honour that he had never painted male genitals, though he had in certain gladiator paintings of the 1920's. When such work was put before him many years later for authentication, De Chirico balked, asserting the above to Claudio Bruni Sakraischik the dauntless cataloguer of his work. When convincing proof was finally submitted, De Chirico agreed to sign the attestation but henceforth regarded, the gladiator and suchlike him as objects of ridicule (45).

One of the few details which De Chirico does provide us with, about his father is the following "my father was very puritanical and, an atmosphere of Puritanism and Jesuitism pervaded our family. I recall that when I and my brother were present while friends of my parents were there, my father and my mother, but especially my father were on tenterhooks and lived in fear that one of those present might say something which however remotely was connected with love or sex" (46). This leads on to The Child's Brain (Illustration No. 1!) painted at the same time as The Philosopher's Conquest and The Uncertainty of the Poet, one of his most disturbing paintings, and one of his very few portraits painted between 1911 and 1917 (there are only three others).

The painting is universally accepted as being a portrait of the artist's father, which was apparently motivated by his childhood fears of parental masculinity. It is a very frightening image, which looms out of the picture. His flesh is flabby and pallid, his eyes are closed because it is claimed that if they were to open De Chirico couldn't bear to look. On the table in front of the figure is a yellow-brown book closed on a bright red book mark which according to Soby "symbolises the father's desire and the mother's acquiescence" (47). The background of the painting is black - with a high open window through which can be seen a bright red chimney - obviously echoing the book marker, this is also very suggestive of that classical freudian theory, - The Castration Complex.

It is also interesting to note that the sexual elements in The Philosopher's Conquest, and The Uncertainty of the Poet are barren or impotent. For example, the highly phallic bunch of bananas in The Philosopher's Conquest all point in the opposite direction to the bust, which is in turn tilting to the left in the opposite direction to the bananas. It is also obvious, that the cannon in The Philosopher's Conquest which is aimed at the shadowed opening in the arcade will never fire a shot. The barrel remains as a symbol of wounded virility or forbidden desire. About these paintings Jean Clair writes "Nothing will ever

happen again. Space has ceased to be, and bodies to live. No air has ever swirled across these terraces. Shadows are depicted here only to show the loss of atmosphere". There is no escape from this Nietzschean-inspired desert. All signs of escape are hidden and inaccessible, steam engines and ships are evident, but inaccessible behind brick walls, or in the case of Gare Montparnasse no train will ever arrive (48).

In Gare Montparnasse and The Philosopher's Conquest, De Chirico has included a clock, in both cases the clocks read twenty five past one. However the clocks' authority in De Chirico's paintings is frequently undermined by the length of the shadows which tell us that it is much later in the afternoon than indicated. I agree with Jean Clair when he puts the works sterility, impotence and disorientation into perspective. "All the work is thus founded on sterility, but its genius and fascination come from the fact that it was created at a time when European Thought itself (the works were painted in 1914) was lost in the same feeling of deprivation" (49).

The Song of Love (Illustration No. 5) is one of De Chirico's most famous and influential paintings, especially as far as the Surrealists were concerned. In 1922 Rene Magritte saw a reproduction of The Song Of Love and was "moved to tears". He gave up working as a commercial artist to dedicate himself to painting. Tanguy saw a reproduction of the painting from a bus and decided to become a painter. Max Ernst who first saw a reproduction of it in Hans Goltz's bookshop in Munich, was "profoundly moved". The Song of Love is probably the finest example of De Chirico's use of depaysement, the ball, the glove, the Head of Apollo, the buildings all seem logically to be unrelated and yet they combine in a way that none of the Surrealists was ever quite able to imitate. All Soby has to say about the work is that "It is cryptic" and that the surgeons glove "may have been included since he suffered from chronic intestinal disorders and was said by friends to be something of a hypochondriac" (50) (Illustration No. 5). However it is about something quite different.... The painting is really an elaborate word play on his name, and a symbol of love for his native land (Italy). As a child growing up in Greece he would have been called Chiricos by his schoolfriends. Chir in Greek means hand, and Oicos pronounced Ios means house, what else is a glove, but the house of the hand. Moreover the glove in The Song of Love is as noted by Soby a Surgeon's glove - or in Greek Cheirangos - which literally means work of hand. The head, taken from the Apollo Belvedere, placed beside the glove indicates that it was made by the hand of an artist. The colours of the head, glove and ball are those of the Italian flag, thus when one adds all the components together, one has a Song of Love from an

Italian artist to the Greco-Roman world.

During his metaphysical phase, De Chirico rarely painted people except as little dots, deep within the painting, which are believed to be The Dioscuri. There are one or two exceptions to this The Child's Brain - and his portrait of his mentor Apollinaire (Illustration No. 129). Guillaume Apollinaire was the most influential, intellectual and poet in Paris in the pre-war years. He was the Editor of Les Soirees de Paris, a very important magazine, which dealt with all of the arts. It published reproductions of works by Archipenko and Brancusi, Bracque, Derain, Leger, Matisse, Picabia and Picasso, poems by Max Jacob, Dalize and Cendars, music by Gabrielle Buffett and Andrea Savino.

The Dioscuri were part of Apollinaire's circle, which congregated at the magazine's offices on the Boulevard Raspail, and in Apollinaire's apartment on Boulevard St. Germain, and in which they were to meet, and in many cases became intimate with most of the major European artists of the time. De Chirico was friendly with Picabia, (who was one of Apollinaire's closest friends) and Derain, with whom he fought, as well as Brancusi, Picasso, Modigliani, the Russians Larinov and Gontcharova, as well as the young Jean Cocteau, who was to become, for De Chirico, the new Apollinaire, when he returned to Paris in the 20's.

