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## Stratigraphy of Andromeda: Giorgio de Chirico, Alberto Savinio, Origins, and Originality

Alessandro Giammei

*vivam, parsque mei multa superstes erit*

—Ovid, *Amores*<sup>1</sup>

A large, cropped wheel with six bolstered spokes is bolted, firmly, to nothing (fig. 1). It looks ready to transfer the energy produced by a grounded pneumatic apparatus (an engine? a plinth?) to some other invisible mechanism, out of view to the right. It is impossible to understand how the slender system of pistons and levers is meant to work. While an aesthetic fascination for the absolute plastic quality of machinery is undeniable, this image does not represent actual technology. It seems that to produce it Francis Picabia used an engineering illustration as an *objet trouvé* and painted over it, highlighting some details while obliterating most of the functional context with his brush.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the machine has no evident function. The two dominant hues underline the artist's estranging gesture. The metallic body of the mechanical object is green, like the patina that surrounds antique bronze statues, while the background evokes the same ineffable golden flatness that abolishes space and time in Byzantine mosaics, Gothic altarpieces, and icons. Its two-dimensional, yet infinitely profound splendor isolates and absolutizes the enigmatic subject, eradicating it from history. Such a visual oxymoron is encapsulated by the title: *Fille née sans mère* ("girl born without a mother").<sup>3</sup>

Critics agree on the material source of this title, which appears among the *locutions latines et étrangères* of the early twentieth-century encyclopedic dictionary *Petit Larousse Illustré*: another

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▲  
 Fig. 1. Francis Picabia, *Fille née sans mère* (Girl Born without a Mother), 1917, gouache and metallic paint on printed paper, 50 x 65 cm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London 2016. Photo © Antonia Reeve, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, UK.

*objet trouvé*, a readymade-locution that echoes the modern dream of non-biological birth expressed in Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's early science fiction or in F. T. Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste* (1909). However, I believe that its literary origin—*Prolem sine matre creatam*, a line from book II of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—should be considered more carefully. The same Ovidian line is also the epigraph of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, and therefore opens the foundation of modern political theory with the same bold implications (this work is unprecedented, there are no comparable models or sources) that informed Picabia's title. Exactly in the same year in which Picabia painted his *Fille*, 1917, Guillaume Apollinaire coined the very term "surrealist" for the rewriting of an episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. Another episode of the *Metamorphoses* gave the title, a year later, to Alberto Savinio's multilingual and vanguardist literary debut, *Hermaphrodito*, while Giorgio de Chirico had been obsessed with the sleep of Ariadne (book VII of Ovid's poem) since at least 1912.<sup>4</sup> Even Marinetti, right before the publication of the Futurist Manifesto, blended his modernist imagery with the mythical one of the *Metamorphoses* by naming his own car after the winged horse born from Medusa's blood: *mon Pegas*, "my Pegasus." In the prime of Europe's avant-garde, decades before Picasso's famous illustrated edition, Ovid's myths were a privileged interlocutor for modernity: a paradoxical influence that is perfectly visualized in the green bronze patina of Picabia's machine, eternalized on its gilded untimeliness.

Within the wide field of studies related to modernist reception of the classics, this article intends to interrogate the paradox embodied by the motherless mechanomorphic girl envisioned by Picabia: a fetishized emblem of modernity rendered as an ancient statue in an iconizing background, a work that claims to escape genealogies through a quotation from ancient poetry. The aim is to overcome the temptation of historicizing late modernity as the theater of a binary opposition between classicism and vanguardism, tradition and newness. Through Ovid, I will explore the problem of origins and originality in the multimedia work of Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio, which provides a particularly telling case study. The two brothers were extremely influenced by classical culture (as well as very knowledgeable about it) and, at the same time, they were among the most crucial protagonists of modernism. Rather than focusing on their over-studied Parisian years, I will examine their engagement with classical antiquity in the interwar period, a time that they spent in Italy, where fascism was famously reviving classical Rome and blending its visual and literary models with modernizing experiences such as architectural rationalism and the second wave of Futurism. This choice offers two interconnected advantages. First of all, it allows this study to position itself outside of the scholarly frame that has dominated Italian modernism studies—namely, the mobilization of antiquity for imperial purposes by the regime’s aesthetics—without renouncing cultural specificity. Secondly, it allows me to shed light on a phase of the de Chirico brothers’ work that has been largely neglected by scholars. Raymond Queneau famously stated that de Chirico’s work is divided into two parts: the first and the bad. This article dismisses that hierarchy by considering de Chirico’s controversial “bad” work (along with that produced by his brother in the same years, during fascism) as an aware and still vanguardist evolution of positions expressed during the “first” phase. I will show that the brothers’ supposed “return to order” in the interwar years was not, in fact, simply a form of neoclassicism, nor an abjuration of the metaphysical aesthetics, but rather an original solution to the paradox posed by Picabia’s use of Ovid’s startling line.

Another crucial goal of this article is to show how the modernist Italian and European gaze on the Greco-Roman past was filtered through intermediate layers of cultural elaboration—the Italian Renaissance in particular, but also Romantic aesthetics. I will approach the two artists as if they were Foucauldian archaeologists dealing with the histories of their own pictorial and literary subjects; my chosen example is a myth from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: the liberation of Andromeda.<sup>5</sup> Ovid is not just, as I’ve mentioned, a particularly prolific (and yet paradoxical) source for the avant-garde; his collection of the myths of transformation is a ubiquitous influence throughout the history of western culture. This ubiquity can be explained with the Nietzschean word I have already used: untimeliness.<sup>6</sup> The literary creation of untimely figures, or myths, is a rhetorical tool that makes it possible to represent reality outside of contingencies, in its recurring constants. Untimeliness and mythopoesis (the lack of a historicizable birth of, and the ability to give birth to, a cultural object) have been interconnected by Nietzsche’s critics, and obviously interact in modernist fascinations for Ovid as a model—including the Dadaist and proto-Surrealist ones aforementioned, all based on the paradox of producing originality through the revival of a sort of Ovidian “original originality.” Rewriting (or visualizing) Ovid can allow one to escape literary ancestries and, at the same time, be

24 part of classical western tradition. The de Chirico brothers interpreted these themes (untimeliness and the paradoxical originality of literary mythology) in a new, modern way, producing an effect of estrangement in their disorienting use of familiar myths. Andromeda is a good exemplar for this analysis not just because the myth is probably the most often rewritten and illustrated, reaching the twentieth century carrying an extensive and articulate baggage of previous non-consecutive strata composed of its own early modern receptions and elaborations. It also provides, in the key scene of the rescue on the coasts of Ethiopia, a gendered situation that produces revealing psychological effects and identifications in the de Chiricos' stratigraphic elaborations.<sup>7</sup>

Before proceeding, it is important to briefly address the use of the archaeological term that opens this article. The text and the painting at the core of this article are both read as stratigraphic sections, as uses of the Ovidian myth that reveal its non-linear Renaissance and Romantic genealogies as simultaneous, yet mappable layers. In my interpretation, de Chirico and Savinio managed to collapse these archaeological layers into a modernist synthesis that intends to be at the same time vanguardist and classicist, modern and antique, aware of its many non-hierarchical origins and yet original. The term stratigraphy, however, also has a second meaning, related to the scholarly approach here adopted. My analysis will be, in a philological fashion, inspired by the creative method of the brothers. The theory of reception exemplified in the following pages works as a stratigraphic archaeology of the recent past, as an attempt to unpack the many layers collapsed in the de Chirico brothers' paradoxical classicism.

