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## Sean Theodora O'Hanlan '11 – Humanities

*De Chirico and the Dioscuri: Metahistory and a Conception of Personal Mythology*



### **Abstract**

Giorgio de Chirico's career as a modern painter was intrinsically linked to the past, as Hellenic references and classical mythology formed the core of his vision. However, his art was also intensely personal, seen in de Chirico's continuous depiction of the particular myths of the Dioscuri and the Argonaut voyage. A look to his extensive memoirs and those of his brother, Alberto Savinio, reveals the artist's preoccupation with the Argonaut and Dioscuri myths as a metaphor of self, central to his creation of a personal mythology. A chronological visual analysis of the recurring subject matter amplifies the artist's constant return to the imagery and themes that came to define much of his oeuvre. De Chirico's 1929 novel, *Hebdomeros*, is the literary equivalent of his artistic treatment of Argonautic voyages and departures.

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In 1972, the New York Cultural Center held a retrospective of de Chirico's work. Curator Donald Karshan asked de Chirico to write inscriptions in his own hand under each reproduction

in the exhibition catalogue. The result is a literary and visual portrait of the artist's life in memoirs, short reflections, and his canvases. His inscriptions provide enigmatic fragments of images and events; creating, in effect, a mysterious narrative of journey. This journey can be traced further through an examination of the Dioscuri and Argonaut myths within his oeuvre.

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### **Preface One: A Metahistorical Narrative**

In his concept of metahistory, critical theorist Hayden White states that the writing of history is a poetic act. According to White, "It is often said, of course, that historical data consist of all the artifacts, monuments, and documents created by men, and that the problem of historical thinking is to classify the forms of these phenomena and to account for their appearances in historical time."<sup>1</sup>

Histories (I include here individual histories) combine an objective chronicle of events and a narrative structure as a means of explanation. White argues that historical explanations are 'metahistorical' in that poetic literary devices are used in order to create understanding. In the same way that White identifies the 'metahistorical' basis to every historical work, I suggest that de Chirico's oeuvre is a "metahistory" that rests upon his personal philosophy of myth, nostalgia, and journey. The literary device he employs specifically is that of metonymy, or the use of a part to represent a whole. De Chirico's history can be parsed down to a sail and a train.

I lend White's theory as a means of identifying the metaphysical impulses behind the artist's largely autobiographical writing and visual work. The reoccurring tropes and themes in his work are his methods of explanation and formulation of self-narrative. Out of objective biography, his creation of a personal mythology fashioned de Chirico's unique metahistorical, metaphysical, interior story. The artist, as a historian, took a chronicle of events and created a narrative discourse in prose, as in paint, and across mediums.

### **Preface Two: The Myths of the Dioscuri and the Argonauts<sup>2</sup>**

In de Chirico's work, the two myths of the Dioscuri and the Argonauts are very important. The story of the Argonauts is that of Jason, son of Aeson, who was robbed of his rightful place as heir to the throne of Thessaly, and returned upon reaching adulthood in order to gain it back from the evil king Pelias. Pelias had been warned of Jason's impending arrival by an oracle, and challenged Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece in order to earn back his right to the throne. The fleece had been stolen and placed on the island of Colchis. Jason set out on his ship, the Argo, with a band of the fifty bravest heroes in Greece. These included, among others, Heracles, Orpheus, Peleus, and the Dioscuri. The Argonauts, as they came to be called, traveled to ports throughout the Mediterranean, where they solved local 'mysteries'<sup>3</sup> and engaged in battles. The Argonautic heroes succeeded in their quest, and the Argo returned safely to Thessaly. Jason dedicated the Golden Fleece to Zeus and obtained his right to the throne. The ship itself was dedicated to Poseidon, god of the sea.

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<sup>1</sup> White, Hayden V. *Metahistory*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.)

<sup>2</sup> Jane Reid and Chris Rohmann. *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 346-347.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting connection can be made between the Argonauts' solving of local conflicts, the 'mysteries' in which they were initiated in the various places to which they traveled, and de Chirico's conception of Nietzschean 'enigmas' within his paintings.

The myth of the Dioscuri, meaning “sons of Zeus,” is that of Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces.) The Dioscuri joined Jason and the Argonauts on their expedition to Colchis. As the twin sons of the mortal Leda, they had different fathers. Because of this, Pollux was immortal and Castor a mortal.<sup>4</sup> Each brother had distinct talents. While Castor was a renowned horseman, Pollux was a famed boxer who notably killed Amycus, the son of Poseidon, in a fistfight. According to the myth, as a mortal, Castor was killed.<sup>5</sup> Pollux pleaded with Zeus to share his immortality in order to revive his dead brother. Some accounts tell how the two brothers split their time between Olympus and Hades; according to Homer, they were alive on alternate days. Together, they became the Gemini constellation.

The Dioscuri were worshiped as protectors of travelers and seafarers from the sixth century B.C. as the twin lights of St. Elmo’s fire.<sup>6</sup> Their location within the Gemini constellation led to their association with navigation. In Euripides’ *Electra*, they appear as protectors of sailors and champions “of just and moral men.”<sup>7</sup> During the Roman period, the Dioscuri were depicted as horsemen, and a temple to the twins was erected in the Roman Forum. Equestrian statues depicting the two deities remain in the Piazza Quirinale on Monte Cavallo in Rome to this day.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1) De Chirico, who spent the majority of his life in Rome, was undoubtedly familiar with these statues

The Dioscuri’s different talents but shared immortality recalls de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio’s divergence in forms of art, but shared sources of inspiration.<sup>9</sup> The depiction of these two myths is consistently found within his oeuvre in the ever-present renderings of horsemen and the sea. The Dioscuri represent the twin brothers, while the Argonauts come to represent de Chirico’s life of journey.

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<sup>4</sup> Alternative accounts assert that Castor was the son of the mortal king Tyndareus of Sparta, while Pollux was the immortal son of Zeus. Thus, the two are half brothers, which bears a connection to Alberto Savinio’s name change in 1909. This is also relevant in the opposition between de Chirico’s realm of painting, and Savinio’s fields of music and writing.

<sup>5</sup> It is notable that Peter Paul Rubens depicts this scene in his 1618 painting, *The Rape of the Daughter’s of Leucippus*. De Chirico was greatly influenced by the Baroque artist, and would later take up Rubens’ style.

<sup>6</sup> An electrical weather phenomena generated by thunderstorms that takes on the form of a bright blue or purple glow emitted from pointed structures, such as the mast of a ship. Caused by luminous plasma, observations of the phenomena in Ancient Greece led sailors to associate the appearance of these ‘fire balls’ with the mythical twins Castor and Pollux.

<sup>7</sup> This is a text that de Chirico was likely familiar with due to his knowledge of antiquity. I suggest that the role of the Dioscuri twins as protectors of “moral” men would be a trait de Chirico would favor, for he constantly espouses his disappointment at the immoral behavior of artists and men of the modern world.

<sup>8</sup> See plate.

<sup>9</sup> An examination Alberto Savinio’s writing deepens this inquiry of personal mythology and metahistory. Savinio did paint to a limited extent as well, but his artwork will not be discussed in the bounds of this paper. Rather, his writing will be used to enrich a study of de Chirico’s paintings, as the themes and images are quite similar. He was, primarily, a musician and a writer.

## Introduction

I believe that a veritable modern mythology is in the process of formation. To Giorgio de Chirico belongs the function of fixing it imperishably in memory.<sup>10</sup>

Andre Breton

Giorgio de Chirico's interest in mythology is reflected in the metaphysical compositions for which he is primarily known. Critics and art historians regard his later work as irrelevant, and it has only been in the last thirty years that this tendency towards periodization has been revised. Historians have cursorily failed to recognize the trajectory of de Chirico's depiction of self, found in the Argonaut-Dioscuri image. His conception of self as an Argonaut figure finds widespread reference in both his art and writing. An examination of his brother Alberto Savinio's writing strengthens these concepts of personal mythology and metahistory.

While de Chirico scholars have examined the artist's incorporation of mythological figures such as Ariadne, the equally pervasive Dioscuri myth has curiously not received similar scholarly attention. That is not to say that the myth is not acknowledged, for it is often referenced in regards to the collective identity of Giorgio de Chirico and Savinio. Though the importance of the theme has been explored in scholarship since the 1980's, analysis and understanding of the long visual record and the full extent of its' biographical significance has not been traced. A cohesive visual analysis of the myth that de Chirico depicted so often, in the context of both mens' memoirs and de Chirico's 1929 novel *Hebdomeros*, reveals a deeply personal connection replete with nostalgia for his childhood companion and origins in Greece. The artist's life can be seen as a journey, explaining his use of the Argonaut-Dioscuri myth as a recurrent metaphor of self.

I suggest that current historical conception of de Chirico and Savinio as Dioscuri fails to appreciate the extent to which the myth is representative of their artistic careers, the symbiosis of the brothers as companions, and their roles as travelers on a journey. In contrast to the scholarly tendency to delineate periods within de Chirico's early career, I have grouped the recurring compositions depicting the mythological twins independently of period or style. I have worked to place the visual works within the context of the memoirs and prose published by both de Chirico brothers. These myths are not illustrative of a single phase of de Chirico's development, but rather an obsessive theme that he bears with him on his travels through his life on the European subcontinent and across his seven decades of artistic production.

De Chirico's paintings and the additional lens of Savinio's writing, provide artistic mirrors of lives of constant departure and voyage. Events of their childhood and early careers, and then the paintings and literature, provide rich understanding of the brothers' conception of self. De Chirico's 1929 novel *Hebdomeros* is the literary equivalent of his artistic treatment of Argonautic voyages and departures, and the *stimmung*<sup>11</sup> created by his depiction of trains, ships,

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<sup>10</sup> Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Giorgio De Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne* (Philadelphia, 2002), curated by Michael R. Taylor, p. 192.

<sup>11</sup> De Chirico admired the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche immensely, writing extensive commentary upon the German philosopher: "His discovery was a strange and profound poetry, mysterious and infinitely solitary, based on the *stimmung* based, I say, on the *stimmung* of an autumn afternoon, when the sky is clear and the shadows are longer than during the summer... This extraordinary sensation can be felt..." As translated in De Chirico, Giorgio, with introduction by Margaret Crosland.

Greece, and Italian *piazze*. Hebdomeros' constant pattern of departure and arrival parallels de Chirico's own traversing of the globe, as both fictional hero and artist sought to discover enigmas, and unearth what de Chirico pointed to as "the other side of the coin"—that being, the metaphysical realities of memories and loci around him.

Returning to Forward One and the theory of metahistory, the Argonauts and Dioscuri emerge in the two brothers' memoirs and art as autobiographical symbols, and de Chirico's creation of a personal metahistory can be seen. A statement from de Chirico's memoirs is quite revealing, "Basically the artist likes what reminds him of certain visions that he had in his mind and in his instincts, and which are his secret world that no one can take away from him."<sup>12</sup> Over the course of his career, de Chirico constantly returned to the theme of the Argonauts and Dioscuri as a personal emblem of his relationship with Savinio, and their collective vision of life as a journey. De Chirico and Savinio's art is helpful to their fellow travelers in the way the Dioscuri, as Argonauts, aided in the quest for the Golden Fleece.

This paper is separated into four sections. The first will provide a biography of the brothers, the critical reception of de Chirico's work over the course of the twentieth century, the discussion of the myth of Ariadne in his work, and recent scholarship on the Dioscuri theme. Having established this traditional scholarly perception of de Chirico, the second section will comprise of visual analysis of Dioscuri and Argonaut compositions, and move into an examination of the brothers' memoirs. The third section will consider de Chirico's 1929 novel *Hebdomeros* in light of the themes derived from his visual work and memoirs. The fourth section will discuss a 1972 exhibition entitled "De Chirico by de Chirico," providing the artist's own retrospective insight into his oeuvre at the end of his career. The section also examines the 1984 republication of Savinio's wartime memoir, *The Departure of the Argonaut*, illustrated with lithographs created by the Italian post-modernist artist Francesco Clemente.

I conclude by describing de Chirico's oeuvre as one of both overt and also implicit depiction of the Argonaut-Dioscuri theme. I suggest that even those pieces in which they are not overtly depicted can be seen as implicit incorporation of his personal mythology within his work. I point to a well-known Metaphysical painting, *The Solitude of the Poet*, in saying this. Turning finally to the symbols of the train and the ship, I argue that they become metonymic representations of de Chirico's voyage, endowing each composition with a metahistorical emblem of the artist.

## I. Biography, Reception, Ariadne, and Dioscuri

### De Chirico: Mythical Beginnings and a Journey of Departures

For de Chirico, no detail of this childhood full of 'metaphysical and provincial events' was insignificant, for much of his visual vocabulary was culled from such scenes remembered.<sup>13</sup>

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*The Memoirs of Giorgio De Chirico*. (London: Owen, 1971), 29. I will continue to use this German word to discuss the artist's work. One could translate it to mean 'atmosphere,' taken in its figurative sense.)

<sup>12</sup> De Chirico, Giorgio, with introduction by Margaret Crosland. *The Memoirs of Giorgio De Chirico*. (London: Owen, 1971), 48.

<sup>13</sup> Massimo Carrà, Ewald Rathke, and Patrick Waldberg. *Metaphysical Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 8.

Giorgio de Chirico was born on July 10, 1888 in Volos, Greece. This Thessaly seaport was, notably, the port from which Jason and the Argonauts set sail upon their quest for the Golden Fleece. De Chirico's brother Andrea Alberto, who later adopted the pseudonym Alberto Savinio, was born soon after in Athens in 1891. Their father, Evaristo de Chirico, was a successful Italian engineer stationed in Greece to oversee the construction of a railway from the capital city of Athens along the coast of Thessaly.

Both boys demonstrated artistic talent at a young age; Giorgio, in painting, Savinio, in music. Their mother, Gemma Cervetto, encouraged them to their pursue studies in Athens. De Chirico's early artistic education consisted of private drawing lessons from two teachers, Carlo Barbieri and Swiss Gillieron. Gillieron had gained renown teaching the royal family of Greece, and specialized in paintings of ancient ruins.<sup>14</sup> In addition to their artistic pursuits, the brothers studied ancient and modern literature, excelling in Greek and Latin, and learned Italian, German, and French.<sup>15</sup> They also became well versed in philosophy. This liberal education, steeped in the context of classical Greece, would come to define their artistic expression.

The brothers' first departure took place in 1906. In May of 1905, the twins' father passed away, and the family moved to Munich in September of 1906 when brothers were aged eighteen and fifteen. De Chirico studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, where he first viewed the work of German Romantic painter Arnold Bocklin.<sup>16</sup> Savinio studied with various composers in Munich during this time. In 1907, Savinio and his mother moved back to Milan, Italy. De Chirico joined them two years later in the summer of 1909. It was during this time alone in Germany that de Chirico began to mature as an artist and gathered many of the symbols that would define the visual language of his early paintings. It was also during this time that he began to read the work of Frederic Nietzsche.<sup>17</sup> Paolo Baldacci attributes the brothers' love for Latin to their teacher Domenico Fava during this time, a Milanese librarian they came to know well between 1909 and 1910. De Chirico's passion for Latin was part and parcel within his art, as he inscribed Latin epitaphs within his self-portraits and books. He recalls reading Giovanni Pascoli's *Hymnus in Romam*, passages of which remain in his writings from Paris from 1912-1913. He used Latin to further the enigmas he created within his work, writing, "Latin is capable

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<sup>14</sup> Paolo Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997), 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 243. Baldacci attributes the brothers' love for Latin to their teacher Domenico Fava, a librarian in Milan when they lived there from 1909-1910. Giorgio's passion for Latin is part and parcel within his art, as he inscribes Latin epitaphs within his self-portraits and books. He recalls reading Giovanni Pascoli's *Hymnus in Romam*, passages of which remain in his writings from Paris from 1912-1913. He used Latin to further the enigmas he creates within his work, writing, "Latin is capable of representing these mysteries better than any other language. The same is true for Roman architecture. Rome is the dwelling place of such mysteries."

<sup>16</sup> Arnold Bocklin was a nineteenth-century German romantic painter who painted mythical scenes derived from literature. De Chirico praised him in an article published in 1921. Bocklin's influence is notable in any examination of de Chirico's early oeuvre, but for the purposes of this paper, the origins of Bocklinian imagery within his oeuvre will be omitted. The use of statuary in de Chirico's first metaphysical canvases can largely be credited to Bocklin.

<sup>17</sup> "Nietzsche was the first to teach the profound significance of the non-sense in life and how such non-sense can be translated into art—indeed, that it must constitute the very skeleton of a truly new, free, and profound art." In Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Giorgio De Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne* (Philadelphia, 2002), curated by Michael R. Taylor, p. 203.

of representing these mysteries better than any other language. The same is true for Roman architecture. Rome is the dwelling place of such mysteries."<sup>18</sup>

In 1909, the brothers traveled together through Italy in search of the "secrets of artistic creation."<sup>19</sup> It becomes clear in his memoirs that de Chirico did not distinguish between the three cities of Florence, Rome, and Milan. Rather, the three became equally important in the mental processes of de Chirico's inspiration. According to Gerhard Roos, it seems that in the seventeen months de Chirico spent in Florence (February 1910-July 1911), eleven of which Savinio joined him, he painted only three works.<sup>20</sup> Roos states that during this time, he devoted a great amount of time to reading, theater, music, and notes and drawings. He writes, "De Chirico had embarked on a path in which music, painting, and literature played virtually equal roles and all were considered possible outlets for the all-embracing artistic research in which both he and his brother were engaged."<sup>21</sup> This period of time demonstrates the brothers' early mutual experimentation in the same media, from which de Chirico turned primarily to painting, and Savinio to music.