Both the Dioscuri were to collaborate with Apollinaire; Andrea who changed his name to Savino, in late 1912 was following Apollinaire's example (his real name was Wilhelm Kostrowiski) had many articles and some of his plays Les Chants de la mi Mort was published in the magazine in 1914. De Chirico was to illustrate the frontispiece of his first collection of calligrammes.

The portrait consists of a variety of different components. At the top of the picture framed in some form of perspective device possibly a camera obscura, is a silhouette of Apollinaire, against a green background that De Chirico was to call a "Veronese Sky". Half of the silhouette is masked by a creamy slab on which is depicted two moulds, one of a fish the other of a shell. On the right is painted an arcade, and at the bottom of the painting is a classical bust wearing sun glasses.

One of the reasons why this work has always aroused a great deal of debate is because De Chirico has painted a target on the silhouette of Apollinaire and it was precisely in that spot that he was struck by a piece of shrapnel while fighting in the trenches in 1916 - and from which wound he was eventually to

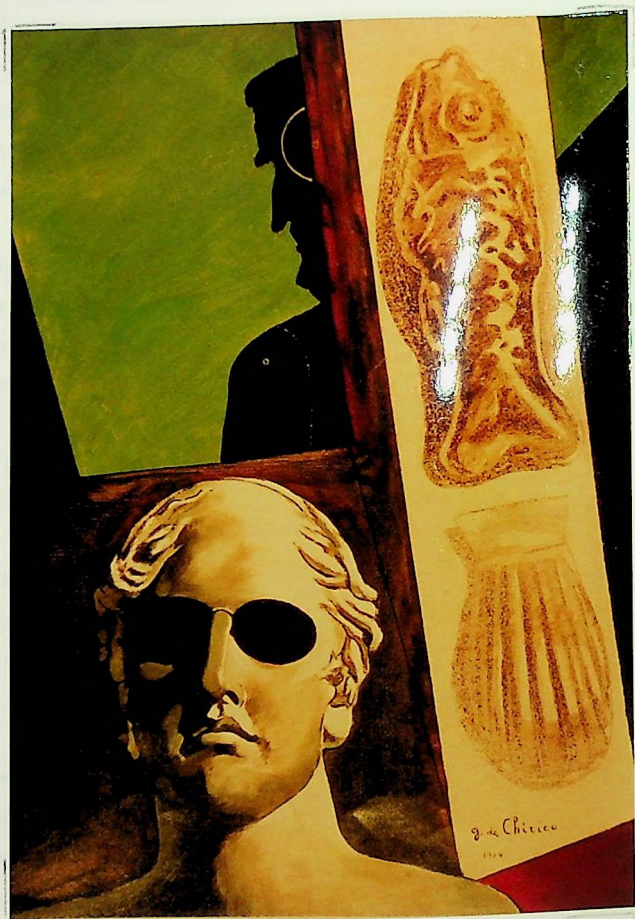


Illustration No. 12 - Portrait of Apollinaire

die, in 1918. Did De Chirico, an enigmatic artist who painted works with titles like *Seer*, and *Oracle*, have some premonition of Apollinaire's death ?

As regards the target, both De Chirico and Savino recall Apollinaire, holding forth at his salons in highly similar ways, De Chirico wrote "most of them were smoking, in accordance with the fashion of the time and in those circles, clay pipes similar to those one sees in the shooting galleries at fairs (51). Savino recalls "Apollinaire, with a sharp nose and a ready hand, was correcting the proofs of *le poete assassine*. Under his senatorial nose he was sucking on one of those little clay pipes that constitutes an elegant and highly fragile target in cheap shooting galleries (52). In the writings of both Dioscuri one finds Apollinaire associated with the target.

Why is Apollinaire depicted as a shadow ? In many of De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, we find him concerned with the problem of the shadow, this isn't merely due to its Nietzschean connotations of *Stimmung*, but also because Apollinaire was also interested in shadows as can be seen in various poems

"Shadow ink of sunlight
Script of my light.

Sun, I am young and it is because of you,
My shadow to be propitious I threw it away.
Excuse me, I make no more shadow than a star
I am the only one who thinks in the immensity" (53).

Much of the popular attention, this work has received, is due to the fact that De Chirico has depicted a bust wearing a pair of sun glasses. Some believe that the bust is an idealised portrait, others believe it is a bust of Apollo - therefore connecting with Apollinaire's name, or as a symbol for the arts in general. However in the same year that he painted this work (1914) he had also painted the "*Song of Love*", which features the head of the Apollo Belvedere, he also studied in the Munich Academy where he would have doubtless been acquainted with the Apollo Belvedere's head.

So who or what precisely does this bust symbolise ? Fagiolo dell Arco - notes that the bust bears a striking resemblance to the Venus De Milo minus a certain amount of hair and that De Chirico intends the bust to resemble Orpheus, and since there is no prototype available, he had to invent his own.

Orpheus was, according to the legends, the greatest poet and musician who ever lived. So great was his musical ability that he even managed to charm his way into the underworld in an attempt to bring his wife Eurydice back to the land of the living. He was also of great assistance to the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece, he helped them pass through the Sympleglades which guarded the entrance to the Bosphorus, and he also soothed the sirens. Apollinaire wrote a collection of poems "Le Bestiaire ou le Cortège d'Orphée" which was published in 1911 and was illustrated with Woodcuts by Raoul Dufy.

