

## THE DE CHIRICO BROTHERS IN FLORENCE (1910-1911): THE MUSICAL, PICTORIAL, LITERARY, AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

*Fabio Benzi*

Between March and April 1910, after leaving Milan, where he had not been particularly happy, and where his brother Alberto had not achieved the success he had hoped for his musical career, Giorgio de Chirico moved to Florence together with him and their mother. We learn that as early as 11 April, he had rented a “very beautiful” (“sehr schönes”) studio<sup>1</sup> in viale Regina Vittoria 3 (today viale don Minzoni), just a few steps from Piazza della Libertà, close to the house where he just went to reside with his family, located in via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20.

Florence was Giorgio’s “favorite” Italian city,<sup>2</sup> where he had been hoping to relocate for some time, and represented an escape from Milan, which had not been kind to either of the de Chirico brothers. Alberto’s much longer stay in Milan (which began in March 1907), where he was the first to move together with his mother, only a few months after initially settling in Munich from Athens (in October 1906), was due in part by the fact that he did not speak German well. It was also the result of the precise advice and solicitation of Pietro Mascagni, who, after meeting the young composer in Munich, where he was to give a concert at the Tonhalle on 16 February, advised Alberto to return to Italy and pursue direct contact with the publisher Ricordi in Milan. Alberto finished (or nearly finished) his opera *Carmela* in early 1907, and played some pieces on the piano (the first two acts, it appears) to Mascagni, who seemed to like it. Then, the famous composer advised the young musician, most likely providing him with a letter of introduction,<sup>3</sup> to contact Tito Ricordi, the leading authority of Italian opera performed around the world.

As is well known, Giorgio de Chirico moved to Milan only two and a half years after his brother (and mother), rejoining his family after becoming dissatisfied with Munich academic teaching (too “academic”). Between July 1909 and March 1910, a period spanning slightly more than eight months, Giorgio also attempted, but failed, to organize a personal exhibition in Milan. To this purpose, he had tried (without

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1 Giorgio de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 11 April 1910, in G. de Chirico, *Lettere 1909-1929*, edited by E. Pontiggia, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 2018, p. 22.

2 As Giorgio himself says in a letter to Fritz Gartz dated 27 December 1909 (id., p. 21). In the same letter, he also informs his friend of his intention to relocate to Florence the following spring.

3 It is most likely from this letter of introduction by Mascagni that Alberto de Chirico drew the opinion of the musician on himself, later transcribed in the program of the concert held in Munich in January 1911 (see below).

success) to contact a certain *cavalier* “Milus, or Milius”:<sup>4</sup> however, the outcome was not more successful than what Alberto had achieved with Ricordi.<sup>5</sup> This contact is likely to be identified with Giorgio Mylius (1870-1935), a wealthy businessman who later committed suicide. Mylius was heir to the family’s large banking and entrepreneurial fortune, which included a bank, several cotton, linen, and silk industries, and a stake in the Società Ceramica Richard. Federico Enrico Mylius (1838-1891) was a great collector who since 1886 had served as president of the Società per le belle arti e Permanente, to which he left a sizable inheritance. Giorgio Mylius followed in his father’s footsteps in his interest in art and especially in the management of Milan’s Permanente, serving as its President from 1907 until his death in 1935. In fact, Giorgio de Chirico must have had at least a nucleus of about ten paintings ready to go in order to consider organizing an exhibition at the Permanente in Milan. Therefore, we must assume that several of his works (perhaps even drawings or studies) were destroyed or dispersed, because only about six or seven paintings from the Milanese period are extant:<sup>6</sup> too little an amount to be able to contemplate even a limited personal exhibition.

Milan had thus been a disillusionment for the two brothers, and Florence was a launching point for both Alberto’s musical and Giorgio’s pictorial artistic endeavors. Far from being a *buen retiro* where the two could recover from the disappointing experience of Milan – an option that objectively contrasted with the character of both of them, and of their ambitious mother’s – their stay in Florence is to be seen as an attempt to establish themselves professionally in the most sophisticated melting pot of the Italian intelligentsia. A role that Florence played in those years owing to its fervent and cosmopolitan cultural milieu, as well as to the crucial importance of the many literary magazines published there, most notably «La Voce».

For Alberto, the Florentine sojourn lasted from March-April 1910 to January 1911, when he left for Munich to attend a concert of its own and of his brother’s musical compositions. From where he moved straight to Paris, never to return to Florence. In July 1911, Giorgio and their mother joined him, restoring the small family nucleus. Rather strangely, no relevant encounters seem to have occurred during their Florentine stay.

The de Chirico brothers, always generous with details about their lives (especially their youth) and particularly active and lively in their social relationships, along with

4 See G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Rizzoli, Milan 1962, p. 65 (first ed.: Astrolabio, Rome 1945).

5 Most likely on Mascagni’s recommendation, Alberto de Chirico did, in fact, sign a copyright transfer agreement with Giulio Ricordi for the opera *Carmela* and its libretto, which he had also written. Alberto’s mother Gemma signed the contract on 21 May 1908, for he was seventeen years old and still a minor. (The contract was published, accompanied by an unsigned commentary, with the title *Opera in tre atti Carmela composta da Alberto de Chirico. Contratto tra Gemma de Chirico e Ricordi & C., 1908*, in «Metafisica», 9/10 [2010], pp. 500-506.)

6 See F. Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico. La vita e l’opera*, La nave di Teseo, Milan 2019, Chapter 3.

a mother who was also very inclined to worldly social life, do not mention any of their Florentine friends and acquaintances. We do know that a paternal uncle and aunt lived in Florence, but not much else.