De Chirico began to gain critical renown in Paris in 1911, and reached the height of his career in the following eight years as the self-proclaimed creator of the 'scuola metafisica,' or metaphysical school of art. He painted in this style until his renouncement of modernity in 1919, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. The two brothers moved in many of the same intellectual circles during their time in Paris in the 1910's and 1920's, as Savinio was received positively as a playwright and a composer.<sup>22</sup> In 1917, they were stationed together in military service in Ferrara during World War I, though de Chirico was later deemed unfit for service due to a nervous condition and was reassigned to a military hospital. After the war, they returned to Paris. In 1932, the two brothers returned to Italy, residing separately in Rome. However, they were not celebrated in their return. A caricature in the publication *Selvaggio* read, "Non quando li prende/ ma quando li rende/ Parigi ci offende." (Paris offends us not when she takes them but when she gives them back.)<sup>23</sup>

One must note that the brother's relationship deteriorated at the beginning of the 1920's with de Chirico's negation of Savinio's involvement in formulating the theories of metaphysical art. By 1920, the brothers' desire to maintain distinction from one other had become a bitter competition. The brothers rarely spoke to one another after de Chirico's renouncement of modernity. The backhanded manner in which de Chirico asserts his supremacy in painting in his later memoirs is the result of years of denying his brother's artistic influence. Despite their strained relation, their mutual preoccupation with the same themes remained. De Chirico painted several portraits of Savinio in the first two decades of his career, among them, a double portrait of the brothers in 1924. (Figure 2) Despite their troubled relationship, at Savinio's death in 1952, de Chirico rushed to his deathbed and placed a laurel wreath upon his head. Indeed, de Chirico's memoirs, which will be discussed at length later, describe the death of his brother for multiple

<sup>18</sup> Baldacci, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard Roos, in, Baldacci, Paolo. *De Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte, Balthus: A Look into the Invisible*. (Firenze: Mandragora, 2010), 116.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> The two brothers also lived with one another in Paris at this time.

<sup>23</sup> dell'Arco, Maurizio Fagiolo. "Biographical Notes on a Metaphysical Argonaut." *ArtForum* XXI, no. no. 5 (1983), 52.

chapters. The death of his companion and fellow traveler was an episode that de Chirico would not forget. He wore a black tie in mourning for the rest of his life.

Until the 1950's, de Chirico spent alternating periods of time in Paris, Rome, and Florence, journeying to the United States and London for brief periods of time.\* After 1950 and Savinio's death, he settled almost permanently in Rome, traveling only when his various commissions required it. He continued to paint prolifically until his death at the age of ninety, taking up the practice of revisiting his past compositions and working on several canvases in multiple styles at once. He also experimented with different media, turning to sculpture and public works of art in the 1950's and 1960's. His paintings from the last three decades of his life comprise of a bizarre medley of classical compositions in the style of old masters, terracotta statues, as well as extensive reworkings of his metaphysical canvases, which have come to be known as his *nuova metafisica* compositions.<sup>24</sup> He died in Rome in 1978.

### Critical Reception: de Chirico as Mithradites

De Chirico was forever neurotic, and perhaps rightly so. In interviews and his writing, he constantly alluded to the stupidity of those around him and his resulting feelings of alienation. It is a sentiment found repetitively in his memoirs as well as in the head of his novel's protagonist, Hebdomeros. It is this sentiment that became the very seed of the *scuola metafisica*, as de Chirico desired to awaken viewers to the reality behind reality. An incident in Paris in 1921 at the Salon Independants provides an example of his feeling of not being understood. At the Salon, Dunoyer de Segonzac and Luc-Albert Moreau, both artists themselves, congratulated de Chirico on the "decorative" quality of the paintings he exhibited at the Salon, telling him that he could become an "excellent decorator." De Chirico wrote of the incident in his memoirs,

I deduced from their comments that despite their bad faith, they had understood absolutely nothing of the profound and solitary lyricism in my paintings. Moreover, no one has *ever* understood anything of them, neither then nor since. Usually people see these paintings as if they were scenes imagined at twilight, in the light of an eclipse foretelling catastrophes, or in the intense silence preceding a cataclysm. They see a kind of atmosphere of terror in them, like a suspense novel or a detective film. These interpretations are well suited to surrealists. On the contrary, it is altogether a different matter.<sup>25</sup>

Statements such as this abound, and for this reason, de Chirico's legacy is likely one of the most disputed of any artist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critical reception over the course of his career presents an arena of disagreement and repeated contradiction stemming from an array of perceived scholarly problems. Chief among these problems is the aforementioned 'break' in his style after 1917-19 with his renouncement of modernity and reversion to a 'neo-classical', Baroque painting style; his complicated personal relationships and alienation of contemporaries and critics; and the critical debate caused by his practice of appropriating early paintings and

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\* See Appendix A for a complete timeline of de Chirico's travels.

<sup>24</sup> Calvesi, Maurizio, Mario Ursino, and Palazzo dei Congressi San Marino. *De Chirico: The New Metaphysics*. Buffalo, NY: Craftsman House; Edizioni De Luca; Distributed in North America by University of Toronto Press, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

backdating works.<sup>26</sup> Despite de Chirico's insistence that his career could not be viewed in distinct stages, the reality remains that his early metaphysical works completed between 1911-19 were never eclipsed by his subsequent painting styles in critical circles. Scholars and curators over the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been quick to dismiss all work completed after this period as irrelevant. In recent years, however, there has been a turn in scholarship. While de Chirico's early vision continues to be celebrated as a triumph of modernity, his later period has begun to be more critically studied and exhibited as well.

In order to examine the evolution of contradictory critical opinion, two schools of thought can be examined at distinct junctures in time over the course of the twentieth century. Looking first at de Chirico's convoluted relationship with the Surrealists, one finds an early attempt to reconcile his changed vision after 1919. Early affinity for de Chirico, evident in the writing of Andre Breton, was shattered by de Chirico's renouncement of the avant-garde and denial of any involvement with the Surrealist artists.

The curatorial opinions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York held by James Thrall Soby and his successor, William Rubin from 1940-82 presented a second school of opinion. Soby was responsible for determining the collection of de Chirico's work in America in the first half of the century, and condemned his reversion to classical painting. He went so far as to state that in his later career, de Chirico, "...tried with every means in his power to obliterate his own brilliant youth."<sup>27</sup> By looking at Soby's 1942 monograph and the reprinted edition from 1966, his highly influential opinion seems to have set the course of curatorial attitudes towards the artist in the United States.

From 1911-17, de Chirico painted what has come to be known as his metaphysical compositions. For a complete explanation of metaphysical art, look to Carra's *Metaphysical Art*, which also contains de Chirico's many essays on the conception of the *scuola metafisica*. De Chirico wrote of his philosophy,

We are constructing in our painting a new metaphysical psychology of things. The absolute awareness of the space that an object must occupy in a painting, and of the space that divides each object from others, establishes a new astronomy of things connected to our planet by the fatal law of gravity.<sup>28</sup>

De Chirico was concerned with narration of a composition rather than form, which accounts for the seemingly arbitrary, counterintuitive grouping of elements within his work. Based upon the writings of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who he had begun to study in Munich, de Chirico's metaphysical aesthetics identify an 'enigma' present within his art. De Chirico defined the '*scuola metafisica*' as a way of seeing, and a state of mind for painters "...for whom plastic reappraisal of reality...was less important than a reallocation of reality's component parts, each more or less realistically depicted, and sometimes combined with incongruity or overt fantasy."<sup>29</sup> The paintings seem uncomplicated, even arbitrary; but the surface gives way to a multitude of

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<sup>26</sup> The precise date of the perceived 'break' in de Chirico's career is contested. While the Surrealists point to 1917 as the 'end' of de Chirico's genius, recent scholars point to the 1919 publication of '*il ritorno al mestiere*' as the point of change.

<sup>27</sup> James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio De Chirico* (New York: Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press, 1966), 162.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Carra, *Metaphysical Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 7.

interpretations. Metaphysical intellect, as defined by de Chirico, is identified by three phases: the metaphysics of being and things; metaphysics of material; and metaphysics of form.<sup>30</sup> Reality rendered according to these phases transcends the physical world, creating illegible symbolic processes.

De Chirico painted what is called his first 'metaphysical' composition in 1911, *The Enigma of the Oracle*. The painting has the components that came to define his 'abandoned piazza' or 'Chirico city' compositions; arches, a sculptural figure, and a distant sea. For the next eight years, de Chirico's art shifts into the impossible spatial perspective, illogical arrangement of objects, and lack of narrative that defined his metaphysical period. There is deep, personal connection to his work, in line with what Apollinaire calls "inner" and "cerebral." The visual language of his Paris paintings is imbued with antiquity. Stylistically, de Chirico developed his metaphysical style, but his classical subject matter is his mechanism for doing so. This is achieved through enigmatic arrangements of buildings, statues, and objects within multiple spatial planes, exemplified with a lone figure of Ulysses, a strange curtain, and the distant seascape of Greece.

As he began to assert his originality as an artist, he drew upon mythological figures to define his language in his art. During his early years in Paris, the poet and critic Apollinaire promoted de Chirico within his circle of friends. Apollinaire wrote of de Chirico,

The art of this young painter is an inner, cerebral art which as no connection with that of the painters who have been discovered in the past few years. It does not stem from Matisse or from Picasso...this originality is new enough to warrant our attention.<sup>31</sup>

From 1915-17, de Chirico experimented with the mannequin form, often referred to as his 'Ferrara period,' where he was stationed during the war. He would return again to these themes in the 1950's and 1960's. After 1919, however, de Chirico began to paint in a neo-classical, Baroque style. He retained the classical subject matter and mythological references of his earlier work, but his style reflects the values espoused by the artist in the coming decades. Gladiators, archeologists, Roman villas, the shores of Greece, and horses define his oeuvre after this point in time. His revisiting of past compositions complicates this, making it difficult to discern a new style. As previously stated, by the 1950's, de Chirico painted in multiple styles at one time. In insisting upon all of his work's continued value, he wrote, "I continually try, in a qualitative sense, to make them better...it is irrelevant to distinguish a de Chirico of yesterday from one of today. There are neither good nor bad de Chirico's."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Joel de Sanna, *De Chirico and the Mediterranean* (New York: Rizzoli: Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Wieland Schmied and Paolo Baldacci. *Betraying the Muse: De Chirico and the Surrealists* (New York: Paolo Baldacci Gallery, 1994), 199.

<sup>32</sup> Excerpts from an interview with de Chirico in *L'Europeo* Milan, 30 April, 1970, pp. 36-42; in, Bristol, Arnolfini Gallery, *Late de Chirico: 1940-76* (Bristol, 1982), curated by Rupert Martin.

"In my work, there are no stages, no transitions from one style to another, as has sometimes been maintained. I have always painted in that way that gave me pleasure...that kind of painting which our modernists call baroque in the defamatory sense of the word or, worse still, baroque-like ornateness...What does that mean? One cannot paint like Giotto anymore. Anyone who tries just wants to

De Chirico articulated his reasons for his reversion to classicism in a 1919 article entitled *'il ritorno al mestiere'* in the influential arts periodical *Valori Plastici*. (Figure 3) The article was essentially his death sentence in critical circles, for in his customarily dogmatic manner, advocated for a return to craft, quality, and traditional technique.<sup>33</sup> One must recognize, however, that this was not a unique sentiment, as the art world in the first decades of the twentieth century was characterized both by extensive artistic experimentation and a simultaneous call to order. One can look, for example, to Picasso in 1921, as he painted *The Three Musicians* in the same year that he painted his wife in the style of Ingres.<sup>34</sup>

Further, the tone of the essay in *Valori Plastici* was provocative, as De Chirico argued that avant-garde repudiation of the traditional Academy was simply 'fancy talk.' He likened Futurism to war, stating, "As far as I am concerned, I think that if Futurism was a necessity like war was, it happened just as war did because it was written it should happen, but by and large we could have done well without it."<sup>35</sup> The prevailing sentiment of the article, however, was a call for a return to technique of the old masters and the inspiration that must be derived from the canon of art history.<sup>36</sup> De Chirico ended the article in stating, "As for me, I am calm, and I decorate myself with three words that I wish to be the seal of all my work: *Pictor Classicus Sum*."<sup>37</sup> The statement came to define the artist's later career, as he continued to unapologetically renounce modernism and paint primarily neoclassical compositions. In doing so, de Chirico claimed to search for the perfection of his technique, asserting the need for quality in art.<sup>38</sup> In later decades, de Chirico appended his earlier title, calling himself *Pittor Optimus Sum*, seemingly asserting the supremacy gained from his status as a classical painter. The decade from 1920-29 was thus a time of contradiction for de Chirico, as he was heralded as a modernist

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furnish himself with a style. Perhaps he cannot do anything else. In my painting, but in contrast, there is an intensification of quality."

<sup>33</sup> Schmeid and Baldacci, 26. Contains a particularly in-depth examination of de Chirico's relationship with the Surrealists and the Parisian avant-garde's response to his artwork and writing after 1920.

<sup>34</sup> An exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2010 entitled *Classicism and Chaos: Art in France, Italy and Germany 1918-1936* addressed the incorporation of the classical tradition in art during the interwar period as indicative of a desire for order, as many artists and audiences called for a return to recognizable subject matter in the interwar decades. Silver, Kenneth E., and Helen Hsu. *Chaos and Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany 1918-1936*, (The Guggenheim Foundation. New York, New York: Guggenheim Press, 2010), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Carra, 145.

<sup>36</sup> De Chirico 1962, 1. The first page of De Chirico's memoirs begins with a recollection of the 'perfect' works of art that de Chirico encountered over the course of his life. The selection is reflective of de Chirico's search for technical perfection: Praxiteles' *Hermes* on Mount Olympus, Rubens portrait of *The Daughters of Lysippus*, Titian, Rembrandt and Vermeer's *Mistress and the Maidservant* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He makes this statement after asserting that he came to understand 'the whole of classical music and classical literature, all philosophy, ancient and modern' well before he came to understand painting.

<sup>37</sup> Carra, 146.

<sup>38</sup> Schmeid, 34. In a letter to Andre Breton in December of 1921, de Chirico states that a problem of *métier* tormented him for almost three years. "This is why I began to make copies in museums, why in Florence and Rome I spent entire days in summer and winter, beside the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian masters, studying and copying them. I dedicated myself to reading ancient treatises and I saw, yes, I saw, yes I saw at last, the terrible things that are happening in painting today, and if painters continue along this course we are nearing the end."

genius for his works from 1911-19, but produced works in a markedly different, classical style.<sup>39</sup> Italian art critics at the Roman Biennale of 1923 dismissed his new paintings; at the same time, his metaphysical work was being celebrated and emulated by New Objectivity artists in Germany.

De Chirico remained true to the convictions in *'il ritorno al mestiere'* until his death in 1978. In 1966, he stated, "There is no inspiration in painting. Perhaps there is among poets...but the subject doesn't mean anything; the essential basis is quality. Technique counts more than anything else."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the paradox of de Chirico's return to tradition was arguably prolonged for the rest of the century, as contemporaries still attempt to reconcile his early period with his open renunciation of modernism. De Chirico, on the other hand, remained unyielding. The later examination of his memoirs will provide further elucidation of this theme.

### **Breton and the Surrealists: 'Betraying the Muse'**

De Chirico's metaphysical compositions completed during his years in Paris provided images that would become central to the Surrealist doctrine. To the group of artists, the 'enigma' present within de Chirico's canvases was consistent with their own imagery based on the principles of free association, dream states, and empty signifiers. Yves Tanguy for example, decided to become a painter after seeing a de Chirico painting in a gallery window in Paris. The Surrealist leader Andre Breton encountered de Chirico's *Song of Love* by chance in Apollinaire's apartment. Breton's initial belief in de Chirico's ability to 'alter time and space' gave way to one of the most bitter feuds in art history.

The exchanges between Breton and de Chirico are indicative of the contradictions of the artist's legacy. Extensive correspondence between the two men remains in the collection of the Fondazione de Chirico. In 1924, Breton published the First Surrealist Manifesto, hailing de Chirico as the movement's foremost predecessor, but disassociating him from Surrealism's future development. In 1925, de Chirico exhibited successfully at many of the leading galleries in Paris, but in the face of extensive criticism. In 1926, after continued ill will between Breton and de Chirico, the Surrealists called him a "dead painter." By 1928, Breton stated openly that all of the "incomparable" works de Chirico completed between 1910 and 1917 were lost in the face of his (inferior) paintings of the 1920's:

He no longer has the slightest idea of what he is doing. What greater folly than that of this man, lost now among the besiegers of the city he had built and rendered impregnable...this same de Chirico whose main preoccupation today is to prevent us proving his fall from grace.<sup>41</sup>

Breton cited 1917 as the end of de Chirico's genius, corresponding to the last year of his Ferrara period. Despite his denunciation, Breton continued, however, to cite de Chirico's work as the basis for Surrealist and other post-abstract art. Such was the complexity of the relationship to the

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<sup>39</sup> Schmeid, 199. "When I realized that, I began with the patience of an alchemist to filter my varnishes, to grind my pigments, to prepare my canvases and panels, and as a result I saw an enormous difference: the virtues of painting—the mystery of color, light, luster—all expanded prodigiously, as if illuminated by a new light."

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Mazars, "Giorgio De Chirico." *Yale French Studies*, no. 31 (1964): 114.