May your heart be the bait and the sky the pool !

For fisherman, what freshwater or ocean fish

Can equal for either form or flavour

This beautiful fish that is Jesus, my Saviour.

Orpheus once turned two fish into musicians (54), this would probably explain, De Chirico's use of the fish mould, it has also quite obvious Christian connotations fish - meaning Christ (qv. the poem). The shell has also obvious Christian connotations, it is a symbol of a pilgrim, but it also refers to Orpheus's lyre, which originally was derived from a shell. In 1942, De Chirico painted a portrait of Apollinaire for the poet Raffaele Carrieri, in which he is depicted in classical robes, his forehead crowned with laurel, holding a lyre, which obviously alludes to Apollinaire as Orpheus.

The inclusion of the foreshortened arcade is possibly a reference to Ancient Rome, both the brothers in their writings refer to Apollinaire, as a Roman Centurion and finally the bust wears sun glasses, which obviously is a reference to sight: De Chirico often referred to the importance of sight - by this he means artistic vision "one can deduce and conclude that every object has two aspects: one current one which is seen by men in general, and the other which is spectral and metaphysical and seen only by rare individuals in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction, just as certain hidden bodies formed of materials that are impenetrable to the sun's rays only appear under the power of artificial lights, which could for example be X-rays" (Note No. 55). So the glasses are a reference to those who according to De Chirico really see, as well as a possible reference to the Seer, like blind Homer, Apollinaire in his Orpheus poems had spoken about the blinding quality of poetic light.

To some it may appear futile to indulge in this kind of interpretation; but De Chirico encourages it, by deliberately building an enigmatic, Labyrinth of meaning throughout his metaphysical paintings, complete with false trails, half hints and red herrings. Thus we have Apollinaire associated with Orpheus - the great poet and musician, who was also a protector of the Dioscuri on their



Illustration No. 13 - Sailors Barracks



Illustration No. 14 - Playthings of a Prince

travels with the Argonauts. We also have him associated with Christ the Saviour - the new prophet Savino called "the angel of the new times" hence the fish. There are also references to seeing i.e. Metaphysically, and seer, - finally as Savino noted "The name Orpheus is of Egyptian and phoenician origin, it is composed of aur (light) and rophae (healing and health), Orpheu's brings men light and truth, Orpheu's isn't dead (56).

Between 1914 and 1915 De Chirico's still-life paintings changed; his subject matter became even more cryptic. He began to paint various types of toys (or toy-like objects) and sweets within a dislocated architectural setting, which are very similar to the camera obscura, which was first witnessed in the portrait of Apollinaire. There are four works in this series, The Sailor's Barracks 1914 (Illustration No. 13), The Evil Genius of a King 1914/15 (Illustration No. 14), The Playthings of the Prince (Illustration No. 15) and Still Life Turin 1888, 1914/15 (Illustration No. 16). These works mark a transition between the external architectural piazza paintings of Paris, and his cluttered interiors of Ferrara. Initially there seems to be very few clues to any of the works meaning.

However a clue is provided in one work, Still Life Turin 1888. The work was up until recently known as Still Life Turin 1828. In fact there's a fair chance that De Chirico, deliberately called it so, in an effort to hide or mask the work's real meaning. The work consists of three sweets or toys, seen through some form of a camera obscura. On the middle toy is written Torino, and on the opposite side of the toy is written 1888 - and beneath it there is a horse's head. It is quite obviously a reference to the day in 1888, when Nietzsche finally went mad, he burst into tears and embraced a badly-flogged horse which had fallen in the road.

Fagiolo dell Arco, points out the importance of games and childhood in the later writings of Nietzsche. De Chirico wrote "To be truly immortal a work of art must go completely beyond the limits of the human: logic and common sense will be completely absent; in that way it will approach the dream state and mental attitude of a child. I remember that often after reading Nietzsche's immortal work Thus Spake Zarathustra, I received from various passages of the book an impression that I had formerly had as a child in reading The Adventures of Pinocchio. A strange similarity that reveals the profundity of the work. In this case, there is no naivete, there is none of the naive charm of the primitive artist, the work possesses a strangeness similar to that which is often created by the impressions of children but consciously (57).



Illustration No. 15 - Still Life Turin 1888

"To live in the world as in an immense museum of strange things, of curious variegated toys that change their appearance, which we as children sometimes break to see how they are made inside, and disappointed, we discover they are empty" (58). This would explain his use of toys and sweets and childhood motifs. However Fagiolo dell Arco, doesn't seem to see that this work could also be almost a homage - to Nietzsche's madness. De Chirico was very interested in madness and its connection to art eg. "That madness is a phenomenon inherent in every profound manifestation of art is self evident" (59). and also "even more inexplicable is the mystery and appearance that our mind confers on certain objects and on certain aspects of life. Physically speaking, the fact of discovering the mysterious aspects of objects could be described as a symptom of cerebral abnormality akin to certain forms of madness" (60).

War had broken out in Europe in 1914. De Chirico and Savino joined up sometime in the summer of 1915. About their reasons for joining up De Chirico wrote, "Driven by the same impulse that drove Apollinaire to enlist in the French Army, my brother and I left for Florence to present ourselves to that military district". Apollinaire - like the Dioscuri - felt he was a wanderer, without roots, he was born in Italy the son of a Polish emigree, and an Italian army officer, he like the Dioscuri had roamed Europe before settling in France. The De Chiricos were sent from Florence to Ferrara, where they were noticed by a staff major and were made clerks. All of this time De Chirico was suffering from chronic intestinal problems and was in agony.

