

ON THE USE OF GERMAN BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

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Introduction: Brief Observations on Giorgio de Chirico's Spelling

Between April and December 1910, Giorgio de Chirico's writing undergoes major changes.¹ The postcards from the first days of July 1909, the letter on crested letterhead dated 27 December 1909 (all sent from Milan), and the postcard dated 11 April 1910 from Florence all show the use of Latin handwriting, which contains some errors due to the fast transcription of phonemes and the equally fast composition of sentences. Indeed, sentences frequently lack proper punctuation, resulting in a very colloquial style, as in Italian.

The letter of 26 December 1910, which is already significant for its content, turns out to be equally significant for its handwriting, which changes completely, displaying graphemes that are entirely different from Latin cursive: in fact, it takes on all the characteristics of the German *Kurrentschrift*, a script employed to simplify Gothic cursive. Giorgio de Chirico also makes use of graphemes that would eventually become the standard after the 1911 government's decision to introduce the *Sütterlinschrift*, which was designed to further simplify *kurrent* cursive.

As early as with the letter of December 1910, the graphemes show an increasingly fluent and confident spelling, although the style remains the Italian discursive one. The speed of writing omits punctuation marks, which are important in German for dividing the clauses that make up a sentence and distinguishing whether a verb belongs to the main or to a secondary clause.

The letter written in German post-1910 reveal a certain level of confidence, suggesting that the Master is now comfortably expressing himself in that language, and is quite pleased with it. Perhaps, the acquaintance with the German professor he had met in Vallombrosa had awoken in him the desire to perfect the knowledge of this difficult foreign language even with regards to spelling.

Therefore, if we want to delve in the meaning of some passages that are crucial to clarifying the Master's thought, one must ask how familiar he was with this difficult foreign language. Being familiar with the German language obviously includes the experience gained through training, study, and practice, as well as the participation in and understanding of the customs and traditions of German civilization.

¹ This article is an expanded version of *Brevi osservazioni sull'ortografia di Giorgio de Chirico*, published in «Metafisica», 20/21 (2021), as an introduction to the current article.

Giorgio de Chirico studied German while still an adolescent, as he recalls in his writings: “After I left the Lycée Leonino my father engaged as a tutor for me and my brother a Sicilia gentleman named Vergara. To teach us German and gymnastics he employed a German who rode a bike and was called Gheit”.² So, the Master and his brother received private lessons, as was customary in wealthy families in Greece at the time; additionally, the study of German was essential due to the strong and close ties with Germany.³ Therefore, he did not choose to study in Munich by chance, although he writes: “Everyone advised us to go to Munich in Germany so that I could continue to study painting and my brother music. Munich at that time was rather similar to Paris today”.⁴ In fact, in the 1910s, it was Munich and not Paris the seedbed of modern art; a place where young artists from all over the continent, like Kandinsky from Russia and Klee from Switzerland, could live the excitement of getting acquainted with their fellow painters. Indeed, the “new” artists believed that they should not only depict the shape of objects as perceived by the senses, but also elicit an emotional response from the audience. Of course, the new artistic wave and the young people who wished to participate in it were supported by an efficient organization comprised of many enterprising and foresighted investors who would fund their work.

In Munich, Giorgio de Chirico attended the Academy of Fine Arts, studied in depth the works of Arnold Böcklin, whose classicism he especially admired, of Max Klinger, whom he praised for his ability to find a neatly defined correspondence between dream and reality, and, above all, encountered Nietzsche’s poetry and philosophy:

In the two years I stayed in Munich the only Germans with whom I was friendly and in whom found a little cordiality and understanding were in fact two Prussians: Fritz Gartz, and his brother Kurt, a medical student. Kurt was obsessed by the philosophical ideas of Nietzsche and I observed in him mental anomalies; at the same time I observed that he, in common with everyone who had read Nietzsche, had not in fact understood what constituted the true novelty discovered by this philosopher. This novelty is a strange and profound poetry, infinitely mysterious and solitary, which is based on the *Stimmung* (I use this very effective German word which could be translated as atmosphere in the moral sense), the *Stimmung*,

2 *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Da Capo Press, New York 1994, p. 39 (first ed.: Astrolabio, Rome 1945).