<sup>41</sup> Andre Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (New York, Harper and Row: 1972), translation in Schmieid, 14.

Surrealist movement: While the artists openly cited the influence of de Chirico's early canvases, they were also increasingly vexed by their inability to reconcile his metamorphosis of de Chirico's art after 1919.<sup>42</sup>

### **De Chirico and the Museum of Modern Art: James Thrall Soby and William Rubin<sup>43</sup>**

When James Thrall Soby, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Alfred Barr began to collect de Chirico's work in the late 1920's and 1930's, they focused exclusively on his pre-1920 paintings. They found the artist's subsequent paintings to be "less good and less relevant to modern painting as a whole."<sup>44</sup> Soby urged leading American museums to collect only early works by the artist. To this day, the MoMA does not own any work produced by de Chirico after 1917.

In 1942, Soby wrote the first definitive monograph on de Chirico in English, entitled *The Early Chirico*. The work was separated into two parts, "The Early Period of Giorgio de Chirico: 1908-17" and "The Influence of the Early Period on Modern Art." Soby celebrates the "unfailing sense of plastic order" and "virtuosity" present within his canvases.<sup>45</sup> His biography of the artist was almost folkloric, tracing the 'mythical' origins of the artist in Greece to his early years of genius in Paris.

Soby's monograph set forth the assumptions that continued to define scholarship on de Chirico until his death in 1978. Soby addresses the 'quarrel' between the Surrealists and the de Chirico, citing it as one of "the least becoming episodes in the history of modern art."<sup>46</sup> Soby, writing in the 1940's, was very obviously in line with the Surrealist camp as he stated, "There was a brief period during which the Surrealists attempted to help de Chirico recapture the brilliant inspiration of his youth."<sup>47</sup> Far from defending de Chirico, he stated that the artist displayed "an appalling lack of artistic conscience when he copied his early works and impeded appreciation of his own early period."<sup>48</sup> He goes on to reprimand the Surrealists for turning upon the painter "...an abusive eloquence worthy of the most harassed Parisian taxi-driver," as they issued cruel reviews at the same artist that they also heralded as their greatest creative influence.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> De Chirico 1962, 45. In his memoirs, de Chirico responds quite strongly to the Surrealists in turn. He states, "Although the Surrealists professed unadulterated communist and anti-bourgeois feelings they always tried to live as comfortably as possible, dress very well, and eat excellent meals washed down with excellent wines; they never gave so much as a centime to a poor man, never lifted a finger in favor of someone who needed material or moral support and above all they worked as little as possible, or not at all." He would continue to dismiss the Surrealists for the rest of his life. In the aforementioned 1966 interview with Pierre Mazars, he stated, "I never thought Surrealism was more than a bottled joke. I was more concerned with creating a work that would be my own."

<sup>43</sup> De Chirico's first solo exhibition in the United States was held in October of 1930 at the Demotte Galleries in New York. It traveled to Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. It was generally well received, save for a notable review by Lloyd Goodrich in *Arts Magazine* entitled, "Horses, Horses, Horses." The continued depiction of the horse and shore theme, according to Goodrich, signaled de Chirico's fall and status as "an instrument for mass production." In Taylor, 74.

<sup>44</sup> William Rubin, *De Chirico: Essays* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), forward pg. i.

<sup>45</sup> James Thrall Soby, *The Early Chirico* (New York: Dodd, Mead & company: 1941), 69.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

Most notably, Soby concluded his 1942 monograph with an epitaph of sorts for de Chirico. He states the importance of de Chirico's work lay in the influence it provided for artists to come, linking him to Picasso and Marcel Ducham He wrote, "After each great painter passes, the way to exploration becomes clearer again...Giorgio de Chirico, who has walked by night, leaving phosphorescent footprints on the long plain."<sup>50</sup> How is it possible, however, to write an epitaph for a living artist? De Chirico would continue to paint for over thirty years after this monograph was printed. However, his practice of copying his own earlier compositions appeared to be an irreconcilable offense to Soby, who, following in Surrealist footprints, also sentenced the artist to death.

This issue emerged again when Soby's monograph was reprinted in 1966 with a more extensive essay, as well as further examination of de Chirico's influence upon Surrealist artists. In referring to de Chirico's return to classicism, Soby revised his 1942 conclusion and gave an harsher evaluation, writing,

His work of the past twenty-five years has brought him not respect and fame, but notoriety. Borrowing from an incredible roster of past artists, reverting above all to the baroque tradition, which he had once held in contempt, devoting much of his energy to violent attacks on the twentieth century visual revolution of which he was once an irreplaceable leader, de Chirico has tried with every means at his power to *obliterate his own brilliant youth*. Fortunately for the history of art, he has failed. His early paintings survive and gain steadily in qualitative and historical importance.<sup>51</sup>

Soby's definitive scholarship set the precedent for the MoMA and, arguably, the face of American museum reception as a whole. Thus, Soby's successor William Rubin's curatorial choices in the 1982 MoMA de Chirico retrospective of one-hundred de Chirico works must be seen in light of Soby's preordained opinions and influences:

I find the distinction made by Soby and Barr to be essentially correct, though I have modified their policy to the extent of exhibiting and reproducing a small selection of the later work, primarily from the 1920's...so as to permit our visitors to make their own judgment on the change in the artist's work.<sup>52</sup>

In his 1982 essay entitled "De Chirico and Modernism" for the MoMA exhibition catalogue, Rubin compared de Chirico's works to works by Surrealist artists, for example, Yves Tanguy *Hands and Gloves* (1946) and de Chirico's *The Serenity of the Scholar* (1914.) In making this assertion, however, he exclusively addressed de Chirico's metaphysical canvases. Any mention of his neoclassical compositions is absent. He concluded in writing that a 'certain neurasthenia' resolved within de Chirico in 1917, after which he reverted to the classic tradition. In an interview about the exhibition, Rubin stated, "The de Chirico *of the second decade of the century* strikes me as being one of the major modern painters. He's not Picasso or Matisse, but he comes

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<sup>50</sup> Soby, 110.

<sup>51</sup> James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio De Chirico*. Reprint ed. (New York: Published for the Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press, 1966), 164.

<sup>52</sup> Rubin, forward p. iii.

right after that. This is major painting.”<sup>53</sup> In saying this, he not only placed de Chirico within a hierarchy of modern artists, but also exclusively considered a period of less than ten years within de Chirico's prolific painting career.

De Chirico's own words provide an appropriate close to an examination of his critical reception. In an interview with Pierre Mazars for the Yale French Studies Journal in 1966, de Chirico reflects upon his continued reference to his early compositions in his later artistic production, as well as his place in the modern world. He is unfaltering in his adherence to tradition in the face of modernism's deceptive nature, as he explains the central importance of his past works to his continued artistic expression:

*Mazars*: “It's said you still do paintings in the spirit of your metaphysical period.”

*De Chirico*: “That's right. The one I'm exhibiting in Venice—the locomotive stopped next to a tower—was painted a short while ago. But modern painting is full of falseness. It's extraordinary how much of it there is. You go after a beggar who has stolen bread, but there's no law against those who falsify art.”

*Mazars*: “You're not at ease in this age.”

*De Chirico*: “Ah, no. But I've got used to it. I've grown accustomed to this world—as Mithradates got used to poison.”<sup>54</sup>

Arguably, de Chirico sampled the many ‘poisons’ of criticism over the course of his career, and lived. Blending his Hellenic subject matter, lifetime preoccupation with myth, and his defensive position against those who would challenge his genius, his classical allusion to Mithradates is only fitting.<sup>55</sup>

### **De Chirico Revisited: Continuing Scholarship**

In the 1970's, several de Chirico retrospectives were held in major cities in Europe and the United States. These influential exhibitions included, for the first time, notable works from de Chirico's later career, and, arguably led to revisionist attitudes towards previous scholarly assumptions. In the early 1980's, two scholars began to examine de Chirico's later work and biographical material in depth. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Paolo Baldacci were the first scholars to acknowledge the Argonaut and Dioscuri theme in regards to de Chirico and Savinio's mutual biography. Subsequently, their work has been cited in nearly every article and publication of de Chirico and Savinio alike. Fagiolo dell'Arco, who passed away in 2002, was perhaps the leading de Chirico scholar in Italy. His collection of essays and primary sources, *De Chirico: il meccanismo del pensiero*, published in 1984, is cited as the seminal work of the artist's writing. He published several specialized articles and publications on certain periods within de Chirico's career. Fagiolo dell'Arco also studied Savinio extensively, publishing a monograph on him in

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<sup>53</sup> William Rubin, “Interview with William S. Rubin on De Chirico”, *MoMA*, no. 22 (1982): 2.

<sup>54</sup> Mazars, 117.

<sup>55</sup> A.E. Hausman's 1896 poem “Terence this is stupid stuff” provides a fitting connection here. “There was a king reigned in the East:/ There when kings will sit to feast/ They get their fill before they think/ With poisoned meat and poisoned drink./ He gathered all the springs to birth/ From the many venomed earth; First a little, thence to more./ He sampled all her killing store/ And easy, smiling, seasoned sound/ Sat the king when healths went round./ They put arsenic in his meat/ and stared aghast to watch him eat;/ They poured strychnine in his cup/ And shook to see him drink it up: They shook, they stared as white's their shirt:/ Them it was their poison hurt./ --I tell the tale that I heard told. Mithridates, he died old.”

1989, following his monograph *La vita di Giorgio de Chirico* in 1988. A 1983 article entitled, “Biographical Notes on a Metaphysical Argonaut,” examined Savinio’s indebtedness to de Chirico for his painterly style. In addition to his studies of each of the brothers independently, his obvious familiarity with both of their biographies and oeuvres resulted in his collective reference to them as ‘*i dioscuroi*.’

Baldacci’s work continues to build upon Fagiolo dell’Arco’s publications. Quite notably, he espouses that the importance of Greece for both of the brothers has been largely unexplored and not sufficiently recognized.<sup>56</sup> He has published almost as extensively on each of the brothers, but most notably, has contributed essays to almost every major exhibition catalogue on de Chirico in the last thirty years. Baldacci wrote his most notable publication in English, *De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period: 1888-1919* in 1997. The enormous work is the most extensive biographical text on de Chirico available, as he looks to de Chirico and Savinio’s family history, primary sources of acquaintances, and their own memoirs. However, in doing so, references only de Chirico’s metaphysical compositions and the years before 1920; a continuation of previous scholarly bias. Baldacci continues to write essays for various exhibition catalogues, the latest of which appeared in the 2010 exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, entitled, “A Look into the Invisible: de Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte, Balthus,” a show that examined de Chirico’s influence upon his contemporaries.

The two men have collaborated on many projects; most notably, they curated an exhibition of the brothers’ works in 1987 entitled “The Dioscuri: Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio in Paris, 1924-1931” at the Philippe Daverio Gallery in New York. The exhibition indicated positive critical reception of de Chirico’s later works, as well as a bold acknowledgement of the Dioscuri theme in reference to the two brothers’ mutually dependent careers. However, it is remarkable that no Dioscuri compositions are featured in the exhibition, and despite the title of the show, the topic of the Dioscuri is mentioned briefly only in the introduction. Despite the scholarly use of the terms ‘Dioscuri’ and ‘Argonaut,’ a comprehensive analysis of visual and literary references to the myth, in addition to de Chirico’s novel, proves to be absent from their work.

Kaela Jewell’s 2004 publication *The De Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* presents the most complete synthesis of dell’Arco and Baldacci’s studies, and a unique approach to the Dioscuri myth. Jewell goes so far as to analyze *Hebdomeros* as an indication of de Chirico’s supposed agenda of Italian nation building. Her book centers upon the idea of the de Chirico brothers’ formulation of a distinctly modern European cultural tradition, one imbued with political sentiment. She states that in addition to the personal attraction to the Dioscuri myth, the brothers employ the Dioscuri as a conscious emblem of a Fascist aesthetic. She cites the “civic” significance of the mythic twins’ role in producing a sense of Italian cultural unity, stating, “The Dioscuri myth is part and parcel of a politico-cultural landscape.”<sup>57</sup> She concludes in espousing the important role the de Chirico brothers played in ideological negotiations of social imagery in all of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup>

However, Jewell reaches her conclusions as a professor of Italian studies rather than of art history. She reads sections of *Hebdomeros* in relation to the European stage at the beginning of the twentieth century, searching for what she labels as the ‘Italianicity’ present within de

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<sup>56</sup> Baldacci, *The Metaphysical Period*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Jewell, Kaela Jane. *The Art of Enigma: The De Chirico Brothers & the Politics of Modernism* New Modernisms Series. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Jewell, 32.

Chirico's compositions. Jewell ties the images of the hero-warriors in *Hebdomeros* to de Chirico's gladiator compositions in the 1920's and 1930's, thereby alluding to the Fascist aesthetic of the strong, nude male figure. She uses the Dioscuri figures by hailing them as 'emblems of postmodern thought', a label that seems questionable as De Chirico was clearly always ill at ease in the modern age. His continuous return to the past and the theme of the Dioscuri is arguably instead the most indicative emblem of his very rejection of modernity. I suggest that de Chirico never abandoned his intense introspection, regardless of what his relation to the Fascist regime may have been.<sup>59</sup> His allegiance to the classical past and his return to the myth of the Dioscuri began well before the rise of Mussolini, and remains present in his work until his death in 1978.

Jewell's reading of de Chirico and his use of the Dioscuri in his work as part of Fascism is strained. An examination of the Dioscuri theme leaves the impression that these brothers' oeuvres are too personal to be enmeshed with nationalist goals. It is impossible to dismiss the fact that the de Chiricos, as Italian artists, painted during formative decades of Italian Fascism. However, it is hard to read de Chirico's work without realizing the extent of its' introspection. A close reading of his writing and that of Savinio reveals a worldview dominated by personal life that finds reflection in his art—i.e., biscuits he finds in army-issued tins in Ferrara, classical fragments of his childhood in Greece. It would seem, more in the line of thinking of dell'Arco and Baldacci, that the myth is representative of a nostalgic extension of self, indeed, selves—and one that cannot be fully understood without visual and literary analysis. It is de Chirico's own metahistorical mode, and his own myth of journey. It is not the selective retelling of European history via his art. Rather, it is his imposition of a narrative upon the chronicle of his experiences, literature, and art making.

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<sup>59</sup> See the aforementioned Guggenheim 'Chaos and Classicism' catalogue for an examination of classicism and art in the first half of the century, pages 45-46. A discussion of de Chirico's collusion with the Fascist regime yields an interesting array of opinion. Breton and the surrealists attacked de Chirico for his allegiance to the Fascist aesthetic as early as the mid 1920s, but as Kenneth Silver points out in his *Chaos to Classicism* catalogue, "Whatever his actual political allegiances, de Chirico's subjects, as the Surrealists recognized, were assimilable to the idea of a revived Roman Empire under Mussolini." When asked by the Parisian art dealer Leonce Rosenberg to paint antique subject matter, specifically stating that he wanted "no abstract or metaphysical subjects", de Chirico responded with his series of Gladiator paintings. Despite Surrealist attempts to paint the works as Fascist propaganda, critics of the time were not convinced. Critic Waldemar George reviewed the paintings harshly, finding them "unconvincing" and "not trying to persuade of anything, save the mythic quality of reality." Two of de Chirico's gladiator compositions, "Gladiators at Rest" and "Gladiators" are featured in the *Chaos and Classicism* exhibition. Interestingly, they are featured in the section of the exhibition entitled, "The Dark Side of Classicism."

### The Myth of Ariadne: A Nietzschean Elegy<sup>60</sup>

De Chirico's use of other myths within his oeuvre has been widely explored. A 2002 exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art entitled, "The Myth of Ariadne and De Chirico," examined the figure within de Chirico's work in great detail. Ariadne was the daughter of the Knossian king Minos. Minos had locked the Minotaur in a vast labyrinth, and ordered that seven Athenian young men and women be sacrificed to the beast each year. The hero Theseus volunteered to embark upon a quest into the labyrinth to kill the Minotaur, a feat no man had ever accomplished. Ariadne fell in love with him upon first sight, and gave him a spool of magical thread so that he could find his way out of the maze. He succeeded in killing the beast and returned to the palace by using Ariadne's thread, thereby saving the island of Knossos from further bloodshed. The infatuated Ariadne fled with Theseus, who abandoned her on the island of Naxos while she slept. She awoke and was raped by Dionysus, the god of drunkenness and physical love. Ariadne thus emerged as a central figure in Nietzsche's writings as this metaphor for the relationship between love, body, soul, and intuitive consciousness.<sup>61</sup> According to Nietzsche, Ariadne was enmeshed within a love triangle between the Apollonian Theseus, hero of reason and logic, and Dionysius, the god of earthly love and the body. She stood in the midst of Chaos, represented by the labyrinth, and inevitability of Time, represented by the Minotaur.<sup>62</sup>

An examination of the Ariadne myth is fitting because it too holds a certain level of autobiographical meaning. However, instead of a personal identification with the Ariadne story, it instead stems from de Chirico's interest in Nietzsche. In his final essay in the exhibition catalogue, curator Michael Taylor concludes in saying,

The importance of Nietzsche's ideas for de Chirico cannot be overestimated, but ultimately the dejected figure of Ariadne transcends its origins in Greek myth and the writings of Nietzsche to become a personal symbol of loneliness, melancholy and mystery for the artist.<sup>63</sup>

Taylor's use of the word "personal" is notable, for the image does become a central symbol within de Chirico's work. And indeed, while the figure of Ariadne becomes a signifier of Greek mythology and Nietzschean philosophy, it does not become a representation of self. It is a visual symbol of enigma and nostalgia, but a subject that reflects his stylistic preoccupations in the few years in which he depicts the subject. Ariadne is depicted as a fixed figure within the distinct juncture in time only from 1911-13, and subsequently in the *nuova metafisica* paintings in the

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<sup>60</sup> De Chirico's choice of myths within his work is indebted to his reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche theorizes that the art of Greek tragedy resulted from the dual forces of Apollonian and Dionysian inclinations, and the struggle and marriage of the two. In tragedy there is joy, according to Nietzsche, reflected in the power of Dionysus and Bacchus. Apollo, the god of knowledge, is present within de Chirico's work as the ideal Hellenic figure. He represents rationality, and to Nietzsche, was a symbol of restraint, proportion, and harmony. De Chirico's rendering of the Apollo Belvedere is an example of his questioning of the classical tradition in the face of the modern. Apollo is a dualistic mythological figure: on one side, he is an ideal, the sun god and the bringer of knowledge. However, he is also associated with darkness, and as god of the wolves, the perpetrator of dark deeds and the bringer of the plague. De Chirico was fascinated with the connections made between psychoanalytic literature and mythology.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, 86.