The psychophysical malaise, which today we might call psychosomatic, that led Giorgio de Chirico to conceptualize his first metaphysical painting in the autumn of 1910 may have prevented him from socializing, leading him to live a solitary life dominated by reading and occasional painting. Was this, however, the case? And, if this was Giorgio's way of spending time, between solitary reading and nausea, was it the same for his younger brother Alberto? It should not be underestimated that they had relocated to Florence in order to achieve what Milan had denied them, namely, acceptance and recognition in the worlds of painting and music, respectively. Going to Florence to isolate themselves from the rest of the world was the polar opposite of their intentions and aspirations, of the professional ambitions that had pushed them both to relocate.

The peremptory affirmation that "Alberto and Giorgio spent a year and a year and a half respectively, leading a rather solitary life, without mixing with the cultural and artistic circles of the city [...] spending most of their time in the libraries and in the studio of Viale Regina Vittoria"<sup>7</sup> seems therefore ridiculous, rather stupid and devoid of evidence.

On the other hand, even in the absence of documents, letters, or specific testimonies, it is not futile to attempt to learn about their possible acquaintances and thus about the milieu that could have enriched their mind and stimulated their intellectual growth.

We are well aware that in the absence of specific documentation, any supposition may be fallacious; however, equally fallacious is the passive acceptance of the lack of data, which is not a sufficient reason not to attempt a reconstruction of the cultural context where an artist operated. This almost total scarcity of data is due, on the one hand, to the chronic dispersion of Giorgio de Chirico's papers, who never kept any correspondence, letters or accompanying documents, which are in fact always known to us (when possible) thanks to the artist's correspondents. We face a similar situation with regards to his brother's papers, at least for what concerns the early years. Furthermore, given the nature of a city like Florence, where people met daily and personally, written correspondence was essentially useless except for specific business reasons. Giorgio and Alberto, on the other hand, were both young beginners, and their notes, if any, were not carefully preserved. At any rate, it is the duty of the historian and of the philologist to attempt to analyze the immediate cultural context that unfolds around the artist under study.

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7 P. Baldacci, *De Chirico 1888-1919. La metafisica*, Electa, Milan 1997, p. 86. The author clings to G. Roos' opinion, who "refutes the hypothesis of contacts, even if indirect, with Giovanni Costetti, Ardengo Soffici, and Giovanni Papini" with similar, indefensible arrogance (see p. 108, fn. 6). This chapter (and the entire book) is riddled with inaccuracies: it begins with a citation from a letter with a misquoted year and continues in the same vein.

The one thing that both de Chirico brothers followed and engaged in while in Florence was without a doubt the musical scene, of which the younger Alberto sought to become part with the concrete help and support from Giorgio.<sup>8</sup> One of the few documented facts that we have is that, left aside the opera *Carmela*, which he was not able to publish or produce, while in Florence Alberto devoted himself to compose an ambitious *Poema Fantastico* for something like a 70-piece orchestra. In this circumstance, even Giorgio, who had never before attempted music himself, exceptionally deviated from his pictorial path: no doubt he did so to support and assist his young brother who was clearly in a creative slump after the disillusionment with Milan, and thus to push him to complete the musical *Poema* as he had set himself to do. On the other hand, according to his profound convictions, expressed shortly thereafter in Paris in an essay entitled *Point de musique*, Giorgio de Chirico believed that, contrary to painting, music is unsuitable to express absolute concepts, and that its specific *medium* does not allow one to leave those vague and indefinite sensations, which are most people's favorite.<sup>9</sup> Such a position constitutes a concrete proof that that one-time musical composition of his had the sole purpose of helping his younger brother Alberto in need. According to the concert program, several pieces must have been composed (unwillingly, but with brotherly solidarity) by Giorgio himself, who thus succeeded in assisting Alberto in his efforts to complete that first concert. But when it came to the point, Giorgio discreetly withdrew, leaving the whole stage to Alberto. When the concert was actually performed in Munich in January 1911, despite the fact that he was the author of roughly a quarter of the pieces and had created the conditions for organizing it through his Munich contacts, Giorgio did not even attend, in order to give Alberto the full merit and leave the limelight exclusively to him.

The concert in question was supposed to be held in the hall of Florence's Teatro della Pergola, but for unknown reasons it was never performed. Indeed, a draft of the program, written in Italian and printed, that Giorgio sent with the German translation to his friend Fritz Gartz for printing the program of the concert in Munich, bears the heading of the Teatro della Pergola.

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8 Further evidence is provided by the fact that some of the books Giorgio was reading at the time (as documented by the borrowing records of Florence's National Library) examined ancient folksongs, which he clearly intended to use as "archaic" inspiration for Alberto's *Poema fantastico*, which he was assisting in composing (Giorgio also authored several pieces featured in the program). More specifically, to judge from their themes, *Le urla dell'orgia* and *I fischi della notte* (by Alberto), *L'interrogazione e i canti consolatori* and *Il canto al mattino dei "votati alla morte" per il ritorno* (by Giorgio), must have been inspired by "vieux chants populaires scandinaves" described by Pineau, as well as the ancient "chant liturgique de l'Église latine" studied by Gevaert – scholarly music books that Giorgio de Chirico was reading at the time (see V. Noel-Johnson, *La formazione di de Chirico a Firenze (1910-1911): La scoperta dei registri della B.N.C.F.*, in «Metafisica», 11/13 [2013] pp. 195-196).

9 G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero. Critica, polemica, autobiografia 1911-1943*, edited by M. Fagiolo, Einaudi, Turin 1985, p. 16.