Typically their mother followed them to Ferrara and took an apartment, where they were able to sleep and eat. After a while Giorgio started to paint again. De Chirico never saw any "action" - nor in fact did his brother, because they were both "incapable of withstanding the strains of war". De Chirico spent a great deal of time in a sanatorium - recovering from his illness.

Most of his war time paintings were interior still lives. This may be due to the fact that his interest in architecture may have waned after his return home to Italy. Though he painted architectural elements while in Ferrara, it was no longer "the subject". Many of the objects depicted in his Ferrara paintings, were seen by De Chirico on his walks through the city. "The appearance of Ferrara, one of the loveliest cities in Italy, had made a deep impression on me but what struck me above all and inspired me from the metaphysical point of view



Illustration No. 16 - Enigma of the Day

in which I was then working was the appearance of certain interiors in Ferrara, certain window displays, certain shops, certain quarters, as for instance the old ghetto where one could find candy and cookies in exceedingly strange and metaphysical shapes" (61).

Much of his work from this period features biscuits and cakes as well as a variety of other elements like maps and constructions made out of draughting implements - unfortunately no key has been found to aid in the deciphering of these paintings. Though Soby has claimed that his use of biscuits and cakes may be due to the fact that these were items - which due to his chronic illness he was unable to eat ! His style of painting however had changed, and his Ferrara paintings show an increasing pre-occupation with texture. His titles have also changed, some bearing tantalizing titles like Politics (1916), The War (1916), The Revolt of the Sage (1916), The Regret (1917). While in Ferrara he also continued to explore the theme of the mannequin.

The mannequin theme was one which he frequently used between 1914 and 1917, but its precise meaning has aroused a great deal of discussion. Most people see the mannequins as a symbol of alienated modern man. It's more or less agreed that Savino was the first to use the theme, in his play "Les Chants de la mi Mort". Though they were born in Greece and prior to enlisting, the Dioscuri had spent little over a year living in Italy, they were fervent patriots. Savino's play *Les Chants de la Mi Mort*, was in fact subtitled "Scenes Dramtiques d'Apres des Episodes du Risorgimento". Throughout the play one encounters the King of Italy, and Italian military songs. This theme of risorgimento was to appear elsewhere in his work, in his book *Hermaphrodito*, written while he was in Ferrara, contains a chapter entitled "Epoca Risorgimento".

The Risorgimento provides one of the key clues, in the decoding of the mannequin paintings. De Chirico often refers to it obliquely in his Turin (in fact Turin was the city where the reunification of Italy was brouhgt into being) Piazza paintings. In the painting *Still Life Turin Spring* (), one can see a statue of a figure on horseback. It should be a statue of King Carlo Alberto, but written on the pedestal is the inscription *Nuele II Torino*, or (Vittorio Ema) Nele II. The same statue appears in the background of the Departure of the Poet. It has also been suggested that the statues of the standing figure in the Enigma of a Day (Illustration No. 16) bears a resemblance to Cavour, with one arm outstretched and the small eye glasses. This would seem more likely since a drawing resembling the statue's head has come to light bearing the words 'L'Enigma Cavourien'.

However this all seems rather insubstantial, until one reads what Andre Breton has to say "The Phantoms..... despite his reticence regarding this subject, De Chirico still admits he has not forgotten them, he has even named two of them for me. Napoleon III and Cavour, and he has informed me he has had protracted dealings with them..... One of the most important dates for De Chirico is that of the secret talks between Napoleon III and Cavour at Planbieres. To the best of his knowledge he says it's the only time that two phantoms have met officially to such an effect, that their inconceivable deliberations were followed by real concrete and perfectly objective results" (62).

This proves the significance of The Risorgimento, Napoleon III and Cavour to his work, but what does he mean by Phantoms ? According to his metaphysical philosophy, there exists certain elemental forces in the Universe, which have occasionally been embodied by men. De Chirico calls them phantoms because their primary existence is on another metaphysical level. Their outward normal appearances are an illusion and have no connection with their real metaphysical existences.

De Chirico mentions phantoms in his 1918 article Zeuxes the Explorer, except here he calls them daemons, quoting Heraclitus of Ephesus who says "The World is full of Daemons". De Chirico goes on to claim that the daemon in everything must be discovered. By this he means, as quoted earlier, "everything has two aspects, a common everyday one which everybody sees and a metaphysical one which only a very few can see" (63). It is metaphysical paintings task to reveal this true or metaphysical reality.

So who precisely is Napoleon III on a metaphysical level? Willard Bohn in his essay Phantom Italy - quotes this passage from De Chirico's 1928 Surrealist Novel Hebdomeros to support his claim that Napoleon the III's daemon was Dionysus "and we know what it means, the daemon who snickers constantly at our side, you are far from town..... you are seated on a beach..... you think you are free and at peace and suddenly you notice that you are not alone, someone is sitting on your bench, yes, a gentleman dressed in old fashioned elegance whose face vaguely recalls certain photos of Napoleon III and also Anatole France at the period of Le Lys Rouge, a gentleman who is observing you and laughing up his sleeve, it is he again the temptor demon" (64).