1960's. Ariadne, though depicted in varying perspectives, remains the same, passive object, indicative of de Chirico's style during the first decade of his career. It is not a symbol of self-mythology.

As previously stated, de Chirico's *Ariadne* series is participant exclusively within his metaphysical compositions. His *Ariadne* of 1913, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, exemplifies the visual representation of the myth in the series of paintings. (Figure 4) The composition comprises of one of de Chirico's deserted *piazze*, rendered in broad planes and simple forms. A shadow cast by receding arches defines the central part of the composition. The statue of Ariadne dominates the left side of the painting as she sleeps with one arm raised above her head. She too casts a shadow to the left of her pedestal. The background is formed by a brick wall that seems to meet the end of the series of arches, beyond which a large white tower is situated between a train on the left, and the distant sail of a ship. The technique of the painting is typical of de Chirico's work in the 1910's, as the paint is thinly and dryly applied. The vivid green-blue of the sky frames a palette of white, grey, dark brown, and ochre.

The Ariadne statuary figure within this work and the series is thus an iconic symbol in the midst of irrational space. Despite variations in her pose and the perspective in which she is depicted in each canvas, she is generally passive, sleeping, and within a deep space that one cannot quite read. Ariadne is an object, quite literally, as de Chirico portrays her as a statue. Despite the sexual implications present within the myth, the original symbol of lust is robbed of a human form as de Chirico renders her in stone. Indeed, the preoccupation with Ariadne was sculptural, as de Chirico made a plaster cast as a model to use for his paintings.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps this is reflective that the debate Ariadne always symbolized between reason and desire is finished. The Dioscuri to de Chirico, in contrast, imply the very active and personal presence of the artist. An important differentiation must be made here. While the Dioscuri also indicate de Chirico's fascination with Greece, they are not images imbued with the same philosophy. Rather, they are linked to his personal myth and metahistory of his childhood in Greece, and the double identity of the brothers.

## II. Visual Analysis and the Memoirs of the Brothers

### A Red Thread: Visual Analysis of the Argonaut and Dioscuri Compositions

The visual record provides many examples of the Dioscuri and Argonaut myths over the course of de Chirico's career. It seems clear that de Chirico was preoccupied with the myth on many levels, as the mythological theme forms a continuous thread within the artist's visual language. In tracing the chronological appearances of the myth, it seems that despite stylistic changes, thematic explorations, and de Chirico's changing locations over the course of his career, the myth of the Argonauts suffused his artistic expression. De Chirico's use of the Dioscuri and the Argonauts was a means of self-mythification. His continued and varying depictions of the mythological twins drew a connection between himself and his brother, and Jason and his companions represent a purposeful life that perhaps this modernist iconoclast longed for; despite his vocal disdain for the critics and popular style. The sheer number of

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<sup>64</sup> Taylor additionally asserts that de Chirico based the sculpture on the Hellenistic prototype of Ariadne in the Vatican collection or a copy in Florence. He adds that the form could also derive from a marble copy at Versailles, or a small wax copy by Poussin at the Louvre. The sculpture at Versailles could be an appropriate source, as de Chirico had one of his notable "metaphysical revelations" in the garden at Versailles in 1909. For a detailed analysis of the series, see Taylor, 20-26.

Dioscuri and Argonaut compositions indicates his preoccupation with the subject, as the same basic composition reappears: male figures on a shore, the distant sea, classical architecture, and horses. With few exceptions, one of the figures has blonde or gray hair, and the other is a brunette.

De Chirico's first two references to the subject center upon the beginning of the Argonaut quest and the theme of departure, paralleling the movement of the artist upon the European subcontinent. De Chirico first paints the subject early in 1909, upon his arrival in Milan at the age of 18. This canvas, entitled *The Departure of the Argonauts*, was completed upon his reunion with his brother after two years of separation. (Figure 5) The painting reveals de Chirico's academic training in Munich, as well as his identification with Arnold Böcklin in his rendering of the figures on the shore and the romantic landscape. It presents the beginning of the Argonaut's quest, and is perhaps his most explicit depiction of the individual Argonauts. One of the figures in the foreground can be identified as Orpheus by the lyre he holds in his hand. This is unusual, and seems to be the only Argonaut or Dioscuri canvas in which Orpheus is depicted.

The Argo, Jason's ship, can be seen leaving the shore on the right hand side of the canvas. A sacrificed animal lies below a statue of Athena, and classical temples can be seen in the background as the curve of the shore recedes into steep cliffs. The painting is also perhaps a first instance of the artist's personal memory incorporated into this depiction of myth, as the statue of Athena is nearly identical to a monument erected in front of the railway station in Volos in honor of de Chirico's father.<sup>65</sup> Stylistically, the bright palette establishes a Romantic vision. This early composition is far from de Chirico's later confident, developed style, as the brush strokes seem hesitant. However, the symbols found in this early composition, such as the heroes' ship and Athenian imagery, and the location upon the seashore, reappear again and become recurrent images participant within subsequent Dioscuri canvases.

It seems no coincidence that de Chirico paints *Farewell to the Departing Argonauts* again in 1920. (Figure 6) The painting was completed the year after he published '*il ritorno al mestiere*,' or "Return to Craft," thus employing the myth as a means of indicating his allegiance to tradition and a reassertion of personal values.<sup>66</sup> Painted in tempera, the neoclassicist style of the painting attests to his examination of traditional painting techniques. The painting recalls certain elements of his metaphysical period, namely, the setting within a piazza and the flat building facades. However, the painting also indicates a shift away from the metaphysical compositions. The perspective is logical, and the statues of his metaphysical compositions have been replaced by human figures. Shadows correspond to their objects, lying in harmony with one another. The architectural space seems inhabitable, as linear orthogonals converge at a single point. Indeed, the door of the building on the right is partially ajar, and seems penetrable. The furthest point in the background can even be discerned, as two Argonaut figures in the foreground gaze out to the *Argo* at sea as it leaves port. In 1920, de Chirico, traveling between Milan and Paris, likely painted the composition in accordance with his studies of great masters. These two early depictions of the same event serves to parallel the departures in the early years of

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<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to Baldacci for this information on the statue, as he asserts that, "The image thereby functions as a symbol of the journey while at the same time ironically linking myth with personal history."

<sup>66</sup> In 1919, de Chirico had a second 'revelation' before a painting by Titian in the Villa Borghese in Rome. It was at this juncture that de Chirico became obsessed with the human figure and begins to make copies of old masters.

de Chirico's career; the first, the departure from his studies in Munich to Italy; the second, the return to those roots of classical studies after his metaphysical period.

In his paintings from 1926-33, de Chirico seems to labor with craft and style. Many self-portraits, paintings of gladiators, and copies of old master paintings distinguish this period of time. He paints the Dioscuri repeatedly during these years, creating compositions comprised of horses and nudes on the shore. There is a distinct softness in the manner in which he renders figures and landscapes, linking sky and waves to aspects of the human body. The delicate, tangible brushstrokes are identified by many scholars (often negatively) as indicative of a Baroque style, especially in his renderings of the sky. Each painting is set against the shore, with classic sculptural fragments and temples contributing to the atmosphere of antiquity.

Though not explicitly identified as a Dioscuri composition in the title, I would suggest that *The Shores of Thessaly* (1926) is de Chirico's first 'mature' depiction of the Dioscuri myth during these years. (Figure 7) This painting establishes a precursor to the explicitly titled paintings of the Dioscuri painted from 1928-1936. The painting is based upon grey tonalities, presenting a single figure with a horse on the shore. The white horse and nude male figure have a distinctly abstract quality to them. They lack facial features, but are rendered naturalistically. The mane and tail of the horse are outlined in a way that recalls de Chirico's rendering of statuary, but shadows create musculature. The sea is glimpsed to the right of the figures, while arches, recalling his *piazze* of the 1910's, recede on a diagonal to meet a red tower, an object so often encountered in his metaphysical compositions. In this way, the painting indicates a transition between his early work and continued experimentation with classical style and technique.

*Horses with Dioscuri on the Shore*, painted in 1928, is indicative of the style in which de Chirico continues to paint into the 1930's. (Figure 8) The figures lack facial features or anatomical details, vaguely recalling de Chirico's mannequin series from the previous decade and maintaining the anonymous quality found in 1926 in *Thessaly*. The painting presents two male figures and two horses in the foreground. The nude Dioscuri figure in the foreground reclines, looking off to the right. A rearing grey horse leads the viewer's eye further into the painting. Behind it, a static brown horse stands next to a second Dioscuri figure, more simplistically rendered than the first. This figure seems to assert control over the horse, as one of his arms rests upon its neck. This is consistent with myth's origin and Castor's known prowess with horses.

The atmosphere of Greece is signified by a classical column fragment in the right foreground, beyond which a second column capital rises from a distant cliff in the background. The palette is comprised of a near-grey scale similar to the colors used two years prior. However, there are more ochre browns and reds, as well as the blue of the sea and sky. The sea and cliffs of the background fade off at the edges of the composition, and a thick navy-blue line separates sea from sky. The technique is also similar to *Thessaly* in de Chirico's soft abstraction of the figures and landscape, with a sky painted in a Baroque style. Many variations of this compositions exist using the same technique and palette.

In 1934, de Chirico painted *The Dioscuri on the Shore with their Horses*. (Figure 9) The painting is highly realistic, recalling his 1920 *Argonauts* composition. The palette is much brighter, with vibrant blues, turquoises, and reds. The increased realism is most evident in the presentation of the two Dioscuri figures in the center of the composition. They stand on either side of a small stream, their bodies rendered with distinct musculature. The figure on the left hand side of the canvas holds a spear in one hand, a red cloth draped upon his arm. He places his other hand on a horse to his left. He has brown hair, and stands facing forward in a stance that

recalls, quite distinctly, the Quirinale Dioscuri statue in Rome (Figure 1) The figure on the right has blond hair, and stands facing the other Dioscuri. He places both of his hands upon the other horse, as if coaxing it. Beyond the figures, a distant temple stands on a cliff above a light blue sea. The sky is a darker turquoise hue, with wisps of cloud above a flat horizon.

In *Dioscuoro* of 1936, de Chirico returns to the soft quality characteristic of his other Dioscuri compositions. (Figure 10) Stylistically, de Chirico employs a Baroque style of loose brushstrokes and rich, thickly applied layers of color. This is especially notable in the folds of the red cloth, and the contrast of thick light and dark shadows on the figures. The expansive landscape is gone, and in its place, de Chirico depicts a solitary Dioscuri figure, arm raised and grasping a staff. The figure takes up the majority of the composition. A red cloth lies at the Dioscuri figure's feet upon the landscape of stone. In a manner that differs from the previous compositions, a horse stands independently of the figure on a diagonal that continues back to a Hellenic temple visible in the distance. The palette is more somber, save for the red of the cloth, of which intimations can be seen in the sky. In the same way that de Chirico painted Ariadne with various perspectives, here too, de Chirico experiments with vantage point.

The Dioscuri again appear in 1936, this time in an eclectic, small painting completed on cardboard by de Chirico during his time in New York City. The composition, entitled *Vision of New York*, presents a metaphysical vision of the Dioscuri twins, transported to the recognizable topography of a New York City street. (Figure 11) A large window in a traditional brownstone opens to reveal the Dioscuri reclining with a white horse. No longer on the Thessalian shores, they are trapped within an interior space, arguably at a loss for what action to take. Are they resting? Are they ill at ease in their urban surroundings? To the right of the brownstone steps, a single arch recalls de Chirico's metaphysical compositions. A lone figure in a business suit stands in the center of the brick arch, facing away into a space inaccessible to the viewer.

This strange painting thus documents de Chirico attempting to resettle his personal mythology, found in the familiar figures of the Dioscuri, into the unfamiliar topography of New York City. De Chirico stayed in New York for two years and exhibited his work in five exhibitions, supported by his American patron Alfred Barnes. Although a period of success, de Chirico moved back to Italy in January of 1938. Arguably, the depiction of his personal myth was a means of adjusting to his new surroundings. I suggest that it indicates his nostalgia for Savinio and his childhood. It is paintings such as this that demonstrate the extent to which de Chirico carried the theme with him across space and time.

A second New York Dioscuri composition entitled *Dioscuoro a Manhattan* provides an interesting variation on the theme. During his time in the city, "Vogue" Magazine asked him to complete a series of illustrations for a 1936 issue featuring an article on the artist. (Figure 12) The series includes fantastical renderings of winged horses and women in evening gowns. Yet present as well are the Dioscuri. In *Dioscuoro a Manhattan*, a New York skyline takes the place of the Mediterranean shore. A Dioscuri figure is recognizable by the same textured hair and the white stallion he looks at and leads. One hand rests on the horse's back, while the other is extended outward, perhaps pointing in the direction they walk. This is a peculiar image set against the backdrop of skyscrapers. Yet it demonstrates a continued preoccupation with the theme at the time of its' completion. As a commissioned piece for a magazine, it could be criticized as a 'sell-out' or a commercial image. However, I believe it is the artist's assertion of his identity, to be disseminated to mass readers.

After returning from New York, de Chirico moved to Milan. In Milan between 1940-41, de Chirico sculpted two small statues in a Dioscuri series, which he exhibited at a one-man show

at the Galleria Barbaroux in 1941. (Figure 13) Critic Raffaele Carrieri wrote of the sculptures, "De Chirico painted these statues of his...with the assiduousness and love with which he paints a canvas. They are paintings: those paintings in which he turns inward."<sup>67</sup> The small sculptures were harshly criticized by others, however, as '*una batutta preparatoria*,' or "a preparatory joke." Both sculptures are terracotta, one finished in polychrome. The works are simple depictions of horse and rider. Stylistically, the medium contributes to a feeling of incompleteness, especially in the piece without polychrome finish. The sculpture with polychrome depicts a simple, nude Dioscuri figure with black hair atop a brown horse with a yellow mane. Interestingly, the piece without color creates the impression of horse and rider as one. The skin of the nude is not differentiated from the coat of the horse, resulting in a feeling of kinship between the horse and the skilled horseman. These sculptures were recast in silver in 1970, in yet another return to his previous work.

De Chirico's renderings of the Dioscuri in the 1950's and 1960's reflect his appropriation of the theme to his neo-Baroque style that reasserted his call to tradition in the postwar years. In 1954, de Chirico reinvented the mythological figures in a new way and completed three variations of *Castor with Rearing Horses* in a style recalling Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens. These were completed in addition to the many self-portraits painted by de Chirico in the decade, depicting himself in period costumes. In the compositions, de Chirico reconfigures the Dioscuri as youthful athlete and master of a rearing horse. (Figure 14) He paints in oil upon an oval canvas, which I suggest recall Renaissance birthing trays or elements of fresco wall decor. The painting also borrows from the nineteenth century French artist Eugene Delacroix in the rearing horse's anatomy and dramatic mane and tail. The painting presents a rich, Baroque landscape of a forest clearing, surrounded by trees and a small body of water in the background. In this setting, a nude Dioscuri with exaggerated musculature (recalling, perhaps, the nudes of Michelangelo) twists and contorts as he holds the bridle of a rearing horse in one hand and a whip in the other. A red mantle flows dramatically from his shoulders, as he seems to lunge forward, in control of the horse. The muscles of the man are echoed in the anatomical rendering of the horse. Stylistically, rich layers of bright colors create an idealized bucolic scene. The series of Dioscuri paintings from the 1950's appropriates the figures in a way entirely different from the figures on the shores of Greece, illustrating the malleability of the theme to de Chirico. And yet the same basic elements remain: the Dioscuri as active youth and skilled horseman, but reinvented in varying settings. The composition reflects de Chirico's fixation on Peter Paul Rubens at the time, and places his personal myth within the world of the Baroque master.