3 The great powers’ support for the separatists determined the Greek people’s independence from the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the establishment of an independent state, but one administered by a foreign ruler, was determined by England, France, and Russia. The first king of Greece, Otto of Wittelsbach, was named Otto I of Greece by the London Convention of 1830.

4 *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, p. 49.

I repeat, of an autumn afternoon, when the sky is clear and the shadows are longer than in the summer, for the sun is beginning to lower.⁵

During his stay in Germany, Giorgio de Chirico had to deal with that foreign language on a daily basis, in what is now known as full immersion, listening, attempting to understand, and finally producing the language. “Production”, in fact, is the stage of learning that, for a foreign learner, is never completed because it is only reached at the end of a long and conscientious preparation. Given the lengthy course of study and the pedagogy in use in Italy until the 1970s, which relied more on translation from the mother tongue than in the spontaneous expression in the foreign language, it is at the “intermediate” stage that de Chirico’s knowledge of German can be assessed.

ANALYSIS OF THE 1909-1911 LETTERS

1. Spelling, Grammar, and Syntax

In nineteenth century Germany, and certainly until the adoption of the *Sütterlinschrift* (1915), all literate people would use the *kurrent* script, as can be seen by the handwritten address corrections on the 1909 postcards, which are thought to have been made by the letter carrier. Compared to the Latin cursive script, *Kurrentschrift* letters are pointed and tilted to the right, and lowercase cursive letters retain some features of the Gothic script, such as the squiggles and flourishes of letters “d” and “r” in the end of a word. From Latin cursive, instead, it borrows the ring above the ascenders of the letter “z”, and above the under-scallops in the “h”.

On the other hand, the letter “s” of *Kurrentschrift* is completely different from its Latin counterpart, for it is made of a single downstroke, as the lower part of letter “f”; while the letters “e”, “n” and “u” are practically identical. Therefore, we often find a small semi-circular sign above the “u” in order to distinguish it from “n” and “e”, as well as to mark the absence of the softening effect of the possible Umlaut (two dots side-by-side above a vowel, graphically but not phonetically corresponding to Latin dieresis). Giorgio de Chirico must have taken a liking to this script, practicing it in order to graphically reproduce it. In fact, his handwriting appears much more confident and fast in the December 1910 letter: he seems to have left behind his uncertainties as well as the elementary style of his early postcards where, among other things, he communicated that letter-writing made him uncomfortable and, as a result, he rarely did so. In fact, several changes can be observed: in Latin cursive, “k” is written in lowercase block letters, while

⁵ *id.*, p. 53.

in *Kurrentschrift* it is written with two loops, one on the upper left and the other on the mean line on the right; the letters “d” and “r” (the latter in the ending of a word) are written with no ligature and take on an upward squiggle; “h” and “z” feature a descender with a ring on the under-scallops; the “s” is rendered as a simple and long vertical stroke; “u” is at times marked by the small semi-circular sign, and at other times softened by the (occasionally wrong) Umlaut. The overall result is that at first glance the letters in *Kurrentschrift* seem to be written by a native speaker.

However, as we progress in reading, it becomes clear that the situation is different, and that the author of the letter is a foreigner learner who has studied German.

The spelling is not always correct and could be misleading. For example, *ausstellen* (“to expose”) is a separable verb, made up by the preposition *aus* and the weak verb *stellen*.⁶ De Chirico often writes it with just one single “s”, so it could be read as *anstellen* (“to place”, “to employ”), another separable verb, *an* and *stellen*, but with a completely different meaning. Also, the conjunction *daß* (“that”), used to introduce a noun + that clause, is at times correctly written with the *ß* (*eszet*), and at other times with two “ss”; in the latter case it could be confused with the adverb *dann*, meaning “then”, “after” or “therefore”.

In the letters, several mistakes affecting grammar and syntax are noticeable: they are most likely caused by the writer’s desire to communicate and share his ideas and reflections with the recipient.

From a grammatical standpoint, mistakes often occur in the declension of nouns and adjectives. For example, in the following sentences “es ist für mich sehr unangenehm ein Brief zu schreiben” and “heute habe ich Ihr Brief erhalten”, *Brief* is a masculine noun used as a direct object, therefore the correct declension should read *einen Brief* and *Ihren Brief* respectively. In the idiomatic phrase “Vor ein paar Tage”, the preposition *vor* used to introduce an expression of time must be followed by *Tagen* in the dative, and not *Tage*. Also, in the sentence “ein Programm des hier in Florenz projektiertes Konzertes”, the correct ending of the adjective accompanying a neuter noun in the genitive singular is *projektierten*, and not *projektiertes*.