If we investigate the Florentine musical context more thoroughly than has been done thus far, we cannot help but notice the striking cultural affinities between the de Chirico brothers and Giannotto Bastianelli, one of the most significant musicians and music critics of the period preceding World War I.

Bastianelli was a versatile young musicologist and musician with a wide range of interests. He was born in 1883, eight years after Giorgio and five years after Alberto de Chirico. In 1909, he was appointed music critic for Prezzolini's «La Voce», with whom he had become friends. He quickly made friends with Ardengo Soffici and Papini. However, the entire Florentine cultural milieu was devoted to him and attended his private concerts, which were held in the Via della Robbia study, about half a kilometer away from de Chirico's own study. Emilio Cecchi, Baccio Maria Bacci, Gianfrancesco Malipiero, Ippolito Pizzetti, and Arrigo Levasti were among his closest friends, as were the intellectuals around «La Voce». Bastianelli performed in a variety of venues, including the Lyceum, a well-known Florentine club founded in 1908. It was a meeting place for the city's cosmopolitan intellectuals, with branches in London, Paris, and Berlin, where Soffici, together with the staff at «La Voce», had put up the famous Impressionist exhibition in April-May 1910, which the de Chirico brothers (particularly Giorgio) had certainly visited.

In sum, Bastianelli was Florence's prominent music critic at that time.<sup>10</sup> In 1909, Soffici wrote to Papini: “Earlier today together with Prezzolini I went and visited Bastianelli, who played Strauss and Beethoven. Strauss is not great, but not terrible either. Beethov. is divine. It was a superhuman joy to listen to his greatness. And I thought I didn't understand anything about music!”<sup>11</sup> Soffici is truly impressed by Bastianelli and admires him greatly:

Prezzolini, his wife, and I attended the damnation of Fausto, a fragmentary, non-ingenious opera that was infamously sung and had a ridiculous and charlatanical stage set up. As I wrote to you, I had my greatest musical joy at Bastianelli's. He is a fantastic pianist who played some Strauss and some Beethoven for an hour and a half! Strauss is a bit like Oscar Wilde, but the latter is a god. The most satisfying

10 In addition to «La Voce», Bastianelli wrote on «Il Marzocco», «Il Convegno», «Il Resto del Carlino», «La Nazione». On him, see G. Bastianelli, *Gli scherzi di Saturno. Carteggio 1907-1927*, edited by M. de Angelis, Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca 1991 (with ample bibliography); unfortunately, Bastianelli's entire correspondence was lost, and the letters we have of him come from the archives of his correspondents. See also M. Brighenti, *Musica come dramma: la filosofia della musica di Giannotto Bastianelli e l'opera di Ildebrando Pizzetti*, in «De Musica», 23.2 (2019), pp. 16-53.

11 G. Papini, A. Soffici, *Carteggio II, 1909-1915. Da “La Voce” a “Lacerba”*, edited by M. Richter, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1999, p. 55 (letter no. 266 of 21 February 1909, from S. to P.). On 18 February 1909, in «La Voce» appeared an article by Bastianelli, entitled *Riccardo Strauss*, expressing a similar opinion.

realization for me was that I understand and feel music: on Sundays, I'll go to Florence to listen to music as often as I can (Cecchi was there, and he's very nice). When we meet again in Florence, we'll go see that young man who, in addition to being a good musician, is also well-versed in literature and philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Bastianelli was versatile and well-read, and was also interested – nota bene – in philosophy and painting. By 1910, when the de Chirico family relocated in Florence, Bastianelli had already become a well-known and respected music critic, supported by the authoritative «La Voce» and, most notably, by the international scope of his culture. A complex personality and a homosexual, he committed suicide in Tunis in 1927. Is it



fig. 1 G. Bastianelli, *Pietro Mascagni*, Naples 1910. Cover

possible that the de Chirico brothers avoided mentioning their association with Bastianelli because of this *maudit* aspect, which in the following years took on more explicit, “scandalous” traits, which were little accepted by the society of the time? What is certain is that cultural interests he shared with the de Chirico brothers, which we are going to examine, are astonishing. Moreover, if we add to this the fact that the familiarity with the most fashionable music critic in Florence seemed to be crucial to the young Alberto’s career, the context becomes as stringent as to be actually necessary.

Bastianelli also authored a monograph on Mascagni (fig. 1), published exactly at the time when the de Chiricos moved to Florence in March-April 1910, and announced by an extract published in February in «La Voce».<sup>13</sup> We should not forget that it was Mascagni himself who, after

hearing his opera *Carmela*, directed the young Alberto de Chirico to Casa Ricordi in 1907. The common and direct link with Mascagni made the acquaintance between Alberto de Chirico and Bastianelli more than inevitable: it was even obvious if not taken for granted. A Strauss scholar (fig. 2), on whom he published an essay in «La Voce» in 1909, and a Beethoven lover, Bastianelli was also well acquainted with Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, whose volume on Mussorgsky he reviewed favorably in «La Voce» in July 1910,<sup>14</sup> and who would be Alberto de Chirico’s first contact person in

12 Papini, Soffici, *Carteggio II, 1909-1915*, p. 57 (letter no. 267 of 22 February 1909, from S. to P.).

13 G. Bastianelli, *Mascagni nella musica europea*, in «La Voce», 2.11 of 24 February 1910. The chapter is extracted from G. Bastianelli, *Pietro Mascagni*, Ricciardi, Naples 1910.

14 G. Bastianelli, *Mussorgsky e Debussy*, in «La Voce», 2.31, of 14 July 1910. The books reviewed is M. D. Calvocoressi, *Mussorgsky*, Maitres de la musique, Alcan, Paris 1908.