In the 1960's, de Chirico began to treat his own work as part of the artistic canon from which he drew inspiration, abandoning his neo-Baroque compositions (exemplified in the aforementioned 1954 canvas) in favor of neo-metaphysical compositions that appropriated his earlier work. The neo-metaphysical works combine themes from paintings over the span of his career, culminating in some of his most puzzling images. *I Dioscuri* of 1967 exemplifies the blending of previous styles. (Figure 15) The painting presents two traditional Dioscuri figures with two horses on the seashore. However, the landscape is rendered in flat planes of thinly applied paint in blue and pink tonalities, recalling his metaphysical painterly technique from 1911-16. The paint in the sky appears to have been applied dryly in the same fashion, but de Chirico places hints of billowing clouds, referencing his Baroque style. The rearing horses, with their flowing manes and distinct musculature, seem to be drawn from his compositions from the 1940's and 1950's. A Hellenic building upon a cliff in the background and classical column

<sup>67</sup> Franco Ragazzi, *Il Grande Metafisico: Giorgio De Chirico Scultore* (Milano: Electa, 2004), 92.

fragment in the foreground echo his Dioscuri series from the 1920's. The Dioscuri figures themselves seem to be appropriated from his 1934 composition, as well as the temple in the background. It is a melding of the Baroque and the realistic styles that he turns to simultaneously. Thus, the painting appropriates elements of technique and images from junctures across his entire career, reinventing and tracing an arch of the recurrent Dioscuri figures through his past.

Between 1950 and 1978, the last three decades of his career, de Chirico's return to the Dioscuri figures became more frequent. This is seen in the countless works on paper, sculptures, and paintings reconfiguring the traditional composition. In addition to the traditional Dioscuri compositions, de Chirico's preoccupation with mythical twins transcended the boundaries of Greece and antiquity. In essence, the many variations upon the original Dioscuri canvases are, I believe, a transposition of his connection to other eras. In saying this, I look to his nearly identical paintings of the Dioscuri in the 1920's and 1930's, the New York City compositions of the 1930's, and the Rubenesque compositions in the 1950's. It is de Chirico's placement of himself within the canon of other ages, in the art of the great artists before him; just as, in these same years, he began to reference his own art. It is a metahistorical impulse to return to his personal myth and reinvent it; taking it from classical antiquity and placing it in the New York City he visited; or in the work of Rubens, who he greatly admired.

### **Self-Portraiture as Autobiography**

A brief examination of de Chirico's self portraits elucidates my assertion of his art as autobiography, especially in a metaphysical impulse to constantly depict himself across the canon of art history. De Chirico's self portraits are more numerous than his Dioscuri compositions, and for this reason cannot be examined with due justice within the bounds of this paper. However, I offer them in order to note his consistent impulse to render himself in various guises; from youthful metaphysician to gray-haired nude. Looking first to a self-portrait from 1924, de Chirico paints himself doubled with a sculptural bust rendering of himself, looking out at the viewer. (Figure 16) The artist is young, confident, and asserting himself in contemplation. The sculptural bust recalls those of Greek antiquity or Roman depictions of statesmen, and it is rendered facing de Chirico. The profile rendering recalls the imagery of Roman coins. The artist and sculptural double are situated within the front of the painting, beyond which a curtain partially obscures a receding building. A lemon rests in the foreground of the painting upon a stone ledge. De Chirico places a Latin inscription in the bottom right of the painting which reads, "Giorgio de Chirico: se ipsum," meaning, "I myself." This inscription is a further assertion of self, as the artist would have been deeply enmeshed within his dispute with critics at the time the painting was completed.

A second self-portrait depicts a total reinvention of himself in 1954 much in the style of Rubens, entitled *Self Portrait in a Park*. (Figure 17) The style of the painting is defined by broad brushstrokes and thickly applied paint, much like his Dioscuri images of the late 1920's. Here, de Chirico wears Baroque period costume with a richly painted lace plumed collar and ruff. His hat and costume are of a brilliant, almost cerulean blue. He is seated, one hand in his lap, the other at his chest as he holds a red book. He stares out at the viewer, his face partially obscured in shadow. Behind him, a landscape of the countryside is partially visible. It seems that in rendering himself in this manner, he too is asserting his acquired status as old master.

The portraits show a self-conscious man never at peace with himself, his role as an artist, or his surroundings. Thus, the idealized image of himself and his brother as timeless figures of

the quest of the Argonauts was so attractive to him, in the same way that a portrait as a bard of antiquity or great master painter was. Viewed in light of the return to the Dioscuri theme, de Chirico's self portraits amplify the extent of his introspection and self-narration. Self-portraiture was autobiography to the artist. With this in mind, his self-portraits can serve as a segue from the Dioscuri and Argonaut compositions, and into his expansive literary recollections.

### **The Brothers De Chirico: The Twinning of Memory and Early Collaboration**

As previously stated, an examination of Giorgio de Chirico's or Alberto Savinio's career without reference to the other is incomplete. Looking at both bodies of work, an unprecedented depth of understanding of their shared childhood and the symbiosis present within both oeuvres emerges. Above all, in conjunction with visual analysis, a reading of the brothers' collective literature underscores their mutual preoccupation with the Dioscuri and Argonaut themes. Their writing reveals their common experience, which resulted in the shared lexicon of images and tropes that dominate their work. Despite the strained relationship between de Chirico and Savinio later in their lives, their literary works provide counterparts to the other.

From the same childhood, they share the same feelings of alienation, nostalgia for the past, belief in the magical quality of art, and idealization of Greece. They both desire immortality, and reflect upon a life of constant arrivals and departures. Looking first to artistic collaboration between the brothers, their individual works will then be examined. De Chirico's *Memorie della mia vita*, published in 1945, will be looked to as the most significant example of the artist's personal recollections and commentary. Savinio's autobiographical novel published in the same year entitled *Tragedia d'infanzia*, (Tragedy of Childhood) will be considered in connection with it. Additionally, Savinio's wartime memoir *The Departure of the Argonaut*, published in 1917, provides the most manifest account of the Argonaut theme. Lastly, de Chirico's recollection of Savinio's death will serve as a close; a final departure for the brothers. Their memories and images are startlingly similar, but also present marked divergences in the manner in which they are recollected. Throughout each text, the Argonaut myth is, quite literally, a song sent out to the other; a means of creating myth and meaning from lives that were filled with illness, melancholy, departure, and loneliness.

As discussed in Section One, de Chirico and Savinio spent the first two decades of their lives traveling, alternating between extended periods of coexistence and departure. Between 1909-1911, the brothers experienced a period of marked collaboration during their travels in Italy together in search of inspiration. Both brothers turned to the *stimmung* of Greek antiquity in an act of personal reference, and what they saw as a union between the rational and irrational worlds would emerge as the tenets of metaphysical art. They both read Nietzsche extensively during this time, studied Greek and Latin, and attended the theater together. De Chirico spent a significant amount of this time composing music instead of painting. The eighteen-month period was thus a time in which the brothers did not distinguish between their respective arts.

Additionally, Savinio completed a study of *Argonautica* by the Greek poet and historian Apollonius of Rhodes in 1909.<sup>68</sup> During the time spent in Italy, Savinio composed an opera entitled *Poema Fantastico*, which reflected the basic tenets of what would become de Chirico's metaphysical paintings. Savinio organized the opera into autobiographical "episodes", the titles derived from memories. Savinio's operas are now lost, but the concert program from the performance survives. An article from 1909 entitled, "The Fifteen-Year-Old Composer" quotes Savinio as stating, "At present I am composing a second opera, a kind of fantastic poem. The

<sup>68</sup> Baldacci, *The Metaphysical Period*, 21.

subject is vaguely mythological insofar as it is partially based in Greek mythology.”<sup>69</sup> Myth and prehistory defined the themes of the work, as chapter titles such as “The Passage of the Pelasgians” (primitive inhabitants of mythical Greece) are found alongside autobiographical titles such as “Childhood,” “The Departure,” “Prelude to War,” and “Whistles in the Night.” De Chirico painted *The Departure of the Argonauts* in the same year. It is fascinating then, from this mutual pool of memory, myth, and history, that the brothers were driven as far away from one another as they were in the next decade.

### ***Memorie de Chirico: An Artist’s Personal Vision***

De Chirico published his first collection of memoirs in 1945 when he was in his late 50’s, and a second volume was published in 1962. De Chirico’s memoirs, poetry, and prose provide understanding of the literary content of his paintings. In saying this, the mythological and historical undertones within each canvas find extension within his collection of writing. His wide-ranging criticism and commentary upon the problems of modern art, artists he particularly admired, and current events are extremely subjective, and become increasingly so over the course of his lifetime.

But perhaps more interesting still is de Chirico’s criticism concerning himself, his family, and his modes of self-expression. In linking the chronicle of his life to his paintings, he creates a metahistorical narrative; a prose discourse from events in his life that he deemed to be of consequence. His *Memorie* retells those events he found essential to his character: his childhood in Greece and his early education in art, his father’s death, his travels with Savinio and their mother, the brothers’ periods of separation, and, comprising a large portion, the episode of Savinio’s death in 1952. It becomes readily apparent in reading his *Memorie* that de Chirico’s ‘metaphysical musings’ did not end in 1919. Above all, his memoirs serve to defy critical historiography. He espouses, again and again, that all of his canvases are of equal value. Subsequent editions of his original memoirs published in 1962 and 1972<sup>70</sup>, reveal changed narration of events, demonstrating his concerns about his legacy. This habit has largely been attributed to the artist’s egocentricity, but I suggest this does not matter.

Instead, for the purposes of this paper, the texts provide de Chirico’s own truth, his myth, and his values. Despite what has been seen as a delusional conception of myth and reality, it is the vision behind de Chirico’s art.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, he writes, “This is the truth and I defy anyone to prove me wrong.”<sup>72</sup> It is a highly selective retelling that leaves out as much as it includes, reflective of his shifting convictions. However it also displays the core of his identity and the consistent threads of values that came to define his lifestyle.

To begin, de Chirico’s recollections are fraught with his personal vendettas. His scathing commentary concerning the Surrealists has already been examined, but de Chirico’s neurosis did not end there. He laments at the poor treatment of artists in Italy; he points to the “usual jealous peoples”—art dealers, critics—who constantly thwart the endeavors of his art and the work of Savinio. With each attack he makes, he adds statements to justify his cause, such as, “I write these things and will continue to write them, remaining indifferent to reactions, since I know that

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<sup>69</sup> Baldacci, *The Metaphysical Period*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> De Chirico chose to include his memoirs in the “De Chirico by de Chirico” exhibition of 1972, discussed in Section 4. They are edited extensively to fit within the bounds of the publication, as well as to reflect, arguably, the pieces present within the exhibition.

<sup>71</sup> Baldacci, *The Metaphysical Period*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> De Chirico 1962, 153.

in addition to being a great painter and a great man, I also have a *mission* to fulfill.” (155) He states that modern painting is the “scandal of our time,” an “orgy” a “saturnalia.”

As he lends details of his own studies, de Chirico also notes Savinio's endeavors over the course of his memoirs; at different times Savinio is mentioned as taking private lessons from a composer, accompanying him to the theater. De Chirico recounts Savinio's failures as well as his successes. At one point while the brothers are in Munich, he “acts as interpreter in a small way because my brother did not know German well enough.” (57) De Chirico praises Savinio at other junctures. In memories of childhood, he references Savinio as “the beautiful one...like a Van Dyck portrait.” (33) However, the vast majority of de Chirico's commentary concerning his brother is characterized by backhanded compliments. For example, he writes,

He [Savinio] was less powerful and profound as a painter than a writer, but all the same left some extraordinary works behind....as a composer he was more on the level of modern music, although he was superior to what is being done today. My brother was also a painter and a musician. His greatest strength, however, was that of a writer and a poet...of magnificent verses of a truly remarkable lyricism, metaphysical quality, and pathos. (203)

Though he praises Savinio's work in music and writing, de Chirico does so in order to clearly assert his own superiority in his field of painting. And yet this bitter, almost childish feud is accompanied by sincere statements of love for his brother, which will be discussed later.

A dual nostalgia for childhood but early status as an outsider emerges in his recollection of childhood. As a young boy, de Chirico was ostracized. He recounts that he was a maker of beautiful kites, but other children would try and ‘fanestrate,’ or knock down, his creations. I suggest that this is not without significance, as this early episode parallels a continued feeling of attack from various artistic circles later in his life. Modernity was yet another iteration of children ‘fanestrating’ his kite. Art emerged as de Chirico's refuge from an early age. De Chirico continued to espouse this sentiment in his old age, as he writes, “In order not to think of so much stupidity in the world I have sought refuge in work and in that sacred temple where two gods hold each other by the hand: True poetry and true painting.” (227) In his memories of childhood, art is imbued with a magical, metaphysical quality.

De Chirico wrote an autobiographical essay in 1929 under the pseudonym Angelo Bardi, and recalls that his first “signed” work, a picture of a horse galloping, was completed at the age of seven. He notes, “Over the course of those academic years, the spirit of Giorgio de Chirico began to develop, to acquire a poetic quality, to identify that aesthetic path that, from then on, he faithfully followed. Little by little, he penetrated the realm of culture, while at the same time the landscape of Athens (this magnificent city) led his spirit toward the romantic, the enigmatic and the obscure that are the true living force behind Greek classicism. Independent of his academic studies, he painted seascapes.”<sup>73</sup>

One of de Chirico's first art teachers was a Greek landscape painter named Bolonakis, whose paintings, “had much atmosphere and were full of poetry.” De Chirico writes of his teacher's ‘magic’ pencil, extolling praise for the quality of his work. The atmosphere is Greece is a metaphysical realm that must be ‘penetrated,’ in which myth and reality are equally present. Of this he writes, “He played near the sea, where he saw the ship of the Argonauts, at the foot of that mountain where he knew the childhood of fast-footed Achilles, and the wise admonitions of

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<sup>73</sup> Baldacci, 26. (de Chirico 1929, pg 21.)

the centaur teachers...<sup>74</sup> In saying this, he sets his childhood as a time where this realm was penetrated, implying that he interacted with the myths that characterized the history of his surroundings.

De Chirico constantly alluded to his superior powers of observation derived from his mythical beginnings in Greece. He likens himself to the captain of a ship upon the 'deck' of his studio, writing, "like the captain of a ship with its sails shortened in calm weather, I watch and scrutinize before me and above me." (163) He insists upon his superior intelligence, writing,

It is certain that all these spectacles of exceptional beauty which I saw in Greece as a boy, and which were the most beautiful I have seen in all my life, made such a deep impression on me and remained so powerfully impressed on my mind and thoughts because I am an exceptional man who feels and understands a hundred times more strongly than others. (24)

De Chirico's recollections of his travels are particularly fraught with nostalgia and dreams of Greece. Recounting his first departure, he writes, "Then, with all the furniture, trunks and cases, we left the city of the Argonauts on a steamer which sailed for the Piraeus." (18) As he recounts his time in New York in 1936, he laments that autumn in the city has no "classic atmosphere" of Europe. "No leaves falling, no melancholy, memories, yearning and nostalgia for the villas and castles left behind and the abandoned beaches; nothing." (135) While in the United States, he recounts, "One night I had a dream; I dreamt that I was in Greece, I saw those trees and bushes which I had seen during my childhood... Suddenly my mother appeared among the olives." (135) He also mentions letters received from Savinio during his stay abroad. I suggest that this discomfort with the atmosphere of New York led him to paint the aforementioned Dioscuri composition of 1936, *Vision of New York*, as he nostalgically yearned for Greece and his companion, Savinio.

Lastly, a distinct fixation upon his father emerges. His father too illustrates his nostalgia for his past and for his childhood. De Chirico recounts the drawing lessons he gave him as a child as a sacred episode in his life. His father's illness is an episode that takes up close to two chapters of his memoirs. He recounts that at his death, he drew him upon his deathbed, adding that his mother or brother still has the drawing. De Chirico writes that his father was "...precisely the opposite of most men today, who lack a sense of direction and any character, are unskilled, incapable and, on top of everything, unchivalrous, highly opportunistic, and full of stupidity" (16) In *Hebdomeros*, de Chirico's protagonist finds immortality "in his father's eyes." I believe that his 'immortality' corresponds directly to the fact that de Chirico sets him as a desired ideal separate from the challenges he faced in the modern world.

An interesting reflection upon de Chirico's native Italy corresponds with his self-narration. He writes, "About countries, as about people and also *individuals*, false legends are created." (54) What precisely is a 'false legend,' if not the metahistory he weaves of his own life?

### **Savinio's *Tragedia l'infanzia: A Song of Return***

Savinio's *Tragedia dell'infanzia*, originally published in 1945, was written seven years before his death. In it, he nostalgically looks back upon his childhood, providing, in his own

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<sup>74</sup> Fagiolo dell'Arco, Maurizio. *Il Meccanismo Del Pensiero: Critica, Polemica, Autobiografia, 1911-1943*. (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1985), 67.

words, “a backward view.” He writes, “While in the company of the pious Mnemosyne [memory], I go back over the traces of what once was and, casting off my moorings to the present, navigate the fabulous seas of childhood.” (16) He creates a metaphor for his entire career as a sea voyage, his life characterized by braving adverse seas and eluding perilous capes. He states that the conditions of life’s voyage changed with age, and that those things in the past that used to frighten him did so because, “It was the fear that my journey might be delayed.” (7)

Like de Chirico, Savinio also writes of his concern about a legacy. He concludes the novel by writing that in looking back, one finds a reward I knowing “we have left an oeuvre.” Knowing this, death means nothing. For in leaving this oeuvre, having reached the end of a journey, one tastes immortality.<sup>75</sup>

Savinio’s novel is also one of a childhood steeped in mythology. In speaking of memory, he references Cronos, the god of time, in saying that time is entirely unknown to children. Savinio recollects an early memory concerning the mingling of myth and reality through conversations with his childhood teacher, Diamandis. On the Thessalian shore, Savinio asked Diamandis who Jason, Orpheus, the Dioscuri, and Lynceus were. His teacher 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.” (48) His teacher thus places the Dioscuri and Jason, mythological heroes, within Savinio’s own earthly realm. It revealed to Savinio and de Chirico, “the heroes’ mysterious presence on earth...as true and obvious facts.” In another instance, he recounts Diamandis’ description of the mythological origins of the city.<sup>76</sup> A notably autobiographical passage, recounts his first exposure to theater using mythological allusions and astronomy to describe the events taking place on the open-air stage.