### Myths in Disguise for a Kid's Enchantment

One of the defining aspects of the de Chirico brothers' work is the clash between the vanguardist position they took at the beginning of the century and their authentic bond to Greco-Roman antiquity, mediated by an advanced European education which made them early adopters of philosophical models of anomalous classicism such as Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone di pensieri* (1898) and *Operette morali* (1827), Arthur Schopenhauer's *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851), and Otto Weininger's controversial theories about Eros and Psyche.<sup>8</sup> Marisa Volpi has eloquently defined such a vital, yet paradoxical balance—which was also indebted to Arnold Böcklin's and Max Klinger's ironic use of classical iconographies and themes—as “*una classicità impossibile*.”<sup>9</sup> To complicate such an “impossible classicism,” the two Greek-born stateless intellectuals, who studied in Athens, Munich, Paris, and Florence, chose Italy as their elective homeland. As Savinio wrote after World War I, no other place in Europe had the “*spiritualità*” required to host the rise of a real, modern new classicism (“*un'arte nuova tendente a un nuovo classicismo*”).<sup>10</sup>

In a revealing later lecture at the Lyceum Club in Florence (never translated into English), Savinio also declared that the real goal of any “authentically modern” (and “authentically Italian”) art should be to make statues “jump off their pedestals and join our company.”<sup>11</sup> This desire for an impossible direct interaction with antiquity—rooted

in the imagery of metaphysical literature since its very beginning—was satisfied by the revival of Andromeda's feminine archetype: a woman taken for a marble statue by her savior, a mineral prisoner, almost a Galatea, who had been famously captured by the eyes of painters such as Vasari and Rubens in the very moment she is freed/animated from the stone by a Perseus/Pygmalion.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the literary emergence of the myth, Andromeda is not even a human character but an inanimate object, a statue.

The myth appears in *Tragedia dell'infanzia* (1937), a narrative masterpiece of Savinio's maturity, and it is the focus of the fifth section, titled *The Voice of the Dragon*.<sup>13</sup> Each chapter of the novel features a meeting between the young protagonist (Nivasio Dolcemare, an idealized version of the author as a child) and a fascinating, yet still somehow dysfunctional, mythical creature who travels incognito across a surreal modernity.<sup>14</sup> Leonidas, for instance, is a tiny but brave sparrow, Xenophon is a cross-eyed servant at the Dolcemare residence, Apollo is "Apolla," an androgynous (maybe transgender) performer, while Narcissus is a bigoted (and ugly!) bourgeois man.<sup>15</sup> Mentor, Telemachus's guide in the *Odyssey*, is at the same time Diamandis, another employee of the protagonist's family: just a gentle Greek man who gladly plays with Nivasio and answers his questions. The relation between classical names and the provincial *fin-de-siècle* reality of nineteenth-century Greece is kept magically ambiguous by Savinio's experimental narrative.<sup>16</sup>

When I asked Diamandis who Jason, Orpheus, the Dioscuri, and Lynceus were, he replied: "They're heroes who hang around these parts, in the forests, along the seashore, on the cart roads that run through the valley and up the mountain." . . . Having spoken, Diamandis began whistling softly again, pressing his tongue between his teeth and looking up at the sky, where the sail woven by Medea slowly glided.<sup>17</sup>

*Quando domandavo a Diamandi chi era Giasone, Orfeo, i Dioscuri, Linceo, quegli rispondeva: "Sono eroi che si aggirano da queste parti, nelle foreste, in riva al mare, lungo le carraie diffuse nella valle e abbarbicate su per la montagna." . . . Finito di parlare, Diamandi ricominciava a fischiare piano, stringendo la lingua fra i denti e mirando il cielo nel quale vogava lentamente la vela tessuta da Medea. ("Tragedia dell'infanzia," 500)*

Such an enchanting disenchantment pervades the novel, and can be seen as well in some of de Chirico's late works. In both brothers' literal revivals of classical antiquity, narrative and figurative mythologems adapt themselves, as subjects of modern fictions and paintings, to a dreamlike bourgeois reality, while at the same time showing the traces of their previous voyage through Europe's cultural history.

When the family of the protagonist decides to leave the city for the summer in order to expose the sickly child to a more salubrious climate, Savinio's alter-ego Nivasio rides joyfully across the city to the port, where a ship is awaiting him and his mother. The ship itself is named Andromeda and the boy falls immediately in love with it, even before understanding that Andromeda is the name of a maiden and that the ship takes her name from a statue:

To reach the boarding ladder, we had to go around the stern. I did not cease to admire that extraordinary machine. But then was it a machine, or rather a creature out of a fable? . . . the round windows arranged in double rows like so many little holes in which to stick pencils; the jet of steam that spouted from a hole above the waterline; the name of the steamship written in golden letters on the gleaming stern; the bright loops that fluttered over the bulwarks! (*Tragedy of Childhood*, 36)

*Per accostare alla scaletta d'imbarco, ci toccò girare dietro la poppa. Non mi stancavo di ammirare quella macchina straordinaria. Ma era una macchina poi, o non piuttosto una creatura favolosa? . . . le finestrelle rotonde disposte in doppia fila come tanti forellini da infilarci le matite; il getto di vapore che usciva da un buco sopra la banda di galleggiamento; il nome del piroscafo scritto con lettere d'oro sullo specchio di poppa; i ghirigori luminosi che farfalleggiavano sulle murate!* ("Tragedia dell'infanzia," 489–90)

A sort of childish version of the euphoria towards technology that is typical of Futurism is clearly perceivable in the text: Nivasio is impressed by the steam, the great line of portholes, the radiance of the ship and its very mechanical nature. This is not surprising; even if he ended up accusing it of "*dannunzianesimo*," Savinio certainly had contacts with Marinetti's movement.<sup>18</sup> He was intimate with anomalous Futurists such as Anton Giulio Bragaglia and Corrado Govoni, and he had already explored techniques and themes proposed by the 1909 Manifesto in *Hermaphrodito*.<sup>19</sup> Here, just as Marinetti did with his automobile, Savinio animates the ship and describes it as a charming monster. He gives it consciousness, he emphasizes its technological strength and imagines it as a post-biological beast eager to conquer space and time.<sup>20</sup>

Her smokestack, turned stubbornly backwards, puffed rings of smoke that opened into black, shifting flowers in the sky. From her invisible mouth came overpowering wails, whereby she summoned the little boats that went rowing out to cluster at her side. Her hull was anxious. It was time for it to move, to double the promontory guarded by the white lighthouse, cross the limit of the known world, and launch itself on the great sea over there, a darker strip wedded to the sky and rising its liquid back beyond the spit of land enclosing the gulf. (*Tragedy of Childhood*, 35)

*Il fumaio caparbiamente rovesciato indietro, sbuffava anella di fumo che in cielo si aprivano in fiori neri e volubili. Dalla sua bocca invisibile partivano ululi prepotenti, con che chiamava a sé le barchette che a forza di remi le si raccoglievano al fianco. Lo scafo trepidava. Gli tardava muoversi, doppiare il promontorio vigilato dal faro bianco, varcare il limite del mondo conosciuto, lanciarsi nel grande mare che laggiù, striscia più scura sposata al cielo, levava il dorso liquido dietro la lingua di terra che cingeva il golfo.* ("Tragedia dell'infanzia," 488–89)