Paris (an occurrence that I do not believe to be a mere coincidence). Alberto de Chirico and Calvocoressi actively collaborated, as it seems, on the subject of a ballet (*Le trésor de Ramsenit*, 1912), and perhaps on other projects; however, Calvocoressi is Alberto Savinio's first important acquaintance in Paris. Until now, it has been assumed that the reason for the meeting had to be found in the Greek ancestry of Calvocoressi's parents, but it is much more likely that he and Savinio were introduced by Bastianelli. Bastianelli was also a close friend of the French writer and music critic Romain Rolland (a Nobel Laureate in 1915), who also corresponded with Calvocoressi,<sup>15</sup> and spent much of 1910 and 1911 in Florence. Also from a musical standpoint, Alberto de Chirico's alleged "modernity", far from being compared to Schönberg's,<sup>16</sup> with which there is no connection whatsoever, it seems rather to be referred to Bastianelli's research based on "dissonance": «Dissonanza» is in fact the programmatic title of a series published by «La Voce» and edited by Bastianelli and Ildebrando Pizzetti – of which only three issues were published in 1914 (fig. 3) – containing two compositions by Bastianelli, one of which is certainly to be dated to 1910-11.<sup>17</sup> After all, the parallel between Alberto de Chirico's musical thought and Bastianelli's ideas had



fig. 2 G. Bastianelli, *Musici di oggi e di ieri*, Milan 1914. This volume is a collection of essays previously published by Bastianelli, including those on Strauss and Wagner

- 15 B. Duchatelet, *Autographes de Romain Rolland*, [https://www.univ-brest.fr/digitalAssets/70/70072\\_AUTOGRAPHES-DE-ROMAIN-ROLLAND.pdf](https://www.univ-brest.fr/digitalAssets/70/70072_AUTOGRAPHES-DE-ROMAIN-ROLLAND.pdf), 2018, p. 26. See also G. Bastianelli, *Romain Rolland*, in «La Voce», I, 20, of 29 April 1909, and I, 23, of 20 May 1909; B. Maria Bacci, *Romain Rolland, Pizzetti e Bastianelli*, in «Giornale di Bordo», 2 (1969-1970), pp. 133-137; Ead., *Rolland e la Gravina*, in «Giornale di Bordo», 3 (1970), p. 233.
- 16 The hazardous musical comparison, completely erroneous, is made by G. Roos, who therefore proves to be a music ignoramus (see *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti: Monaco Milano Firenze, 1906-1911*, Bora, Bologna 1999, p. 391: "the compositions by the young *Italian man* seem to possess a radical quality close to Schönberg's"). In addition, Roos has the audacity to contrast the Munich newspapers' criticisms about Schoenberg (even if harsh but cogent and reasoned) with those of Alberto Savinio; in fact, the press mercilessly crushed him, pointing out his lack of compositional rudiments – a subject obviously not even mentioned in relation to Schönberg: "pretension as great as his poor ability"; "conglomerations of sounds"; "[his music] shows the ruin and impotence of an idealist lacking of a systematic education"; "a canivalesque joke"; "in all honesty, we could not understand what the composer meant to express"; "[he] lacks the necessary skills, and does not go beyond some cheap tricks"; "we hope the musicians [...] survived the evening safe and sound"; "contrary to what had been promised, the mountain gave birth to a mouse, or, in this case, a whole family of mice"; "the meaning of 'the first musical case', as of many other things, remained completely obscure to us"; "it was preposterous, difficult to describe and even more difficult to live through" (id. pp. 391-396).
- 17 *Terza sonata in mi bemolle per pianoforte Op. 3*, published on «Dissonanza», 1 (1914), but certainly to be dated to 1910-1911 since the fourth sonata, later and unpublished, is dated 1910-1912; the second composition published on «Dissonanza», 3 (1914) is the *Sonata in fa min. per violino e pianoforte Op. 8*.

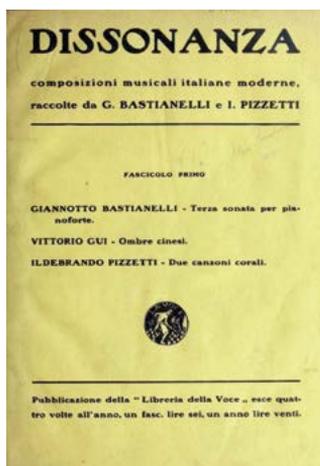


fig. 3 *Dissonanza. Composizioni musicali italiane e moderne, raccolte da G. Bastianelli e I. Pizzetti*, first issue, Libreria della Voce, Florence 1914. Cover

already been noted by those who have dealt with him from a musical standpoint.<sup>18</sup> The many reviews published in local newspapers on the music presented by Alberto de Chirico in Munich, written by a parterre of well-informed and knowledgeable critics, all agree in highlighting the composition's inarticulate quality, and the dissonance originating from Bastianelli's own sources, namely Wagner and Strauss. As one of the Bavarian reviewers noticed: "It can be admitted that de Chirico studied the modern scores such as Strauss's by learning from the orchestration". This opinion confirms my theory that the work in question, the *Poema fantastico*, was inspired by Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, both in structure and in Nietzschean themes.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Mascagni's and Tito Ricordi's praises for the young Alberto, who proudly and unrealistically claimed them in the program and posters of the performance, stirring a paradoxical effect of irony and mockery towards the self-proclaimed "extraordinary

genius", attest to how much the "dissonant" effects must be referred back to a context that is certainly not dodecaphonic, but rather of verismo reinterpreted in the light of Straussian orchestrations. Moreover, all those themes of *Poema fantastico* that are specific and typical of Giorgio de Chirico's imagery, were explicitly signed by him: he imbued his brother's different scenery – more Panic, descriptive, mythological, and verist – with cogitations made in the late 1910s, that is, the moment when Giorgio was conceiving his metaphysical art (with titles alluding to metaphysical art foundational painting, *L'enigma del pomeriggio d'autunno* ["The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon]: "Enigma of Eternal Recurrence", "Autumn Afternoon", "The Enigma of Autumn", up to the Böcklinian "Sacrifice of Tritons").