In a manner also quite similar to de Chirico’s work, the atmosphere, or ‘*stimmung*,’ of Greece determines much of the plot of the novel. In recalling a severe childhood illness, it is not his pain that Savinio fixates on. Instead, he recollects the sounds of Greece that he could hear from his bedroom window, from “...a little narrow gauge railroad linking that Argonauts’ port with the interior of Thessaly assembled there at mealtime.” (10) He recollects nights laying in delirium, when he could hear sailors’ roars and boatmen’s drunken antics, Levantine traders and Dutch ships dropping anchor. As he lay in his convalescent bed, he imagines his mother as a goddess. Upon recovery, the first image he sees is the sea; a sea that is synonymous with the Argonauts. As Savinio recounts first getting out of his bed, he writes, “In exploring my spelling book, I had not ventured beyond the letter L. Each page of the book illustrated a historical event or personage. The A page was devoted to the departure of the Argonauts. Armed men, as self-possessed as statues, watched the sea’s horizon and raised their hands in salute.” (20) This passage establishes his early familiarity with the mythological figures. He lives within the realm of the Argonauts.

As in de Chirico’s memoirs, the theme of departure emerges as a key theme in the novel. Quite relevant to the content of de Chirico’s writing and titles of his paintings, Savinio writes, “Is there anyone who doesn’t know what departure means? I gave myself over, body and soul, to my

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<sup>75</sup> I find this notable in comparing this passage to *Hebdomeros*, as in the final pages, Hebdomeros meets a woman named Immortality, having braved similar seas and adversity. This will be examined in full later, but keep in mind that while Savinio meets immortality with the “shining eyes of his mother,” de Chirico meets a feminine apotheosis of immortality with his “father’s eyes.”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 48. “At the time when things were being formed, when cities moved to the sound of lyres and islands said around like flowery ships on the young sea, this city fell down one day from its high and natural place on the mountain.”

new destiny.” (34) After his recovery from illness, his doctor requests that he embark upon a journey, to which Savinio recollects his excitement at voyaging by sea. He writes that the sea is that place where, “...one day at the dawn of the world Jason, protected by the oracular beam that Athena had set in the ship’s prow, sailed off in the direction of the fatal Symplegades...driving me towards distant worlds...” (34) These passages place the course of his own life upon the same course as the Argonauts whom he constantly evokes. As he prepares for his first departure from home, he thinks of the sea, “facing the city of the Argonauts, open, tempting, an invitation to set sail.” (44)

The novel ends, quite fittingly, with an entreaty to the Argonauts. A ship weighs at anchor, and a “song of the sailors comes back in gusts, always farther away.” Warriors standing on the shore respond, “This is the song of return,” and a goddess appears, saying, “The Argonauts have departed.” I suggest that the warriors are the Argonauts, mentioned previously with the illustration of the Argonauts in his spelling book. Here, Savinio looks up at the goddess, and sees the shining eyes of his mother. What is the tragedy of childhood? Is it the inevitability of departure, or perhaps the departure of a world in which myth exists as truth?

Interestingly, the book contains no mention of de Chirico. Nowhere is the word “brother” written. The story focuses upon Savinio’s childhood illness, his love for his mother, and his introduction to theater. Yet it is steeped in the same mythology as de Chirico’s writing and paintings. What is the reason for this, one asks? Why is the tragedy of childhood one of only Savinio? Where does his ‘twin’ brother figure within the same childhood landscape, the same stories? A note on the last page states that the story was first written in 1919, in draft form. Could it be that Savinio edited out any mention of de Chirico, as the brothers were not on speaking terms at the time it was published and edited? A look at his wartime memoir makes mention of his brother and his sadness at their separation. It is curious that the two memoirs have such markedly different tones and that de Chirico would be absent from the narrative, being that the brothers lived together in Paris in the 1920’s. Rather, perhaps Savinio wrote it as a solitary experience years later for the same reasons that the brothers ceased speaking to one another, as struggle between their collective identity and their individual artistic identities resulted in a rift between the two men. Seen in light of de Chirico’s poetic recollection of Savinio’s death, this becomes particularly fascinating, and one that could allow for future inquiry.

### **Savinio’s *The Departure of the Argonaut: The Possibility of Return***

In 1918, Alberto Savinio published a travelogue and wartime diary. A reading of the text amplifies the sentiments found in de Chirico’s writing. The book begins, fittingly, in a train station, Savinio “catching sight of the light brown eyes of my brother,” as he and de Chirico zigzag through a crowd that “views my departure with indifference.”<sup>77</sup> To the brothers, however, the act of departure “takes on the solemnity of an act of fate.” Leaving Ferrara, Savinio reflects on travel by train, writing of that “...prickly, indefinable sensation which takes hold of a traveler at the beginning of every journey.”

Savinio also espouses the same sentiments of public reception that de Chirico constantly writes of:

I’m not given to being understood nor can I bear it when I am. To pass freely through the middle of this life, I’m dedicated to laws and have established a moral

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<sup>77</sup> Savinio, *The Departure of the Argonaut*, 2.

code. I enjoy my slice of beauty, of sky, sea, air, light, color, etc., but I won't allow anyone whatsoever to assist me during my aesthetic meal. But am I being sincere?

The majority of the plot takes on the form of a train journey along the coast. The train becomes his "home on wheels," and he recalls the atmosphere of each place the train stops.

Ah Jason, more than ever I feel myself the Argonaut...standing in front of the foremast's tarred trunk, looking straight into the face of guiding fate, I take off my cap, 'O Mediterranean, hail; Proteus appears/ Who rises from the waves/ his head crowned with seaweed.' He thinks of sirens singing to him on the crest of a wave, "The Argonaut, if he goes/ when he'll return, nobody knows.

The ocean evokes the same feelings for Savinio as it does for de Chirico. "Navigare necesse est/ vivere non est necesse," Latin for, "it is necessary to sail, it is not necessary to live." Navigation "cultivates ingenuity and restores one's health. Ashore, leave is over and sailors in their whites gather at the landing 'of the two seas.' To sum up, I despise all this coming and going." Savinio feels excitement and curiosity "at the thought of revisiting this sea after a separation of so many years." He falls into dreams of "wind and salt." Savinio writes,

Eagerly, I search for a direct correspondence with my childhood memories and fix on two paired waves, thin as thread, which come into being at the opposite expanses of the shore and rush to cancel out their brotherly lives on the sand of the beach.

However, the sea of his travel is not always the sea of his childhood. At one point, the sea is the "stone cold" Adriatic; he compares it to the Antarctic, empty, immobile, without a sail in sight. Yet later, he writes, "With the Mediterranean this is an entirely different matter: this is the sea of my destiny. No longer the sweet solitude of a deserted and beckoning Antarctic, the sea now before me throws tragedy into relief." The sea of war, to the organizers of military supply lines is not a manageable thing. It is dangerous. Savinio writes, "But I, to the contrary...disavow all this: the sea I engage is the same one I've called 'friend' as far back as my earthly birth; the sea of delight, of sparkling air and hearty appetite."

In the text, Savinio references Apollonius of Rhodes, the Greek poet whose work *Argonautica* celebrates the tale of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. He writes of his first hours upon a military transport ship, wishing that Apollonius "...will splash out of one of the Holy Grails of ever renewed poetic license and work up a sweat singing my fugitive tale in blank verse." This is quite a bold sentiment to espouse that the Greek poet he studied extensively should retell his own journey as one on par with the Argonautic voyage.

The text is a blending of a celebration of voyage, and desire for home. He calls his travels an "ultramarine voyage." Savinio remarks, "je suis chez moi" in the epilogue, "I am home," after declaring the value of the *Lusiads*, an epic poem describing the voyages of Vasco de Gama; Jules Verne, whom he admired. Perhaps most interestingly, Savinio does not sing the praises of this travel. "As impressive as comings and goings may be, are they all true voyages? I lean more towards imaginary voyages—those not involving the transfer of organic matter." This sentiment is a metaphysical ideal.

Savinio, like de Chirico, creates a Mediterranean imbued with myth. His mythological references are endless, at different junctures mentioning Charon, the Three Fates, Hermes, and the Dioscuri. The topography of the novel is still haunted by the past and antiquity. He sees the “maimed Praxitelean Venuses,” a reference to Venus de Milo, the statue of Aphrodite found off the Greek coast of Milos. At another juncture, he sees Poseidon and Amphitrite, god and goddess of the sea. He calls out to Hermes Oneiromompos, the messenger god and sender of the dreams that Savinio recounts in his travelogue. The text concludes with a reflection upon the Argonauts. He writes:

At this moment my expanded imagination returns to thoughts of the homeland. I want to go back. And how annoying the song of the ever-present sirens ringing in my ears: “The Argonaut, if he goes/ when he’ll return nobody knows...” Yes, to return: but only to myself and to my own heart... Because, after all, does it matter to anyone else if the Argonaut returns never more?

The tale is thus deeply personal. Despite a plot based during a time of Italian nation building and war, all that matters is the narrative of self, the journey of self, and his desire to go back to his own home; that home created, in travel, in the ideal of Greece.

Savinio’s own words are fitting for a conclusion to an examination of memoirs: “Analogy is a form of security. It serves to convince us that the ground around us is firm (is inhabitable, is inhabited), and that we are not in danger of walking into the void.”<sup>78</sup> In looking now to *Hebdomeros*, one encounters the same analogies de Chirico uses within his self-narration, but transposed into the realm of fiction.

### The Final Departure

The final instance of departure arrives with De Chirico’s recollection of Savinio’s death in 1952. His recollection is an elegy, but also a celebration of his brother’s legacy. Despite the fact that the brothers had not spoken for several years, de Chirico rushed to Savinio’s deathbed and placed a laurel wreath upon his head. De Chirico writes of the sight of the dying Savinio,

“The expression on his face was serene and I remembered the expression on my father’s face as he lay on his death bed; the expression of a man who, weary from the long and trying journey of life, is content to rest at last in the arms of kindly death. Only my brother still had that slightly ironical and contemptuous smile that I know and which was also the smile of an exceptional man who knows.” (201)

In saying this, he emphasizes the personal connection between them, placing emphasis upon the superior quality of Savinio, as a man and an individual. De Chirico goes on to quote an epode from Savinio’s previously examined *Tragedy of Childhood*, “Tranquil departures, pleasant returns...journeys of clouds...covers the silent sleep of night.” (205) By incorporating his brother’s own words, de Chirico pays homage to his art. The passage he chooses also reflects the mutual lexicon of the brothers, as these words could easily have come from de Chirico’s own writing. He continues his lament for several pages, concluding in writing,

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<sup>78</sup> A. Savinio, 1944, p. 329. In, De Sanna, Joel. *De Chirico and the Mediterranean* (New York: Rizzoli, 1998), 58.

Yes Brother, au revoir. The greeting that you gave me the last time in this life echoes in my mind. You were leaving for the other shore, leaving me alive at the frontier of time, and I do not know what kind of labyrinth the streets constitute on the other side of your wall. In this adventure of life... I shall meet you and say to you, Brother, here I am!<sup>79</sup>

This final farewell incorporates the imagery of the Argonaut myth in the reference to the 'shore.' One of the two figures, I suggest, leaves the composition and embarks on a final solitary journey; as the other, de Chirico, is left to solve further mysteries in this "adventure of life."

### III. The Novel

#### Hebdomeros: A Rendering in Prose

The subtitle of the original 1929 edition, "le peintre et son genie chez l'ecrivain", "the painter and his genius as a writer" illuminates de Chirico's goal in taking up the pen. His novel is a rendering of his paintings in words, via a wandering traveler, through landscapes, still lifes, sculptures, architecture. One could argue, in fact, that one is unable to read the novel without having viewed de Chirico's paintings. Conversely, the reading of his paintings in light of the novel is equally illuminating.

Hebdomeros, in conjunction with his memoirs, demonstrates his lifetime preoccupation with the question of truth in painting and in literature. Just as de Chirico's memoirs are imbued with nostalgic recollection and poetic accounts of his own life, Hebdomeros too can be said to be on a nostalgic quest, and the book is a poetic, ephemeral rendering of many of the themes found in de Chirico's accounts. His visuals and his novel become examples of his work deepening and transforming the experience and the world into one that is unmistakably his own.

The arguably autobiographical hero protagonist named Hebdomeros is never fully recognized as he embarks over a series of dream adventures. He remains faceless in the same manner as de Chirico's mannequins, and wears masks to alter his identity save for the steady stream of philosophical musings and questions he utters. His name, however, reveals much about what de Chirico had in mind: Hebdomeros, or "seventh" in Greek, and "Omeros", Homer. Through his name, Hebdomeros is placed within the tradition of archetypal travelers past. Seven can also be associated with the seas, the number of notes in the musical scale, the seven-star constellations, and epic poetry.<sup>80</sup> The protagonist embarks on a journey independent of time of space; indeed, the novel lacks any sense of temporality or plot. Instead, the novel consists of a constantly shifting topography of images and themes recognizable from his visual art: seaports, *piazze* with silent statues, trains, ships, stairs, interior rooms, corridors with no apparent end. Hebdomeros is ill at ease with his surroundings, consistently asking what is real. Each space he enters lacks a sense of past or present. De Chirico essentially deprives the novel of concrete reality. His conception of language leads to a novel of impressions, as opposed to fully realized events and objects. The language is solely of description. This leads the experience of reading the novel to be quite challenging, as it has a passing, almost ephemeral quality of a dream.

American poet John Ashbery was particularly drawn to the "hypnotic" poetics of de Chirico's prose. His 1964 essay "The Decline of the Verbs" remains one of the foremost critical reviews of the novel. Ashbery begins in stating, "The novel has no story, though it reads as if it

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>80</sup> Orion and the Pleiades figure within Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and also relate to navigation.

did.”<sup>81</sup> Ashbery points to de Chirico’s ability to give the novel a semblance of plot via “...the masterful way in which leitmotifs are introduced, dropped, and reintroduced when one least expects them...revolutions and assassinations; emigrations...tidal waves; visions of the Arctic, of Africa, of Greece...form a backdrop against which he moves, both Dante and Virgil.”<sup>82</sup>

And in my own reading, indeed, *Hebdomeros*, the main character, evolves through an ever-shifting topography in which events have no consequence. He is there only to observe and to reflect, without getting at the significance of people or places. The return of a prodigal son, for example, is not a momentous occasion, but simply the arrival of an unfamiliar shi It becomes readily apparent in reading the novel that the prose is a literary rendering of the themes present within his paintings—the same arcades, towers, ports and seascapes, ships and trains appear endlessly. The seemingly arbitrary arrangement of images within de Chirico’s canvases are equally riveting as de Chirico’s renders them in prose. Nothing quite makes sense—demigods enter the sea so as not to get wet; bananas and pineapples fall in avalanches; the artichokes in his 1914 painting *The Melancholy of Departure* appear on a menu served to Hebdomeros and his companions at a restaurant in an unknown land alongside carrot soup and semolina pudding. (72) Certain passages could well narrate his compositions which will be examined in further depth in Section Four when de Chirico provides commentary upon his paintings later in his life.

### **Hebdomeros the Misanthrope: de Chirico’s Extension of Self**

In the same way that it reflects his visual compositions, the novel can also be read as a reflection his own memoirs. de Chirico, in the same manner as Proust and other writers, seems to have projected many of his own idiosyncrasies upon the main character. There are parallels that prefigure, and even perhaps justify, many of de Chirico’s struggles within his own life and work. Hebdomeros’ alternating periods of loneliness and travel with companions, of departures and “speaking in a language which no one understands” parallels de Chirico’s own misanthropic life of constant relocation and alienation. Hebdomeros struggles to stay independent from an “inexorable flow of immigration to the west” that he cannot turn back against; a reference, I suggest, to the direction of modern art. From the outset, Hebdomeros “reflects on the difficulty of making oneself understood when one’s thoughts reached a certain height or depth.” (1) His feeling of misunderstanding continues, as he writes, “Its strange for me, the very idea that something has escaped my understanding would keep me awake at night.” This sentiment, as previously discussed, is one that the artist espouses often in his memoirs and his correspondence.<sup>83</sup> Hebdomeros, in a fashion quite similar to the way in which de Chirico speaks out against the Surrealists, states, “there were always those people who reproached him for stepping out of the frame that seemed to have been assigned to him...he had acquired a privileged position from which his adversaries tried in vain to dislodge him.” (111) Is this not an

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<sup>81</sup> Ashbery, John, and Eugene Richie. *Selected Prose* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), x.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

<sup>83</sup> In a letter to Fritz Gartz, a friend in Munich, dated January 29, 1910, de Chirico writes, “I study a lot too, particularly literature and philosophy, and plan to write books later. (I want to whisper something in your ear: I am the only man who understands Nietzsche, all my works prove that.) I would have many other things to tell you, for example that my brother and I have composed the deepest music...” in “A Look into the Invisible” catalogue, 187.

echo of de Chirico's quarrel with Breton, or any other of the "usual jealous people" aimed to thwart his genius?<sup>84</sup>

It becomes evident that de Chirico participates in the narrative as Hebdomeros, the "interrogator of enigmas." Hebdomeros' feelings of alienation become a literary rendering of de Chirico's own anxieties in "...the vast world in which the things which are your enemies are much more numerous than those which are in your favor." (141) The mythical surroundings of de Chirico's Greece and the classical fragments of his paintings are omnipresent as the hero—de Chirico or

Hebdomeros is isolated and estranged. As a result, he continuously departs, searching for another enigma.