This temptor demon is Dionysus. He was highly regarded by Nietzsche who saw him as a symbol of renewal, for he was born twice the second time from the thigh of

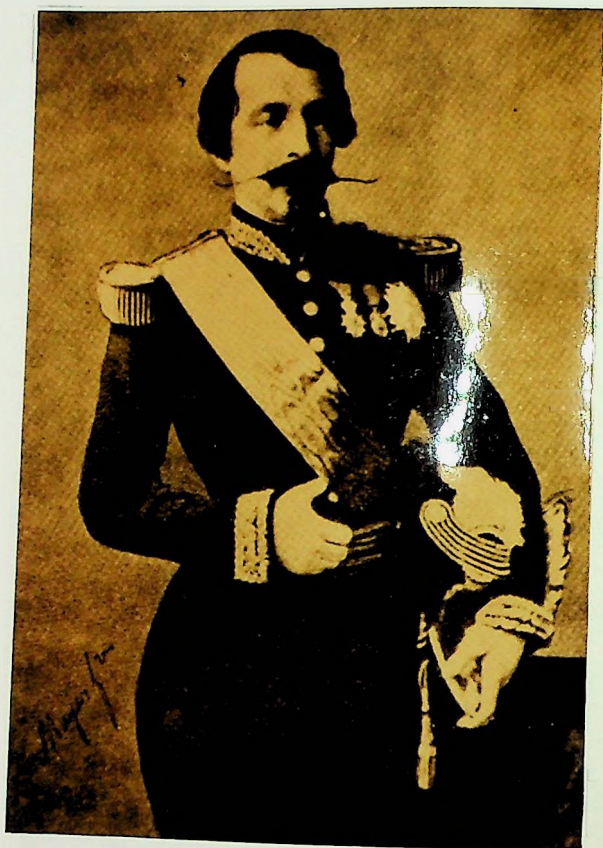


Illustration No. 17 - Napoleon III



Illustration No. 18 - The Return

Zeus. Dionysus also spent his winter in the underworld, returning each Spring. This would explain why De Chirico, titled a drawing from a series executed in 1917, The Return. The drawing features two figures, one a man, the other a mannequin talking in an almost bare room. The man, wearing a toga, bearing an uncanny resemblance to photographs of Napoleon III, is conversing with a mannequin whose head is composed from several draughting instruments. The Dionysus/Napoleon III figure has his eyes closed, which is an allusion to the fact that this conversation is occurring on another or metaphysical plane.

This drawing is a metaphysical representation of the secret meeting at Plombieres in 1858 - which as noted by Breton was of great significance to De Chirico: the mannequin figure is obviously Count Cavour, who was known as "The Architect of the Risorgimento" hence his head is depicted as being composed of draughting implements. This interpretation by Bohn seems to be correct for it holds when applied to other paintings for which up to now no one has been able to arrive at a satisfactory explanation eg. The Joy of Return (1915), and The Double Dream of Spring 1915 (Illustration No. 19). This writer believes that the titles of both these works, like the drawing imply rebirth, renewal or Risorgimento. In the foreground of the Double Dream of Spring, there is a blackboard on an easel, which obscures most of the background. On the blackboard is depicted a variety of De Chirico motifs, a train, fragments of Ariadne, cryptic writings and fragments of architectural plans.

Standing to the left of the painting is a figure dressed in a frock coat whom we know to be Cavour. To the right of the painting one can see peering out from behind an arcade the domed head of a mannequin. We know this represents Napoleon/Dionysus - because, in De Chirico's drawing The Mathematicians (Illustration No. . .) which depicts two mannequins, one was a head composed of mathematical instruments - as in the Return, this therefore is Cavour, the other has a domed head, like in The Return of Spring and must therefore be Napoleon. The drawings on the blackboard must represent their plan for the Risorgimento. If Napoleon represents Dionysus, who is Cavour's metaphysical counterpart? Bohn argues, none too convincingly that Cavour is Dante. Citing Alberto Savino who wrote "Henceforth the creative artist is a statified frock-coated politician". From another text in which Savino specifies that the frock coat belongs to a government minister, we know that the politician (and the statue) is none other than Cavour. In addition the first text goes on to equate the "creative artist with Dante Alighieri, sublime incarnation of the poet" (65).

However if Bohn had studied his sources more closely he would have arrived at a

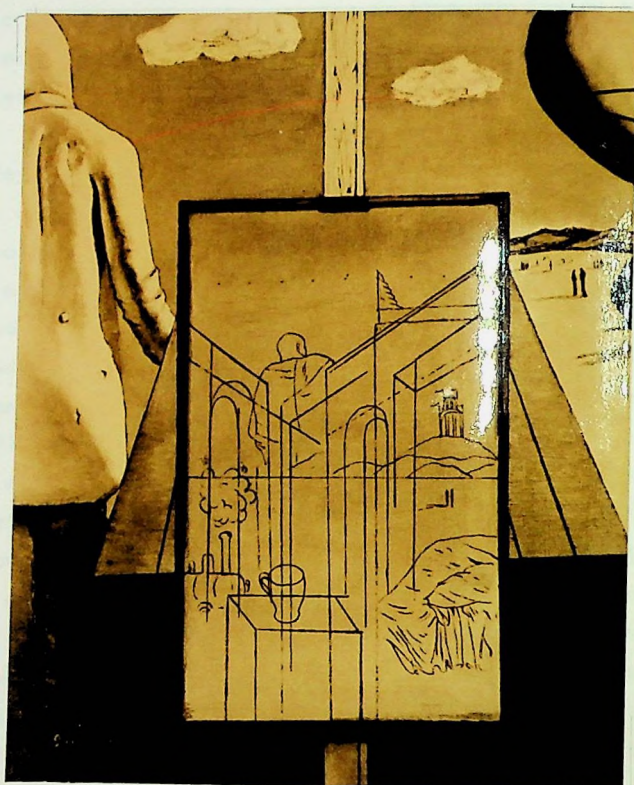


Illustration No. 19 - The Double Dream of Spring

different conclusion, for Cavour's demon is in fact Apollo. In the Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche claims that the arts derive from two principles, sharply opposed in their origins and aims and which are symbolised by the art-deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus. "In contrast to all those who are intent on deriving the arts from one exclusive principle, as the necessary vital source of every work of art, I shall keep my eyes fixed on the artistic deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus and recognise in them the living and conspicuous representatives of two worlds of art, differing in their intrinsic essence and in their highest aims (Note 66).