Naturally, the Florentine musical milieu associated with Bastianelli's personality, to whom Alberto de Chirico appeared so close, revolved around Prezzolini and the people at «La Voce», including two painters, Baccio Maria Bacci and Giovanni Costetti, who held an exhibition together in Florence in May. Baccio Maria Bacci was a very close friend of Bastianelli's, with whom he kept up a very close correspondence; Giovanni Costetti, on the other hand, was a long-time friend of Giovanni Papini's, of whom he

18 G. Giachin, *Retrospectiva su Savinio e la musica*, in «Rivista Italiana di Musicologia», 15, 1.2 (1980), p. 239. On Bastianelli's conception of "modernity", see G. Bastianelli, *La crisi musicale europea*, Pagnini, Pistoia 1912 (which includes texts published precisely during the de Chirico's stay in Florence).

19 See Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico*, p. 54.

painted two famous portraits in 1903, and Prezzolini's. Both were fervent supporters of Arnold Böcklin in Florence, whose iconography and stylistic features they echoed in their paintings and engravings. I believe that Giorgio de Chirico attended, and with interest, the exhibition of the two young painters, held in May 1910 at Palazzo Gondi: they were both pursuing a parallel path to the one, not at all obvious, which Giorgio had been following since the previous Milanese period clearly inspired by Böcklin. That de Chirico had met Costetti (and with him, consequently, the artistic circle of «La Voce») in that very occasion, as widely hypothesized by Calvesi in 1982 based on heavy, circumstantial evidence, was anticipated by Cristina Nuzzi in 1980, who argued that de Chirico “became friends [with Costetti] in 1910 also because of their shared cultural interests in Wagner and Weininger”.<sup>20</sup>

I would like to add that at the end of 1912, Bastianelli, with a dashing intellectual move that I would define no less than astonishing, spoke of Arnold Böcklin's painting in a manner definitely inspired by de Chirico, using a terminology that suggests a direct contact between him and Giorgio: “The real meaning of Böcklin [...] is indeed to be found in the transformation of classical mythology into a religious (metaphysical) modern mythology [...] pensive nostalgia of metaphysical mystery [...] the modern German man turns all the mythological elements into metaphysics”.<sup>21</sup> To this we should add, in the same context, quotations from Nietzsche on Apollonian and Dionysian, from Schopenhauer, and, naturally, considerations on Ariadne: the theme of Strauss' opera which became, exactly around that time, one of the central themes of de Chirico's metaphysical painting.

Believing that all this is just a coincidence, or the result of mere chance, means to be really unperceptive, or just stupidly biased. The articulation of such special terminology, associating Böcklin with the term “metaphysical”, linking Florence's musical context (Bastianelli) to the milieu where Alberto de Chirico moved his first steps as he moved to Paris (Calvocoressi); the coincidence of Savinio's musical studies and interests (Mascagni and Strauss) with Bastianelli's, and the connection between the Böcklin inspired painters around «La Voce» (Bacci and Costetti) with Giorgio de Chirico – these are all objective data that, taken together, provide an inescapable picture of interweaving and decisive influences.

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20 See *Arnold Böcklin e la cultura artistica in Toscana*, catalogue of the exhibition (Fiesole, Palazzina Mangani, 24 July-30 September 1980), edited by A. De Palma e C. Nuzzi, De Luca, Rome 1980, p. 178. Cristina Nuzzi, a Florence native, evidently reported oral news from the city's cultural context, which at the time still included more or less direct witnesses or at least “persons of interest”. Her accounts are completely independent of the later, and more circumstantial analysis performed by Maurizio Calvesi.

21 G. Bastianelli, *Mitologia tedesca e umorismo straussiano (L'Ariadne auf Naxos)*, in «Dissonanza», 5, 2 of 9 January 1913, later published in G. Bastianelli, *Saggi di critica musicale*, Studio editoriale lombardo, Milan 1914, p. 44.



fig. 4 G. de Chirico's bibliographical notes on the program of A. de Chirico's *Poema fantastico*, Fondazione Isa e Giorgio de Chirico, Rome

Further significant elements point in this same direction. It has been recently noted, albeit briefly, that there is a “coincidence of interests” between Giorgio de Chirico and the activities held at the Biblioteca Filosofica fiorentina and the books kept therein.<sup>22</sup> This institution, founded in 1908 by Papini, Prezzolini, and other Florentine intellectuals, and directed by Giorgio Amendola (who was also close to the intellectuals of «La Voce» and featured among its contributors) between 1909 and 1911, was located very close to de Chirico's studio (in piazza Donatello 5; also steps away from Bastianelli's).