The analysis of the syntax yields the most important information, because it shows that Giorgio de Chirico knew German well: he successfully used very complicated verb forms and courtesy formulas, and was familiar with several idiomatic phrases. However, he did not master the language: word order, some erroneous verbal construction, the repetition of the past perfect, difficulties in recognizing the gender of words, mistakes in the declensions of articles, determiners and adjectives – all betray his Italian origins and lead us to believe that the Master “translated” from Italian.

6 In German grammar, the regular verbs are called “weak” and the irregular ones “strong”.

An example of this is an important sentence constructed on Italian word order: “weil sicher seitdem Sie leben hat Ihnen jemand nie so etwas gesagt” (“because I’m sure no one has ever told you anything like this in your entire life”). According to the correct German word order, the subject must come immediately after the conjunction, the verb must come at the end of the subordinate clause, and the past participle and auxiliary must be inverted; then the second subordinate clause can finally be added, preceded by an obligatory comma: “weil jemand Ihnen sicher nie so etwas gesagt hat, seitdem Sie leben” or, alternatively, “weil jemand Ihnen, seitdem Sie leben, sicher nie so etwas gesagt hat”.

Of similar interest is the construction of some German verbs who can be followed by either dative or accusative but in Italian or English are followed by a preposition, such in the sentence: “Send my regards to your lovely wife”. In the German equivalent, the verb *empfehlen* takes both the accusative object (the greeted) and the dative (the greeter): “Empfehlen Sie mich bitte Ihrer Frau!” In this case, however, not unlike the foreigner learners who are used to translate from their mother tongue, de Chirico translates the preposition “to” with the German equivalent *neben* (“close to”): “Empfehlen Sie mich bitte neben Ihrer Frau!”

However, when it comes to using the most basic phrases for a foreigner learner, the use of German phraseology appears correct, as in the case of phrases like “coming to” or “a few days ago”, which in German are conveyed by using words and expressions that have only a slightly similar or even opposite meaning in Italian and English: “going to” and “a couple of days ago”.⁷

What we mean here is that when learning a foreign language, certain words and expressions become part of one’s personal vocabulary and are used repeatedly with different meanings for which specific terms are already in place in the target language, terms that a foreigner omits or ignores. This is confirmed by de Chirico’s *Memoirs*, where he tells that during his stay in Germany, to be sure that he was expressing himself clearly and that his requests were met, he would turn to his friend Fritz Gartz for help; or that for the translation of the lecture that his brother was to present at the Tonhalle in January 1911, he asked for help to the German professor he had met in Vallombrosa.

Therefore, the translation of the correspondence becomes an interpretation, precisely because the extrapolation of idiomatic phrases, let alone the literal translation, are insufficient; the translation becomes the reconstruction of a puzzle the pattern of which is formed by the Italian language and where the pieces fit in according to the Master’s progress in studying or understanding the German language.

7 A typical example from current German is: “I come to school here”, the literal equivalent of which would be “I go to school here” (“ich gehe hier in die Schule”).

2. Adjectivization

For a correct understanding of de Chirico's "German", we should enter the mindset of the foreign learner of this language, from which he derives the words most appropriate and meaningful to them by subtraction. For foreign learners, who have a limited vocabulary and feel confident only when using everyday expressions (with the few exceptions taken from a phrasebook of good manners), it is the spoken language that aids comprehension. This applies especially to Italians, who usually characterize their emphatic tones with gestures and facial expressions.

In his correspondence with Fritz Gartz, the Master tries to use polite and refined phrases, but his infrequent practice of German and lack of dictionary use often prevent him from finding the precise and most correct words for what he wants to convey. Nevertheless, he is confident that he is being understood, even if some very important passages in his letters appear to be of uncertain meaning because of the use of words and phrases that are not easy to render into German, and, above all, because they are always formulated by using the same adjectives.