Nietzsche's key argument in The Birth of Tragedy, was that tragedy was born out of the fusion of the two tendencies: The restraint, control, and prophetic quality of Apollonian art, and the passionate, primordial and mad anguish and ecstasy of Dionysian art. In The Birth of Tragedy he claimed "That the highest goal of tragedy and art in general is attained when the relation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian symbolised by a fraternal union of the two deities.

Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, Apollo however speaks the language of Dionysus" (67). Further on he wrote "The union of the Apollonian and Dionysian, their sacred and mystic wedlock occurs in tragedy. Tragedy is the fusion of two otherwise variant tendencies, whose antagonism cannot be resolved in the superficial truce of the common term "art". In tragedy that is in the presentiment of supreme joy through annihilation and havoc, in the imagined apprehension of the metaphysics of being" (68) and finally "every artist is an imitator, that is to say either an Apollonian artist in dreams or a Dionysian artist in ecstasies" (69). Another of Nietzsche's key arguments in The Birth of Tragedy; is that tragedy had been killed off by the rationalism of Socrates, and it is this tragedy, this pre-classical tragedy with its reconciliation of the two disparate tendencies of Dionysus and Apollo, that De Chirico tried to depict in his mannequin paintings.

Therefore one has in the Double Dream of Spring, The Return, The Mathematicians at least two levels of meaning, Napoleon conversing with Cavour, and Dionysus reconciled with Apollo.

It is because of this complexity of reference - a mannequin whose head is composed of draughting implements represents both Cavour and Apollo, a barrel shaped toy on which a horse's head and date are painted commemorates Nietzsche's madness - that scholars have until comparatively recently failed to explain De Chirico's metaphysical paintings true meanings.

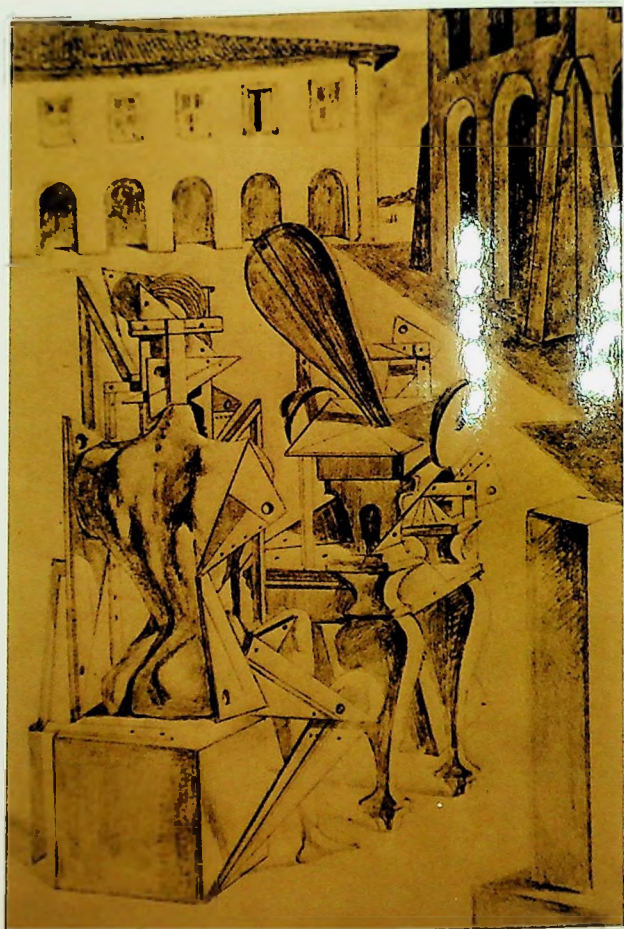


Illustration No. 20 - The Mathematicians

CHAPTER 3

GARY COYLE

DEGREE THESIS

CONCLUSION

Considering the influence of Giorgio De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, it is astonishing that these works, have been misinterpreted for over 70 years by scholars who have subscribed to "Atmosphere of terror" theories. It is only in the last 10 years that scholars like Willard Bohn, Maurizio Fagiolo Dell 'Arco and Paolo Baldacci, have begun to uncover the true meaning of the works.

This longstanding misinterpretation is due in part to De Chirico's refusal to speak about meanings, and to his highly complex iconography which is the result of several interwoven sources. De Chirico absorbed from Schopenhauer, the view that only art could penetrate the vital principle of things. He also took from Schopenhauer his notion of Genius, and that "a truly immortal work of art, can only be born through revelation" (69), as well as his view that almost any object could be worthy of art. From Nietzsche he derived his "atmosphere" or *stimmung*, his love of pre-socratic Greek tragedy, with its combination of Apollonian and Dionysian elements, and the desire to revive the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy in his art. From Nietzsche, also he acquired his highly romantic and pessimistic view of the modern world.

He combined the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche with his own philosophical views. Most interesting of these was his belief in phantoms, he believed that certain very rare and special individuals, were the embodiment of certain elemental forces in the Universe. He combined this view with his construction of an automythography. Thus he and his brother were the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, the inseparable brothers, who joined the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece. Apollinaire was Orpheus, Napoleon III was Dionysus, Cavour was Apollo. Another key element in his highly complex iconography, was his intense love for his native land, thus his interest in the Risorgimento.