Yet in this case the "*macchina straordinaria*" is not a product of recent industrialization. It actually is—and here is the rub—a decadent vessel in one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, harbors of Europe.<sup>21</sup> The Futurist rhetoric that brings the ship to life is suddenly defused by the intervention of reality; Nivasio's mother finds it very small ("so much smoke for such a little ship!") and the father ridicules it with no mercy, calling

it a “*vecchia carcassa*,” an old wreck. Only a child is able to see a “*macchina straordinaria*” in a “*vecchia carcassa*,” to look at such a shabby old wreck from a Futurist point of view. The paradoxical clash between a decaying past and a vibrant newness requires the special sensitivity of childhood. Childhood itself is, in Savinio’s other main autobiographical novel, *Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare*, a nymph, whose name is a pun that involves the two meanings of the Italian word *prima* (before and first):<sup>22</sup>

“Infancy” is a corrupted evolution of the word “Nymphancy”: the period of life that men live under the authority of “Ancy,” the nymph of first times. (“Ancy” comes from “ante-”: before or first).

*Infanzia è una corruzione di Ninfanzia: periodo della vita che l'uomo consuma sotto l'autorità di Anzia, ninfa delle primizie. (Anzia da “ante,” prima). (“Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare,” 573)*

Such a literary use of childhood is not to be linked to Giovanni Pascoli’s famous poetics of the eternal child or “*fanciullino*,” but neither is it, in my opinion, Savinio’s own invention.<sup>23</sup> I believe that the equation that relates childhood to a golden antiquity (and adulthood to a disappointing modernity) is rooted in Leopardi’s *Zibaldone*, in which classical antiquity is described as the childhood of human culture.<sup>24</sup> This childhood, in Leopardi’s theory, was soon lost, and the only Latin author that, throughout a sort of collective coming of age, was able to remain original and truly antique is Ovid. According to Leopardi, another *puer aeternus* is Ludovico Ariosto, an important model for Savinio’s “*nuovo classicismo*.” A Leopardian infancy, suspended between “before” and “first” like Savinio’s “nymphancy,” makes the protagonist of *Tragedia dell’infanzia* able to recognize classical myths in disguise and to narrate them as exciting avant garde subjects, even if his main sources are his own imagination, illustrated spelling-books, and the confusing tales of servants.

In *The Voice of the Dragon*, the culturally naive young Nivasio realizes that Andromeda is a “*creatura umana*” only after having identified the name with the ship, which is in turn a “*creatura favolosa*.” The meeting with the woman is almost a shock:

[W]hat struck me the most was that woman attached to the prow of the ship, her breasts pointed, her stomach swathed in a cloth that waved behind her like a dragon’s tail, who was chained by her elbows and stared at the horizon with terror stricken eyes. Guessing my astonishment, my father said: “Are you looking at that big wooden doll up there? It’s Andromeda for God’s sake!” His words did not enlighten me in the least. He added: “The figurehead.” I knew less than before. (*Tragedy of Childhood*, 36)

[C]iò che maggiormente mi colpì fu quella donna attaccata allo sprone della nave, le mammelle a rostro, il ventre fasciato da un panno che le ondeggiava dietro a coda di drago, incatenata per i gomiti, e che fissava l’orizzonte con gli occhi revulsi dal terrore. Indovinato il mio stupore, il babbo disse: “Guardi quella bambocciona lassù? L’è Andromeda perdiolo!” Le sue parole non m’illuminarono affatto. Aggiunse: “Figura prodiera.” Ne sapevo meno di prima. (“Tragedia dell’infanzia,” 490)



- 28 The child always calls Andromeda “*la donna*,” the woman, showing—in a perfect subversion of Perseus’s mistake—not to understand that it is a statue, as his father ambiguously stated using the word “*bambocciona*” (big doll, puppet).<sup>25</sup>

At night, on the high seas, Nivasio meets the woman again, but this time in a dream. He clearly doesn’t know, in the fiction, the Ovidian version of the myth, but his imagination replicates it. He becomes empowered with mythopoiesis. Towards the end of the episode, he expresses the wish to free the young woman chained to the bow of the ship.

Chained by her elbows to the prow, turning her terror-stricken eyes to me, Andromeda pleads for help from me, an unarmed Perseus. But what, oh what, can I do? Merciful and omnipotent God, grant me the strength to free my kind, beautiful little sister! (*Tragedy of Childhood*, 40)

*Incatenata per i gomiti alla prora, volgendo a me gli occhi revulsi dal terrore, Andromeda invoca soccorso al mio inerme perseismo. Ma io che posso, che posso? Dio pietoso e onnipotente, concedimi tanto di forza da liberare la mia buona, la mia bella sorellina!* (“Tragedia dell’infanzia,” 493)

In the end, a myth mostly related to misogyny and patriarchy in late modern interpretations is defused, in Savinio’s imaginative reappropriation, through a form of emotional identification, through empathy, and through a neat erasure of the castrating figure of Medusa.<sup>26</sup>

Even though modern reality tries to treat her as an ordinary object, Nivasio gets progressively closer to Andromeda’s true nature, and he finally discovers that she is not a terrifying virgin to be conquered by defeating feminine monsters, but rather a melancholic, desexualized sister who needs help. His ingenuous mythopoiesis turns an unexciting object into a fabulous rewritten myth. A similar enigmatic domestication of the myth can also assist in interpreting de Chirico’s main attempt to revive the ancient fable.

### Interchangeable Titles for a Kitsch Disenchantment

De Chirico sent a painting titled *Perseo libera Andromeda* to the XXIII Venice Biennale (fig. 2).<sup>27</sup> It is signed, in Latin, “*Giorgio de Chirico pictor optimus pinxit*,” and it was almost certainly completed in 1940. At that point the painter had already consumed the main vein of his initial Parisian and Ferrarese inspiration (Queneau’s “first” phase) and had concluded the romantic period of his mature painting (already “bad” in Queneau’s terms).<sup>28</sup> Though recognized as a master of modernism, in 1942 de Chirico mostly sent to Venice works inspired by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century masters; he pursued a sort of high-quality bad taste painting, ironically forswearing his own vanguardist eminence. The picture dedicated to Andromeda, however, is quite puzzling. The subject is of course antique, and the pictorial technique is visibly outdated, with baroque draperies and an oily, quite pasty cloudy sky. Today we could perhaps



▲  
Fig. 2. Giorgio de Chirico, *Perseo libera Andromeda or Ruggiero libera Angelica* (Perseus Frees Andromeda, or Ruggiero Frees Angelica), 1940–41, oil on canvas, 90 x 118 cm, private collection, Rome, Italy. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome, Italy.

define it as vintage or nostalgic, but it lacks both the serenity of Attican classicism and the novelty of avant-garde solutions. At the same time, some devices attributable only to a late modern visual rhetoric are evident: the nude in the foreground, for instance, looks like the result of a collage, its tones and hues do not harmonize with the rest of the canvas, and its iconography and emotional attitude are clearly out of place.