### **Hebdomeros as Metaphysician**

In the first pages of the novel, Hebdomeros espouses the central tenet of de Chirico's metaphysical philosophy of art. He states, "Deep down he felt an instinctively attracted to the enigmatic element in all things, animate and inanimate." (5) The enigma that Hebdomeros is drawn to is that same enigma that pervades de Chirico's canvases. Hebdomeros resents those who he calls "knot-people," or those who are incapable of comprehending, creating, writing, or painting. (39) A long, central episode begins with de Chirico making a speech to a gathered crowd of "disciples" and sailors. He calls for metaphysical seekers, "who at heart believe even less in space than in time" and finds himself joined by sailors and fisherman.<sup>85</sup> These sailors are those who share his vision; who are also, "perspicacious young men who were given to lyrical flights of the imagination." (71) The connection to be made here is that these sailors are those that worship too, the mythical Dioscuri, protectors of sailors and ships.

His metaphysical tenets are visible further as de Chirico alludes to the *stimmung* of various scenes in the novel, recalling the way in which he also used the Nietzschean term to describe the atmosphere of his paintings. The atmosphere of Hebdomeros' travel constantly changes, as shadows on sundials mark noon, shadows stretch or are absent, loud noises result in brusque changes in light, and deadly cataclysms arrive and plunge the countries he visits into apocalyptic darkness. Storms arrive unexpectedly; wind provides solace and violent upheaval,

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<sup>84</sup> The subject of Hebdomeros and the Surrealists presents an interesting paradox. I suggest that a large amount of Hebdomeros' feelings of alienation can be tied directly to de Chirico's fight with the Surrealist camp, discussed in Chapter One. It must be noted that the book emerged at a time when de Chirico was at odds with Breton. Despite this, the novel was heralded as a triumph of the movement's art due to the dream imagery, as well as the parallels between Hebdomeros as heroic, surrealist hero with moral responsibility to throw off the Surrealists' perceived "restrictions" of the world. Matthews states that the novel, despite the Surrealists' sharp criticism of de Chirico in the years prior, was acclaimed for "The search for an absolute, evaluated against the background of eternity and in the face of time, has always been the goal of surrealism, even when it has authorized humor and appeared to encourage levity." (89)

And indeed, there are plenty of references that Surrealists would find to be entirely in line with their ideology. De Chirico's dream sequence of a novel, his free associations of strange non-sequitors, and lack of any sense of time are tenets of Surrealist literature. Random, unrelated objects appear in the same way they are arbitrarily placed within his metaphysical canvases. For instance, in one passage, Hebdomeros complains that he cannot pass one's nights sleep "in the fear of meeting an ichthyosaur or of being awakened from a deep sleep by the roar of a volcano." (72) Additionally, de Chirico ascribed to the Surrealist belief that beans cause dreams "to be dark and confused," a belief prevalent among Pythagoreans.

<sup>85</sup> Recall the three types of metaphysics found on page xxx in section one.

alternatively. At one point, Hebdomeros states that he detests the *stimmung* of spring. This is quite an intriguing statement given de Chirico's artistic revelations, which took place in autumn.<sup>86</sup> The novel is also cloaked in a distinct *stimmung* of silence, which seems to be linked to de Chirico's metaphysical musings on reality. Hebdomeros walks through dark streets filled with silent crowds on three separate occasions. In one scene, a piano player plays while no sound emerges, "that pianist you didn't really see..." (4) At another juncture, a ghost asks Hebdomeros, "Where is it all going? Toward what unknown shores do all these things sail?" He thinks about the question, providing no answer, and reflects upon "...the mood the somber questions create, the *Stimmung*, as Hebdomeros called it—created by such questions." (24) Hebdomeros thus takes up de Chirico's main metaphysical terminology as his own.

To further the autobiographical implications of Hebdomeros' character, halfway through the novel, de Chirico establishes that Hebdomeros is also an artist. He looks around a room and states that he had "achieved something" by cleaning the corners of his studio. He writes, "The shapes were progressing, and several canvasses were sketched out and some nearly finished." (95) This is the first moment that we see Hebdomeros in the act of painting, or as creator of art. As if acknowledging the sudden appearance of this role, Hebdomeros states, "I too am a good painter." Thus, in addition to mythical traveler, Hebdomeros becomes artist, depicting the same metaphysical vision of de Chirico; traveling and inspiring those to understand.

### Hebdomeros as Argonaut

Within the novel, the Argonauts figure quite prominently. Hebdomeros' solitude is qualified by the accompaniment of 'companions' who are comparable to the Argonaut band of heroes. The Argos, the ship of the Argonauts belonging to the hero Jason, appears at various junctures. And the literal existence of the Argonauts as travelers mirrors Hebdomeros' constant arrivals and departures, via ship or rail. The landscape of Greece, the seaports, parallels the description of the Argonauts derived from the Oxford dictionary, "encountering and solving problems." Chirico, in the same way, traveled the European subcontinent and gathered and solved enigmas. Hebdomeros is a metaphysical traveler, viewing the world, illuminating enigmas, but posing no answers to them.

De Chirico's references to astronomy are also quite interesting in regards to the Dioscuri myth. The Dioscuri are known as the Gemini as well, and de Chirico references "trapezoidal" and "well-known" constellations over the course of the novel. A hero lies down and contemplates the stars (48); at another moment, "The constellations were so clearly arranged that they formed real pictures drawn in dots like the illustrations in dictionaries." (80) Hebdomeros states, "You could see the Heavenly Twins, leaning against each other in a tranquil, classical pose." (80) I find a small lithograph by de Chirico completed in 1956 entitled *Gemini and Other Signs of the Zodiac* to be quite relevant here. (Figure 18) The etching depicts the Gemini

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<sup>86</sup> Baldacci and Roos, *A Look to the Invisible* catalogue, 45. In another letter to Fritz Gartz in January of 1911, de Chirico espouses his love for Nietzsche further, beginning in saying that he had had a change in his state of mind. "The young hero—who has overcome everything, the free spirit without dogma, of course that is much better than the whole stupidity of modern and past life—but a new wind has now inundated my soul—I have heard a new song—and the whole world now looks changed to me—the autumnal afternoon has arrived—the long shadows, the crisp air, the clear sky..." (translated by Gerhard Roos) I suggest that there is a correlation between these sentences written by a young de Chirico at the outset of his metaphysical paintings, and the state of mind of Hebdomeros, the lone hero, traveling the world and free of the "stupidity of modern and past life."

constellation of the two Dioscuri figures in the sky. He thus references and renders his own myth, supplanting it into Hebdomeros' vision. Over the course of the novel, de Chirico proceeds to point out other parts of the zodiac. Stars have, so de Chirico writes, "witnessed wars, cataclysms, and plagues striking the world and destroying what man has created." (82) So too does his personal myth exist in the cosmos, bearing witness to antiquity, and now upon the brothers.

Beneath the sky, the sea is the vehicle of departure and return. It forms the core of the topography of Hebdomeros' travels just as it forms the basis of the Dioscuri compositions. Harbors appear on almost every page; ports look out at the ruins of famous temples. The sea is alternatively, "smooth, perfectly mirroring the sky in the light of the setting sun," and, "...swelling up and gathering speed, then crashing headlong 'gainst the shore..." (7) De Chirico describes the alternating "thunderclap" of the waves with the "absolute silence and calm" in the interim.<sup>87</sup> Storms at sea trouble Hebdomeros' heart. The ocean is a place of action, of monsters and of an in-between state of nostalgia for the shore. As the book progresses, a "magnificent panorama opens like a map of the world, and he suddenly *saw* the Oceans." (61) This moment of revelation, the excitement brought about by the sea, parallels de Chirico's moment of true sight at particular works of art over the course of his career.

There are many ways in which de Chirico ties Hebdomeros to a role as protector of the sea. Arguably, de Chirico endows Hebdomeros with the same powers as the Dioscuri. The text is interspersed throughout with verses referencing the sea, "Give me your cold seas, I will warm them in mine!" (17) In a similar manner, Hebdomeros hears the entreaty of the fisherman's wife. He muses, "Let my arms be your oars and my tresses your ropes, for the great black fishes might wallow you up in the fathomless depths of the sea." (7) Hebdomeros feels "seasick" and "shipwrecked" at alternative moments while on the solid shore, but this, I suggest, is a feeling of nostalgia and loss. These passages seem to situate Hebdomeros as a Dioscuri figure, protector of sailors and moral men; but also as de Chirico, the metaphysician and protector of those moral men so rarely found upon the seas of modernity.

An interesting reference to the journey of the Argonauts emerges with a story of a prodigal son's return. On page 74, a steamer named the *Argolide* arrives in Hebdomeros' port, with the return of a man named Thomas Lecourt, son of a "butterologist." At this spectacle, Hebdomeros reflects that there is nothing more moving than a homecoming. All of the townspeople stand on the promenade and watch the reunion in silence. As he arrived, they shout, "Three cheers for the one who has come back! Three cheers for the wanderer's return!" This episode leads into Hebdomeros' musing on the "sweet and strange torpor such as he [himself] felt on journeys, for when traveling he always had the slight impression of being in a dream." (77) This recollection of travel could easily be derived from one of the brother's memoirs.

### **Hebdomeros as Dioscuri Child**

This metaphysical realm of the brothers' childhood becomes Hebdomeros' own. His topography is one where gods and humans inhabit the same space. Recalling Savinio's childhood belief in a world inhabited by heroes, and de Chirico's memory of playing upon the Argonaut's shores, Hebdomeros' world too is one where gods are present within daily life. He stands in the vicinity of mountains that are "...the site of the famous caves inhabited by demigods..." who turned into sages and poets in the twilight of their lives. The work's rich mythological references form a red thread throughout the novel. Orestes plays a lyre, the Colossus of Rhodes is equated

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<sup>87</sup> This parallels Savinio's alternating feelings towards the seas over the course of his own travels.

to the ocean, demigods and bearded sea monsters emerge on the crests of waves. Mercury appears to Hebdomeros in his dreams, as “he who guides the souls of the dead to the world beyond, but also of bringing dreams to the sleep of the living.” In a curious painting on the wall above Hebdomeros’ bed, Mercury is depicted as a shepherd, driving before him towards the darkness of sleep his flock of dreams. Remember here that Savinio similarly describes Mercury as the deliverer of his dreams.

Compare this passage to de Chirico and Savinio’s recollections of their childhood:

He saw, moving up slowly out of the chiaroscuro of his memory and little by little defining themselves in his mind, the shapes of those temples and sanctuaries built in plaster that stand at the foot of sheltering mountains and rocks through which ran narrow passes that made one strangely aware not only of unknown worlds nearby but of those distant horizons heavy with adventure that ever since his unhappy childhood Hebdomeros had always loved. (64)

The topography of Volos and the twins’ childhood playing in the shadow of the mountain is Hebdomeros’ own. An additional passage references the same sentiments of de Chirico and Savinio’s memories of childhood: “...years of ones youth, of serenades by the foot of those necropolises, so white in the moonlight surround...those children who loved to daydream, for the north attracted them more than the other points of the compass, later they would feel the pull of the west as well.” (13) This “pull” of the north, I suggest, represents the brothers’ relocation first to Germany and then to France. The pull of the West could reference further travels on the continent, as well as de Chirico’s travels to the United States.

De Chirico and Savinio’s unhappy childhoods of illness and their father’s death, compounded with their longing for the idyllic Greece of their innocent years, can be said to be present here. I suggest that there is no better example of a passage where the Dioscuri come to represent nostalgia for a world in which the de Chirico brothers, as Argonaut travelers, long to return. Thus, the novel provides a further extension of the brothers’ memoirs and de Chirico’s compositions. Hebdomeros is an extension of the metaphysician de Chirico, as well as Dioscuri-Argonaut.

### **The Ship and the Train**

With few exceptions, a train and ship can be located in the distance in each of de Chirico’s early metaphysical compositions as well as his *nuova metafisica* works of the 1960s. As previously discussed in memoirs, the theme of departure in de Chirico’s painting and own life pervades the novel. In the novel too, ships and trains are consistent symbols of journey and nostalgic memory. Hebdomeros constantly expresses a desire to flee, to depart, to travel and to evoke the nostalgia of the traveler.

The sail of a ship is present in almost every metaphysical painting. In the same way, ships are present at all points in the novel. Boats are moored at every port, ships on stormy seas fly strange flags, and black pirate sails are seen from a distance. The sea is a threat as well as a point of solace for Hebdomeros, seen especially in the tale of the director of an important shipping company named Martiobarbulus who “always kept a large lifebelt placed on the floor and leaning against the foot of his bed.” He would reply to those who inquired about this habit, “Its

best to be prepared, for you never know what may happen.”<sup>88</sup> Ships drop anchor off deserted shores, representing the archetypal movement of ages. The Argonaut's ship arrives in the novel to bring a son back to his father. This is interesting as the de Chirico brothers, as Argonauts, traversed the continent, but never returned together to Greece. Indeed, they could not return to their adoring father, for he was dead. The theme of the return of the prodigal son is thus an interesting composition for de Chirico to render in prose or paint, for I believe that it indicates his own desire to return to Greece.

The journeys by trains determine the ‘plot’ of the novel as much as they are memorialized in the brothers’ memoirs. In the same way that both de Chirico and Savinio frame their memoirs with departures and returns, Hebdomeros thinks, “In electric trains as brightly lit as theaters, hopes were setting off on a journey.” (21) One must remember that de Chirico's father was an engineer who built the railway to Volos, and passed away in Greece. Trains are equally indicative of the brother's constant travels, as Hebdomeros sits in second-class carriages (recall Savinio's *The Departure of the Argonaut* in particular) on endless journeys, through “inexplicable halts” and “deserted stations, lost.” de Chirico writes of, “Infinite nostalgias and sudden bursts of emotion which, in his imagination, heightened by the sleepless nights in the trains of the state railways...”(54) The same sentiment is present within the brothers’ recollection of the emotions inspired by travel.

It becomes clear that trains and ships transcend rational placement within the novel as well as de Chirico's paintings. They emerge within streets suddenly, appear within the sky, and mysteriously exist in the background of various scenes. They are, in effect, the physical vehicles of the nostalgia that suddenly overcomes Hebdomeros, and de Chirico, at various times. They are self-referential objects, alluding to the artist's as well as Hebdomeros' journeys.

### **On Immortality**

The novel concludes in a fashion almost identical to Savinio's *Tragedy of Childhood*, as Hebdomeros meets Immortality. The *stimmung* of the world changes to become “devoid of hard things.” A wave washes over the land and submerges everything in “infinite tenderness.” In the middle of a new ocean, Hebdomeros' ship floats, and all sails are still. Out of the wave, a tornado of his fears emerges, accompanied by horses “pushing towards infinity.” (116) It is then that Hebdomeros meets Immortality, who has the eyes of his father. She comes forward and states, “Have you thought of my life? One day, O brother...” After meeting immortality, his thoughts abandon him, surrendering themselves to “caressing waves of unforgettable words, and on these waves they floated toward strange and unknown shores.” (117) These last sentences, I believe, reference the creative act and process of leaving a legacy. In a way, it provides the answer to de Chirico's concern. Yet a fascinating detail is found here and connects directly to Savinio's *Tragedy of Childhood*. To de Chirico, Immortality is a woman with the eyes of his father. This is the representation of Immortality almost identical but precisely the opposite of Savinio's Immortality, who has the shining eyes of his mother. These conclusions set the two separate works in an almost identical structure, demonstrating without doubt the twinning of their shared preoccupations.

Another passage presents a fascinating autobiographical reference, as Hebdomeros states,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 37. I suggest that this character of Martiobarbulus is an interesting manifestation of de Chirico's own neurosis.

Since you are here, you are therefore my brother and my accomplice, we are in the same situation...armored in a formidable fashion against a thousand dangers of the ordinary man, the father of a family, the bearded and spectacled worker, the hairy man busily running about the railway platform with a small valise in his hand. (96)

Is this a reference to Savinio and his father? Savinio, as brother and as fellow Argonaut, presents a simple enough connection. However, I suggest that this can also be said to recall de Chirico's father. In the same way, a statue of a tail-coated politician holding a scroll is a reference to the public statuary in de Chirico's paintings, as well as a reference to a commemorative statue of his father erected in Volos in praise of his work on the railway line. Hebdomeros speaks of his father further, stating,

The town where he passed his childhood was a favorite subject of his memories; he spoke of it with love and tenderness, sometimes even with exaltation...he looked beyond the world and things, lost in a dream without end: 'I believe I can see it' he said. The engineers, having finished their work on the railway line under construction...the town stretched gracefully along the foot of a mountain...it offered its marble quays to the little waves of the port that came silently to caress it. (105)

Hebdomeros' terrestrial and metaphysical adventures, as he calls them, are fed by de Chirico's own retelling of his family memories, his exaltation of Greece, and the autobiographical reference to railway engineers and the port of Volos.