It is very difficult to understand or assess his iconography in terms of its influence, because its decoding has only been a recent phenomena, though his interest in myth, myth versus history, and his quotation from the past has influenced members of the current Italian trans avant garde group, in particular Chia and Cucchi.

One of the key arguments of this thesis, has been that Giorgio De Chirico was, in spite of his and others protestations to the contrary, strongly influenced by the Modernist Movement. However, unlike Cezanne and the Cubists, De Chirico was not interested in revolutionizing the representation of the visible world

through a re-organisation of perceived facts. De Chirico, due to the influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche sought, to quote Wieland Schmied "a new sensation, evocative but unrelated to the traditional symbol by selecting psychological facts deposited in the consciousness in reaction to external images (70).

The traditional argument concerning his antipathy to modernism, has frequently focused on the contrasts between De Chirico and his Italian contemporaries the Futurists, in particular on De Chirico's use of classical motifs and renaissance perspective. Jean Cassou rightly contrasts the futurists "concern for the present for modernity" with De Chirico's "intense reaffirmation of the past", (71). But he is incorrect to see this as proof of De Chirico's "Classicism". Whereas futurism with its fascination with the machine and speed, and its desire to capture the instant was a celebration of progress and the modern world, De Chirico's modernism was a sceptical and pessimistic view of technology inspired by Nietzsche.

Thus, De Chirico painted a paradoxical world, a world which though built by man, cannot be lived in. Nobody lives behind the arcades of De Chirico's palazzi, nor does anyone work in his factories, whose chimneys stand inactive. Man has become alienated from himself and his man-made world. He is confronted by a world of artifacts which have become foreign to him and amongst which he can no longer find his way. It is evident from his metaphysical paintings that De Chirico fully understood the implications of Nietzsche's most famous statement "God is dead", for the power to provide logic has died with God, and what we are faced with in his metaphysical work, and in particular his Piazza paintings is the decay of order and the loss of orientation.

However in a sense, Casson was most perceptive when he wrote about "De Chirico's intense reaffirmation of the past", for in fact De Chirico was a man out of time. Many people who met him during his long life were struck by how old-fashioned he was in his manners, speech and attitudes, that he was really a man of the 19th century. Soby wrote "Seldom since the 19th centuries period of high romanticism has there been a more unrestrained confession of the dual attraction of the past and present, of the near and far, one hears a blurred echo of Baudelaire's Rhetoric" (72). Soby reasserts what Casson wrote as well, drawing comparisons with De Chirico, and the high romantics for indeed, De Chirico, with his melancholia may have been more in tune with his time had he been born 40 years earlier than he was. However his romanticism was tempered, and made bitter, twisted and desperate by his repressed sexuality and by knowledge of Nietzsche's writings.

Jean Clair wrote about his "reaffirmation of the past". "No other art can rival his in its subtle evocation of its inventive nostalgia, combined with a truly prophetic sense of the present. The romantic Heimweh of a return to roots is contradicted by a projection of the future, making the painter at once the Orpheus and the Cassandra of the modern age. No art of his time was marked by such a tension between the call of the dying past whose last heralds were Bocklin and Klinger, and the anticipation of a future that would be the world of technology. That tension was the life-blood of De Chirico's work" (73).

If there is one element which separates his metaphysical paintings from his classical works of the 1920's and 30's it is this tension which is so apparent in the former and which has been replaced by calm in the latter. De Chirico's metaphysical paintings were the result of great personal tensions, he was a man out of step with his time, trying to cope with the modern age, he had also embraced madness "That madness is a phenomenon inherent in every profound manifestation of art is self evident" (74) "the fact of discovering the mysterious, aspects of objects could be described as a symptom of cerebral abnormality akin to certain forms of madness" (75).

He stopped trying to cope with modernity in 1918-1919 - when he declared himself a classical painter, he rid himself of these tensions, and finally found relief, solace and comfort in classicism.

1. William Rubin, De Chirico (Exhibition Catalogue 1982 Ed By William Rubin, Tate Gallery Publication) Page 7.
2. Wieland Schmied, De Chirico 12 Theses (Exhibition Catalogue Italian Art in the 20th Century, Ed by Emily Braun 1989, Royal Academy of Arts Publication) Page 77.
3. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, (Rome 1961, London 1971 A Wheaton & Co Exeter) Page 39.
4. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 45.
5. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico (New York Museum of Modern Art Publication 1955) Page 24.
6. W. Wallace, Life of Arthur Schopenhauer (London 1890) Page 99.
7. Giorgio De Chirico, Meditations Of A Painter, (Unpublished Article 1972, Paulhan Manuscript, Appendix B, Giorgio De Chirico by James Thrall Soby) Page 28.
8. *ibid* Page 28.
9. Cited in Ivor Davis, Giorgio De Chirico: The Sources of Metaphysical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche Page 57.
10. William Schopenhauer, The Metaphysics of Fine Art cited in *ibid* Page 58.
11. *ibid* Page 60.
12. *ibid* Page 60.
13. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico Page 27.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy 1872 Page 40 Vintage Books New York.
15. *ibid* Page 41.
16. *ibid* Page 42.
17. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico, Page 27.

18. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 55.
19. Ibid Page 55.
20. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 60.
21. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 61.
22. Ibid Page 61.
23. Giorgio De Chirico: Meditations of a Painter, Page 29.
24. Butterworths Medical Dictionary.
25. William Rubin: De Chirico and Modernism (De Chirico 1982, Tate Gallery Publication London) Page 55.
26. Jean Cassou cited by William Rubin; De Chirico and Modernism Page 55.
27. James Thrall Soby Giorgio De Chirico Page 42.
28. Giorgio Chirico Memoirs Page 64.
29. Ivor Davis Giorgio De Chirico: The Sources of Metaphysical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (Art International) An-March 1983) Page 53.
30. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 132.
31. Ibid Page 133.
32. Ibid Page 127.
33. Ibid Page 153.
34. William Rubin, De Chirico and Modernism Page 60.
35. William Rubin, De Chirico and Modernism, Page 55.
36. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs page 67.

37. Ibid Page 43.
38. Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1885, Penguin Classics Page 97.
39. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico Page 69.
40. Jean Clair, Dans La Terreur de l'Histoire Giorgio De Chirico (Exhibition Catalogue, Musee National d'Art Moderne Paris November 82 - January 83) Page 46.
41. Robert Pincus Witten. Giorgio De Chirico: Post Metaphysical and Baroque Paintings 1920-1970 (Exhibition Catalogue Robert Miller Gallery New York) Page 11.
42. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs Page 57.
43. Ibid Page 101.
44. Robert Pincus Witten, Giorgio De Chirico Post Metaphysical and Baroque Paintings Page 12.
45. Ibid Page 13.
46. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs Page 38.
47. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico Page 72.
48. Jean Clair "Dans La Terreur de l'Histoire" Page 45.
49. Ibid Page 45.
50. James Thrall Soby, Giorgio De Chirico Page 76.
51. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs, Page 66.
52. Alberto De Savino cited in Maurizio, Fagiolo Dell Arco - De Chirico in paris 1911-1915.
53. Ibid Page 25.

54. Guillaume Apollinaire "The Song for Orpheus" Le Bestiaire ou le Cortège d'Orphée" 1912.
55. Giorgio De Chirico, Meditations of a Painter, Appendix B, Soby, Page 29.
56. Alberto de Savino - cited in Maurizio dell'Arco's, De Chirico in Paris 1911-1915 Page 57.
57. Giorgio De Chirico, Appendix A, Soby Page 245.
58. *ibid* Page 245.
59. Giorgio De Chirico, on Metaphysical Art - published in Metaphysical Art, Ed. Massimo Carra - Milan 68 - Page 85.
60. *ibid* Page 86.
61. Giorgio De Chirico Memoirs Page 80.
62. Andrew Breton "Les Surréalisme et la Peinture (Paris 1928) - pp 35-36.
63. Giorgio De Chirico - Zeuxes The Explorer - Page 152 Metaphysical Art.
64. Willard Bohn - Phantom Italy Arts Magazine USA Vol. 56 Pt 2. October 81 P 132-5 cites Giorgio De Chirico's Hebdomeros pp 133-134.
65. Willard Bohn - Phantom Italy Page 134.
66. Friedrich Nietzsche - The Birth of Tragedy Page 205.
67. *ibid* Page 319.
68. *ibid* Page 174.
69. *ibid* page 320.
70. Wieland Schmied - De Chirico 12 Theses.
71. Jean Cassou cited in William Rubin De Chirico and Modernity - see note 2 page 76.

72. James Thrall Soby Giorgio De Chirico Page 55.

73. Jean Clair "Dans la Terreur de la Histoire" Page 41.

74. lbid Page 60.

75. lbid Page 59.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

JOHN BECK, THE METAPHYSICAL DE CHIRICO AND OTHERWISE ARTS MAGAZINE (USA) VOL. 57
PART 1. SEPT. 1982 PAGES 84-85.

ANDRE BRETON, LE SURREALISME ET LA PEINTURE (PARIS: GALLIMARD 1928).

WILLARD BOHN, PHANTOM ITALY, THE RETURN OF GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, ARTS MAGAZINE
(USA) VOL. 56 PART 2 OCTOBER 1982 PAGES 132-135.

MASSIMO CARA, METAPHYSICAL ART (LONDON, THAMES & HUDSON 1971).

CLAUDE CINTZ, THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY, LATER DE CHIRICO, ART IN AMERICA
(USA) VOL. 71 PART 6 SUMMER 1983 PP 104-109.

JEAN CLAIR, DANS LA TERREUR DE HISTOIRE, GIORGIO DE CHIRICO (EXHIBITION
CATALOGUE - CENTRE GEORGE POMPIDOU NOV. 82 JAN. 83 PAR WILLIAM RUBIN, WIELAND
SCHMIED ET JEAN CLAIR PP 39-54.

IVOR DAVIES, GIORGIO DE CHIRICO HIS SOURCES IN SCHOPENHAUER AND NIETZSCHE (JAN.
MARCH) ART INTERNATIONAL 1983 PAGE 53.

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO MEMOIRS, (LONDON 1971, PETER OWEN)

RUPERT MARTIN, LATE DE CHIRICO 1940-1976 EXHIBITION CATALOGUE, ARNOLFINI GALLERY
PUBLICATION 1985.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA 1885 PENGUIN CLASSICS.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY 1879 - VINTAGE BOOKS.

WILLIAM RUBIN, DE CHIRICO, TATE GALLERY PUBLICATION 1982.

JAMES THRALL SOBY, GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, M.O.M.A. PUBLICATION 1955.

PATRICIAN H. WERHANE, PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN ART. PRENTICE HALL INC. 1984.