Several interpretations have been proposed to solve the disturbing incoherence of this kitsch masterpiece, whose classical inspiration is belied by a number of tiny details: the position of the protagonist and the absence of any chain, Perseus's incongruous mount, the monster's tail, the spear instead of the sword and so on. Flavio Fergonzi has recently read the work as an allegory of the impossibility of painting in modernity, considering its classical source as the only theatrical space available for the polemic *mise-en-scene* of the end of art itself.<sup>29</sup> Mario Ursino instead insists on the autobiographical value of the scene, noticing that the model for Andromeda's figure is Giorgio's wife Isabella and proposing a psychological subtext for the mythical subject.<sup>30</sup> Most critics agree on the liminality of the painting and on its multiple literary and iconographical references, which imply a look not only to classical antiquity but also to its major artistic revivals. As a consequence, the most cited names for comparisons are those of Piero

30 di Cosimo, Rubens, Delacroix and of course Böcklin. Rather than challenging these interpretations, I intend to complicate the implications of this work with reference to de Chirico's "impossible classicism," adding the naked figure in the foreground to the gallery of Andromedas explored by the brothers.

While fascist artists, between the wars, were trying to dismiss any filter between their new figurations and their visual or literary *auctoritates*—pretending to literally revive and faithfully modernize the glory of the ancient empire in Mussolini's third Rome—de Chirico accepts the impossibility of directly looking at classical antiquity as if it was an absolute, autonomous object. His version of the most represented scene of Andromeda's myth is therefore contaminated by the memory of later, related subjects, and Andromeda herself—again—is not a young terrified virgin but a melancholic grown woman with a twentieth-century hairstyle and fashionable jewelry. For this reason, I believe, the artist felt free to sell the work with a different title, *Ruggiero libera Angelica*, which reveals his explicit intention to build the painting as a balanced mass of non-hierarchical remakes of the same archetype: as a stratigraphic section of many superimposed "motherless girls." The new title, alluding to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, is still used in catalogues and monographs.<sup>31</sup> Perseus clearly wears sixteenth-century armor in the painting. Classical myths are our contemporaries in Savinio's fiction; they survive to modernity as everyday objects that can be recognized by those who are at the same time both new and ancient. De Chirico, similarly, makes their recognizable elements collapse into their own subsequent genealogical elaborations, creating a mixture that cannot be traced back to a single positive origin.

To explain the spear brandished by the hero and the absence of wings on his horse and on his feet, the viewer has to add another layer and consider the knight as a representation not only of Perseus and Ariosto's character Ruggiero, but also of Saint George. (Such a hypothesis adds credibility to Ursino's autobiographical interpretation of the scene: an identification of Perseus/Ruggiero with Saint George could represent a way for Giorgio to give his own name to the savior, and the Jewish origins of Isabella would make the slain creature an allegory of Nazism at the eve of the German occupation of Italy.) In my view, the most important thing is to notice how wide a gallery of motives and episodes, all connected by a stratified genetic bond, de Chirico's visual philology is able to fit into a single classical *sujet*, treated as an utterly familiar scene. After all, what is the dying creature on the foreshore if not a descendant of Ingres's monster in *Roger délivrant Angélique*, with the same tusks, red reptile tongue, and aghast eye (fig. 3)? And does not the compositional relation between its open jaws and the rampant horse remind us of the vertical tension of the dragons killed by Saint George in both Paolo Uccello's masterpiece and Cosmé Tura's Ferrarese fresco (figs. 4–6)?

A very similar stratigraphy of iconic dragons is included in de Chirico's posthumous novel *Monsieur Dudron*, started in 1934 but never finished. As recent studies have concluded, Giorgio abandoned the literary project in the same years that he was painting the enigmatic Andromeda, but not before publishing a rich excerpt in the journal *Prospettive*, directed by one of the founders of Italian magic realism, Curzio Malaparte.<sup>32</sup> In the excerpt, a short paragraph titled *Le cose più inverosimili* (the most



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 Fig. 3. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Roger et Angelique* (Ruggiero and Angelica), 1819, oil on canvas, 147 x 190 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photo © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.



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 Fig. 4. Paolo Uccello, *San Giorgio e il drago* (Saint George and the Dragon), about 1470, oil on canvas, 55.6 x 74.2 cm, National Gallery, London, UK. Photo © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, New York.



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 Fig. 5. Cosme Tura, *San Giorgio e la principessa* (Saint George and the Princess), about 1469, tempera on canvas, 349 x 304 cm, Museo del Duomo, Ferrara, Italy. Photo © Scala / Art Resource, New York.

unlikely things) includes a vision of a common garden lizard that gets transformed into the three mythical monsters I have identified in the 1940 painting: the one petrified by Perseus, the one killed by Saint George, and the one fought by Ruggiero. One could call it an untimely, or stratified, lizard.

We have everything around and close to us,—Mister Dudron used to say—the most unlikely things. The most fabulous monsters are here, within reach; take a look, for instance, at the lizard that darts on the wall of your garden and rests where the wall is warmer because it has been for longer under the scorching rays of the summer sun; that lizard is the dragon of myths, of religions and legends. It is the dragon grounded by Saint George, who defeated the spirit of evil, it is the dragon pierced by the spear of Perseus to save Andromeda, the one beheaded by Ruggiero's sword to save Angelica.



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Fig. 6. Details from de Chirico, 1940–41, Ingres, Tura, and Uccello (photo courtesy of wikiArt).

*Noi abbiamo tutto intorno e vicino a noi,—soleva dire il signor Dudron—le cose più inverosimili. I mostri più favolosi stanno qui, a due passi; guardate per esempio quella lucertola che guizza sopra il muro del vostro giardino e si ferma là ove il muro è più caldo perché da più tempo esposto ai torridi raggi del sole estivo; quella lucertola è il drago dei miti, delle religioni e delle leggende. È il drago atterrato da S. Giorgio, vincitore dello spirito del male, è il drago trafitto dalla lancia di Perseo per salvare Andromeda, decapitato dal brando di Ruggiero per salvare Angelica.<sup>33</sup>*

Andromeda's unimpressed, almost vacant look in the painting sent to Venice the following year seems to echo Dudron's words: the most fantastic things are here, at our fingertips. Significantly, the issue of *Prospettive* in which these lines appeared was devoted to the Italian alternatives to French and Nordic surrealisms: "a magical without magic" or "surreal without surrealism" as Gianfranco Contini termed it five years later in his famous anthology *L'Italie Magique*.<sup>34</sup> The lizard in this paragraph could also be

34 the dragon in Savinio's *Tragedy of Childhood*, whose voice terrifies Nivasio even though his parents explain that it is just a mechanical roar produced by the engines of the ship. Both the maiden, Andromeda, and the monster are recognized beyond the tedious surface of reality by the cultivated, yet infant eyes of the metaphysicians/archaeologists.