In this regard, a more in depth investigation would be beneficial. For example, an annotated list of authors who piqued Giorgio de Chirico's interest around the end of 1910 has been thankfully preserved on the fourth page of the draft of the musical program for the concert that Alberto was to give at Teatro della Pergola. This draft was sent to Gartz to

be translated into German. G. Roos and P. Baldacci have read this document, not unlike with Garz's correspondence, in a rather clumsy way.<sup>23</sup>

A more thorough and correct analysis of this draft (fig. 4), conducted by means of philology – an unfamiliar term, albeit much abused by the gang of “scholars” of the “advisory board” gathered around the aforementioned couple – confirms that the Biblioteca Filosofica was one of Giorgio de Chirico's frequented whereabouts. As it was for the cultural milieu of «La Voce» which was so closely connected to the Biblioteca Filosofica that, in addition to providing library services, organized conference cycles (fig. 5). By drawing a broad and detailed comparison between Papini's and de Chirico's ideas, Maurizio Calvesi had already stressed the paramount importance of the milieu of «La Voce» for the development of the metaphysical art by de Chirico. I have further expanded Calvesi's analysis pointing towards Soffici who, through the explicit example set by Douanier Rousseau, provided the young de Chirico with the “technical” tools that helped him escape Böcklin's influence and create the new, “modern”, visionary language of the early metaphysical paintings.

22 M. Pratesi, «Firenze è molto bella in primavera...»: *Approfondimenti e precisazioni su de Chirico nel 1910*, in «L'Artista. Critica delle arti in Toscana», 2.2 (2020), p. 96.

23 See Baldacci, *De Chirico 1888-1919*, pp. 88-90.



fig. 5 Conference schedule for April 1910 at Biblioteca Filosofica in Florence

Thanks to an important study by V. Noel-Johnson,<sup>24</sup> we now have a fairly clear picture of the two de Chirico's cultural interests during their Florentine sojourn: the records of borrowings and checked out books at Florence's National Library have shed light on a series of texts that piqued their interest and the authors of which, in fact, appear in the list pinned to the program mentioned earlier. Firstly, we should note that this list is not a compilation of names culled from written sources, but rather names of authors who most likely came up while de Chirico was conversing or taking notes at some conference, possibly one organized in conjunction with the activities of the Biblioteca Filosofica. The misspelling of the first of the names listed, "Menhard", suggests this "oral" aspect. Roos, followed by the ill-equipped Baldacci, interprets it carelessly as "(Wilhelm) Mannhardt". However, if

they had paid closer attention to what was written in that manuscript note, they would have noticed that de Chirico corrected the name immediately after writing it by crossing out the "h" in the middle. As a result, the correct name for "Menard" emerges: Louis Ménard was the author of the famous *Hermès Trismegiste, traduction complète précédée d'un étude sur l'origine des livres hermétiques* (Paris 1872), which was in the Biblioteca Filosofica's holdings in 1910. In fact, this volume does not appear in the National Library's records of the books borrowed or checked out by de Chirico brothers.<sup>25</sup> Based on this erroneous phonetic transcription, one might speculate that the notes could have been taken following a conversation with Giovanni Amendola (but this is a supposition: it could have been a conversation with one of the many readers at the Biblioteca Filosofica; however, the idea that de Chirico discussed the authors to be read with the director-librarian has an objective reason). In 1910, Amendola compiled a most useful *Catalogo*

24 Noel-Johnson, *La formazione di de Chirico*, pp. 171-211. In the same vein, Paola Italia has conducted a research on the de Chirico brother's visits to the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan: P. Italia, "Leggevamo e studiavamo molto": Alberto e Giorgio de Chirico alla Braidense (1907-1910), in *Origine e sviluppi dell'arte metafisica: Milano e Firenze 1909-1911 e 1919-1922*, (Milan, Palazzo Greppi, 28-29 October 2010), Scalpendi, Milan 2011, pp. 11-23.

25 A second name that is misread is "Pineau", correctly transcribed by de Chirico, but that Ross and Baldacci read as "Pencan (?)". It is in fact a reference to Léon Pineau, whose book *Les vieux chants populaires scandinaves (Gamle nordiske Folkeviser). Époque barbare: la légende divine et héroïque*, Paris 1901-1902 de Chirico borrowed from the Biblioteca Nazionale. "Pineau" is annotated together with the phrase "Mythus Geschichte", that is, "history of myth", and not "Mythische Geschichte" as put forward by the duo.

*dei libri della Biblioteca Filosofica*, listing, as we shall see shortly, all the authors that de Chirico had pinned down, except two. Another likely mistake by the cited duo concerns the reading “Robertson Smith”, which, if read correctly, in fact refers to two different authors: J. M. Robertson, who wrote *A short history of freethought* (Swan Sonnenschein and Co., London 1899), and W. B. Smith, who authored the famous essay *Der Vorchristliche Jesus* (A. Töpelmann, Giessen 1906),<sup>26</sup> where the figure of Christ is thought of as the reworking of an earlier local legend. It is indeed in this Christological perspective that the two writers are associated in an article in a 1911 issue of the «Bollettino della Biblioteca Filosofica»: “The factual and phonetic similarities, through a series of comparison between legends about and names of the Gods, were supposed to explain the latter’s origin. Thus, Jesus becomes Joshua, who, according to W. B. Smith, was a god worshipped by the Hellenes Jews one hundred years before or after Christ; or, as John M. Robertson would put it, Joshua was a God of the Ephraimites”.<sup>27</sup>

We have reported in the following footnote the other authors cited (and correctly spelled by de Chirico), along with their books present in the Biblioteca Filosofica’s holdings.<sup>28</sup> De Chirico’s list of pinned authors reveals his strong interest in religious

26 Together with that of Pine’s, this is the only book cited that does not appear in the catalogue of the Biblioteca Filosofica, although an extract will be listed therein the following year: W. B. Smith, *The Pre-Christian Jesus*, in «The American Journal of Theology», 15,2 (1911), pp. 259-265.