### **The Departures of Hebdomeros, Ulysses, and de Chirico**

To conclude an examination of Hebdomeros, there are distinct literary renderings of his paintings found in the novel. The first is an account of Hebdomeros' flight around the perimeter of an interior room. De Chirico writes, "He went all around his room in a boat, continually forced into a corner by the undercurrent and, at last, abandoning his frail craft..." (37) The image of a man sailing around a room in a boat is rendered in de Chirico's 1968 canvases *The Return of Ulysses* and *The Return of Hebdomeros*. Here, Hebdomeros' predilection for small interiors and "hatred of panoramas, especially the corners of rooms and low ceilings" is found visually in de Chirico's paintings.

In *The Return of Ulysses*, painted in 1968, the figure of Ulysses rows a small skiff upon a small ocean within a claustrophobic interior. (Figure 19) Upon the walls on either side of the room, a metaphysical composition hangs on the left, perhaps representing his past. On the right-hand side, a classical landscape is visible, with a column, temple, and a distant sea. Ulysses wears a toga, but recalls de Chirico's Dioscuri figures in the pattern used to depict his hair.

*The Return of Hebdomeros* from the same year presents a puzzling canvas. (Figure 20) The canvas is a marriage of the Dioscuri canvases, Hebdomeros, and *The Return of Ulysses*. Hebdomeros, in a dress suit, rows the same skiff found in the Ulysses composition. Instead of an interior, however, he returns through a maze of constructed channels, below strange buildings that recall bathing canopies. Two nude male figures stand in the water channel, one with blonde hair, the other a brunette. I suggest that one can say the Dioscuri are present within Hebdomeros'

return as well. The nude male figures are transported here from the Dioscuri canvases and placed in a modern iteration of self.

The composition remains the same in *The Return of Hebdomeros* as well as *The Return of Ulysses*, but in both, Hebdomeros' name must be remembered, as de Chirico endows him with the heritage of archetypal travelers past. What is different is the temporality. While Hebdomeros wears a man's suit, Ulysses wears a toga. I suggest that the paintings depict de Chirico himself as Hebdomeros and Ulysses as one and the same: a traveler of seas. De Chirico, as both men, links the two within the canon of voyagers past, placing himself within it; further constructing a metahistorical narrative.

### **De Chirico and Savinio: Theater and Reconciliation**

The novel also brings up an interesting discussion of theater. De Chirico and Savinio designed sets and wrote music for theaters across Europe in the 1920's and 1930's. Hebdomeros too appears to be preoccupied with the premise of acting, the sadness and melancholy innately to do with the organization of the theater. Hebdomeros delivers soliloquies over the course of the novel, and sits in amphitheaters at various junctures. At a party for the return of the prodigal son, amateur actors present comic sketches until "a most unfortunate incident arose; it was caused by two of the actors in the third and final sketch." As the scene continues, the actor turns to the other and says dryly, "Sir, you are going too far." The other actor replies, "And you, Sir, are forgetting that we are actors on a stage, and what we are acting is purely imaginary." The entertainment is abandoned as a result. At another moment, de Chirico describes the night sky as "the backdrop of this brilliantly illuminated, obscene little theater." (82)

The world thus becomes a stage upon which man moves. Actors also perform *tableaux vivants* of the death of Patroclus, fights between the Greeks and the Trojans, and other episodes of the Homeric poems. It is during a performance that Hebdomeros claims he "understood everything" at the same time that he realized "being the only person present to comprehend a thing so rare and profound worried him." (93) I believe this facet of the story can be read in line with de Chirico and Savinio's aforementioned early collaboration and subsequent solitary forays in theater design and music.

Despite the separation of the brothers, I suggest that de Chirico offers a reconciliation of sorts at the end of his novel. Hebdomeros asks,

"Are we not all brothers, and sisters, and friends, and what again? Are we not all travelers, sailing on the same ship past the shores strung along our way that, slowly but surely, change their dry, rocky and inhospitable look to a sweeter, more smiling one?" (95)

## **IV. Conclusions**

### **De Chirico by de Chirico: The Maestro's Final Word**

Towards what unknown banks are all these signs that I see in my mind  
sailing?<sup>89</sup>

In 1972, Giorgio de Chirico was invited by the New York Cultural Center to exhibit works of art that represented the entirety of the artist's prolific career. The exhibition, completed

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<sup>89</sup> New York, New York Cultural Center, *De Chirico by De Chirico* (New York, 1972), curated by Giorgio de Chirico and Donald Karshan, 60.

at the end of his life, was the first museum retrospective of de Chirico's art to take place in the United States since James Thrall Soby's 1966 exhibition of the artist's metaphysical work from 1910-1919. Donald H. Karshan, the exhibition curator, wished to represent the entire career of the artist over fifty-two years of continuous productivity and stylistic development. In conjunction with this, Karshan asked de Chirico to write personal comments in his own hand under each reproduction of his work in the catalogue, writing, "Now, let the works and the Maestro's own eloquent words speak for themselves in this personal review of a lifetime of extraordinary imagery and thought."<sup>90</sup> He also asked de Chirico to select documents to be published in the catalogue, and the eighty-four year old artist chose to include his memoirs.

The resulting catalogue provides invaluable insight into the artist's conception of self at the end of his life, as he looks back upon his earlier work in 1972, and recalls his 1929 novel *Hebdomeros* quite frequently. De Chirico gives us poetic, metaphysical musings in regards to each picture, in addition to the memoirs at the beginning of the publication. The result is a portrait of the artist's journey in memoirs, brief inscriptions, and visual work. In a style typical of the artist, he does not address form, biography, or the techniques employed in any of the works. Instead, he provides enigmatic fragments of images and events, creating, in effect, a mysterious journey over the course of his art through these pictures. He underscores, in beautiful prose, the importance of that journey to his understanding of self. The exhibition, in addition to de Chirico and Savinio's memoirs and literature, solidify the fact that the artist's view of self remained cloaked the same values over the course of his career.

The exhibition contains eleven self-portraits of the artist from various junctures in his career. De Chirico's reflection upon the aforementioned *The Return of Ulysses* reads, "A great lassitude took hold of me, a lassitude for my past life, for my present life and for the years that still await me, with their torture of sad hours, or smiling ones...just hours."<sup>91</sup> It seems that the painting of Ulysses trapped in an interior reflects de Chirico's feelings about the passage of time. (Figure 21) A weariness and languor accompanies the thought of his 'past' and 'present' lives, as well as those unknown shores to which he has yet to reach. A 1970 drawing entitled, *Remembrance of a Dream* is inscribed, "The passing gods with their inscrutable faces, draped in dignity, haunt the memories of my childhood."<sup>92</sup> This is quite an autobiographical reference.

I suggest that a last work, *Italian Square*, painted in 1971, is a Dioscuri composition, in addition to being incredibly self-referential. (Figure 22) A traditional Italian piazza with an industrial tower recalls his metaphysical canvases; geometric shapes and mannequin forms in the foreground recall his Ferrara period; a distant ship's flag hovers above a classical temple; and curled architectural elements within the foreground recall *The Return of Hebdomeros* composition. At the very center of the piazza, two small figures clasping hands cast a long shadow. They each wear the same business suit that Hebdomeros dons in *The Return of Hebdomeros*. I suggest that these are the Dioscuri, de Chirico and Savinio; the same pair of figures that dominate so many of his canvases. De Chirico's inscription reads, "I saw, engraved and painted, many troubling signs, the point of departure for a long series of inspirations both capricious and surprising."<sup>93</sup> The 'series of inspirations' references de Chirico's incorporation of elements from his art over the course of his career—his brother, classical Greece, statuary, the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, forward p. i.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 37.

squares of Turin. He sees, “engraved and painted,” his oeuvre, as a series of inspirations gathered over the course of his lifetime. It is a gift to be able to see de Chirico’s narrative of his works.

### **Francesco Clemente’s *The Departure of the Argonaut: A Modern Illuminated Manuscript***

In 1986, Savinio’s *The Departure of the Argonauts* was republished with forty-eight original lithographs by transavantgardia artist Francesco Clemente. (Figures 23 and 24) Clemente’s images present a modern instance of manuscript illumination, one that is quite personal. Savinio’s text, rich in visual ideas, is illustrated with a fantastical array of styles that link the images of Clemente to Savinio’s prose. It is fitting that Clemente illustrated the text, as the artist’s education, like that of Savinio’s early life, also consisted of extensive travel and classical studies.<sup>94</sup> The illustrations are breathtaking, and each link to aspects of Savinio’s visual vocabulary. In the first chapter, recalling the brother’s travel from Rome to Ferrara, Clemente renders an astronomical diagram contained within a circle, upon which a fragment of the Coliseum is situated. In the third chapter, red and blue classical sculptures in gladiator’s armor accompany his recollections of Savinio’s travel with thousands of other soldiers to Macedonia, recalling the ancient Roman empire. Nautical flags, ropes, seashells, dolphins, and a rendering of a tempest illuminate his vague upon the Adriatic sea; a simply rendered, almost childlike drawing of a ship upon a wave illustrates Savinio’s dreams.

### **Metonymy and the Immortality of the Dioscuri**

De Chirico and Savinio, as Dioscuri, exist independently of time. They are heroes traveling with companions, and yet simultaneously alone, sailing for unknown shores, immortalized in visual art and prose.

In concluding, I suggest that the constant presence of the train and the sail, viewed in light of the literary discussion in Section Three, is de Chirico’s placement of self-mythology and metahistorical narrative within his paintings. Looking to paintings completed between 1911 and 1916, this metaphor is particularly evident. I offer his *The Uncertainty of the Poet*, painted in 1913, to trace an arc from his metaphysical canvases, to *Hebdomeros* in 1929, the *Return of Hebdomeros* in 1968, and the additional layer of the recurrent Dioscuri canvases. (Figure 25) This composition is heralded for exemplifying metaphysical tenets. Yet the arbitrary objects that enter his canvas—bananas, the fragmented torso of a classical sculpture, illogical shadows and planes—exist alongside the ship and the train which are deeply embedded with references to personal history. (Figure 26) They are not simply objects given to free associations, but rather, the emblem of the artist. A look to his *Ariadne* canvas of the same year, discussed in Section One, reveals the same ship and train in the background beyond the sleeping statue and a low brick wall. (Figure 27) Thus, these myths are a consistent theme in his work throughout his life, and demonstrate that a rejection of his post-1919 work as irrelevant is neither fair nor critical. The same themes determine his art from the first years of his career to the last years of his life. The visual analysis in line with the collective writings of de Chirico and Savinio confirm this.

Returning to the theory of metahistory, if de Chirico and Savinio’s personal myth is that of the Dioscuri, participant in Argonaut’s voyage of sea, of sails, of trains, and of stars; then I suggest, de Chirico incorporates a metonymic representation of his life’s journey by placing the

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<sup>94</sup> Francesco Clemente is perhaps the foremost artist of the Transavantgarde movement. In undertaking the illustration project, Clemente stated that he became fascinated with the technical aspects of printmaking, a medium he was unfamiliar with for the majority of his career. The illustrations reveal a range of lithographic techniques that result in the wide variety of visual effects in the illuminated text.

sail and the train within his canvases. Thus, even in those canvases in which the Argonautic voyage or Dioscuri figures are not overtly depicted, there is an implicit presence of the personal myth. He thereby constructs a metahistorical narrative by transposing his own experience upon his character Hebdomeros; in the same manner he reworks and retells his own Argonautic journey in the Dioscuri paintings; and within his metaphysical compositions through the ship and the train. De Chirico rendered, in effect, a collection of paintings connecting himself and his brother, as archetypal travelers, to history; to the antiquity of Greece, to the stars, and to the metaphysical realm beyond reality—he and his brother become the metaphysical truth behind each of his canvases.

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## Appendix A:

### Timeline of the Artist's Travels

1888: Giorgio de Chirico is born in Volos, the capital of Thessaly, Greece.

1889: The de Chirico family moves to Athens.

1891: Andrea Francesco Alberto is born (he does not take the pseudonym Alberto Savinio until after 1910.)

1896: The de Chirico family returns to Volos, where de Chirico begins drawing training with Mavrudis, a Greek railway employee, for two years.

1889: The de Chiricos return to Athens, where de Chirico takes drawing lessons with the Italian Carolo Barbieri and Swiss artist Emile Gillieron, mentioned in Section One. He then enrolls in the Polytechnic Institute in Athens at the age of twelve, where he studies for four years.

1905: de Chirico's father, Evaristo, passes away.

1906-1908: de Chirico and Savinio relocate to Munich with their mother, where both brothers continue their artistic training (de Chirico in painting, Savinio in Munich, where he studied under Max Reger, "the second Bach.")

1909: de Chirico travels to the Venice Biennale, and then settles in Milan. In October of this year, he travels to Florence, where he has the "revelation" in Piazza Santa Croce that precipitates the metaphysical composition, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*.

1910-11: de Chirico moves in with Savinio in Florence, and travels to Rome. Savinio moves to Paris in the early months of 1911.

1911-1915: de Chirico is conscripted and told to report for duty in October of 1911. Subsequently he leaves Florence with his mother in order to join Savinio in Paris. On this train journey to Paris, de Chirico stops in Turin, where he finds further inspiration for his "Piazza d'Italian" compositions. Upon arrival in Paris, de Chirico falls ill. He is declared a deserter by the Italian government.

1912-1914: de Chirico is ordered to Turin, where he is assigned to an Infantry Regiment. He flees, returning to Paris and joining Savinio again. Upon his return to Paris, Guillaume Apollinaire recognizes his talent, and de Chirico has three exhibitions in 1913, and signs a contract with art dealer Paul Guillaume in 1914.

1915-17: de Chirico and Savinio return to Italy, after the Italian government issues a decree of amnesty to all deserters. The brothers arrive in Florence and enroll in the Italian army. Both are

assigned to the same regiment at Ferrara. Their mother moves to Ferrara to be close to her sons, who live in her apartment. De Chirico, still ill, continues to paint and write.

1917: de Chirico meets Carlo Carra at the Military Reserve Hospital outside of Ferrara, where both artists are sent for their nervous disorders. De Chirico is transferred later in the year for five months of rest, though still enrolled in the army. The two become friends at first, but their friendship deteriorates as they go on to argue about the conception of the *scuola metafisica*.

1918: de Chirico exhibits many of his works from the Ferrara period in Rome. The periodical *Valori Plastici* is published later in the year by Mario Broglio, and de Chirico begins to publish frequent articles and paintings for the next three years.

1919: de Chirico holds a major exhibition at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia gallery in Rome, and Andre Breton begins collecting de Chirico's work. After a revelation at the Villa Borghese, de Chirico reverts to copying Italian masters. In doing so, the artist's widely acknowledged "return to classicism" begins at the height of his critical recognition.

1920-25: de Chirico continues to exhibit his work in Paris, Milan, and Rome. He designs theater sets for a performance of Luigi Pirandello's *la giara*. He would continue to work in set design for the rest of his life. By the end of 1924, he is settled in Rome.

1925-28: de Chirico returns to Paris, where two of his paintings are featured in the first Surrealist exhibition in November of 1925. By the end of the year, de Chirico and the Surrealists are at odds. Still in Paris, de Chirico continues to condemn modern painting. In response, the Surrealists write scathing review of exhibitions in which de Chirico's works are featured.

1928: de Chirico publishes a collection of articles on painting technique in Milan. He will continue to write essays on the subject until his death.

1929: *Hebdomeros* is published in Paris and receives widespread praise, even from the Surrealists.

1930: de Chirico exhibits his work of the last decade extensively, and an exhibition travels to the United States.

1932: de Chirico moves to Florence for a year.

1933-35: de Chirico returns to Paris until the summer of 1935. In 1935, he designs the *Vogue* cover featured in Chapter Two. He would design additional covers in 1937.

1936-39: de Chirico travels to New York City in 1936. He also Albert Barnes, who would purchase many of de Chirico's paintings in the next five years. Multiple publications during these years focus on his controversial relationship with the Surrealists. His mother passes away in 1936.

1938-45: de Chirico, aged 50, returns to Italy, moving to Paris by the end of 1938. He returns from Paris and settles in Milan for the duration of the war. Exhibitions, especially in America, continue to take place, and in 1942, he exhibits at the Venice Biennale.

1945: de Chirico publishes the first edition of his autobiography, *Memorie della mia vita*.

1946: de Chirico declares all of the works featured in an exhibition at the Galerie Allard in Paris to be forgeries. This sets off the controversy over the authenticity of his paintings that would plague the artist for the rest of his life.

1947-52: de Chirico moves to Rome, Clement Greenberg declares that de Chirico's works after 1919 are irrelevant to the development of modern painting. De Chirico, now known for his eccentricity, continues to issue statements against modern painting. He organizes an Anti-biennale in 1950, for all "anti-modern" painters.

1952: Savinio passes away. Though the two brothers had not seen each other in years, de Chirico rushes to his deathbed and places a laurel wreath upon his brother's head. He would wear a black tie in mourning for his brother's death for the rest of his life.

1962: An appended version of de Chirico's memoirs is published, with sixteen additional years. *Hebdomeros* is also reissued. He lives in Rome for the next sixteen years.

1968: Salvatore Quasimodo's translation of the *Illiad* is illustrated by de Chirico.

1972: de Chirico and his wife Isabella Far go to New York for the New York Cultural Center's De Chirico by De Chirico exhibition, discussed in the conclusion of Section Four. The exhibition is arguably the impetus for revisionist attitudes towards de Chirico's work.

1972: de Chirico returns to Greece for the first time since 1906.

1970-78: Retrospective exhibitions of the artist's work take place in almost every major city. In 1976, de Chirico suffers from a debilitating heart attack. In 1978, at ninety years old, de Chirico suffers from a second heart attack and passes away in Rome. His tombstone reads: Giorgio de Chirico, Pittor Optimus."

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