In this regard, for example, it is interesting that in his letters de Chirico never uses the word *nett* ("nice", "kind"), very common among foreign learners, but unable to convey the emphasis with which he wants to highlight how friendly and kind Gartz's wife was: a woman who becomes and will always be *liebenswert*, that is, "lovely" (literally: "worthy of love"). Even more intriguing is to understand the meaning of some other adjectives: de Chirico uses *dumm* ("stupid") with meanings that are always different from the most current one; *furchtbar* ("terrible", "fearsome") simply becomes an augmentative modifier; *tief* ("deep") is employed repeatedly in its many articulation and once the Master specifies its use "in the old sense of the word", that is, with its opposite meaning.

3. On Searching for Meaning or Interpretation

It is especially interesting to see how the de Chirico expresses himself with confidence and how, as his practice of German progresses, he manages to compose increasingly complicated sentences while maintaining a colloquial style flourishing with terms that he quickly expresses. For those who understand German, reading his letters aloud helps understand his thoughts: one can sense his desire to communicate or share his feelings and the surprise that took him!

Indeed, as previously stated, the most relevant passages in the correspondence remain suspended, as it were, if not read with the proper intonation. When in a letter dated 26 December 1910 he writes "What I have created here in Italy is not great or deep (in the old sense of the word), but it is terrible", one must understand the emphasis he intends to place on his words in order to uncover their hidden meaning. First, one must understand, as Fritz Gartz did, how much and how sternly Giorgio de Chirico criticizes

modernists who value only magnitude of size and “emptiness” of forms. Accordingly, the “old sense” of which he speaks in parentheses is to be found in the meaning of *tief* (“deep”) as it was used in Alt- or Mittelhochdeutsch,⁸ that is, as *hohl*, “hollow”, “empty within”. Second, one must also understand that the adjective *furchtbar* (“terrible”) is used figuratively and could be replaced with *gewältig* (“powerful”, “impressive”). Indeed, it would be sufficient to think to the elementary sentences in spoken Italian where “terrible” is used as an intensifying modifier, as in “I have a terrible headache” or “I am so tired! It has been a terrible day”.

Giorgio de Chirico was an enthusiastic person, and this quality of his is the key to access the hidden meanings of the elementary adjectives he employs while writing in his third language, the language spoken by a foreign learner. He uses *tief* (“deep”) to describe a state of mind, his painting, Böcklin’s paintings as well as Dante’s, Goethe’s and Nietzsche’s sense of poetry and lyricism. But what does “deep” mean to him? Perhaps, for the inventor of Metaphysics, depth is to be found in what is difficult to grasp with the mind, for it is hidden and inconspicuous, but precisely for that reason it is truer and more important. The *Tiefenpsychologie* encompasses the branches of psychology that study the unconscious and the layers of consciousness that are the furthest from awareness. Therefore, what de Chirico later says about Böcklin can help us understand what he means for “depth”:

in Böcklin the metaphysical power always stems from the exactness and clarity of a specific apparition [...] Arnold Böcklin was classic in the purest sense of the word. In each of his works one can feel the principle of vision that suddenly presents itself to the spirit, coming on a dove’s feet, to use Nietzsche’s words. It is a revelation of something inexplicable that fills the artist with divine joy, perhaps the deepest and purest joy granted to us mortals.⁹ And also: “Böcklin is the most profoundly poetic painter that ever lived and yet he was a tremendous realist. [...] For the true artist, realism is a means for efficiently expressing what he feels and imagines.¹⁰

The key to reading is, therefore, the *revelation*, the depth found in the appearance and meaning of things perceived outside of conventional reality, as it happens when one

8 The *Althochdeutsch* comprises the dialects of central and southern Germany from the earliest written transcriptions (ca. 810) to around 1100. *Mittelhochdeutsch* is the stage of German language development that occurred between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, that is, between *Alt-* and *Neuhochdeutsche Sprache*. *Neuhochdeutsch* is the level of German language development, including written language, from Martin Luther’s Bible translation to the present day.

9 G. de Chirico, *Arnold Böcklin*, in Id., *Scritti/1, (1911-1945). Romanzi e Scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellesa, under the direction of A. Bonito Oliva, Bompiani, Milan 2008, p. 706.