27 See «Bollettino della Biblioteca Filosofica», (1911), p. 439.

28 Here is the list in alphabetical order (unfortunately, there are no records of borrowings and checked out books from the Biblioteca Filosofica):

G. Maspero, *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l’Orient*, Paris 1875;

Id., *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l’Orient classique*, 2 vols., Paris 1895-97;

Id., *L’archéologie Egyptienne*, Paris n. d.;

L. Ménard, *Hermès Trismégiste, traduction complète précédée d’un étude sur l’origine des livres hermétiques*, Paris 1872;

H. Oldenberg, *La religion du Veda*, Paris 1903;

Id., *Le Buddha, sa vie, sa doctrine, sa communauté*, Paris 1903;

Id., *Vedic hymns*, Part II, Oxford 1897;

H. Oldenberg, M. Müller, *Grihya-Sutras*, 2 vols., Oxford 1886-1892;

H. Oldenberg, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Vinaya Texts*, 2 vols., Oxford 1881-1885;

S. Reinach, *Cultes, Mythes et Religions*, Paris 1905 (present since 1912);

Id., *Orpheus. Storia generale delle religioni*, translated and with an appendix by A. Della Torre, 2 vols., Palermo 1912;

E. Renan, *Averroès et l’Averroïsme*, Paris n. d.;

Id., *Gli Apostoli*, Milan 1866;

Id., *Vie de Jésus*, Paris 1863;

J. M. Robertson, *A short history of freethought*, London 1899;

W. B. Smith, *The Pre-Christian Jesus*, in «The American Journal of Theology», 15,2 (1911), pp. 259-265.

The library held several books on *Zend-Avesta*, the primary sources of Zoroastrianism, including various volumes of the collection entitled *Sacred Books of the East*, edited by F. Max Müller, Oxford 1879-1910: first series, vol. IV *Zend-Avesta*, Part I: *Vendidad* (1880); first series, vol. XXIII, Part II: *Sirozahs, Yaçts, Nyayiç* (1883); second series, vol. XXXI, *Zend-Avesta*, Part III: *Yasna, Visparad, Afrinagan, Gabs, Miscellaneous Fragments; Zend-Avesta* (1887). On Friedrich Nietzsche, de Chirico’s primary interest at that time, there were several original works, translations and biographies: F. Nietzsche, *Werke*, 10 vols., Leipzig 1906; F. Nietzsche, *Così parlò Zarathustra*, Turin 1899; A. Grage, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, Edinburgh 1906; Halevy, *La vie de Friedrich Nietzsche*, Paris 1909; E. Förster Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches*,

foundational myths (from Orpheus to Christ, Zarathustra, the religions of India, etc.), reflects the areas of research for which the Biblioteca Filosofica was particularly equipped, but especially bespeaks the spiritualist atmosphere where the group of «La Voce» was immersed. Papini Prezzolini, Bastianelli, Soffici, Levasti, Baccio M. Bacci, Costetti – all the people at the journal were involved: in other words, precisely the context where the de Chirico brothers cultivated their musical, philosophical, intellectual, and, obviously, artistic interests.

But there is another contextual element pertaining to the Florentine milieu, which is worth exploring, albeit necessarily in a nuanced and approximate way: the relationship between Soffici and de Chirico. Elsewhere I have analyzed the relationship between the rapid stylistic evolution of the metaphysical art by de Chirico and Douanier Rousseau's painting, relationship fostered by an article by Ardengo Soffici promptly published on «La Voce» in September 1910: "promptly" for it represents the theoretical and stylistic trigger inducing de Chirico to disengage from the Böcklinian-Secessionist style to embrace the "aplat" manner of the earliest metaphysical paintings (*Enigma del pomeriggio d'autunno*).<sup>29</sup> Following this critical juncture, there is another that is probably less significant but that I believe is important in understanding de Chirico's early metaphysical speculations. I am referring to the influence that Arthur Rimbaud and his *Illuminations* wielded on him. Although it is much more elusive and difficult to prove than the more striking and obvious Rousseauian ascendancy, the knot Rimbaud-de Chirico has always nagged at me and I have inconspicuously alluded to it on several occasions.<sup>30</sup> It is a fact that the first book on Rimbaud published in Italy was authored by Ardengo Soffici and released just a few days after de Chirico left Florence for Paris (fig. 6).<sup>31</sup> If de Chirico knew Soffici – directly, as I believe, but even indirectly (for example, through Bastianelli, Bacci, or Costetti) –, he should not have been unaware that Soffici had been intensely working for a long time on a critical book on Rimbaud, a poet with whom he had been familiar for years and had thoroughly studied since 1902 or 1904. Soffici nearly completed his study in August 1910,<sup>32</sup> possibly in the form of an article. It was finally

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2 vols., Leipzig 1895-97. To be sure, many of the authors and titles listed above were also to be found in the records of the books borrowed or checked out by the de Chirico's brothers at Florence's National Library.

29 F. Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico e la nascita della metafisica. L'"altra" avanguardia italiana, 1910-1911*, in *Secessione e avanguardia: L'arte in Italia prima della Grande Guerra 1905-1915*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 31 October 2014-15 February 2015), edited by S. Frezzotti, Electa, Milan 2014, pp. 90-107; Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico*, Chapter 4.

30 E. g., by explicitly using the term "illuminations" in quotation marks: see id., p. 79. See also my introduction to G. de Chirico, *Ebdòmero*, La nave di Teseo, Milan 2019.

31 A. Soffici, *Arthur Rimbaud*, «Quaderni della Voce–Quaderno tredicesimo», 31 July 1911, Casa Editrice Italiana, Florence 1911.

32 On 16 August 1910, Prezzolini writes to Soffici: "When do you think the Rimbaud is going to be ready? By 15 September?"