The autobiographical mash-up of classical relics, Renaissance rewritings, and romantic irony that informs de Chirico's post-surrealism in the 1940 canvas could also be seen as a sort of cultural and iconographic transvestitism, a masquerade connected to the parade of disguised heroes and divinities in Savinio's *Tragedia dell'infanzia*.<sup>35</sup> In an article that appeared in *L'Espresso* in 1962, a stroll in Giorgio's house is described as a visit to an extraordinary and hallucinating museum, and the painting is clearly mentioned as if it were one of the costumes worn by the landlord and his wife:

It is the first time that I visit someone's mansion and the master of the house walks up to me in a costume—and it is a nineteenth-century costume, lent by the Opera House, green with silver buttons, white silk cuffs and collar. While the mistress of the house is completely naked and, seated on red velvet, wears only a string of pearls around her neck. I've never seen anyone changing dress so quickly. I can't even fully appreciate the great green jacket before he has changed to a different seventeenth-century costume, a scarlet one, and puts on a big felt hat with black feathers on it. I walk just a few more steps and he sports a late fifteenth-century red and grey suit with golden ribbons. His wife, in turn, rapidly dresses up again, adorned with a coat and a hat in panther furs (the pearls vanish, replaced by earrings and a glove). A moment later, she is an eighteenth-century dame, but as soon as I get to the living room she is already naked again, and her gaze, under her curly blond hair, is definitely brazen. Obviously I am walking through the extraordinary and almost hallucinating museum that is de Chirico's house . . .

*È la prima volta che, andando a fare una visita, il padrone di casa mi viene incontro in costume, ed è un costume dell'Ottocento, che gli ha prestato il Teatro dell'Opera, verde con bottoni di argento, polsi e colletto di seta bianca. Mentre la padrona di casa è completamente nuda e, seduta sul velluto rosso, ha unico capo di vestiario un filo di perle al collo. Né ho mai visto gente capace di cambiarsi così in fretta. Non faccio in tempo infatti ad ammirare la gran giacca verde che lui è già bell'e dentro un altro costume secentesco, scarlatto, e in testa ha un cappellone di feltro guarnito di piume nere. Il tempo di andare avanti di qualche metro, e sfoggia un tardo Cinquecento rosso e grigio con cordoni d'oro. La moglie a sua volta si riveste rapidamente, per mostrarsi in pelliccia e berretto di pantera (e via le perle dal collo per mettersi gli orecchini ed infilarsi un guanto). Subito dopo è una dama del Settecento, ma ora che arrivo in sala da pranzo, è di nuovo nuda, e il suo è uno sguardo, decisamente di sfida, sotto i capelli biondi e ricciolini. Chiaro che sto percorrendo quello straordinario e quasi allucinante museo che è casa de Chirico . . .*<sup>36</sup>

The cultural strata that simultaneously appear on the 1940 canvas of the *pictor optimus* are not unearthed and rediscovered, but rather recognized and mapped, as in the quiet lizard-epiphany of *Monsieur Dudron*. The de Chirico brothers' archaeological creative method, thematized in a number of Giorgio's paintings, is not just a form of antiquarianism, of positivistic imitation of the classics, or of classicist reaction to their previous style (fig. 7). It is a way to represent the simultaneity of the strata that compose modern resurgences of classical antiquity.



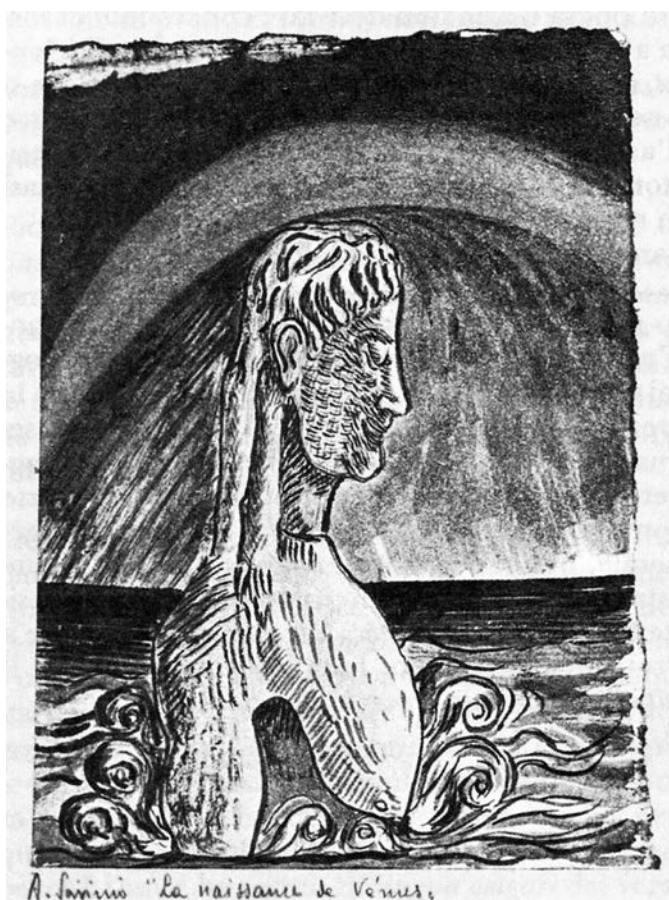
Fig. 7. Giorgio de Chirico, *Gli archeologi* (The Archaeologists), 1927, oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Photo © Alessandro Vasari / Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy.

### **Motherless Girls: Andromeda, Angelica, and Aphrodite Anadyomene**

The use of Ariosto's Angelica as a possible understudy of Ovid's Andromeda in the de Chiricos' stratigraphy is also a key gesture to establish a mediated connection between ancient Greece and modern Italy, and allows the brothers to position themselves in the only place where a new classicism seemed possible in a decaying Europe. After all, by choosing Italy as their homeland, they refused the nation that welcomed and acclaimed them most, France, and its modern aesthetics.

In the 1930s, Savinio identified Ariosto with a special kind of intelligence, irony, which is—according to his 1934 text *Mangiatore di abissi*—an Italian way to domesticate

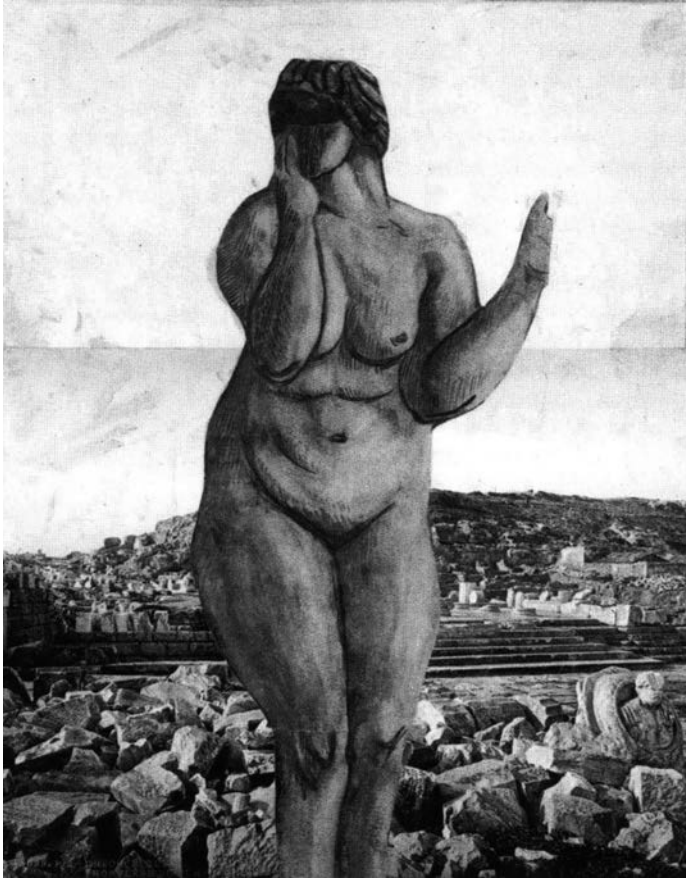




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 Fig. 8. Alberto Savinio, *La Naissance de Venus* (The Birth of Venus), 1925–26, ink and pencil on paper, 26 x 20.5 cm, private collection, Rome, Italy. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Reproduced with permission of Ruggero Savinio.