10 G. de Chirico, *Gustave Courbet*, in «Metaphysical Art», 14/16 (2016), p. 44.

looks at an actor in his dressing room, that is, offstage, where makeup and costume no longer alter the essence of the person, who is no longer the character, but the man.¹¹ In the opposite case, revelation occurs when, for example, one finds the image of a centaur at the blacksmith's among ordinary people realistic: "The composition's genius lies in the fact that the spectator has the impression that the event really did take place".¹²

Considering, therefore, that the letter was written in December 1910, one well understands the Master's enthusiasm after he himself first has had the *revelation* in Florence, and finally realized why he was so "deeply", unconsciously, fascinated by Böcklin's painting. After so much time spent studying and several attempts at executing paintings with which he was dissatisfied, so much so that he destroyed all the Böcklinian paintings of the Milanese period, de Chirico arrived in Florence and began to create something that satisfied him, pleased him, and filled him with inner joy, until everything became clear to him on that "autumn afternoon" on Piazza Santa Croce, a vision from which he would develop the "Italian mystery". And it is Giorgio de Chirico himself who describes this path in his 1929 autobiographical sketch, published under the pseudonym of Angelo Bardi:

Having accomplished his studies (if we may say so), he left Germany and went down to Italy. [...] He spent his first Italian year in Milan. During this period he painted works in which the influence of Böcklin was still all too evident. He destroyed these paintings himself. After moving to Florence [...] Giorgio de Chirico started discovering his path. It is to this Florentine period that works such as *The Enigma of the Oracle*, or *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, belong. We speak of two works that, by their poetic power and innovative power, are worthy, even if dated 1910, of being placed on the same level of any of his later works. As previously he had discovered an enigmatic Greece, very different from that documented in school books, in the same way, after reading Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* Giorgio de Chirico set about discovering the "Italian mystery". He liked to

11 "These artists thus reveal the enigmatic side of apparition, the hidden side of a spectacle, similarly to that of an actor, whom having been seen on stage under the footlights, is seen in a setting that 'normalizes' him, 'humanizes him, theatrically speaking, and whom, once the curtain has fallen, we surprise in the same clothes and makeup in his dressing room where he appears with an infinitely more solitary and metaphysical aspect, so that you come to think: this is his real appearance, the one that nobody has thought of so far!" (G. de Chirico, *Vincenzo Gemitto*, in «Metaphysical Art», 17/18 [2016], p. 217; trans. D. Smith).

12 G. de Chirico, *Max Klinger*, in «Metaphysical Art», 14/16 (2016), p. 56. And also: "It may possibly have been Böcklin's influence [the reference made here is to the painting *The Centaur at the Blacksmith's Forge*] that caused Klinger to develop a strange emotion through the appearance of mythological beings in numerous etchings, where centaurs, fauna and tritons are represented not only in open nature with gods and demigods as artists often do but in the company of men in a surprisingly 'natural reality', which when seen for the first time gives the impression, as I have already said, that such beings actually existed" (*ibid.*).

place this “mystery” in Northern Italy and in particular in the city of Turin. It is to the “mystery” of this Savoyard or Cavourian enigma that we owe a whole series of paintings in which solitary statues erected on very low pedestals cast their long post-meridian shadows on the vast deserted piazzas, surrounded by arcades. But despite their poetic power, these paintings, these “documents” of a new kind of painting lay hidden in a room of a house in Florence.¹³

In poetry, too, the key to reading “depth” is the *revelation*: for Giorgio de Chirico, the images and stories described in the complex architecture of Dante’s canticles, or in the wanderings of *Wilhelm Meister*, or in the ambivalence of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*, were not enough; it is in Friedrich Nietzsche’s poetics that the Overworld is to be found, which makes “useless things” sensible.

From this point of view, Michelangelo’s imagination, creativity, and skills don’t reach that “depth”, and he is thus referred to as “the dumbest” of artists. However, one of the meanings of *dumm* is “naive”, and it is believed that the Master wanted to define the *titanic* artist in this way. Giorgio de Chirico appreciated Michelangelo because he admired the greatness of his spirit and not for the size of his figures or paintings. He greatly admired Michelangelo for his skills as a painter too, so that in 1928 he wrote: “About eight years ago, at the Uffizi Gallery, I made a very well-executed copy of Michelangelo’s *Holy Family*. This painting still adorns the walls of my bedroom, and I am so enamored with it that more than once I refused considerable offers from people who wanted to buy it. I recall that none of the copyists I saw at the time were able to capture the deep luminosity of Michelangelo’s flesh and drapery”.¹⁴ Such admiration cannot imply “stupidity”, but rather a sense of regret that the great artist was not caught by the *revelation*.