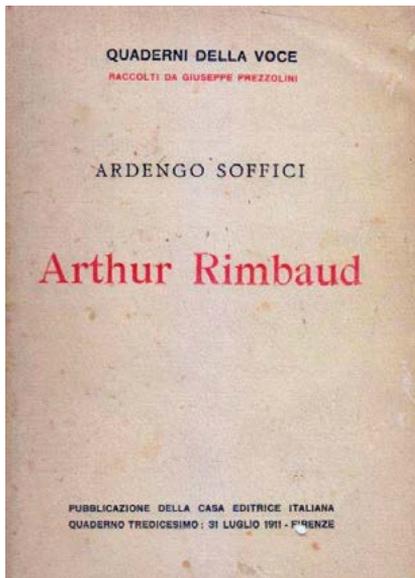


fig. 6 A. Soffici, *Arthur Rimbaud*, «Quaderni della Voce» 13, Florence, 31 July 1911. Cover

published as a book-length monograph on 31 July 1911, in the «Quaderni della Voce», immediately after Giorgio de Chirico's departure for Paris. Rimbaud's poetic influence is clear in the style of Soffici's article on Douanier Rousseau, published in the Fall of 1910.<sup>33</sup> As I was able to demonstrate, this is a keystone for the "stylistic" evolution of de Chirico's metaphysical art.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, an almost exact awareness of Rimbaud's vocabulary emerges in the visionary angst of de Chirico's French writings (1911-1915), a sense of "illumination" that cannot be explained recurring to Nietzsche's language despite its divinatory emphasis. I was not able to find precise quotations from Rimbaud prior to 1917, when in the piece entitled *Promontorio* de Chirico explicitly and glaringly quotes the French poet.<sup>35</sup> (I believe, however, that Rimbaud's gleaming language can be detected between the lines as

early as the Florentine manuscript on Andrea del Castagno dated 25 May 1911, where de Chirico describes "cieux étrangement bleus et profonds", "paysages solitaires et mélan-

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I need it soonish" (G. Prezzolini, A. Soffici, *Carteggio, I, 1917-1918*, edited by M. Richter, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1977, p. 126, letter no. 139). Soffici's study indisputably marks the critical reception of the Rimbaud in Italy. Prior to that the knowledge of his oeuvre had been fragmentary and inaccurate, see C. Roccatagliata Ceccardi, *Il libro dei frammenti - Versi*, Milan 1895; G. Nicoletti, *Rimbaud e la sua fortuna in Italia*, in «Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate», 12.4 (1954), pp. 287-316; F. Petralia, *Bibliographie de Rimbaud en Italie*, Institut français de Florence, Sansoni, Florence 1960; S. Giovina, *Le traduzioni di Rimbaud in Italia*, in «Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani», 33.2 (2018), pp. 65-77. In the intellectual circle around «La Voce», Rimbaud was obviously a current topic of discussion.

33 In his book on Rimbaud, Soffici quotes from *Alchemy of the Word*, contained in the collection *A Season in Hell*, a passage of which is clearly reprised (quoted almost verbatim) in the article on Douanier Rousseau: "I liked stupid paintings, door panels, stage sets, back-drops for acrobats, signs, popular engravings" (A. Rimbaud, *Complete Works. Selected Letters*, translated with an introduction and notes by W. Fowlie, updated, revised and with a foreword by S. Whidden, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005, p. 284). "Backdrops for street acrobats, old fireguards, signboards of dairy stores, hotels, barbershops, herbalists, country tabernacles, ex votoes, circusy ballerinas and soldiers, door panels with still lifes, frescoes in salons and rural inns" (A. Soffici, *Henry Rousseau*, in «La Voce», 15 September 1910).

34 See above fn. 29.

35 De Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, pp. 50-51. See the namesake prose poem entitled *Promontoire*, from *Illuminations*. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Rimbaud mentions the Peloponnese and Epirus in this poem about which de Chirico was particularly interested. The strange "Palais Promontoire" will be echoed in the opening pages of de Chirico's novel *Hebdomeròs* (1929) in the "strange building" that "looked like a German consulate in Melbourne", transporting us into a dreamlike narrative.

coliques qui semblent se recueillir dans l'attente de quelque miracle".<sup>36</sup>) Rimbaud's echoes can also be found in other manuscripts by de Chirico, the dates of which cannot be easily established, as in passages like these: "quelque chose de terriblement superficiel – comme le sourire d'un enfant", or "une musique curieuse, profondément bleue comme ces vers d'Horace", which refer to the chromatic synesthesia in *Alchemy of the Word* that Soffici cites in his aforementioned article on Rousseau as well as that mixture of awe and innocence often found in Rimbaud's poetry.

De Chirico, Soffici, and Rimbaud converge on another crucial theme, namely the analogy Soffici suggests between Nietzsche and the French poet:

Friedrich Nietzsche, who can be compared (as it was) to our poet [i.e. Rimbaud], attending in the *Zarathustra* to a philosophical work, in his excited mind was almost fatally dragged to move from prose to dithyramb in order to better convey the flight of his spirit; Arthur Rimbaud, composing lyrical poetry, moves from fixed meter patterns to free verse and from this to prose. Was it possible that they were both drawn to music unconsciously? One might think so.<sup>37</sup>

The attention paid by the intellectuals gathered around «La Voce», to Rimbaud, also through the comparison with Nietzsche, certainly fascinated de Chirico since the Florentine period. In the end, Rimbaud was for him a second source of interest, following Soffici's article on Rousseau that constituted a turning-point in de Chirico's stylistic shift leading to the first metaphysical paintings in the fall-winter of 1910.

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<sup>36</sup> De Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> A. Soffici, *Arthur Rimbaud*, edited F. Livi, Vallecchi, Florence 2002, p. 83.