fantasy.<sup>37</sup> Implicitly criticizing the French surrealists, the artist chose Flammariion as the perfect example of an anti-Italian author. At a time when Ferrarese fascists were trying to use the figure of Ariosto to revive the Renaissance in parallel with Mussolini's new *Romanitas*, Savinio and de Chirico instead chose him as a junction between their modernist use of Greco-Roman legacy and antiquity itself. Such an attitude towards the "Classici" is clearly readable in one of the most important articles written by Savinio about metaphysical painting. In it, the author reconstructs an ideal evolution of modern art up to the birth of a new classicism represented by the early works of his brother. Such a destiny, he claims, has its exact parallel in the evolution of ancient sculpture.

Within the history of Greek statuary it is possible to establish, with chronological precision, the progressive phases of the gradual dissolving of sadness, so gloomily represented in the whole of the archaic period (closed phase), and to get by degrees to the unwinding



▲  
 Fig. 9. Alberto Savinio, *La Naissance de Venus* (The Birth of Venus), 1925–26, ink and pencil on paper, 27.5 x 22.3 cm, private collection, Rome, Italy. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Reproduced with permission of Ruggero Savinio.

of that sadness: from the xoanon, monomorphic and hermetic, to the first detachment of the limbs from the body, to the progressive movement and, regarding facial expressions, to the first statue that smiles and, doing so, becomes a prelude to Classicism—and therefore reaches the fulfillment of its organic and spiritual movement.

*Nella storia della statuaria greca, si possono stabilire con esattezza cronologica le successioni del graduale sciogliersi della tristezza, così cupamente affermata in tutto il periodo arcaico (fase chiusa), per arrivare gradatamente allo spianamento di quella tristezza: dallo xoanon, monomorfo ed ermetico, al primo distacco delle membra dal corpo, al progressivo movimento, e, nei riguardi dell'espressione, alla prima statua che sorride, precludendo al classicismo—che penetra cioè nel pieno adempimento del suo moto organico e spirituale. (Savinio, “Anadioménon,” 59)*

It is interesting to read this passage, written in 1919, alongside Savinio's first approaches to the visual medium. Fittingly, in the latest Italian edition of his essays on art and aes-



▲  
 Fig. 10. Arnold Böcklin, *Ruggiero befreit Angelica aus den Klauen des Drachen* (Ruggiero frees Angelica from the Claws of the Dragon), ca. 1880, oil on wood, 82.5 x 55 cm, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany, Inv.-Nr. M 5047 (lost art work). © Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany.

thetics, the text is illustrated by *La Naissance de Venus*, a drawing in which the rising divinity of the title is represented by a smiling idol emerging from the waters (fig. 8).<sup>38</sup> The image is perfectly coherent with the excerpt from the 1919 essay. However, in the same period and using the same title—a French version of the title of the 1919 essay, “*Anadyomenon*”—the artist also produced a different picture, composed by a collage of a drawing on a photograph (fig. 9). In it, a background of Greek ruins in black and white is dominated by a majestic feminine figure with no face. Such an Aphrodite could seem, at first sight, a primitive goddess—another archaic idol, with limbs detaching from the body—but it is actually a literal visual quotation from a painting by Böcklin, the main source of inspiration for de Chirico’s romantic/Ariostean paintings of the

1920s.<sup>39</sup> Not from one of Böcklin's majestic Venuses rising from the waters, which could offer a direct genealogical model, but from his romantic version of Ariosto's Angelica, the 1880 painting *Ruggiero befreit Angelika aus den Klauen des Drachen*—in which the princess is about to be covered with a heavy red mantle that looks identical, in its pictorial values, to the one on which de Chirico's Andromeda/Angelica/Isabella sits in the 1940 painting (fig. 10). The re-semanticization of Böcklin's Angelica has a dense symbolic meaning in Savinio's collage, a multi-layered work that can be read as an emblem of the collapsing gesture that informs the de Chiricos' stratigraphic creative method. The original iconography is just slightly modified in order to transform the girl into an archetype: no facial expression, no interpretable hand gestures, no emotional and no physiognomical identity. Like de Chirico's dragon (which is Ovid's dragon, Ariosto's dragon and, at the same time, a common lizard and the spirit of evil defeated by Saint George), she is Aphrodite, Angelica, Andromeda, and, ultimately, modern art.<sup>40</sup>

In the dazzling kaleidoscope of Savinio's stratigraphical references, metaphysical aesthetics is then a new classicism, rising from a fertile cultural ground. It is comparable to Venus Anadyomene, who rises from the waves seeded by Chronos: another Ovidian myth, another "girl born without a mother," to quote Ovid (and Montesquieu, and Picabia). The smiling kuros rising from a primordial sea in the first drawing is a more hermetic equivalent of the faceless Angelica rising from the ruins of ancient Greek culture, clearly represented by the archeological background. As in a Nietzschean eternal recurrence, the goddess of beauty rises again as Ovid's maiden, who rises again as Ariosto's princess, who rises again as a muse of metaphysical narrative and painting. All of these strata simultaneously compose an ideal art that should be simultaneously new and ancient, just like the ship in Savinio's tale, the woman in de Chirico's painting—or in Böcklin's picture itself, which is a romantic version of a Renaissance version of the Latin version of an original Greek myth. This particular kind of cultural simultaneity—inherently different from the merely optical or oneiric ones developed by Cubism, Surrealism, and Futurism—this untimely recurrence, this stratigraphy, is the substance of the "impossible classicism" of the de Chirico brothers' multimedia work. And it makes it possible.

## Notes

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1. Ovid, *Amores*; *Medicamina Faciei Feminæ*; *Ars Anatoria*; *Remedia Amoris*, ed. Edward J. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36. The epigraph draws from line 42 of elegy 15 in book one of *Amores*.

2. This is not an uncommon technique in Picabia's depiction of machines. See Arnauld Pierre, "Sources inédites pour l'oeuvre machiniste de Francis Picabia: 1918–1922," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art française* (1991): 255–81.

3. The subject will later fill an entire book: Francis Picabia, *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Imprimeries réunies, 1918). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

4. On this Ovidian obsession in particular, and on the question of Ovid's afterlife in modernity in general, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

5. I am obviously referring to the methodology described in Michel Foucault's *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). However, as my title openly reveals, this study tries to propose a more specific method, tailored on (and inspired by) the case-study: this is an article on literary and aesthetic reception of the past, not on epistemology. I will discuss the use of the word "stratigraphy" (which, as a metaphor, comes from Foucault, but also directly refers to the switch of paradigm triggered in the late Seventies by Edward Harris' "proper" archaeological method) further on, and I hope it will be apparent that its metaphorical implications are related to both the creative method that I am describing and my own interpretation of texts and visual works. In any event, my use of the archaeological term (both in a thematic and in a methodological sense) is also rooted in the seminal "Archeologies of the Modern," ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Micheal Shanks, special issue, *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 1 (2004).