Concerning the works of this period and the moment of his *revelation*, here we quote the Master’s own statement contained in the introductory essay for the 1921 exhibition in Milan:

13 *The Life of Giorgio de Chirico*, in «Metaphysical Art», 5/6 (2006), pp. 497-498 (trans. K. Robinson, slightly modified). Andrea Cortellesa, the editor of de Chirico’s collected writings published in 2008, informs us that this autobiographical sketch devoted to Giorgio de Chirico by «Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique» (issue no. 8), published in Antwerp in 1929 and signed “Angelo Bardi”, was attributed to the Master by Gerd Roos in «Otto/Novecento», 1 (1997). It is the longest and most challenging autobiographical writing published by de Chirico before his *Memoirs* (1945). According to Katherine Robinson, the author of the English translation, based on Maurizio Calvesi’s research, the architecture in *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* reproduces a detail of Giotto’s fresco *The Stigmata of St. Francis*, which de Chirico saw in Florence in the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce, where there is also the apparition of an angel, from which the Master would have drawn his pseudonym.

E. Pontiggia hypothesizes, as already done by Gerd Roos, that this “autobiography” was actually written by Alberto Savinio. See “Carissima Mamma”. Letters of the de Chirico Family (1924-1936), in this journal, pp. 88-91.

14 G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, in Id., *Scritti/1*, p. 33.

Et quid amabo nisi quod enigma est? The paintings and drawings I am exhibiting today in Milan today are the result of a year's worth of work [...] I am showing a copy of Michelangelo's *Holy Family* that, in my opinion, is the most difficult painting in the whole Uffizi Gallery to interpret and copy. In a copy such as this, on which I worked for six months, I have tried, as much as I could, to capture the color, the clear and neatly applied impasto, in the complicated spirit of its lines and forms. [...] The metaphysical aspect of painting has always concerned me. This can be seen even in the few juvenile works I am exhibiting. Painted between 1908 and 1910, they belong to a time of my life when I was living and working on my own in Florence after a few years of arduous academic life in Germany. I would draw a lot, paint and sculpt occasionally, and, at night, study art history, philosophy, Greek, and Latin at night. There are three paintings from the juvenile period – *The Enigma of the Oracle*, *The Morning Meditation*, and two *Afternoon Meditations* – to which I attach a high spiritual value, a value to which I believe only a few painters have arrived so far.¹⁵

The adjective *dumm* is also used to define the personality of the German professor de Chirico met in Vallombrosa: “ein sehr dummer Kerl”, literally “a very stupid type”. As we said before, perhaps he helped the Master learn *Kurrentschrift*, and de Chirico entrusted him the correction of the lecture that his brother Alberto was to deliver in Munich before the performance of his work *Il Primo Caso Musicale – La musica più profonda sinora scritta*. As a result, it appears unlikely that such a trustworthy person would be thought of as “stupid,” that is, as having low intelligence or dullness of mind; rather, that phrase appears to be an expression concealing a common saying (“a strange type”), or even the distortion of a phrase of understanding between two friends, or, again, and more simply, a misuse of an expression that good-naturedly described the naiveté of the person to whom it was referred.

“Stupidity” (*Dummheit*) resurfaces once again, and very sadly, in the letter dated 5 January 1911, when de Chirico tells Gartz that he has been thinking all night about the frailty of his brother Kurt, who has committed suicide. This “stupidity” refers to the unawareness of those who are unable to see beyond conventional signs and do not realize that other possibilities exist.

Indeed, it is in this context that de Chirico returns to explain what he meant when he wrote that Michelangelo was “the stupidest of artists”, implying that his works represented a spiritual force and power that those who referred to him as a *titan* misinterpreted: “Michelangelo was the last great painter within whom classicism dwelt with all

15 *Prefazione al catalogo della mostra personale*, in Id., *Scritti/1*, p. 744-745.

its signs and mysterious symbols”. And: “One must add that Michelangelo has always been called a *titan* and a *giant* because his sculptures and paintings represent muscled figures expressing physical power. It is certainly for peripheral reasons that he is defined a titan and with no thought as to his talent or the greatness of his artistic personality”.¹⁶

David’s complex set of aesthetic and philosophical values was idealized in the physical representation of his harmonic figure, with his perfect anatomical proportions, his manly and powerful forms. This “hero” however, was not the “Superman”, the interpreter of the song of eternity, the philosopher of eternal recurrence, the one who lives in the Overworld. Michelangelo could never have created this figure because he lacked the gift of revelation, and his naiveté had simply prevented him from doing so.

Conclusions

German is a difficult language to learn for foreigners due to the complexities of its grammar and syntax. From the very beginning, one has to study nouns divided into three genders, with each gender having its own declension divided into classes, subclasses, and exceptions; the declension of the noun coordinates as many declensions of articles, determiners, and adjectives, making their correct production a very challenging task.¹⁷

Giorgio de Chirico had been studying German since he was an adolescent, using a methodology of learning that facilitated the study of foreign languages in terms of correctness of expression but did not allow for rapid and spontaneous linguistic production. His stay in Germany greatly aided him in understanding the customs and traditions of that people; however, his linguistic practice was always quite limited, so much so that in 1909 he could still write: “Es ist für mich sehr unangenehm ein Brief zu schreiben, deswegen schreibe ich so selten” (It is disagreeable to me [i.e., I find it uncomfortable] to write a letter, this is why I write so rarely). Even in his later writings, one still finds simple clauses and short sentences; only in the letter of 27 December 1909 do we find longer sentences with more subordinate clauses. The writing and syntax differ dramatically from the letter of 26 December 1910, by which time de Chirico had already spent time in Vallombrosa for treatment. Since the letters are filled with ideas, reasoning, and feelings, the vocabulary is enriched, and the writing not only replaces graphemes with the *kurrent* alphabet, but becomes more fluid and confident, it is safe to assume that his acquaintance with the German professor resulted in real language lessons.

16 Id., *Pictorial Classicism*, in «Metaphysical Art», 14/16 (2016), p. 51 (trans. K. Robinson).

17 Modern German arose from the linguistic reform brought about by Martin Luther’s Bible translation (1522-1534). Modeling its grammar and syntax on Latin and making use of the printing press innovation in order to popularize it, Luther standardized the various languages used in the German territories by giving all social classes, especially the emerging bourgeoisie, access to the written language, which had previously been reserved to the clergy, knights, nobles, and rulers. The rule of capitalizing nouns, which greatly benefits foreigners, stems from the Augustinian monk’s desire to thank the Lord for everything he has created.

However, it has already been mentioned that in de Chirico's German writings syntactical and grammatical errors are present, but it has probably not been made clear enough that words and phrases used since the beginning of the language practice remain in a learner's memory. This mindset frequently leads to linguistic flaws that are difficult to correct, but we cannot address this issue here; it is enough to acknowledge it.

Giorgio de Chirico employs some words and phrases repeatedly. We have already investigated on the meaning of *liebenswertig*, *tief*, *dumm*, and *furchtbar*. As for *ein paar*, which he uses in an expression of time as well as in a direct object ("vor ein paar Tagen" and "ein paar Gemälde"), we should point out that *paar*, when used as an adjective is invariant and translates as "some" or "a few", while the noun *das Paar* is used to indicate a "pair" or "a couple", as in "a pair of gloves" (*ein Paar Handschuhe*) or in "to form a couple" (*ein Paar bilden*). After all, for those who have studied German using a now-outdated methodology, it is extremely difficult to determine the correct gender of words, so in these letters one frequently encounters words unfinished or used incorrectly. However, what clearly emerges from Giorgio de Chirico's correspondence is a desire for communication and sharing; we can see that the Master does not care about the order of the parts of speech; he inserts adverbs, conjunctions, appositions, and expressions of the spoken language as if he were speaking in front of his friend. His expressions are colloquial, and follow the Italian word order rather than the German one; he often begins his clauses with *aber* ("but"), uses both direct and inverted constructions in the subordinate clauses, especially in the reported questions introduced by *weil*, where transposed word order is required; the clauses are consequential, follow each other quickly, and intersect as in an Italian dialogue.

In conclusion, understanding de Chirico's "German" necessitates an assessment of the artist's multi-faceted and creative personality, without forgetting that his production of the foreign language was hampered by a lack of consistent practice and by his typically Italian temperament.

The above text has been translated from Italian into English by Francesco Caruso