6. The conception of history as an eternal recurrence is famously central in the work of the German thinker, who reflected on Pythagorean cyclic representations of time in his *Untimely Meditations*. Untimeliness is also at the base of his anomalous use of figures, which places his writings at the interface of philosophy, rhetoric, and actual literature or even poetry—a liminal position to which de Chirico's painting, as recently posited by Ara Merjian, actively aspired. See Steven Hicks and Alan Rosenberg, "Nietzsche and Untimeliness: The 'Philosopher of the Future' as the Figure of Disruptive Wisdom," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 25 (2003): 1–34. For the influence on de Chirico, see in particular Ara H. Merjian, "The Nietzschean Method," in *Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City: Nietzsche, Modernism, Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 1–29.

7. The Ethiopian setting of the myth is also interesting in relation to the general fascination with African aesthetics of the Parisian avant-garde. The search for a non-European antiquity, for models and traditions there were extraneous to classicism, is another crucial aspect of the conflict between origins and originality in modernist poetics and aesthetics (also in the Italian case, especially because of the early work of the Egyptian-born leader of Futurism). This specific trait does not seem to be central to the de Chiricos' uses of the myth.

8. On the topic of classicism in the de Chiricos' work, this article is particularly indebted to four previous studies: Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Utopische Vergangenheit: Archäologie und moderne Kultur* (Berlin: Mann, 1976); Paolo Baldacci, "Le classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico, théorie et méthode," *Chaiers du Musée National de l'Art Moderne* 11 (1983): 18–31; *L'idea del classico, 1916–1932: temi classici nell'arte italiana degli anni Venti*, ed. Elena Pontiggia (Milan: Fabbri, 1992); and Keala J. Jewell, "Afterword: *The Brothers Look Back*," in *The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), 191–200. On Savinio's obsession with Ovid's and Apuleius's myths in particular, see Claudia Zudini, "La presenza degli animali nell'opera narrativa di Alberto Savinio," *Italies* 12 (2008): 299–318.

9. Marisa Volpi, "Classicità impossibile," in *Dei ed Eroi: Classicità e mito fra '800 e '900*, ed. Maria Teresa Benedetti (Rome: De Luca, 1996), 63–75.

10. Alberto Savinio, "'Anadioménon,' Principi di valutazione dell'arte contemporanea," in *La nascita di Venere. Scritti sull'arte*, ed. Giuseppe Montesano and Vincenzo Trione (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), 45–63, 54, 57.

11. "L'arte che edifica non una civiltà, ma un mondo. Che perfeziona la vita, che perfeziona l'uomo. Che umanizza i mostri, che dà una personalità agli oggetti, un'anima alle cose, che fa scendere le statue dagli zoccoli e le aggrega alla nostra compagnia. Che esclude a poco a poco quanto c'è di bestiale, di duro, di settario, di ottuso, di ostile, di incomprendibile nelle cose, nella natura, nell'uomo. Che perfeziona la biologia, che mette tregua alla lotta feroce dei sessi . . . Questo l'arte moderna, l'arte italiana ha il fine nonchè di rappresentare ma di attuare" (Savinio, "Pittori italiani del '900 in Francia," in *Italiani nel mondo* [Florence: Sansoni, 1942], 551–67, 566).

12. One of the earliest texts that was destined to be collected in *Hermaphrodito* is the story of a statue that animates and gets off the column on which it has been for centuries (Savinio, "Ferrara . . . Partenza," in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi* [Milan: Adelphi, 1995], 69–71). Also de Chirico's poems and proses written during the brothers' sojourn in Ferrara (which coincides with the metaphysical phase

of his painting) contain references to the motif. See for instance de Chirico, "Lora inquietante," in *Il meccanismo del pensiero* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), 54. Animated statues (often of ancient people that revive to guide the author through a modern but at the same time ancient reality) later appear in many of Savinio's books, such as *Dico a te Clio*, *Ascolto il tuo cuore città*, and *Narrate uomini la vostra storia*.

13. This was one of the first literary works by Savinio that received national attention: Jacobbi reviewed the first edition in 1938, underlining not only the original balance between avant-garde and tradition, but also the influence that Savinio's poetics might have had on the French Surrealists. See Ruggero Jacobbi, "Tragedia dell'infanzia," *Circoli* 5–6 (1938): 416–21.

"La voce del drago" is the central chapter of the novel and was previously published separately twice: in *Illustrazione Italiana*, January 29, 1922 and in *Fronte*, June 1931. See Savinio, "Tragedia dell'infanzia," in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi*, 487–93.

14. Savinio, in the first edition, dates the original draft back to 1919, but he later amended that to 1920; see Savinio, *Preface to Dico a te Clio* (Florence: Sansoni, 1946), 1–7, 5. Most of the chapters appeared autonomously in journals and newspapers (*Illustrazione Italiana*, *Fronte*, *La Tribuna*, *La Nazione*, and *Spettatore Italiano*) from 1922 to 1933.

15. About these name-games, defined as "una catena di epifanie verbali," a chain of verbal epiphanies, Edoardo Sanguineti wrote that "ogni nomen . . . occulta un omen, cela un numen" ("Il segreto di Lanarà," in *Scribilli* [Milan: Feltrinelli 1985], 91–93). The episodes are in Savinio, "Tragedia dell'infanzia," in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi*, 476–80, 481–86, 506–27.

16. Only a mysterious goddess, who appears in the final sections of the book and only interacts with Nivasio, is immune to the modernist ironic strategy of *Tragedia dell'infanzia*: she looks genuinely divine and her mystery remains intact at both ends of the hermeneutic circle. Such a character, though, is not the result of a classical resurgence, and even though she occupies more than one chapter, she has no name. On the other hand, Andromeda is, at the beginning, only a fascinating name, and the progressive revelation of her identity passes through different stages.

17. Savinio, *Tragedy of Childhood*, trans. John Shepley (Marlboro, VT: Marlboro Press, 1991), 48.

18. Savinio, "Anicet ou le Panorama di Louis Aragon," *La Ronda* XI–XII (1921): 812–16.

19. Govoni hosted the two brothers on their very first sojourn in Ferrara, and appears in Giorgio's writing of that period. At Bragaglia's gallery (Casa d'Arte Bragaglia), de Chirico held his first Italian exhibition in 1919, and at his theater (Teatro degli Indipendenti) Savinio got in touch with the intellectual society of Rome and later produced his play *Capitano Ulisse*. Far more engaged, as is well known, with French avant-garde circles (Apollinaire's *Les Soirées de Paris* and Tzara's "Dada Manifesto," in particular, and later the Surrealist movement of course), Savinio refused the iconoclasm of Futurism but, at the beginning of his Ferrarese phase, he got in touch with the movement. Soffici presented him and his brother to the Italian readership of the Futurist journal *Lacerba* in 1915, suggesting that Marinetti would have loved Savinio's music (see Ardengo Soffici, "Italiani all'estero," *Lacerba* 2 [1914]: 207). As a matter of fact, Marinetti indeed loved "la meravigliosa tempesta musicale di Savinio," as he wrote to Soffici: see *Archivi del futurismo*, ed. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, vol. 1 (Rome: De Luca, 1958), 344. In addition, some of the chapters of *Hermaphrodito* (in particular "Dio-ruotalibera") follow the experimental syntax of futurist "sintetismo."

20. In his most famous 1908 Futurist ode, "All'automobile da corsa," Marinetti calls his "automobile ebbra di spazio" a "formidabile mostro giapponese," and lovingly talks to it while describing its mechanical body as it was a seductive beast. The first title of the poem—originally written in French—was linked to Andromeda's myth: "À mon Pégas."

21. As Savinio writes two chapters before the Andromeda scene: "Andavo consumando l'infanzia in un borgo marittimo della Tessaglia, in quella stessa Jolco che vide salpare la prima nave" (*Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi*, 499).

22. Savinio, "Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare," in *Hermaphrodito e altri romanzi*, 565–688. Almost entirely published in eight issues of the journal *Italiano* (1935–38), the novel was printed in full by Mondadori in 1941. In it, most of the atmosphere and the characters recall *Tragedia dell'infanzia*, but the prose is more cohesive and traditional.

23. Giovanni Pascoli, *Il fanciullino* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982). *Il fanciullino* is a sort of manifesto of Pascoli's poetics, published in its final version in 1907. On the distance between Pascoli and Savinio,

42 see Rosita Tordi, *Il diadema di Thoth: Itinerari per una diversa esplorazione del reale nella letteratura italiana del primo Novecento* (Rome: Edizioni dell'ateneo, 1981), 134.

24. See Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, trans. Katheleen Baldwin, Richard Dixon, David Gibbons, Ann Goldstein, Gerard Slowey, Martin Thom, and Pamela Williams, ed. Michael Cesar and Franco D'Intino (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 727. (I am using the page numbers of the original manuscript, as is the common use). According to Leopardi, imagination is a creative force typical of children and, at the same time, of the ancients: "esclusivamente propria degli antichi" (57). In the evolution of Western literature (a process compared to the ageing of a human being), such an antique energy has been replaced—already among the Latins—with feelings, affection, sentimentality: only two authors have been able to keep being imaginative (i.e. unchanged, not evolved, still infantile) and are therefore considerable as original and truly antique. Those two authors are Ariosto and, of course, Ovid.

Savinio himself seems to aspire to the same modern antiquity that characterizes Leopardi's Ovid and Ariosto through his infantile counterpart: a juvenile intellect still capable of classical imagination.

25. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.673–77: "vidit Abantiades, nisi quod levis aura capillos / moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu / marmoreum ratus esset opus; trahit inscius ignes / et stupet et visæ correptus imagine formæ / pæne suas quater est oblitus in aere pennas" (Oxford Classical Texts: *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. Richard J. Tarrant [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 118–19). Stanley Lombardo translates these few lines as follows: "When Perseus, Abas' great grandson, first saw her chained to the rock, he would have thought she was a marble statue except that a light breeze was rippling her hair and warm tears flowed down from her eyes. Perseus was stunned. Entranced by the vision of the beauty before him, he almost forgot to keep beating his wings" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Stanley Lombardo [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010], 113). Among the many interpretations of the theme of mannequins and puppets in Metaphysical art, the most recent and convincing is in Merjian, "Ecce Homo (Orthopedicus): The Seer," in *Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City*, 219–65.

26. Within the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, Medusa's figure has been related by Freud to the menace of castration. Perseus is able to defeat the dragon only because he has previously killed the petrifying she-monster: Angelica is the dominated female prize that he gets after having defeated her aggressive counterpart. See Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth, 1961), 273–74, 273. Such an interpretation has been deconstructed and de-masculinized by feminist critics: see for instance Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

27. Painted in 1940, this oil is number 52 in the third volume of the general catalog of de Chirico's painting: *Catalogo generale Giorgio de Chirico: Opere dal 1908 al 1970*, ed. Claudio Bruni Sakraischik and Isabella Far (Milan: Electa, 1971). Owned by a private collector, it has not been exhibited often, but it appears in the catalog of the Roman great 1982 retrospective at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (no. 95): *Giorgio de Chirico 1888–1978*, ed. Pia Vivarelli (Rome: De Luca, 1981), 186.

28. This phase has been defined as Baroque, even if the same old metaphysical balance between classical antiquity and a modern perspective seems to actually resist the artist's disenchantment (Giorgio De Chirico, *Romantico e Barocco: gli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta*, ed. Maurizio Fagiolo dall'Arco [Florence: Farsetti, 2001]). From this perspective, I am partially embracing an idea of Maurizio Calvesi in *La Metafisica continua* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana editoriale, 2008).

29. Flavio Fergonzi, "Episodi della fortuna del Furioso nella pittura del Novecento in Italia," in *L'Orlando furioso nello specchio delle immagini*, ed. Lina Bolzoni (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 2015), 525–43.

30. Mario Ursino, *De Chirico e il museo* (Milan: Electa, 2008), 228.

31. See Domenico Guzzi, *Giorgio De Chirico: Arma virumque cano: il mito classico dell'eroe guerriero* (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1989), 57–63.

32. See the digital critical edition of the text curated by the Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica in Milan, and the attached chronology: de Chirico, "Monsieur Dudron," *Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica*, [archivio-artemetafisica.org/home-it/ricerche/monsieur-dudron/storia-e-cronologia-del-testo/](http://archivio-artemetafisica.org/home-it/ricerche/monsieur-dudron/storia-e-cronologia-del-testo/).

33. Giorgio de Chirico, "Il signor Dudron (dal romanzo di prossima pubblicazione)," *Prospettive* 5 (1940): 7–11.

34. Gianfranco Contini, "Prefazione," in *Italia magica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), 5.

35. The concept has been used to describe de Chirico's psychological attitude towards art in general; see Paolo Baldacci, "Paure, segreti e maschere in de Chirico scrittore 1911–1940 (dai Manoscritti Parigini a Il Signor Dudron)," *Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica*, [archivioartemetafisica.org/home-it/opinioni/de-chirico-scrittore/](http://archivioartemetafisica.org/home-it/opinioni/de-chirico-scrittore/).

36. I quote the article from Giorgio de Chirico, "Gli scritti critici," in *L'uomo, l'artista, il polemico: Guida alle interviste 1938–1978*, ed. Mario Ursino (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2012), 37–102, 55.

37. Alberto Savinio, "Mangiatore di abissi," in *Torre di guardia*, ed. Leonardo Sciascia (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993), 39–45.

38. The status of similar "xoana" in the de Chiricos' imagery has been recently explored by Merjian. See, in particular, the chapter "Ecce Homo (Orthopedicus)" in *Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City*, 219–63, 232–39.

39. On this phase and on Ariosto's influence, see Alessandro Giammei, "Ariosto, the Great Metaphysician," *Modern Language Notes* 132, no. 1 (2017): 135–62.

40. Here too, interestingly enough, it is possible to add an autobiographical/onomastic layer: the name of Savinio's daughter, born in 1928, was Angelica (her brother, six years later, would be named Ruggiero). Angelica is also the protagonist of an experimental novel published by Savinio in 1927, in which the Ariostean princess is not overlapped with Andromeda, but with another Ovidian mythical girl, Psyche (Savinio, "Angelica o la notte di maggio," in *Hermaphrodito e altri racconti*, 353–436).